COMMUNICATION TIPS

When writing, remember that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating in writing is more concrete than verbal communications, and there is not as much room for error and even less room for mistakes. This is especially true for email as well as for other forms of communication. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, writing style and wording all are challenging and all are important for good communications.

Technology makes writing many forms of communications easier by providing templates for memos, letters, newsletters and lessons. Writers have tools that check and correct misspelled words and incorrect grammar. Unfortunately, these tools are not foolproof and still require writers to carefully proof, review, and double check. Your knowledge is still important in creating written work.

Some basic tips to remember when writing:

- Know your audience and use appropriate level language. Avoid slang words.
- Do not assume the gender of correspondents. Strive to make your wording gender neutral.
- Always spell out names the first time, rather than using abbreviations, initials, or acronyms: for example use National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) the first time and then you can use NAP after that.
- Do not use symbols in place of words, such as & for and.
- Do not assume correspondents are familiar with parliamentary terms, i.e. parliamentary authority, deliberative assembly, provisional members. Parliamentary authority – book of rules. Deliberative assembly – a group of people who have the right to vote in an organization. Provisional member – member who has not passed the membership exam. Either use clear, understandable language or explain insider terminology.
- Always include area code with telephone numbers
- Clichés should be avoided, or at the very least, used with caution
- Take great care to spell the names of people and companies correctly
- Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: Ten years ago, our unit…). The number 10, or anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: Unit ABC has 15 members.)
- Quotation marks should be placed around any directly quoted speech or text
- Book titles should be in italics or should have quotation marks placed around the title.
- Avoid long, complicated sentences.
- Include all possible contact methods (phone, fax, email, Web site, etc.)
- NAP has published a style guide to use for guidance in communications and use of the NAP logo.
- *Leadership in the Spotlight* is another NAP reference that has many suggestions for public relations and communications.
- The NAP Web site www.parliamentarians.org contains many references that can provide assistance for your communications program, including websites for associations and units.

While these tips cover some hints and helps for writing letters, memos and reports, they in no way deal with everything you need to know to ensure your written communications are accurate and understood.

There are many sources available to assist with writing style, including *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, a small, easy-to-understand, no-nonsense guide to writing. There are many other guides, but this one is probably the most compact and easiest to use.

The Importance of Careful Proofing

The most important thing to remember is to check everything thoroughly when completed. Even when you think it is exactly what you want, read it one more time. Enlist other people to proof also. More than one set of eyes helps catch pesky mistakes. When you proof your own material, it's easy to miss things. This suggestion holds true for everything you write—memos, letters, proposals, etc.

Use both the grammar and spell check on your computer, but with caution. Do not place total faith on your computer. You should have both a dictionary and thesaurus (printed or online) available to double-check the computer's suggestions as computer tools are not always reliable.

Make sure your document is clear and concise. Is there anything that could be misinterpreted? Are there unanswered questions? Can you reduce the number of words used? Have you used long words rather than simple ones (i.e. utilize instead of use)? While you do not want to be too brief, you do not want to be too wordy either.

Is your written communication well organized? Does each idea move from one idea logically to the next? Should you break it up with headings? Make sure your written communications are easy to read and contain the necessary information, using facts where needed and avoiding information that is not relevant. Have you stated clearly what you want the reader to do, such as call, register, or go online?

In your concluding paragraph, make sure to include contact information. If there is no contact information, your communication goals may not be reached.

NAP Communications Committee
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