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Send for success: A descriptive look at prescriptive manuals for email

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SEND FOR SUCCESS: A DESCRIPTIVE LOOK

AT PRESCRIPTIVE MANUALS FOR EMAIL

by

Jean Reid Norman

Bachelor of Science
Northwestern University
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

**Send for Success: A Descriptive Look at
Prescriptive Manuals for Email**

by

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Email has existed for almost forty years, but in the past ten, it has become a

dominant form of communication in the business world. A sign of the maturation of

email and its dominance in commerce is the rise of how-to books on writing effective

emails. This paper analyzes six of those recent texts to develop a taxonomy of current

prescriptive advice for email. It examines contextual issues as well as issues of content,

such as structure and tone; format, such as length of paragraphs, forms of salutation and

farewell, and use of emoticons and abbreviations; and grammar and correctness. It finds

in the taxonomy evidence that implies some unique attributes in electronic language and

areas where email may be creating pressure for change in the English language.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who thinks technology has a minimal effect on daily language and life need only consider the old joke about the monk who worked as a scribe in a monastery for most of his adult life transcribing passages of the Bible and other holy documents. One day he went to the basement archives to check an original text. Hours later, his fellow monks went looking for him and found him in a carrel banging his head against the wood muttering, "CeleBRATE. It says celeBRATE."

The technology of writing, from its inception with the Sumerian alphabet, development of hand-copied manuscripts of the Middle Ages through books created on a printing press, and now the various forms on the Internet, has had a profound effect on how we use the language we learn at our mother's knee. The changes in our use of our native language have in turn had a similarly profound effect in how we live our daily lives. The alphabet and manuscripts made possible codification of laws and histories. The printing press brought to English standardized spellings and grammars, as well as novels, scholarly papers, and newspapers. The digital revolution, with computers, the Internet, and now mobile devices, has changed the printed word from a linear experience, with a beginning, middle, and end, to one of associations, with hypertext allowing us to choose the order in which we consume written knowledge. It has changed the printed word from a primarily asynchronous experience, with the recipient reading the words at some point after they were written, to either asynchronous or synchronous, depending on whether one is accessing a Web site or using one of the many real-time chat functions

available. As Marshall McLuhan so aptly pointed out in the 1960s, well before

computers became a household appliance, the medium brings its own message

(28), and the message for language is one of constant change as we adapt to

each new form.

One could argue that the English language is evolving as rapidly now as it

was during the Renaissance, before Samuel Johnson's landmark dictionary,

when William Shakespeare made up a word if it did not already exist and

spelled his own name several different ways. Not only have new words been

added to the English language because of the new technology, new roots for

words have sprung up. Place a lower-case "e" in front of any noun, and a new

word has been coined, thanks to an expansion of the coinage "email."[1]

Emoticons have added a new system of symbols, and text messaging has

popularized acronyms such as BRB (be right back), OMG (oh my God), and

ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing).

The view seen in the media is that the Internet is destroying English.

Linguist David Crystal in *Language and the Internet* notes how pundits predict

the end of the language as we know it (Locations 38-43), and Naomi S. Baron

poses a similar question in *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World*

(6-7). As I have talked to friends and neighbors about my research, I inevitably

hear a comment about how email is eroding English, and they give examples of

grammar and spelling errors in their digital correspondence. Inevitably, the

speaker is a supervisor over the age of 40 in an office setting, complaining

about emails received from younger subordinates. It is hard to tell whether the

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[1] I have spelled "email" without a hyphen as a noun and with a hyphen as a verb, consistent with the Oxford English Dictionary Online. Within quoted matter, the word is spelled as in the original.

complaints are a function of poor education on the part of subordinates, a shift in the use of online language or just curmudgeonliness. As Baron points out in *Alphabet to Email: How Written English Evolved and Where It's Heading*, it is difficult to obtain access to a corpus that will determine that answer because of privacy concerns (Location 5377).

What is not difficult to find is advice on how to properly write for digital media. A search on Amazon.com of "email writing" shows 2,855 results with titles such as "The Executive Guide to E-mail Correspondence," "E-Mail: A Write It Well Guide," "The Art of Email Writing," and "Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents." A similar search on Google shows 81 million results, though, of course, that would include many duplicates and most of the Amazon.com results, as well as some irrelevant or no-longer-existent Web sites. The search brings up many Web pages that are part of marketing or consulting organizations or other content providers. Most of the advice manuals focus on email, partly because it is the digital function that has been around the longest and partly because it is the most widely used. This reflects a maturation in this form of digital communication that makes it ripe for research.

I intend to examine the use of language in email through the lens of those advice manuals. First, I will look at the roots these guidebooks have in history, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to the Early Modern period. Then, I will look at where they fit in the current evolution of the English language. Finally, I will make a case for a descriptive analysis of these books as an imperfect but defensible way to examine the evolution of a new type of language.

Prescriptive Tradition

The advice manuals can find their forerunners in the prescriptive language texts that generations of Americans studied in school. The rules set out in these texts, as difficult and arbitrary as they may seem, have served a role of standardizing and formalizing language. This role has existed at least as far back as the rules of rhetoric of the ancient Greeks and Romans and has changed with the technologies used to transmit language.

Prescriptive language texts that many adults studied in school teach as a matter of right and wrong. But language in the real world does not exist in such a stark dichotomy, and it never has. There are levels of formality in language that are appropriate in some cases and not in others. "Y'ain't gonna go there, are ya?" is perfectly acceptable in an informal setting in certain parts of the country, just as "Thx 4 the msg, see u l8r 2nite" is correct in a text message on a cellular telephone. Neither of these usages would be appropriate in a more formal setting.

While there is a segment of the population willing to enforce the prescriptive rules at every turn, I propose the rules should be considered "best practices" of speaking or writing, to use a computer technology term. A look at the history of prescriptive texts shows this to be an accurate portrayal. Plato in *Poetics* and Aristotle most famously in *On Rhetoric* articulated the best way of reasoning in their oral culture. The goal of both was to reason for that which is true, but both works set out their rules not as a matter of right or wrong, but of better use of language that would be more persuasive. Aristotle, in particular, writes performatively, using the rhetoric he is teaching to persuade the reader that his

way produces effective communication that can accomplish specific goals, such as motivating soldiers or nations to war (Olmsted 14-15).

The Romans took these rules and turned them into a tool for power. Horace addresses the great social power of poetry in *Ars Poetica*, noting that "honor and renown came to the divine poets" (133). Homer and Tyrtaeus, he writes, "sharpened masculine hearts for war by their verse" (133). Horace's own rise from the son of a freed slave to the patronage of Augustus illustrates the power of well-used language (Leitch 121). Ultimately, good use of the language is not a matter of right or wrong, but of clarity, honor, and power, as Longinus underscores in *On Sublimity.* He writes, "Choice of correct and magnificent words is a source of immense power to entice and charm the hearer. This is something which all orators and other writers cultivate intensely" (148). Quintilian, who at the height of the Classical Period made one of the most important statements in Roman rhetoric in his *Institutio Oratorio,* refers to the "weapons of rhetoric" (168). The ancients saw great power in use of language and defined best practices for their students to make them the most effective speakers possible. It was a matter of good, better, and best, not right or wrong.

The email guides follow in this tradition by offering instruction in how to write the "most effective" emails, electronic correspondence that will "get results" in the business world. To make their point, these guides offer examples of emails that can or have obtained the desired results and counterexamples of ones that have produced particularly bad results. In fact, in providing those examples and counterexamples, they do not use the terms "correct" and "incorrect." They use comparatives: Here is one way to write this email; here is a better one.

The email guides also follow closely in the tradition of the seventeenth-century grammar books, which cropped up after the invention of the printing press. With movable type technology, the written word became a primary means of communication in commerce, and its use was no longer restricted to highly trained scribes. The printing press is generally seen as a force for standardizing English and, not surprisingly, formal grammar books soon followed, beginning with Latin, still considered the universal language of the civilized world, and later English (Dons 4). The authors sold their books on the premise that their readers wanted to increase their social status by using the language of the upper class. The purposes stated in their prefaces were to ensure that boys who were being trained for leadership roles in society would have the ability to write and speak well in formal occasions and to ensure that immigrants had a standard of their adopted language they could learn so they could take their place in society and the economy (Jonson E1v). They justified their language rules economically, to further commerce and improve the sharing of scientific literature to boost progress.

That tradition of helping to further commerce is followed by the modern instructional books on business writing. These guides market themselves to those in middle management and below who aspire to higher positions and want to sharpen their language skills to fulfill those aspirations. The guidebooks generally have a sympathetic tone to their readers, who may be stepping outside their area of expertise to write a letter pitching a product or requesting a meeting. They try to define rules that, if followed, will make a good impression and facilitate the business the reader is pursuing. As secretarial pools have given way to personal computers and proposals are more likely to be

emailed than put through postal mail, these business writing books have adapted and addressed the electronic media. They have incorporated early writing guides for the Internet, called Netiquette guidelines, which cover topics from who should receive copies of correspondence to whether or not to capitalize Internet, and they continue to address other writing basics for the non-professional writer.

These books address how email has changed the basics of business writing and how to be most effective in email--what to say and how to say it well. They have evolved quite a bit from the days of Netiquette guides, which were relatively brief and basically told readers that use of all-capital letters was considered shouting. Many email guides are book-length now, and the business writing manuals that address email no longer segregate the topic to a chapter at the end. The advice is integrated throughout the guide.

These books offer an opportunity to examine email in the business world. What are the essential elements in an email in this genre? What issues are specific to this medium? What issues do these "experts" identify as necessary to address for non-professional writers, in terms of structure, tone, and grammar? The topics they choose to address and those they remain silent about point to some of the issues that should be examined in defining Netspeak, and their advice offers a peek into some of the emerging issues in the field.

The Literature

Most of the work on computer-mediated communication, as the field is known, has been done outside the field of linguistics, in the field of information

systems and sociology or psychology. A smattering of linguistic papers were published in the 1990s trying to define the type of language being used in computer-mediated communications--email, Internet Relay Chat, bulletin boards, etc. Some situated that language within the well-researched speech-writing continuum explored by Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and others. Milena Collot and Nancy Belmore documented what they called "Electronic Language," what people use on Bulletin Board Systems, which at the time of their writing in 1996 was "perhaps the most ubiquitous form of computer-mediated communication" (13). Using Douglas Biber's multidimensional-multi-feature analysis (Biber 63), they analyzed a corpus of about 200,000 words from electronic bulletin boards and found that the genres they most closely resembled were public interviews and letters, personal as well as professional. Simeon J. Yates analyzed a corpus of 2.2 million words from the British CoSy computer conferencing system and compared it against the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus of written British English and the London-Lund corpus of spoken British English. He found the computer-mediated communication similar to the written word in its choices of vocabulary but more like speech in its use of the first and second person and use of modalities (39-44). The bulk of linguistic work in the field since then has been done by Naomi S. Baron and David Crystal. One cannot credibly write about any type of computer-mediated language issue without entering into dialogue with their work.

Beginning with her 1998 paper, "Letters by Phone or Speech by Other Means: The Linguistics of Email," Baron profiles email based on social dynamics, format, grammar, and style, placing email on a continuum between traditional writing and speech in 24 different features. She finds email to be a

hybrid--more like the written word in some way, more like the spoken in others --and suggests it is in the process of a creolization. In her 2000 book, *Alphabet to Email: How Written English Evolved and Where It's Heading,* she describes email as "an emerging language centaur--part speech, part writing" (Location 5375). After a thorough survey of writing systems, beginning with the Sumerian alphabet, she further develops the idea of email as a type of creole between speech and writing, but she pulls up short in defining email as a new language.

In 2001, Crystal takes that step with *Language and the Internet.* He begins by noting the small amount of research done in the field: "I wrote this book because I wanted to find out about the role of language in the Internet and the effect of the Internet on language, and could find no account already written" (Location 39). He credits the scholarly work of the prior ten years for providing substance and an intellectual framework, then dubs the language variety used on the Internet, not just email, as Netspeak. "It does things that neither of these mediums do, and must accordingly be seen as a new species of communication. … I would have to adopt an aliens metaphor to capture my own vision of Netspeak as something genuinely different in kind--'speech + writing + electronically mediated properties'" (Location 553). In showing how Netspeak is similar to and different from both speech and writing, Crystal gives it equal status with writing, speech and sign language. (Location 245)

Baron, in her 2008 book, *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World*, adopts Crystal's moniker and assumption that electronic communication constitutes a new form of language equal to speech and writing. While the focus of this book is how the multiple media require strategies to control the

volume of language input in our lives, she still keeps in mind the evolving nature of electronic language. She foresees the possibility of "print culture sans print," where writing culture transfers to electronic media. In this scenario, she writes, the written word would continue to be culturally valuable, but the physicality of the printed word could be replaced by electronic books or online texts (211). The future could also hold "print sans print culture," in which the values of well-edited works common in the print culture go by the wayside but books are retained as decorative objects or for other reasons (212).

