

Effective Writing for Public Relations

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Randy Zane

Randy Zane is a senior level communications leader with expertise in all aspects of strategic and integrated communications and marketing. Mr. Zane currently leads communications for Precision for Medicine, a healthcare company focused on research, analytics and marketing services. With a career spanning the technology, healthcare, services and media industries, Mr. Zane has the expertise to identify, build and implement strategic communications programs for large organizations nationally and internationally.

At Precision for Medicine, he leads the corporate communications function, overseeing external and internal communications, and social media. He provides strategic counsel to executive leadership on communications strategies and serves as the company spokesperson for all aspects of public relations and media relations.

Before joining Precision for Medicine, Mr. Zane spent more than 20 years in the technology, healthcare, services and media industries. Most recently, he developed and led global communications strategies and programs for the Commercial and Commodities Markets at McGraw Hill Financial. Prior to this role, Mr. Zane led communications worldwide in two divisions at IBM. He oversaw global media relations and thought leadership at IBM Global Business Services and, led communications worldwide in several sectors at IBM Research including, big data and analytics, commerce, business services, and government. He also developed global communications initiatives that helped launch Watson, IBM's super computer.

Earlier in his career, Mr. Zane was head of corporate communications and marketing at Ziff Davis Media where he developed thought leadership programs that led to weekly segments for company leaders on CNN and Fox. He has also led communications and marketing programs at CMP Media, Empire BlueCross & Blue Shield, and the Insurance Information Institute. He began his career in communications for the Office of the Governor of Massachusetts.

Mr. Zane received his Master's degree in Communications from Emerson College and Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Towson University.

The Value of Communications

- The purpose of communications is to get your message across to others clearly and unambiguously
- We communicate for three reasons:
 - I. Inform
 - II. Persuade
 - III. Entertain
- There are several core communications competencies and skills including: verbal, listening, kinesics/proxemics, presentation and **WRITING**



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Communications: Clear and Concise Messaging



Communications: Sender and Receiver

- Communication is successful when both the sender and receiver understand the same information
- If you are the sender:
 - How important is the information you are sending?
 - Who needs to know the information?
 - How will you share the information?
 - What action do you want after the information is sent?
- If you are the receiver:
 - Be an active listener
 - Repeat information back to the sender
 - Receive acknowledgment that message was received

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Business Communications

You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere.

- **Lee Iacocca**

It's far better to use a simple term and commonplace words that everyone will understand, rather than showing off and annoying your audience.

Richard Branson

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Business Communications Impact

- Many organizations struggle communicating their thoughts and ideas effectively – whether verbally or in written format
- For every \$1 billion spent on a project, \$135 million is at risk¹
 - 56% (\$75 million of that \$135 million is at risk due to ineffective communications)
- Poor communication will strain the productivity of the organization. Awareness of such problems in communication is the first step toward solving them.

¹2013 Project Management Institute, Inc. The Essential Role of Communications

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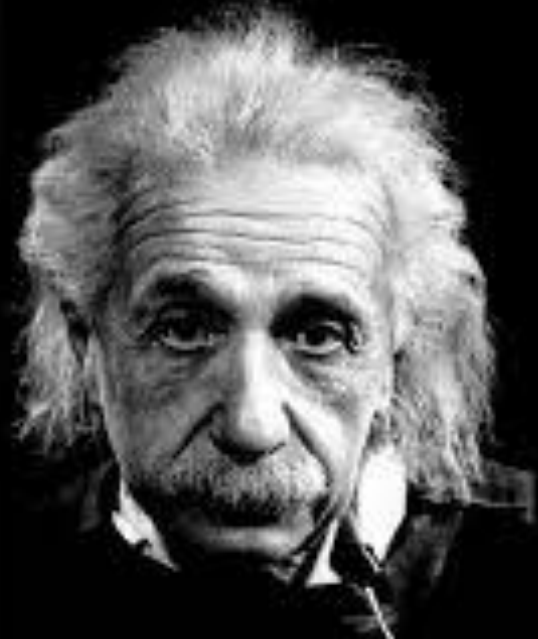
7 Steps to Effective Business Writing

1. Preparation is key
2. K.I.S.S.
3. Objective: define your purpose before you begin to write
4. Outline: create it first, then go back in and fill in the details or write the article you'd want a reporter to write
5. Audience: understand who you are targeting
6. Be clear: avoid business or industry jargon
7. Proofread: review your content before sending it

Simplifying Your Language

“Everything should be made
as simple as possible,
but not simpler.”

