Feedback from Mentors on Business Writing Expectations
Dale Tweedy Mentoring Program for Entrepreneur Scholars
entrepreneurship.appstate.edu

Feedback from Andrew Loos in Los Angeles, CA
Co-Founder and CXO (Chief Experience Officer) of Attack! Marketing, an experiential marketing firm that has created and managed marketing campaigns, promotions, and staffing for companies such as Red Bull, Mini Cooper, Red Box, and artists like Gwen Stefani and Green Day.

At Attack! Marketing, the types of writing employees perform include website material, online social communities, blogs, contractor training materials, client spec books, style guides, proposals and RFP generation, and general client/vendor/contractor email correspondence.

When asked what writing skills are lacking in the emerging workforce, Andrew answered, “the basics.” Andrew went on to say, “I see some (not ‘all’ or ‘most’) kids right out of college lacking basic grammar and punctuation skills. There seems to be a real need for continued education around conjunctions. (I blame texting.)”

Tone is another important issue. Andrew said, “The kids we hire directly out of college initially seem to have a difficult time adjusting email tone as it relates to variance in the receiver. I would never ask that a contractor be addressed in an unprofessional manner, but the tone of the request is almost always delivered in a much more conversational fashion than we would to a client. Unfortunately, this usually is a trial-and-error type formula that results in an annoyed client every few months.”

What is Andrew’s advice? Know your audience. Adjust your tone, written or spoken, to cater to the type of person you’re communicating with.

Feedback from Bob Webb - Charlotte, NC
CEO of Meyers and Chapman, Inc., a regional company providing general contractors and construction services with a focus on strong client relationships.

At Meyers and Chapman, Bob and his colleagues regularly write meeting minutes, letters of introduction, thank you letters, formal proposals to win new work, technical explanation of construction issues, and lots and lots of email correspondence. The writing skills Bob sees as lacking in the emerging workforce include proper grammar and properly organized and succinct communications. Bob suggests students have lots of opportunities for practice: “Give them honest and helpful feedback so that they can consistently produce effective and professional written communications.”
Feedback from **Reglan Brewer** – Asheville, NC  
Founder and ownerRgb Design Solutions, a shoe design agency with clients such as Salomon, Timberland, Keen, and Billabong.

Reglan’s thoughts on business writing expectations focus around structure and simplicity. “Because we get hundreds of emails daily, communication must be short and effective to keep our computer time efficient.” Communicating with folks that speak English as a second language is another challenge. It’s important to be able to communicate across cultural lines.

Feedback from **Michael Holzworth** – Boone, NC  
President and CEO of Hospitality Mints, the largest producer of customized wrapped mints in the US. Mike was formerly with Pepsi and Nestle and the former President/CEO of Kathryn Beich, a private confectionery company spun-off from Nestle.

“First, there is a general lack of the basics surrounding spelling and grammar that leaves the perception of a less than professional organization. The standard of anything goes as long as the person knows what you’re trying to say does not work in the business world. Second, there is a big need to keep written communication concise and to the point. The time people have is too valuable to do otherwise. Along that path, one of the biggest opportunities we see is not with internal communication, but external communication. It is all about effective copy and content. We’re constantly striving to do a better job in delivering our message to consumers and customers in a fashion that is concise and engaging.”

Feedback from **Terry Ainsworth** – Boone, NC  
Professional Leadership Coach who aims to “enhance lives and livelihoods” by helping entrepreneurs create personal and professional wealth. Terry has experience in numerous industries such as motor sports, marketing and public relations, law firms, financial planning, insurance, real estate, manufacturing, health and fitness, hospitality, and entertainment.

Terry writes in his business through emails, texts, personal hand-written notes, and business letters. The writing skills Terry sees as lacking in the emerging workforce include the ability to write business letters using correct spelling, sentence structure, and appropriate grammar. When asked, "What advice can you give to community college teachers on what writing topics need to be taught?", Terry said: “Social media, text, and email are not the only media. Being able to write a good letter that is personally signed is a competitive advantage that’s not being done anymore.”

Feedback from **Bill Barr** – Blowing Rock, NC  
Founder and President of Handel Barr Learning, Inc., a U.S. based firm specializing in assisting organizations with sales performance. Bill has helped organizations such as Microsoft, IBM, Peak 10, Compuware, and many others.

The types of writing Bill does in his business include email, power point presentations, proposals and proposal responses, thank you notes, and occasional letters. The writing skills he sees as lacking in the emerging workforce include spelling, sentence structure, and thought organization to prevent rambling. The main writing issue Bill sees in employees is lack of writing. He noted many are resistant to write follow-up emails, letters, notes, and the like.
Feedback from Chuck Ciaramita (aka Mr. C) – Boone, NC

Educator at AppState in the Department of Marketing and retired from HC Brill Company, a world leader in retail in-store baking ingredients and goods. Chuck also has an active consulting business, Stingray Enterprises, and holds two U.S. patents.

