

# Professional English

## *Speaking, Writing, and Cultural Training*

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### Current Challenges to Professional Communication in the U.S.

By Dr. Maureen Archer

During the past twenty years of teaching executives (and college students eager to become executives), I have seen some troubling patterns emerge. These patterns illustrate particular difficulties to sustaining a standard, professional dialect throughout the U.S. business community.

Below I have identified some current challenges to maintaining (and in some cases regaining) polished speech and writing in the U.S.

#### Email and Text Messaging

With over 1.1 billion email users worldwide, email traffic per day totals about 183 billion messages. Email has replaced the business letter as the primary form of written business correspondence. However, many people do not communicate effectively in writing, so sent messages often need to be clarified by follow-up questions via phone or email. This wastes time and money, and it lowers the credibility of the email sender.

“R U texting him?” The cryptic spelling and grammar of text messaging may dramatically influence the younger generation’s future writing patterns. After all, they will decide what is “professional” in 20 – 30 years.

#### Empathy Decline

At the very heart of effective communication is the ability of the speaker/writer to understand the needs of the listener/reader. This empathic perspective allows the sender to choose and package information for easy and persuasive comprehension. A self-centered speaker/writer is a poor communicator.

#### Introducing Two New Services:

Responding to our clients’ needs, we have added two new services to our professional communication support programs:

##### Distance Writing Coaching

Real-time writing coaching has many proven benefits. Our distance coaching program is conducted via internet document sharing and telephone discussions. The client and coach are able to solve immediate work-related writing issues together, even though they may be across the country (or just across town).



##### Business and Technical Writing/Editing

This service is for those who don’t have time to write manuals and reports, and for those who want to ensure their organization is producing professionally written documents. Our highly experienced writers will research, write, and/or edit documents that you need to have completed and polished quickly.

#### Evolution of Language

Even though every living language evolves over time, this age of instant mass communication is speeding up the process. It took very little time for the sentence “**I sent an electronic mail message to him**” to become “**I emailed him.**” Rapid changes can lead to confusion and debate about what is currently appropriate for business.

(cont.)

## Current Challenges (cont.)

### English as a Second Language

As a nation, we gain a great richness of talents by having over 34 million non-native English speakers contributing to our society. However, strong accents and unsure vocabulary use can hinder clear, professional communication. For example, if a newly immigrated nurse said to the doctor: "The patient is *breeding* heavily," does she mean "*breathing*" or "*bleeding*"? The distinction is vital.

### What is the Solution?

#### Education:

- Education about **why** clear, concise, and polished communication has a strongly positive impact on listeners and readers, and
- Education in **how** to communicate more effectively and professionally with others.

#### Benefits of Continued Communication Education in the Workplace

1. Better job performance and confidence
2. Less turnover/ greater job satisfaction
3. Improved professionalism and company image
4. Greater potential for internal promotions
5. Reduced time due to miscommunication

"As retention becomes more crucial in the talent wars, [we] will need to earmark greater resources to continuing education." – Robert Grossman in "The Truth about the Coming Labor Shortage" (*HR Magazine*, March 2005)

## Dr. A's Corner:

### What does your email say about you?



Because email is so often used for business communication, many refer to email as the "new business letter." Most of us started using email in its infancy, when it was okay to type in all caps (or no caps) and not worry about punctuation. Those days are long gone.

Business email is now expected to follow more of the professional rules of business letters. Here are some guidelines for writing in this business email style:

1. Write in complete sentences (not "Got your message. Can attend meeting.")
2. State the message's purpose at the beginning.
3. Be brief while maintaining a polite tone.
4. Proofread for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (It helps to read your message aloud once before sending it.)

What does your email say about you? Does it say that you are professional enough to polish your messages before sending them, or does it say you are so rushed that you didn't bother to do a spell check?

Of course, the quality of your business email reflects not only on you personally but also on your organization as a whole. For more advice about writing email messages, please see our Summer 2004 newsletter on our website.

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## 30-Second Writing Clinic:

**Sick Sentence:** It will be incumbent upon you to make contact with me after thoroughly reviewing these various documents. [Diagnosis: Wordy, indirect, and stuffy]

**Healthy sentence:** After you review these documents, please contact me.

## Saving a tree or two...

In an effort to save a few trees, this is the last newsletter we are sending on paper. If you would like to continue receiving our concise, useful insights about professional communication, send an email to [info@professionalenglishinc.com](mailto:info@professionalenglishinc.com) with the subject line: **Put me on PEI's list!** We will make sure you receive our periodic (2-3 times per year) insightful email postings. Thank you.

