

BUSINESS WRITING FOR ASSESSORS



Instructor: John Gellatly, BS, MMA,
City of Duluth Assessor (retired)

In our increasingly informal world of communicating via text, e-mail and web sites, writing requires less and less care in terms of purpose, content, style, and so on, right?



WRONG!

Revenge of the English Teachers

For all those people who told themselves they would never write once they left high school, I give you *e-mail, texting, web sites and social media*. Bwa-ha-ha-ha!!!



If your written message can be:

1. Stored/accessed outside of your control
2. Reproduced verbatim
3. Passed along to others with the speed of an e-mail attachment

you should exercise forethought and practice the skills related to business writing.



UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION

Lesson 1: The fundamental function of a written message

"Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood."

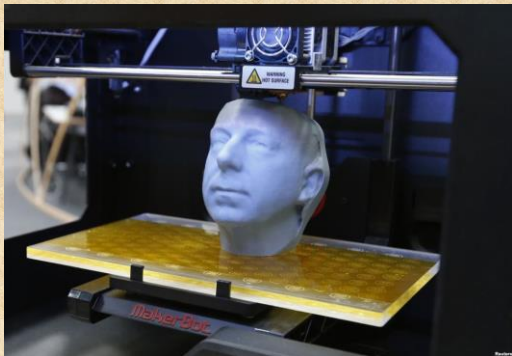
Freeman Teague Jr.



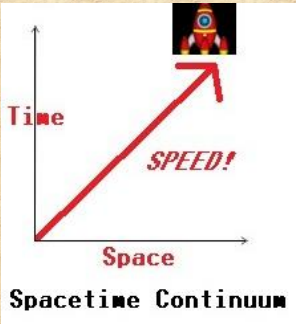
The fundamental function of a written message is:

Take a **CONCEPT** in the writer's head and... encode it into printed words such that... the reader will come to understand the concept as the writer intended.

This is the generic *function* of just about any writing. Business writing will have various *concept-specific purposes* we will consider later. The point to consider right now is that **the writer starts with a conceptual understanding that he/she needs to share with the reader.**



What is this object?



What is this natural phenomenon?



What philosophy is reflected in this work of art?

Green Acres
Property Tax Fact Sheet



This fact sheet provides information to property owners who currently have land enrolled in Green Acres about the options available for their land. It also provides farm owners information about how to enroll their class 2a agricultural land into the program.

If you have further questions about your property or Green Acres, please contact your county assessor's office.

The "Green Acres" concept must successfully travel from the mind of the author of the legislation to the minds at the D.O.R. to the mind of the assessor and then to the mind of the farmer. What could go wrong?

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION

Lesson 2: Conveying a concept to a reader;
"business writing" versus just "writing"

"There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept."

Ansel Adams

Mutual Conceptual Understanding
Between Writer and Reader

Is Achieved With the Skilled Use of Language

The unfamiliar concept is made more comprehensible by describing it with familiar words and/or...


The unfamiliar concept can be broken down & analyzed by descriptive words (particularly nouns and adjectives) that appeal to the senses and common reasoning: shape, size, texture, density, color, purpose, process, cause-effect, and /or...

The unfamiliar concept can also be described by how it resembles something that is already familiar.

"Few people understand how this Ponzi scheme of taxation really works...." Taxpayersleague.org web site on 1/30/14 referring to the MN property tax system.

And here is a key point when writing to help others comprehend...

...concept words that become associated with an object or idea can influence its acceptance or rejection.



Categories of Concepts That Taxpayers May Need Help Comprehending

Physical Objects

Process/Procedure/Natural Order of Things

Rationale/Philosophy

From Writing in General to Writing for “Business”

Business writing is **utilitarian writing**: it is writing to advance a transaction, be it economic, service, legal, contractual, or obligatory due to the writer-reader relationship. (The transaction may NOT be completed with any one written document.)

Business writing has utility; it is not purely conversational, social or entertaining.

Therefore, business writing rules and skills apply to both for-profit and non-profit enterprises.

To summarize:

Writing: taking a concept in your head and encoding it into printed words such that the reader understands the concept as you do.

Business writing: writing with a utilitarian-specific purpose: enabling a transaction between you and the reader.

And despite the well worn claim that “the customer (your reader) is always #1,” the writer’s goal is to...

...help the reader conceptualize to accomplish the WRITER’S purpose.

STRONG EVIDENCE THAT YOU CAN INFLUENCE HOW PEOPLE CONCEPTUALIZE THINGS




Some people view this as an acceptable, low-priced alternative to unprocessed meats.

ABSOLUTE PROOF THAT YOU CAN INFLUENCE HOW PEOPLE CONCEPTUALIZE THINGS



Some people view this as an acceptable, low-priced alternative to Spam.

Are there any **Minnesota Property Tax Concepts** that taxpayers and agencies working with the assessor may have problems understanding?



- How a house becomes a homestead
- What constitutes a “farm” + Green Acres
- Why market value is converted to tax capacity
- Allocation of total mkt value over contiguous common-owner parcels
- Mkt value for property tax purposes vs. fee appraisal purposes
- Date of the appraisal vs. valuation notice date vs. appeal date vs. tax billing date vs. tax due date
- Comparable sale and the adjustments made to it
- Two statistical tests to audit assessment quality
- Valuation by income capitalization specific to an industry

Minnesota Property Tax Concepts (continued)

- Potential for annual equalization orders
- Add-on's to the property tax bill that are unrelated to value and class
- Multiple taxing authorities within the same jurisdiction
- Multiple tax rates within the same jurisdiction
- Total taxable value of a jurisdiction is a moving target within the assessment database over the calendar year
- TIF
- JOBZ
- Taconite Tax Credit
- Disabled Vet's Exemption
- Charitable Institution



COURSE OUTLINE

UNIT ONE: Introduction

Just "writing" vs. "business" writing. The goal of getting the reader to understand a concept as the writer does.

UNIT TWO: The Value of Written Communication

The power of words, America's love-hate relationship with formal language, and why we will always need rules for writing.

UNIT THREE: Demonstrating Skills in the Required and Elective Rules of Writing

Analyze writing situations using a communication model; and four elements of style: word choice, sentence structure, organization, and presentation.

UNIT FOUR: Some Particular Writing Situations

Guidelines and examples of responding to a request, enforcing a policy, publicizing a law/rule, refuting a claim, teaching/informing, and reporting on research.

