



Business Skills -- Do's and Don'ts for More Professional Speaking and Writing

Tips and tricks gleaned from UGA's
Foundations of Leadership and
Management Program



Business Skills Quiz

1. Sixty-seven percent of first impressions are true.
 - > true
 - > false

2. A firm handshake is only offered to a businessman, not a business woman.
 - > true
 - > false

3. How long should a business sentence and business paragraph be?
 - a. A business sentence should be no more than 15 to 20 words and a business paragraph no more than 7 to 9 lines.
 - b. A business sentence should be no more than 3 to 5 words and a business paragraph no more than 2 to 3 lines.
 - c. A business sentence should be no more than 4 to 6 words and a business paragraph no more than 3 to 4 lines.
 - d. A business sentence should be no more than 8 to 9 words and a business paragraph no more than 5 to 6 lines.



Business Skills Quiz

4. It is ok to shake hands with someone while seated.
 - > true
 - > false

5. What should be the first thing you think about when beginning any written communications?
 - a. The content.
 - b. The format of the content.
 - c. The reader.
 - d. The size font to use.

6. What kind of notes should you prepare prior to speaking to your audience?
 - a. Lengthy notes describing everything you are going to say.
 - b. A key-word outline, using the fewest words possible.
 - c. Notes in paragraph forms.
 - d. It is not necessary to prepare notes prior to speaking.



Business Skills Quiz

7. What does a speaker do with his/her hands for the most energy and sense of professionalism?
 - a. A speaker should keep hands clasped behind their back.
 - b. A speaker should keep hands clasped in the front of their body.
 - c. It is best to keep hands above the waist.
 - d. A speaker should speak with their hands at their side.

8. What is the best way to rehearse prior to a presentation?
 - a. Don't rehearse. Instead, look at your outline, think through what you want to say and give your presentation.
 - b. Rehearse for at least 30 minutes prior to your presentation.
 - c. Rehearse for at least one hour prior to your presentation.
 - d. Rehearse for at least 15 minutes prior to your presentation.

9. Most people understand when you have call waiting and must take another call.
 - > true
 - > false



Business Skills Quiz

10. It is polite to recap and welcome latecomers to meetings.

- > true
- > false

11. When you arrive at a professional function and you know no one in the room, what should you do?

- a. Head straight for the food table – you don't have to talk when your mouth is full.
- b. Look for a large group gathered around a central speaker and attach yourself to it.
- c. Stand on the fringe of the crowd and observe.
- d. Look for a small group – 2 or 3 persons – and join it.

12. It is okay to use all uppercase characters in an email if you are trying to make a point.

- > true
- > false



Business Skills Quiz

13. An email sent to thank a professional contact for some service should begin with the words 'Thank you for...'
- > true
 - > false
14. The safest comfort zone for most people (distance-wise) is 3-6 feet.
- > true
 - > false
15. Use the pronoun 'I' liberally in business communications – it makes it more personal.
- > true
 - > false



Business Skills Quiz

16. Which of the following is not a poor professional use of email?
- a. It is okay to reprimand someone by email.
 - b. You can send greeting cards to people at work for holidays or birthdays.
 - c. It's quicker to email the person just down the hall rather than call or visit them.
 - d. Re-read each email before you hit the send button.
17. Exchange business cards at the beginning of the meeting.
- > true
 - > false
18. The subject line of an email should always be specific.
- > true
 - > false



Business Skills Quiz

19. No one will notice a slight spelling, grammar, or punctuation mistake in your business writing.

- > true
- > false

20. Using emotional words such as hope, feel, and believe will make your business correspondence have more impact on the reader.

- > true
- > false

That's all! Now don't you feel smarter?



Business Letter Pointers

- **Keep in mind what your reader doesn't know.**
- **Write simply and naturally – the way you talk.**
- **Make your writing active – and personal.**
- **Use short paragraphs, short sentences, and short words.**
- **Be specific.**
- **Understate rather than overstate.**
- **Avoid vague adjectives and adverbs.**
- **Strike out words you don't need.**
- **Choose the right word (affect vs. effect, its vs. it's complement vs. compliment).**
- **Punctuate carefully.**
- **Make it perfect (no typos, misspellings, etc.).**
- **Double check phone numbers and URLs.**
- **Use plain English even on technical subjects.**



