

Business Communication For Accountants at Wits



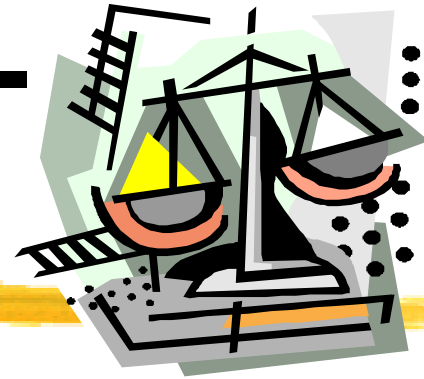
**Presentation for Plain
Language Conference,
Toronto, Canada**

Business Communications

- ⌘ Context : SA - Accountants - Wits
- ⌘ Outline: Course design to address needs
- ⌘ Contents -specifics to meet aims and objectives of course, Plain Language



Context I: Constitution - national needs



- ⌘ Multi-racial, multilingual - language issues
- ⌘ SA Constitution: transition to democracy: final draft assisted by several local and international Plain Language experts to make language more accessible.
- ⌘ Ministry of Justice conference in 1995: legislators, judges, courts, academics, businesses realize need for plain language

Accountants' (professional) needs - research findings



- ⌘ More emphasis on communication skills - more training in English (grammar and spelling), composition, technical writing courses (especially reports) & public speaking
- ⌘ direct curriculum towards thinking, problem-solving
- ⌘ encourage liberal arts courses, extra curricular activities to broaden perspective and develop personality
- ⌘ more mathematics, philosophy, logic, ethics and psychology
- ⌘ social skills, ability to interact orally and in writing in business and social spheres. Activities to broaden outlook, develop personality.

Skills needed for accounting professionals



- ⌘ Writing of correspondence, memorandums, informal & formal reports, also reading speed, reading comprehension, oral presentations, listening attentiveness & responsiveness, correct grammar, outline development, inductive & deductive reasoning, coherence, clarity and conciseness in verbal presentation, use of visual and graphic aids
- ⌘ These skills affect hiring - yet in-house courses run
- ⌘ Research indicates world-wide need for upgrading of language skills - needs to be addressed in Accounting education

Context 3: Wits University



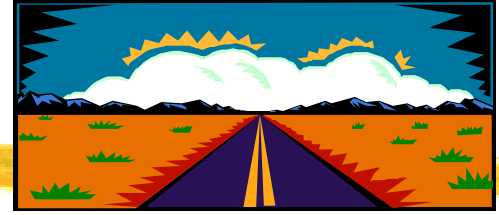
- ⌘ School identified need - appointed tutor
- ⌘ Needs analysis in Accountancy school: students, teachers, textbooks, examination papers
- ⌘ Students: Questionnaire to identify language profile, language problems (listening / understanding, speaking, reading, writing) reading habits, plus cloze test.
- ⌘ Standardized national literacy/ numeracy test
- ⌘ Results indicate tremendous need.

Outline of course designed

- ⌘ Clear thinking: Problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking
- ⌘ Text structure and text characteristics: Reading, writing skills, including rhetoric, process & genre approach to writing used.
- ⌘ Style - Plain language, conciseness, clarity
- ⌘ Application: Business communications, such as letter writing, report writing, memorandums, oral presentations, organizational communication.

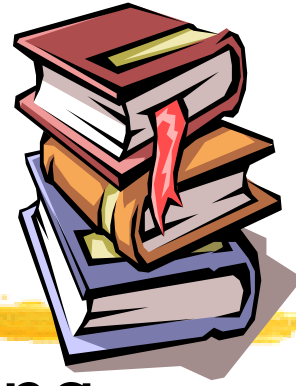


Clear thinking: prerequisite for clear writing



- ⌘ Problem solving techniques: mind mapping - tool for analyzing/exploring a problem, other problem-solving methods, e.g. DANDY
- ⌘ De Bono's 10 creative thinking methods: exploring alternatives not generated through logical analysis
- ⌘ Critical thinking: The argument, deductive and inductive reasoning, fallacies

