Question Eight

Nonacademic writing, especially online writing where people tend to become more casual, is often required to be straightforward and non-personal. It is critical for the individual voice not to affect the tone of a technical document. How do you, as the writer, have to change who you are to get your point across to the general population of readers? What writing methods are used in order to ensure that the voice in your document is correct for the audience? Select a document, such as a white paper or email, and offer a critique, making note of the methods employed that made the document effective and methods that could be employed to improve the document.

Explain your reasons and support your reasons with appropriate references.

By

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Abstract

A number of writing conventions common to nonacademic settings are discussed. Woolever's approach to the organization and summary of information is outlined and applied in a variety of writing contexts. The characteristics of email and other online communication are highlighted. Research has resulted in a series of recommendations that writers should be aware of related to the structure and content of their messages. A related topic, the subtle differences between writing targeted for print and the Internet is considered. Several scenarios emphasizing the use of email by students in business environments and the myriad of challenges inherent in writing are evaluated for their impact on how tone and structure may change when writing. Lastly, a whitepaper on collaborative technologies from Cisco Systems is critiqued, noting the positive and negative characteristics of yet another form of nonacademic writing. Writers should make use of these techniques to communicate effectively with their audiences.

The style in which a document is written can significantly impact whether it successfully conveys the intended meaning of the writer. In particular, academic writing is known for several conventions, which serve to associate a piece of writing with the genre. The same can be said for documents that are written for reasons other than research purposes. In these cases, writing must be straightforward and the individual voice of the writer should not affect the tone of the document. To be effective, a thorough understanding of the audience and techniques used when writing in nonacademic settings is required. As an example, the use of email as a medium for technical communication is explored. Empirical research shows the advantages as well as constraints of the medium and what can be done to ensure consistent and effective messaging. Considerations for writing in this medium are explored in considerable depth, as the use of email has increased significantly in recent years, with many organizations using it to supplant communication that was previously conveyed through other means, such as voicemail. Another form of nonacademic writing, a technical whitepaper, is critiqued to further illustrate structured writing outside of an academic setting. The strengths, weaknesses, and possible areas for improvement are noted, while keeping in mind the purpose and intent of the document. Efficient use of these principles allows the writer of a technical document to address specific readers and the general public.

Before any writing can take place, the author of a document must determine those techniques that are appropriate for the kind of writing they intend to do. Kristin R. Woolever of the University of New Hampshire identifies several ways that technical writing can be organized for the benefit of both writers and their readers. Similar to academic writing, Woolever posits that effective writing for technical audiences has a definitive structure (Woolever, 2008, p. 54). This can take many forms, be they formal (such as an RFP) or designed with a specific audience

in mind. Sometimes, organizations may have official style guides that dictate a certain format with characteristics unique to their business.

       Often, these documents may be written to a specific audience, be it managers, employees or other stakeholder groups. Individuals belonging to these groups likely will have different expectations and needs that they expect from a technical document. Writers should be mindful of this and make sure that their words are "reader-directed" and understandable by both individuals and the public at large (p .54).

       Whether the goal of document is to either inform or persuade, it is important to be efficient when writing, giving audiences the information that they are looking for in a way that is easy to understand. In these situations, Woolever suggests a number of techniques to help readers make sense of what is written. In particular, "frontloading" or providing clues in the structure of the document to highlight important sections is useful. State the main ideas towards the beginning of the document so they can be easily recalled by readers, giving them an indication where to focus their attention (p. 55). She also suggests guiding readers through a document with a "road map", which will detail the individual topics to be discussed. Lastly, the use of signposts or internal transitions between ideas will indicate to readers where one idea ends and another begins. Dividing information into manageable sections (also referred to as "chunking") leads the reader from more general ideas to the specific key point that a writer wants to communicate. This will make the information more readable and easier to understand (p. 61). These sections can be organized in a number of ways, including chronologically, spatially, or based on priority. The same idea also applies to paragraphs as a way to introduce readers to specific ideas based on the overall theme of a document (Woolever, 2008)