UNIT FIVE: Demonstrating Skills in Some of the Rules of Grammar (If there is time.)

UNIT TWO: THE VALUE OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Lesson 1: The power of words to do good and mischief

"Get your facts first, then you can distort them as much as you please"

Mark Twain



Because we conceptualize in words, **words shape understanding.**

The broader your vocabulary and better your language skills, the more adept you will be at both understanding and communicating concepts.

What is implied about the reader's education/experiences when she describes a swimming pool as a "cement pond"?



Words Gain Additional Power When Written
Because People Give Written Words
More Credibility Than Spoken Words

1. Writing is perceived to involve more time and thought than speaking.
2. Written words have permanency; because they can be stored and looked up in the future, people assume that the writer is being more careful than the unrecorded speaker.
3. Written words, because of their permanency, are not subject to as much distortion as spoken messages that are repeated over and over from memory.

Words Gain Additional Power When Written
Because People Give Written Words
More Credibility Than Spoken Words (cont.)

Small town gossip spoken at the local café can be inaccurate and hurtful.

Inaccurate and hurtful small town gossip that is posted to Facebook or a blog can be...

...slander and cause for a lawsuit. (*This American Life*, MPR, April 2014.)



Some Examples of the Power of Words

(Both constructive and destructive power available to the writer)

Stick in the reader's memory:

"Where's the beef?"
"Tear down this wall."

Promote uncritical thinking:

pretty ugly
nice fine
good average quality home
"That will work."
"This sucks."

Devalue concepts due to misappropriation:

easy payments

covers in one coat

totally free checking*

describing a Job Z industrial park as "tax free"

What word is being devalued in the following names/titles?

Ultra Mega Vitamins

Lube Pro's

General Cleaning Specialists

Truth in Taxation

Some Examples of the Power of Words (continued)

Disguise uncomfortable facts:

You and I guess, but doctors...
It's not a tax, it's a...
Interoperative awareness with recall is...

Create confusion/doubt:

Open 7 days a week and Sunday
Be there at about noon
relatively deadly

A certain chain of pawn shops claims it offers both...

1. highest return

when you pawn your gold and jewelry

2. lowest sale prices

when you buy their gold and jewelry

Some Examples of the Power of Words (continued)

Dramatize facts:

How dangerous is commercial fishing? *"It's not fish you're buying, it's men's lives."*
Sir Walter Scott


When an ongoing project appears doomed, efforts to fix it are described as "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic."

My proposal to use tablet computers while doing field inspections crashed and burned at the budget meeting.

We had hoped to sail through the county board meeting, but bureaucratic headwinds blew us off course.


Some Examples of the Power of Words (continued)

As seen in this photo from their store in Duluth, the folks at Target have information technology problems at even the most basic levels of the business operation.



The writer can use the power of words to help the reader understand a concept in a manner that will accomplish the WRITER's purpose.

This goal is not unethical or devious unless the purpose is.



I am from the government. I am here to help you.

The power of words can help the reader understand a concept in a manner that will accomplish the WRITER's purpose (continued).

The writer's purpose and the reader's needs/interests are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The power of words can help the reader understand a concept in a manner that will accomplish the WRITER's purpose (continued).

Where superior to the reader in knowledge/experiences, the skilled writer will decode esoteric terms to aid reader comprehension, hopefully casting the writer as the layman's source for the "truth."

The power of words can help the reader understand a concept in a manner that will accomplish the WRITER's purpose (continued).

The skilled writer will use words designed to reduce the chance that non-topical issues will arise, thus keeping the focus on the writer's purpose.

The power of words can help the reader understand a concept in a manner that will accomplish the WRITER's purpose (continued).

The skilled writer will take advantage of current event opportunities to make her point using common reasoning.


The power of words can help the reader understand a concept in a manner that will accomplish the WRITER's purpose (continued).

Whenever possible, the skilled writer will avoid judgmental words that could incite the reader to emotional responses and cause the writer to lose control of the transaction (or worse, lose the transaction itself).

EXAMPLES FROM THE FOOD INDUSTRY OF HOW WORDS SUGGEST A WAY TO CONCEPTUALIZE THINGS TO THE BENEFIT OF THE WRITER

For which will people pay big money?

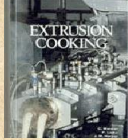
An ounce of caviar?



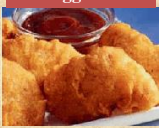
An ounce of sturgeon egg mass?


Caviar

At the factory: extruded poultry pulp.



In the frozen food isle: nuggets!!!






On the farm: chickens.

UNIT TWO: THE VALUE OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Lesson 2: America's love-hate relationship with formal language

"This is the sort of nonsense up with which I will not put."

Winston Churchill



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OK

NOT OK

TO: Bill
FROM: John, BS, MMA, SAMA, CAE
SUBJECT: Tuesday's Meeting With the Lake Association
DATE: March 24, 2014

After our eleven o'clock meeting with the Allwett Lake Association, let's have lunch at the Allwett Café. My treat.

TEST YOUR TOLERANCE FOR FORMAL ENGLISH

1. You answer the phone and an unfamiliar caller asks for you. You respond, "This is... he (or she)."

2. A taxpayer comes into your office, stops you and wants to know the name of the person responsible for reappraising Breemerflink Township. You are that person, so you tell the taxpayer, "It is. 1."

3. Bill e-mails you that he will be attending a meeting at Boggsland Township. You respond with the question, "Who / Whom are you meeting with?"

4. You indicate the likelihood that you will attend a future meeting: "I shall be there with a brief report."

4. "I tend to be more aggressive about investigating homestead applications than he / him."

	Formal Title For a Woman	Formal Title For a Man
• Married:	Mrs.	Mr.
• Marital status unknown:	Ms.	Mr.
• Unmarried:	Miss	Master


UNIT TWO: THE VALUE OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Lesson 3: It really sucks that we need rules for formal writing

"Principles and rules are intended to provide a thinking person with a frame of reference."
Carl von Clausewitz

Conversational English
Is Not a Good Place
To Build and Save the English Language

Most communication in any culture is done so on a conversational level, either face to face or through social media such as Twitter and Facebook. American culture has always been crude to some degree because we are relatively free to do and say what we want. Consequently, conversational English is not a good place to build and save the language for two reasons:



Face-to-face communication uses nonverbal cues, which cannot be encoded into words.

Americans value freedom of expression. The result is some words and phrases gain acceptance for their sheer shock value or colorfulness, not because they help promote understanding.

