

# This ain't no English lesson

The fast and dirty writing academy

**BANER**®



a b c d e f g h i j k l m  
n o p q r s t u v w x y z  
, . : ; ! ? ( ) ' “

$$200 = 80\%$$

the of and a to in he have it that for they I with as not on she at by this we you  
do but from or which one would all will there say who make when can more if no  
man out other so what time up go about than into could state only new year  
some take come these know see use get like then first any work now may such  
give over think most even find day also after way many must look before great  
back through long where much should well people down own just because good  
each those feel seem how high too place little world very still nation hand old life  
tell write become here show house both between need mean call develop under  
last right move thing general school never same another begin while number  
part turn real leave might want point form off child few small since against ask  
late home interest large person end open public follow during present without  
again hold govern around possible head consider word programme problem  
however lead system set order eye plan run keep face fact group play stand  
increase early course change help line

So how does that  
lead to this?

By taking a strategic, disciplined, enterprise-wide approach to aligning, managing and measuring learning and development initiatives, organisations ensure that their people have the right skills and knowledge to perform at their best.

XPROD\* is the most comprehensive solution available to address the strategic mandates of the learning organisation – to deliver effective formal and informal learning that is tied to clear business outcomes and strategic human capital management initiatives.

\* Company name changed to protect the guilty

Of course it can go  
too far the other way

Starlight Lines. The official agency for the Starship Titanic. The exclusive agency. Showing you things you've never seen. Exclusive things. We're proud. Very proud. So proud we hired a PR company. To teach us how to write. Be lovely, they said. Be positive. Short sentences. Say nothing. This is what it's like. The writing. Positive. Lovely. Meaningless. Meaningless, because you're a success. You don't need us to tell you what to think. See for yourself. Enjoy. The ship. The cosmos. Life. Be happy. Love you. Miss you. Mean it.

'Marketing' copy from the release of the Starship Titanic computer game

A bit of philosophy

Meaning is not contained  
in words

All communication  
is a conversation

We communicate to persuade

# Three bits of good business writing

Let's take the concept of thin-slicing one step further. Imagine you work for an insurance company that sells doctors medical malpractice insurance. Your boss asks you to figure out for accounting reasons who, among all the physicians covered by the company, is most likely to be sued. Once again, you are given two choices. The first is to examine the physicians' training and credentials and then analyse their records to see how many errors they've made over the past few years. The other option is to listen in on very brief snippets of conversation between each doctor and his or her patients.

Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink*

There are three basic flavours of incentive: economic, social and moral. Very often a single incentive scheme will include all three varieties. Think about the anti-smoking campaign of recent years. The addition of a \$3-per-pack “sin tax” is a strong economic incentive against buying cigarettes. The banning of cigarettes in restaurants and bars is a powerful social incentive. And when the US government asserts that terrorists raise money by selling black-market cigarettes, that acts as a rather jarring moral incentive.

Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics*

Why do remote controls have more buttons than we ever use? The answer starts with the noble intentions of engineers. Most technology and product design projects must combat “feature creep,” the tendency for things to become incrementally more complex until they no longer perform their original functions very well. A VCR is a case in point.

Chip and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick*

Tips, tricks and techniques

Understand your audience

Be relevant

Write plainly and simply

Tell tales

Start by starting (fix it later)

# The rule of three

# The dictionary rule

# The jargon rule

Don't repeat yourself  
Don't repeat yourself

Avoid the passive

And and but

Edit. Edit. Edit.

Edit. ~~Edit.~~ ~~Edit.~~

Cut by a third

'That' isn't needed

Exclamation marks are like  
laughing at your own joke!

Proofread

Proofread

Enjoy what you write

# More stuff

You can download the notes for this presentation (as well as a handy guide to proofreading) at our blog: [b1blog.wordpress.com](http://b1blog.wordpress.com) – simply click on the ‘downloads’ tab.