In addition to keeping the audience in mind, the researcher suggests several ways to approach the writing of a technical document. A key distinction is made between describing and summarizing, as each action will determine the particular tone used while writing. Descriptions are best suited to explain mechanisms or processes, while summaries are often used to indicate actions performed by individuals to show what has been done (Woolever, 2008, p. 247-248). Descriptions are often accompanied by details about the parts of an object and how it works. Processes may be used to illustrate actions and diagrams are common in many fields of study. As these two approaches often appear within the same document, it is often useful to describe the actions of people who were involved or the decisions that were made (Woolever, 2008).

Another area that deserves consideration is audience analysis. When writing in a technical setting, writers should be mindful to think about who will read the document that they create. This allows information to be targeted and more relevant to each group of people. In the case of managers, pre-existing knowledge may dictate the level of detail that goes into a report; to be efficient writers must ask, 'What does the reader need to know?' and craft appropriate responses. As before, techniques such as front-loading are useful to provide audiences with an appropriate document scope. Other document characteristics such as visual cues and how a page is laid out can also make it easier to understand (p. 255).

Lastly, the researchers emphasize a number of concerns related to the editing of these kinds of documents, to ensure that they serve their intended purpose. At times, writers may provide too much information or describe things in a way that is not consistent with the rest of the document. Keeping the general thesis in mind will help to focus writing on those ideas that are most relevant to a particular audience. Being able to identify these techniques allows a writer to develop strategies to highlight pertinent information. Given that technical communicators

dedicate a significant portion of their time to the creation of descriptions and summaries, the techniques provided here should prove invaluable.

Ensuring that the tone of a document is unaffected by the opinions of the writer on a particular topic is not an easy task, it requires not only an understanding of the tenets of good writing, familiarity with the audience, and an approach which articulates why the audience should consider what a writer has to say. Readers are more likely to go along with what is being said if they are presented with evidence that demonstrates how the information affects them. The intent is not to persuade, but explain how the information will influence decisions they make. Given a complete understanding of the situation (aided by the kind of writing discussed earlier) individuals will make better decisions, knowing that all possible outcomes have been considered and that they have made the right choice.

Within organizations, the use of email as a primary communication mechanism has grown substantially. A 2005 study by the Economic Intelligence Unit found that email has become the most common form of written communication, supplanting telephone calls thanks to its ubiquitous nature. A Pew Internet survey found similar results; as seventy two percent of employees have email accounts dedicated to their jobs and thirty seven percent of those who were surveyed said that they "check email frequently" (DeKay, 2010, p. 109)

The reasons for this change are obvious, but have significantly influenced how organizations work. First of all, email is fast. Increasingly, more people access their email using a device other than a traditional computer. Writers should keep this in mind and draft an appropriate response. Second, email is free to distribute, making these interactions extremely cost-efficient. Lastly, it allows for simultaneous communication among large groups, a need that is increasingly important for organizations seeking to operate on a global scale (DeKay, 2010).

Present day use of email has moved beyond simple messages and the design of a message has become increasingly important, but compared with past studies on email, relatively few studies exist. While past research on email focused on usage patterns, message design is not as well understood, in part due to the fact that researchers did not understand the specific constraints of a medium like email (DeKay, 2010).

To further highlight this change, DeKay cites a study conducted in a large Fortune 100 company over the course of twenty-one months to determine the effects of message design on communication. In the study, participants were asked to evaluate contrasting email messages and provide feedback on the design of the document. Seven "old style" and seven "new style" messages were compared, based on the amount of feedback (comments and questions) received for each message. The "old style" messages were simple, often lacking titles paragraphs, or typographic cues. And did not include any features typically associated with email messages.

By contrast, "new style" messages included a number of document elements to aid readers in their understanding of the content. These messages also included all of the characteristics that were determined to be common to the email genre. The inclusion of these elements proved to be extremely effective compared to "old" messages, with the result that the amount of positive feedback on these messages was greater by a factor of ten (DeKay, 2010).