   The email guidebooks seem to be trying to move the language toward the first of those choices. They unequivocally state that email is a written form and, as such, email users must keep several factors in mind, among them its permanence, the need for logical structure, and the benefits of editing out errors. The guidebooks, which are targeted generally for business use of email, seem to agree, in practice anyway, with the claim that electronic communication is its own language. All of the authors in the selected corpus offer advice specific to the electronic nature of email, from the structure of an email to acceptable conventions of salutations and farewells. They discuss the proper uses of the medium and all maintain a constant awareness of the likely email audience--both intended and unintended recipients.

   Baron acknowledges the rise of these guidebooks, but she notes, "no one monitors their content, much less whether people are heeding them" (*Alphabet* Location 5370). While sales figures might give an indication of how useful readers find these books, Baron is correct in pointing out that it is impossible to accurately measure their effect on the language. Of the people purchasing the guidebooks, how many are actually reading them? Of those who read the

books, how many are following the advice? How are the books' directives changing the language? These questions cannot be answered easily, if at all. However, I would argue that an analysis of these books offers a reflected look at how email is developing as a language.

Baron notes correctly that a corpus study of email is difficult, because access to large amounts of person-to-person correspondence, especially at a business level, is hampered by privacy and legal concerns. Business email writing guides provide a lens to examine the pressure points Netspeak creates on written and spoken language as it evolves. These books profess to teach non-professional writers how to compose emails well. They target salespeople, human resources professionals, managers, law enforcement officials, business people, medical professionals, consultants--myriad people for whom writing is not their primary task--to help them craft clear, persuasive electronic communications. The authors are consultants who have worked with corporate executives in designing writing workshops to model the type of electronic language the executives would like to see used. They have presented these workshops with this authority to employees who have been told this is what will help them get ahead. I think, given this context, these books offer at least a tentative look into how electronic mail is evolving in the workplace. While they may not define actual practice, the guidebooks may predict some emerging standards and identify issues that are creating tension among users as they try to sort out what might be most acceptable in this new language, Netspeak.

I propose a descriptive approach to these prescriptive manuals. I plan to use content analytical methods to create a taxonomy of the advice given for writing emails, looking at how the books define the role of email in workplace

11

communication, issues of structure and content, format, and traditional

grammar. What are the general categories of advice given for writing email?

What are some of the issues addressed that are specific to this technology?

And what points of grammar are consistently addressed through them all? This

work should help categorize some of the issues that electronic communication

is dealing with as it evolves into its own language.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The linguistic research on electronic communication thus far has been corpus-based, finding samples of language being used in the medium and analyzing various attributes that make it similar and different from both the written and spoken word. The two primary corpus-based studies used Bulletin Board Systems (Collot and Belmore) and the CoSy computer conferencing system (Yates). Both are public, one-to-many forms of electronic dialogue. Both Baron and Crystal look at the some of the advice books on writing effective emails and rely loosely on corpora of their own, mostly their own in-boxes and those of close family and friends. The most effective way to analyze the use of a changing language, based on past research, is a corpus-based approach-- looking at many samples for patterns, similarities, and other evidence of consistent language use.

I think the current advice books on writing emails offer an imperfect but valuable corpus to examine how the language of Netspeak, as Crystal defines it, is evolving in email in the business world. The best way to do such an analysis is to gather a representative corpus of these books and use content analysis methods to examine how they address compositional and linguistic issues. Dons uses a similar approach with prescriptive grammars of the seventeenth century, doing a descriptive analysis of the primary advice manuals of the day and comparing it to existing corpora of language in that period to discern how well the grammars reflected language as it was actually used. His findings, which might surprise many scholars, were that the seventeenth-century prescriptive grammars were, overall, more descriptively adequate, as defined by

13

Chomsky, than modern analyses (251). While the scope of this work does not include a corpus of actual emails, Dons' finding gives me some confidence that a descriptive analysis of the prescriptive guidebooks on use of email can provide some insight, however imperfect, into the issues that are evolving in this form of language.

<p style="text-align:center">The Analysis</p>

After reading all of the books to get a broad sense of what they addressed, I chose to look at issues of context, content, format, and grammar. Context was chosen as a constant, to examine the purposes the authors defined for themselves and the reasons they thought their guidebooks were necessary. This context is brought into play to understand disagreements among the authors on certain points and to illuminate some of the broader issues on which they agree. Beyond that, I looked at standard language issues of content and grammar, as well as those format issues that are unique to email. Advice was culled from each of the books and coded into one of these categories.

- Context was defined as unique attributes of email that the authors addressed, such as its immediacy and asynchronous nature; its permanence and space limits on the computer screen; appropriate uses of email; risks, both legal and practical, of using email; general rules of usage, such as editing before sending and exercising care in not allowing negative emotion into email; and assumptions the authors make about the writers and recipients of emails.

- Content covered the authors' advice on how to organize the writing in the body of the text and issues of tone or diction, such as sentence structure and vocabulary.

- Format issues included the length of emails, length of sentences, use of white space; font and type sizes; use of bullets; subject lines, *To:* and *From:* fields, *Cc:* and *Bcc:* fields; salutations and farewells; and use of emoticons and abbreviations.

- Advice on grammar and correctness was divided into issues of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and other grammatical issues.

Within each of those categories, common advice was organized into a taxonomy with an eye to how these attributes might reflect ways that electronic communication is applying pressure on the English language. Issues where there was some agreement, but it was not unanimous, were further analyzed to determine whether an emerging standard in Netspeak might be predicted. In some cases, the proscriptions were as instructive as the prescriptive advice. All of the analysis is directed toward helping to better define Netspeak as it is being taught to those who aspire to move up in a business setting.

Selecting the Corpus

To select the corpus, I began with a search on Amazon.com of the words "email" and "business writing." I eliminated books that were not writing manuals and that did not address email specifically in the preface or table of contents. To make the corpus more relevant and manageable, I further limited the books to those written within the past two years--2007 and 2008. A new version of one of the books, *The e-Policy Handbook* by Nancy Flynn, was due out

in January 2009, so I included it as well, assuming it would be available before I began my analysis in spring 2009.

The result was six books that give advice on business writing and address email specifically. Four of them are published by groups or companies that specialize in business advice, such as the American Management Association, Syntaxis, and Career Press. One, published by Kaplan, the study guide publishing company, is part of a series called "MBA Fundamentals." One, *Send*, is published by a general interest publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. The breakdown of authors follows a similar pattern. Four are consultants who offer writing workshops to businesses and corporations. The Kaplan book is written by a professor, and the Knopf book is co-written by a journalist and a book editor.

Particular attention was paid to the perspective the authors bring to the subject matter. The four business writing consultants differed on particulars, but their advice generally aligned toward a similar goal. Flynn was silent on some of the topics because of her focus on legal issues, but went on at length on other topics. Shipley and Schwalbe took the most situational approach of the corpus because of their focus on the relationships between the parties and the etiquette involved. One might think that readers buying these books are willing, perhaps even eager, to hear and follow the advice offered. But each author nevertheless takes the time to make a case for the sets of rules they lay out. It is worthwhile to examine the underlying arguments they use to justify their advice.

The Books

E-Mail Etiquette for Business Professionals by Ellen Jovin. New York:

Syntaxis Press. 2007. This small guide grew out of training sessions and is

one of a series by the publisher "designed to combat problems … by developing

oral and written communication skills needed in the workplace"(ix). The book

deals with broader writing issues, such as organization, wordiness and spelling,

but it situates all of those discussions within the medium of email. The author

notes in her Introduction: "Despite the conversational feel of much computer-

based communication, e-mail is a written form and should therefore observe

many of the conventions associated with traditional business letters and

memos" (1). Her focus is to bring a more formal style to email writing, and she

organizes her work in short chapters addressing topics from the nature of email

(she defines it as between a business letter and interoffice memo) to

grammatical issues.

The Executive Guide to E-Mail Correspondence by Dawn-Michelle Baude.

Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press. 2007. Baude writes that her approach grew

out of coaching writers "whose email documents were a career liability. Their

emails were either heavily revised before being sent through the chain of

command, or they were bounced back for more and more rewriting." After

working with her, she writes, some of her clients went on to receive

commendation for their writing skill (3). She argues that email is different from

print media and should be treated as such. "E-mail is designed to move or

transact information as rapidly as possible from writer to reader. E-mail usually

produces immediate action, often in the form of another e-mail," she writes (9).

Because of this and other unique features of email, Baude defines a style for

email that is concise, clear and simply written. She organizes her advice

around sample emails for situations ranging from a sales pitch to reprimand of

an employee. Some of the advice is specific to the subject matter; some of it is

more traditional grammar advice. Within this framework, she addresses

traditional writing topics including organization, rhetoric, sentence structure,

and spelling.

The Language of Success: Business Writing that Informs, Persuades, and Gets

Results by Tom Sant. New York: American Management Association. 2008.

Sant is a consultant specializing in improving sales processes and messages

and has worked with major corporations such as AT&T, Dell, and Microsoft. He

offers a business writing guide that assumes most documents in the modern

world will be email. "We emphasize e-mail as the primary medium for delivering

most of these messages for several reasons. First, e-mail has obviously become

the dominant mode of communication all over the world. Second, it's different

enough from traditional ink-on-paper writing that it poses its own unique set of

challenges" (1). While giving examples of emails that had disastrous effects, he

argues that because of email, "our mistakes are no longer confined to a small

group of people who may not have had the highest of expectations for us. Now

they are broadcast for the whole world to see" (7). Sant deals with issues from

structure, such as how to organize one's thoughts effectively, to formatting,

such as the use of fonts and fields. He provides examples of what he considers

ineffective emails, principles of writing effective ones and exercises in editing

them.

MBA Fundamentals: Business Writing by Timothy E. Flood. New York:

Kaplan. 2008. This guide by a professor of business writing and oral

communication comes from the company best known for its test preparation. It addresses business writing in general in its first part, then the media specifically--print and email--in the second part. Two appendices address commonly misused words and editing strategies. While Flood argues that all professionals should have writing skills, he does not privilege email as the other authors do. It is another of the many types of writing that an employee who wants to move up the ladder must master. He sees email as having a ubiquitous role in interoffice communication: "Business email is the preferred format for most internal business communications, eclipsing the more formal memo" (147). His advice on writing is more targeted to the audience rather than the medium, but his assumption about audience is narrow. His reader is always busy, scanning for the main point and resentful of any extra time spent combing through too much information. He draws a distinction between seeing and reading, and notes that most readers in business settings see and extract information before they read. In the first part, which focuses largely on email and attachments, he addresses punctuation and grammar issues; tone and choice of vocabulary; and formatting. The second part then deals with issues specific to print and email.

The e-Policy Handbook: Rules and Best Practices to Safely Manage Your Company's E-Mail, Blogs, Social Networking, and Other Electronic Communication Tools by Nancy Flynn. New York: American Management Association. 2nd ed. 2009. Flynn is executive director and founder of the ePolicy Institute, a consulting and training firm dedicated to helping employers reduce the legal and other risks of using electronic media. Her work is mostly directed at corporate legal issues regarding email and other forms of electronic

communication, including texting and Internet relay chat. She covers the law regarding retrieval of email for legal purposes and makes the point that any computer-generated communication could be evidence at some point. Most of her focus is advising companies how to set up policies that best protect them, but two chapters deal with linguistic issues. In one, she lays out for companies a sample style guide for electronic writing that addresses form, content, and grammar. In another chapter, she turns her attention to individual users, focusing on what should and should not be said in an email. The central point of her ten tips is summarized in e-Policy Rule 51: "Assume you are being monitored at the office and at home, too. Always think before you write, send or surf!" (197).

Send: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe. New York: Knopf. 2007. Shipley, deputy editorial page editor for the New York Times, and Schwalbe, former senior vice president and editor in chief of Hyperion Books, bring their experience as professional writers and frequent users of electronic mail to examine email from a perspective of etiquette. Their book looks primarily at email in business use, but does not limit itself to that genre. Much of their work addresses choosing the right tone to take with various correspondents in various situations. They begin with their "Eight Deadly Sins of Email," which range from being vague to replying too many times. They write about appropriate times to use email and times when it does not carry the correct tone, as well as formatting issues. They make more allowances for less formal tone or less precise grammar based on the recipient than the writing guides specific to business. They also briefly address legal issues ("The E-mail That Can Land You in Jail"). Their advice, which shows its

roots in etiquette, boils down to this: "Think before you send. Send email you would like to receive" (222).

To summarize, four of the books in the corpus--Jovin, Sant, Baude, and Flood--approach the topic from a business writing perspective, with a focus on getting the desired results, whether that be a bit of information, a sale, or cooperation from a team. One, Flynn, approaches it from a legal perspective, looking primarily at a company's liability, and one, Shipley and Schwalbe, from a viewpoint of propriety, with a theme of "Send unto others as you would have them send unto you." Despite the different contexts, the authors still have many shared issues and points of agreement. It does help, however, to understand their varied perspectives in analyzing their advice.

