



**Municipal Clerks
and Treasurers
Institute**
September 13, 2024


Reba Hull Campbell

Effective (clear) Communication



Three topics today

- Effective (clear) communication
 - Word nerd 101
- All presentations big and small




Three themes today

✓
Simplicity


💡
Clarity

🔍
Focus



What is effective (clear) communication ?

Engages
↓
Builds trust
↓
Connects

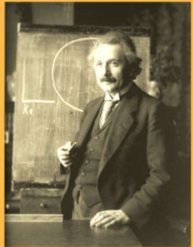



Lessons from a songwriter and a scientist



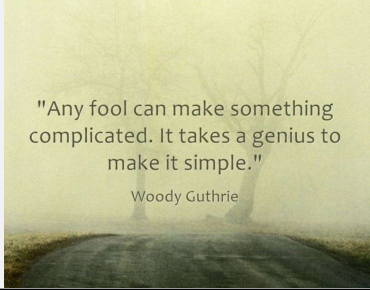

The scientist says ...

If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.






... and the songwriter

"Any fool can make something complicated. It takes a genius to make it simple."
Woody Guthrie

Bottom line

-  It's about making the reader/listener's job easy
-  It's not about you

Six Tips for Effective Communication

1	2	3	4	5	6
Know your audience	Keep your words simple	Avoid jargon or acronyms	Build a narrative	Don't fear verbal white space	Be prepared




1 - Know your audience

1. Identify your audiences

- Internal
- External

• Answer these questions about each audience

- Why we communicate (what's in it for them)
- What we communicate (type of content)
- How we communicate (platforms)



Know your audiences - Example

Audience: Business owners concerned about millage increase

<p>Why we communicate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate questions • Allay fears • Respond to concerns <p>What we communicate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply background of the process • Why the increase is necessary • How the process is administered 	<p>How we communicate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Template responses to phone calls and email inquiries • Website copy • News release • Fact sheet illustrating benefits of new dollars • Social media posts 
--	---

2 – Use shorter/fewer words

Instead of	Try this
utilize	use
ascertain	learn
attempt	try
demonstrate	show
in a timely manner	on time
obtain	get
pertaining to	about
for the duration of	during
witnessed	saw
commence	start



3 - Avoid jargon, abbreviations, acronyms

You know why you have an MRI or where the UFO might have landed.

But do most people think a TIF is minor argument or GASB means your lunch gave you indigestion?



4 – Build a narrative



Be real – speak from what you know



Tell stories overlaid with data/numbers



Use examples

5 – Don't fear verbal white space (pace)



Pause



Take a breath



Let your words sink in

6 – Be prepared



You be you



Breathe



Practice

Credibility busters

Upspeak

- A declarative sentence sounds like a question

Passive voice

- Subject receives the action of the verb

Body language

- Audience often sees before it hears


Confidence boosters

- Breathe**
 - Verbal white space
- Clarity**
 - No "um," "like," etc.
- Practice**
 - Use a mirror, record, have someone listen/watch


Questions?

Reba Campbell
reba@themedwaygroup.com

@rebahcampbell @themedwaygroup
themedwaygroup.com
RandomConnectPoints.blogspot.com

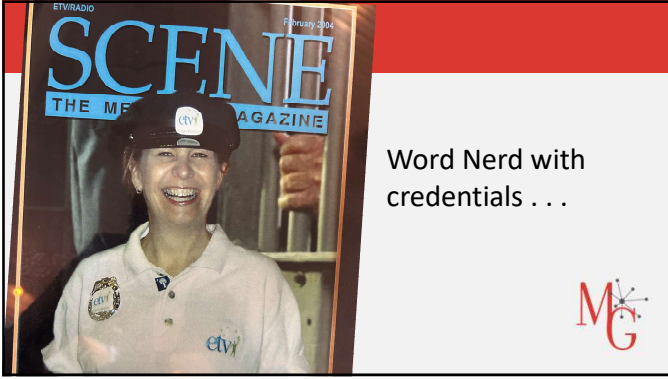


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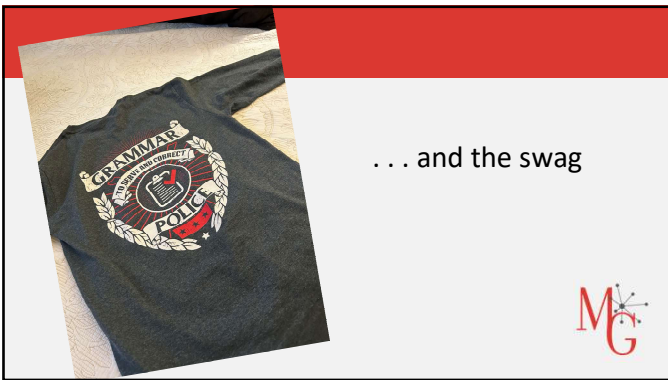
Word Nerd 101





