



classy - *adjective* (pronounced "kla-se") Having or showing class; elegant, stylish.

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Five-Minute Business Writing Tips E-Newsletter - April 2013

Hi everyone,

Hope you're having a happy spring.

Has business-ese ever baffled you? Common jargon, such as **change agent**, **best in class**, and **zero-loss** can confuse readers unfamiliar with those terms. Complex words, the passive voice, and long sentences also help readers stumble away. It makes sense to simplify your writing to keep your readers (customers), which is the subject of this month's article.

Also, for more information on this topic, don't forget to visit my **blog** (more info below).

Thanks!

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5 Ways to Write in Plain English

1. **You are not your audience.** Perhaps you have the habit of using more complex words when you write than when you speak, or you become jumbled in jargon. Sometimes, if you sit before a computer screen, you can focus more on how you think you should sound. Record yourself speaking about the main points of your article with a friend, then transcribe it, or have someone take notes of the conversation. Phone and tablet PC apps, such as **Dragon Dictation**, can transcribe for you. See if this makes your writing sound more human and alive.
2. **Pretend you're writing to a friend.** Some of us are self-conscious about being recorded, so this is an alternative to #1.
3. **Keep a journal.** I've found some of my best, most open writing occurs when I write in my journal. It's like I'm talking to an uncritical therapist or a friend. It's a great way to practice writing and to relax, so your words will flow more freely.
4. **Read your writing aloud in a flat voice.** Printing a copy helps. Sometimes what we see onscreen doesn't match the printed page. Take a pen and note any corrections or additions. Our ears can catch things our eyes don't.
5. **Let someone else read.** If you're open to constructive criticism and won't take it personally, have a trusted friend or loved one read your writing. Another set of eyes can help you see more clearly.

The Classy Writing Blog - Steer Clear of Business-ese: It Helps Sell

According to a survey by MarketProfs and Junta42 Content Marketing Institute, "For businesses with existing content marketing strategies, the largest challenge is 'producing the kind of content that engages prospects

and customers' (36% of respondents).” (*B2B Content Marketing: 2010 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends*)

In *Five Ways to Write in Plain English*, I covered how to make your writing sound human rather than robotic. This can happen when you use:

- 1) complex words
- 2) long sentences
- 3) the passive voice
- 4) jargon common to your industry for a general audience

As I state at my Web site, I follow a philosophy similar to that of the book *The Cluetrain Manifesto* -- customers are more likely to respond to text which sounds human, rather than jargon-filled, complex, and robotic. Conversational copy connects with people better. Text can't replace face-to-face contact, but if it's written in an engaging style, it can sell your products or services effectively.

complex words

Why use a five-dollar word when a five cent one will work well? Sometimes, I don't really need your *assistance*, as much as I need your *help*.

long sentences

Short sentences also keep readers focused, if you don't use too many together at one time. Then, your shiny prose becomes dull — too repetitive and more mechanical.

the passive voice

The pain of plowing through passages of the passive voice is also unpalatable...

To read more, visit www.classywriting.com/blog

Quotes

Incomprehensible jargon is the hallmark of a profession. ~ **Kingman Brewster, Jr.**

Even to a writer who is being intentionally obscure or wild of tongue we can say, “Be obscure clearly! Be wild of tongue in a way we can understand!” Even to writers of market letters, telling us (but not telling us) which securities are promising, we can say, “Be cagey plainly! Be elliptical in a straightforward fashion!” ~ **William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style***

Comments? Suggestions? Need help with your writing?

Feel free to email me: michelle@classywriting.com

Thanks for reading, and tell your friends! ☺

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