Text structure - applied to listening, reading, writing, study



- ⌘ Informed by research in reading, writing, discourse analysis, rhetoric.
- ⌘ Principle of unity - topic, focus, coherence, order: sentences, paragraphs, whole text structure
- ⌘ Discourse analysis findings - markers / linking words: semantic and syntactical links
- ⌘ Rhetoric - 4 different types of text: narrative / descriptive / expository / argument - exploring different ways of presenting data

STYLE



- ⌘ Clear thinking connected to clear style
- ⌘ Gowers: Complete Plain Words, Plain Language and style guidelines, etc.
- ⌘ Writing from receiver's point of view
- ⌘ Jargon
- ⌘ Editing checklist: 8 C's: Coherence, Clarity, Correctness, Conciseness, Completeness, Courtesy, Consideration, Conversational

CONTENTS: SPECIFICS



- ⌘ Problem-solving- mind mapping, De Bono, the argument applied to topic: Ethics in Accountancy (Enron/ case studies, etc.)
- ⌘ Reading and writing: reading academic articles, taking notes and summarizing, writing essay on topic.
- ⌘ Style: Read articles on requirements of users of accounting info., Plain Language Movement, look at and rewrite jargon

Applications: Letters, reports, memos, presentations



- ⌘ All the above genres are written or presented avoiding jargon, in plain language, written for the layperson so that the reader (user) can understand.
- ⌘ Two excellent textbooks for accountants, that focus on plain language:
 - ⌘ 1. May, Claire & Gordon S. 5th ed. 1999. Effective Writing -A Handbook for Accountants. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall
 - ⌘ 2. McKay, Melanie & Rosa, Elizabeth. 2000. The Accountant's Guide to Professional Communication. Fort Worth: Harcourt



CONCLUSION



- ⌘ (English) Language proficiency in SA clearly a problem
- ⌘ Language proficiency in other English - speaking countries also problematic, as is language/accounting training - lacks thinking skills, communicating skills, broad background for understanding/coping
- ⌘ Plain language (part of) the solution, but as goal or end-product of a long process

Quotes on style:



⌘ “Good style avoids attracting undue attention to itself..the distracting effect of a conspicuous style is comparable to that of a loud noise or a garish colour...it respects literally the rule that no writer should intrude between the reader and the page. Effective communication is the ultimate achievement of good style”

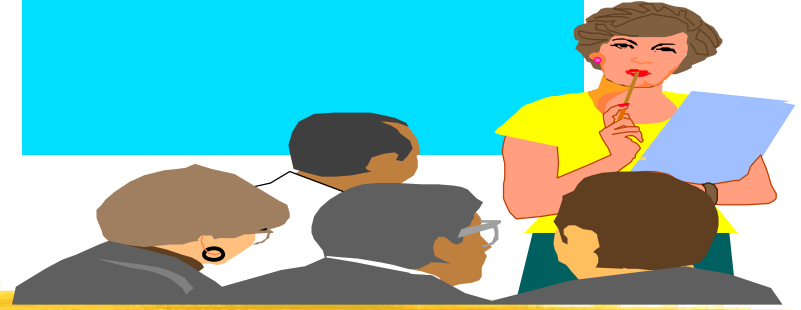
Turner

Quote on style



⌘ "Think before you write, when you write, and think about how you can improve or revise after you've written. Writing which serves your particular purpose requires you to think your purpose through. Clear writing stems from thoughtful planning. Concise writing results from thinking your way through to essentials, eliminating the extraneous and the irrelevant. And writing which is correct and appropriate in style reveals that you have thought of how the reader will react and have designed your communication to produce the reaction you want." Shurter

Materials used



- ⌘ Thinking: Buzan (mind mapping), De Bono (creative thinking methods), Critical thinking - various, plus case studies
- ⌘ Text: Accounting texts: journal articles, newspaper/magazine reports, etc.
- ⌘ Style: Short stories, articles, reports on clear writing, style guides, exercises
- ⌘ Communication tasks: problem-solving scenarios plus writing task - case studies



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