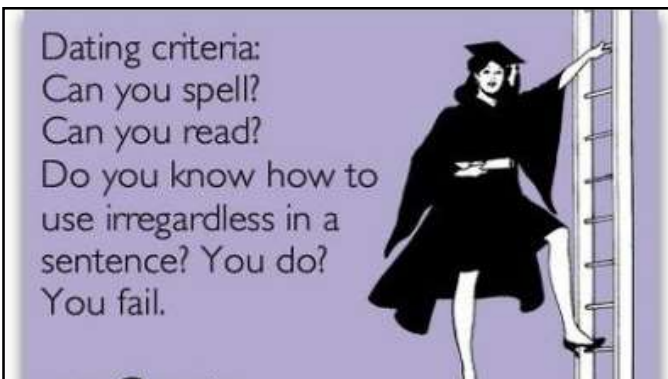
Word Nerd with credentials . . .





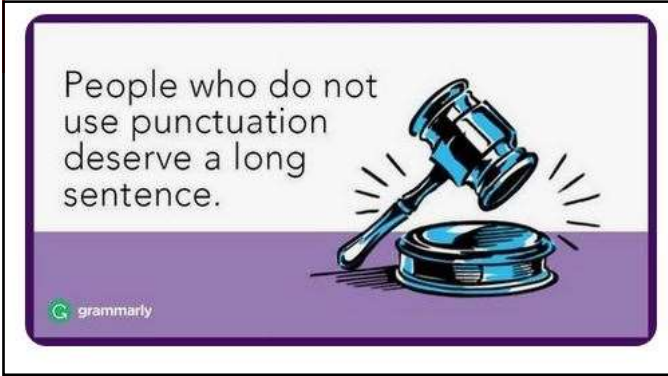
. . . and the swag

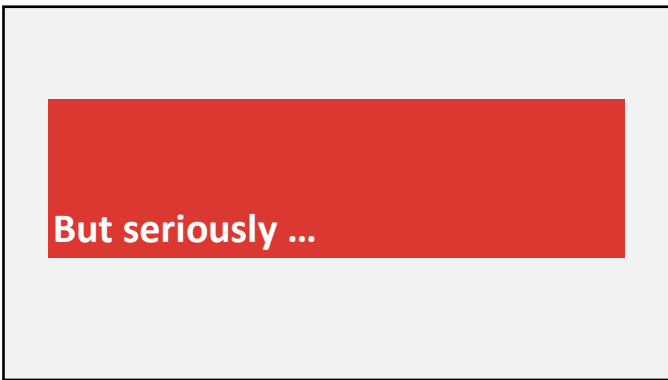


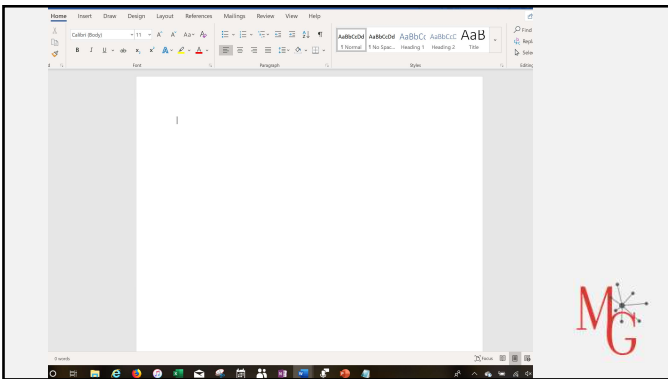


Dating criteria:
 Can you spell?
 Can you read?
 Do you know how to use irregardless in a sentence? You do?
 You fail.











The writing

Organization level
 “big picture” – just get it down (SFD)

What’s in it for the reader, not the writer.

Does it flow with a natural start, middle and end?

Can the message be summarized in three simple points?