Others have recognized this emergence of email as the primary communication mechanism within organizations and pose specific guidelines that businesses can make use of to facilitate more effective communication. Munter, Rogers & Rymer are quick to point out that the quick nature of the medium can lead to miscommunication simply because people do not give it their full attention.

Yet overly speedy e-mail writing can result in much slower e-mail reading and even miscommunication. Moreover-mail merits considerable attention because it comprises much of management work today—e.g., 'I no longer meet with my team, I e-mail them.' Overall, e-mail is work, important work, which requires time and know-how to use effectively. (Munter et al, 2003 p.26)

To address this issue, the researchers propose a series of guidelines intended to give email a more formal structure befitting to its use by organizations. These suggestions are divided among three sections: recognizing the nature of the medium (both strengths and weaknesses), composing messages, and finally methods to process large amounts of email (a relatively common issue in corporate settings). For the purposes of this paper, the first two guidelines are particularly relevant when discussing the creation of technical documentation as email often serves as a collaborative tool to help organize this kind of writing among the members of a team. As email has supplanted other forms of written communication as the most common form of interaction in organizations, it makes sense that individuals are choosing to use a tool that is instantly familiar and can be adapted to a wide range of uses.

First, the researchers propose that email bridges the gap between speaking and writing as "a virtual dialogue" which "provides a record" (Munter et al. 2003, p. 27). Of particular interest, Munter and her colleagues acknowledge that email "has multiple uses…in terms of content structure, style, and format" (p.27). The context of a message may also vary depending on factors such as organizational style and the audience that it is intended for. Larger trends, such as not sending messages in capital letters have created basic standards, but are by no means appropriate for all situations.

When composing messages, the researchers urge writers to spend time considering their audience. Are they frequent users? Is email the preferred form of communication within their organization? (Munter et al, 2003) While the answers to these questions may seem obvious

given the date when the recommendations were published, increased use of email as a general

communication tool has led to situations where the basics of the medium are often ignored.

Specifically, Munter et al. encourage writers to think about their message as a conversation to the

recipient and what their reaction might be. Taking the time to consider the formatting of a

message will make it easier for readers to understand the meaning of a given message. When

dealing with more complex topics in an email, a more formal approach may be needed

"…including strategic planning and adapting for the audience and careful crafting, revising, and

editing of drafts" (Munter et al. 2003, p. 29-30).

Lastly, it is important to keep structure in mind for formats like email where readers may

expect certain conventions from a message. For example, the subject of a message should be a

clear indication to readers whether or not the message is important enough for them to read.

Similar to printed material, information that appears "above the fold" is considered to be more

important than what comes after it. This is the information that readers will remember most

about a message. Here the researchers are clear: "If you want a reply, ask for it up front. If the

reader needs to do something, state what it is at the beginning" (Munter et al. 2003, p. 32).

Effective communication about technical issues depends on a keen understanding of the audience

and what their needs and expectations are for a given message. By following these conventions,

the chances for successful communication increase significantly.

Amy Newman at Cornell University examines the impact that real-time communication

tools such as instant messaging are having on young professionals entering the communication

field. Newman proposes a simulation to observe the effects that other modes of communication

can have on students' ability to prioritize and respond appropriately to email in a business

environment. During the simulation, students are educated about and asked to demonstrate

effective use of email as a tool for professional communication. The experience, which helps

participants "…analyze messages and make important communication decisions regarding

response time, channel choice, and tone" (Newman 2007, p.467) illustrates the challenges

inherent in transitioning from a nonacademic to a professional writing setting. While only

conceptual, this framework highlights some of the issues that are present in nonacademic writing

contexts and why the individual tone of the writer can distract from efficient communication.

Newan's findings are significant in that they illustrate a problem with email that is not often

discussed. As email has become the medium of choice for organizations to communicate, the

conventions that define the format are sometimes in conflict with real world usage, which may

be less organized and lacking in fully developed thought. An emphasis on instantaneous

communication has resulted in email not being given the time and attention that the medium

requires.

