

Effective communications

by

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The LRET Research Collegium
Southampton, 16 July – 7 September 2012

Lloyd's Register Group

Effective Communications

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July 2012

Agenda

- Introductions
- Effective writing
- Report writing
- Presentation skills
- Engaging the media
- Q&A

Life Matters

Lloyd's Register has been an independent body for 250 years. Today our constitution reaffirms the long-held principle that the organisation's public benefit objective is to help enhance the safety of life and property across a wide range of industries and to promote education and research in those sectors.

The work of Lloyd's Register touches many aspects of people's daily lives, from the ships sustaining world trade to the nuclear power plants generating energy for homes and workplaces. With our commitment to safety and innovation we will continue to play an important role as the world adapts to meet tomorrow's challenges.

This is the task of the Lloyd's Register Group... because life matters.

The Group at a glance

- 8,000 employees at offices in 250 cities and towns covering all parts of the world
- Over 100 companies
- We celebrated our 250 year anniversary in 2010
- Four business divisions:
 - Marine
 - Energy
 - Transportation
 - Management Systems (LRQA)
- 2009/10 turnover US\$1.25bn

Effective writing

- Plain English is a message written with the reader in mind and that is clear and concise.
- Advantages of plain English are:
 - it is faster to write
 - It is faster to read, and
 - you get the message across more often, more easily and in a friendlier way.

Plain English or gobbledegook?

We are currently experiencing an issue which is impacting the appearance of availability for some seller offerings.

(Amazon.com)

The substantial drops in asking prices are further confirmation of the underlying trend of more sellers re-adjusting their prices downwards.

(spokesman for 'Rightmove', BBCNews web site)

Passenger shoe repatriation area only.

(BAA sign at Gatwick Airport)

Conciseness



Tips to achieve conciseness

KISS – Keep it short and simple

Don't repeat words or use words with similar meaning

- He already has skill and aptitude in the language.

Consider: large in size, urgent warning, absolute certainty, first established, final outcome

Avoid unnecessary fillers and jargon

- Generally, basically, actually
- To be honest, going forward, I am flagging this up, to touch base, at the end of the day

Avoid expressions such as:

- At this point in time
- This is the reason why
- There is a chance that
- For your kind perusal

Tips to achieve conciseness

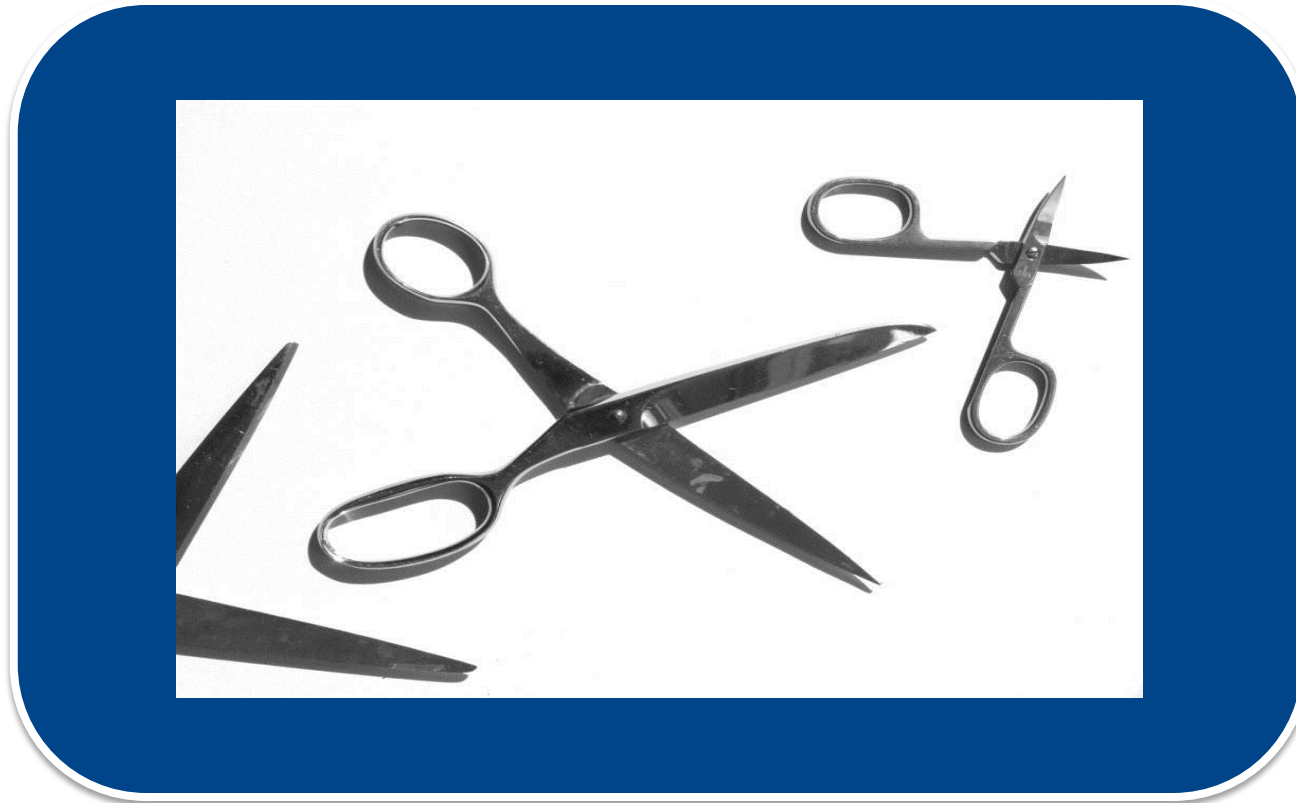
Use strong verbs rather than weak ones:

- I have a job where I work in a team of five.
- He did the agenda for us.

