



Fred Meijer Center for Writing & Michigan Authors
and
PACES: Professional Development for Graduate Students

Effective Communication within Academic and Professional Settings

Michelle Sanchez

Today's Workshop

Regardless of your field of study, developing effective workplace communication skills is essential. This Graduate Student Writing Workshop will introduce you to the concept of "you attitude," a style of writing that ensures your reader's needs are met, whether you are writing an email, memo, or other professional document. Today, we'll learn practical tips and practice "you attitude" strategies that will make you an effective workplace writer.

The background is a solid blue gradient. At the top, there are several wavy, horizontal lines in shades of light blue and cyan. A single dotted line, transitioning from light blue to green, follows the curve of these waves across the top of the slide.

Who is joining us today?

What do you hope to learn today?

Overview

Purpose of today's workshop:

- You attitude: Learn strategies to a style of writing that ensures your reader's needs are met.
- Positive Emphasis: Create positive attitude with words, information, organization, and layout.
- Applying “you attitude” and positive emphasis to written communication.

You Attitude

“You attitude is a style of writing that looks at things from the reader’s point of view, emphasizing what the reader wants to know, respecting the reader’s intelligence, and protecting the reader’s ego.”

What do “you attitude” & positive emphasis do?

- Builds goodwill between you and your reader
- Speaks the reader’s language
- Makes your message persuasive
- Presents information from the reader’s point of view
- Respects the reader

Techniques to You Attitude

- Talk about the reader, not yourself.
- Don't talk about feelings except to congratulate or offer sympathy.
- When applicable, tell the reader how they will benefit or are affected.
- In positive situations, use *you* more often than I. Use *we* when it includes the reader.
- In negative situations, avoid the word *you* and protect the reader's ego.

Talk about the reader, not yourself

- Tell the reader what they need/want to know.
- Tell the reader how *they* will benefit or are affected.
- Use the reader's name or the pronoun "you" liberally.
- Give the reader lots of reference points from their perspective.
- Remember that you're writing to a person/people; you're not writing about stuff (or about yourself or your concerns/problems).

Don't talk about feelings, except to congratulate or offer sympathy

- Readers usually don't care whether you're happy, sad, bored stiff, or stressed-out.
- The reader *does* care about the situation from his or her point of view.
- Don't talk about the reader's feelings.
- It is appropriate to talk about your own feelings/emotions to congratulate or offer sympathy.

In positive situations use *you* more than *I*. Use *we* when it includes the reader.

- Begin with “you” or “your.”
- Keep your reader in the message from start to finish.
- Use the reader’s name when appropriate.

In two kinds of situations it is advisable not to use “you:”

- When the reader has made a mistake.
- When the reader has expressed an opinion different from your own.

In negative situations avoid the word *you*.

Instead of *you*,

- Use passive verbs:

these describe the action performed on something without necessarily stating *who* did it.

- Use impersonal expressions:

these omit people and talk only about *things*.

Example

You must get approval from the director before you publish any articles based on your work in the English department.

Better: Department personnel must get approval from the director to publish articles based on their work at the English department.

You made no allowance for student error in your estimate.

Passive: No allowance for student error has been made in this estimate.

Impersonal: The estimate makes no allowance for student error.

What is positive emphasis?

Positive emphasis is a way of looking at things. You can create positive emphasis with words, information, organization, and the layout you choose.

Why use positive emphasis?

Positive Emphasis

By using positive emphasis we:

- Avoid negative words
- Focus on what the reader can do rather than on limitations
- Justify negative information by giving a reason or linking it to a reader benefit
- If the negative is truly unimportant, omit it

Examples

Accuser: You made no allowance for the amount of time it would take me to grade your paper.

Passive voice: No allowance for the amount of time it would take to grade your paper was made.

Accuser: You failed to sign your check.

Passive voice: Your check was not signed.

Accuser: You'll be happy to hear your scholarship has been renewed.

Passive voice: Congrats! Your scholarship has been renewed.

Avoid negative words

- “Dis” words
- “Mis” words
- “Un” words
- “In” words

Negative: We have failed to finish our project.

Better: We haven’t finished our project.

Still better: We will be finished with our project by Friday.

Negative: Never fail to back up your disks.

Better: Always back up your disks.

Focus on what the reader can do rather than limitations

- When there are limits, or some options are closed, focus on the alternatives:

Example:

You will not qualify for the student membership rate of \$25 a year unless you're a full-time student.

You get all the benefits of membership for only \$25 a year if you're a full-time student.



Justify negative information by giving a reason or linking it to a reader benefit.

- A reason helps readers see that the information is necessary.
- A benefit suggests that the negative aspect is outweighed by positive factors.

Example:

The bookstore cannot sell agendas from 2010.
In order to keep students current and to help you with planning, we sell 2011 agendas only.

If the negative is truly unimportant, omit it.

Omit negatives when:

- The reader does not need the information to make a decision.
- The information is trivial.

If you're not satisfied with the student's insurance plan, you do not need to renew the policy.

Omit the sentence.

You attitude & positive emphasis

- Put yourself in your reader's place, and look at the situation from their point of view.
- Emphasize your reader's benefits or actions in a situation.
- Present information as pleasantly as possible by avoiding negative words.
- Offer a helpful suggestion or appreciative comment when possible.
- Choose words that do not insult or accuse your reader.
- Choose words that are clear and natural.

Email: Netiquette

Keep in mind that:

- Email is a form of public communication.
- Email is increasingly formal.
- Email standards are still being formed.

Guidelines for Netiquette:

- Be concise.
- Provide only need to know information.
- Treat the contents of the email the same as you would the contents of a postcard.
- Don't say anything that you wouldn't say in a face to face meeting.
- Wait to respond to a message that made you angry or upset
- Avoid much humor, irony, or sarcasm.
- Be careful about forwarding the email of others.
- Be forgiving of the grammatical mistakes of others – but don't make them yourself.

You Attitude, Positive Emphasis & Email Netiquette

- You attitude: a style of writing that ensures your reader's needs are met.
- Positive Emphasis: use a positive attitude with words, information, organization, and layout.
- Netiquette: Apply “you attitude” and positive emphasis to written communication to build goodwill between you and your reader.

The background is a solid blue gradient. At the top, there are several wavy, horizontal lines in shades of light blue and cyan. A single dotted line, transitioning from light blue to green, follows the curve of these waves across the top of the slide.

Questions?

Thank you for your participation
today!

Works Cited

Johnson-Sheehan, Richard. *Technical Communication Today*. 3rd edition. New York: Pearson Inc, 2010. Print.

Locker, Kitty. *Business and Administrative Communication*. 7th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006. Print.