

## Writing Tip: Finesse With Tone

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

### Finesse with Tone

Tone is the *Sweet* in the KISS principle: Keep it Short and Sweet. This principle reminds you to get things done in paragraph one using a positive tone. Tone is not what you say; it's how you say it.

Your tone should create a spirit of cooperation and leave your readers feeling good about themselves. It should also eliminate any possibility for your readers to feel defensive.



Stan Berry

### Tone is Attitude

Tone is personal. It reflects how you feel about your reader. It also reflects your attitude on life—including your deeply held belief that you should treat others as you want them to treat you. When you feel impatient, defensive, or angry, your feelings can come through in your words—often to the detriment of what you want to get done.

Attitude quality falls into two categories: negative or positive.

#### *Negative*

harsh  
demanding  
rude  
critical  
accusing  
angry  
pompous

#### *Positive*

helpful  
understanding  
polite  
constructive  
asking  
cheerful  
sincere

### The Power of Tone

Tone is a powerful tool for gaining your readers' cooperation. The tone you use boomerangs back to you. Positive tone gets positive reactions. Negative tone gets negative reactions. Your tone can promote or hinder cooperation.

Review the following statements and consider their impact on the reader:

	<i>PROMOTES Cooperation</i>	<i>HINDERS Cooperation</i>
1. We can't authorize your line of credit until you send us your signed application form.	_____	_____
2. We will authorize your line of credit as soon as we receive your signed application form.	_____	_____

The second option is more likely to promote cooperation. Which statement would you rather receive?

### Use This Checklist for Effective Tone

Checking your language for tone is the last step in the *Writing to Get Things Done*<sup>®</sup> (WGTD) writing process. Here is a list of questions to help you improve your tone:

- Does the tone encourage cooperation?
- Is the tone friendly and professional?
- Does it build goodwill and cement a cooperative working relationship?
- Did you use positive words such as *please, can, will, help, appreciate, give, and happy*?
- Did you avoid negative words such as *blame, cannot, neglect, careless, fail, error, and disagree*?
- Did you avoid expressions that are threatening, condescending, demanding, or sarcastic?

Remember, tone reflects your attitude—and you get back what you send out. So, before hitting the send button, check your attitude and make sure you sweeten your tone to encourage cooperation.



*Stan Berry has devoted the past 34 years to improving the writing skills of over 55,000 business and government professionals. After completing his Master's degree from Yale University, he co-authored five books on writing that he uses in his seminars. He's been a member of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) since 1975 when he served as the newsletter editor and on the Board of Directors for the Twin Cities Chapter. Stan can be reached at [www.BerryWritingGroup.com](http://www.BerryWritingGroup.com) or 612-578-1487.*

*Stu Tanquist has presented at four American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) National Leadership and TechKnowledge conferences and written two best selling ASTD Info-Lines. With over 20 years in the learning and development field, Stu's expertise has ranged from working as a professional trainer to serving as a strategic-level director for training and development. He holds three degrees including a Masters in management. Stu can be reached at [Stu@BerryWritingGroup.com](mailto:Stu@BerryWritingGroup.com) or 612-799-1686.*



**Stu Tanquist**



**Sign-up to receive free Writing Tips by email at [www.BerryWritingGroup.com](http://www.BerryWritingGroup.com)**

© Copyright 2010 Berry Writing Group, Inc.  
All Rights Reserved

*This document may not be reproduced or distributed when used in conjunction with any for-profit endeavor or instructional activity without prior written authorization.*