Journalism skills

For non-journalists
What we’ll cover today

• Evolution of journalism
• Why everyone’s a journalist today
• Take responsibility for your communications
• Use the inverted triangle
• The importance of strong headlines
• The importance of CTAs

• Use active language! No passive voice
• Read your work aloud
• Give a headline/ triangle / CTA exercise
• Writing for screens – how users read on the web
• The dreaded wall of text
• Tips for scannable text
Everyone’s a journalist today
Take responsibility to be part of the solution
People decide whether they want to keep reading based on the first sentence or two.

- Get to the point fast!
- Structure your text like an inverted pyramid.
How to use the pyramid

• Most people don’t finish articles or read emails, especially long ones.

• This trend is even more evident in web and online reading.

So...

• Start strong and deliver most of the info at the beginning.

• Those who are more interested can find additional details at the end.
The importance of strong headlines
The importance of CTAs

A safe place for all your files
The importance of CTAs
The passive and the active voice

Active Voice
You stole the cookie from the cookie jar.

Passive Voice
The cookie was stolen from the cookie jar.
Read your work aloud
Exercise

Let’s try it out!
How users read on the web

They don’t.
Instead, they **SCAN**.

They scan the page to pick out individual words and sentences that are meaningful to them.

If you write text that is scannable, your users will read your page faster.

They will retain your message better.

They will have a better experience.
The dreaded wall of text
The dreaded wall of text

*Wall of Text* is the web term for one giant block of writing that is incredibly hard to read/scan.

There are few (if any) paragraph breaks, and no subheadings.
Tips for scannable text

- Use the *inverted pyramid*.
- Write simply.
- Limit yourself to one idea per paragraph.
- Break texts into lists.
- Use headings and subheadings.
- Highlight keywords.
It is all very well for you to write simply and the simpler the better. But do not start to think so damn simply. Know how complicated it is and then state it simply.

Ernest Hemingway
Write simply

• If your text is clear and concise, your users will spend less time reading—and will be happier.

• Use vocabulary that is easy to follow.

• Avoid jargon and clever wordplay. Explain jargon if you must use it.

• Get to the point quickly with:
  • Short words and phrases
  • Concise 2- to 3-sentence paragraphs

• Use about half of the word count you might use for printed text.

• Take out the fluff and the unnecessary, paring the content down to an understandable minimum.
Write simply

- A great tool is HemingwayApp at hemingwayapp.com.
- The goal is to reduce the grade level required to read your text.

Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear.

The app highlights long, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow sentence, shorten or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red.

You can utilize a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over it for hints.

Adverbs are helpfully shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick verbs with force instead.

Phrases in green have been marked to show passive voice.
Break text into lists

• Lists make text even more scannable.
• They break up large blocks of text into smaller chunks that are easier to read.
• They give the user's eye something to lock onto when they scan the page.
• If you are using a lot of commas within a sentence, consider a bulleted list instead.
Lists are en vogue...

_Listicle_

An informal term for an article made up of a series of facts, tips, quotations, or examples organized around a particular theme.
Lists are easy to read
Headings and subheadings

- Headings are a great way to make a long sequence of paragraphs easier to scan.
- Headings announce exactly what the chunk of text is about.
- They let your user decide whether they want to invest their time in reading the rest.
In summary

Use these basic journalism skills in all of your business writing!
Email etiquette

How to apply these principles to email
Using journalism skills in your email etiquette

- Why email etiquette is important
- A few common email mistakes that cause problems
- Subject lines are headlines
- Some examples

- Journalism rules still apply to email!
- Clear and succinct is always better
- Remember your CTAs
- Email is part of your personal brand
- When email won’t work
Why is email etiquette important?
A few common email habits that cause problems...

- Changing the topic without changing the subject line
- Including multiple subjects
- Misaddressed recipients
- Displaying addresses of recipients who are strangers to each other
- Replying vs. forwarding
Subject lines are headings

• Use a precise headline for your messages

• This makes it easier for your audience to manage their emails

• Avoid sending email with a vague subject line
### Ineffective subject lines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hi</td>
<td>09:17 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>questions</td>
<td>10:11 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>12:44 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One more thing...</td>
<td>03:02 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some thoughts</td>
<td>04:21 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: please help with this!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Effective subject lines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party planning meeting rescheduled for 3pm</td>
<td>09:17 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help: I can’t find the draft for the Smith Paper</td>
<td>10:11 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminder: peer-review articles due tomorrow (3/30)</td>
<td>12:44 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about Sociology 210 project</td>
<td>03:02 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulations to Jennifer for winning Nobel Prize</td>
<td>04:21 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: Question about Smith paper</td>
<td>10:11 am</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Change subject lines when necessary**
- **Remove extra email prefixes**
Journalism rules still apply to email!

- Keep the message focused and readable
- Keep it short
- Use the pyramid!
- Active not the passive voice
- Brevity and clarity
- Use paragraphs
- Break into paragraphs; skip lines between
- Avoid fancy typefaces
Clear and succinct is always better
Jon,
Hey, I was just thinking about the meeting we had about the new workshop you were planning for next week about resume writing. I think that we may have forgotten to include all of the students who might benefit from this workshop. There are several groups of students at the School of Public Health that were not on your list. Of course you may have added them to your list since our last meeting. Sara from the School of Public Health contacted me to ask if the students from the Epidemiology programme were on our list of included students. She also wanted a list of all of the included departments from the School of Public Health. Can you send me a list of all of the included student groups? I can then send the relevant information on to Sara because she needs this information by tomorrow.
Thanks,
Rachel
Jon,
Can you send me a list of the students included in the resume writing workshop by tomorrow?

We may have forgotten to include all of the students who might benefit from this workshop. There are several groups of students at the School of Public Health that were not on your list. Sara from the School of Public Health contacted me to ask if the students from the Epidemiology programme were on our list.

I will send her that information tomorrow after I get the list from you.

Thanks,

Rachel
Remember your CTAs
Email is part of your personal brand

How you see yourself

Your personal brand

How others see you
When email won’t work

- There are times when you need to take your discussion out of the virtual world and make a phone call.
- If things become very heated, a lot of misunderstanding occurs, or when you are delivering very delicate news then the best way is still face-to-face.
Email etiquette

Keep it short
Easy to read, short and clear. Shrink sentences and list items. Save everyone’s time by linking to the resources instead of leaving everyone to find them individually.

Reply to all
Always Reply to all by default. The most common mistake amongst teams is lack of communication. Check that everyone relevant is included. Carbon Copy those who don’t need to take action.

Searchable emails
How will you be able to find this email after a month? Think about which keywords you would search and include them.

Descriptive subject
The subject of an email describes its content and attachments in a short sentence.

Keep it organised
If there is already a related email, reply to it. If it has a different subject create a new one.
We tell stories that engage your audience. We use words, conversations, video and pictures to tell your story. We work online, face to face and in print to create compelling content. But really, the medium by which we tell your story doesn’t matter, it’s how we tell it that makes the difference.

So how can we help tell your story?