Edit expletives (forms of 'to be' or 'there is', 'there are' and 'it is')

- There is no law which specifically addressed this issue.
- There are many questions the Chairman has to answer.

Shortening sentences



Clarity



Tips to achieve clarity

Use parallel constructions

- “I would like to write quickly, smartly, accurately, and in a concise manner.” vs. “I would like to write quickly, smartly, accurately, and concisely.”

Avoid noun strings

- “Draft laboratory animal rights protection regulations” vs. “Draft regulations to protect the rights of laboratory animals”

Use a low noun-verb ratio

- “He works on the development of new systems.” vs. “He develops new systems.”

Check for misplaced modifiers

- “Jones almost wrote the entire report.” vs. “Jones wrote almost the entire report.”
- “The court only hears civil cases on Tuesdays.” vs. “The court hears civil cases on Tuesdays only.”

Avoid unclear pronoun references

- “Sally told Linda that she would have to work on Saturday.” vs. “After Dave left, Joe found his keys.”

Correctness



Tips to achieve correctness

Factual: dates, names, content

Grammatical: tenses, verb and pronouns agreements

Spelling and punctuation: don't count on the spell checker (affect/effect; accept/except; dependent/dependant; council/counsel)

Completeness



Tips to achieve completeness

Include all necessary information:

- “Our company was formed over ten years ago.” vs. “Our company was formed in 1999.”
- “My manager will be in touch with you soon.” vs. “My manager, John Brown, will contact you next Friday.”

Are these sentences complete?

- I have arranged a meeting for next Tuesday at 10 o'clock.
- Our managing director will be leaving next month to take up a new position.
- I really enjoy my job it is very interesting

Consistency



Tips to achieve consistency

**Numbers: 10 or ten?
10,000 or 10000**

Abbreviations and acronyms

Capital letters

Formatting

Dates

Punctuation

Organising and planning reports



Effective report writing

1. Be focused

What is the report to be about? A surprisingly simple question that is often difficult to answer. If you can answer it, you will not only know the objectives you have to achieve, you will be focused and the report will be much easier to write. If you can't - you will fail.

2. Know your target audience

Who wants the report and why? Who will read the report and what are they looking for? What will happen as a result of the report? What are they going to do with the information they are looking for? If you can put yourself in the shoes of the report's intended audience you will know the messages they are looking for and the best way to impart that information.

Effective report writing

3. Scope the report

What should the report contain/cover? What should it Not cover? Know the boundaries of your report subject matter. That way you will not waste time researching and writing beyond the scope of the report. You will also be able to identify and address gaps and omissions in the report before it is published. You will also be able to incorporate appropriate disclaimers, caveats and assumptions in the report to manage your audience's expectations.

4. Size the report

How long can the report be? What is expected? Are there limitations on the size of the report (No of words/pages, size of electronic files)? You need to have a good feeling for the size of the report so you can gauge how much information and content you have to gather/collate and the level of detail that you can enter into. Sometimes it's harder to write a short report than a long one because of the need to summarise and decide on what to keep in and what to leave out.

Effective report writing

5. Know what you want to say

Look before you leap - applies to a report as well as a wall. What messages are you trying to get over? If your messages are important, be overt with them. Don't leave it to chance that the reader will be able to discern them. Clearly understand these first before you start writing. Your writing must support, explain and emphasis your key messages.

6. Outline your report

Create a blueprint or a basic outline of the report that you wish to generate. Create the skeleton of your report. Think through your message structure. Decide how best to structure your writing to support your key messages and points of view. This allows you to break down the report writing task into manageable tasks whilst keeping you on the right track and maintaining your focus.

Effective report writing

7. Gather and collate information

What do you already know? What information already exists? What information is to hand? Align your information to your outline. What information is missing? Are there gaps? What areas do you require to research further? Pull all the relevant information together and understand what it is telling you. Does it support your key messages? Are your assumptions still valid?

8. Decide on style before you start

Are you going to adopt an active or passive writing style? Are you going to use formal or informal language? Is there a standard you have to follow? Make these decisions up front. It is easier to get the format correct from the start rather than having to go through and make amendments to the layout as you go along.

Effective report writing

9. Pre write

Although you have broken the report up into manageable chunks it is still important that you think about what you want to say and how it should be structured before you start writing. List down the key messages you wish to get across and brainstorm your thoughts on them. Preferably use single words. Don't worry about grammar and the 'glue' words at this time. Focus on content and structure. Once you have done this you will be clear in your own mind what you want to say and how you want to say it. Writing it then becomes much easier.