Why the Written Word Will Always Have Value

1. No serial distortion.
2. People forget most of what they hear very quickly.
3. Some information is too complex or too voluminous to present orally.
4. Sometimes there are too many people to speak to face to face.
5. Sometimes the writer and/or reader wants proof of what was communicated.
6. There are times when the message needs to be repeated verbatim numerous times.
7. Public speaking scares the heck out of most people.
8. The language of a large population evolves over time. Without rules for writing the language, the spoken language will eventually split into variants that may become incomprehensible to users of other variants.

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS
IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE
ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 1: The foundation is lucid writing

*"Complexity beyond a certain point is
fraud."*

Unknown

As we all should be painfully aware: PUBLIC WORKERS ARE ROUTINELY ACCUSED BY THE PEOPLE WE SERVE OF PROVIDING CONFUSING AND MISLEADING INFORMATION. Assessors in Minnesota must conduct business in an environment that exposes them to substantial opportunities to confuse people.

For instance, my spring *Valuation Notice* for taxes payable in 2015 lists **eight** potential line items that may cause *taxable* market value to differ from *estimated* market value:

1. Green acres value deferred
2. Rural preserve value deferred
3. Aggregate resource deferred
4. Platted vacant land exclusion
5. This old house exclusion
6. Disabled veterans exclusion
7. Mold damage exclusion
8. Homestead market value exclusion

*Why don't we just
bring back limited
market value, too!*



Assessors in Minnesota must conduct business in an environment that exposes them to substantial opportunities to confuse people (cont.)

As the person with the responsibility for a successful transaction, the business writer is obligated to offer a **REASONABLY LUCID EXPLANATION** of...

1. What is the status quo between writer and reader regarding the current transaction (newly initiated or ongoing).
2. What may/will happen to the reader as she conducts further business with the writer.
3. What the writer's and readers' responsibilities are to advance the transaction further (if need be).

Because the writer is attempting to get the reader to comprehend a concept for the *writer's* purpose, providing a **REASONABLY LUCID EXPLANATION** is entirely the writer's responsibility and can be hampered by one or more of three barriers.



First barrier to lucid writing: writer's knowledge and/or subject complexity. The writer's knowledge/understanding of the subject may be inadequate, or the complexity of the subject cannot be simplified without serious omission. (*Beyond scope of this seminar.*)

"Nonhomestead agricultural property that is owned by a family farm corporation, joint farm venture, limited liability company, or partnership; and located not farther than four townships or cities, or combination thereof from agricultural land that is owned, and used for the purposes of a homestead by an individual [emphasis added] who is a shareholder, member, or partner of the corporation, venture, company, or partnership; is **to receive the first tier homestead class rate on any remaining nonhomestead class tier that is in excess of the market value of the property, if the owner, or someone acting on the owner's behalf notifies the county assessor by July 1 that the property may be eligible under this paragraph for the current assessment year, for taxes payable in the following year.** *The verb of the subject of this sentence finally appears.* In this paragraph, 'agricultural property' means property classified under section 273.13, along with any contiguous property classified under section 273.13, if the contiguous 2a and 2b properties are under the same ownership."

Second barrier to lucid writing: writer's meaning is misunderstood due to inadequacies/errors in the message itself.
(What we are here today to consider.)

How can we use...

- word choice**
- sentence structure**
- organization of our thoughts on paper**
- presentation** (degree to which the writing reflects you, the writer)


to meet the triple challenge of getting taxpayers to understand the assessment process?

Those challenges being...

Attitudes and beliefs that taxpayers possess about property taxes before you communicate with them.

The complexity of the Minnesota property tax system.

The Minnesota property tax system is not a consumer product designed to provide customer satisfaction.




Sweet! I got just the TIF district you're looking for right here, pal. Maybe I can swing a little JOBZ action, too. But you gotta act now!

Third barrier to lucid writing: writer "spins" the message to such a degree that the reader does not trust the writer's intentions.

Let's play...

GOOD SPIN or



BAD SPIN?

Is there a valid reason to say it this way?

Enemy soldiers are... "soft targets"

While civilian casualties are... "collateral damage"

Velveeta is a... "cheese product"

Per the FAA, when a jet turbine comes apart in flight it is... "an uncontained blade liberation"

Civilian employees of an air force base were not fired, they were put on... "non-duty, non-pay status"


Top executives are not forced out, they leave to... "spend more time with family"

With captured terrorist suspects, interrogation techniques may become... "enhanced"

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 2: Show skill with the required rules and talent with the elective rules

"Anyone who isn't confused really doesn't understand the situation."
Edward R. Murrow



What Are the Required And Elective Rules of Writing?

Required: Rules of English grammar

Grammar: rules of a language for generating all sentences possible in that language; a set of standards that preserve the language against time.

Practicing good grammar is a base skill expected of writers. **Poor practice of this skill will ALWAYS detract from the meaning of your message no matter how talented you are in the elective skills of writing.**

How many errors below?

Its neither the policy nor practice of the Assessors office to demand an interior inspection of peoples' homes. As that is your perception of my appraiser's demeanor I will speak to him and asking how he worded his request.

7 errors

It's neither the policy nor practice of the Assessor's Office to demand an interior inspection of people's homes. As that is your perception of my appraiser's demeanor, I will speak to him regarding how he worded his request.

What Are the Required
And Elective Rules of Writing? (cont.)

Elective: word choice, sentence structure, organization and presentation

Practicing the elective rules of writing are finer skills than the base skills of grammar. **These rules allow the writer to execute a strategy** by such means as:

1. Choosing situation-appropriate words.
2. Structuring the complexity of sentences to match the topic and the reader.
3. Exhibiting patience, empathy, restraint, frustration, humor and so on.

The most likely threats to your writing in a REASONABLY LUCID manner arise from the elective rules. More on this later.

Example of practicing the elective rules of writing to execute a strategy:

SITUATION: A taxpayer has written to his county commissioner and made several very serious but exaggerated claims about how you or someone in your office recently treated him. The commissioner has asked you to respond to the taxpayer.

So, you write to the taxpayer and say... *You are lying.*
You are wrong.
You are mistaken.
That's not true.
That's not the case.
That is not my understanding of what happened.
I disagree with your characterization of what happened.

Will all of these responses advance the transaction equally?

