

ADVICE & MISCELLANEOUSLY CRITICAL TIPS FOR WRITING THE WORD

1. Do not hesitate to use misspellings (e.g., “miscellaneously”) or violate grammar rules to make your point (as long as your reader/listener knows you know what’s correct).

Grammar, spelling and punctuation errors rarely affect your comprehension, but they always affect, if not also effect your credibility.⁵ You do not want people to reject ideas because you ignored and/or abused the “king’s English.”

Grammar matters: Would you buy this book?

2. Edit, Edit, Edit. Michener once said I am a lousy writer, but I am a great editor. Your first draft is never your best. Work it. Work it. Work it. Here are some examples—

- ✓ What is the difference between “His name is Jesus Christ” and “His name is Jesus the Christ?”
- ✓ What is the difference between “The church failed its mission...” and “The church failed their mission...” Or, “Myrtle Lake, the church that cares...” and “Myrtle Lake, the church who cares...”
- ✓ Difference? “Don't have another set of eyes handy?” and “Do not have another set of eyes handy?”

3. Proofread, Proofread, Proofread. You always need another set of eyes; even an uninformed reader will detect problems you do not detect. Don't have another set of eyes handy? Read your writing out loud; it is amazing what you will hear you did not see.

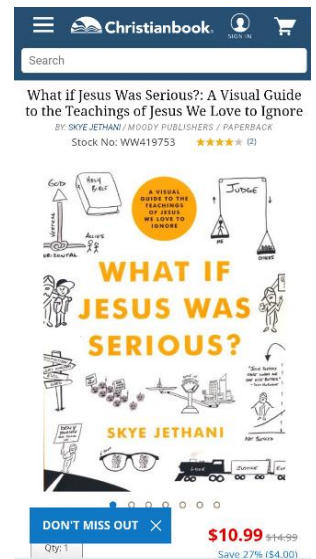
4. How do you know you are a successful communicator? People use your ideas. They borrow them. They steal them.

- ✓ And, yes you have also done it, whether you know it or not.
- ✓ Hubris is rarely found among ethical communicators. Nor is hubris ever found among effective communicators.

5. **Effective communication is neither agreement nor comprehension.**

- a) People may agree because they like you, not your ideas. People may agree because they already think or feel “that way.”

- b) People may comprehend because they know more about the topic than you. People may comprehend simply because the ideas being shared are easy to understand.



⁵Word choice matters—sometimes critically. In this case, for example, using *affect* rather than *effect* argues the factors in question are related to each other. If *effect* is used, then it means one factor *causes* the other. Failing to use the correct idea may create chaos between you and your reader/listener. For example, do good works affect salvation, or do good works effect salvation?

Effective communication is:

- ✓ Knowing about what your reader/listener disagrees.
- ✓ Knowing what your reader/listener does not know.

Understanding what is misunderstood is the true gauge of “effective” communication.

6. Formal communication does **not** use contractions; informal communication **does** use contractions, intentionally. Why? For example...
 - a) What is the difference between "Do not." and "Don't."? [*sic*] Also, the difference between “Jesus is God’s Son” and “Jesus is the Son of God.”
 - b) Formal and informal communication also differ dramatically—
 - ✓ Consider the difference between "Yes." and "Yeah."
 - ✓ Consider “That is likely...” versus “That is probable...”
7. Written pauses? Comma, short pause. Dash, serious stop.
8. Oral pauses? Silence, period (3 or 6 rule). Not "like..." or "uh..." or "and..."⁶
9. Unless you're a professionally trained actor, your “speech” should not be read. Talk talk. Don't talk writing.
 - ✓ Similarly, written communication is not “talked;” oral communication is intentionally more informal, less structured, and affected more by nonverbal behavior.
 - ✓ Written communication is rarely pleasant to the ears—when it is, we call it poetry.
10. Make no mistake about it, written communication also has nonverbal elements. [bullet choices?] Font, spacing, font size, font emphases [e.g., bold, uppercase, italics, underline, superscript] lines, boxes, illustrations, color choices, margin choices, vertical white space between paragraphs, deploying bullets or enumeration, etc. Consider these examples...
 - ✓ Font: Jesus is the Christ versus **Jesus is the Christ**.
 - ✓ White space matters. Does it not?
 - ✓ Font—The Lord God Almighty is here. versus **The Lord God Almighty is here.**
 - ✓ Capitals—The Lord God Almighty is here. versus **THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY IS HERE.**
 - ✓ Meaning Shift—The Lord God Almighty is here. versus **The LORD God Almighty is here.**