     Sue Hershkowitz-Coore echoes many of the same sentiments while arguing that perhaps

e-mail as a medium is to blame for the lack of communication. While it provides many

conveniences, the constraints are increasingly evident.

> What it doesn't do very well, however, is enable effective successful communication.
> Instead it allows writers to take the easy way out; to dump their information, hope that
> the reader will sort through and make sense of it, and – most important to many writers –
> to avoid any human interaction (Coore, 2005, p. 11)

     She describes a situation in which a manager decided prohibit email for one day to

emphasize the benefits of "old-fashioned face-to-face communication." These incidents have

become increasingly common in organizations, especially those where the volume of email is

high. If the original intent of email as a medium was to replace traditional meetings, this is a

clear indication that we've gone to far and overall communication is suffering as a result. In

addition, Coore observes many of the signs that indicate people have become dependent on a piece of technology in order to communicate, "E-mail, with its emphasis on communications efficiency rather than communications effectiveness, can be its own worst enemy!" (p. 12)

Instead, the researcher encourages choosing the right tool for the job; using communications tools (like e-mail) only for the purposes it was designed for. For those writing technical documents, this may seem obvious, but rarely is it practiced to the extent that it should be. Consideration should be given to grammar, spelling, and message clarity to show respect for the reader (2005). The suggestion to "treat e-mail as you would any standard business communication" (p. 13) is especially appropriate because it encourages a serious approach to the writing of a message: concise and only containing necessary and relevant information. Still, Coore realizes that email is not perfect and "consensus requires conversation" (p.13). Determining whether email is the proper tool for the job is key. If little progress is made, consider refocusing on the issue at hand, instead of the lack of communication from a colleague or manager. In these situations a face-to-face meeting may just be needed in order to resolve the issue.

A study conducted by Mark Mabrito at Purdue University may explain why (as Newman observed) the choice of a particular medium can lead to a more informal style of writing. He recognizes the effects of a change in medium and how it can change the nature of interaction between individuals. Computer mediated communication mechanisms introduce other factors which may affect the tone or structure of a piece of writing.

> …discussion is markedly different from face-to-face communication, and students with different learning styles may react differently to the challenges of communicating electronically, a form of discourse that is somewhere between speech and writing. (Mabrito, 2000)

To understand this dynamic, the researcher sought to observe the behavior of students with a high degree of writing apprehension as they communicated in a variety of online settings. According to Mabrito, although anxiety about writing is common, another term, known as "writing apprehension" describes a more complex form of communication aversion.

Writing apprehension refers to a collection of behaviors that include a writer's tendency to avoid situations that involve writing, to find writing unrewarding, to fear having one's writing evaluated, and to develop increased anxiety over having one's writing viewed in a public forum (Daly, 1977, 1978, 1984). (Mabrito 2000)

While the use of a computer has been shown to improve the writing skills of such individuals, the advent of computer mediated communication and networking is not well understood. Individuals may participate more frequently and through this participation come to understand their own writing processes.

Participants were required to engage in written communication in two separate conference environments based on audience: familiar ("local") or unfamiliar ("global"). At the beginning of the study, a Writing Anxiety Test was given in order to identify those students who would be classified as high-apprehensives, as opposed to the regular control group. During the data collection phase of the study, students participated in class-based and Internet newsgroups based up on their professional interests and submitted a report at the end of the study that summarized their participation in the groups. Participation levels indicated that Mabrito's initial hypothesis about increased use of the global newsgroup among high apprehensives was supported. Writers in this group contributed to the global newsgroup more frequently and wrote longer responses when compared to the local newsgroup, indicating that they felt more comfortable participating in this particular forum (Mabrito, 2000). Although the results of the

study were successful, the researcher is quick to point out that "The comparatively safe and non-threatening environment of the global newsgroups – achieved through the anonymity of the participants- may have provided more of a low risk environment for these writers". (Mabrito, 2000). As a result, the findings are not entirely conclusive and would benefit from further study to identify similar situations outside of an academic setting that resulted in less apprehension among writers.