While six books may be a fairly limited corpus, it allows for a close and detailed analysis of many language issues, from structure to punctuation. Because of the limitations, the analysis should be seen as a pilot study, a look at issues that are worth examining and results that might be found in a broader corporal study. Baron has noted the difficulties of obtaining a valid corpus of one-on-one emails from business settings because of the legal and privacy concerns (*Alphabet* Location 5377). In my conclusion, I suggest two possible approaches to a broader future study to examine the nature of Netspeak.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT

There would be no need for an advice book on email if we all knew how to do
it well, and all of the authors begin by defining the problem of writing
successful, effective emails. "Just as previous generations struggled to
integrate first the telegraph and then the telephone into their lives, we're
struggling to integrate email into ours. We're using and overusing it and
misusing it. Email is afflicted by the curse of the new," Shipley and Schwalbe
write (8). The authors of these six instructional manuals lay out the unique
attributes of email and the pitfalls that those attributes present. They address
the proper and improper uses of email and provide general rules of usage. Most
interestingly, while they focus primarily on email in a business context, they all
present slightly different assumptions about the reader or audience. How the
authors frame the problem and the assumptions they make about their
audience play key roles in the advice they give. I plan to begin my analysis by
defining the broad context that these authors lay out for themselves. In these
sections, the authors are trying to persuade their readers to think about what
they plan to say before they commit it to writing. These issues of context
include:

- Unique attributes of email that make writing in this medium different
  from other types of writing.
- The appropriate uses of email. Just as you would not send a resume in a
  greeting card, there are some types of communication that are not
  appropriate for this medium, the authors maintain.

- Risks of using email. These include both practical and legal implications.

- General rules of usage. The authors all provide general constraints for what to avoid saying in an email and general advice for a best overall approach to the medium, such as editing before sending.

- Assumptions about sender and receiver. To understand the advice these authors give, it helps to understand who they believe their readers are and the purpose for which those readers are using email.

These contextual issues begin to define this new medium in the same way that the 8 ½-by-11-inch sheet of paper with corporate letterhead sets parameters for the business letter. Understanding how these authors set those parameters is a crucial first step.

Unique Attributes of Email

The unique attributes of email both make it a valuable tool and create many of the problems that the authors address. Those characteristics include the time frames in which email is used. It is both immediate, arriving within seconds after the writer hits the "Send" key, and it involves a time lag during which the intended recipient has not seen the message or has seen it and not responded to it. It appears ephemeral but has a lasting effect, for both good and bad. It feels private, almost intimate, but can quickly become public. And it has physical limitations that are different from those of earlier media.

Because of the instant nature of the Send function, the authors note, it is easy to fail to give enough thought to what is being written. This is the primary problem all of the authors address--how to put more thought into emails before

they are sent. Baude adds that this immediacy also compels action with each email. She says that, unlike print, email is by its nature a transactional medium--a sent email demands a reply, or action, on the part of the recipient. All of the authors note that the speed of email and its transactional nature are factors in how it is used and how it is changing language. Those are good observations that should be considered in future analysis of the medium.

The inherent paradox of email is that while it is instantaneous in the sending function, there is often, but not always, a time lag on the receiving end. This creates both opportunities and problems. Because of the time lag, email is a perfect medium to communicate across time zones or to try to reach executives directly after regular office hours, Shipley and Schwalbe note. However, with the greater popularity of hand-held devices that make email available at all hours, they say, sending an email outside of regular work hours requires some thought. A sender could unintentionally interrupt the dinner of an executive and leave a bad impression rather than a favorable one. Another advantage the time lag gives email over nonwritten communication is the ability to reply "on your own terms and your own schedule," Shipley and Schwalbe say (19). This gives senders the advantage of thinking through what they are writing or walking away from a confrontation until an initial burst of anger has passed.

However, the time lag also robs the sender of any real-time feedback, all of the authors note. This means that the words in an email must be carefully crafted to avoid unintentional insults. "In face-to-face (or voice-to-voice) conversation, our emotional brains are constantly monitoring the reactions of the person to whom we're speaking. We discern what they like and what they

24

don't like. Email, by contrast, doesn't provide a speedy real-time channel for feedback," Shipley and Schwalbe write (11). Jovin writes, "When a person sends an e-mail, vocal and physical cues are absent. Without accompanying nonverbal signals, messages can easily come across as rude, or curt, or confusing--despite the good intentions of the sender" (8). The lag creates problems that are addressed throughout the volumes, and not just on the level of inadvertently insulting the recipient. This time element is the basis for much of the rest of the advice offered, from general rules to tone.

Another unique attribute of email that is repeatedly pointed out is that while it appears ephemeral, each press of the Send button creates a permanent record, if not on the sender's server, then on the server of the recipient and the computers of anyone to whom the email might have been forwarded. "Never forget the permanence of email," Flood writes. "Even when you delete it, it's still on a server somewhere or in someone else's inbox" (159). All of the authors offer examples of email disasters that would not have happened if the senders had just remembered that once an email leaves their screen, it has the potential to take on a life of its own. Email offers no privacy, all of the authors emphasize, despite its appearance of being a one-to-one communication. The fact that the authors were able to obtain emails between other parties for use as examples in their books underscores this nature of email communication.

Five of the authors also point out the physical shape of an email window changes the dynamic of the words. It limits what can be seen (and hence read) at a first glance. If the sender wants to get a point across, it must be done quickly. Baude describes it best: "In e-mail, multiple frames relentlessly focus the eye on the text. Rigid borders confine our gaze, keep it on the words. …

When we look at an e-mail, we expect to receive information--right away. And

we get frustrated when we don't get it" (9). All but Flynn make at least a

reference to the physical limits of email. The four business-focused writers note

that the computer screen limits the reader's ability to scan for information, and

this is the purpose behind much of their advice on organization. With the

exception of Shipley and Schwalbe, whose how-to book is slanted but not

exclusively targeted toward business use, the authors offer advice to get results

in the business world, and the limits of a computer screen produce this

repeated theme: Get to the point quickly.

Three of the authors also address the further limits of the screens on hand-

held devices. None of them suggests writing emails short enough to be seen in

their entirety on a hand-held device, but they do suggest making the point of

the email evident in the first sentence because of that limitation. This advice

will be addressed in greater depth in Chapter 4, on structure. The authors also

make suggestions about the subject line that accommodate the screen size of

hand-helds, which will be addressed in Chapter 5, on formats.

Appropriate Use of Email

The authors take the time to address when email is the appropriate medium

to use for a given communication. It is one of many tools available to a person

to carry a message to an intended recipient, and all of the authors recognize

that other modes will do certain jobs better. Some authors, such as Baude,

find email appropriate for a wide range of purposes, from transmitting legal

documents to consoling co-workers who may have just lost loved ones. Others

recognize greater limits to email. "E-mail should complement rather than

replace the spoken word," Jovin writes (82), and she recommends supplementing email with a phone call when a deadline looms or an exchange is becoming confrontational (82-83). Shipley and Schwalbe spend the most time defining appropriate uses of email. They lay out "Eight Reasons You May Not Want To Email," which include such limiting but practical tips as, "If you wouldn't stop by a colleague's office every ten minutes for a chat, you probably don't want to email him frivolously thirty times a day" (23), and "Don't forget that every email is an interruption. If the matter isn't urgent, a letter can be less intrusive" (27). Both Shipley, an op-ed editor of The New York Times, and Schwalbe, a book editor at the time of *Send's* first edition, are recipients of many unsolicited emails and may be more sensitive to those interruptions than the other authors, who are primarily consultants in business writing. It is not surprising, then, that their limits are the most conservative of the bunch, and it is doubtful that they will persuade their readers to send email less frequently. The trend is for greater use of email, and the times to refrain from its use are becoming more and more limited.

However, there is one time Shipley and Schwalbe say email should not be used that rings true with the other authors: It is inappropriate to fire someone or deliver other bad news via email. This would seem like common sense, but all of the authors have examples of employers doing just that. While today's teenagers may find text messaging a fine way to hook up and break up with one another, communicating news of such import via email is considered just wrong by these authors. This may be a prohibition on email's use that could become standard, if this small sample is a fair indication.

The authors are also unanimous on the inappropriateness of email to communicate anger or frustration. They all caution against "flaming," or deliberately insulting someone, in electronic mail. And they go a step further, advising that words written in an emotional moment can come across more harshly than they are intended. Flood writes, "Always remember that once you compose an email and hit send, you can't take it back. The recipient will see it and read it. That email is forever out there. This is crucial to remember when you feel anger or take offense, or experience any other unpleasant reaction to a work related email or to a situation on the job" (155). Baude writes, "Emotions come across in an e-mail with more force than we often imagine. … What may have seemed like an aloof observation could strike the reader as downright rude. The off-hand complaint could come across as aggressive" (16). All of the authors tell their readers not to use email when they are emotional. Pick up the phone instead, they say.

They also caution against trying to be humorous or sarcastic in email. A joke or sarcastic remark delivered via email is just as likely to insult its recipient as it is to make the person laugh. In fact, many of the examples of email disasters the authors offer were attempts at humor. They strive to get their readers to realize that email is more like the written word than the spoken word in this respect. This is another area where the authors are unanimous. The caution against flaming has a long tradition in Netiquette guides, but these authors' expanded definition of inappropriate displays of emotion in email may become standard advice in the workplace.

Risks of Using Email

All of the authors at least touch on the risks of using email inappropriately, in ways that might be construed as discriminatory, sexually harassing, or in any other way unethical or illegal. Jovin notes, "Although it is often treated as conversation, e-mail is not conversation, … Unethical or inappropriate e-mail can do significant damage not only to the sender's reputation, but also to the reputation (and perhaps balance sheet) of the sender's employer" (1-2). Flynn addresses the legal risks as a primary focus of her work, which makes an argument that companies need to have specific policies for use of email and other electronic media in the workplace. She makes the point in several places that an inappropriate email can give an employer cause to fire the employee who sent it. "The easiest way to control your risk of termination is to control your written content," she writes in a chapter directed to employees. "In other words, watch your language. … That means no obscene, pornographic, sexual, harassing, discriminatory, defamatory, menacing or threatening language. Don't transmit gossip, rumors, jokes, disparaging, or defamatory remarks. Don't violate confidentiality rules or expose trade secrets" (201). She defines emails to employers as potential evidence (234) and lays out guidelines for archiving that protect the company in the event of a subpoena. Even Shipley and Schwalbe, who seem to target the broadest audience, mention the legal implications among their "Eight Deadly Sins of Email." Sin number three is "The email that puts you in jail," and sin number eight is "The email that's inappropriate" (13). All of the authors are mindful that the permanence of email on a server somewhere creates a legal liability.

But the authors are also mindful of more practical risks that come from the nature of this technology. Flynn points out that employees "have absolutely no reasonable expectation of privacy when using the system to transmit e-mail, surf the Web, or engage in any other form of electronic communication" (197). This extends even to personal email or Internet Relay Chat, such as AOL Instant Messenger, that the employee may access from an office computer or through an office connection. Employees cannot even be assured of privacy when e-mailing at home, Flynn says. Her e-Policy Rule 51 is blunt: "Assume you are being monitored at the office and at home, too. Always think before you write, send, or surf!" (197). That lack of privacy even at home comes in part from the vulnerability email has to being forwarded. Shipley and Schwalbe cite this as one of eight reasons to not send an email. "Rule: Never forward anything without permission, and assume everything you write will be forwarded" (27-28). They note another vulnerability in the next rule: that an email can be changed in the act of being forwarded, and they recommend any sensitive information that the author wants to ensure will not be changed should be put into a hard-to-alter attachment such as a .pdf (28). They also note that emails--not only the ones sent but also the ones received--can be used to hold recipients accountable. "Not only everything you've sent but also everything you've received can come back to bite you," they write. (27) Not all of the authors frame the risk in this way, but they all agree that the ease of forwarding emails is a factor that senders should take into account. In fact, two of the authors point out that letters also can be shared, but that the ease with which emails can be forwarded makes it not only possible but also likely that their correspondence will reach beyond the intended audience.

These risks must be weighed before any email is sent, the authors say. The risks should help senders measure the words they choose before they commit them to the screen or to edit those words before they execute the Send command. While these risks may not be factors that will define language use in electronic communication, they are important in understanding what makes email a unique medium. And if these considerations are taken seriously by those using email, users could well change how they use language in email communication. The authors provide some general rules they hope senders will use to reduce these risks.

General Rules of Usage

Because of these unique attributes of email, all of the authors offer some general rules of usage they hope will guide their readers in all of their email correspondence. All of the business consultants' books point out that, while email is rapid and has a conversational feel, it still is a written form and deserves the attention and time that their readers may reserve for print documents. As a written form, emails do not communicate emotion very well, all six authors caution. The most consistent and forceful prohibition in these books is writing an email when angry or trying to convey humor or sarcasm in an email. "No matter how angry, insulted, and indignant you are at the e-mail you just received, fight the temptation to let off steam," Baude writes. "The last thing you need at work is a reputation as a flamer. Coworkers will sift through the ashes and gossip" (16). They all advise self-restraint when writing an email while in any sort of negative mood. Most of them also recommend against

using email to deliver bad news, such as layoffs or a reprimand of an employee, though Baude offers a sample email for a reprimand (182).

