

# How to write a contact email

If you have received any type of contact email, you know there is a way to do it and a way not to. Just this week I received a contact email that made me realize lots of salespeople don't know how to do it. The email I got was this:

*Hi Deborah:*

*I'm working with the [company name] sales channel, and my client requires the assistance of a company specializing in "Communications Audits".*

*Kindly drop me a line to discuss (my phone number is provided below). Thanks,*

*[Email signature]*

This email followed a voice message that went like this:

*Hi Deborah, My name is X , a consultant working with the sales channel (...) and [my client] is inquiring about a communications audit. And I'd like to talk to you about it, how does it work, relative to their sales channel, it would be very lucrative to your business. ...*

The consultant seems to assume I understand what "the sales channel" is supposed to be. He is also looking for "communications audits" relative to the sales channel. And lastly, he is telling me it would be lucrative to my business. There are two things going on in the contact, and they are at odds with each other: looking for a solution for a client and offering something to me. Which is it? Neither is clear.

I asked for clarification as to what exactly he was looking for, and this consultant suggested having a 15-minute

conversation. When I said I needed more information to see if there was a fit, he repeated what he had told me. I then wrote back saying I thought there wasn't a fit. To top it off, I got this email back from him:

*I'll gladly give you appropriate details if we were to connect.*

*Surely you're not too busy to grow your business and frankly, if you are – delegate to as a sales rep.*

*You're not too important to talk to me; I deal with Presidents of companies with revenues exceeding \$100M.*

In the end, this person is really trying to sell ME something, which is obvious since he can't tell me what problem his client is having that he thinks I can help with. What he really wants is to have a connection with me. And he thinks that by insulting me and assuming things about me, I will want to talk to him (not to mention that he has grammatical challenges...)

If you want to have write a successful contact email, do not follow the example above. Here is what you should do instead:

1. Start with being clear on the purpose of your contact. What you are looking for. Are you looking for a quote? A description of services? A location?
2. Tell the contact how you found him/her and/or why you are contacting him/her. For example: I am looking for a general contractor, and I came across your name in the XYX directory.
3. Provide details that may be relevant. Don't assume that the person understands everything you are saying. Using the example of the general contractor: I am looking to add a powder room to the first level of my two-level house. Currently, I have two bathrooms upstairs. I think there is

enough space on the first level to accommodate this change. I am not sure if the plumbing can be worked in.

4. Ask specific questions. Are you able to do this service? What do you charge? What other information do you require?

5. Close nicely and provide contact information: Thanks for your attention and please contact me either by email or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

6. Before sending, make sure your spelling and grammar are correct. Emails that are full of typos and mistakes make you look unprofessional.

Realize that you may not always get a response. That's OK. And if you do get a request for clarification, clarify! You may have questions, and the contact may have questions. Don't assume that you both know everything.

Finally, don't do what the guy in the contact email to me did: say you want one thing, while meaning something else. People see through that and it makes you look bad.

Thoughts?

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## **How to start (or restart) blogging**

Having an organizational blog has loads of benefits, not the least which is it helps with SEO and it establishes expertise. And yet, many organizations have put off adding a blog, or have abandoned the blog they started. In my experience, there

are many reasons for this, among them:

- Not enough personnel or hours in the day
- Not knowing what to write
- Feeling overwhelmed by having to produce something consistently

Blogging doesn't have to be overwhelming or extremely time-consuming. If you don't have someone else to handle the blog, it is possible for you to do it. You just need to learn how to do it (and why you should).

Having worked with dozens of people who have a desire to blog but don't know how to start or what to say, I have developed a way to teach how to do it and it's my **How to write your blog workshop**. I am offering the next one on Thursday, February 28, at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The workshop is limited to 10 participants, and will be intensive and participatory. We'll discuss why you aren't blogging and why you should, and we'll get you writing. The cost is \$75, and includes materials and refreshments.

To register, visit the Eventbrite page at [howtowriteyourblog3.eventbrite.com](http://howtowriteyourblog3.eventbrite.com) .

Start or restart your blog in 2013!

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## Making blogging easier

The reason I created the How to Write Your Blog workshop—which I just presented on Tuesday at the Silver Spring Civic Center—is because I have spoken to many people who think blogging is hard or that it takes too much time. I have found

blogging to be fun, and wanted to teach people that it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

The workshop leads you through reasons to blog to writing a blog post. We discuss keywords, categories, tags and headlines. We discuss what you should and should not do on a blog. And what most participants find helpful is the part on generating blog post ideas.

Out of the three hours allotted to the workshop, we spend 20 minutes writing a blog post. The idea is that when you realize you can write a whole post in 20 minutes, it seems doable and perhaps even easy.

One of the participants said that breaking up the process into its parts makes it seem less stressful, and that is exactly the point.

My colleague Lisa Newman took photographs of the workshop and created this montage:



If you missed the workshop this time around, you may want to sign up for my newsletter so that you can find out when it's being offered again.