⁶Ironically, if one’s *written* text for an oral sharing of same, intentional inclusion of an “uh” or “and” makes the written text sound more human, more personable. Very important when reciting conversations or hyper-formal writing.

- ✓ Word Emphasis— “The LORD God Almighty is here.”⁷
 - The** LORD God Almighty is here.
 - The **LORD** God Almighty is here.
 - The LORD **God** Almighty is here.
 - The LORD God **Almighty** is here.
 - The LORD God Almighty **is** here.
 - The LORD God Almighty is **here**.
- ✓ Even Bullet Choice— Compare...
 - The LORD God Almighty is here ... versus
 - § The LORD God Almighty is here ... versus
 - ✓ The LORD God Almighty is here ...

11. Nonverbal elements not only affect your audience, their manifestation affects **you**. For example, when you speak louder, even intentionally and experimentally, it changes you. Try it. Talk too loud intentionally, even to yourself. What changes in you did you notice, even though you were being loud artificially?

- ✓ Remember how you felt when you had to speak louder because your listener was hard of hearing?
- ✓ When you are closer, or farther away, from your audience, you change— whether you want to or not. Getting closer may be good; e.g., you become more personable.
- ✓ Other changes are bad; e.g., how do you feel when “over” dressed? “Under” dressed?
- ✓ Remember how you feel when someone “invades” your personal space?



⁷This is especially true orally; note how bland, how sterile the sentence when *none* of the words are emphasized.

Good Writing is Read Writing!

—FUNDAMENTAL GUIDEPOSTS—

1. Clarify in one simple sentence what you want to accomplish in your essay/article/paper.
 - a) Be as behavioral as possible—e.g., I want people to affirm they believe that x is true and that y is the basis on which one should believe x is true. This is a two part objective—what is true and how one ascertains it is true.
 - b) Another example: I want people to know what I feel about x and that I will understand what they know about what I know about x because they will ask questions related to my understanding of x, not theirs, not others, but my understanding.
2. Use short sentences. They are more readable. Readable writing is read writing; short sentences contribute to readability.
3. Use familiar words whenever possible—they are more readable. Readable writing is read writing. Familiar words create less confusion and facilitate more attention to the ideas you are trying to share. Assimilating esoteric etymological linguistic symbols with erudite echelons is neither pragmatically functional nor linguistically viable. (Big words don't mean squat.)
4. Readable writing is read writing; familiar words contribute to readability. Yet...

Sometimes *unfamiliar* words must be used:

 - a) For example, there are no familiar synonyms for “hypostatic union.” Ergo, you will need to provide a definition using familiar words to demonstrate (1) you know what it means, and facilitate (2) your reader knowing what it means.
 - b) Technical terms have their place, but NOT when a familiar word could serve as a substitute. For example, using “teleological cessation” might “impress” your reader, but what you really want them to understand is the end of time. Use end, not cessation. Use time, not teleological. Your goal is to communicate, not to impress. Great ideas impress; grand vocabulary does not.
5. Vary the length of your sentences. Long sentences bore if not confuse readers.⁸ Short sentences sometimes fail to communicate the complexity of the ideas you’re sharing. Varying sentence length using familiar words whenever possible and shorter sentences whenever possible contributes to readable writing. Readable writing is read writing.
6. And yes, redundancy contributes to readability. Readable writing is read writing. Readable writing is understood writing. Readable writing is persuasive writing. Write readable. Good writing? Read writing.

© 2023 by D. Thomas Porter, Ph.D., Faith Theological Seminary, Tampa, Florida

⁸Rule of thumb: When your writing exceeds more than three typed lines, see if you can reduce the sentence length by eliminating unnecessary words and/or dividing the sentence into two or more sentences.