

Compliance Today – September 2018 Business writing

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“Language is the Dress of Thought”

– Samuel Johnson

One of my favorite sayings from an earlier mentor of mine is, “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” The small stuff he was talking about was so process-oriented, we had the potential to miss the forest for the trees. I have tried to keep that adage in mind to keep the stress level down when I worked on big projects; however, I am torn, because I also think we need to keep an eye on the small stuff (e.g., business writing, to make sure what we provide is professional and shows our best work).

Why discuss this issue now? Well, I must be honest that between the politics of the day, the speed at which news is delivered, and the apparent lack of fact-checking (and more specifically, spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors) makes me wonder if we are relaxing our standards on what we produce. If we continue to allow this, we may be normalizing unprofessional behavior. It goes without saying that our policies, procedures, protocols, investigations, audits, education materials, and reports need to be factual, succinct, and in the most accurate English (or whatever language we are using) possible.

Mistakes in written or verbal reports may lead to a negative consequence. Our listeners may discount what we say or write, and question our comments or conclusions. Our effectiveness as leaders and compliance officers may be compromised, because our industry is as much about intelligent persuasion as authoritative dictates. We need the trust of our leaders and colleagues to persuade them to make positive ethical business or operational process changes.

Diversity is important to prevent group think and lack of inclusiveness. When writing a report, involve colleagues as reviewers who have a different perspective so all angles of an issue can be reviewed, and when findings are presented, they can be trusted to be the most informative and complete at time of writing.

As a refresher, the following are some basic tenets for improved business writing:

- Make sentences clearer, tighter, and unambiguous.
 - Remove unnecessary details or words.
 - Add necessary details that have been omitted.
 - Check that the tense is consistent.
 - Use active voice and first person where possible.
 - **Correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.**
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- Improve the flow as needed, by re-arranging the sequence of sentences or paragraphs.

Always do your best — review, edit, and edit again.

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