

On the Job **WRITING**



BASIC EDITION

Lesson 4

In this lesson, you will discover how to:

- Set a tone for writing
- Understand what influences tone

WATCH YOUR TONE

Roshanna thinks about what to say in her letter to Hal Renning. She's ending his contract for IT consulting services at Design Professionals, the graphic design business she started eight years ago.

This is a hard letter for Roshanna to write because Hal has worked with her since the beginning of her small business. He has provided excellent service, and she considers Hal a good, professional friend.

From its one-person beginning to now, Roshanna's firm has grown to five full-time designers and two part-timers. Because a graphic design firm is highly dependent on technology at all times, any IT problems need to be solved immediately. Although Hal provided fast service in the past, he no longer is able to offer the speedy IT service Roshanna needs.

She plans to be honest with Hal regarding why she is changing to another IT consulting vendor, but their long-standing relationship is important to her, and

she wants to maintain his good will. She is willing to give Hal a chance to return to faster service if he can guarantee it.

She wants to set the right tone in her letter—one that is business-like and expresses her respect for Hal. She writes and revises the opening for her letter several times. She thinks she may have found the right tone.

"Hal, you've been working with Design

Professionals from before we opened the doors on the first day. Without your expert help, I would have been lost regarding our IT issues. Now that we have grown to over five times our original size, we find ourselves needing even more attention than previously."



DEFINE IT! Tone

The mood or attitude a writer sets in a written message affects how the reader reacts or responds.

SET THE TONE

Any time you put written words together, you set a tone—the same way musical notes establish a tone. This tone influences how a reader reacts to your message. To gain the reaction you desire, you must set the right tone.

When you see friends face to face, you can tell their mood by their tone of voice. When you notice something in their attitude is different from usual, you might say:

“You seem really happy today!”

“Why are you smiling?”

“Are you mad at me?”

“What’s wrong?”

Your writing tone expresses your attitude just the same way your happy or angry tone affects listeners in everyday talks.

Tone is present in all written communication, whether you intend it or not. In the workplace, the tone you set when writing a customer, prospective client, coworker, supplier or other person is of high importance because it makes the reader “feel” a certain way.

By the way you put words together to create a tone, you might:

Gain or lose a sale

Obtain a fast or slow response

Make the reader happy or sad

Improve or damage a relationship

Here are examples of writing tone. Which of these would be inappropriate for business writing?

Casual

Serious

Informal

Formal

Admiring

Sad

Apologetic

Confident

Reflective

Funny

Condescending

Sincere

Arrogant

Gloomy

Appreciative

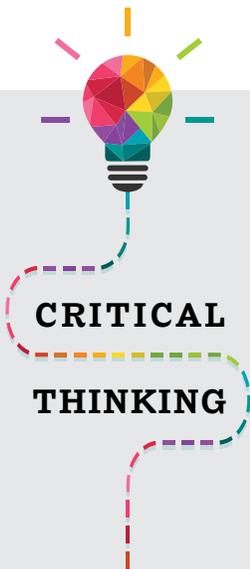
Helpful

Optimistic

Pessimistic

Sarcastic

Enthusiastic



What tone would you recommend for these writing situations?

As loan officer at a bank, you must refuse a loan to a customer.

As the animal manager at a science research laboratory, you must report to your boss that 1,000 mice died within the last week, although you are not responsible for the problem.

INFLUENCERS OF TONE

The type of message you will send determines the tone needed. Two factors are important in creating tone: the audience and the purpose.

A good news message, understandingly, can be more upbeat, optimistic and enthusiastic than a bad news message. A refusal should contain positive overtones, but, if it's too casual, comical or insincere, it will fall flat and get a negative reaction.

Ask yourself these questions before settling on the tone for a written document. They will help you decide how to approach the reader.

Why am I writing this document?

Who am I writing and what do I want the reader to understand?

Audience

Your reader is always the most important part of business writing. You need to have a clear understanding of the reader's demographic and the person's wants and needs before you can create the best tone.

In a proposal to a homeowner who wants a repair estimate after a tree fell on his roof, a roofer should

respond in a confident, courteous and sincere, but not-too-formal tone. He should point out his ability to do the job well and express appreciation for the quote request.

Similarly, in a proposal to the owner of a large apartment complex that was damaged by a raging fire, a construction manager would set a tone of confidence, courtesy and sincerity, but would also show empathy and understanding in a slightly more formal way.

Purpose

The tone of workplace writing must match its purpose. When your purpose is clear, you can more easily define the tone you should take.

An employee manual is meant to explain a company's policies and procedures, so it should be straight-forward and instructive.

A proposal tries to convince the reader to take an action or to buy or use a service or product. Therefore, the tone should be persuasive and believable to the reader.

LESSON 4 ACTIVITY



Write a beginning sentence or two to set the tone for these workplace writers:

An administrative assistant will write his firm's housekeeping contractors to complain about the constantly shifting days of the week that the cleaning crew arrives. He wants to maintain the current schedule.