

Exploring Leadership

COMMUNICATION: WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Every day, even in a world where technology does so much of our reading and writing for us, we are bombarded with Written Communication. Literacy is the single most valuable and used skill we will ever acquire, and it is important that everyone (not just writers and editors) know the basics. This activity allows participants to see (in a whimsical way) why it is important to write with a clear purpose and audience in mind and to use appropriate punctuation.

CONVERSATION STARTER:

"The Pen is mightier than the sword.... Take away the sword - states can be saved without it." - Edward Bulwer-Lytton

- Ask/Discuss: What do you think this means?

Written Communication is making use of the written word to deliver information. Anytime a person writes something for someone else to read, they are using Written Communication: text messages, post-it notes, tweets on Twitter, e-mails, blog posts, comics, books, magazines, letters, contracts, traffic signs, advertisements, school essays, poems, and too many others to mention. Even movie scripts and speeches - which end up being watched and heard, begin as written documents.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Identify reasons Written Communication still matters.
- Review the elements of Written Communication young writers should practice.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Copies of the Punctuation Parable (Appendix A)
- Projector/Poster/Board to display quote and definitions (Appendix B)

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

Give a copy of the Punctuation Parable for participants to read silently. This activity allows participants to see why it's so important to write with a clear purpose and audience in mind and use appropriate punctuation. Divide participants into small groups to discuss these 4 below questions and discuss responses with the entire group.

FACILITATOR TIP:

- Display the definitions of the four elements of Written Communication (see Appendix B) so groups can see them during their discussions. (You could also just run them off on the back of the Punctuation Parable.)

- Who do you think is the intended audience of the will? Why?
- Does the will achieve its purpose? Why or why not?
- List some words that describe 'Lil Ant'ny. Why do you think so?
- Who do you think the judge gave the money to? Why?



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What is the moral of this parable? (What lessons should you learn from it?)
- Why is it important that documents like wills and contracts are in writing?
- The old man clearly knew his purpose in writing the will, and he obviously had an audience in mind, but because of his poor Written Communication, neither was clear. What should he have done differently to avoid the confusion?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- How would your “voice” be different in the following Written Communications?
 - A text message to your mom, asking her for money to see a movie with friends
 - A note on the door of your room telling your little brother to stay out
 - An email to your teacher or boss explaining why you were absent
 - A research paper for a history class
- What kind of Written Communication do you do most often? What kind are you best at?
- What is the most difficult thing for you about writing?



CONCLUSION:

The great advantage of Written Communication is that it can be referred to at a later time, which is why it is still the best way to express and preserve information. So, the next time a teacher assigns you to write something, remember why it is important to do it well!

Utah State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution and is committed to a learning and working environment free from discrimination. For USU's non-discrimination notice, see equity.usu.edu/non-discrimination.

REFERENCES

- <http://ffjh.blogspot.com/2006/01/why-english-matters.html>
- <https://learn.g2.com/written-communication>
- 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 catalogue. '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:

All forms of Written Communication contain these Elements:

- Audience -- Who is it written for?
- Purpose -- What is the audience supposed to do, feel, or know after reading it?
- Narrator's Voice -- How does the "speaker" or "voice" of the writing seem to feel?
- Rules -- How will the reader interpret the meaning of the writer's words? (grammar, punctuation, spelling, usage, etc.)