Mostly, the general rules boil down to Shipley and Schwalbe's conclusion: Think before you send (222). Flood writes, "… it is fundamental to remember that email is just like a report or formal letter. It's simply another kind of business writing you must engage in, and it's just as essential to keep a critical eye on tone and content" (148). That means emails should carry a business-like tone, the authors agree. "When we write too casually, we may sound amateurish or juvenile," Sant writes (14). Even Shipley and Schwalbe, who are not writing for a business audience, caution their readers about being too casual in their "Eight Deadly Sins of E-mail," where they list as number seven, "The email that's too casual. ('Hiya! Any word on that admissions thing?')" (13). Baude allows for a less formal tone in emails, but still says there should be a minimum level of formality: "E-mail is more like sticking your head through a colleague's office door than introducing yourself at a conference table. It remains polite and dignified, but it often loses many of the trappings of hardcopy correspondence" (12). All of the authors agree that emails should be revised before they are sent, and many of them suggest writing important emails in word processing programs to allow for revision and reflection before pasting them into the email body. This advice deliberately slows down the process that they have defined as speedy and seeks to formalize the use of this new medium, at least in business settings.

Assumptions about Audience

The one common denominator in all emails is that there is an intended audience. As the authors point out, often emails will be distributed beyond the intended audience, but email software will not execute the Send command unless there is a valid address in the To field. So when the writer begins composing an email, someone or a group of someones is the intended recipient. All of the authors acknowledge the audience in various ways--if only by evoking sympathy for the poor reader who has to make sense out of what the writer has committed to the computer screen. Jovin and Baude take this approach. Jovin writes, "Poor sentence structure can befuddle or weary the audience, making the task of reading more unpleasant than informative" (60). Baude writes, "Readers want to cut right to the chase" (11). Flynn makes the point that the audience in all cases could someday include lawyers and a judge, and Flood defines the audience among his "key concepts" as not only the intended recipient but also "the extended or secondary audience (those people who might seek out or happen upon the text for guidance, validation, reference, or replication)" (4). He also sets out as Rule 1 for effective business writing, "Know Your Audience" (13).

Sant and Shipley and Schwalb take a more holistic approach to audience. "Have you ever coached a team of 8-year-old soccer players? Led a troop of Cub Scouts or Brownies? Then you know you have to speak in a way that gets their attention and is understandable to them," Sant writes. "… Well, our adult audiences would appreciate it if we'd do the same for them" (90). He spends a section of his book discussing two key factors when it comes to audience: the recipients' level of technical or professional expertise and their preferences in

how they receive information. Many email writers overestimate the recipients' knowledge of the subject matter, Sant writes, so he advises, "Err on the side of keeping things too simple, not too complex" (92). In addition, some people want just the bottom line, the facts on which they can make a decision, while others are interested in the process and reasons behind the conclusions. He suggests evaluating the knowledge and personality of the intended audience and targeting the email to make it more effective.

For Shipley and Schwalbe, audience is at the core of their advice: "We've emailed badly because we've forgotten who we were in relation to the person we were writing" (11). They return to this theme often throughout the book using vivid examples:

> If you were a new employee in, say, tech support, you wouldn't dream of walking into the CEO's office with a minor complaint. If you were a student, you wouldn't think of calling your professor in the middle of the night with a question about an assignment you didn't understand because you were hungover in class. … Email is both so intimate and so easy that it makes unwise actions far more likely: once you have someone's address, you can contact that person any time of day or night from your very own office or bedroom. This once unimaginable access clouds our ability to discern who we are in relation to the person we're writing. (24)

This argument undergirds all of Shipley and Schwalbe's advice: Think about the person you are writing to and your relationship to that person before you press the New Message key. This determines what you say, when you say it, how you

say it and whether you use email to say it. It gives their book as much a feel of an etiquette book as a how-to book on email writing.

Conclusions

Each of these six authors defines the problem of poor email writing differently and takes a unique approach to their advice based on how they define the problem. For Flynn, email is a workplace issue--a legal liability and threat to productivity and corporate security. For Jovin and Flood, it is just another form of business writing with a few adjustments being made for the new medium. Sant takes a similar approach, but with a stronger emphasis on the potential audience. Baude leaves print behind altogether and sees email as a new medium capable of addressing nearly any business problem. Shipley and Schwalbe address email as a social problem and ultimately point their readers to the high road.

These broad perspectives are essential to understand when examining the specific advice they give on writing and format. Baude, Jovin, Flood, and Sant place their advice firmly within the context of business writing and, as consultants, bring to bear their experience in instructing non-professional writers in the corporate setting. Flynn treats email as a legal issue, and as a result often does not address writing issues the others treat in detail. Shipley and Schwalbe approach email as a social construct, another type of communication that requires rules of etiquette, just as a conversation involves turn-sharing.

The authors offer some common insights on the nature of email that are worth summarizing. They include:

- The paradox of email, as both an instant form of communication and one that involves a time lag, can become problematic.

- The asynchronous nature of email robs it of an ability to convey feedback from the recipient and makes it a poor medium for any kind of emotional communication. Negative emotions are amplified and positive ones are often overlooked.

- As a result, email is an inappropriate medium for matters of great importance, such as firing.

- Though it feels one-on-one, email provides no privacy. Any email can be forwarded.

- Email has become a permanent form of communication, although it seems temporary.

- As a result, senders must be cautious about writing inappropriate comments, such as anything that can be construed as discriminatory, harassing, unethical, or illegal.

- Email is an inappropriate medium for humor or sarcasm, which can come across as offensive.

- Email is primarily a written form, though it shares attributes with spoken forms, and as such it should be carefully composed and edited.

Given the unique features of email as the authors define them and the authors' assumptions about their audiences, the topics the books address and their advice on these topics offer a window into some of the current "best practices" in email use in a business setting. Where they agree, their advice may point to new emerging standards. Where they disagree, usage may still be in flux or there may be tension developing between Netspeak and written or spoken

forms. Some of their rules may indicate a greater use of certain constructs in email than previously occurred in other forms of the written word. Within this limited study, there may be some hints at how electronic mail is developing its own standards of the English language.

CHAPTER 4

CONTENT

In the way that poetry was the literary form for an oral society, providing rhythm to aid memory, and the novel is the literary form of a print society, filling leisure hours with an engaging tale, the authors of these email guidebooks attempt to define a structural form for business correspondence in the electronic age. In the spirit of Hemingway, the former newspaper reporter who adapted his writing style to the telegraph, these authors prescribe forms that are adapted to the strictures of the medium of email. As Marshall McLuhan points out (19), the medium carries its own message, and to these authors, that message rings out loud and clear.

The bottom line: Get to the point and be clear about it.

They deal with the process of writing not only from the standpoint of this specific electronic medium but also from the perspective of the genre of business writing. Each provides specific advice about how to structure the body of an email and how to take the proper tone to get the attention of and action from the recipient--their definition of an "effective" communication. Flood breaks down the writing process into a formula, while Jovin gives more general advice. Baude and Shipley and Schwalbe provide samples suitable for adaptation for multiple occasions. Sant combines the approaches. All but Flynn, whose guidebook focuses on legal implications, offer advice on the effective organization of an email, and all of the authors, Flynn included, provide advice on how to shape the tone of an email.

I will look at the ways the authors approach structure and tone. Structure, while the authors may call it by different names or not identify it as such at all,

addresses how the ideas are organized. The classic structure of an academic paper, for example, is to state the thesis, provide methodology, give supporting points and analysis, and articulate the conclusion. Two of the authors provide a prescriptive formula similar to this for email. The others provide more general advice, but all of it addresses the order in which ideas should be presented, especially at the outset. The matter of tone is similar to the classic idea of diction: sentence-level strategies such as the length and variety of sentences, choice of vocabulary, use of passive versus active verb tenses, and syntax. What these authors advise is largely targeted to a business audience--both the readers of these books and the people the authors assume their readers hope to reach. The challenge will be to discern which matters of structure and tone arise from the nature of the electronic media and which are simply business writing bromides.

<div align="center">Structure</div>

All of the business-focused authors begin by making the argument that email is hard to skim, so the writer owes it to the reader to provide enough information in the first paragraph to understand the purpose of the email. "Begin with your conclusion, then explain," Baude advises (11). "Screen-based media by nature emphasizes the opening of the announcement, not its middle or end. The opening is visible on the screen when we open the document; the rest of the email often isn't. The reader's behavior is usually determined by the impact of the first few lines," she adds later (145). Flood comes up with an acronym to remind readers of this imperative--BLOT, meaning Bottom Line on Top. "Do not make the readers wait for the key ideas or information. Provide

key ideas and reference to all actionable items first. Do so in every sentence, every paragraph, every page, every document" (13-14). Jovin advises readers to get to the point quickly, and Sant notes that, because email clients will strip out incompatible formatting from incoming emails, the structure has to carry the weight of the message.

Only Shipley and Schwalbe differ on this point, and it has much to do with their approach to email as a place for good manners. They recommend including a little chitchat in emails. They write:

> We don't just walk around barking orders at each other, or answering questions, or apologizing, or even thanking. We say "hello," we ask about one another's health. It's equally important to do this in email. The most effective emails manage to be clear and succinct but also friendly. This is not yammering away; it's about remembering to be pleasant-- particularly if what you're about to say is in any way contentious or discomfiting. In those cases, it's best to write something kind at the beginning *and* at the end of the email. (173)

Even though their audience is broader than the strictly business audience of the other authors, it is clear Shipley and Schwalbe intend this advice to be taken in the business sphere. While the advice comes within the context of writing thank-yous and apologies, the examples in the chapter have to do with colleagues and subordinates. It has to do with working relationships, and it is clear that Shipley and Schwalbe believe that the bottom line can wait for a polite, "Hello, how are you?"

Both viewpoints of how to begin an email have validity, and the best approach depends as much on the intended recipient as on the message itself.

Baude, Flood, Jovin, and Sant assume that the recipient is in most cases in a highly formal relationship with the sender--client, prospective client, boss, or subordinates--in a formal purpose. The examples they give include project updates, performance appraisals, sales pitches, and requests for information. They all assume either a low level of familiarity between the parties or a hierarchical relationship that makes time the most important element in the email. Their recipients are always very busy people who do not have sufficient time in any given day to read email. In this view, most effective approach is to take the least amount of time and to facilitate a quick decision.

They make a valid point that the email screen has limited space, and the first paragraph in the message on that screen will be privileged with the most attention. It is probably a good idea to make the point of the message clear within that limited space if the writer wants to keep the reader's attention. But Shipley and Schwalbe, in viewing email as a social construct to further communication, are correct in pointing out that a kind word can be effective in setting the stage for the business to follow. The danger in their advice would be a prescriptive type of social nicety that wears thin from too much use, such as "Hello, how are you" when there is no intention of asking about one's health. Ultimately, the relationship between author and recipient must guide the beginning of an email, and some of the authors show they understand this.

While Flood preaches, "Bottom Line on Top," he also instructs his readers in his first rule of effective business writing: "Know Your Audience" (53). "Effective business writers know their audience well enough … that they can share credit, gratitude, and praise in order to outline past information and simultaneously move the readers toward a path of future action," adding later on the same

page, "Strategic personalization can positively impact a document's readability and success; just don't let personalization obscure the work message" (67). Flood recognizes there is a balance of social niceties and business purpose. In his mind, the social niceties belong at the end of an email, but they at least have a place (67). What he does not do very well is define where an effective balance might be found.

Sant also advises his readers to keep the audience in mind when thinking about how to structure an email. He offers three structures for three different types of business writing, all of which begin with the most salient information. His advice seems to boil down to this: Get to the point. But his examples offer wiggle room. Sant offers among those examples an email to clarify an earlier communication with the advice, "Use a professional tone and keep your message on topic," and he cautions against showing irritation that the recipient did not understand the first time. His counterexample certainly gets right to the point: "Just to be clear, I did NOT say that the new policy will replace personal days." His model of the better way to address this issue actually adds one of those niceties that does not immediately make the business point but does serve a more important relational purpose. "Thanks for writing. I can see how the new policy might be a bit confusing, but …" (138-139). His example of a competitive analysis is addressed from a financial adviser to clients, but spends an entire paragraph on social niceties while laying out the purpose of the email. "Dear Ted and Doris-- / It was great to see you yesterday! And how exciting to hear that you're about ready to retire. Ted, I'm sure the trout from here to Montana are all feeling very nervous if they've heard that you'll soon be pursuing them full time!" (148) This paragraph makes the purpose clear: The

sender is following up on a previous meeting about the recipients' retirement. Financial planning is a business, as many are, that depends on trust and relationship-building, and Sant's advice, at least through example, takes the relationship-building as seriously as the immediate purpose.

Shipley and Schwalbe do not offer advice on the structure of the email text beyond suggesting a word of kindness at the beginning and, if needed, at the end. They deliberately sidestep the issue of what is good writing. They instead identify "Six Essential Types of Email" and offer choices for ways to approach them. "A Guide to Requesting," for example, suggests first that the sender consider whether the request is a fair one to make, then gives a couple of possible structures: Introduce yourself and offer to follow up by another medium; put something attention-grabbing in the subject line and make the request early in the email; or make immediate reference to a mutual acquaintance who connects the sender to the receiver. (144-145) They give an example of a state legislator who suggests that emails to her begin with identifying characteristics that connect the sender to current local issues. (152) They take a light touch on the concept of "effective" writing, instead trying to point out the potholes that can be avoided. They leave to their readers the final decision of how to organize their thoughts in an email.

