

CHAPTER ONE

The Writing Process

Successful communication is three-tiered: visual, verbal, and written. All firms, but particularly design firms, give considerable thought to the visual image and design style that represents their public image in the form of letterhead and business cards, as well as their marketing pieces. But because designers are often gifted orators as well, they do not always give equal consideration to the writing style and documentation that supports the graphic and oral image.

The purpose of this handbook, therefore, is to provide a variety of writing samples and examples of forms and schedules used throughout the design and construction process. The information contained in the documents has been carefully selected and edited and the formatting is consistent and easy to convert to each firm's graphic style.

Clients, consultants, and coworkers will all appreciate documentation that is readable, correct, and consistent in style. An abundance of publications that support the mechanics of good writing are available. Two that writers will find invaluable are Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999), and Manhard's *Goof-Proofing* (Fireside, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1998). Each publication comprises 85 pages of precise, useful information. From cover to cover,

these texts serve as quick and easy-to-understand references.

Designers would not ignore structural details; neither should they ignore the details of good writing. They should develop the habit of looking up word usage and grammar, learn correct forms of address, and become familiar with the proper use of titles and honors. They should learn proper abbreviations and acronyms and use them correctly; and if correspondence crosses cultural borders, it is imperative that they research the etiquette that may be unique to communicating with foreign colleagues, clients, or vendors.

The principles of good writing should be incorporated into office standards as conscientiously as the parameters of good design are established as office standards. With both standards in place, continuity in design can be matched with continuity in written documentation. Almost everyone writes—from labels to e-mail, transmittals to general correspondence, meeting notes to change orders. Many people are involved in the process and have influence on the results. The practical way to simplify the basic parts of the writing process, and save time in the daily routine, is to provide templates for formatting and examples for style and content. Institut-

ing writing standards and guidelines makes it possible to implement a systematic approach that improves efficiency and effectiveness. By establishing such standards within an organization, designers will be well on their way to maintaining the path to continual improvement.

In the design industry, the list of written documentation that can be generated is long. As expected in such a specialized industry, there are

many unique documents. Some require the efforts of the full-fledged writing process, while others may require only filling in the blanks with appropriate words, phrases, or numbers. Each document should be referenced in the office standards and guidelines. Well-documented guidelines are continually updated so that all variety of correspondence and forms are easy to emulate.

EXAMPLE OF STANDARD GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Correspondence— [Designer & Associates, Inc.]

Introduction

[Designer & Associates, Inc.] has established these guidelines to promote the highest level of professionalism and consistency of format for all correspondence and written documentation. This includes letters, transmittals, meeting notes, spreadsheets, and other documentation that represents the company and its employees. It is our goal to make a notable impression on our clients, consultants, and other related business associates.

These guidelines are simple and direct. They are designed with the intent that employees can determine, at a glance—and in more detail, if desired—the standard format for the variety of correspondence used and distributed by the firm.

Letter Style

1. Block style: Left-justify only, with 1-inch margins around the body of the letter.
2. No indents, except as acceptable for displayed quotations, tables, and similar material.

Font Style

1. Arial 11 point throughout the body of the document.
2. Insert file name at 9 point.

Heading

1. Use embossed letterhead at top, left.
2. Date line:
 - a. Position at second return, below letterhead logo.
 - b. State month, date, and year, as shown (January 2, 2004).

Opening

1. Inside address:
 - a. Position at third return below date line.
 - b. If letter is addressed to two or more people at the same address, list each name on a separate line.
 - c. If letter is addressed to two or more people at separate addresses, the individual inside addresses may be typed one under the other with one return between, or side by side in column format.

Second Page: Insert second page header and format as shown with name, date, and page number.

Mr. John Smith
January 2, 1004
Page 2

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Sincerely,
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DESIGNER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

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John Q. Public
Principal

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JQP/blr

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Enclosure

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c: X. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, Company
X. XXXXXXXXX, Company
X. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, Company

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bc: X. XXXXXXXXXXXX, Company
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g:/arch/letter/smith

- d. Do not abbreviate street, road or suite.
 - e. Per United States Postal Service standards, do not put periods after the letters indicating direction in address (e.g., NE, SW).
 - f. For foreign addresses, type country abbreviation in caps on separate line after city, state, and zip code.
2. Attention line:
 - a. Position at one return below inside address.
 - b. Do not abbreviate “Attention:”
 - c. To note “Personal,” “Confidential,” or a mailing notation such as “Via Facsimile,” position notation at one return below inside address.
 3. Reference or subject line:
 - a. Position at one return below attention line or mailing notation.
 - b. Use **bold** typeface.
 - c. Type out the word “Subject:” rather than the outdated Latin “Re.”
 - d. Type “Project No. #” directly under the reference line, also in **bold** typeface.
 4. Salutation:
 - a. Name (usually first name) followed by a comma and one return.
 - b. Use a colon after the salutation when a title and last name are used.
 - c. Use “Messrs.” for two or more men, “Mesdames” for two or more women.

