

## Communication Skills, Part 4 – Written Communication

### Where do we use written communication skills?

Each venue may call for different written communication skills.

Informal Emails	Formal Cover Letters	Work Documents
Introductory Emails	Resume	Status Reports
Cover Letter Emails	Thank You Letters/Emails	

### Write With Caution

“When writing, be mindful of the fact that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating in this way is more concrete than verbal communications, with less room for error and even less room for mistakes. This presents written communicators with new challenges, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, even writing style and actual wording.” (2)

### Basic Writing Tips (2)

- Avoid the use of slang words
- Try not to use abbreviations (unless appropriately defined)
- Steer away from the use of symbols (such as ampersands [&])
- Clichés should be avoided, or at the very least, used with caution
- Brackets are used to play down words or phrases
- Dashes are generally used for emphasis
- Great care should ALWAYS be taken to spell the names of people and companies correctly
- Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: Ten years ago, my brother and I...). The number 10, or anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: My brother has 13 Matchbox cars.)
- Quotation marks should be placed around any directly quoted speech or text and around titles of publications.
- Keep sentences short
- Appearance is key- the email should look like it is a real letter.

### Cover Letters and Basic Rules

“Cover letters are powerful tools that can greatly enhance your odds of getting an interview when they accompany your resume. Often they make the difference between getting an interview or not.” (1)

“Because your cover letter explains your reason for contacting someone and sending them a resume it serves as your introduction of YOU. It highlights your unique qualifications and demonstrates your writing ability and communication skills. For these reasons *YOU MUST WRITE YOUR OWN COVER LETTER.*” (1)

1. Keep it short – no more than 1 Typed page
2. Address it to specific individual – Sir/Madame, To Whom it May Concern, Friend, Recruiter – generally get tossed in the garbage. If you cannot identify a specific person who will receive the letter, chances are it will go unopened.
3. You must highlight all your experience, which is relevant to the job/or company, which you are applying to. Consider using a table- one side says “You are looking for this” and the other side reads “I provide the following.” When you just can’t fit it all in remember Rule #1. Your cover letter is a “snap-shot” or “introduction”, not your resume or autobiography.

4. If sending a cover letter via email, put your phone number and email address below your signature block.
5. Consider making your cover letter “page 1” of your resume. Refer to the sample on the Job Team web site.

### Tips For Improving Your Written Communication Skills (3)

#### **Tip #1: Organize what you want to say beforehand.**

Before you even start to touch your pen to paper or your fingers to the keyboard, plan what you want to say. **Think about the message you want to convey** and the important points you would like to make.

All of your thoughts might be swirling around in your head in a jumbled mess. This is very normal—it happens to most of us. That’s why you need to spend a little more time preparing. **You need to find a way to organize all those thoughts into a coherent, logical fashion.** Effective written communication is presented in a clear, logical manner that readers find easy to follow.

Start by jotting down some ideas of what you would like to include in your letter or email. You can even write a general outline of the document. This will also help you to organize the structure and maintain a logical flow. The extra time you spend in the beginning will actually save you time from having to revise the document later.

#### **Tip #2: Stick to your topic.**

How many times have you rambled on and on and on about something for so long that you forgot what you intentionally planned to say? We are all guilty of not staying focused, especially when we’re stressed, tired or overworked. This can often happen in written documents if you aren’t disciplined enough.

Effective written communication involves **sticking to your original topic.** It also includes avoiding the tendency to start discussing irrelevant subjects half-way through.

Remain focused on your topic or original message throughout the entire document, not just the beginning!

#### **Tip #3: Clarify any requests or terms.**

Another important aspect of effective written communication involves specifying exactly what you mean. **Try to avoid ambiguous terms** such as “too much”, or “just enough” or “soon”. Quantify measurements, time periods or dates so that the reader won’t misinterpret what you are trying to say.

Maybe you will want to clarify the dollar amount when you ask your son not to spend “too much” on that little [computer part](#) he needs for his school project. I mean how could you know that the word “little” he used referred to size, not dollar value?

You should also specify specific dates and times. Getting to a party “early enough” may mean 5 PM for you and 8 PM for your friend. It’s best to find out before she shows up to meet you!

#### **Tip #4: Explain any foreign or technical terms or references.**

There are times when it’s appropriate to include a common foreign word or technical term in your written documents. However, effective written communication **means the reader can actually understand what you are trying to say.** Therefore, you should never assume that someone will understand the meaning of a complicated term or reference just because you do.

Maybe a lawyer will understand that the term “ab initio” is a Latin term for “in the beginning,” but I’m sure most of the rest of us won’t! A language major will probably be the only person who understands the ancient Greek word, apeiron, meaning unlimited or boundless. The only thing your reader will understand after reading your written correspondence is your “apeiron” lack of judgment!