The other authors provide more specific instruction on how their readers can organize their thoughts once they have placed the bottom line in the first paragraph. Some offer sample letters, some do not. Only Flood does not offer choices. He applies his "Bottom Line on Top" advice to the entire structure. His proposed outline for all effective business writing is this:

    1. The essential information first

2. Streamlined detailing next

3. Concise reiteration of key points and forward-looking actionable items last. (12)

The strength of the advice is that is makes the sender think through the purpose of the email. What is the bottom line, after all? Does the writer know? The weakness, of course, is that the email may end up sounding abrupt or demanding if the advice is followed prescriptively.

Baude and Jovin offer a few choices each. Baude's structures address four purposes: the need to persuade the recipient, to explain "why," to articulate "how," or to describe "what." To persuade, she says, "use cause-and-effect to make your case. … One thing leads to another, or maybe a pair of things. Then those things lead to a result. When you put the causes in the right order, the result usually has an air of inevitability" (100). To explain why, as in why a person was promoted, she says to "arrange sentences in a present-to-past pattern. … The present-to-past setup emphasizes the facts behind a current development and makes the outcome appear to be a logical conclusion" (108). To explain how, which she says is similar to cause-and-effect but more neutral, she advises "a past-to-present pattern. … The interpretation of the process is up to the reader" (108). Finally, she suggests, "Arrange sentences according to special logic to describe a tangible 'what.'" She suggests either the "zoom technique" or "framing the area." "The zoom technique either begins with the panorama and zooms in on a detail or vice versa. … [frame] the area by moving clockwise, counterclockwise, or in a grid around a visual object" (109). Jovin offers three general organizational principles, which read more like suggestions:

44

1. In many e-mails, the most important ideas should appear first, with less important ideas appearing later. …

2. In other e-mails, ideas appear in a logical chain. … A cautionary note: where you develop the big idea last, you should still have at least introduced this core theme in your e-mail's opening line. …

3. Content can also be presented in chronological order. (50-51)

Jovin allows mixing and matching of these structures, saying "Principle 1 may be at work in one section of an e-mail while 2 or 3 dominates in another section" (53). The common thread here is to make the best use of limited space while fitting the form to the purpose.

Sant gives his greatest emphasis to organization, noting "Structure is more important than style for successful writing. … Over the years, I've come to believe that the worst mistakes in business communication have nothing to do with grammar or spelling or sentence complexity. Instead they stem from using the wrong structural pattern" (102). He explicates three different purposes for writing a business email: to inform, evaluate or persuade. He defines each by identifying the dominant element. If the focus is the subject, the purpose of the email is to provide information about the subject matter; if it is the sender, the email is to evaluate, because it assumes the sender has some expertise; and if it is the audience, the email seeks to persuade the recipient. (121-122) He suggests a journalist's "funnel" approach for the informational email: most important facts first (including who, what, when, where, why and how), then next important, then next, "until there is nothing left to say" (122). To evaluate, he suggests a hamburger shape: "you need a top bun (the introduction), a bottom bun (the conclusion), and lots of meat in the middle" (123). To

45

persuade, he gives a four-point outline: 1) State the reader's needs, issues, concerns; 2) focus on the outcomes or results the customer want to achieve; 3) recommend a solution; 4) provide evidence you can do it. (124-126)

The advantage of Sant's approach is that it forces email writers to think about the outcomes they desire. What it does not take into account is the ambiguous nature of those definitions. For example, imagine an employee has found a problem with a piece of equipment at work. Does the employee wish to inform the manager of the problem? Evaluate for the manager the cause of the problem? Or persuade the manager to fix it? Sant might argue that it is a matter of emphasis and that the writer should make this decision before composing the email. I think the relationship between the employee and the manager and possibly the employee and co-workers would play a key role in this decision as well. If the manager and employee have a good relationship and the manager sometimes asks the employee for an opinion on matters, the employee might be justified in offering an evaluation. If the employee is a night shift worker reporting the problem to the manager on the day shift, the employee may not know the manager, and it may be informational. An evaluation might seem presumptuous. If the night shift needs the equipment more urgently than the day shift, the night co-workers may be relying on the employee to persuade the day shift to fix the problem. These are only some of the possibilities that would affect how the writer of such an email might approach the structure if following Sant's advice.

While all of the authors take different approaches on the specifics of structure, two common themes emerge: Effective emails must get to the point quickly and they often include some personal courtesy. Both of these themes

46

arise directly out of the physical limitations of email. The idea that they must

get to the point quickly is a bow to the size of the screen window, which is

limited in all email programs, but especially in hand-held devices. If email

senders hope to have their messages read, at least in the business world, they

must ensure that their recipient knows the purpose of the email within the first

few lines or risk losing the recipient's attention. And in the tone-deaf world of

email, where all of the authors note emotions are easily misread, it is helpful to

insert a friendly word early on to avoid unintentionally offense.

Tone

The authors have a great deal more to say about tone than whether to

include a friendly word in the introduction. They are unanimous that humor,

sarcasm, anger, meanness, and loaded phrases have no place in email. The

computer screen just cannot convey that kind of emotion effectively, they all

say. But they all go further, depending on their emphasis. Flynn, with her

legal focus, insists that company email policies should require "business-

appropriate language and strike a tone that is conversational, yet professional.

Instruct employees to adhere to the ABCs of effective electronic business-

writing: accuracy, brevity, and clarity" (230). Shipley and Scwhalbe, with their

social perspective, note that email requires the writer pay attention to tone. "…

the message written without regard to tone becomes a blank screen onto which

the reader projects his own fears, prejudices, and anxieties" (9). They suggest

following the correspondent's lead: "The best way to convey a neutral or

generally positive tone is to respond in kind to the message you were sent. A

long chatty email is a good way to reply to a long chatty email; a fragmentary

answer balances a fragmentary question" (164). They add that corporate culture has a role in the choice of tone. If the boss is always terse, no one takes offense. But if the boss is usually more expansive and sends out a terse note, people might be offended or worried. "Consistency is the key," they write (165). Neither of these authors offers instruction in precisely how to strike their recommended tones. Their advice remains broad and open to much interpretation, but it makes some salient points about one of the limitations of email. It just does not convey paralingual information very well.

The four business-focused authors, however, offer a great deal of specific advice about striking the proper tone. All of them agree it should be an "executive" tone. They tell their readers that they will be communicating with executives or may want to be executives someday, so they should begin now to develop the tone they will need in the future. All of the authors also emphasize clarity through using everyday language as opposed to a multi-syllabic vocabulary and a complicated syntax. Sant and Flood both recommend writing to the comprehension level of secondary school students. Sant recommends a level below twelfth-grade reading. Flood recommends the eighth grade and explains among his reasons that eighth graders are "interested but impatient," "motivated but needing instruction," "focused mostly on the present," "open to new ideas with clear value," and "questioning of authority" (60). For Sant, the way to accomplish the goal is to use readability statistics such as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level index, which he says should be below 12, preferably below 10. The reading index measures word choice and sentence length (shorter is better in both cases). He even recommends that writers use the "Show readability statistics" function in the popular word-processing program

48

Microsoft Word to ensure that words and sentences do not run on too long. (67) Baude echoes this advice, noting "Short sentences keep ideas on track--for the writer as much as for the reader. They're a quick remedy against grammatical issues clogging long, convoluted sentence structures" (12). The authors all agree that effective emails use simple sentences and simple words.

All of these authors say business writing should remain in the active voice and avoid passive as much as possible. Sant even limits the amount of passive verbs in an effectively written piece to ten percent. Jovin says this is commonly given business writing advice that should have some leeway: "The idea … is not to eliminate passive voice entirely; rather, you should avoid excessive or unjustified use of passive voice" (64). They also all rail against wordiness, technical jargon, and business clichés. There are limits to brevity, they all agree. "Being clear is more important than being concise," Sant writes. "You've made a bad bargain if you trade the clarity of your message for saying it in fewer words. Our goal, though, should be to write messages that maximize both qualities" (81). This is advice that English teachers across America would nod their heads in agreement with, where the traditional English composition books meet the purposes of these business writing guides. It is not necessarily advice that responds to any of the unique features of the medium.

When these email guidebooks address the body of the email, their advice falls back onto generations of prescription for business-writing instruction. This is where the authors show their individuality, offering formulas and examples they have devised through their years of consulting to help their clients. The limits of this advice, of course, is that learning to write is a process that requires feedback, and a book offers no such feedback. What the authors

49

do offer, however, is some insight into how the form of the body of an email might develop in response to the physical limitations of the medium. Email is difficult to scan, unlike the typewritten page. This privileges a journalistic or business writing style that lets the reader know quickly the purpose of the correspondence--as Flood would say, putting the bottom line on top. But email also is tone-deaf, requiring some level of social exchange to avoid being abrupt and perhaps rude. Flynn sums up the two competing requirements when she says the tone of emails should be "conversational, yet professional" (230). I would predict that the truly effective email form will find a way, as Sant did in his sample letter from the financial adviser, to combine social relationship-building with a statement of purpose within the first few lines.

CHAPTER 5

FORMAT

Email presents many unique issues other than the limits of text on a computer screen. The email format, which mimics that of a traditional interoffice memo, has raised new issues about how to use the empty boxes in the form. How does a writer format the body of the text, issues such as white space, paragraph indents, salutations, and farewells? What is the proper role of smiley faces, fonts, wallpaper, and other ways of personalizing the message? The advice these books give can provide a window into what is widely accepted as standard as email becomes a ubiquitous medium in the business world. Where the authors speak with one voice, a standard may well be set. Where they differ, a standard may still be evolving or may not be called for.

The use of these guidebooks has its limits in that they are a dim mirror. A better way to measure such standards, which is outside the scope of this work, would be to gather a wide array of corporate stylebooks and analyze them in this light. However, this analysis may provide a hint at what a larger study would find. In this analysis, I will look at issues of format, specifically what the authors advise on issues of paragraph length and use of white space; fonts and type sizes; wallpaper and other graphic elements; bullets; subject lines; the *To:*, *From:*, *Cc:* and *Bcc:* fields; salutations and farewells, emoticons; and abbreviations common to text messaging. Consensus is evident on some issues and still clearly evolving on others.

Paragraphs and White Space

   The authors are unanimous in their advice that email paragraphs should be short and separated by a blank line. White space is encouraged in all cases. "White space is not empty. It's full of meaning," Baude writes. "White space tells the reader that there's a change in idea, a shift in the argument, an example on the way, a contrast coming, or an objection being raised" (10). "Don't fear white space," Shipley and Schwalbe advise (130). Short paragraphs, like short emails, keep the reader moving, and speed is part of the nature of this new medium. Baude and Flynn add to this point that long emails should be broken up into two shorter ones or that background material can be left out of the body of an email and included as an attachment.

   Baude also advises readers to not indent paragraphs (13), a subject that none of the other authors addresses specifically. However, in all of the sample emails provided by the other authors, indents are not used at the beginning of paragraphs. They indent consistently in their own text in these books--no indent after a subhead, but indents beginning all other paragraphs. However, the electronic mail they cite or create consistently omits paragraph indents. Perhaps Baude has noticed and articulated the trend that the others just assume.

Fonts and Type Sizes

   The guidebooks are also unanimous in their advice on fonts and type sizes, as well as colors, wallpaper, or other visual enhancements in email. Keep it simple, they advise. "As tempting as it is to play with the full range of fonts available, it is wise only if you are in a very creative field and writing to people

who relish eccentricity," Shipley and Schwalbe write. "Common sense tells you as much: the medium should never overwhelm the message" (96). When they provide specific advice on fonts, they suggest a standard Times New Roman, Courier or Arial and point sizes of 10 to 12. "A good typeface policy for business e-mail is not too small, not too large, and not too fancy," Flynn writes. (229) The authors call colored type, wallpaper, and other graphic elements amateurish unless they are designed by professional graphic designers. Based on my own email in-box, where I have correspondents who regularly embed wallpaper or other graphic elements, it is hard to tell whether this advice is considered standard or whether it is a hopeful attempt to restrict a relatively new capability. I do find in my own email in-box that most of my correspondents use a limited range of fonts and usually do not use colors other than black for type.

<div align="center">Use of Bullets</div>

The five business-focused writers recommend using bullets or bullet substitutes such as hyphens to organize email and shorten paragraphs. They differ on the value of numbering items. Baude warns of the hierarchy that numbers imply. "While numbers are an appropriate structuring device, they carry hierarchical meaning that may clutter a text, send the message that some points aren't as important as others, or encourage the reader to look for sequential links that don't exist" (204). She prefers bullets or hyphens as a substitute. Flynn, on the other hand, recommends numbered lists within paragraphs. "This approach saves space while maximizing readability," she writes. "Example: 'Manage electronic business communication risk through the

<div align="center">53</div>

implementation of the "3-Es": (1) Establish written policy; (2) Educate the workforce; and (3) Enforce policy with a combination of disciplinary action and technology tools'" (230). Sant does not advocate or prohibit bullets, but he does make the point that often fancy formatting used by the sender is lost on the receiving end. To combat this, he recommends textual cues, such as "First, …" "Second, …" "On the other hand, …" "Finally, …" "because those won't be wiped out if your message gets reduced to plain text" (21). Bullets are useful, these guidebooks say, but there is no widespread standard on their use.