Types of organizing

- Chronological – forward or backward
- Story/case study (Narrative + Data = A Compelling Story)
- Topical

The writing

Sentence level “fluff and puff” – how to say it better

Active voice

Parallel construction

Consistent punctuation and grammar (organizational style guide)

Short paragraphs

- Bullets, headers, paragraph breaks

Varied sentence structure/length




Consistent voice and tone

The writing







How to get there

- SFD that no one else will see
- Multiple drafts process
- Final version
- Let sit, read aloud, read backwards then edit again (*organizational style guide for consistency*)
- Final final version

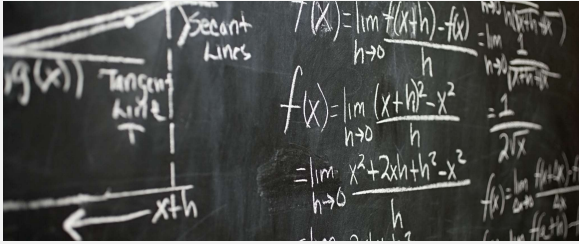
The editing *(the art of it)*

-  Improves overall quality of the project
-  Looks for consistent voice and tone
-  Assures meaning and context are accurately communicated

The proofing *(the science of it)*

-  Use a style guide
-  Let it breathe a bit
-  Read backwards
-  Cut redundant words / repetitive themes / fluffy phrases
-  Use accurate spelling and grammar
-  Check facts, phone numbers, addresses, etc.

Rules – Some negotiable, some not



The rules – Some are non-negotiable

You never know who is going to be reading your writing.

Assume it's your eighth grade English teacher.



The rules – Some are non-negotiable

- "She is going with Mary and I" will never be correct. Ever. For any reason.
- Dangling participles are insidious gremlins.
 - Opening the door, it was time for everyone to enter.
 - Eating lunch with his parents, the sandwich was really good.



The rules – Some are non-negotiable

Keep it simple

Instead of	Try this
utilize	use
ascertain	learn
attempt	try
demonstrate	show
in a timely manner	on time
obtain	get
pertaining to	about
for the duration of	during
witnessed	saw
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The rules – Some are non-negotiable

- Spelling is spelling. Period. Creativity isn't an option in spelling.
- Apostrophes indicate possessive not plurals.
 - Merry Christmas from the Smith's. The Smith's what?



The rules – Some are non-negotiable

Active voice is almost always more powerful than passive voice

The dog ate the bone.
 vs
 The bone was eaten by the dog.

The bullet grazed the man.
 vs
 The man was grazed by a bullet.



Reba's Rules – Some are negotiable

- Sometimes it's acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition.
 - What's the story about?
- Sentence fragments and single word sentences can occasionally help make a point. Right?



Reba's Rules – Some are negotiable

Starting a sentence with a conjunction can sometimes improve a transition or be a bridge between ideas. But when is this a good idea?



Reba's Rules – Some are negotiable

- The rule of split infinitives may be outdated. Use common sense for clarity.
 - The repair service arrived quickly to fix the problem.
 - OR
 - The repair service arrived to quickly fix the problem.



Reba's Rules – Punctuation notes

Oxford Comma

Styles vary on the Oxford comma. Just be consistent.

- The flag is red, white, and blue
- OR
- The flag is red, white and blue.



Reba's Rules – Punctuation notes

Ampersand



Can AI help with writing/editing?


Yes ...

But ...




Writing resources

- Style guides
 - AP
 - Chicago Manual of Style
 - Your own organization's style guide
- The Elements of Style – Strunk and White
- Bird by Bird – Anne Lamott
- Eats Shoots and Leaves – Lynn Truss



A few final notes


- Know your audience.
- Narrative + data = a compelling story.
- There's no good reason to skimp on accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling. Remember your eighth grade English teacher.
- Bonus Tip: You can never go wrong with a handwritten note.





Questions?

Reba Campbell
 reba@themedwaygroup.com

@rebahcampbell @themedwaygroup
 themedwaygroup.com
 RandomConnectPoints.blogspot.com



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There are ~~is~~ ~~3~~three approved forms of municipal government in South Carolina: mayor-council (strong mayor), council (weak mayor), and council manager. When the General Assembly passed the Home Rule Act in the mid-1970's, all municipalities had choose to operate under the form that most closely aligned with the structure they were then working under that was in place.



The council can change the city's form of government in one of two ways. The first is initiated after approval is granted through a public referendum, which is initiated either by a certified petition from 15 per-cent of the city's qualified electors. The second is by an ordinance passed by the council.

