

## **Tight and Bright: How Decluttering Your Language Improves Communication**

Many people dread putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) to write letters, memos and reports. They don't know what to say and they don't know how to say it. They end up cluttering their composition with fancy phrases and stilted language, and their message gets lost in the muddle. Here are some tips to avoid that trap:

1. **Know your audience.** Are you writing to invite your cousins to a family reunion? Then you can be informal and conversational. Or are you writing an annual report that will be scrutinized by the executives at head office? Your tone will be formal, but not flowery. Simple words are always appropriate.
2. **Pare it down.** Write "now" instead of "at this point in time," for example, or "money" instead of "monetary units."
3. **Use the active voice.** Write "I made a list of writing tips," not "I have been occupied in the writing of a list of composition tips."
4. **Use the right tools for the job.** Keep a dictionary and style book handy. Look for templates and writing samples online. Use a word-processing program that fixes spelling mistakes and alerts you to grammatical errors.
5. **Don't use slang:** It will not be understood by many of your readers, and it won't stand the test of time.
6. **Ask a friend or colleague to edit and proofread your work.** A fresh set of eyes can often spot spelling mistakes and missing words. If they don't understand a phrase, you can be sure most of your other readers won't understand it, either.
7. **Read it aloud:** If you stumble over a passage, so will your readers.
8. **Keep a list of common writing problems.** And refer to it often. Here are some examples:

<b>USE:</b>	<b>NOT:</b>	<b>WHY:</b>
Planning	Advance planning	All planning takes place in advance
Question	Unanswered question	The word "question" implies there is no answer
Destruction	Complete destruction	Something is either destroyed or there's some of it left, so the word "complete" is redundant
The Clear Writing Festival	First Annual Clear Writing Festival	There is no guarantee there will be future Clear Writing Festivals
Happy	Very happy	You're either happy or you're not; the word "very" is redundant
See	Perceive	As editors often say: Why use a \$2 word when a 50-cent one will do?
Help	Assistance	See above
First	Inaugural	See above
Said or say	Expound, retort, reply, explain, etc.	See above
Show	Demonstrate	Ditto

By applying these simple rules you can clean up your text and your message will be bright and clear. Once you know what to say and how to say it, writing those letters, memos and reports will no longer seem like such a daunting task.

If you enjoyed this article, please pass it along to others who would find it useful and sign up for our Organize Anything newsletter on our homepage at [www.organizeanything.com](http://www.organizeanything.com)

© 2010 Colette Robicheau  
The Organizing Coach  
Organize Anything  
Phone: (902) 233-1577 Fax: (902) 455-0553

Permission to reuse or redistribute these materials is hereby granted provided they are reproduced or redistributed in their entirety with full attribution.