In a way, the distinction between writing in academic and nonacademic settings mirrors the challenges inherent in writing technical documents destined for print or the Internet. Judy Gregory of the Queensland University of Technology believes that writers would do well to remember how writing on the web has been shaped by the lessons learned from the traditional print process (Gregory, 2004, p. 276). The researcher describes a number of behaviors typical to how readers process information online and the similarities to doing the same thing in print. Close examination reveals some familiar themes: separating content into sections, writing with the assumption that most readers will scan as opposed to reading each word, etc. Contrary to popular belief, Gregory reiterates that this phenomenon is not new and is well founded in research.

It appears in discussions of technical writing (for example, Nord and Tanner 1993, and Redish 1993), in comments about Plain Language writing … The need to write for scanability applies to the Web and to many types of print and the guidelines offered to Web writers are equally valid when writing for print (Gregory, 2004, p. 278)

Understanding that these issues exists helps to explain why online writing has developed a reputation as a more casual medium. In this context, readers seem to not have the time or patience to read as they normally would something in print (Gregory, 2004). The objective is to find the information that you are looking for and move on so that knowledge can be applied somewhere else.

As an example of these writing methods, a whitepaper from Cisco Systems describing how the need for businesses to collaborate has created significant demand for voice and video services was analyzed. The document highlights a number of communication tools and their uses within key industries that Cisco serves. As a result, a convincing argument for collaboration is made and supported by the real use cases.

As a white paper, the document is a prime example of structured writing (more commonly associated with academia) but is written in the straightforward tone that is necessary to make such a topic accessible to a wide audience of readers. In some ways, the document is intended for management who may not have the most up-to-date technical expertise, but are responsible for making decisions about how the organization will use technology to work together and engage with various publics. As written, the paper meets the expectations of management (who can develop strategies which will encourage collaboration) and employees (the ones responsible for executing on such a plan). Both groups gain knowledge through the document.

While the writers of the paper do not explicitly make use of the "frontloading" technique in this part of the document, the introduction to their paper makes the case for why collaboration is vital to a business, giving the document a well-defined purpose. Similarly, deductive ordering is used to inform the target audience (business owners, managers) how technology can help their employees work more effectively as part of a team.

Further study of the document shows several of the writing principles described earlier. The organization has a clearly defined format for research of this kind, designed to make readers aware of the business problems that Cisco has experience in solving. It begins with a general description of how collaborative efforts in the workplace have evolved and how various tools

and technologies have been developed in order to meet the communication challenges that

businesses face on a daily basis. At the same time, the writers of the document recognize that

professionals outside of the IT industry may read what they have to say, and it is reflected in the

"reader directed" style in which the document is written. Even though the thesis of the article

focuses on technologies that businesses can use to address the "flattening of the organization", it

does not go into specific details about how the various products and services work, which is

beyond the scope of the document.

To accomplish this goal, the writers make extensive use of frontloading in order to set

readers' expectations about what they will learn from the whitepaper. This approach can be seen

in the thesis statement where the company lays out the topics that they plan to cover with

specific examples to be discussed within those sections: "The following sections describe how

information technology is "flattening" and decentralizing businesses," they write, setting

expectations for readers about how the document is organized; they also address the impact that

this kind of organizational shuffle has had on companies, namely that it is "…transforming the

traditional corporate operational model and changing the way people work and communicate".

Specific industries are highlighted to give a clear indication of the kinds of organizations that

will be discussed later in the document. All other information follows based on this pattern,

describing how clients were faced with decentralization of a large global workforce and had to

adopt various collaborative technologies in order to remain productive.

