Freebie guide

The do's and don'ts of business writing

GilesAgency

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In our ever-evolving world, written communication consistently ranks among the most sought-after workplace skills. Effective communication is transformational: it can drive both businesses and individual professionals to success.

Propel your own career forward by mastering this valuable skill. To get you started, here we present The Giles Agency's 10 do's and don'ts when it comes to effective business writing.

Do's

1. Follow a style guide for a polished, professional and, above all, consistent look.

2. Proofread all documents before sending them out to make sure the spelling, grammar and facts are all correct.

3. Keep it brief. The more people have to scroll or swipe, the less receptive they'll be to your message. Focus your content and tighten your language.

4. Avoid jargon. You want to sound like a person, not an institution.

5. Use white space effectively. This makes documents easier to read. Allow generous margins, leave spaces between paragraphs, and break up text with subheads where possible.

6. Date collaterals such as white papers, annual reports, articles and press releases to give the reader a frame of reference.

7. Always include an email signature, even within a long chain – that way, people can easily find the information they need.

8. Make good use of the subject line. With a generic – or blank – subject line, your message could end up buried in your recipient's inbox. By making your request easy to find, you'll improve the chances of it being acted on.

9. Before sending an email, make sure you have included all the relevant people and attached all the necessary documents.

10. Think about who you are CC'ing, and only copy those who need to be included, and who will immediately grasp why they're on the thread.

Don'ts

1. Never use all caps. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING!

2. Don't waffle. Get straight to the point in your first few sentences.

3. Spell out exactly what you mean. Never assume people will know what you're talking about.

4. Don't tell – show. Be specific enough that you lead your readers to draw their own conclusions (conclusions that match yours, of course).

5. Avoid hitting "Reply All" unless you are sure all the recipients need to be included.

6. Don't write a very long topic in the subject line of an email.

7. Never write when angry. Take a step back, breathe, and come back to your writing when you can express yourself calmly and objectively.

8. Don't put anything in writing that you would be ashamed to see reported on the front page of The Straits Times.

9. Don't rush things out. It takes less time to write a clear message the first time around than it does to follow up to explain what you meant to say.

10. Never forget your call to action! What do you want the recipient to do? Make it easy for your reader to know what the next step is.

Want to learn more? Ask about our Write to the Top online course.
training@gilesagency.com