

Grammar Goofs Can Take You to Court or Cost Your Career

Communication Expert and Author Develops Assessment to Test Writing Skills

(Dallas, TX. October 2004) Poor writing can sink a sale or sabotage your career success. Consider these examples:

Did Richard Clark state a compelling case in his memos to his boss, Dr. Condoleezza Rice?

Did Jamie Gorelick, who serves on the 9/11 Commission, write with authority when she opined that the CIA and the FBI should remain separate entities and keep their intelligence-gathering efforts inside their own walls?

Did the writers of the Florida Election Code understand the difference between *shall* and *may* when they drafted the law that helped determine the president of the United States?

Did Martha Stewart regret the handwritten phone messages she and her assistant jotted to each other regarding the infamous stock sale?

One thing is for certain: political pundits and CEOs alike understand the role of writing in decision making, action, liability, consequences, results, and rewards.

No doubt the 9/11 Commission members found themselves embroiled in a grammar brouhaha as they wrote their final report: Passive voice seems to be the structure of choice for bureaucracies who can't come to consensus about blame: "Mistakes were made." To know why is to understand a major issue in grammar and writing style. The active-passive decision is the same choice every salesperson makes when writing "We appreciate your business" versus "your business is sincerely appreciated."

Writing Is the Basic Business Act

How important is writing to the conduct of business of the organization as a whole? Communication expert Dianna Booher says, "Companies today do primarily all their day-to-day business by email. Their marketing information is on the web. Their internal policies and procedures are on the intranet. *More*, not fewer, people write. And more people write more. Screen or paper—it makes little difference in the outcome."

How Well Do YOU Write?

Booher has developed the *PERC Writing Assessment* (www.HowYouWrite.com), a free online assessment to test business writing skills and habits in the workplace. This test takes about 20-25 minutes to complete. It measures effectiveness, productivity, and grammar/clarity.

"What you write is what you get," says Booher, who has been a consultant to numerous Fortune 500 corporations and government agencies for the past 25 years. So how do you know if your

own writing is compelling? The assessment also includes a 360-degree component so users can gather feedback from readers of their documents.

Writing skills are not getting any better: A 2004 survey by the College Board's National Commission on Writing asked members of the Business Roundtable to comment on writing skills of employees from six sectors (mining; construction; manufacturing; transportation and utilities; services; finance, insurance and real estate). According to respondents, one-third of US workers do not meet the writing requirements of their job. And two-thirds of salaried workers in large companies have to write as part of their job function.

“In today's e-commerce, written communication makes the competitive difference in overall organizational success. Customers, clients, and prospective business partners often check out your website before they even phone or fax you. If your website doesn't communicate what they need to know or build your credibility, you'll never get a chance to connect with them by phone or face to face,” according to Booher. “Today more than ever, poor writing tempts a customer to click away, doubting that your technology or service is any better than your communication. An email, a web headline, or a product proposal with disorganized ideas, convoluted paragraphs, intimidating layout, or grammatically incorrect sentences tells the client that you won't service their engines well, amortize their mortgage correctly, or interpret their insurance coverage fairly.”

First impressions hang on for a long time. What's the payoff when people and organizations write well? Clear messages. Better decisions. Increased productivity. Better image.

About the Author

Dianna Booher is CEO of Booher Consultants, a communication training firm, and developer of the free online PERC Writing Assessment at <http://howyouwrite.com>.



Dianna is the author of more than 40 books. She has published with Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books, Warner, McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, and HarperCollins. Her latest books include *Speak with Confidence!: Powerful Presentations That Inform, Inspire, and Persuade*; *E-Writing: 21st-Century Tools for Effective Communication*; *Communicate with Confidence!*; and *Your Signature Work*[®]. Several have been major book club selections. Her work is widely available on audio, video, and online courseware (WBT and CBT).

Booher has received the highest awards in the professional speaking industry, including induction into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame. Additionally, *Successful Meetings* magazine named Dianna on its list of “21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century.”

Consultant and CEO Booher first began to lead organizations to increase their productivity through effective communication in 1980 when she founded Booher Consultants. Since then,

Booher trainers have taken Dianna's communication principles and techniques to hundreds of organizations around the world.

Dianna has been interviewed by Good Morning America, CNN, CNBC, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *New York Newsday*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, National Public Radio, Bloomberg, *Investors Business Daily*, Fox Family Network, *Working Woman*, *Success*, *Entrepreneur*, among other national media.

Booher's books, audios, videos, online courseware, speech descriptions, and full-action video clips are all available at <http://booher.com>. Email to training@booher.com or phone 1-800-342-6621.

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