While this technique does not strictly follow the Woolever's definition of "chunking" by

dividing information into clearly understandable sections (usually chronologically, spatially,

based on cause and effect or otherwise), the headings of individual sections provide a clear sign

to the reader about the kind of information that they can expect to find there (Cisco, 2010). This

technique can also be seen in how individual paragraphs are organized, which begin with a

general premise and eventually move to specific details about how Cisco clients have evolved

the tools and processes they use to collaborate with one another. Organization in this part of the

document is clear as the writers provide a designated overview section about the kinds of

companies that they plan to address.

To give further weight to their argument, the writers provide ample historical details

about how the various communication technologies make the transition to using collaborative

tools easier than it was in the past. As a result, the writers are not reluctant to voice their

opinions about how the next decade may play out.

…'The death of distance as a determinant of the cost of communicating will probably be the single most important force shaping society in the first half of the [21st] century. Technological change has the power to revolutionize the way people live, and this one will be no exception. It will alter, in ways that are only dimly imaginable, decisions about where people work and what kind of work they do, concepts of national boarders and sovereignty, and patterns of international trade'. (Cairncross, via Cisco, 2010).

While serving as a well-constructed example of technical writing examined from a

nonacademic perspective, the paper does present some problems in its ability to reach a

particular audience. Given the size of Cisco as an organization, one can see why specific

examples were chosen to highlight the ways that companies are embracing collaborative tools.

The writers of this document assume a large decentralized workforce to be the norm, thereby

dismissing a number of smaller businesses that face similar challenges. As a result, the

suggestions about the use of communications technologies have less to offer these organizations.

In fact, some of the suggestions outlined, such as multimedia conferencing and telepresence may

be cost prohibitive for these organizations or inappropriate for their use case. It can be argued

that what is missing in Cisco's analysis is how they plan to address the larger market of small

businesses who face similar challenges as they grow but do not have the resources to pursue this

kind of large scale technology investment.

Another area that may cause a problem can be found in the second to last paragraph of

the introduction, where the writers acknowledge that their study may be somewhat premature as

the environment for collaborative work changes.

> Doubts about the real merits of a new technology, or general resistance to change, can
> lead to delay or outright rejection. Cultural, social, and linguistic factors also play a role.
> It is no different with some of the new communications and collaboration tools and
> platforms that have started enjoying widespread attention in recent years, including
> instant messaging, blogs, wikis, telepresence, mashups, and social networking, to name
> but a few (Cisco, 2010).

This suggests that while the techniques mentioned in the paper may eventually come to

define how teams operate within an organization, the cases presented are not the norm. While

they were successful in changing how collaboration happens in the workplace, these early

adopters took a significant risk, both financially and from a productivity standpoint. While these

shortcomings are noted, the overall tone of the document is intended to emphasize the positive

effects that happen within a company.

Several themes are present throughout the document that could benefit from further

improvement. Specifically, the lack of transitions between case studies is a strange omission as

is the inclusion of industry specific details at the conclusion of each of these sections. The reader

is left to interpret that the paragraph has reached its conclusion and instead sees additional

material that is meant to highlight Cisco's role in customer successes but may benefit from

additional context. It is not always clear that this is the purpose of the document element, which

does little to suggest that it is important information that should be read. Headings are small,

using a similar font that is smaller than the rest of the document's body. In some cases, the

background of these sections is presented in an alternate color to emphasize the text and increase

readability. In one instance, the aside spans multiple pages and provides no indication that

additional information exists (Cisco, 2010). Although seemingly insignificant, an indication to

the reader that the information continues and is in fact is explained in more detail on the next

page would be useful.

Aside from the positives and negatives related to writing conventions, the language used

and examples within the paper do not lend themselves to understanding by the general

population of readers.   This is not as much criticism as it is recognizing that others outside these

particular industries cited (but who share similar concerns in terms of collaboration) might read

this document trying to gain insight into how others in the industry have dealt with the same

challenge. With this in mind, the company would do well to develop a similar plan of action for

its smaller customers and indicate how Cisco's products have helped them work more efficiently.