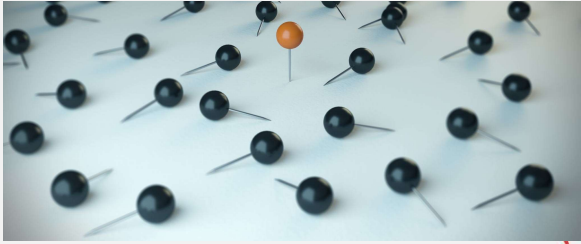
Carol Timms, owner of the local salon on Main St., said, "Opening the door on changing the form of government, the council knows it's going to be hard to fight."



It is important for elected officials to understand their form of government, how it is designed to operate, and knowing what the responsibilities are for elected and appointed officials. Beyond understanding how their form of government operates, both elected and appointed officials must respect their form of government and operate within the bounds of their respective roles. Dysfunction is caused when the boundaries are blurry or ignored.

"It's right with the mayor and me to go ahead with another vote quickly to change our existing form of government," said an anonymous council member after the lights came back on during a recent thunder storm. "We can't always count on your vote, but we'll get this done before anyone knows where the opposition stands at."

All presentations great and small



Formal vs informal

- Meetings with senior leadership/council
- Meetings with citizens
- Budget presentations
- Zoom meetings
- Phone calls
- On-camera interviews
- Committee meetings



Remember your audience - Example

Audience: Business owners concerned about millage increase

Why we communicate

- anticipate questions
- allay fears
- respond to concerns

What we communicate

- Simple background of the process
- Why the increase is necessary
- How the process is administered

How we communicate

- Template responses to phone calls and email inquiries
- Website copy
- News release
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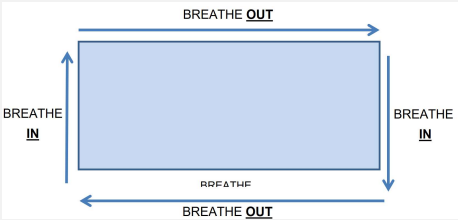
Tackling nerves

1 Breathe	2 Appearance counts	3 Understand stage logistics	4 Practice
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Tackling nerves

1 - Breath exercises


- Rectangle breathing or square breathing



Tackling nerves

2 – Appearance counts

- Wear comfortable shoes
- Avoid shiny or loud/jangly jewelry
- Make sure tie and collar are straight, check buttons
- Sit on suit jacket tail
- Check for reflection on glasses
- Keep hair away from lavalier
- Have a place to attach a lavalier if necessary



Tackling nerves

3 – Stage logistics

- Mic types – handheld (individual or shared), lavalier (clip on with battery pack), tabletop (individual or shared)
- Lectern – height, bulk, mic location, shelf
- Staging
- Types of seating (director chair, stool, low comfy chair. etc)
- The mic is always hot

Tackling nerves

4 - PRACTICE

- Speak to the mirror
- Record yourself
- Ask trusted colleague



Techniques for responding to questions

Bridging

- “Thank you for bringing that up, however, it’s also important to emphasize...”
- “That is an important point, and it also speaks to a bigger issue which is...”
- “That is one way to think about it. Another way is...”
- “That is not my area of expertise, but I can tell you...”
- “What’s most important here is that” Or “The key issue is...”
- “It’s our policy not to discuss XYZ, but what I can tell you is...”



Techniques for responding to questions

Mirroring

Question: "What color is the sky?"
Response: "The sky is blue."



To slide or not to slide



To slide or not to slide

Use slides strategically



Are you comfortable enough with your presentation that you could give it without the crutch of slides?



How familiar is your audience with your topic?



What are your audience's expectations?

To slide or not to slide

Focus on the audience

- ✔ Let slides support the presentation, not BE the presentation
- ✔ Avoid the temptation to read slides
- ✔ Keep eyes on the audience, not the slides
- ✔ Create slide deck from notes, not the other way around
- ✔ Have a Plan B if technology doesn't work


To slide or not to slide

Build concise slides

1	2	3	4	5	6
Limit text	Remember people in the back of the room	Maintain parallel construction	Save details for a handout	Use single slide/single idea approach	Avoid spreadsheets or detailed graphs

Zoom tips


- External (attached) cameras and mics typically higher quality
- "Touch up my appearance" feature
- Spot above the camera for focus and avoiding the ceiling fan
- Mute feature
- Light on the face
- Simple background
- Ethics of recording
- Sit up straight



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