Can You Read Me Now?
Effective Communication at Work

Melissa Bostrom
21 September 2009
Today’s agenda

- Structuring your content
- Adapting your style
- Changing your tone
- Designing for impact
Attention all: I have nothing against Orville Redenbacher. The reason for no popcorn is that 60% of all fire alarms in office buildings are because some idiot let it burn in the microwave. Last night we had another incident........Based on our last 2 weeks, we have made anywhere from [removed] to [removed] bookings after 8 O'clock. Therefore this popcorn cost us between $[removed] and $[removed] that will not be recoverable. If you must have popcorn, buy it already made in a bag or a tin. If you have microwave popcorn at your desk you will be terminated...........Period! Thank you.

Bob Becker
Vice President
Consumer Research
1-800-xxx-xxxx Ext xxxxx
Dave’s email

From: Xxxx, Dave
Sent: Wednesday, January 24, 2007 2:59 PM
To: Kenan-Flagler Students; Kenan-Flagler Faculty and Staff
Subject: Fire Alarms

On January 16, we had another fire alarm due to microwave popcorn being burned. This is the second such occasion over the past year and has created disruption across the school that we feel is completely avoidable. We experienced interrupted classes, interviews with recruiters cut short, inconvenienced employees and students etc. We cannot afford to risk future disruption to the school’s operations from this issue. Therefore, we are instituting a policy prohibiting the use of microwave popcorn throughout the school. We will be removing microwave popcorn from all vending machines and Café McColl in support of this policy. We realize this may seem like an extreme reaction to some but we’ve tested this direction with several constituencies and the bottom line is that we’re doing all we can to minimize future disruptions to the core mission of the school. In addition, we continue to receive feedback that microwaves are frequently left unattended when in use. If you’re cooking anything in a microwave you should never leave it unattended. Thank you for your cooperation. Regards, Dave.
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Bottom line

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Structure revisions

- Subject line
- Bottom line
- Reasons (1 paragraph or less)
- Details (1 paragraph or less)
- Forward-looking closing
- Signature and contact info
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Style: Passive voice

Attention all: I have nothing against Orville Redenbacher. The reason for no popcorn is that 60% of all fire alarms in office buildings are because some idiot let it burn in the microwave. Last night we had another incident. Based on our last 2 weeks, we have made anywhere from [removed] to [removed] bookings after 8 o'clock. Therefore this popcorn cost us between $[removed] and $[removed] that will not be recoverable. If you must have popcorn, buy it already made in a bag or a tin. If you have microwave popcorn at your desk you will be terminated. Period! Thank you.
Passive voice examples

- The smoke was smelled...[by whom?]
- The fire department was called by an alert staff member...
- The popcorn was made...[by whom?]
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Style: False subjects

- “It is necessary to ban popcorn...”
- “It has come to my attention that two fire alarms...”
- “There is no need for such disruptions...”
- “There are plenty of other snacks in the vending machine.”
- “We must ban popcorn...”
- “I’ve learned that two fire alarms...”
- “We don’t need such disruptions...”
- “We offer plenty of other snacks in the vending machine.”
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Style: Weak verbs

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Tone tips

- Use pronouns
- Use contractions
- Strive to transfer a conversational sound to the page
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Design: Fonts

Sans serif vs. serif fonts

Sans serif for body text of electronic documents

Serif for body text of print documents
Design: Headings

- Label document’s parts
- Show readers where to find information
- Describe the contents well
Design: Good headings

- Keep more space above than below
- “Pop” off the page in a bold sans serif font
- May demonstrate “you attitude” by appealing to the reader directly (e.g., asking a question)
Design: Overall appearance

- Short, no-indent paragraphs
- 10-point font for readability
- Most important information at top
Design: Indented lists

- Bullets list items in no particular order
- Numbered items put items in order
- Both break up page
Typeface enhancements

- **Bold** items “pop” off the page
- *Italicized* items “pop” from the paragraph
- Underlining looks like a hyperlink
- ALL CAPITAL LETTERS LOOK LIKE SHOUTING!
Questions?