We may continue to **include unnecessary complicated foreign words in our correspondence without realizing the negative effect** it has on our readers. On the other hand, we will probably all recognize the meaning of the word “faux pas” when we stop receiving any replies! If you include a complex or foreign term that does not add to the relevance of your written document, **leave it out.**

## Types Of Cover Letters

<b>BROADCAST LETTERS</b>	A broadcast letter is a direct mail piece and is prepared by extracting facts from your resume. <b>It is sent without a resume</b> to the person in the organization who has the power to hire you. Generally, this person holds position one or two levels above the job you seek. Unless you are seeking a job in Personnel, do not send your letter to the Personnel Manager.
<b>NARROWCAST LETTERS</b>	A narrowcast letter is used most frequently when you have in-depth information about a company’s needs but they haven’t advertised a position - <b>it is not accompanied by a resume.</b>
<b>COVERING LETTERS</b>	Covering letters are used to answer advertisements, inform Third Party Recruiters of your availability and/or as direct mail. They differ from broadcast and narrowcast letters only in that <b>they “cover” or are “accompanied” by a resume.</b>
<b>“THANK YOU” LETTERS</b>	Thank you letters should be sent to after all job interviews. They are an excellent way to re-state your interest in the job/company, mention any skills you forgot to discuss in the interview or overcome any objections that you were unable to deal with during the interview.
<b>RECRUITER LETTER</b>	Recruiter letters are used to “Blast” out your qualifications to all the Recruiters and Headhunters you can find in the hopes they may have an assignment you fit.
<b>NETWORKING LETTER</b>	Networking letters are used to inform your immediate circle of friends, colleagues and trusted advisors (like your lawyer or accountant) that you are actively looking for new opportunities.

## Unsolicited Emails – “How ordinary recruiters deals with emailed resumes”

Most recruiters use filtering software to weed out unsolicited emails. Filters are set up to route unsolicited email messages that have the word “resume” into my Resume Folder. The mail filter is also configured to redirect ALL messages from MASS EMAIL SERVICES like Blast my resume.com, GrassIsGreener.com, and ResumeZapper.com into resume folders.

Which emails do you think recruiters or managers will read first? Every subject line that contains the text, “Please review my resume. I look forward to hearing from you” gets deleted. Why?

## Suggestions For Email Correspondence (3)

Make sure your Subject line gives the recruiter or manager a reason to open and read your message. “George Smith’s cover letter and resume” isn’t a good enough reason for me to open and read it. Your cover email should get someone’s attention within the first three sentences. Remember you only have 10 to 15 seconds to make an impression, so don’t waste it telling the manager you’re “Hard working and enthusiastic” - so is everyone else!

1. Direct your email to a specific person
2. Use an Inviting Subject Line
3. Your Opening paragraph must capture my self-interest
4. Tell the recruiter/manager how to get hold of you
5. Embed your resume into the email message

## **General Business Application: Effective Email Rules and Formatting**

The Carlos Consulting Group has published an article which outlines general rules to follow. Some of the suggestions can be applied to your email correspondence when job searching. (4)

### **Proof Reading !!!! (2)**

“Perhaps the most important thing to remember when writing a letter is to check it thoroughly when it is completed. Even when you think it is exactly what you want, read it one more time. This “unwritten” rule holds true for everything you write – memos, letters, proposals, and so on.” (2)

“Use both the grammar and spell check on your computer, paying very, very close attention to every word highlighted. Do not place total faith on your computer here. Instead, you should have both a printed dictionary and thesaurus nearby to double-check everything your computers editing tools highlight, as these tools are certainly not always reliable, for a variety of reasons.” (2)

“When checking your written communications, make sure the document is clear and concise. Is there anything in the written communication that could be misinterpreted? Does it raise unanswered questions or fail to make the point you need to get across?” (2)

“Can you cut down on the number of words used? For instance, don’t use 20 words when you can use 10. While you do not want to be curt or abrupt, you do not want to waste the reader’s time with unnecessary words or phrases.” (2)

“Is your written communication well organized? Does each idea proceed logically to the next? Make sure your written communications are easy to read and contain the necessary information, using facts where needed and avoiding information that is not relevant. Again, outline the course of action you expect, such as a return call or visit.” (2)

“Close appropriately, making sure to include your contact information. While this may seem obvious, it is sometimes overlooked and can make your written communications look amateurish. This can diminish your chances of meeting your written communication’s goals.” (2)

### **References used to create this paper:**

(1) “WorkInsight: *How to act as your own High-Tech Headhunter*” by David E. Perry, copyrighted © 2001

See also “Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters: 400 Unconventional Tips, Tricks, and Tactics for Landing Your Dream Job” by David E. Perry

(2) <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/WritingSkills.htm>

(3) <http://www.effective-communicating.com/improving-your-written-communication-skills.html>

(4) [http://www.carlosconsulting.com/downloads/Effective\\_Email\\_Rules.pdf](http://www.carlosconsulting.com/downloads/Effective_Email_Rules.pdf)