



Exploring Leadership

COMMUNICATION: WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Every day, we use written communication—texts, emails, social media posts, and even street signs. Writing is everywhere, but just because we do it often doesn't mean we always do it well. Clear writing helps us share information, express ideas, and connect with others. Whether for school, work, or everyday life, strong writing shapes how we are understood and remembered.

CONVERSATION STARTER:

Edward Bulwer-Lytton said, "The pen is mightier than the sword...Take away the sword—States can be saved without it!" How can words be more powerful than force? Can you think of a time when writing or communication changed history?

Whenever you write something for someone else to read, you're engaging in written communication. From school essays to text messages, every word choice shapes how your message is received. Even movie scripts and speeches begin as written words before they are spoken. Writing with clarity helps you communicate ideas, build connections, and avoid misunderstandings. The clearer you write, the greater your impact.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Review the key elements of effective writing.
- Recognize why clear writing and punctuation are essential for communication.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Copies of the Punctuation Parable (see Appendix A)
- Computer and projector to display the quote and definitions (see Appendix B)

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

Writing can be powerful, but only when it's clear. A single misplaced comma can change everything! This activity highlights why careful writing is essential.

- Divide participants into small groups.
- Hand out the Punctuation Parable (see Appendix) to each person.
- Have participants read the parable silently, noting how missing or incorrect punctuation changes meaning.
- Discuss the following questions in small groups:
 - Who do you think the intended audience of the will is? Why?
 - Does the will clearly communicate its purpose? Why or why not?
 - How would different punctuation choices change the meaning?
 - Who do you think should inherit 'Lil Ant'ny's fortune? Why?
- Reconvene as a full group to compare responses and explore how punctuation shaped different interpretations.

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- Use a computer and projector to display Appendix B so groups can refer to it during discussions.
- Optional: Print Appendix B on the back of The Punctuation Parable for easy reference.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What lesson does this parable teach about the importance of clear communication?
- Why must legal documents like wills and contracts be written with absolute clarity?
- The old man had a purpose for his will, but his unclear writing led to confusion. How could he have made his message clearer?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- How does your tone or writing style change based on your audience? Consider how you would write in these situations:
 - Asking a friend for a favor in a text.
 - Leaving a note for a family member.
 - Writing a formal email to a teacher or employer.
 - Completing a school essay.
- What type of writing do you use the most? Which form do you feel most confident in?
- What is the most challenging part of writing for you? What strategies could help improve it?
- Can you think of a time when written words had a major impact on history or society? What made that communication powerful?



CONCLUSION:

Unlike spoken words, writing lasts. A conversation fades, but written communication can be reviewed, shared, and remembered. That's why writing with clarity and purpose is essential. The next time you send a text, email a teacher, or post online, think about how your words will be interpreted. Writing well isn't just about following rules—it's about making sure your message is understood. Your words have power—use them wisely.

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REFERENCES

- Why English Matters: <http://ffjh.blogspot.com/2006/01/why-english-matters.html>
- Essential Skills for Written Communication by Mary Clare Novak: <https://learn.g2.com/written-communication>
- The pen is mightier than the sword by Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_pen_is_mightier_than_the_sword



APPENDIX A:

THE PUNCTUATION PARABLE

Charmingface Tony Simmons-Timmons ('Lil Ant'ny, to his legion of fans) was a mega-famous pop star who was rich beyond belief -- he owned a huge mansion, businesses and properties, not to mention the rights to his musical catalog. 'Lil Ant'ny was on his way to a gig in Europe when his private jet flew into a lightning storm. Realizing the danger, he remembered his last conversation with his lawyer, who had been advising him to finalize his will for years. Just then, a bolt of lightning struck the jet, and it began to plunge toward the ocean. Hastily, 'Lil Ant'ny texted his last will and testament to the lawyer just before the jet went into the ocean. Soon thereafter, all his greedy relatives came to see who would inherit his fortune, but when the text message was read, this is what they found:

I leave my possessions to my nephew none to my brother never pay the bills of the tailor none by any means for the
beggars everything I have said is my desire
charmingface tony simmons-timmons (lol #mayday!)

Because 'Lil Ant'ny had not punctuated his text message, no one could understand it, and each of the parties mentioned in it tried to claim the fortune. They all went to court and presented their interpretation of the text message.

First, the **brother** presented his version:

I, leave my possessions to my nephew? None! To my brother. Never pay the bills of the tailor. None, by any means, for the beggars. Everything I have said is my desire.

The **nephew** objected strongly to the brother's version and presented his own:

I leave my possessions to my nephew. None to my brother. Never pay the bills of the tailor. None, by any means, for the beggars. Everything I have said is my desire.

Next, the **tailor** objected and presented his version:

I, leave my possessions to my nephew? None! To my brother? Never! Pay the bills of the tailor. None , by any means, for the beggars. Everything I have said is my desire.

But a **beggar** in the courtroom objected and presented yet another version:

I, leave my possessions to my nephew? None! To my brother? Never! Pay the bills of the tailor? None, by any means! For the beggars -- everything I have! Said, is my desire.

The judge had to decide who would inherit 'Lil Ant'ny's estate.



APPENDIX B:

QUOTE

"The pen is mightier than the sword...Take away the sword—States can be saved without it!"

-Edward Bulwer-Lytton

ELEMENTS OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Great writing is more than just words—it's about making sure your message is understood. Every piece of written communication includes these key elements:

- **Audience** – Who is reading this? Choose words and style that fit them.
- **Purpose** – What is your goal? Make sure your writing has a clear message.
- **Narrator's Voice** – How does it sound? Tone and word choice affect meaning.
- **Rules** – Are you being clear? Grammar, punctuation, and spelling help avoid confusion.