10. Capture the reader's interest

You will not be able to control how your readers read your report. Some will skim, some will skip about. You need to capture their interest. Use highlighted paragraph headings, bullet points and break up the report into meaningful, but small chunks, so the reader can identify areas of specific interest. Your outline will help you to do this.

Effective report writing

11. Make good use of graphics

A picture paints a thousand words. Make judicious use of graphics (graphs, diagrams, pictures). Not only does it brighten up what may otherwise be acres of boring typeface, graphics can powerfully put over a complex concept/scenarios in a simple and reader friendly way.

12. Repeat your key messages

Tell them what you are about to tell them then remind them of what you've told them. It's a proven fact that people tend to remember more of the first and last things they are told. It is also true that busy people don't have the time to wade their way through screeds of text. So cut to the chase. Provide an Executive Summary at the start and a Conclusion at the end.

Effective report writing

13. Check the report

Does the report meet the objectives? Are the key messages clear and supported by the content of the report? Is the report consistent in content and style throughout? Perform a spell check and grammar check. Carefully proof read. Spell checks don't highlight wrong words that are spelt correctly.

14. Bounce the report off of others before releasing it.

Avoid the motherhood trap. People find it difficult to be truly critical of their own work. Let someone else look at the report and comment on it. Tell them what the objectives of the report are and who the target audience is and let them get on with it. Discuss their comments with them and understand the reasoning behind the comments. Don't get defensive. Make changes as appropriate then check the report before distributing it.

Presentation skills : preparation

- Your voice – *how* you say it is as important as *what* you say
- Body language – expresses what your attitudes and thoughts really are.
- Appearance – first impressions... dress appropriately
- Prepare the objectives and main points you want to make
- Create a rough draft
- Review the draft
- Delete superfluous / irrelevant parts
- Check story flows consistently and smoothly
- Never read from a script. It is your work – you should know what to say!
- Use cue cards
- Rehearse

Presentation skills : making the presentation

- Greet the audience
- Tell the audience what you're going to tell them
- Keep to time allowed
- Keep is short - 2 mins per slide
- Don't digress – stick to the plan!
- Sum up – tell them what you have told them
- Leave time for discussion
- Ask if there are any questions

Presentation skills : Delivery

- Speak clearly – don't shout or whisper
- Don't rush – or deliberately talk slowly
- Pause for effect – emphasising point your are making
- Avoid jokes unless you're a natural
- Change delivery – speed, pitch
- Use hands wisely
- Look at the audience – not on one individual
- Pitch presentation towards the back
- Don't talk to the screen!
- Don't pace too much
- Keep an eye on audience's body language

Engaging the media

- Develop relationships – understand the journalists and their publications
- Know your message (research & rehearse)
- Identify what is newsworthy (and leverage it to get your message across)

What is media?

- Trade Publications
- Scientific Journals
- Newspapers
- Newswire Services
- Websites
- Television, Radio
- Social media

Not all media are the same...

- TRADE TITLES – reporters tend to have greater knowledge of our business, but the magazines have smaller audiences (albeit sometimes with key demographics). Flexible Deadlines.
- GENERAL NEWS OUTLETS (newspapers, wires, radio/television) – reporters have less specific knowledge, but these media streams have wider readership = wider publicity = greater rewards/risks. Tight Deadlines.
- NATIONAL VARIATIONS – investigatory accuracy and journalistic ethic fluctuate widely from city to city, country to country and media to media

Keys to mitigating risk

- Know your message – be prepared
- Choose the right speaker
- “Write The Headline”

- Anticipate sensitive areas of questioning (where’s my Achilles’ Heel?)

- Know the media (what are their response times; what is their editorial focus; how well do they know the industry; how aggressive are they, etc.)

- Engage the Media: having “a conversation” helps effective communication and lessens the risk of misunderstandings

- Journalists are your clients (your product is information) and responding to media queries should be prioritised as such – not when you’re finished your other work

What you have a right to expect from reporters

- Civility
- The option to decline the interview
- Some acquaintance with the story background – that they've done some basic homework
- To stick to agreed topic of the interview -- loosely
- Clarification of questions
- Sense of fairness -- lack of bias?
- Accuracy

What you shouldn't expect

- That the story will not be written if you decline the interview
- Questions in advance (basic framework, yes)
- To review the article prior to publishing
- Your opinion to be the only one expressed in any subsequent article
- Editorial coverage in exchange for advertising

Don'ts

- Argue or show frustration
- Speculate
- Be too technical
- Answer outside your area of responsibility
- Say “no comment”
- Make a sales pitch
- Talk about the competition
- Talk about specific companies, countries, industries in a negative context
- Go “off the record”

Basic guidance for talking to the media

- Map out and rehearse a message strategy
- Have a witness – especially for 'new' reporters
- Take your time
- Stay positive
- Establish rapport
- Listen – make sure they understand
- Use simple, concise language (no jargon, or acronyms)
- Remember your target audience – It's not the reporter
- Support messages with facts, if possible
- Ask to have a question repeated if required

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Q&A