

Write it right

Because so much of interpersonal communication at work these days is done by typing (emails, texts, tweets), more and more employers are looking for workers who excel at writing. Your expertise in professional written communications is demonstrated by your adherence to the following rules of the road.

Grammar matters ... really

Pop quiz: What are the correct usages for their, they're and there? How about discrete and discreet; your and you're; it's and its; principle and principal; complement and compliment; past and passed; role and roll; pedal and peddle; or two, to and too?

And now that you're on a roll, what's wrong with the following sentence? "The accountant said they are ready to submit a report?" Correct it to: The accountants said they are ready to submit a report. Or: The accountant said she (or he) is ready. Incorrect noun-pronoun agreement is one of the most common grammatical mistakes made.

Another common mistake is noun-verb disagreement, as in: "The report from the accountants show good news." Change the verb to shows, because the report (the noun in that sentence) is singular.

Proper punctuation also can trip up writers, as in this example: "The architect's floor-plan outlines three bedrooms, including a master suite with a walk-in closet and a garage." A garage in a closet is quite a novelty, no? The sentence simply is missing a comma: "... walk-in closet, and a garage."

Will your readers still know what you mean if you occasionally make grammatical mistakes similar to those mentioned above? Probably. But that's not really the point. Rather, your professional image is *advanced* when you use the language correctly.

Know when not to type

If the message you need to convey is

long or complicated, pick up the phone and talk with the person to whom you were going to send the message. Or set up a meeting or conference call. Don't make your recipient sift through a lengthy and complex email while trying to discern exactly what you mean.

Face-to-face conversations are best in these circumstances, because the other person can stop you during the conversation to ask questions if something is unclear.

Also stop typing when the information you're about to give is of a very sensitive nature or easily could be negatively misconstrued. Remember the age-old adage: "Don't hit send if you absolutely would not want to see your message printed on the front page of a newspaper." You can always write down your frustrations, but that doesn't mean you have to send them.

And remember, emails, texts, tweets and other written communications are inappropriate for dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Indeed, people tend to be less inhibited when communicating in writing. And conflicts handled electronically tend to escalate and get overblown. If you plan to criticize a colleague, don't hide behind a keyboard. Ask for a face-to-face meeting and have a quiet conversation to resolve the problem.

Pay attention to tone and nuance

Typed messages don't come with the cues of nonverbal information (e.g., voice tone, facial expressions, eye contact) we usually rely on to determine what someone really means. A study conducted by Albert Mehrabian, a psychology professor at UCLA, found that 55 percent of meaning in an interaction comes from facial and body language, and 38 percent comes from vocal inflection. Indeed, only 7 percent of an interaction's meaning is derived from the actual words.

That's why word selections and appropriate tone are so important in your written com-



munications. And be careful of nuance, that is, how your word choices could be interpreted. For example: "We'll see about that" (vaguely negative connotation) vs. "Good thought. Let me consider that for a while" (a bit more professional in tone).

Lastly, just because all of your college friends know the usual abbreviated expressions developed for tweets doesn't mean everyone at your new job will, too. Don't fall back on shortcuts that may not be understood by all in your audience. Professionals pay less attention to speed of communication and more to the message they're trying to convey.

Who is copied on the email?

That terrific feature in email programs that allows you to start typing a recipient's name

in the "To" field, and the software automatically populates the field with the name it thinks you want can be a blessing — and a curse.

Has this happened to you? You're sending a personal message to several friends, and you mistakenly populate a client's email address into the CC field. Within a few minutes you get the inevitable email back from the client: "Did you mean to send this to me? Yikes. Use extra care when selecting recipients."

Proofread much?

Don't just rely on spell check. Carefully read what you're about to send. Does it make sense? Are you using your words correctly?

Remember, writing should be viewed as reflection of your best self. Engage wisely.