Body

1. Consists of the message for as many pages as is necessary.

Second Page

1. Header at upper left corner includes three lines of information:
 - a. Name of addressee
 - b. Date
 - c. Page number, typed as “Page #.”

2. Insert one return and continue body of letter.

Closing

1. Signature block is positioned at one return after last line typed in body of letter and consists of the following parts:
 - a. Complimentary closing of “Sincerely.”
 - b. Company signature, in this case, “Designer & Associates, Inc.”
 - c. Writer’s name and professional designation; for example, John Q. Public, AIA, or John Q. Public, PE.
 - d. Author’s title, if appropriate; for example, Principal or President.
2. If appropriate, reference initials: initials of sender in caps, followed by forward slash and initials of keyboarder in lowercase; for example, JQP/blr.
3. Enclosure notation:
 - a. Position at one return below reference initials.
 - b. Spell out “Enclosure(s).”
 - c. If necessary for further clarity, list enclosed items by numbering and referencing each as follows:
 1. Invoice No. 12344
 2. Check No. 43213
4. Copy notation:
 - a. c:[TAB] name/company: Used to indicate that this person received only a photocopy of the letter.
 - b. c/enc:[TAB]: Used to indicate this person also received the attachments. If more than one attachment is enclosed, you may name documents within parentheses on the same line.
 - c. Use title (Mr., Ms., Dr.) before the name, followed by the name of the company (Dr. John Smith, General Hospital).

- d. For blind copies, attach a list of persons blind-copied to the company file copy.

File Name

1. Place in footer, if possible, or at the bottom of each page.
2. If more than a one-page letter, do not show file name on the first page of the document.
 - a. Font: Arial, 9 point, left-justified.
 - b. Format: Lowercase; and show as drive/directory/file name as follows:
g:/arch/letter/smith

Envelope

1. If letter is addressed to more than one person, send individual envelopes for each person, with full address and without reference to other recipient's names.
2. The following notation(s) may appear in the lower left of the envelope, in caps:
CONFIDENTIAL
PLEASE FORWARD
HOLD FOR APPROVAL
SPECIAL DELIVERY
REGISTERED
PERSONAL

General Notes for [Designer & Associates, Inc.] Documentation

1. Avoid abbreviations wherever possible.
2. Follow Information Systems Department protocol for naming a document. Do not create directories to "help" organize or separate files.
3. Use **bold**, *italics*, underlining, and CAPS only as necessary for reference or emphasis.
4. Do not staple multiple pages of letterhead. Use paperclips.
5. Use spell-check each time a change is made to a document.
6. Use the ampersand symbol (&) only as in a company logo.
7. Write out numbers one through nine. Show only two-digit numbers numerically.
8. When typing dollar amounts, use decimal (e.g., \$500.00, not \$500).
9. Do not allow date or individuals' names to wrap to the next line.
10. Use either a title before a name, or the degree or honor that may follow a name (Dr. John Smith, or John Smith, MD).
11. Follow Designer & Associates, Inc.'s standard abbreviation list for usual notations (e.g., square foot as SF, linear foot as LF) in each document.

A well-designed letter serves as the boilerplate for all further correspondence. If there is a good story to tell, tell it! Have fun with writing, and keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Stay with the topic.
- Do not mix verb tenses throughout the composition.
- Think about the promises being made and review contractual language with the proper legal resources.

- Consider style, format, and letterhead, and establish a suitable text format with typeface and font that is complementary. Formatting incorporates how the continuing pages will look, how sections will be defined, and how charts and photographs will be added to text. Once decided upon, address all of these points in the standards and guidelines.

- Pay attention to spelling and grammar—software cannot do it all.
- Build a library of reference materials for punctuation, usage, and style, and refer to the experts when unsure of a word or a phrase.

Note that the appendix in an up-to-date and comprehensive dictionary is a powerful resource, covering grammar and usage, as well as abbreviations, proper forms of address, foreign phrases, and much more; it is the primary resource you must have in your library. Other well-established and dependable reference publications, in addition to the aforementioned Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style* and Manhard's *Goof-Proofing*, are current editions of *Roget's Thesaurus*, and *The Gregg Reference Manual*.

To complement the variety of documents, forms, and schedules found in this handbook, review the many documents available in both

written and electronic format from industry sources. The American Institute of Architects (AIA), national engineering societies, and national contractors' and builders' organizations all offer supportive information. In addition, financial and project management consultants sponsor seminars and publish a variety of guidelines for use in the design industry. There are programs that feature guidelines, outlines, and examples of business letters in the wide selection of current business software.

The samples, forms, and schedules in this handbook are meant to become useful tools for your office. Edit, format, and convert them to conform to your firm's graphic style, and use all of these resources wisely and effectively. Seek legal counsel to confirm that the verbiage and forms you select are appropriate for the services you provide and for the goals of your firm.