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COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Write for Results

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Your words carry power. Your words define you and your brand—especially in our email-centric world. Think about the messages you get from people you’ve never even met. You form instant impressions of those people from their words. Is this person smart? Can I trust them? Do I want to work with them?

As an actuary, you are good at your job because of your intelligence, experience and technical skills. You’re being judged daily on both your modeling skills AND your communication skills. If you develop the model to change the future of the world as we know it, how will your colleagues and clients understand your model’s benefits to them unless you can effectively write about those benefits in terms they will understand? Writing for your readers is the key to your success.

To keep your documents short, correct, and on point, edit, re-edit and review them before you send them out. No one ever said “I wish that email was three paragraphs longer.”

How many emails, reports and model updates do you write in a given week? Most of the time when we begin to write, we ask ourselves, “What do I want to say?” You’ll achieve better results if instead you ask yourself, “What do my readers need to *do* or what do my readers need to *know*?” After you answer that question, write your main message first so your readers can quickly grasp what’s most important.

When you use active language, you help your readers know what they need to do after they read your email or document. Instead of writing that you’d like to make a recommendation, write: “I recommend” or “Let’s take these steps.”



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You’ll deliver more effective messages when you consider cultural nuances and write to reflect your readers’ experience. What is their first language? Is their culture more formal or informal? Will they understand specific jargon or local references? When you consider your readers when you write, you avoid possibly confusing them and having to answer unnecessary questions.

Think about the power your words hold the next time you write. Consider how you’re being judged when your readers receive your email or report. You will be viewed as professional and credible when you put your readers’ needs first and write to appeal to what’s important to them. ■



Pamela Burns works with Exec|Comm to help her clients connect and focus more on others when they write, meet and present. She can be contacted at pburns@exec-comm.com.