

5 Tips to Enhance Your Staff's/Your Team's Writing Skills

Use these 5 tips to enhance your staff's or team's on-the-job writing:

1. **Encourage writers to list each document's key ideas before writing** to ensure complete content and logical organization. If you've asked for a report, for example, ask to see a list of key ideas or a preliminary outline before they start to write. Also, to ensure complete content and an appropriate level of detail, discuss how the information in the report will be used.

After the report is finished, explain what the writer did that helped you access information, what content was especially valuable, and provide one or two suggestions for improvement, as necessary.

2. **When you review a document, don't cross out the writer's words.** Remember that your goal is to produce not only a better *document* but also a better *writer*. Weak writers can't be expected to learn anything if you rewrite a document for them. In fact, rewriting someone else's document only reinforces their perception of themselves as a "bad writer." Instead, as you review the document, bracket the words or phrases that might be left out or changed; then write your suggestions for improvement above.
3. **Phrase criticism as gently and positively as possible.** Most people's egos are on the line when you discuss their writing. Reinforce the writer's strong points. Encourage the writer to reproduce them in future documents.
4. **Be flexible.** Just because someone writes with a style that differs from your own doesn't mean that he or she isn't communicating clearly. Change someone else's words only with good reason:
 - If information is incorrect or incomplete.
 - If wording is misleading or illogical.
 - If wording is negative or too blunt.
 - If grammar or usage is incorrect.
 - If the document is wordy.
5. **When working to improve overall style, offer only a few suggestions at a time, usually beginning with suggestions about improving structure.** Sometimes simply asking for a shorter version will eliminate a writer's tendency to be wordy or redundant.

Above all, give your writers feedback. Let them know immediately that you appreciate their efforts to improve their writing and that you notice and care about good writing. Helping a subordinate learn to communicate clearly will save time for both of you and help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your group.

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