

# To Talk or Write? A Critical Communication Decision (Part 1)

By DIANNA BOOHER APRIL 28, 2020





The US has just come through a political minefield—most referencing texts, emails, phone calls, and meetings as proof of either guilt or innocence, depending on which side of the aisle presented the evidence. No doubt, some people who texted now wish they hadn't. And some who talked face to face now wish they had written to document their exchange.

But even those of us not involved in politics need to consider seriously the decision about whether to talk or write. While you may feel that you do better talking than writing (or vice versa), that comfortable choice may be detrimental to the outcome you want.

For example, that dilemma surfaced again for me today: A client owes us money—a lot of it. And the payment is late again. Sometimes the difference between a positive or negative response from a supplier, partner, or coworker—a “go” or “no-go” decision from the boss—comes down to how we ask: by email or conversation.

Selecting the best approach can be critical—both to a key action as well as to your career. The list is long when you consider the advantages of writing versus talking.



Writing ...

## **Allows time to re-read and absorb technical information**

Frequently, HR needs to pass along complex information: policy statements, instructions, legal opinions, government regulations, technical audits. Sure, some such statements may be simple and brief, but others can be quite lengthy—with exceptions and examples.

In those cases, a discussion may be hard to follow—and especially difficult to understand and remember. If you prepare your own tax returns and have a complex situation, consider how many times you re-read a sentence or paragraph to grasp the concept.

Ask yourself: Will readers consider this information technical and complex?

## **Serves as a later reference**

A document may be the best choice for later reference for two reasons: infrequent use or legal situations.

Even simple, straightforward instructions can be difficult to remember if you need to take the action only once or twice a year. If you want to prevent those follow-up calls after you think you've explained something clearly, reconsider your platform for sharing. An assembly? A conference call? A video broadcast? Which will be easily accessible for “re-runs” six months later?

Most importantly, you may need that reference email for court proceedings, for example, in wrongful termination lawsuits or copyright infringement cases.

## **Aids second-language speakers who often read the language better than they speak it**

Since most organizations do business globally and have employees, suppliers, and partners from diverse cultures, the chances are great that you need to communicate with those who speak English as a second or even third language. And talking over the phone can exaggerate accents and increase the difficulty of communicating clearly.

By writing to the second-language speaker, your chances for clarity rise.



## Ensures accuracy and speed when readers share your information

At some point in our childhood, we've all probably played the game of Gossip, whereby one speaker whispers an idea to the second person in the circle, who then relays it to the third person, and so on. By the time the statement gets to the last person, it's totally scrambled.

Article Continues Below

SPONSORED CONTENT



### AI and Automation: How They Will Impact the Future of Recruiting?

Conversational AI, automation, and chatbots are already making a difference for recruiting departments. The latest report from TLNT, underwritten by Mya Systems, shows how organizations are utilizing these new technologies to drive real results.

**DOWNLOAD THE REPORT!**

That same phenomenon often occurs as employees summarize information to share with colleagues. That scrambling occurs both laterally and up and down the chain of command in an organization.

So if you want your information passed on clearly—with the same tone and attitude as you intend—you'll do better to write it.



## **Allows recipients to share and magnify praise with those important to them**

Managers have long learned to reprimand in private and praise in public. Public praise amplifies the enjoyment. Yes, you can praise in a conversation. But all the people the receiver wants to hear the comments may seldom be together. In addition to any public comments, putting your praise in an email allows the receiver of those “atta-boys” to pass the comments along to a supervisor, clients, partners, or family members.

An additional benefit is their ability to read and re-read the comments to enjoy again and again.

## **Allows time for others to change their mind**

Ask someone whether they’re more persuasive when talking face to face or writing, and many will tell you they have better success talking. While that may be true with objective listeners, talking can be counter-productive when you’re communicating with someone who disagrees with you.

Push to persuade, and those people push back. They become defensive, even stubborn. To change their mind and agree in the moment, they often feel like they’re “losing face.” But when you make a strong persuasive case in writing, the reader has time to “mull over” what you’ve said and come back to you with a face-saving “reason” about why he or she has had a change of heart and now agrees.

They often begin their response with face-saving lead-ins like these: “In light of the new information about X, I can see your point now.” Or: “When I said X last week, I wasn’t aware that Y. What you’re proposing makes sense now.”

## **Underscores the importance of a message or situation**

The old cliché “talk is cheap” applies here. When you go to the trouble to document something in writing, people consider it “official” and important. The written format is especially appropriate for messages about cost-cutting, initiatives/goals, employee benefits, job offers, or changes in procedures.

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this “talk-write” debate next week, when we’ll consider the appropriate times for talking rather than writing.





## Dianna Booher

Dianna Booher’s latest books include *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*; *Communicate Like a Leader*; *What MORE Can I Say?*, *Creating Personal Presence: and Communicate With Confidence*.. She’s the bestselling author of 48 books, published in 61 foreign editions. Dianna helps organizations communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. National Media such as Good Morning America, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, Forbes, FOX, CNN, NPR, and *Entrepreneur* have interviewed her

[SHOW MORE](#) [AUTHOR ARCHIVE](#)

## Topics

[HR Communications](#)

[HR Communication Corner](#)

### ALSO ON EREMEDIA

**“When You Democratize Work, ...**

4 days ago • 2 comments

Do you have great people working inside your organization? Hold on, ...

**4 Forces Shaping Your Employer Brand — ...**

8 days ago • 1 comment

Employer brands are insanely complex and complicated things. They ...

**Recruiters Are Lazy**

2 months ago • 1 comment

That’s right. I am putting it out there. Recruiters are lazy. My 18 years of ...

**Lookin Chang**

a month

Editor’s decade been a

0 Comments

EREMedia

[Disqus' Privacy Policy](#)

[Dianna Booher](#) ▾