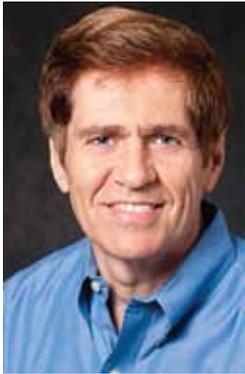


## Write To The Point

by Jack E. Appleman, CBC



Remember those writing assignments from high school or college English? Your teacher would demand a composition of at least five typewritten pages or 1,000 words. So you figured out how to use as many words as possible to convey your ideas. Who cares if your paper was redundant or if you didn't understand all the words you included? You had to up that word count at all costs to get a good grade!

While the pressure to complete lengthy assignments may be years behind you, some old habits refuse to go quietly. If you still write a business e-mail like an essay for English literature, adding text wherever possible, it's time to get out of the classroom and into the real business world. Co-workers, clients and others want to read as few words as possible. They just want you to get to the point.

### Write Like You Speak?

Many people who tend to beat around the bush before making their points on a document find it much easier to speak, whether in person or over the phone. In my one-on-one coaching

sessions as a corporate writing instructor and professor, I often ask what an individual is trying to convey in a long-winded and confusing paragraph, to which he or she replies, "I want to say, A, B and C." So I come back with, "Then write A, B and C and it'll be clear." If you can say it clearly, you should be able to write it clearly because good business writing is conversational.

### Tap The Power Of Simplicity

Sometimes it's hard to be simple. The beauty of simplicity can be illustrated by a 1990s TV commercial for consulting services. One man (we'll call him

Pete) is speaking in complex technical jargon to his colleague (let's call him Don) about why their company should invest in a particular software package. Frustrated with his colleague's cryptic explanation, Don implores Pete to cut the techno-babble and explain the purchase rationale in a way that management could understand. Then Pete pauses and says: "For every buck we invest, we'll get back two." That's powerful—yet so simple.

### Don't Impress Readers With Your Vocabulary

We loved to impress teachers with all the flowery words we knew, which may

*Effective business writing means conveying your points clearly, concisely and explicitly so readers understand the message and take the desired action.*

have earned us higher grades. That won't work with impatient corporate employees who want to understand your message as quickly as possible and move on to the next task.

### Stuffy And Wordy

ZX Partners developed a new capability, incorporating a software program that can facilitate the tracking of expenses at a 50 percent faster rate than they were during the course of 2011.

Aren't you impressed with the vocabulary "capability," "incorporating" and "facilitating" all used correctly? Give the writer three stars. But those in the business world could care less. They just want to know what the new software does better: track shipments 50 percent faster than in 2011 (see below).

### Clear and concise

ZX Partners' new software program will enable us to track expenses 50 percent faster than we could in 2011.

### Use Straightforward Language

Among everyone in the corporate world, top executives probably appreciate straight-forward language the most; it helps them make decisions faster.

### Stuffy

The capabilities of our program revolve around incorporating a process that allows first-line managers to enhance workplace efficiencies by 25 percent, resulting in maximum gains in their team's overall productivity.

### Straightforward

Our program will help first-line managers work 25 percent more efficiently so their team maximizes productivity.

### Trash Unnecessary Words

More than 230 years ago, Thomas Jefferson, the third U.S. president and author of the Declaration of Independence, offered some profound yet

simple advice: "Never write two words when one will do." So any word that doesn't add meaning should be trashed.

### Too many words

It has come to our attention that all performance reviews completed over the course of the last six months omitted key information.

Who cares when it "came to your attention?" Plus, "the course of" contributes nothing to your message.

### Concise

All performance reviews completed over the last six months omitted key information.

Taking Jefferson's advice to the next level, write as few sentences as possible.

### Two wordy sentences

The members of the administrative team attended a regional meeting in Dallas. During the sessions there, they developed several innovative ideas for lowering operating expenses.

Don't waste an entire sentence just to state that a meeting took place.

### One concise sentence

At the regional meeting in Dallas, the administrative team developed several innovative ideas to lower operating expenses.

### Express, Don't Impress

Effective business writing means conveying your points clearly, concisely and explicitly so readers understand the message and take the desired action. It's not any more complicated than that. The next time you sit down to write an internal e-mail, report, proposal or other document, forget about impressing the reader. Just express your ideas as simply as possible.

### About the author:

Jack E. Appleman, CBC, writing instructor and coach, is author of *10 Steps to Successful Business Writing* (ASTD Press), a top seller in its category. His corporate writing workshops have consistently earned outstanding evaluations. Subscribe to Jack's free writing tips newsletter and contact him at [jack@successfulbusinesswriting.com](mailto:jack@successfulbusinesswriting.com), 845-782-2419 or [www.twitter.com/writecoachJack](http://www.twitter.com/writecoachJack).