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS
IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE
ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 3: The superstructure of the English language—the parts of speech & the parts of a complete sentence

"English is a funny language: we have noses that run and feet that smell."
Unknown

As a writer using the English language, you have 8 parts of speech at your disposal.

NOUN...person, place, or thing; serves as subjects and objects of other parts of speech.
Your market value is officially assessed on January 2, 2014 for property taxes payable in 2015, and it can be appealed until late June 2014.

PRONOUN...noun & pronoun substitute to prevent repetition or to stand for an unspecified subject.
Your market value is officially assessed on January 2, 2014 for property taxes payable in 2015, and it can be appealed until late June 2014.

As a writer using the English language, you have 8 parts of speech at your disposal (cont.)

VERB...expresses action or state of being.
Your market value is officially assessed on January 2, 2014 for property taxes payable in 2015, and it can be appealed until late June 2014.

ADJECTIVE... describes or limits nouns and pronouns by limiting, qualifying and specifying.
Your market value is officially assessed on January 2, 2014 for property taxes payable in 2015, and it can be appealed until late June 2014.

Note "your" is a pronoun playing the role of adjective.

As a writer using the English language,
you have 8 parts of speech at your disposal (cont).

ADVERB... modifies verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs;
answers the questions: How? When? Where?
Why? How much?
*Your market value is **officially** assessed on January 2, 2014 for
property taxes payable in 2015, and it can be appealed until **late**
June 2014.*

PREPOSITION... connecting word placed before a noun/pronoun
(then known as the object of the preposition) to show the
relationship between the object and some other word in
the sentence.
*Your market value is officially assessed **on** January 2, 2014 **for**
property taxes payable **in** 2015, and it can be appealed **until** late
June 2014.*

As a writer using the English language,
you have 8 parts of speech at your disposal (cont).

CONJUNCTION... connects two or more words, phrases, or
clauses to demonstrate equal and subordinate
relationships.
*Your market value is officially assessed on January 2, 2014 for
property taxes payable in 2015, **and** it is subject to appeal until late
June 2014.*

INTERJECTION... brief expression of emotion or response to a
stimulus or question.
*Your market value is officially assessed on January 2, 2014 for
property taxes payable in 2015, and it is subject to appeal until late
June 2014. **Duh!***

The parts of speech are used to construct sentences.
A complete sentence in the English language
requires what two parts at minimum?

subject

verb

I voluntarily enrolled in this seminar.

I
Pronoun
as subject

voluntarily
Adv
(relationship is between "I" and "seminar")

enrolled
Verb

in
Preposition
Noun as object of
preposition

this
Pronoun as
adjective

seminar
Noun as object of
preposition

Your sentence must have at least a minimum of a subject and a verb.

SUBJECT
Person *appraiser*
Place *neighborhood*
Thing *tax*

VERB
Word that describes an action OR
a state of being.


The **appraiser** will inspect an average of 30 homes each day.

The **neighborhood** is in the declining stage of its life cycle.

Your **taxes** do not rise in lockstep with your value.

GRAMMAR SCHOOL FLASHBACK

Identify the subject of the following sentence:



SHUT UP!

Your sentence must have a minimum of a subject and a verb. All other parts of speech you add should be chosen to help achieve your purpose for writing.


"Your 10-year assessment history shows an average annual increase of only 2.3 percent."

history
assessment
10-year
Your

shows
increase
of
an annual
average
2.3 percent
only

By the way, automated editors such as spell and grammar checkers are NOT reliable sidekicks.

affect and effect	into and in to	may and can
lie and lay	farther and further	each other and one another
rise and raise	ensure and insure	bring and take
sit and set	borrow and lend	good and well
fewer and less	between and among	




Holy co-dependency!

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS
IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE
ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 4: Play the role of writer and try to understand your reader via a communication model.


"Know your enemy and...you can fight a hundred battles without disaster."
Sun Tzu



Play the Role of Writer

For the purpose of this seminar, your identity is **writer**. You are defined by...

- ...**your concept-specific purpose** (does achieving your purpose also meet the reader's needs?)
- ...**your skills at using the required rules of writing** (does your practice of these skills help advance mutual understanding with the reader?)
- ...**your talents at using the elective rules of writing** (does your exhibition of these talents help advance mutual understanding with the reader?)




This is where your **writing style** develops. You can't distinguish yourself from others in capitalization skills, for instance. But you can have your own way of choosing words, structuring sentences, organizing your thoughts and allowing your personality to show (a.k.a. presentation).

Play the Role of Writer (cont.)

Your writing style reflects who you are. This immediately raises the question...

Is that a good idea?



Play the Role of Writer (cont.)

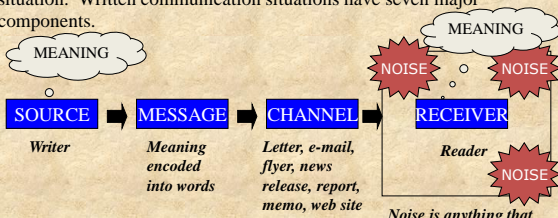
Your writing style should reflect PART of who you are: **a person who is skilled in writing for the situation.**

And who you are as a business writer is ultimately in the eye of the beholder, namely, your reader. It is your reader's perception of you that counts. You can't tell the reader what to think of you. He'll figure it out from your writing.

One way to visualize all that is involved in the development of the reader's perception of you is through a communication model.

Analyze Your Writing Situation
Using a Communication Model

To be skilled in writing for the situation, you should analyze the situation. Written communication situations have seven major components.



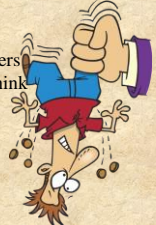
The diagram shows a linear flow from SOURCE to MESSAGE to CHANNEL to RECEIVER. Above SOURCE is a cloud labeled MEANING. Above MESSAGE is a cloud labeled MEANING. Above CHANNEL is a cloud labeled MEANING. Above RECEIVER is a cloud labeled MEANING. Below SOURCE is the label 'Writer'. Below MESSAGE is the label 'Meaning encoded into words'. Below CHANNEL is the label 'Letter, e-mail, flyer, news release, report, memo, web site'. Below RECEIVER is the label 'Reader'. There are three red starburst shapes labeled NOISE: one between MESSAGE and CHANNEL, one between CHANNEL and RECEIVER, and one below RECEIVER.

Noise is anything that prevents the reader from receiving the writer's meaning as intended.

