

Writing for business? Try English.

 By [Tiffany Markman](#)

10 Mar 2009

How to use simple words and clean phrases in your business writing, so you don't sound like you're trying to mimic a pompous colonialist with top hat, tails and a large marble in each cheek...

Why can't the English...?

I grew up on Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle*, standing on a cold London street and growling at each other. "Why," begged Higgins, "can't the English [teach their children how to speak?](#)"

Today I find myself wondering the same thing: why do we use old-fashioned, long-winded English - peppered with ugly expressions like 'the aforementioned', 'in light of the fact that', and 'by virtue of', when we could just write as we speak and let our readers get on with their lives?

We do it for two reasons: One, everyone else does it. Two, it gives us added confidence.

The diagnosis

1. *Everyone else*

We typically enter the working world without a huge amount of writing experience behind us. Often, we don't have a writing qualification - and yet we spend at least 50% of each day writing. So, for many of us, the quickest, most efficient way to drag our writing to the 'correct' corporate level is to copy those around us: to watch, learn and parrot the way they do it.

Unfortunately, the people we imitate sometimes have bad habits or subscribe to old-fashioned writing rules. They're crazy about 'Yours faithfully' and 'Attached hereto please find...' They believe in 'hence' and 'herewith'; 'amongst' and 'whilst'; 'thus' and 'therefore'.

Yuk. As your mother used to say, the fact that 'everyone else' does it doesn't mean it's okay.

2. *Confidence boost*

The ability to pad skimpy writing with 'to whoms' and 'from whiches' gives us extra confidence, because it makes our writing seem more substantial. But the reality is that it's actually less substantial and more foggy. It's less powerful and more *pap*.

The old-fashioned phrases I call 'baggage language' have the same effect as the act of dragging an empty suitcase around with you. We may look like we're on our way somewhere, but we're not going to have much to go on when we get there.

So how about using strong nouns and verbs to inject greater 'vooma' into your writing - because you're usually writing about people or things - and leaving the outdated stuff to the old people (who aren't going to change, no matter how many of my writing workshops they attend).

The symptoms

The symptoms of trying to sound too businesslike in your writing include such beauties as:

- 'as per your request'
- 'I wish to acknowledge receipt of'
- 'the undersigned'
- 'at your earliest convenience'

The prescription

These and other phrases make your writing stilted and stiff and they cause you to come across as haughty - which is not a promising basis for a business relationship. So how about relaxing a little?

Feel free to vary your tone from familiar to formal but whatever the tone, try to sound natural. Say things in a regular way; ie as you speak. Here's my golden rule: If you'd feel like a twit saying it, don't write it.

The prognosis

Resisting the temptation to sound 'proper' typically translates into your becoming more business-minded - because you write more efficiently. You use fewer words, you need less time to prepare, and your reader needs to make a smaller time/energy investment in comprehending what you have to say.

In other words, the prognosis is pretty good that if you avoid trying to *impress*, you'll better *express*.

A dose of help

Instead of...	
the aforementioned	use <i>this</i>
in light of the fact that	use <i>because</i>
by virtue of	use <i>due to</i>
Yours faithfully	use <i>Yours sincerely</i> or <i>Sincerely</i>
Attached hereto please find	use <i>Attached is</i> or <i>I've attached</i>
hence	use <i>so</i>
herewith	leave out
amongst	use <i>among</i>
whilst	use <i>while</i>
thus/therefore	use <i>so</i> or <i>as a result</i>
As per your request	use <i>As you requested</i> or <i>As promised</i>
I acknowledge receipt of	use <i>Thank you for</i>
the undersigned	use <i>I</i> or <i>me</i>
at your earliest convenience	rather give a specific time/date

**My Fair Lady*, 1964

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