How to Improve Your Writing
Agenda

• Outline the fundamentals of good communication

• The mechanics of writing vs. the art of writing

• Provide tips & tools for improving written communication

• Reinforce the fact that good communication is critical for success
Examples of Bad Communication
Common Complaints

- The purpose of the communication is unclear
  • “So why do I care?”

- The “call to action is unclear”
  • “What am I supposed to do now?”

- Too much technical jargon
  • “What does this mean?”
Common Complaints

- Poorly organized & formatted

• What are the key points?

• What is more important?

• What is less important?
The Solution is Usually Better Planning and Organization.

The Mechanics of Writing – 4 Steps
Step 1 - Determine Your Purpose

My audience is __________________ and the purpose of my communication is to ___________________ so that the reader will ___________________.


My audience is Mill Street Parking Permit Holders and the purpose of my communication is to inform them of upcoming construction on Mill Street so that the reader will plan to park in an alternate parking facility.
Step 2 – Think About Your Audience

- How much does the reader know about the subject?
- How much does the reader need to know about the subject?
- What’s in it for the reader?
- What does the reader care about?
- What information will impact the reader the most
Step 3 - Gather All of Your Information

• Determine what information is important

• Determine what information is *not* important

• Organize your main points logically, perhaps:
  
  o By business priority
  o Chronologically
  o By topic
Step 4 – Create a First Draft

• **Introduction/Executive Summary**

  This should include your previously identified “purpose,” and depending how complex the communication is, might also include a high level overview of the main points you will cover in the main body.

• **Main Body**

  Where you further develop the main points of your Communication – and provide supporting information.
Step 4 – Create a First Draft

• **Conclusion**

  Recap your main points and your call to action.

• **Next Steps**

  Describe what the reader can expect to happen next.
The Art of Writing
90% of Writing is Rewriting & Editing

• The first draft should not be your final product

• After writing your first draft, put it down and walk away
Use the Fewest Words Possible

Maintain structural integrity of the message while removing unnecessary words.
Tip for Removing Words

• Avoid Wordy Prepositional Phrases:
  ✓ In the amount of = **for**
  ✓ In order to = **to**
  ✓ Due to the fact that = **because**
  ✓ In the event that = **if**
  ✓ During the time that = **when or while**
Rewording Sentences

Exercise #1

Harvard University President Drew Faust has made the announcement that she will retire from her position as President after the current 2017-2018 academic year is over.

Revised

Harvard University President Drew Faust will retire in June.

Seventeen fewer words in one sentence
Exercise #2

Scan the article below and remove as many words as possible.

It is often said that energy is the fuel for innovation and Harvard’s continually growing innovation corridor in Allston is going to need an energy system as advanced as the cutting-edge research being conducted up and down Western Avenue. In order to meet this challenge, the University has designed a lower-carbon, climate resistant, and highly efficient district energy facility (DEF) that’s just beginning to take shape behind the rising steel of the new Science and Engineering Complex (SEC).
Second Draft

It is often said that Energy is the fuels for innovation and Harvard’s continually growing innovation corridor in Allston is going to will need an energy system as advanced as the cutting-edge research being conducted up and down Western Avenue. In order To meet this challenge, the University has designed a lower-carbon, climate resistant, and highly efficient district energy facility (DEF) that’s just beginning to taking shape behind the rising steel of the new Science and Engineering Complex (SEC).
Avoid Jargon & Simplify
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Exercise #3

Simplify the following paragraph and avoid jargon.

While the new Tomcat 6530.6.7.8 computer system provides extensive memory and is extremely user compatible, it lacks the requisite capacity for calculating at a significantly high rate of speed.
Avoid Jargon & Simplify

Exercise #3

Simplified version of the previous paragraph.

The new computer system has extensive memory and users like it, but it’s not fast enough for high speed calculations.
Don’t Bury the Lead!

Exercise #4

Unbury the lead in the following paragraph.
As you know, Harvard has long been dedicated to sustainability and has set aggressive GHG reduction targets. These sustainability efforts also expand into all facets of University operations such as landscaping and dining. Campus Services employees have been at the forefront of this effort and they should be applauded. With that said, we are pleased to announce that Harvard has been named the greenest University on the planet and to celebrate every employee will receive an extra vacation day!
Don’t Bury the Lead!

Exercise #4

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As you know, Harvard has long been dedicated to sustainability and has set aggressive GHG reduction targets. These sustainability efforts also expand into all facets of University operations such as landscaping and dining. Campus Services employees have been at the forefront of this effort and they should be applauded.
Format Properly

Formatting helps punctuate and clarify complex messages.

Use formatting tools:

- **Bold**
- **Italics**
- Bullets
- Headings
- Indents
Campus Services - Internal Service Providers

Helping business units reach their goals.

Campus Services (CS) has a number of internal service providers that directly support the CS business units. These internal service providers partner with the business units to help them achieve their strategic objectives. Support functions include Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Communication.

The primary goal of these service providers is to achieve organizational effectiveness and success through a culture of accountability and responsibility and by recognizing the value of teamwork, transparency, collaboration, and great customer service.

Primarily located at 46 Blackstone Street, Campus Services Finance is comprised of two primary teams: The Controller Group and Financial Reporting & Budgeting. CS Controller - Led by the Director of Accounting Operations and Controller, supports all accounting operations for CS business units. In addition, the group is also responsible for supporting Harvard University accounting and helps ensure the accuracy of the University's financial statements. Service offerings include accounting, accounts payable/receivable, HCOM / P-cards / Crimson Cash, audits, payroll, and taxes.

Financial Reporting & Budgeting – Led by the Director of Budgets, Reporting and Analysis, supports CS businesses by creating greater consistency in budgeting and reporting practices. In addition, this group acts as an intermediary between the CS business units and the University’s Central Finance department including the CAPS and Budget offices. Service offerings include capital planning, financial analysis, budgeting & forecasting.
Characteristics of Good Writing

*Writing is a skill that only improves through practice and repetition.*

- Simple and easy to understand – Don’t write to impress!
- Organized logically
- Resonates with the reader
- Uses the fewest words possible