How to Avoid Miscommunication in Writing

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Today, we communicate via text more than ever.

We send emails to colleagues, text messages to friends, and instant messages through various social media platforms. This is true for businesses as well. Gone are the days when every letter had to follow a formal template. Or when you had to be careful to close a letter the right way, with a 'Yours Sincerely' or 'Yours Respectfully' based on who you write to.

Nowadays, such conventions might go against you!

While we write to each other more than ever thanks to the convenience modern technology offers -there's a real potential for miscommunication.

The absence of body language, tone of voice, and immediate feedback that we rely upon in face-to-face conversations can often lead to misunderstandings when communicating via text.

However, there are many ways we can prevent miscommunication issues and we'll share them here. Let's dive in!

1. Use a Conversational Tone

 Many people are under the impression that being formal and overly polite language is the best way to communicate through writing. However, more often than not – this can come off as passive-aggressive or even aggressively unfriendly!

A formal tone of voice rarely has a place in modern text-based communication. Instead, a conversational tone is more appropriate and safe.

What does a conversational tone in writing mean? It means writing as if you're speaking to a friend.

For example, instead of writing "I would appreciate it if you could send me the report by tomorrow", try writing "Could you please send me the report by tomorrow? Thanks in advance!"

Even here, you can see how different both the sentences sound. The first sounds almost annoyed and threatening but the second is far more typical in verbal communication between friends. So, make sure to use this tone even if you're writing to your CEO.

2. Emojis are Your Friend

Once upon a time, emojis were only appropriate in social chat situations.

However, businesses today embrace the use of emojis in professional communication as well.

Emojis are a great way to add emotion and personality to your writing. They can convey tone and help avoid misunderstandings.

For instance, let's consider a simple message like "I'm waiting for the file". Without emoticons or emojis, this message could be interpreted in many different ways, potentially carrying a tone of impatience or frustration.

However, by merely adding a smiley face at the end, "I'm waiting for the file :)", the message instantly becomes friendly and mild, eliminating any negative connotations.

And they're perfectly okay to use in work situations!

There are so many emojis to choose from today. However, be warned, you also want to avoid those emojis that have a double meaning or a negative tone. Stick to the classics like ? or ?.

3. Be Clear and Concise

When communicating through writing, it's essential to be clear and concise.

Avoid using vague language, long sentences, or complex words that could lead to misinterpretation.

Remember, the person on the other end of the screen cannot see your facial expressions or hear your tone of voice. So, it's best to keep things short and straightforward.

Use bullet points, numbered lists, and headings to break up your text and make it easier to read. That is if you're sending a post or article.

You can also use these elements in an email, but make sure not to overdo it. Also, use bold and italics to emphasize important points or add emphasis.

Also, keep your sentences short and to the point. You can be effective with fewer words. Did you know that social media posts with fewer than 80 characters get 66% more engagement? It's clear that less is more when it comes to text communication.

And most importantly, always proofread your message before sending it out. This will help ensure that what you've written is easy to understand and free from any errors.

4. Read Your Text Out Loud

Want to know how your message sounds to others? Read it out loud to yourself.

This simple exercise can help you catch any awkward or unclear phrases that may lead to miscommunication.

Reading your text out loud also allows you to hear if it's confusing or complex. If you stumble while reading, chances are your message needs some adjustments.

5. Play it Safe

When it comes to using writing, it's better to be safe than sorry.

Not sure if you should use a particular word or phrase? Don't take the risk and find an alternative.

Not sure if you should address a dicey topic via email or a Slack direct message? Avoid it altogether! Unless you're a leader and have to bring up difficult topics, it's best to have such conversations in person.

If you must address a sensitive topic through writing, make sure to choose your words carefully and use the tips mentioned above to avoid any misunderstandings.

Finally, avoid using sarcasm, irony, or any other forms of humor that may not translate well through text.

When in doubt, stick to professional and polite language to avoid any potential miscommunication.

6. Be Mindful of Cultural Differences

It's not unusual to have coworkers or clients from different countries and cultural backgrounds. And it's essential to be mindful of these differences when communicating through writing.

Certain phrases, words, or even emojis may have different meanings in different cultures. So, take the time to research and understand cultural norms before sending out a message that could potentially be misunderstood.

It's also important to avoid making assumptions about someone based on their culture. If in doubt, ask for clarification or use more neutral language to avoid any potential misunderstandings.

7. Follow Up and Ask for Feedback

Last but not least, always follow up with the person you're communicating with and ask for their feedback. This will help ensure that your message was received as intended and any misunderstandings can be cleared up.

This doesn't have to be complicated. Just a simple "Did you receive my message? Is there anything I can clarify?" will do.

Following up also shows that you care about effective communication and are willing to take the extra step to avoid misunderstandings.

Be a Clear Communicator

When done correctly, sending written communication can save time and make your work more efficient.

Just make sure that you don't commit any of these communication faux pas to avoid misunderstandings and maintain positive working relationships.

We've covered several tips here that will help you be an effective communicator. Apply these tips in your writing, and you'll see a big impact on your communication effectiveness!

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