Given the overall intent of the paper and its focus on large organizations, it does not

address the numerous small businesses that could benefit from a similar effort. The writers of

the paper cite this as a potential limitation of the company's approach, but do not offer many

viable alternatives that smaller organizations can make use of.

> Of course, not all organizations will reap benefits from embracing collaborative
> workplace practices to the same degree. However, most information-based organizations
> are likely to lose a competitive edge over time if they do not pursue at least partial
> adoption of collaboration (Cisco, 2010).

Despite this admission, the writers of the document conclude by arguing that collaboration mediated through technology and a distributed workforce is inevitable. "Ultimately, nearly all organizations will be forced to question how they should adapt working practices to new and changing business realities" they state, this can send the wrong message to readers about what Cisco's intent is and is written in a much more aggressive tone that the rest of the paper (Cisco, 2010). As a result, individuals reading this may get the impression that they must consider how their business makes use of collaborative technology or risk being left behind.

Writing a technical document requires a keen understanding of both core writing principles and the intended audience. Woolever's strategies for describing and summarizing information allow writers to efficiently convey their ideas to an audience in a sensible way. Organizing a document is also beneficial as it gives readers an indication of what they should hope to learn from the document. Accomplished through the use of main ideas, with transitions and signposts to move between them, the subject and key themes of a document become evident.

Research into writing in nonacademic settings shows that the medium through which a document is conveyed can have a significant impact on understanding. DeKay and Munter provide guidelines for dealing with email in a corporate environment, well aware of the fact that email has become the most common form of business communication. As a result, the conventions that have come to define email take on an added measure of importance. The researchers detail several of the conventions that have come to be synonymous with email and also empirically demonstrate the effect on communication that can result if messages do not meet these expectations.

At the same time, Hershkowitz-Coore's analysis of the effects of email on communication is a cause for concern. Using the right tool for the job will help ensure successful communication. Lastly, Gregory's work to remind writers of the subtle differences between writing destined for print and web are an example of some of lessons that can be applied regardless of where a document is published.

Individual studies by Newman and Mabrito both show that students in academic settings may write differently when asked to do otherwise. Being able to address a large volume of email in a given time is an extremely common use case and the results of the experiment reflect the fact that students have simply not had enough time in this kind of environment to develop new behaviors.

Mabrito's work on writing apprehension within an online setting helps to explain the casual tone of voice that is frequently used outside of an academic setting. When students are asked to write about something that interests them, it is easy to understand why participation levels increase. More specifically, the apprehension felt by these writers about the process was notably less when interacting with a larger group.

Lastly, the critique of a Cisco whitepaper illustrates both the positive and negative effects of writing outside of an academic setting. Overall, much of the writing is found to be straightforward, with numerous document elements including titles, headings and other typographic cues, and a summary listing all of the technologies mentioned along with applicability to various types of collaboration scenarios.

However, the tone of the document and intended audience has the effect that Cisco may not reach as many people as they would like. The writers acknowledge the focus on a particular audience (large, decentralized organizations) but do not offer meaningful suggestions as to how

the ideas about collaboration can be used appropriately on a smaller scale. Considering that collaboration is an issue that all companies must deal with, it would be wise to develop a separate document that addresses the challenges that these customers face on an ongoing basis.

Effective use of writing principles and an understanding of the target audience leads to better communication. The examples described demonstrate some of the techniques available to writers to ensure that information is explained in the most straightforward manner, while also meeting the expectations of readers using a particular format such as email. In this regard, writers should be mindful to work within the constraints provided by the medium. Guidelines for writing help to address the specific needs of the primary audience while also making work understandable by the public at large. The positives and negatives of instantaneous communication are noted, along with awareness that that these methods may not always be the most appropriate mode of communication for a given situation. This serves as recognition of the fact that email has become an increasingly important method of communication within organizations. Knowing when and how to apply these techniques will allow writers to reach as many audiences as possible. When used effectively, the conventions and structures common to various forms of writing help readers understand the purpose and intent of a piece of written communication.

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