

Red Pen COMMUNICATIONS

Your message. Better.

"Write the way you talk."

Please ignore that all too common advice. But do write conversationally, in an engaging exchange with your reader.

Once upon a time, we took a little time to think before we spoke. That changed as sound bites overtook oratory, but we still applied some thought to written communication. Now that we talk through fingers on keyboards, the thought and craft once applied to writing seems to be sliding away.

What a shame.

The way we talk is atrocious--sometimes it's barely even English. Here is a transcript of a real conversation (used with permission).

"Y'know, in regards to that, I think it's well, y'know, all that stuff and--yeah, well, no."

Thank goodness I had the benefit of tone of voice, pauses and other audible cues to decipher that. Those cues don't come through in our emails, posts and tweets.

None of us would inflict such verbal mash on a reader, but we do repeat in writing many sins of the spoken and often unfiltered word. Too many interjections, too many clichés, too many words in general, which buy us time to collect our thoughts as we speak. But their overuse obscures even conversation, and we shouldn't need them at all in writing. Writing (and revision, but that's another newsletter) lets us compose our thoughts and convey them clearly, without placeholders and time fillers.

So do write conversationally--just not the way we really talk.

In the February 2011 newsletter I invited you to tell me what you read for the quality of editing. You can still send your ideas and I'll report on them soon, probably in the next edition.

Until next time--

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