Business Letter Pointers

- **Make sure you have the correct name and address.**
- **Choose the right salutation.**
- **Think before you write.**
 - **If you are replying to a letter, read it carefully and circle the important points you want to address.**
 - **Gather as much background material as necessary. Do you need to know more about the writer/the situation/etc?**
 - **Jot down the ideas you want to convey in your letter.**
- **Choose your first sentence carefully. It makes the first impressions – good or bad.**
- **If you are replying to a letter, include a reference to the date of the letter in your starting sentence so the recipient can refer to that letter if necessary.**
- **Your final sentence should express the idea of prime interest to you – the call to action or what you want to happen.**
- **Stop when you're done.**
- **End with a sign-off (thanks again, sincerely, etc.).**



Email Best Practices

Housekeeping:

- **If you want action, list only one name in the To: field. Otherwise, recipients don't know who holds responsibility for follow-through.**
- **If you are sending large attachments, compress the files.**
- **Don't use emoticons or wallpaper.**
- **Remember copyright laws when cutting and pasting info from the Internet.**
- **Typically omit salutations and complementary closings.**
- **Vary your closes:**
 - **Thank you for your time,**
 - **Looking forward to hearing from you,**
- **Include name, company and contact information at the end of all your messages.**

Formatting:

- **Use upper and lower case.**
- **Enter hard returns after every 60 to 68 characters.**
- **Avoid bolding, italics, font and color changes.**
- **Keep you email short. If your message is long, create it as an attachment and send it along with a short cover note.**
- **Use white space. Computer screens distort the way we see things.**
- **Break text into brief paragraphs.**



Email Best Practices

Composing:

- **Restrict each message to one subject. Send separate messages rather than several topics in one message.**
- **Make the subject heading clear – and compelling.**
- **Avoid acronyms.**
- **Consider how much background your reader really needs.**
- **Responding to an earlier issue raised in an email message?**
 - **Paraphrase it briefly.**
 - **Change the old title on the subject line.**
- **And – after two rounds of problem solving on email – pick up the phone.**
- **Use active vs. passive voice.**
- **Don't write anything you would not want anyone other than the intended recipient to see.**

E-motions!

- **Before writing, think about your frame of mind. If you are angry or irritated, walk away.**
- **Don't deliver bad news in an email message.**
- **If it's urgent, pick up the phone.**
- **Don't hide behind email. Any sensitive communication should be done in person.**



Email Best Practices

Don't Press Send Yet!

- **Let your email get cold. Then reread it.**
- **Read it aloud if you can.**
- **Read it slowly.**
- **Cut out the fluff.**
- **Double check grammar and spelling.**
- **Now press send.**

Do Not Email If:

- **The topic is legal and requires signatures.**
- **This is an invite to a formal event.**
- **This is a fund raising letter.**
- **You are canceling a meeting scheduled for that day.**
- **You are introducing yourself for the first time.**

On the Receiving End?

- **Acknowledge business emails if your response will be delayed, i.e., "give me a few days".**
- **Do not pass on messages to others unless you are sure the sender will not object.**



Business Speaking Pointers

Speaking in public, particularly at the lectern, is everyone's number one phobia!

How do you overcome this fear?

- **Make your oral presentation an extension of yourself.**
 - **Never try to be someone you're not.**
 - **Analyze aspects of your personality that appeal to others.**
 - **Practice speaking to a professional group as though you're speaking to just one person.**
 - **Increase volume and energy to suit the size of the room.**
 - **Keep practicing until the 'professional you' and the 'personal you' are the same person.**

- **Use verbal and non-verbal approaches that capture attention.**
 - **Always use body language that approaches the audience.**
 - **Use hand motions that bring the audience towards you rather than away from you.**



Business Speaking Pointers

- **Know your material.**
 - **It should be obvious that you have prepared for the occasion.**
 - **It should not seem as though you have memorized the material or are reading it work-for-word from index card or full pages.**
- **Assess your audience.**
 - **Consider all the demographics represented, e.g. age, gender, and occupation.**
 - **Keep in mind what your audience is expecting from you, both in content and style.**
- **Organize and direct the message appropriately.**
 - **Determine how you will gain attention, develop your points, and conclude the message.**
 - **Use techniques that befit the nature of the audience and are in keeping with your style of speaking.**

