

Professional English, Inc.

Speaking, Writing, and Cultural Training

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Do English Skills Really Matter?

By Dr. Maureen Archer

A study by the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis states: "Many U.S. workers do not read, write, do math, solve problems and communicate at high enough levels to do their jobs effectively. Small and medium-sized firms report about 35 percent of their hourly workers, more than 10 million employees, have basic skills problems that impair work performance."

We see poor writing and speaking abilities even in our college-educated workforce. So, if well-educated communicators have poor English skills, do following Standard English rules really matter? Yes, significantly. A person's, and thus the company's, image, efficiency, and adaptability are greatly affected by how well one communicates.

IMAGE: How we dress and speak greatly influences how we are perceived. When a customer service representative says, "We ain't got none of dose," the image of the representative, and the company she works for, plummets. It is the same for writing: those who know punctuation and grammar rules recognize those who don't. We are more likely to buy from and put our trust in those who speak and dress professionally.

EFFICIENCY: Huge amounts of time are wasted because of confusing communication. If a letter states: "The offer that was made before could indeed be viable in the near future," it might mean "We will decide on your second offer by next week" or "We will decide on your second offer by next month." A follow-up correspondence is needed to clarify the original message. This scenario is repeated far too often. Also, huge amounts of business are lost because of customer frustration with miscommunications.

Free Pocket Guide!

Professional English has developed a new (laminated) pocket guide:

Communication Tips For Managers

This quick reference pamphlet provides insights and suggestions concerning:

- **Communicating with Stressed Employees**
- **Body Language to Avoid in Professional Settings**
- **Giving Constructive Feedback**
- **Email Communication**
- **How to Soften a Negative Message**

For your free copy, please contact us at archer@allenglishtraining.com

ADAPTABILITY: Individuals who are proficient in Standard English can move up the ladder of success with relative ease. Likewise, businesses that employ workers with good English skills have greater flexibility in moving employees upward within the company. Adaptability suffers greatly when individuals lack the writing skills or speaking abilities to perform in different and high-level jobs.

The Standard English dialect exists so we can communicate with people around our country and around the world. It lacks the colorful slang and playfulness of regional dialects, but it employs vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and pronunciation rules that help us connect with those from different regions and backgrounds. Standard English must be taught and maintained if we want efficient, effective communication to continue.

What's Happening at Professional English?

Professional English is now offering the new workshop series **Professional Communication**. Designed to be delivered at the workplace in convenient segments that are easy to fit into busy schedules, this series of five workshops focuses on improving the interaction between client and employee.

Workshop topics include:

- **Fully Understanding Your Clients: Strategies for Enhancing Your Listening and Questioning Skills**
- **Dynamic Face-to-Face Communication: How to Enhance Your Conversation Skills**
- **Positively Successful: Simple Techniques for Retaining Your Clients When Conveying Bad News**
- **Dealing with Challenging Clients: Techniques for Communicating with Stressed, Frustrated, and Angry People**
- **Phone Strategies That Work: Making Every Call Professional, Positive, and Persuasive**

Improved communication results in higher customer *and* employee satisfaction. Please contact us to learn more about these valuable short courses.

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The \$2,000,000 Comma

An unidentified congressional clerk was instructed to write: "All foreign fruit-plants are free from duty." Instead, he wrote: "All foreign fruit, plants are free from duty." It cost the U.S. government \$2 million before a new session of Congress could rectify the error.

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What do the best managers have in common?

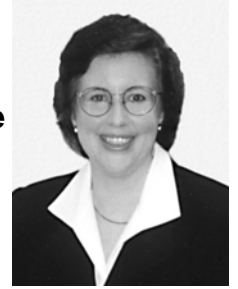
The ability to communicate

Supervisors don't have the luxury to say the first thing that comes into their heads. They need to think first, and choose their words carefully, if they want to gain cooperation and respect. Supervisors who know how to communicate effectively in person, over the phone, and in writing will motivate others and get results.



Dr. A's Corner:

The Most Important Communication Principle



After nearly twenty years of helping adults improve their speaking and writing skills, I have come to fully appreciate the following communication principle:

A message should focus on the needs of the receiver.

It seems deceptively simple, but this principle determines the effectiveness of both oral and written communication.

Peter Drucker's quote (see the yellow box below) can be extended to "Communication takes place in the mind of the reader, not the writer." As "senders," speakers and writers have the great challenge to create messages that connect with their "receivers."

Effective communication is easy (and often pleasant) to understand. This can be achieved if senders first answer the following questions about their receivers:

- What do the receivers already know?
- Which details do they need to know? (*Not* which details does the sender want to give)
- What will motivate the receivers to act?
- What may cause them to react negatively?
- Which method of communication (face-to-face, phone, email, or paper) is the best for delivering the message?

A message that addresses all of these needs is a joy to receive.

Dr. Maureen Archer, President of Professional English

**"Communication takes place in the mind of the listener, not the speaker."
-- Peter Drucker**