Webinar Agenda

- The *good*, the *bad*, and the *ugly* of writing
- 15 ways we can destroy good writing
- *Writing to Win* guidelines
  - Compelling – Responsive, hot buttons, benefits focus
  - Concise - Readability
  - Customer Focused – 10 characteristics
- Tools for writing to win
- Best practices

Today's Selling Environment

Often harsher attitudes towards sales and the business development process

Changing technology and communication dynamics

Today's environment

Trust is becoming harder and harder to earn

More and better information about both the buyer and the seller

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Why **Good** Writing

Good writing focuses on the customer's needs:

- Builds trust with customer
- Wins more business – higher evaluation scores
- Establishes credibility
- Improves our personal and company brand
- Reduces confusion, re-work, and waste
- Compels customer toward a decision – easy to evaluate. Answers the "why us" question
- Demonstrates competence

Why So Much **Bad** Writing

We know BAD when we see BAD
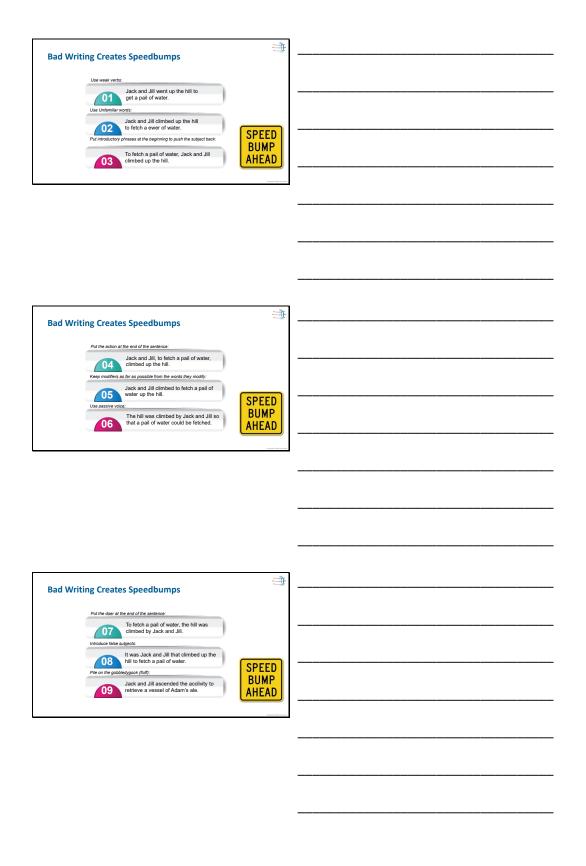
- We try to "impress"
  - Wordiness, too technical, jargon, complex thoughts
- Bad writing causes:
  - Confusion
  - Non-compliant (thrown out)
  - Hard to score/evaluate (frustration)
  - Loses credibility
  - Speedbumps for the evaluator

Bad Writing Costs Businesses Billions

"Bad writing is costing American businesses close to $400 billion every year. That is a staggering number."

- Josh Bernoff

Bad Writing Creates Speedbumps

Use weak verbs:

01 Jack and Jill went up the hill to get a pail of water.

Use Unfamiliar words:

02 Jack and Jill climbed up the hill to fetch a ewer of water.

Put introductory phrases at the beginning to push the subject back:

03 To fetch a pail of water, Jack and Jill climbed up the hill.

SPEED BUMP AHEAD

Bad Writing Creates Speedbumps

Put the action at the end of the sentence:

04 Jack and Jill, to fetch a pail of water, climbed up the hill.

Keep modifiers as far as possible from the words they modify:

05 Jack and Jill climbed to fetch a pail of water up the hill.

Use passive voice:

06 The hill was climbed by Jack and Jill so that a pail of water could be fetched.

SPEED BUMP AHEAD

Bad Writing Creates Speedbumps

Put the doer at the end of the sentence:

07 To fetch a pail of water, the hill was climbed by Jack and Jill.

Introduce false subjects:

08 It was Jack and Jill that climbed up the hill to fetch a pail of water.

Pile on the gobbledygook (fluff):

09 Jack and Jill ascended the acclivity to retrieve a vessel of Adam's ale.

SPEED BUMP AHEAD

Bad Writing Creates Speedbumps

Turn verbs into nouns:

10 Jack and Jill did the hill climb for purpose of water retrieval.

Use unnecessary technical jargon:

11 Jack and Jill traversed the gradient to fetch an alembic vessel of H_2O.

Add wordy phrases (fluff):

12 Jack, in the company of Jill, climbed their way up the hill for the purpose of fetching water in the approximate amount of a pail's full.

SPEED BUMP AHEAD

Bad Writing Creates Speedbumps

Multiple redundant words:

13 Both Jack and Jill climbed all the way up to the top of the hill's summit to fetch a pail filled to its capacity with water.

Throw in clichés indiscriminately:

14 Jack and Jill, who need no introduction, climbed up the hill by leaps and bounds to fetch through their good offices a pail of water by hook or by crook.

String lots of nouns together to form the subject:

15 Jack and Jill water retrieval hill ascent was achieved.

SPEED BUMP AHEAD

Ugly Proposal Writing

Ugly is ugly

- Poorly organized – doesn't follow instructions
- No "road maps" (headings)
- BORING to the evaluator
- Confusing to the evaluator
- Painful to look at
- Cluttered
- "All about you" (seller focused)

A Few of Your Questions

How do you convince a SME that simple, concise language without jargon/technical over speak is better in a written proposal?

A Few of Your Questions

What are the best practices for writing customer-focused proposals and how do we trim the fluff?

A Few of Your Questions

When writing technical proposals, are there any tips for keeping readability statistics below that of advanced education levels?

