

The Importance of Good Writing

Anthony Balderrama, CareerBuilder.com writer

If your grade-school education was anything like mine, lessons on parallelograms, subject-verb agreement and neutrons were met with a chorus of whiny students asking, "When will we ever need to know this?"

I admit, many years later I still haven't tapped into my algebraic knowledge of a parabola, but other subjects have played important roles. Writing lessons, for example, have played a large role in my life, and not just because of my line of work.

Between e-mails, texts and Tweets, our society spends a lot of time [communicating](#) via the written word. We spend more time writing in our professional and personal lives than we probably imagined we would back in school. What you may not realize is that these written exchanges can boost your career or hinder it, depending on how you treat them.

Write your way to a job

Todd Henning recently began an [internship](#) with a [public relations](#) firm, and he's quickly discovering that his [writing](#) abilities are helping his fledgling career. In the few months he's been interning, he's seen his list of responsibilities grow.

"Right after I was hired, they told me it was largely due to the writing samples that I had given them during the interview process, and they had stopped considering others because of their writing samples," Henning says.

Of course, if you're applying for a position where writing samples are part of the application process, you're probably not surprised that composition skills pay off. But Rebecca West, [interior designer](#) for Rivalee Design, recently landed a position because of her writing skills. Not what you'd expect for someone whose job relies on a [creative](#) eye rather than a way with a pen.

West met with a potential client to discuss a bathroom [remodel](#), and she didn't think the meeting was a success. She didn't think she connected to one homeowner and the other homeowner was unable to attend.

"I always send a follow-up thank you after my first [consultation](#), but this time I took it a step further and composed a full letter describing to the client how I thought I could best help in their project, and offering to meet with them once more," West says. "I didn't really expect anything to come of it, but several days later they called and asked to set up another time to meet. During my second visit the second homeowner mentioned my letter, thanked me for it, and said it brought 'tears to his eyes' -- and no, he wasn't being facetious."

After the second meeting, all three parties decided the homeowners didn't need a designer to execute their remodeling plans, but that didn't bother West.

"From them I had two business referrals, and I was able to refer them to a contractor of mine who in turn got the remodeling work," West says.

Employers care

Lilia Fallgatter, an [author](#) and e-learning [consultant](#), has enough experience as a hiring manager in higher education to know that writing skills affect every career.

"How you write speaks volumes about you," Fallgatter stresses. "Incorrect grammar, spelling and usage make a bad impression and can affect your credibility on the job. With the advent of text messaging, instant messaging and social networking sites such as Twitter, more people are abandoning the rules of writing. The use of abbreviations, failing to use capitalization and punctuation is extremely informal and does not translate well to the professional setting."

Fallgatter is quick to point out that, all things being equal, in a showdown between two job applicants, she'll choose the better writer.

A reputation as a good writer has paid off for Mel White, vice president of [marketing](#) and [business](#) development at Classic Exhibits, a firm that specializes in providing equipment to trade show [vendors](#) and exhibitors. He says effective communication skills have enhanced his professional image in ways he didn't expect.

"I'm no genius, no superstar -- but strong writing skills have always made me a valuable asset," he says. In business school, he frequently earned higher marks than his classmates because of his writing abilities, a trend that carried over to his business life. "Regardless of my position, I've become the default writer and editor everywhere I've worked. Writing skills matter. For some odd reason, people think you are smarter and more competent."

This phenomenon has held true for other professionals, including Dustin Weeks, author of "Lessons From a Recovering Worker Bee."

"While working abroad I was responsible for making sure that all written communications for our American English-speaking clients were grammatically correct," Weeks explains. As a result, he became the resident expert on English and North American business strategies. "I was often asked strategic questions about how something should be presented to our North American clients because I had command of the English language and was from North America."

How to make writing work for you

All this said, strong writing skills can lose you a job if you're not careful. If your command of English makes you the go-to editor for the office, you still need to temper your criticisms a bit. If your eagerness to mark up a paper with red ink outweighs your desire to help your colleagues and boss, you'll appear arrogant.

With that in mind, here are some tips to help make the most of your written communications at work:

· **Proofread, proofread, proofread**

Typos, slang and bad grammar send a negative signal whether you're a job seeker, new employee or a supervisor. Look over your own writing and if it's an important document, ask someone else to review it, too.

· **Even e-mails deserve attention**

All business communications should be treated with some level of professionalism. Although not every e-mail is a letter to the CEO, don't forget that these messages can be forwarded to anyone. Plus, in a culture where e-mails are more prevalent than face-to-face conversations, your writing is the face of your professional image.

· **Pick your battles**

If you're a great writer, don't become the office grammarian who constantly corrects the usage of "who/whom." Congratulations on your knowledge of "The Elements of Style," but being known as a know-it-all can overshadow your knowledge.

· **Context matters**

Part of being a good writer is knowing how to communicate effectively to your audience. A white paper should be more formal than a personal message to a colleague you know well. If you treat every correspondence with too much formality, that will be more noticeable than the content. So sometimes "Hi" is a better way to open a message than "Salutations."

Anthony Balderrama is a writer and blogger for CareerBuilder.com and its job blog, [The Work Buzz](#). He researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues.

Last Updated: 07/10/2009 - 9:38 PM

RESOURCE:

<http://www.careerbuilder.com/Article/CB-1245-The-Workplace-The-Importance-of-Good-Writing/>