Potential Sources of Noise


A. Credibility the reader assigns to the writer.
This is based on the reader's perception of and attitude toward the writer's...
1. Education 4. Sincerity
2. Knowledge of the subject 5. Concern for the reader
3. Trustworthiness

Of the above five attributes on which taxpayers may judge assessors, on which one do you think we generally score the worst?



Potential Sources of Noise


B. Reader's intelligence and attitude.
1. Ability to comprehend and reason
2. Knowledge of the subject
3. Openness to new ideas




Potential Sources of Noise

C. Reader's perceived differences with the writer.
1. Economic and social status 4. Age
2. Education and experience 5. Gender
3. Race 6. Religion

Recent noteworthy change in America's cultural perceptions.



Next noteworthy change in America's cultural perceptions?

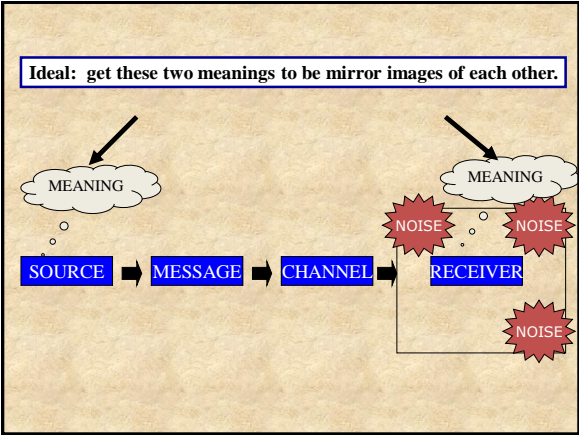


Potential Sources of Noise (cont.)


D. Channel (or semantic) distortion.
1. **Definitional distortion:** reader disagrees with writer over how something should be defined or categorized.

2. **Emotional distortion:** writer uses words that create unintended images or conclusions in the reader's mind.

3. **Process distortion:** active, ever-changing and/or complicated processes are described in words that imply a stability or simplicity that just is not there.
"Our estimated market values must average 90 to 105 percent of what properties are selling for."



When mutual understanding of a concept is achieved.



UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS
IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE
ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 5: Word choice is an element of your
writing style.

*"You can fool all of the people some of
the time...and that's enough to make a
good living."*

W. C. Fields

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style

The effective writer will choose words that will lead the reader to
conceptualize things the way the writer intends.

Returning to the **8 parts of speech**, there are four in particular that are
valuable to the writer in the effort to help the reader understand things
as the writer intended.

Nouns--identify people, places, and things, such as ideas and concepts.
Think of nouns as "labels" that *can* affect understanding.

terrorist → insurgent → fighter → revolutionary

Verbs--most describe actions, which *can* come in degrees that can affect
a reader's understanding.

Taxes rose.
Taxes accelerated.
Taxes skyrocketed.

Taxes drove me out of my home.
Taxes showed me the way out the door.

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Adjectives and adverbs--these parts of speech offer finer (or vaguer)
detail. Your choices of adjectives and adverbs say a lot about you as
they *can* reflect subjective thinking and expose your...

Powers of observation.

Command of vocabulary

Sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Belief system.

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Consider words as tools to help the writer build mutual
understanding with the reader. Here are examples of what
words can do when used as thoughtfully chosen tools.

Use Words to Add or Remove Value

truck → sport utility vehicle
clerk at Wal Mart → associate
garbage man → sanitation engineer
front door entry → foyer
changed → new and improved
values were raised → values were equalized

CAUTION
Any of these exhibit
too much "spin" in
your opinion?

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use Words to Employ Psychological Strategies

Example Strategy: Don't cross an undesirable line.

2004 OLDS BRAVADA AWD.....\$7,999	2001 CHEVY SUBURBAN 4WD.....\$9,999	2007 JEEP COMMANDER AWD, 4DR, SILVER.....\$14,999	2011 KIA SORENTO LX AWD, 4DR.....\$18,999	2008 CHEVY EQUINOX LT AWD, V6.....\$18,999
2012 KIA SORENTO LX AWD.....\$19,999	2012 FORD ESCAPE LTD 4WD, 4DR.....\$21,999	2008 DODGE RAM 1500 AWD, QUAD CAB.....\$22,999	2012 FORD EDGE LTD AWD, 4DR, BLACK.....\$27,999	2009 CHEVY SILVERADO AWD, CREW CAB.....\$27,999

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Again, don't cross an undesirable line.

City administration desired to "capture" new revenue from
expansion of the tax base due to new construction only.
The PR line was that the city "**held the line**" regarding the
city tax rate. (The levy was still higher versus last year.)

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use Words to Employ Psychological Strategies (cont.)

Example Strategy: Good by association.
It's not just a used car, it's a **one-owner** car.
Truly fine food has a French name: **foie gras** ("fatty liver").
"Your **property-tax-supported** county health nurse helps our neighbors stay in their homes."

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use Words to Employ Psychological Strategies (cont.)

Example Strategy: Refine the reader's argument to your purposes.
"Yes, our property tax system is complicated, just as all the **special interest groups** designed it." (Expand the list of recognizable influences beyond government bureaucrats.)
"I see that your city property tax has now grown to nearly the size of **my annual cell phone bill**." (Add perspective via comparison with a common item or process.)

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

CAUTION

Any of these exhibit too much "spin"?

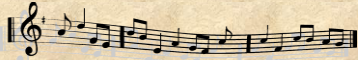
Use words to inhibit potential conflict

Tea Party fanatic → radical → conservative
regressive tax → property tax → bill for services
invasion of privacy → surveillance → security procedure
Amazon Inc.drone → unmanned aerial vehicle → pkg. delivery system
socialism → "Obamacare" → national health insurance
socialism → Medicare → national health insurance (with age discrimination)

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)


Use technical words that specify but are not incomprehensibly accurate

full-time equivalents = ?
pupil units = ?
actively farming
actively engaged in farming

There are two classes of ag property owners eligible to apply for ag homestead:
authorized entities
natural persons
"Old natural person had a farm, e...i...e...i...o"


Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)


Use technical words that specify but are not incomprehensibly accurate



Perhaps this sign is a little too unspecific?

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

What is Minnesota homestead law regarding a husband and wife who "consciously uncouple"?



Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words that do not lead the message off your topic

Issue--Requiring business to cover abortion through their health plans: *cell* → *fetus* → *human being* → “*choice*”

Issue--decreasing aid to the poor: *social safety net* → *welfare state* → the “*have-not’s*”


Issue--protecting seniors from increasing property taxes: *people on fixed incomes* → *retired* → *financially vulnerable adults* → *the elderly poor*

Issue—protecting our national security via actions in other countries: *pre-emptive strike* → *invasion* → *incursion* → *self-defense* → *surgical strikes by drone* → *assassination*

Issue--Highway funding: *toll lane* → *Lexus lane*

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)


Use words that do not lead the message off your topic (cont.)



Remember Romney’s “47 percent” quote?

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words that do not lead the message off your topic* (cont.)



“If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut the whole thing down.” –US Senate candidate Todd Akin of Missouri

(*Intended topic was potential exceptions to prohibiting federal funding of abortions.)

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words to steer the reader’s point of view

To the taxpayer who complains he does not get all he pays for in property taxes... “*You don’t want some of the services paid for by property taxes.*”

To the stockholders of an airline company, the accountant’s end-of-year financial statement describes the crash that destroyed an airliner as... “*a conversion of an asset.*”

As the space shuttle Columbia burned up during re-entry in the skies over Texas, the NASA spokesperson described the scene as... “*a re-entry event.*”

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words to steer the reader’s point of view

My State Farm agent recently told me that they do not raise my car insurance *rate* as I file claims.


What happens is that I lose *deductions* applied to the rate. Thus, my premium can go up with no change in the rate.

My agent does not like to use the word *premium*.

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words to steer the reader’s point of view


To the students in the cafeteria who think they are eating leftovers, the lunch lady’s menu says... “*it’s Cook’s Surprise.*”




Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words to cause or inhibit imagery


Imagery-- using language to cause the reader to picture what the writer is describing



er imagines...
his value. C...
when she th...



es. Fur...
hen they...
their...




Bad imagery: the meat coat buyers imagine bald think of public employee trucks.

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)

Use words to cause or inhibit imagery (cont.)

Both of the following statements identify the same fact about the purity of candy. Which is the better worded statement?

“Meets federal confectionary standards for purity.”



“Contains less than 60 insect fragments per 100 grams of product.”*


*Actual standard as reported by Atlantic Monthly, Dec. 2003

Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)


Use words to cause or inhibit imagery (cont.)

Children with night time bladder control problems are called bedwetters.

Adults with night time bladder control problems are described as... incontinent.



Word Choice Is an Element of Your Writing Style (cont.)



The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.

Poem by Randall Jerrell


When I died they washed me out with a hose.

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 6: Sentence structure is an element of your writing style.

“Writing is easy. All you have to do is cross out the wrong words.”

Mark Twain



Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style

“The senator has got to understand...he can't have it both ways. He can't take the high horse and then claim the low road.” Candidate G. Bush in Florence, SC, 2/17/2000

Four Basic Sentence Structures in the English Language

1. SIMPLE = Subject + Verb

I win.

2. COMPOUND = S and V + coordinate conjunction + S and V

I win and you lose.

(independent clause) (independent clause)

3. COMPLEX = S and V + subordinate conjunction with S and V

I win if you lose.

(independent clause) + (dependent clause [a.k.a. subordinate clause])

(Subordinate conjunction could also be at beginning of sentence.)

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Four Basic Sentence Structures in the English Language (cont.)

4. COMPOUND-COMPLEX =

S and V + coordinate conjunction + S and V + subordinate conjunction with S and V

I win and you lose, which I like. (No required order for the coordinate and subordinate clauses.)

Any sentence can have multiple subjects with one verb or vice versa.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Adding modifying words and phrases does NOT change the basic sentence type.

Simple sentence with modifying word: *I won handily.*

Compound sentence with modifying phrase:

I beat Randy handily, and he was a poor loser; of course.

Complex sentence with modifiers:

I win the match if you lose in this round.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Adding modifying words and phrases does NOT change the basic sentence type.

Compound-complex sentence with modifiers:

He lost again, which he always blames on some circumstance beyond his control, and I am tired of his excuses.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Beware of the KISS principle when it comes to sentence structure. Writing in simple sentences only is not recommended because:

- 1. Reading one simple sentence after another will bore the reader silly.
- 2. Simple sentences cannot communicate relationships and conditional issues well.



Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Reading one simple sentence after another will bore the reader silly.

A list of related facts in simple sentences: This market value is an estimate. The estimate is based on your blueprints only. The resulting estimated tax bill is based on the current real estate market. It is also uses the current tax extension rate for your township. Your home is far from completed. The market will likely change by completion time. So will the tax extension rate.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Reading one simple sentence after another will bore the reader silly.

This market value is an estimate based on your blueprints only, and the resulting estimated tax bill is based on the current real estate market and tax extension rate for your township, both of which may change by the time you finish building your new home.

Why a comma here and here?

CAUTION

How do you feel about the length of this sentence?

Why no comma here?

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Simple sentences cannot communicate relationships and conditional issues well.

Potential outcome in a simple sentence: *A taxpayer may not be allowed to appeal to her county board of appeal and equalization.*

Condition on which outcome is dependent in a simple sentence: *The taxpayer did not make an appeal to her local board of appeal and equalization.*

Combine to describe conditional outcome: *Taxpayers will not be allowed to appeal to their county board of appeal and equalization if they did not make an appeal to their local board of appeal and equalization first.*

Why no comma here?

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

The writer should also use sentence structure to practice THREE SENTENCE DESIGN STANDARDS:

UNITY--expresses one main thought; additional thoughts are subordinate and should be in subordinate sentence structures (such as subordinate clauses).

This tax increase, which is the result of state aid cuts, will hit homesteaders hard.

This tax increase, which will hit homesteaders hard, is the result of state aid cuts.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Explain the difference in thought being expressed between the following two nearly identical sentences:

We will not support any expansion of tax capacities through new value tiers, which will strangle our state's feeble economic recovery.

We will not support any expansion of tax capacities through new value tiers that will strangle our state's feeble economic recovery.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

THREE SENTENCE DESIGN STANDARDS (cont.)

COHERENCE--place modifying adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and clauses near the words they modify. When using noun phrases, maintain consistent form.

Clanking like a piece of junk, Elvira nursed her car into traffic.

The homestead class rate not only applies to your urban homestead but also the one-acre farm homestead site.

Answering taxpayer inquiries in a timely manner and to give understandable answers are important public relations tools.

I love only you. I only love you. Only I love you.

Sentence Structure Is an Element of Style (cont.)

THREE SENTENCE DESIGN STANDARDS (cont.)

