



Communication Culture

WRITING TO BE READ... OR HEARD

By Helena Kaufman, *The Afro News Vancouver*

THE SECRETS OF HOW to catch and keep people's attention were revealed in the August issue of *The Afro News*. Now, as the season pulls us all into memories of back-to-school days, let's look at what's happened since you and I were taught to present or rehearse our messages in writing.

Generally, the guidance of the day was to be more formal for academic or 'official' writing, including business. As an instructor of business writing and conversation specialist I both promote and personally rely on writing. Technology, however, has boosted the speed of communication and the way we write. Instant publishing of our ideas, be it in letter form with home printers, email, blogs, website or other communication vehicles has also made us all instant 'content' writers.

The responsibility to respond quickly and on many levels – locally, internationally, formally and casually has blurred the lines – and the rules.

New Take on Style

In addition to the opportunity of being our own writers and publishers, our wide ranging new reach across regions and cultures now requires us to be style editors! Each piece we write needs to be assessed by us on two key points:

1. Does it get to the point quickly, making it clear what your message is about?
2. Does it speak to the reader in their language showing that you understand their needs, wants and goals, before you presume to even meet them?

The solution to some of this is what many have called 'plain talk':

- eliminate jargon
- use only necessary technical language
- use simple and clear language
- monitor humour or locally used phrases

Accepting plain talk does not mean eliminating tact or sensitivity. Do let your human voice and personality shine through but be ruthless with dropping 'extra' phrases that might be misunderstood, if at all, or of including more information than the reader needs.

Did you say hearing? Speak up.

Yes! Write as a fast and reliable route to see and sort your ideas. Rewrite your draft to refine your message. Then – read your work aloud.

If you can't finish a sentence in one breath, then it is too long. If you bore or confuse even yourself or a friendly listener, clarify your message. Criteria for today's communication culture calls on your ability to get to the

point sooner and faster. For your message to get heard, read and admitted into the consciousness of your readers it must also use their language and fall nicely on their ears.

The famous elevator or introductory speech you write to win friends, dates or deals – may quickly (and unexpectedly) move from paper to out loud and live. Make it work on paper first and then on the ears too.

VIP – Your very important point is to think of writing as a conversation with your intended reader. This will help you be more in tune with the personal and more relaxed style of today's punctuation, language use and even international communication.

Next time we'll look at how good writers and speakers are also good readers and what to read towards effective communication success.

Helena is a communication consultant specializing in business writing and conversation with elegance and speed. Get great tips on language use and communication strategy – free – at the sign up box for Express Lane Tipster at: www.helenakaufman.com www.theafronews.ca