Mr. C said:

“If there is one (actually three factors in one) talent that community college teachers can impart, in my judgment, it would focus on the following (I call them the three C's and I impart them to my students each semester):

1. Write with clarity...facts that support ones' position and the objective.... Everything else is extraneous and redundant.

2. Be concise...distill, distill, distill. Relevant facts should be the goal.

3. Write with confidence....The words chosen and the logic must flow, building the narrative, and should engender the same depth of passion in the audience as the writer or speaker has.”

Feedback from Rick Handford - Charlotte, NC

President of Meyers and Chapman, Inc., a regional company providing general contractors and construction services with a focus on strong client relationships

One of Rick’s biggest pet peeves is the lack of writing skills among college graduates. Rick holds a degree in mathematics and has served in various engineering and management positions throughout the past 35 years. Most people in those types of positions hold degrees in engineering and project management, but Rick said he fit right in because “our people did not function as engineers, but as communicators, facilitators, and managers.”

Rick said:

“People in our business need to be able to write requests for information; document events through daily logs and meeting minutes, issue proposals that contain numerous clarifications, qualifications, and exclusions; descriptions of the Company’s qualifications, history, team members, and other requested information; and generate business letters and email communications on various subjects, including claims and dispute resolutions.

I find that recent graduates (and some not so recent) are lacking in virtually all areas of writing skills to various degrees. Grammar and spelling are weak, and proofreading seems to be unknown. I can only surmise that the importance of clear and correct written communication was not stressed in their programs of study, and that their output was judged on technical content rather than the form in which it was presented.

The majority of the errors could be easily detected if the writers would simply read what they have written, preferably aloud. They then might notice that verbs don’t match with nouns, that the same
adjective or adverb is used repeatedly in a paragraph (sometimes in a single sentence), that they have left extra words in their sentences or needlessly repeated the same idea. They might also pick up on the fact that spell checkers can’t differentiate between ‘case’ and ‘care’ or ‘cake’; or even between ‘Te’ and ‘The.’

If I were trying to teach students how to be better at writing, there would be a number of things that I would do. The first would be to impress on students that the best ideas in the world can be overlooked as nonsense if presented badly, and that the ability to write well is every bit as important as being able to determine the correct answer. I would grade on correct writing as well as content. I would require that three or more English courses be included as a graduation prerequisite in every major. I would tell students to read, read, and read some more. To read anything that is of interest, but read a lot of it. The more well-written things they read, the easier it is for them to write correctly.

Lastly, to proofread their work. Do it carefully, and more than once if they can stand it. If they can’t effectively proof their own work, then agree with another student to proofread it for them—but always to make their own corrections, so as to learn their most common mistakes.”

Feedback from Dale Tweedy - Charlotte, NC
Entrepreneur, Business Strategist, and owner of Stonegate Developers, LLC, a company who develops and invests in commercial real-estate and student housing.

The main type of writing that Dale and his employees do take the form of proposals: multi-page documents with great detail and based on company research and experience. They also utilize email regularly and here lies another writing issue that needs to be addressed. Dale noted writing differences among different generations, saying the over-40 crowd (owners, managers, directors) use proper English for the most part and are descriptive and detailed in their emails. The under-30 group tends to write in fragmented sentences and use abbreviated acronyms to the point of being cryptic and difficult to read and/or understand.

Dale noted the importance of writing with structure, detail, accuracy, and thoughtfulness, without writing a book on something that should only take a paragraph or a page.

Feedback from Kent Tarbutton – Blowing Rock, NC
Proprietor of Chetola Resort and chairman of the following groups: Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority, High Country Host, and Blowing Rock Retail Study Committee.

At Chetola, Kent and the staff look at each endeavor as a marketing opportunity, whether getting employees to come out for a wellness forum or creating new guest events and advertising communications. So writing skills are important in many jobs at the resort. Kent went on to say, “Specifically, being able to organize thoughts and present them with passion. ‘Bells and whistles’ is a valued asset here.”

"Managers regularly contribute to the resort’s newsletter, speak publically representing Chetola, and generally, write their own materials and must be able to communicate well with their peers to get things done.”
Kent noted that speaking and writing are the resort’s two powerful communications vehicles, and both require the ability to logically organize the thought, present benefits and/or commonalities, and entice a response.

“That is what we look for in areas like marketing, the front desk, the restaurant wait staff, and all customer contact positions. So what can you teach? The ability to organize the thought, learn how to determine and direct it at the right audience, measure their response (from reply tones to body language), and react with a passionate message.”