Subject Lines

Subject lines are seen as a crucial part of the email by all of the authors except Baude, who says, "The problem with subject lines: The busy reader doesn't always read them" (15). Baude does address their use, writing, "Subject fields in e-mail function like titles in hard copy" (14), but she seems to consider them optional, unlike all of the other authors. The others agree with Flood, who notes, "… many writers leave this line blank, thinking of it as an option rather than an integral part of the email. … By writing an accurate, compelling subject line, you increase the odds that your email will be read" (148-149). When the authors give more detailed advice on using the subject line, it generally boils down to what Sant says: "A good subject line should be clear, specific, and short. Short is particularly important, because it may get truncated, depending on how your recipients have their e-mail systems configured" (13). It is hard to say in this case whether there is a standard on the use of subject lines, with Baude just out of step, or whether this is still evolving.

Advice is heavy on how to use the *To:* field, but it is not unanimous. The

advice does not contradict each other, but the different authors focus on

different aspects of this part of the form. Shipley and Schwalbe, who consider

the social side of email, spend a quite a bit of space on the subject, and they

agree with Flynn on the primary consideration: Think about whom you include.

"… even the most elegantly phrased email won't get you want you want if it

doesn't go to the right person: the person who can act on it," Shipley and

Schwalbe write. (55) Flynn notes: "Send email only to readers with a legitimate

need for your information" (87). Shipley and Schwalbe take Flynn's advice a

step further, noting that if too many people are in the *To:* field of an email

asking that someone bring a document to a meeting, chances are good no one

will bring the needed document.

Shipley and Schwalbe address another issue that Flood brings up: the

privacy of recipients' email addresses. Flood suggests not placing the names of

multiple recipients of an email into the *To:* field, because "Many people consider

their address to be private information and do not want it shared with

strangers" (148). Both guidebooks suggest putting the email addresses of

multiple recipients in the *Bcc:* field so that no one can see the others' addresses.

Shipley and Schwalbe, Jovin, and Sant also raise the issue of the *From:*

field. All three suggest paying attention to how the sender's name appears in

that field. Jovin says the sender's full name should be displayed instead of just

the email address. Sant and Shipley and Schwalbe caution against having

email addresses that may reflect poorly on the sender. "Calling yourself

RedneckGeezer@gmail.com might be fine if you're exchanging messages only

with your buddies," Sant writes. "It's a poor choice if you're trying to conduct business" (12). To this, Shipley and Schwalbe add that the sender needs to consider whether to send from a personal or business email address.

Clearly, these authors have given quite a bit of thought to the *To:* and *From:* fields, but a consensus about the important issues regarding these fields on the email format has not yet emerged. Less attention is given to the *Cc:* and *Bcc:* (carbon copy and blind carbon copy) fields. Only Shipley and Schwalbe and Flynn give advice on these fields specifically. Flynn says only to be careful who gets carbon copies. Shipley and Schwalbe, however, give a plethora of advice about whom to include, when to use the *Cc:* field and when to use the *Bcc:* field and when and how to drop someone from the *Cc:* field. All of this advice revolves around the social implications involved and appears not to be an issue for the business-oriented writers. This is an interesting omission for the business-oriented writers in that all of the examples Shipley and Schwalbe provide have to do with the social implications within business settings, such as when to include the boss in a *Cc:*. This reflects Shipley and Schwalbe's greater focus on the relationships and other situational factors involved in email.

<p style="text-align:center">Salutations and Farewells</p>

There is a great deal of disagreement on the matter of salutations and farewells. Email has raised the nagging question: Since the name of the sender and recipient are in the fields labeled *From:* and *To:*, are salutations and farewells repetitive? The one point of agreement for five of the authors is that salutations are still appropriate in email. All but Sant seem to agree with Jovin,

who writes, "Although recipient information appears in the *To* field, for most professional e-mails, you should still greet the person in the body of the message. A greeting adds warmth that a name and e-mail address in the remote *To* field does not" (15). Shipley and Schwalbe do allow some instances when a salutation is not necessary (104-105), but seem to prefer emails with greetings.

The form suggested for salutations varies widely. Jovin allows "a number of salutation styles" (15), while Baude insists on the recipient's first name by itself followed by a comma or colon, depending on the desired level of formality (13). Shipley and Schwalbe favor the more traditional "Dear," and note, "People you don't know are always Mr. and Mrs." (97), while Flood suggests "Dear" or "a simple Hello or Hi" (149).

Most of these authors note that the salutations are omitted in a series of dialogic emails, but Flynn advises companies to insist on salutations with every reply. She has a legal purpose in this: The series of salutation and farewell establishes a clear contextual chain within the emails "leaving no doubt who said what," she says. (223-224) She does allow for less formal salutations as an ongoing back-and-forth series of messages continues. (224)

There is less agreement on whether a farewell is necessary and what form it should take. Email now provides the ability to add what is called a "signature file" at the end of the message. Many correspondents use this signature file to include information traditionally put in a letterhead: name, title, company, mailing address, phone number, and/or email address. Sant reflects the lack of consensus on whether a formal farewell is appropriate, given the *From:* field and the widespread use of signature files: "Some people end with a variation of

the complimentary close, something like 'Regards,' or 'Best wishes,' but a lot of people don't use anything at all. Most people type their name at the end of their e-mails, but even that's not universal" (63). Flynn tells companies that they should have an approved list of appropriate farewells, such as "Best," "Sincerely," and "Cordially" (224). Jovin finds "Sincerely" a bit too formal and prefers "Regards" (26-27). Baude also likes "Regards" over more formal closings such as "Yours very truly," which she says "sound quaint in e-mail" (10). Flood recommends "an appropriate business sign-off, as well as your name (or better yet, a proper signature)" (149). Shipley and Schwalbe like farewells, because "They tell each party something about the nature of the relationship. They also give you an opportunity to let your recipients know how you wish to be addressed" (106). They give examples of "Best" or "Best regards" as the most popular currently and "Sincerely" as the most formal, but add, "What's most important is to make sure that you aren't being inappropriately formal or informal" (107). This clearly is an area that is still developing, though the use of "Best" before a signature seems to be the preferred form when there is one.

<center>Emoticons and Abbreviations</center>

One can almost feel a shudder going up the spines of the five business authors when they reach the subject of emoticons and text message abbreviations. Emoticons are visual representations of emotion created by symbols on the computer keyboard, such as :) for a smiley face (it must be viewed with the head tilted left for the correct effect). Emoticons have become so common in electronic communication that many software programs, such as Microsoft Word and AOL Instant Messenger, automatically convert certain

<center>58</center>

combinations of symbols into emoticons, such as ☺. For the business writing instructors, this trend needs to be stopped. "Smiley faces don't belong in your business e-mails," Sant writes. "… Using these is all right if you're sending an e-mail to a good friend, to a child or to a message board, such as one where you can anonymously post your feelings about your favorite sports teams. … But no emoticons in your business e-mails, please" (16). None of the business writing experts allows emoticons in professional emails. Shipley and Schwalbe allow the little graphics, but only among "those with whom you've already established a comfortable electronic correspondence" (134). Formal emails should avoid emoticons, they say.

Text message abbreviations, such as IMHO (in my humble opinion) or LOL (laughing out loud), get a similar treatment among these guidebooks. Flood defines these abbreviations as "emotinyms," a useful moniker, and he says to avoid them. (62-63) Flynn allows only "legitimate and recognizable abbreviations" such as FYI (for your information) and FAQ (frequently asked questions) (228), and Jovin advises, "Resist the temptation to incorporate such shorthand into work-related e-mail messages" (40). Only Shipley and Schwalbe allow that such abbreviations "have an important function. … all these facilitate communication." But they caution, "when the conversation is formal or you're not sure the other person knows the code, spell words out" (136). The situational advice of Shipley and Schwalbe and the strictures of the others imply that the use of emoticons and emotinyms is probably widespread. If the authors' parenthetical comments calling them amateur and juvenile are any indication, these symbols are part of the youth culture and are spreading from young to old, with the oldsters resisting the change. I suspect this is an area of

the English language that is still evolving, and use of these written pieces of shorthand could become more acceptable in future generations, if they survive. It will be interesting to see how much emoticons and emotinyms are used in twenty years, when today's younger generation takes its place of power in the business world. Will these be youthful flights of fancy that they abandon, or will they become part of the accepted business vernacular?

Conclusions

On format issues--those items that are unique to the way email is designed-- a taxonomy of best practices can be derived from areas where the authors agree, overtly or implicitly. They would include:

- Keep paragraphs short.

- Use a blank line space between paragraphs.

- Do not indent paragraphs.

- Keep use of fonts simple. Standard fonts such as Times New Roman, Courier or Arial and point sizes of 10 to 12 are recommended. Do not use colored type unless you consult a graphic designer.

- Use salutations in emails, but less formal salutations can be appropriate. Some examples are just the person's name, Hello or Hi.

- Emoticons are not appropriate in formal emails.

- Text message abbreviations, also known as emotinyms, should not be used in formal situations.

It would be fair to say that these are points on which the self-made email experts agree, and they may reflect what is considered best practices in business emails.

There are many other issues that the authors thought were important enough to address but where they differed enough that it appears the norms are still developing. They include:

- The use of bullets. Some of the authors insist bullets are the best way to organize email. One liked numbering systems within paragraphs, and still another recommended textual cues such as "first, second, finally." One difficulty noted is that some email systems strip out formatting, and in those cases, the appearance of the bullets can be distorted.

- Subject lines. Most of the authors strongly recommend using the subject line. They say text in the subject lines should be brief and specific to help the reader know whether the email needs to be read immediately. But one author finds subject lines irrelevant, so it is unfair to say this is considered a best practice. Given the common themes of five out of six authors on subject lines, however, I would not be surprised if the advice of the majority on this issue becomes standard practice.

- *To:* and *From:* fields. Most of the authors provide advice on the *To:* and *From:* fields, but the issues they choose to address do not have a common enough thread to glean any standard practice among these authors. The closest bit of advice, which seems like common sense, is to give thought about whom emails are sent to.

- *Cc:* and *Bcc:* fields. Not enough of the authors address the *Cc:* and *Bcc:* fields to conclude that there are any best practices. The advice that is offered is similar to that for the *To:* field: Think about who is included in the fields.

- Salutations and farewells. While use of some type of salutation should be considered a best practice based on this analysis, there is no agreement on what that salutation should be, from the formal Dear to just the recipient's first name. There is less agreement about farewells. It is not even clear whether they should be used, or whether the sender should sign a name. The authors mention signature files, which include the name and contact information, but do not agree on their use and whether to combine them with a farewell and signature. There is no standard emerging here at all.

Based on how the authors deal with the subjects and what I see in my own professional and personal email, I would not be surprised to see a standard evolve regarding subject lines. I would expect such a standard to suggest it is a best practice to use the subject line and create a specific, brief description. I also am interested to see how the use of emoticons and emotinyms, or text messaging abbreviations, evolve in emails over the next decade. There currently is a revulsion among the business writing experts for those forms, but I suspect this is a new vocabulary that is generation-specific. The question is whether emoticons and emotinyms will survive into another generation, as some slang words do, and whether they will rise above their current status as being considered juvenile or amateurish. All of the authors do point out that email lacks the ability to accurately convey emotion, so these small indicators may have a usefulness that just has not been accepted yet. And two abbreviations with roots in the interoffice memo and Internet have become widely accepted among the authors: FYI (for your information) and FAQ (frequently asked questions) are considered standard, even by the most

prescriptive of these business writers. Can IMHO (in my humble opinion) be far

behind?

CHAPTER 6

GRAMMAR AND CORRECTNESS

All of the guidebooks address grammar and correctness, and they all say it is important to pay attention to traditional rules of grammar and style. "Every message you write, whether electronic or on paper, is a reflection of the company's credibility and your professionalism. Your e-mail correspondence is expected to be just as polished and professional as your written letters and proposals," Flynn writes (213). Her comments are echoed by the other four business writers, and even Shipley and Schwalbe, who write, "Also, because it's *often* acceptable to be lax about the rules of grammar on email, there's the misconception that it's *always* acceptable to be lax about them. That's not the case" (115). Three of the authors restrict themselves to issues they believe are unique to email. Two of them are more comprehensive, taking the opportunity to provide broader rules of usage that they believe are relevant to the business world. Flynn simply recommends companies provide grammar books for employees.

I would expect some of the rules, as with most prescriptive grammars, to reflect the preferences and pet peeves of the authors. But I think more can be learned here. I think this analysis can provide a clue to the direction of the grammar rules of Netspeak, a language that Baron describes as a centaur-- part-written, part-spoken, but not fully either (*Alphabet* Location 5375). As written forms of language change with this new medium, which rules do the self-made experts think are relevant enough to reiterate? Which ones are overtly relaxed? Which ones are underscored as especially problematic? Any consensus among these six authors might begin to give us a clue.

