

FREE

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Discover the secrets of
successful communication

commsPLUS[®]
Making complex information appear simple

Introduction

Jackie Barrie founded Comms Plus in 2001. It's a writing and design business that specialises in making complex information appear simple.

Her communicating experience comes from over 20 years in the industry backed by an honours degree specialising in the psychology of how people 'tick' and how they process words and symbols. She writes without waffle (also known as Plain English) and is an ex-member of the Information Design Association committee.

"We no longer need to produce brochures as the newsletters are far more versatile and portray us in a really professional way. We also find Comms Plus easy to work with and they really take the lead in producing the newsletter, we are genuinely delighted with what Comms Plus does for us."

Ashley Blackmore, Sterling Syncordia

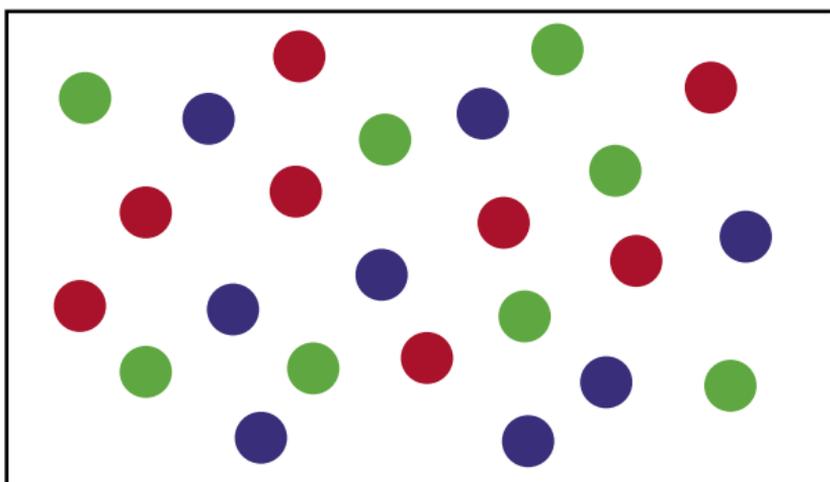
Get noticed

We are constantly bombarded with information. In one day our brains take in more messages than our grand-parents did in a whole year. So we have to be selective and filter out anything that is not of interest to us.

Get a group of people together and try this:

Prepare a piece of paper with 8 dots each in 3 different colours, randomly arranged (as shown below). Show it to your audience for a few seconds, asking them to count the red dots. Hide the paper and ask them how many green dots there were.

Most people will get the answer wrong because they quite naturally ignore anything that is not relevant to the task.

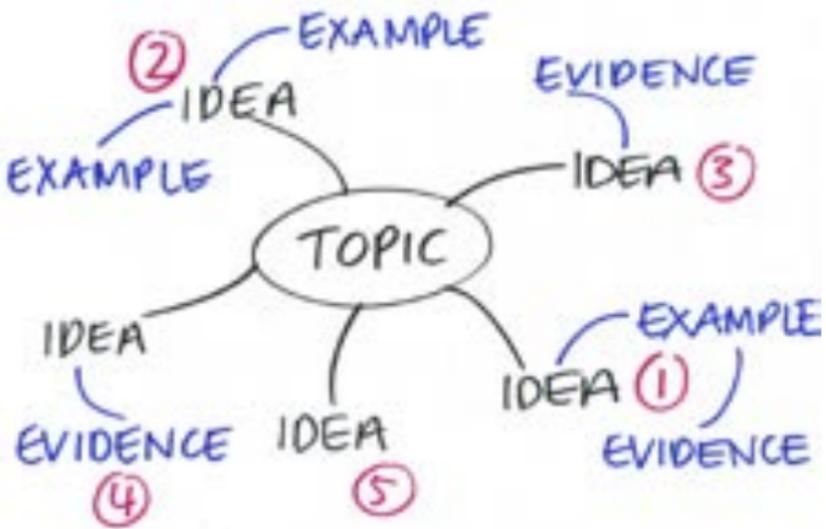


"Comms Plus provided a quick, clear and professional finish that my customers will find easy to understand."
Barry Winsbury, Quantumhydro

Keep it simple

It can take longer to write something short than to write something long. But it is important to respect people's time and only write what is relevant.

It can help to 'brain dump' your thoughts in a 'mind map' or 'spider diagram' before you number your points in order of priority and then re-write in a standard format with a beginning, middle and end.



"Your website is beautifully clear and user friendly. It really works."

Katherine Trimble, Gaelkat Ltd (copywriter)

Layout tips

Avoid solid text

Add navigation such as sub-headings so people can skim-read to find what interests them.

Keep it visually interesting by

- breaking
- lists
- into
- bullet
- points

Be aware that some people respond well to **words**, some to **numbers** and some to **visuals**, so try to ensure that your documents contain the same information presented in those three different ways.

And most of us learn best from experience, so make your message **interactive** where you can.

"Comms Plus has been absolutely marvellous. From uploading our first web page to helping us set up our email."