**“Be sincere; be brief; be seated”
FDR**



Presenting Before a Group

- **Strive for a quality of naturalness in your delivery.**
 - Think of it as a particularly important conversation.
 - Try to speak as though you were addressing just one person.
- **As you practice your speech, remember the importance of your nonverbal behavior.**
 - Audiences are quick to detect discrepancies between what you say and how you say it.
 - Audiences do not so much listen to a speaker's words as 'read' the speaker who delivers them.
- **Avoid standing stiffly behind the podium.**
 - As space and time allow, try to get out from behind the podium and closer to the audience.
 - Move around at a comfortable, natural pace.
 - Be aware of your posture. Stand erect, but not ramrod straight.
- **Don't fiddle with objects as you speak.**
 - Use regular letter-size paper rather than note cards, so you don't distract attention through constant paper shuffling.
 - Put your pen or pencil down. Don't jab the air with it or use it as a crutch.



Presenting Before a Group

- **Practice your speech using a fully developed speaking outline.**
 - **Focus on your speech ideas rather than yourself.**
 - **Don't practice by looking in a mirror. That will cause you to fixate on your facial gestures and mannerisms.**
 - **Instead, practice on a 'tactful' friend or relative or simply run the presentation in your mind or voice it to yourself while becoming familiar with the outline.**
- **Practice under realistic conditions.**
 - **Visualize the audience as you speak.**
 - **Practice using your outline unobtrusively.**
- **Time your speech.**
 - **Time each portion of your speech (introduction, body, and conclusion).**
 - **If the speech is too long, look for extraneous material that can be cut.**
 - **If the speech is too short, review your evidence and make certain that you have adequately supported your main points.**
 - **Evaluate and adjust your rate of speech. Slow down!**



Presenting Before a Group

Getting Comfortable

- **Exhibit enthusiasm.**
 - **Speak about what excites you.**
 - **Project that enthusiasm through the energy you bring to your message.**
- **Project a sense of confidence and competence.**
 - **Focus on the ideas you want to convey rather than on yourself.**
 - **Inspire the audience's confidence in you by appearing confident to them.**
- **Engage your audience by being direct.**
 - **Establish eye contact with your listeners.**
 - **Use a friendly tone of voice.**
 - **Smile whenever appropriate.**
 - **Consider positioning yourself so you are physically close to the audience.**



Presenting Before a Group

Getting Comfortable

- **Animate your facial expressions in a way that is natural and appropriate to your speech.**
 - **Avoid a 'deadpan' expression.**
 - **Establish a rapport with your audience.**
 - **Don't feel compelled to use expressions that are out of character for you.**
- **Maintain eye contact with your audience.**
 - **Let your listeners know that you recognize and respect them by establishing eye contact.**
 - **Avoid perfunctory glances; make the contact genuine.**
- **Read more of your listeners. Practice scanning the room with your eyes, pausing to gaze at selected listeners.**



Presenting Before a Group

Getting Comfortable

- **Use gestures that feel natural.**
 - **Make sure that your gestures clarify your message.**
 - **Avoid exaggerating your gestures, but make them broad enough to be seen by each member of the audience.**
 - **Use gestures that arise from your feelings and conform to your own personality.**
- **Pay attention to your attire and grooming.**
 - **Clothing and grooming will be the first thing that your audience notices.**
 - **Dress appropriately for the occasion.**
 - **Dark-colored suits (for both men and women) convey a sense of authority and power.**



Managing a Meeting

- **Do create an environment of equality.**
- **Stand to shake hands when someone walks into the room (whether male or female).**
- **Respect the leader.**
- **Discuss, don't argue. Don't slump; it's not professional and shows disrespect.**
- **Don't create non-verbal barriers, like crossing your arms across your chest or putting your hands on your hips.**
- **Demonstrate a high level of energy and enthusiasm.**
- **Listen and show respect by paraphrasing what people say.**
- **Don't spout off unless you know what you are talking about!**
- **Don't purposely introduce controversial topics.**



Managing a Meeting

- **Plan for your meeting and create an agenda you can stick to.**
- **Avoid personal comments unless you know the group members very well.**
- **Don't allow the meeting to deteriorate into a discussion of technical jargon that leaves some of the members out.**
- **Start and end meetings on time.**
- **Don't recap information for latecomers.**
- **Stand up and go to a flip chart when you need to make an important point.**
- **Observe the audience.**



Managing a Meeting

- **Control your hands, don't fiddle with pens, markers, or any part of your clothing or hair.**
- **Turn off all cell phones and pagers.**
- **End the meeting with actions.**

**“To speak and to speak well are two things.
A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks”
Ben Johnson**