EMPHASIS--the most emphatic position in a sentence is the beginning. Lesser details should follow.

Land values have increased substantially because investors have shifted capital from the falling stock market into real estate.

The falling stock market has caused investors to shift capital to such areas as real estate, where land values are now increasing substantially.

I have never felt more frustrated. ➔ Never have I felt more frustrated.

This office has now twice made written request for the rent rolls.

Twice now this office has made written request for the rent rolls.

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS
IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE
ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 7: Organization is an element of your writing style.

"...in all disorder (there is) a secret order."

Carl Jung

Organization Is an Element of Style

ORGANIZATION--arranging the elements within a document that are related in topic but different in function so that together they communicate the intended meaning.

When you write, you should have one *generic* **INTENT** and one *specific* **PURPOSE**, be it a memo, letter, e-mail or something more involved like a report.

INTENT--to cause the reader to understand your meaning as you do to achieve *your* purpose.

Organization Is an Element of Style (cont.)

When you write, you should have one *generic* **INTENT** and one *specific* **PURPOSE**.

PURPOSE--a limited, situation-specific objective.

Some situations call for...

- ...responding and perhaps moving toward teaching.
- ...teaching and perhaps moving toward persuasion.
- ...persuasion and perhaps moving toward making a request.
- ...making a request and perhaps moving toward making a case for action.
- ...making a case for action and perhaps moving toward making a demand.

Organization Is an Element of Style (cont.)

Typical Purposes for Business Writing

- Inform / teach
- Respond to a request
- Announce an event or change in status quo
- Persuade
- Critique
- Interpret data
- Establish / enforce a rule or policy
- Establish existence of a problem
- Propose a solution to a problem
- Refute a claim

Organization Is an Element of Style (cont.)

A Very Basic Outline for Keeping Your Writing Organized

- Introductory Paragraph
1. At a minimum, clearly identify the central idea of the document.
 2. The less a reader knows about you, the more you want to consider identifying who you are and what gives you credibility on the subject. For reports, identify for whom the report is done if ordered by someone.
 3. For reports, an additional paragraph outlining the order of the report may be worthwhile.

Organization Is an Element of Style (cont.)

- A Very Basic Outline for Keeping Your Writing Organized
- Subordinate (or Body) Paragraphs
1. Further explain/define the central idea via describing steps in a process, offering clarifying examples and analogies, or...
 2. Make and prove one or more claims that makes the central idea logically acceptable to the reader.
- Conclusion
1. May begin with a transitional word that notifies the reader that this is the final thought.
 2. Closing statement(s) that summarizes, draws conclusions for the reader, or describes what must be done next.

Organization Is an Element of Style (cont.)

- Example Organization of a Business Letter
- Writing Purpose: Respond to a Request**
- Outline
- I. Identify the request.
 - II. Provide a clear response: yes, no, or the action you will take. If the request is to be denied, offer a reason. (This may also be reversed: first review the reason[s] leading up to rejection, then clearly deny the request.)
 - III. If the request is to be denied and a potentially acceptable alternative is available, describe it.
 - IV. Regardless of acceptance / denial, describe what is the next step (or state that all activity is complete).

UNIT THREE: DEMONSTRATING SKILLS
IN BOTH THE REQUIRED AND THE
ELECTIVE RULES OF WRITING

Lesson 8: Presentation is an element of
your writing style.

*"Our work is the presentation of our
capabilities."*
Edward Gibbon

Presentation Is an Element of Style

PRESENTATION--the step beyond simply transmitting
messages; presenting a message implies **performance**. The
writer performs with skills that reflect his intellect, integrity,
philosophy, sense of humor, intensity, empathy, etc.

WRITING PERFORMANCE
Act I: Characterizing the truth

Abso		
Last	00	EMV increased one-third.
This	00	EMV is up 33%.
Chan	00	EMV climbed \$91,700.
		EMV ballooned to almost \$370,000.

Presentation Is an Element of Style
Act I: Characterizing the truth (cont.)

Truth or Characterization?

This is a nice home. Your home is larger than most.
Your home is 236 s.f. above the median size of all homes sold in the
last 12 months.

Minnesota's property tax system has multiple classes, some of
which have multiple class rates.

Minnesota's property tax system is among the most complicated in
the country.

Your estimated market value for property tax purposes is \$85,000.

The basement finishing is of a lesser quality than that of the main
level.

Basement walls are paneled and the ceiling is finished with
acoustical tile, versus the main level in which both walls and
ceiling are covered in textured sheetrock.

Presentation Is an Element of Style
Act I: Characterizing the truth (cont.)

Truth or Characterization?

I understand completely your concerns about the valuation increases.
I am familiar with taxpayer concerns about the valuation increases.

It is my understanding that the cost to cure the failed well is
\$15,000 for a new drilled well.

The wife let me in the home but within a minute the husband
arrived and told me to leave the property. I was allowed neither an
interior inspection nor a walk around the exterior of the home.

The husband was upset, and he demanded that I leave the
property.

I don't know what my house is worth, but the assessor's value is
way beyond it!

Presentation Is an Element of Style
Act I: Characterizing the truth (cont.)

Truth vs. Claim

A few facts, like the *assessment date* or...*what application
form is required* or...*assessors are underpaid*...are
absolute truths.

But in many cases, what you are trying to get the reader to
understand is not an absolute truth. So you then are
making a claim. And claims need proof because they are
not "truth" until proven so.

A **claim is an assertion you want your reader to accept into
her belief system as true**. There are three types of claims:

Presentation Is an Element of Style
Act I: Characterizing the truth (cont.)


Claim of **FACT**: something is, was, or will be so.
Demand for housing will continue to strengthen this year.

Claim of **VALUE**: something has value/worth (not
necessarily in a well defined unit of measure)
Your home has an estimated market value of \$546,000.

Claim of **POLICY**: something should be done.
*If a private septic system on a parcel for sale cannot be tested due
to frozen soil, the county should require the seller to escrow 110
percent of a written estimate to install a complying system.*

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act I: Characterizing the truth (cont.)



"What do I think of your new deck? Well, it sure is built to last."

Presentation Is an Element of Style

WRITING PERFORMANCE

Act II: Personal versus abstract

Readers will most closely pay attention to a message that is solely about them. They will relate to your message by decreasing degrees as the message expands to include others.

Message is very personal

Message is very abstract

How the homestead classification affects Mr. Smith's tax bill.