I have analyzed the authors' advice by issues of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and other grammatical issues. Because email takes the form of typed words on a computer screen, most of the grammatical issues specific to email revolve around issues of the written word--spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Some issues present a clear consensus that can be compiled into a taxonomy. On other issues, the authors do not present enough agreement to define a best practice, but the prohibitions pointed out offer some insight into issues that the authors find problematic. Of course, with this limited project, their consensus offers just a clue as to ways that email is evolving grammatically. A broader study would have to be devised to get a stronger sense of the accepted standards of correctness for email.

Spelling

All of the authors advocate regularized spelling. "Professionals are judged on their spelling. Fair or unfair, one of the quickest ways to cause readers to draw negative conclusions about your larger competence is to misspell words," Jovin writes (40), and the other authors agree. Flood writes, "You wouldn't let a report or letter go out with embarrassing errors, strange punctuation, or casual comments. Don't send emails like that either" (151-152). The great danger with email, especially as programs have become more sophisticated, is that misspellings are often automatically corrected, and sometimes those corrections end in the wrong word choice altogether. Or the email writer may have just chosen the wrong spelling of a word (its vs. it's is a common example), and the spellchecker will not catch it. Sant makes this point, then helpfully offers his readers thirty-one examples of words that are commonly confused, from

affect/effect to precede/proceed (82). All of the authors leave it to their readers to find ways to improve their spelling, and none allows for nonstandard spelling in business email.

<div align="center">Capitalization</div>

The authors note a current tendency to type entire sentences either using all lower-case letters or all upper-case letters. Shipley and Schwalbe make this point best:

> When words are written in CAPITAL LETTERS, it means that THE WRITER IS SHOUTING AT YOU. Since no one likes to be yelled at, and people generally shout when they feel that they can win only by intimidation and not by reason, it's a good rule to never compose entire emails in capitals, even cheery ones.
>
> Oddly, writing only in lowercase doesn't indicate the opposite of shouting--no one thinks you are whispering when you abstain from using capital letters. They just think you are too lazy to hit the Shift key from time to time. … When in doubt, though, capitalize normally, especially if someone wrote to you that way. (132-133)

Flynn takes this advice a step further, suggesting that companies include in their electronic communication style guides standard ways of capitalizing such things as job titles, departments, job functions, and the like. Baude advises readers who may be in doubt about a certain term to look in previous company documents for examples of how it has been done before. The trend here is strongly toward normalized capitalization in business email.

<div align="center">66</div>

<center>Punctuation</center>

Punctuation seems to be an area where change is being allowed by these experts, but only to a point. Shipley and Schwalbe note that the written language has changed dramatically, and so has the purpose of punctuation: "It's useful to remind ourselves that punctuation originated as a reading tool. … Punctuation was a lifeline in a sea of poor handwriting and ink blotches. But email is completely legible. Generally, you can understand what someone is trying to tell you" (128-129). Still, they say, it is best to punctuate correctly if you are e-mailing someone senior to you or people whose emails arrive in your inbox properly punctuated. Because the other authors assume a more formal audience than Shipley and Schwalbe, they all advocate standard punctuation overall.

However, Baude makes some specific allowances and prohibitions for email that may be a reflection of changing usage. She notes that the semicolon is little used in modern English. "Once email took over most of our communication needs, the semicolon lost more ground to the multitasking dash," she writes. (160) Comments by other writers also seem to indicate that the dash is in much greater use in email than it was in other written media. Shipley and Schwalbe make a reference to "paragraphs … littered with dashes" (128), and Jovin notes, "The dash is a relatively flexible piece of punctuation, but distribute your dashes with care!" (39) The need for such caution and the reference to dashes as litter indicate in a negative way that dashes are becoming more commonly used in electronic media.

Similar cautions about the proper use of ellipses also indicate a spreading use of this punctuation mark that the authors find troublesome. Flood, in a

<center>67</center>

long list of Do's and Don'ts for email grammar, says, "DO use ellipses to indicate that a section of a quotation has been omitted. DON'T use ellipses to indicate trailing thoughts" (24). That seems to be the theme of the misuse of the ellipses, to indicate a trailing thought. Of course, this use of ellipses did not begin with email. Herb Coen, longtime columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and Joe Delaney, longtime entertainment columnist for the *Las Vegas Sun*, both used trailing ellipses regularly in their columns. The remarks of the email guidebooks indicate this use has become common enough in email to warrant specific instruction against it.

Baude makes a point of allowing greater use of parentheses in business email. "Often overlooked as marks of punctuation, parentheses provide a handy, concise way of expanding, explaining, or commenting on a point you've already made," she writes. (137) None of the other writers make an overt mention of parentheses, but both Sant and Flood use them in ways consistent with Baude's direction.

The one form of punctuation that is advocated strongly for email is the apostrophe when used in contractions. Shipley and Schwalbe do so most overtly, with this statement:

> Email--flat, informal, democratic email--should encourage us to use contractions in a way we'd never use them in formal letters. In email, *not* contracting comes with a risk. ... The word "don't" is a warning; the phrase "do not" is both a warning and a reprimand. ... Many noncontractions manage to make the recipient feel scolded. ... In most general email correspondence, the contraction should be the default, the uncontracted form used for special emphasis. (131)

68

While other authors do not prescribe contractions so specifically, they tend to favor their use through example. The sample emails include contractions, most commonly of negative constructions, but some authors include the future tense "will" and forms of "to be" regularly in contractions as well. This is likely a change that would be found consistently between email and more traditional written forms in a larger study.

One prohibition most of the authors note indicates another habit that seems to be unique to email: what Jovin calls aggressive punctuation. She defines this as "the combination of multiple consecutive exclamation points and/or questions marks (instead of the usual allotment of one) to demonstrate anger, irritation, or urgency" (39-40). Baude makes an amusing comparison on this point: "Just as a loud scarf or tie can ruin an otherwise perfectly good professional look, too many punctuation marks can bring down the authority of an e-mail. One exclamation point, used properly, carries more emphasis than 10 used improperly" (81-82). The fact that the authors feel the need to address use of multiple exclamation points or question marks indicates that they have seen this usage often.

Other grammatical issues

For the most part, other traditional grammar points, such as subject-verb agreement and run-on sentences, do not come up. Flood, in his laundry list of Do's and Don'ts, does encourage agreement of subjects and verbs and of subjects and their object pronouns (41-42), and Jovin shows her readers what a comma splice is (63), but for the most part, the authors leave these issues to other books that give the issues a more thorough treatment. Shipley and

69

Schwalbe, in fact, state this explicitly: "We aren't going to offer a guide to style and usage here--lots of books have done that already and done it well" (115). Flynn also recommends that company executives "provide employees with dictionaries, writing style manuals, and grammar and punctuation guidelines" (231). This bow to traditional sources of information on these issues indicates that these are not grammatical issues that are relevant to email as a unique medium or language. Email is not pushing the standards of English on these matters, nor are the traditional standards of English applying pressure to email.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

The authors had some areas where their agreement was strong and unanimous, and it is fair to compile this advice into a taxonomy that may point to best practices as they define them. They include:

- Use regular spellings, and be careful of words that are similar but have different meanings. Spellchecking programs will not make a correction if affect is used instead of effect, for example. In fact, some spellchecking programs may correct a badly misspelled word to a word totally unintended by the sender.
- Use standard capitalization.
- Do not write in all-capital letters. It is considered shouting.
- Use standard punctuation when in formal situations.
- Make greater use of contractions.

This taxonomy is fairly short and relies on an assumption that the reader understands what standard spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are.

Some of the authors give a primer on those subjects, and some do not. The gist of the advice is to treat email as any other formal written work, to a point. Email writers should not relax their standards of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation just because they are composing an email, but they should make greater use of contractions.

The authors' advice of what to do is not as interesting as their advice of what not to do. In their prohibitions, the authors give a hint of some of the troublesome trends they see cropping up in business emails, either in emails they receive or in the concerns of the executives who pay them. Those trends may be a better barometer of how email is defining itself grammatically. Some of those issues include:

- In spelling, the use of shortcuts common in text messaging, such as "gr8" for "great" or "u" for "you." The business authors hate these shortcuts, and even the most permissive authors note that their use should be limited to recipients with whom the sender has a close relationship. I have to wonder, however, whether the strength of their comments is in proportion to the actual usage of these shortcuts. When I talk to people about the subject matter for this thesis, this is always the first issue I hear about. My acquaintances, usually over 40, immediately launch into how terrible it is to see these shortcuts in email. However, this is a construction I rarely see in emails I receive. Maybe this has to do with the age and position of my correspondents, but it is also possible that the reaction to this trend is overwrought, and this is not the great danger to the English language that some imagine. Either way, the fact

that the authors all feel compelled to mention it indicates it is an issue where email is applying pressure to standard English usage.

- In capitalization, the use of all lower-case letters, disregarding standard style for use of capital letters at the beginning of a sentence or for names. Even the most permissive authors note this trend and gently advise against it. Given the increasing use of hand-held devices, with their tiny keyboards, to deliver email, this may be an area where new technology presents a force for further change. English has been evolving toward fewer capitalizations since the seventeenth century, when it was considered correct to capitalize all nouns. e.e. cummings made lower-case style fashionable in poetry. Maybe email will continue that trend into a new genre.

- An increasing use of dashes. The authors disagree on the appropriateness of dashes. Some caution against their overuse, and others say they work well for emails. Either way, the attention dashes receive indicates their use is changing, and email is a force in that change. None of the authors prohibits the dash--as some English teachers might. But the fact that some of the authors feel the need to caution their readers against its overuse indicates that they, and the executives they report to, are seeing more of them. And the fact that one author advocates them indicates that a greater use of the dash may be acceptable in this new form of language.

- Use of trailing ellipses. Not all of the authors address ellipses, but those who do note that they are for omitted material, not to indicate thoughts trailing off. It is not a new construction, but apparently it is becoming

more frequent in email, if the reaction of these authors is an indication. It is a construction unique to written language (although, I have heard people say, "dot, dot, dot" to indicate the meaning of trailing ellipses). And apparently its use is cropping up more in this medium that has some features of the written word and some of the spoken word. The fact that some of the authors point out what they consider as this incorrect use of the period is a telling indicator that its use is increasing in electronic media.

- Aggressive punctuation. Jovin defines this as use of repeated exclamation points or question marks, and all of the authors address this point. The business authors prohibit repeated exclamations and caution against their overuse in general. However, one of these books advocates their use to convey emotion in a medium that is not very expressive. I think this is an area where email is defining new standards for itself.

Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization appear to be under pressure from this new electronic medium, but subject-verb agreement, use of pronouns, and other issues do not seem to be. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that capitalization, punctuation, and spelling are grammatical issues unique to the written word, and a new way of writing is bound to challenge the traditional way of doing things. Subject-verb agreement, use of pronouns, and similar grammatical issues have to be dealt with in both the spoken and written word, so email has less of an opportunity to effect change there.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Out of these six guidebooks for writing effective emails can be gleaned some common threads that may point to future standard practices for what Crystal calls Netspeak. Given the authority these authors bring to the subject--most are consultants who teach or coach those in the business world on writing--the taxonomy of issues where they agree can provide a reflected view at what executives in corporations, who brought these consultants in to their companies, would like to see in the business world.

The taxonomy provides insight into unique attributes of email and what they mean in practice; the best practices for organizing the body of an email, given its physical limitations; emerging standards on the various format issues; and grammatical issues that are changing with this new medium. The authors also inadvertently suggest new ways to look at email academically. Their observations suggest sources to obtain a legitimate corpus of individual-to-individual emails within a corporate setting, rather than relying on academic bulletin boards and listservs, as past corpus-based studies have. They also suggest that situational factors play a bigger role in email style than previously recognized, and from this observation I will suggest a new model to consider in future research.

Unique Attributes of Email

At first blush, email does not seem much different from an interoffice memo. But as Crystal and Baron have pointed out, the new medium has spawned a new way of using language. It shares features with the written and the spoken

74

word but is its own form of communication, they say. The six authors in this study articulate many unique attributes of email that set it apart from traditionally written forms of communication. While these attributes may seem obvious, the authors detail the implications of these unique attributes--implications that are shaping the development of the unique Netspeak that Crystal and Baron describe.

Email exists in a time paradox. It is both instant, in that it takes only the click of a button to send, and involves a time lag until the recipient reads the email and replies. The instantaneous nature of email makes it a transactional medium. When an email is sent, it prompts an action of some sort--if only a reply email. It can reach across time zones and can reach the in box of busy executives at all hours. Given the rise of hand-held devices, this can be a drawback as well as an advantage for the sender. If the busy executive is interrupted during down time by unwanted emails, the executive may be unfavorably inclined to the sender. The asynchronous nature of email robs the medium of the ability to convey feedback from the recipient, making it tone-deaf. Negative emotions come across more forcefully than intended, and a friendly tone has to be deliberately created to avoid coming across as rude or abrupt. Because of this attribute, email is a poor medium to use for bad news of great importance, such as firing. It is also inappropriate for humor or sarcasm, which can come across as offensive, the authors agree.

