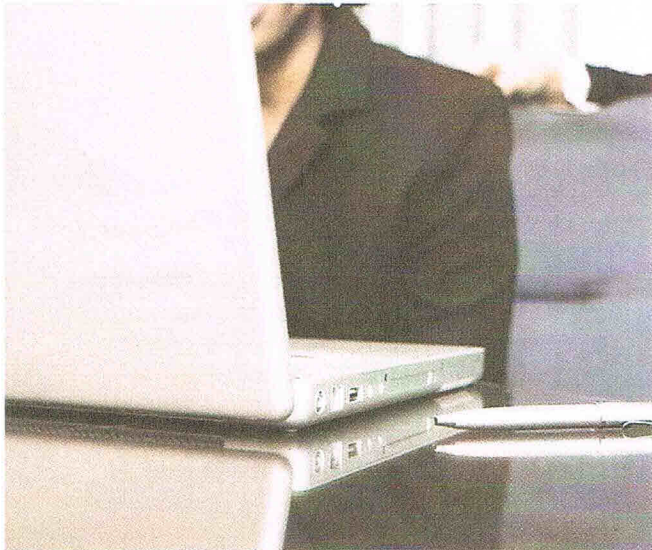


BE CONCISE



Need to get someone's attention and make a point? So, it builds your case, makes the sale, strengthens your budget,

changes a policy, informs quickly, gets people to the table?

Then it is time to write a memo. And some of the rules have changed since we sat in English class.

RULE 1: Think electronic. Hard copies will leave a writer in the dust of those whose e-mails have flown around the world instantly.

RULE 2: Consider your audience. Is this a co-worker? Your boss? A new colleague from Chile? A member of your book club? Your daughter? The more global the audience, the more formal the message should be. Use an opener (Dear So-and-So) and use complete sentences throughout the message.

Also, don't use jargon and close with a proper ending (Kind Regards). The closer the relationship, the more acceptable are shortcuts and informality.

RULE 3: Be smart about subject lines. First, use them. I, like almost every other busy businessperson, am unlikely to open an e-mail without a subject line, having been burned by viruses. Second, pack a lot into the subject line. For example, instead of "Meeting," write "Staff mtg, 10/3, 12-1, re budget action items." Your reader — with hundreds of unopened e-mails — will be grateful.

RULE 4: Nail down basics: who, what, where, when, how. Maybe even why.

RULE 5: Think "Winston," be brief. Prime Minister Winston Churchill was known to love brevity. This was the man who gave a speech at Oxford University, "Never, never, never give up," then sat down. While leading England through a devastating war to victory, his time and patience were limited. His military colleagues knew that to be effective with him, they had to present a battle plan on one page or less. Do not underestimate this rule. Following it takes time, thought and good editing. But the discipline is worth it; your document is more likely to be read.

RULE 6: Some absolutes remain from English class: accuracy of facts, correct spelling, excellent grammar and proper punctuation. Violate these absolutes and you risk being considered uneducated, sloppy or a boor. For those who mistake "it's" for "its" and "their" for "there," the errors are like fingernails down a blackboard for former English teachers, who widely populate the world of business — one never knows where they lurk.

And finally, **RULE 7:** Send only what you're comfortable seeing broadly distributed. This used to mean the front page of tomorrow's newspaper. Today it means around the world, on everyone's screen, within minutes. Especially if you're writing in an emotional state. By all means write, but hold off on the "send" button until the next day, at which time you may rewrite the document or toss it altogether. And remember: computers have incredible memories. Just because you or someone else hits "delete," does not mean the item is deleted forever.

Cheers! ☺

BITE THE (ELECTRONIC) BULLET

Learn business e-mail basics:

Subject lines are essentials. Spelling and grammar should be checked before clicking send. Do not use all caps or emoticons.

Use send/reply etiquette:

Beware of "reply all" and know what Carbon Copy (CC) and Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) mean.

CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE

Text message to daughter:

r u ok?

E-mail to colleague in Chile:

Dear Viviana, Are you all right?
Kind regards, Sarah

BE SHORT AND SNAPPY

Avoid wordiness: If exceeding one page, turn the document into an attachment and make the e-mail a short summary.

Be interesting: Strive not to bore.



Anne Messenger, SPHR, is president of Messenger Associates, in Manlius and Binghamton. She is a recognized career strategist and has practiced in the field of human resources for 20 years. She is a proud former English teacher.