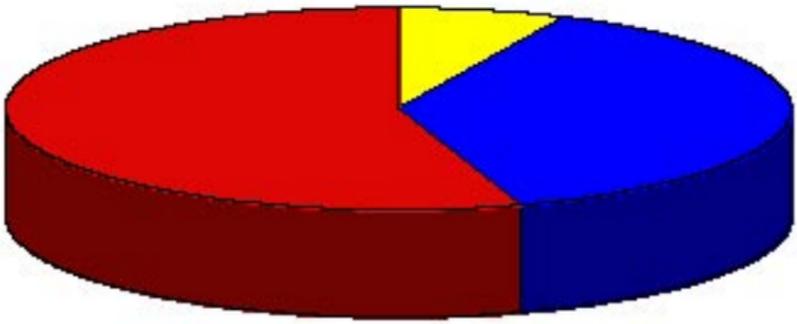
Nicky Gill, ND Management

Famous facts

You may have seen this statistic before:

Only 7% of effective communication is caused by the words we use. That's why they are so important!

38% is caused by the tone of voice we use, and an overwhelming **55%** by the body language we display.



7% ■ words

38% ■ tone of voice

55% ■ body language

"Damned you are good. Well done. It's when I see work like this that I know you are worth your weight in gold."

Pankaj Patel, Croydon Zone

Choose your channel

Now let's overlay those figures with the communication channels that are available to us.

Things like **email, letters, brochures and web-sites** are based around words only. So they only have a 7% chance of reaching the audience in the way you intended them.

Phone calls include tone of voice as well, so you have a much better chance of your message being received and understood.

But **face-to-face** communication is the only one that has 100% chance of effectiveness.

	Words	Tone of voice	Body language
Writing 7%			
Telephone 7 + 38 = 45%			
Face-to-face 7 + 38 + 55 = 100%			

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"Thorough proof-reading and stunning attention to detail meant Jackie found 24 mistakes in the web-site we thought was already perfect."

Tony Adams, TA Design

Writing



Let's see if I can prove those statistics to you. This experiment is to demonstrate the potential problem with written communications. Read aloud the words in each sentence below, stressing the word that is highlighted:

'I didn't say I stole the cookie'

No, someone else must have said it

I **didn't** say I stole the cookie'

No, you said something else entirely

I didn't **say** I stole the cookie'

No, but you might have stolen it anyway

I didn't say **I** stole the cookie'

No, someone else must have stolen it

I didn't say I **stole** the cookie'

No, perhaps you just borrowed it

I didn't say I stole **the** cookie'

No, but perhaps you stole another one

I didn't say I stole the **cookie**'

No, perhaps you stole something else instead

See how there are 7 or 8 different interpretations of those words, depending on how you read them? That is why emails and written communications are so often misunderstood and why it's so important to **get the words right.**

"We used Jackie's recommendations for our booking forms and travel information. The format was well presented and professional and we found her objective viewpoint extremely useful."

Chrissie Trotter, Skyros Holistic Holidays

Telephone



Now let's try to demonstrate a phone conversation. First you need a group of people...

- Give each person a piece of plain paper
- Ask everyone to close their eyes
- Now, with their eyes closed, ask them to fold the paper in half and tear off a small piece in the top right hand corner
- With their eyes still closed, ask them to fold it in half again, and tear off another piece in the top right hand corner
- And now ask them to fold it in half again, it's probably getting a bit more difficult, and tear off a piece in the top right corner
- One more time, ask them to fold it in half, they may need their teeth to help by now, and tear off a final piece
- When that's done, ask them to open their eyes, open up the paper and compare the results.

See how no-one has exactly the same!
See how, although you might think the instructions you gave were perfectly clear, everybody's interpretation was completely different!

"We're good at what we do, but we're not writers. Jackie is very good at what she does, that's why we use her. We're more than happy with the work done."

Richard Hubball, Choice

Impact on marketing

When you are promoting a business, you want to use all the tools at your disposal.

Written marketing commonly includes sales letters, direct mail and web-sites. Telesales is a form of spoken marketing. But the explosive growth of business-to-business networking demonstrates that face-to-face marketing can be the most effective.

Referral networking groups such as BNI and BRE generate results by meeting face-to-face every week. It just wouldn't be the same if they had a weekly email, or a weekly conference call.

But it takes time. Let's face it, it's unlikely that you will meet someone on day 1 who says, "I don't know you but let me give you some business!" In my experience it can take 6 to 8 meetings before someone turns from a stranger into a customer. That's why weekly breakfast meetings work so well, it can be only 6 to 8 weeks before you get some business. But if you go to a monthly event, it takes 6 to 8 months. With bi-monthly events, it can take a couple of years.

"The stand Comms Plus helped create was one of the best presented stands at the fair and I heartily recommend their services to anyone who intends to exhibit."

**Sarah Harper-Booth, President,
Croydon Chamber of Commerce**

Get it right!

Let's end with a few examples of how words can go horribly wrong.

In the Sunday Express:

'On page 35 of this week's section 3 we feature a recipe for lemon tart. Readers should note that, while the method is correct, the ingredients should include three lemons.'

And a really scary one from a US magazine called 'Easy Sky Diving':

'Please make the following correction. On page 8 line 7 'state zip code' should read 'pull rip cord'.'

And finally, Freemans catalogue used to sell the Silentnight cuddly hippo with this description:

'Henry Hippo is 9 1/2 inches high and comes in his own striped pyjamas!'

Contact Comms Plus for help with all your communications – on paper, on screen and face-to-face.

"We've always found Jackie to be highly efficient and organised. We've recommended her to a few of our own clients and they've always been very happy. Her services are a big help to our creative offer."

Mark Norman, Court Three

**Newsletters
Copywriting
Web design
Proof-reading
Events**

Other tips booklets include:

- 10 top tips for effective networking
- Checklist for events that go with a bang!
 - 8 guaranteed ice-breakers
- Climb that marketing mountain,
with ease

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