Email also appears ephemeral but creates a permanent record, another paradox that puts constraints on its best uses. Email feels like a one-to-one, controlled communication, but because of the ease of forwarding, no email communication is private. Senders must assume that their emails will reach a

much broader audience than was intended. And because of this ability to forward so easily, emails never die. A sender can delete an email, but it still exists in the in box or archive of the recipient and anyone else it might have been forwarded to. The fact that all of the guidebooks offer real examples of misguided emails shows just how vulnerable the medium is to public exposure. Because of this, senders must guard what they say. This is another argument for not including sarcasm or humor in email, because even if the intended recipient understands it, the context may be lost on any unintended recipients, and it may be misinterpreted and used against the sender, as some of the examples illustrate. In addition, senders must be careful not to write inappropriate comments, such as anything that can be construed as discriminatory, harassing, unethical, or illegal, the authors say. The emails that include those comments can come back to haunt the sender.

The point all of the authors make in defining these unique attributes is that email users need to think before they send. Users should consider whom they are addressing, the purpose of the message, and the consequences of a misstep. They should edit their emails before they send them, as they do other written communications. Some of the authors even recommend writing important emails in regular word processing programs first, then copying and pasting the text into the body of an email. While their purpose is not academic, their observations do offer topics for future academic study.

Features of Netspeak

In addressing form and content of email, the authors agree on enough points to provide a taxonomy that gives a glimpse into ways language in this

electronic medium might be different from the written and spoken word. They

base their advice on the physical limitations of the medium, its format, and

practices they see that they think are not appropriate--at least in a business

setting. In some cases, their advice points directly to practices that are likely to

become part of this new language. In others, their proscriptions, and the

vehemence with which they make them, indicate practices that are widespread

enough to gain their unfavorable attention.

The physical limitations of email elicit the advice to get to the point quickly.

The nature of email makes it difficult to scan, and the email window limits how

much text the recipient can see at first glance. It is important within those first

few lines that are visible to do two things: Make the purpose of the email known

and establish a friendly, professional tone that furthers the relationship

between sender and receiver. A journalistic or business writing style, where the

conclusion or most important point comes first, is privileged in this format, but

it should be softened with a personal touch to keep from appearing too abrupt.

The rest of the form for emails--the *To:* and *From:* fields, availability of fonts,

and other format features--raise several issues. Tentative standards appear to

be emerging on some of them. These experts seem to agree that paragraphs

should be short, a blank line should separate paragraphs, and no paragraph

indentation should be used. Fonts should be standard with point sizes of 10 to

12 and the type should be black. Salutations should be used, though there is

no consensus on what form those should take, and there is no consensus on

whether to use farewells or even to sign the end of an email, especially given the

rise of signature files. No firm standard has evolved yet on subject lines,

though five of the six authors recommend using the subject line and making it

as specific as possible and brief. Five of the authors rail against use of emoticons and emotinyms (abbreviations common to text messaging) for business emails, at least in formal settings, but this is an area of the language that may be generational. All of the authors note the inability of email to convey emotion but call emoticons and emotinyms juvenile and amateurish. Perhaps they are the lexicon of younger generations and will become standard as those generations take their places in the business world. On the other hand, those generations may outgrow the use of emoticons and emotinyms. The issue is worth revisiting over time.

The grammar points that are commonly addressed illustrate the written nature of email. They focus on spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, issues that are not relevant in spoken communication. However, the advice in the taxonomy shows how the electronic medium is changing the way these topics are addressed. The authors advocate regular spellings, standard capitalization, and standard punctuation. The fact that they prescribe standard usages indicates there is a common usage of non-standard spellings, capitalization, and punctuation that the authors feel needs to be corrected. A couple of them mention some of those common usages, such as spellings shortcuts like "u" for "you," writing in all-lower-case letters, or using commas where periods are called for. They all note that use of all capital letters is considered shouting in this format and proscribe this practice. Dashes and trailing ellipses are also more common in email. Three authors caution against overuse of dashes and use of trailing ellipses, although Baude advocates dashes, implying this may be an area of punctuation that is becoming unique to email. Also through their proscription, the authors indicate an increasing use of what one calls

"aggressive punctuation"--an increasing use of exclamation points and multiple exclamation points and question marks together. It would be interesting to see if a corpus study confirms these grammatical patterns in real business emails.

<center>Sources for a Corpus</center>

Baron points out the difficulty of gaining access to a corpus of emails from a corporate setting, given the existence of privacy concerns. Flynn's work suggests two ways to study Netspeak as it is developing in that sphere. She advises corporations to create stylebooks for their own best practices in the use of email, Internet relay chat, text messaging, and other forms of electronic communication. Surely some corporations have already done so, and it may be possible to gather a corpus of these stylebooks to gain a more direct look at what corporations consider best practices in the use of Netspeak. These will still be prescriptive, but they have the authority of the company behind them, so they will reflect a true set of best practices. Flynn also points out numerous times that once the Send key is pressed, an email becomes potential evidence. In fact, she mentions several legal cases involving email, and the court documents from those cases would include those email exchanges. A search of public court records would probably result in a good sized corpus of authentic email exchanges. Another source not mentioned by these authors could be emails from governmental offices, because such correspondence is considered public record. The White House, in fact, has released emails to presidential libraries as part of the presidential papers. When those documents become available to scholars, they would provide an email corpus, albeit a specialized one.

<center>79</center>

A New Model

Most of these authors assume a formal, hierarchical relationship between email sender and recipient. While all of them address audience, only two of them consider that the audience might be someone other than a boss, client or subordinate and that the relationship might be something more than strictly formal. This might be a fair assumption for the author of a prescriptive writing guide who wants to set a high bar, but not for a descriptive look at current practices in the medium. The need for a model that is more relational becomes clear in a couple of anecdotes Baron and Crystal share in their work.

Crystal, in examining some earlier Netiquette guides, analyzes the style guide for *Wired* online magazine at length. The Wired style guide was written specifically for the online magazine, but it was published for the general public and marketed as sound advice for anyone who wanted to venture into online communication. Crystal writes, "What is of interest, in the burgeoning Internet literature, is to see the way writers are struggling to maintain a bent which is naturally descriptive and egalitarian in character, while recognizing a prescriptive urge to impose regularity and consistency on a world which otherwise might spiral out of control" (*Language*, Location 727). He says the need and apparent demand for such instruction is one sign that Netspeak is a new variety of language, but he also argues that the informal style advocated by the *Wired* style guide may not be appropriate or comfortable for all users of the Internet. He tells the story of a retired teacher friend who, after reading directives about informal style suited for the Internet said that, clearly then, the Internet was not for her. "Of course it is," he writes. "It's the manual that needs revision" (Location 1173).

Baron gives an example from the opposite perspective. She tells of an email she received from a graduate student at a university in the Philippines. The graduate student emailed Baron requesting help on his master's thesis in computer-mediated language.

> The thesis, it seems, was due very soon, and his library's resources were sparse. After presenting me with a long list of questions, he closed with, 'OK, NAOMI. I really need your information as soon as possible.' I responded (politely and briefly), though 'OK, NAOMI' seemed rather presumptuous from a person who was probably half my age and was, after all, seeking my help. My correspondent felt I was withholding information. He wrote back: 'If you know something … tell me.' Email is legendary for inviting personally aggressive behavior, but here was an assault against the rules of social decorum. (*Always On* 165)

In both cases, what is overlooked is the audience and, more importantly, the relationship between sender and receiver. When I was an undergraduate student studying journalism, one of my professors emphasized clear writing by imploring us to "Think of the poor reader." This rhetorical approach to consider the audience is apropos for any computer-mediated communication, because, unlike speech and writing, communication on the Internet is always intended for a reader of some sort. One does not talk to oneself or write a private diary on the Internet. Any communication that is created for this medium is created with an ultimate audience in mind, and, as became clear in the taxonomy, there is always the potential that the audience can spread beyond the original intention.

Crystal and Baron both consider the reader in their work, but only in a general way. Crystal, with his teacher example, points out that not all readers or senders of email are the same. Baron's anecdote about the graduate student underscores how the sender did not take into account his reader. So while his email delivered a message in intelligible English, it delivered it in such a way that he did not get the desired results.

M.A.K. Halliday defines three situational factors he says should be taken into account in analyzing semiotic meaning. Each situation consists of a field, tenor, and mode. The field consists of the social action; the tenor is the role structure among the participants; and the mode is symbolic organization, or the status assigned to the text within the situation (57-58).

Using Halliday's types, I would like to propose a new way to think about email that I think can be useful. The mode is the medium in this case: use of email, subordered within the genre of business writing. As Crystal and Baron note, email is part of a new type of language, Netspeak. Halliday writes that "the organization of text-forming resources is dependent on the medium of the text" (59). The analysis of structure within the corpus indicates that email presents organizational issues unique to the medium. Halliday's analysis of mode applied to this corpus provides additional support to Crystal's and Baron's argument that electronic communication is its own language.

More useful for my analysis are the other two types Halliday defines: field and tenor. I think three factors are crucial in determining the how formal or informal a tone is appropriate for an electronic communication and how much context is needed. These are (1) the level of familiarity with the recipient(s); (2) any hierarchy of authority between sender and receiver(s); and (3) whether the

purpose is personal or professional. An email between best friends or siblings is likely to be very informal and include abbreviations and other linguistic shortcuts that do not need explanation because of the level of familiarity. Such a communication can probably tolerate vulgarities, typos, and wordplay that would not make sense or would be considered offensive outside their private world. An email between mother and daughter probably will have similar linguistic shortcuts but may not include the vulgarities or typos. A text between a boy who hopes to flirt with a girl (or vice versa) may also include less formal language and even typos, but is likely to require more context to fill the gap of lack of familiarity. In the professional world, an email between workmates sitting desks apart from one another is likely to be less formal and require less context than one between one of those workmates and a supervisor or one of those workmates and a client.

To define these factors within Halliday's analysis, the professional/personal dichotomy is the field of the communication, "what socially recognized action the participants are engaged in" (58). The social action on the professional side of the dichotomy is the conduct of business; on the personal side, it is purely social interaction. The hierarchy of authority between sender and receiver makes up the tenor by Halliday's definition. This is "the role of the relationship in the situation" (59). If the correspondents are equals, the tone will be different than if one is trying to sell a product to the other or issuing a reprimand. The level of familiarity is a second-order social role by Halliday's definition, "the roles that come into being only in and through language" (59). Familiarity, especially within Netspeak, comes only through communication. In the first exchange of email on a professional level, there is likely to be no

familiarity or a low level of familiarity (perhaps a brief introduction at a business mixer) between the correspondents. Over time, as the correspondents engage in dialogue through electronic and other media, they become more comfortable with one another and the level of familiarity increases.

I think the most important of these variables is the professional/personal dichotomy. Electronic communication has become such an integral part of the corporate landscape of the twenty-first century that any competent employee understands that words committed to email in the workplace must be at a different level than those send from a personal email account. The five business-oriented authors within the corpus assumed all electronic correspondence occurs at this level. The level of hierarchy I believe is the next important factor--whether the intended recipient(s) has any sort of power over the sender, which can be supervisory authority or just the power to say yes or no to a date or a sales pitch. The final factor, familiarity, can provide a sender a little more wiggle room in a situation that might otherwise require a greater level of formality. Think, for example, of a professional situation in which a sales executive has dealt for years with the same contact at a company that is a regular customer. Over time, they have probably talked about their families, hobbies or other interests, even if they have never met face to face, and that level of familiarity may allow easing in the formality otherwise considered appropriate of the professional situation and level of hierarchy. Levels of formality can be modulated by use or absence of honorifics, modal verb forms, and presence or lack of polite language. Levels of context can be modulated by including or excluding such information as an introduction and the amount of detail regarding the purpose of the email.

Baron's graduate student was clearly out of line on two out of three of these factors. It was a professional communication in a hierarchical situation: He was requesting the help of someone more experienced who had something he needed. There was no level of familiarity. He appeared to have provided ample context (his school library was deficient and he provided a list of questions) but should have also gone in with the highest level of formality. No wonder his email did not have the desired effect. It communicated an intelligible message in English--please help me--but it carried a subtext in its form of a lack of respect. Crystal's retired teacher, on the other hand, might find that there could be some instances in electronic communication where she might enjoy letting her guard down a little, as long as it is not required in every instance. For her, the levels of formality might remain higher longer, and that is certainly an acceptable choice.

Of course, the level of familiarity, level of formality, and amount of needed context will vary from person to person, situation to situation. What one person considers an appropriate level of formality or an accurate measure of familiarity in a relationship may be very different from the other party. In such social matters as communication, we always need to make adjustments as we go. The scope of this research was not conducive to consider how these factors were addressed within the corpus, but it is clear at least some of the authors have given them quite a bit of thought. Future studies may want to consider this application of Halliday's types as they analyze electronic communication. In the tone-deaf world of email, I think it is useful to keep these social factors in mind, because we cannot tell from a facial expression whether we have erred. A

85

more rigorous examination of how they come into play in email might provide insight into the nature of Netspeak.

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