
Business writers can learn techniques from literature

Enhance your writing with creative writing techniques. Use attention-grabbing words and emotion, avoid excess description and get to the point to sell your concept.

Literature and business seem unrelated disciplines, but literature demonstrates effective communication and selling techniques, says Katherine Wikoff, an associate professor at the Milwaukee School of Engineering.

Study the classics, such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, to learn struc-

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Fiction and business writers understand character. Most business communication is transactional. "You always have to analyze your audience," Wikoff says. "You want to make something happen as a result of your communication."

Marc Antony's speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* illustrates how to make a point by leaving something out. To convince listeners that the men who assassinated Caesar lacked integrity, he juxtaposed Caesar's good qualities against those of the "honorable men."

"He never says anything bad against these guys, but he skillfully arranges what he says so the people make the connections," she says.

Use rising action in your business writing. Select where to begin by knowing where you'll end. "You want to come to some clincher just as you would in fiction."

A simple positive opening and a

simple positive close in routine communications will maintain a relationship with people, but high-stakes situations may require ingenuity.

Emotion and attention-grabbing tactics determine the outcome of any project. Wikoff explains that emotion is neither rational nor irrational. Gut feeling, instinct and intuition are universal human qualities. Focus on what is significant and draw the conclusion from that.

She advises frontloading—stating the point at the beginning. Hollywood calls this high-concept marketing. "You should be able to distill anything that you're writing to one, maybe two or three, sentences."

Use pertinent description. Don't get bogged down, as literary writers sometimes do, with the wonderfulness of your descriptive passages. If you're trying to go someplace, any amount of description slows you down.

Avoid redundancy. Though word repetition can be effective, too much of it becomes obnoxious.

First impressions are critical. Written communication is often seen as tedious, with paperwork rather than communication the real product. But doing a bad job of communicating can wreck a relationship or ruin a business.

Applying fiction writing techniques, or even literary analysis, to a proposal can improve communication.

WTW interviewed Dr. Katherine Hennessey Wikoff, associate professor of general studies and program director for the technical communication degree, Milwaukee School of Engineering, 1025 North Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202; 414/277-4542; wikoff@msoe.edu.

■ **Apply Joseph Campbell's theories to business**

"Most fiction is based on myths, not only about our culture but culture throughout the world," Katherine Wikoff says. All ethnic groups have similar archetypes, such as Cinderella.

Joseph Campbell talked about the archetypal hero's journey, a quest for fulfillment, common in mythologies. Corporate writers seeking to persuade should consider this. They must know what people value, what they desire and where they want to be.

Wikoff recommends studying the hero's journey in *Star Wars*. Watch the stages that Luke Skywalker goes through and remember that your goal is to motivate your readers to take positive action.