

Effective Written Student Communications

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Today's Agenda

- How To Communicate With Diverse Populations
 - Types of Written Communications
 - What Students Respond To
 - Emphasizing Benefits to Students
 - Keeping It Simple
 - Common Mistakes
 - Effective Use of Photos and Graphics
(and Resources To Find Them)
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Community Colleges Deal With Diverse Populations


- Age
- Culture
- Language
- Schedule
- Night vs. Day students
- Homeless
- Other factors

How To Reach All of Them?

For each written communication, ask:


- *Exactly who* is the audience?
 - Is it going to all students or a select group?
 - Given these factors, what is the best way to convey the message?
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Types of Written Communications

- Letter
 - Flyer
 - E-mail
 - Poster
 - Web site
 - Tent cards in cafeteria/library
 - Postcard
 - Bookmark
 - Booklet
 - Brochure
 - Wallet card
 - Campus marquee
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Deciding What Type of Communication To Use

Ask yourself:


- What is the message, or “call to action?”
 - What is the message length?
 - Do I want the item to be retained and referenced later?
 - What is my budget?
 - Can it be created and/or printed in-house?
 - How soon do I need the item to be ready?
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Take Into Account Your Limitations


- **Timeline**

- ✓ Build in time for campus approval
- ✓ If item is being created or printed by external vendor, set a due date and include time for revisions

- **Budget**

- ✓ In-house: Save money by utilizing programs on your PC and on-campus printing services
 - ✓ External: seek at least three bids
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What Do Students Respond To?

- Bright colors and graphics
 - Short and sweet
 - “What’s in it for me?”—*benefits to students*
 - Top-10 lists
 - Break up lengthy text with sidebars, boxes, callouts and bullets
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“What’s In It For Me?”


With so many messages coming at us, we sometimes “skim” rather than read.

Students want to know why they should care about your message.

Give them what they want right away—start by explaining how your message benefits students.

Emphasizing Benefits to Students


Examples:

- “Receive less mail by signing up for our e-mail service!”
 - “Learn how you can save \$20-\$150 each month—attend our free budgeting workshop!”
 - “Fulfill your loan requirements and have your questions answered by a counselor. Stop by the financial aid office today!”
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Keep It Simple

Rule of Thumb:

Write for the attention span of a 12-year-old.

- Don't use big words
 - Keep sentences and paragraphs short – in fact, keep the whole thing as brief as possible
 - Bold or underline the most important part of the message (no more than one sentence)
 - Always include contact info for follow-up
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Common Mistakes

- Too much information
 - Burying the message
 - Jargon and hard-to-understand language
 - Using ALL CAPS
 - Overuse of **bold**, *italics*, underline
 - Not verifying phone numbers, addresses
 - Lengthy sentences and paragraphs
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Simplify Your Words

**Even though you use a term all the time,
don't assume students will understand it.**

Instead of:

Matriculated Student

Indebtedness

Forfeiture

Facilitate

Functionality

Use:

Registered Student

Total Debt

Loss

Help

Function

...and avoid acronyms whenever possible!




Overusing All Caps, Bold and Underline:

IT IS **VERY IMPORTANT** THAT YOU STOP BY THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE THIS WEEK. WE HAVE IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR AID PACKAGE. IN ORDER TO RECEIVE YOUR LOAN FUNDS, **YOU MUST MEET WITH A FINANCIAL AID COUNSELOR.** PLEASE BRING YOUR FINANCIAL AID FOLDER WITH YOU. THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER.

See How Much Easier This Is To Read?

It is very important that you stop by the financial aid office this week. We have **important information** regarding **your aid package**. In order to receive your loan funds, you must meet with a financial aid counselor. Please bring your financial aid folder with you. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.



Why **NOT** To Trust Spell Check

Among others, Spell Check does not distinguish between these terms...

Identity • Identify

There • Their • They're

Your • You're

To • Too

Lose • Loose

Role • Roll

Our • Are

Except • Accept

Affect • Effect

Were • Where

Then • Than

Or • Of

An • And

From • Form

It's • Its

In • Inn

Paste • Past

Choose • Chose




**There's no substitute for
an extra pair of eyes!**

**Always have someone
proofread for you.**

Effective Use of Photos and Graphics

Graphics are great but...

Don't forget the importance
of **white space** to balance out
a page and make text look less busy



Effective Use of Photos and Graphics

Where to find photos and clip art:

- In Microsoft Word, click the “Insert” tab, then click “Picture” then “Clip Art.”
- Web sites with inexpensive or free images:
 - www.istockphoto.com
 - www.dreamstime.com
 - www.shutterstock.com


When Choosing Graphics...

Things to remember:


- **Diversity**

- ✓ Different ethnicities, ages, weights/heights, and individuals with disabilities.


- **Don't Offend**

- ✓ Just because it's not offensive to you, don't make assumptions about others' reactions.
 - ✓ If there's any potential to offend, choose another image.
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Don't Get Yourself in Trouble

- Don't just copy and use images from Web sites or other publications—these are usually covered by copyright law.
 - Violating copyright law could get you and your institution into legal trouble.
 - If you're unsure whether an item is covered by copyright, don't use it—find another one.
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What We Covered

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Q & A

**We're sure you've got
lots of questions...**

...Ask away!

