

Writing Tip: Use a forecasting subject line

Adapted from Writing to Get Things Done® seminar

Productivity Tip

When you want your emails to get things done, begin with a forecasting subject line. This simple step will turn your readers from passive to active. It often determines whether your email gets read or not.



Stan Berry

Forecast the Bottom Line of Your Email in the Subject Line

Forecasting subject lines tell the reader what you're going to tell them. In other words, they forecast the business application of your email - they tell readers how your email affects them. Effective subject lines offer more than a general topic description. Assume for a moment that you work in human resources. Which of the following is more likely to pique your interest, a topic subject line or a forecasting subject line?

1. "Benefits Plan" [General topic description]
2. "Recommendation for Enhancing Our Benefits Plan" [Specific forecast of the bottom line]

The Power of Forecasting Subject Lines

People are naturally curious. Consider the previous example. By disclosing the business application of the email, readers will wonder, "What is the recommendation? How could the benefit plan be enhanced?" These questions grab the reader's attention and turn them passive to active.

Examples of Forecasting Subject Lines

Use the following subject line openers to enhance reader interest:

- Review of...
- Request for...
- Proper Handling of...
- Recommended Use of...
- Instructions for...
- Comments about...

To further increase productivity, follow these four guidelines for writing forecasting subject lines:

- Should repeat key words from paragraph 1
- Should be written last - after a rough draft is completed
- Should not be a sentence or a question
- Strive for no more than 50 characters

A Small Step that Offers Big Results

Forecasting subject lines are a simple yet powerful tool for Writing to Get Things Done. By stating the business application of your message in the subject line, you will entice your readers to learn more and take action. Consistently follow this simple tip and watch your productivity grow.



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 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 www.BerryWritingGroup.com or 612-799-1686.



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