A Few of Your Questions

How is the best way to ensure consistency across the entire proposal?

A Few of Your Questions

What if I am just answering questions from an RFP? How do I make it impactful and not boring?

***Writing to Win* General Guidelines**

Use short, coherent, logical paragraphs (≤8 lines).
Use lists wisely.
Use active voice.
Keep sentences < 20 words.
Use headings mirroring bid request language.
Use graphics to support your sales message.
Substantiate all claims.
Preview graphics in the text before graphic appears.
Be consistent.

Writing to Win is Customer Focused

01	Name the customer before us?	06	List benefits before features.
02	Name the customer more often than us?	07	Validate all claims.
03	Mention and address the customer's buying objective.	08	Organize as instructed.
04	Link the buying objective to our offer.	09	Make our value proposition apparent to the customer.
05	Address customer "hot button" issues in prioritized order?	10	Be consistent, clear, and concise.

Writing to Win is a Team Sport

- Write for the evaluator – Treat them like a teammate, not an enemy
- Collaborate with technical experts and SMEs
- Plan and organize before you write
  - Leverage your internal team and resources
- Engage peers and others to review
- Revise for clarity, conciseness, and accuracy
- Double-check everything (peers)
- Monitor readability

Improving Readability
Writing to Win Improves Readability

"Think of your (proposal) like a puzzle. You want your readers to be able to solve your puzzle as easily as possible.

That's readability."

Source: Tips for Improving Readability, Grammarly

- Leverage *lists* in the proposal
- Use graphics that support your message
- Use headings to guide the reader
- Use simple, concise words – avoid wordiness
- Use active voice vs. passive
- Avoid technical jargon and wordiness
- Be consistent

Improve Readability
Be Consistent with Lists

1. Numbering isn't always needed
2. Entries should be short, rather than complete sentences
3. Nested lists can confuse
   1. Unclear font variations
      - Mixed indicators
      - Not parallel
4. Inconsistent format

Best Practices
- Name the list
- Make items parallel
- Use bullets (unless order is important)
- Limit number of items
- Highlight with white space

***Writing to Win* Leverages Good Graphics**

Graphics

Do visuals clearly communicate major selling points?

Are captions compelling?

Figure 4.2 Consistent Revenue Growth. *By implementing our marketing automation system, ABC Company grew revenue by an average of 14% per year over five years.*

Improve Readability
Use Effective Proposal Headings

Telegraphic

Informative (2nd Level)

1.0 Introduction — 1.1 An Overview for Improving Sales Performance

2.0 Organization — 2.3 Our Flat Organizational Structure Reduces Overhead Cost

3.0 Design — 3.4 A System Designed for Tailoring to Public Sector

4.0 Implementation — 4.2 Continuous Support Through a Three-Phase Implementation

Improve Readability
Use Concise Words

Wordy	Simple
have the ability to	can
conduct an investigation of	investigate
make a modification to	modify
make use of	use
with the result that	so that

Avoid Unnecessary Technical Wording

"I utilized a multi-tined instrument with quadruple points of entry to process a starch resource."

"I used my fork to eat a potato."

Use Active Voice to Trim the Fat

In **passive** voice,…vague and illusive.
- *The ball was missed by the batter.*

In active voice,…action and ownership
- *The batter missed the ball.*

The focus should be on the "batter", not the ball.

Be Consistent in Your Writing
Leverage Reviews to Improve Quality

Inputs

- Capture and Proposal Strategies
- Instructions
- Evaluation Factors
- Proposal Outline
- Master Compliance Checklist
- Completed Section Planners
- Section Mock-ups

Proposal Review 1 (Pink)

Outputs

- Redirection on Strategy
- Documented Comments and Recommendations
- Verified Compliance Checklist

Inputs

- Final Proposal Draft
- Proposal Review 2 Kickoff Briefing
- Evaluation Factors
- Proposal Review 2 Assignments
- Proposal Review 2 Instructions
- Review Forms
- Master Compliance Checklist

Proposal Review 2 (Red)

Outputs

- Quantitative Scoring Prediction
- Qualitative Assessment
  • Strengths and Weaknesses
  • Comments
  • Recommendations
- Documentation of Findings
  • Marked-up Draft
  • Review Documentation
  • Author Meetings

Use Checklists and Tools

- Is the theme or value proposition stated first? Is it specific and quantified?
- Do you name the customer **before** your company?
- Did you state benefits **before** features?
- Is your solution tied to the customer's hot buttons?
- Did you preview the content for the reader?
- Is content organized as instructed?

- Do you clearly identify how your solution benefits the customer?
- Are your discriminators obvious?
- Did you substantiate your approach and claims?
- Did you use clear visuals with action captions?
- Did you use telegraphic and informative headings on proper levels?
- Is information organized logically?
- Did you use active voice?

A Few Examples

e**X**ample

Writing to Win Summary

- Understanding the good, the bad and the ugly of writing
- Writing to the customer/evaluator
  - Reviewers are human – make it easy
- Improve readability
- Apply best practices
- Write to win on your next proposal

Your Questions and Discussion

Join Us Next Time

Shipley Associates | June 24, 2020 | Proposal Management

Making Color Team Reviews Work

It's one thing to conduct a color team review – it's an entirely different thing to facilitate an effective color team review. This webinar will review some of the mandatory proposal color team reviews and discuss some basic tools to make them more effective. Short-changing your review costs much more than pocket change – it can cost you the deal.

June 24, 2020 1pm ET

REGISTER

Making Color Team Reviews Work WEBINAR

**Next Webinar: June 24th;
1:00 p.m. Eastern**

REGISTER HERE

THANK YOU

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