"Right now most Americans are working for the economy. We need an economy that is working for Americans."

Candidate John Kerry as quoted in Time of 2/2/04.

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act II: Personal versus abstract (cont.)

The Abstraction Ladder

Top: the subject is described in terms that make very nearly no reference to any characteristics of the subject that started at the bottom of the ladder.

Bottom of ladder: the subject is described in terms that are personal to the reader, using words the reader would likely use.

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act II: Personal versus abstract (cont.)

Abstraction is good for emotional topics when calm, rational communication is needed.

State-wide SFD owner turnover rate

All owners of single family dwellings

Homestead class taxpayers

Anecdotal evidence can be persuasive, but if you use it alone, opponents will jump on its zero statistical value.

Eunice Swogholter (homesteader on low fixed income)

Presentation Is an Element of Style

WRITING PERFORMANCE

Act III: Weight of evidence versus dramatic detail

Weight of Evidence: evidence is presented in three forms

- Specific instances
- Statistics (many specific instances)
- Testimony of witnesses and experts

For example, how many tests are there in Minnesota law for determining whether someone is domiciled here?

Minimum number of comps for the typical fee appraisal of a home?

Minimum number of residential/srr improved sales in a township the D.O.R. uses to judge the quality of an assessment?

26

3

6

Minn. R. 8001.0300, subp. 3 (2001)

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act III: Weight of evidence vs. dramatic detail (cont.)

You can make your point by piling up data.

Readers have to be able to “reason” how the data support the claim of fact, value or policy. Both **SIGN** and **CAUSE-EFFECT REASONING** are relatively easy intellectual processes that most readers can perform without instruction.


Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act III: Weight of evidence vs. dramatic detail (cont.)

What are SIGNS of good land and building sites?

What are SIGNS of value in a home?

What CAUSES market fluctuations?



Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act III: Weight of evidence vs. dramatic detail (cont.)

Dramatic Detail: can be used instead of or in addition to piling up evidence. Dramatic detail is also known as anecdotal evidence or telling detail. What drama can do:

Dramatic detail puts a face on statistics.

Dramatic detail is, therefore, emotionally impacting. It is a counterpoint to logic if you can risk bringing emotion into the subject at hand.

Dramatic detail is also a good method for showing how something works. Gives the reader a “for instance” story.

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act III: Weight of evidence vs. dramatic detail (cont.)

Examples of using dramatic detail:

Attack the property tax system with a story of an individual taxpayer. Show how much his value has risen, how much his taxes have gone up, and describe what the taxpayer has had to give up (opportunity cost) as a result.

Defend the property tax system with a story of an individual taxpayer helped by local services funded by the property tax.

Presentation Is an Element of Style

WRITING PERFORMANCE

Act IV: Perceived objectivity of the writer

HYPER OBJECTIVE

Impersonal, emotionless language of contract law; achieving mutual understanding is relatively easy.

“President Clinton committed perjury.”

HYPER SUBJECTIVE

Passionate, maybe even illogical language of love, war, religion, politics; achieving mutual understanding is very difficult.

“President Clinton is a lying skirt-chaser.”

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act IV: Perceived objectivity of the writer (cont.)

INTENSITY—the quality of language which indicates to the reader the degree to which the writer’s attitude deviates from objectivity.

HYPER OBJECTIVE

“party”
“liability”
“feedback”
“cognitively impaired”
“high c.o.d”

Discipline

law
accounting
education
psychology
assessment


HYPER SUBJECTIVE

“enemy”
“loser”
“verbal assault”
“stupid”
“unfair”


Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act IV: Perceived objectivity of the writer (cont.)

LIBERAL



What happens to a candidate who wants to appeal to enough general election voters to win?



Presentation Is an Element of Style


WRITING PERFORMANCE

Act V: Using literary tools

Literary tools can make the writer’s meaning clearer and even memorable because...

Some literary tools create associations and pictures in the reader’s mind. (**Assessor** and **tax** have become inextricably associated.)

Some literary tools come at the reader in an unexpected way, causing the reader to take notice.



Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act V: Using literary tools (cont.)

METAPHOR

Figure of speech that **implies** a resemblance between two things which would not ordinarily be perceived.

Property taxes are chasing people out of their homes.

The leather seats in this car caress you.

The whole system is a house of cards.

He came to the board of review with fangs extended.

“George Bush’s lips are where words go to die.” Garrison Keilor

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act V: Using literary tools (cont.)

SIMILE

A weaker metaphor because it **expresses directly** rather than implies the resemblance between two things which would not ordinarily be perceived.

Explaining property tax law is like explaining cold fusion theory.

Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.

Financing for real estate is about as frozen as a Minnesota lake in January.

Your property classification is like a filter that controls your exposure to the local tax rate.

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act V: Using literary tools (cont.)

CONTRAST

Placing opposing actions, descriptions, and states of being right next to each other, causing each to stand out.

“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

Do everything you can knowing you can’t do everything.

Most properties are greatly overvalued by the assessor, right up to the time they sell for more than the assessed value.

In World War II, Allied fire bombing of the German city of Dresden killed 25,000 people in one night. One historian described the mission as the “raid that went horribly right.”

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act V: Using literary tools (cont.)

ANALOGY

Teaching by story. Because Item X and the subject are alike in some important respect(s), the story of Item X can teach the reader something about the subject.

Sale of Comparable #1 teaches us something about the value of the subject home.

Outcome of Policy X in Iowa teaches us something about how this policy may work in Minnesota.

Iran would be the President’s Viet Nam.

Do NOT use the term “crusade” when writing about fighting terrorism in Muslim countries.

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act V: Using literary tools (cont.)

PARADOX

A statement that at first seems contradictory but actually contains some truth.

Each of you is unique, just like everyone else.

Our national forests need to burn.

Assessment equity is achieved with multiple property tax classes and class rates.

“If I hadn’t told you I wouldn’t bring you here, you wouldn’t have come.” Geoffrey Wheatcroft describing how George Bush and Tony Blair directed their respective countries into the Iraq War . *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2004

Presentation Is an Element of Style

Act V: Using literary tools (cont.)

UNDERSTATEMENT

A statement that makes a point as though it is not as important as the facts would indicate.

A billion here and a billion there, and soon we're talking real money.

The New York City Police fired 41 shots at the suspect. This effectively subdued him.

"Obviously a major malfunction." NASA spokesperson moments after the space shuttle Challenger exploded.

"It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed." USAF Training Manual.