

Professional English, Inc.

Speaking, Writing, and Cultural Training

Winter 2005

Bad News for Good Communication

By Dr. Maureen Archer

Have you noticed the slow demise of good communication? Maybe you have received too many confusing email messages, labored through too many long reports, or sat through too many ineffective PowerPoint presentations. These are symptoms of a large problem affecting all areas of business and government: the inability of many people to communicate clearly and professionally.

On December 7, 2004, The New York Times published an article entitled: "What Corporate America Can't Build: A Sentence." In it, Sam Dillon gives the following (sobering) information:

A recent survey of 120 American corporations concluded that about 30% of employees in the nation's blue-chip companies write poorly and that businesses are spending as much as \$3.1 billion annually on remedial training (\$2.9 billion of this amount is for training of current employees).

This investment in writing training has become necessary to reduce the costs of miscommunication. These costs may stem from work redone because of unclear directions, efforts to clarify messages, and time spent reading unorganized, rambling documents.

For example:

- Assume the annual salary of a manager is \$75,000 (about \$38/hour).
- If 60 minutes each workday is spent reading unnecessary words or rereading for clarity, the amount in lost productivity begins to accumulate:

One hour daily (\$38) X 250 days annually = \$9,500 per manager X 8 managers = **\$76,000 lost annually just for reading poorly written messages and reports.**

(cont.)

Spotlight On... Jody Tangredi



As one of our experts, Jody Tangredi provides coaching and executive-level English classes to many of our foreign-born clients. She improves their speaking, writing, and cultural understanding so they can better function in the U.S.

Jody is also one of our top cross-cultural consultants. She grew up living in Iran, France, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Canada. Recently, she worked for six years in Japan: three years as an English trainer and three years as a Director of Human Resources.

Jody moved to Hampton Roads with her Navy pilot husband in 2003. Besides working for us, she stays active assisting the Executive Director of the World Affairs Council and being the Coordinator for Oceana Fleet & Family Services Center's Foreign-Born Spouses Support Group.

If you see Jody at a HRSHRM meeting, please say hello. She will be delighted to meet you, and you will discover what a wonderful person she is.

Add the time spent struggling with **writing**, and the costs quickly increase. The numbers continue to grow as the loss of productivity of all employees is thrown into the equation, making it easy to see how the demise of good communication can have a major impact on the bottom line.

The Price of Bad Communication

Here are some real-life examples to illustrate the dangers of poor writing skills:

1. Computer manufacturer Coleco lost \$35 million in a single quarter, and eventually went out of business, when customers purchased its new Adam line of computers, found the instruction manuals unreadable, and rushed to return their computers.
2. A company spent hundreds of thousands of dollars developing a new pesticide, only to discover that the formula had been worked out five years earlier by one of the company's technicians. He had written his initial report so poorly that no one finished reading it.
3. A nuclear plant manager ordered "ten foot long lengths" of radioactive material. Instead of getting the ten-foot lengths it needed, the plant received ten one-foot lengths, at a cost so great it was later classified.



Assuming a 20% loss per call due to unclear speech and other miscommunication, a customer service rep, working full time, will lose about 2,000 hours per year.

How much are your employees' poor speaking skills costing your company in lost time and lowered reputation?

A Happy, Healthy Workforce

Studies have shown that people who communicate well often have lower blood pressure than those who communicate poorly. Suppressed stress, anxiety, and anger can contribute to many physical problems.

----- NEW WORKSHOP -----

Interpersonal Communication: Building a Positive and Productive Work Environment

This new workshop focuses on the communication skills necessary for good work relationships, especially during stressful times. Listening effectively, projecting positive body language, and choosing words that motivate are all skills that can reduce friction, minimize conflict, and enhance cooperation. Presented as half-day or full-day sessions, this workshop enhances participants' skills in communicating clearly with respect and understanding. (Individual coaching is also available.)

Dear Dr. A:

"Please review the rules for using hyphens."

**Douglas Wong
Newport News, VA**



Dear Douglas:

The hyphen, like its cousin the dash, is often misused. Let's begin by identifying these two punctuation marks. The hyphen is used to connect two or more words (e.g., cross-index), whereas the longer dash is used to connect sentence parts (e.g., My brother – the one with three kids – lives in Florida.) (Dashes should be used sparingly because commas and colons are considered more professional.)

Hyphens are used most often in numbers (twenty-one), fractions (one-fifth), certain prefixes and suffixes (all-, ex-, self-, and -elect), and compound words (son-in-law). The dictionary shows which compound words are hyphenated and which are attached with a space or no space (e.g., cross-country, cross matching, and crossover).

The most challenging hyphen rule involves words acting together as adjectives before nouns. These compound adjectives are connected by hyphens to identify their linked meaning (the many-sided issue, three well-known facts). Also, hyphens in a series are suspended (Do you prefer first-, second-, or third-class tickets?). Just to complicate matters, words ending in -ly should not be hyphenated (the highly effective worker).

Ex. 3 in **The Price of Bad Communication** gives excellent proof of the hyphen's power.

Please send your communication questions to Dr. Maureen Archer (archer@allenglishtraining.com).

Three little words...

In the mid-1960's, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was proofreading a letter he had just dictated to his secretary. He didn't like the way she formatted it, so he wrote the words, "Watch the borders" at the bottom of the letter and asked her to retype it. The secretary did as she was told and sent it off to all top agents. For the next two weeks, FBI agents were patrolling the Canadian and Mexican borders in droves as requested by their leader.