Albert Einstein



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Jargon Examples

- Buzzword
- Core competencies
- “Best of breed”
- World’s leading
- End user
- “Move the needle”
- “Deep dive”



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Avoid Industry Jargon and Wordiness

- Jargon is shorthand between members of a particular group of people, often words that are meaningless outside of a certain context
- Avoid unnecessary words and technical terms, but sometimes in industries like IT and finance it's nearly impossible
- Are you smarter than a fifth grader?
 - Write your press release or media pitch at a 4th-grade reading level and avoid any industry jargon to ensure your news is understandable to the majority of your readers

5 Tips to Simplifying Your Language

1. Write like you speak: be real, use conversational style
2. Clarify transitions: as a writer you can take your audience down many paths; it's important to clarify transitions for readers so they can follow along. Use bold headers or simply state what you are doing
3. Visualize: Use and embed infographics, hyperlinks, photos and videos into your press release. It will help illustrate your story
4. Keep it short: write shorter press releases, email pitches, sentences and paragraphs. Use bullets and numbers whenever you can
5. Read and re-read: have a colleague read your content to ensure simplicity

Writing a Fantastic Headline



The Headline

- The headline is the most important real estate on the page – it grabs your attention
- According to David Ogilvy only 20% of readers actually read the body of a text. The rest, 80%, simply read the headline and move on
- When your press release is shared on social networks, it's the headline that is the first thing that is visible
- A striking headline must communicate your subject matter instantly and convey why the content is new and interesting

“A poor headline will render your article invisible.”

6 Tips for Writing a Great Headline

1. Lead with a concept, not your brand name — readers and reporters care more about finding a good story than your brand or company name. Lead with a compelling concept to attract them
2. Length: ideally headlines should fit on one line
3. Keywords: use actionable and punchy words. Place your most important keywords at the beginning of the headline within the first 50 characters
4. Numbers: readers like data points, place numerals in the headline
5. Utilize a subhead to add more context
6. Test your headline with colleagues, just like any other content

Writing Press Releases That Work



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Writing an Effective Press Release

- The press release is not the end all be all. It is just one tool in the tool box (media pitches, blog posts, owned media, videos, social media)
- If the release has no news value, lacks SEO wording, is poorly written, has a boring headline and there is too much corporate/marketing speak, then the chances of media pick-up decrease
- Develop a strategy by placing your press release (story) with the media first before issuing the release over the wires. Once it is issued it has less news value to reporters
- SEO: press releases are great SEO builders. The wire service will distribute it to the media but also to hundreds of websites, with a link back to your release

6 Tips for Writing an Effective SEO Press Release

1. Use the most popular phrase in the headline (don't use company jargon)
2. Pick 1 to 3 relevant keywords and repeat them at least 3 times
3. Don't over-hyperlink words – and don't use acronyms

6 Tips for Writing an Effective SEO Press Release

4. Include referral links which will allow you to track how successful a posted link was and place them in the first 2 paragraphs
5. Include rich media content (videos, infographics, images)
6. Optimize your website and news center for keywords and keep it consistent. The website should have a keyword density between 2 and 8%. This website: www.keyworddensity.com enables users to enter a URL and chosen keyword density analysis

Media Pitches



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Pitching the Media

- Journalists Pet Peeves from PR Professionals:

“ I automatically delete any pitch that begins, Dear Sir/Madam ”

“ Don't start emails with 'How are you?' when we've never met ”

6 Tips on Writing a Powerful Media Pitch

1. Attention grabber: think like a reporter, use relevant content
2. Personalize your email: don't send a mass email; understand what the reporter covers
3. Keep it brief: write 2-3 paragraphs
4. Don't embed a picture or video in the email
5. Don't tell a reporter how great the company is, find someone else to do that like a customer or an analyst
6. Provide a unique angle – offer embargoes and exclusives
7. Leave them wanting for more – have a call to action

Key Takeaways

1. Clarity: Deliver your message clearly and unambiguously
2. K.I.S.S.
3. Avoid unnecessary words and technical terms at all costs
4. Simplify: keep it short and visualize
5. Headline: use actionable/punchy words; lead with a concept not your brand
6. Press release: pick 1 to 3 relevant SEO keywords and repeat them 3 times
7. Media pitch: think like a reporter, leave them wanting for more



Questions & Answers

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