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# How you can shine

Lately, I feel that we live in a very mediocre world as it relates to communications and writing. Open up the newspaper most days and you will find a few articles that seem as if they were written by a teenager. Online, I see typos and spelling mistakes galore. On social media, I see a lot of rude behavior, I suppose reflecting the loss of civility evident everywhere.

But, as with all problems, there is an opportunity—an opportunity to shine. Because we are surrounded by mediocrity, working to be better will make you stand out.

Here are few ways to shine:

**Mind your grammar, spelling and typing:** Perhaps you need an editor or just a better review of your writing. And, if you aren't really that good at grammar, perhaps take a class or read a book to improve your skills.

**Skip the passive voice:** There is nothing like reading long passive sentences. It kills your writing. If you don't know what I am talking about then you never had a teacher who corrected your passive voice and made it active.

**Avoid the cliches and jargon:** Another dead giveaway that screams laziness and even stupidity is the overuse of jargon and cliches. People hide behind these words. For instance, the following excerpts are from a job description (let me know if you understand what this person does for a living):

- Stakeholder relationship management
- Standardizing processes, roles and responsibilities
- Outreach strategy
- Virtual collaboration

**Be polite:** If someone writes you an email or leaves you a

voice mail, respond. If someone comments on your blog, thank him/her. On Twitter, acknowledge re-tweets. Watch your swearing in a public space (yes, social media is a public space).

**Think about your audience:** If you think about who your audience is, and what information they need, you will be a huge step ahead. Considering your audience will help determine your language, your timing, etc.

**Learn how to network effectively:** Perhaps we are spending too much time with our gadgets, but it seems more people are less able to interact personally with others. If you go to a networking event, try speaking to other people. It is as easy as introducing yourself, and asking a simple question (how did you hear about the event, have you been here before, etc.) You may also want to follow up with the people you meet.

**Be a LinkedIn rock star:** Not a week goes by that I don't get a LinkedIn invitation that is a) not personalized and b) from someone I don't know. Sometimes, I go to somebody's profile, and it is missing information, does not have photograph, and lists an old position where the person is no longer working. So, you have the opportunity to shine on LinkedIn by:

- Completing your profile (include your photo)
- ALWAYS personalizing invitations
- Not connecting with every Tom, Dick and Jane out there.
- Having an updated job description
- Joining (and participating) in groups

How do you shine? Please share what you do to stand out from the crowd.

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# A tagline that works

Taglines can help or hamper your marketing efforts. They must be clear and relevant. A few nights ago, I was watching TV and saw the following commercial for Red Lobster:

[youtube  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySl03vqdKNQ&w=560&h=349>]

The last line is: “I see food differently. “The tagline for this campaign is **Sea Food Differently**. I think this is tagline writing at its best: clever, play on words, and RELEVANT. They are saying that Red Lobster does seafood differently (presumably better) than other restaurants. Perfect.

Compare that to Salonpas. Salonpas, which has a completely weird name that makes me think of a hair salon, is a pain relief patch. They are running this spot on TV right now:

[youtube  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX4WVN4YN0Q&w=560&h=349>]

The tagline is: “Nothing’s been proven to beat the relief.”

What does that mean? It is saying that nothing is proven to provide relief—which, I am pretty sure, is not the message they intended.

Some taglines make you scratch your head, some don’t make you think at all, and some, the ones that work, make you think.

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# Write well or fail

On Monday, I came across a letter to the editor in the Washington Post that made me nod my head vigorously. The author, David Klinger was writing about the Scripps Spelling Bee coverage, and I think you should read his letter:

I have written for a federal agency throughout a 34-year career. I had to pass a spelling test before graduating from the University of North Carolina's journalism school. Yet I turn to the dictionary half a dozen times a day to check a word or reconfirm a spelling. That's the nature of good, careful writing.

Memorization of words like "thanatophidia" (which isn't even in my Webster's) or "bondieuserie" for the Scripps spelling bee is about as relevant to me – or to today's generation of texters and youthful online denizens – as a buggy whip.

Scripps included, we desperately need to acquaint the next generation with a few, basic English grammar skills that seem to have disappeared amid society's collective cyber-mania: complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, correct punctuation and that all-important axiom that "an apostrophe does not a plural make."

**David Klinger, Martinsburg, W.Va.**

Basic grammar skills are disappearing left and right. I see the use of apostrophes to make plurals ALL the time. People just don't get it. However, to those in the know, using grammar poorly makes you look dumb. There is no other way to describe it. In marketing and PR, which are communications-based disciplines, writing well is key. It is key because if your grammar, spelling or sentence structure don't add up, you are probably not getting your thoughts through clearly.

Over on the Journalistics blog, Jessica Love writes "The Write Stuff: Still the #1 PR Skill." Yes, it should be, but no, many PR practitioners don't have it. We can blame many things from a failing school system to an overreliance on short form messaging, but the responsibility to straighten out your writing skills lies with you.

Write well, or fail to communicate.