

# 5 fundamentals to come across as professional in your writing



You may be a highly competent professional. But do others get that impression when they read your writing? Use these tactics to adopt the right professional tone, and you'll show your readers that you're as smart and credible as you really are.

## 1. Demonstrate the “three Cs:” craft, caring, and cause.

It's a fine art: Convincing an audience that you have the knowledge and integrity to make your message worth paying attention to. Jay Heinrichs, a writing expert and author of [Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion](#), says the best way to do it is to deploy what he calls the “three Cs:” craft, caring, and cause.

As you write, ask yourself:

- **Craft:**

*How can I show that I know what I'm talking about (e.g., by using relevant titles, expertise, or past experience to support my case)?*

- For example: “*After completing three data migrations, I've learned ...*”

- **Caring:**

*How can I convey that I genuinely care about my reader and their needs?*

- For example: “

*I'm sharing this feedback because I want to help your project succeed.”*

- **Cause:**

*How can I tie my message to what my organization values—its highest cause?*

- For example: “

*To help our company become ‘the region’s top furniture maker,’ we’ve done  
...”*

Often, people don’t naturally consider all these factors as they write. So if using craft, caring, and cause feels challenging at first, Heinrichs recommends creating a fictional character in your mind. Imagine a smart, compassionate leader who shares your organization’s values—then write as that character. “The phrase ‘fake it ‘til you make it’ applies!” Heinrichs says.

## **2. Adjust your tone depending on your audience (and always remember that you’re at work).**

You send this message to your boss: “What the heck was Ahmad talking about in that meeting?? lol 😅”

Your credibility: Crashes and burns  

Depending on who you’re writing to and how familiar you are with one another, you should shift your language, punctuation, and phrasing in small but meaningful ways. This shows your emotional intelligence and respect for your reader’s position—and helps you connect with them fast.

For example, a message to your teammate might include more friendly touches like a “*Hi there*” greeting or exclamation points (“*Thanks for jumping in to help!*”). Whereas a message to your company’s executive vice president might rely on formal phrasing (“*Hello Brian*”), but still come across as warm and clear (“*I really appreciate your help.*”).

That said, even when you're writing to close colleagues, err on the side of formality to show that you understand you're in the workplace. A professional tone doesn't have to feel stiff or academic. It can be more like wearing a button-down shirt than a three-piece suit—but *not* a ripped t-shirt. In general, be wary of whether and how you use jokes, slang, and casual touches such as gifs and emojis. These flourishes can make your writing feel less mature or polished—and they may not translate well for people with different backgrounds.

When in doubt, ask yourself,

*Who's going to see my writing, and what's the right level of formality for that audience?*

Then use your best judgment.

For more, see [Improving tone and style](#).

### **3. Follow your organization's communication norms, templates, and terminology.**

The sales team likes to communicate by chat, but you're emailing them instead. You keep mentioning “SQQEs” in your reports, but your clients don't know what those are. Whoops!

Every organization has its own communication norms, whether they're explicitly laid out in a style guide or implicit in commonly used language, formats, and writing styles. Following these norms shows that you understand the company's communication culture and makes your writing feel more familiar and credible to your readers.

Start by referring to any formal guidance your company offers, such as style guides or presentation templates. And observe how others—especially leaders—communicate so you can follow their example. For instance, if people at your company prefer memos rather than emails—and those memos tend to follow a specific format with a bullet-point summary at the top—write that way.

If you're still not sure of the best way to deliver a particular message, ask someone who's worked at your organization longer and is tuned into the culture—perhaps your boss or a mentor.

#### 4. If you write in a more stilted way than you speak, explain your ideas out loud to help you strike the right tone.

Some people's writing comes off as stiff, confusing, or jargon-y. But when they speak—as they explain their ideas in a meeting, for example—they sound confident and clear. If this is you, writing more like you speak can help you capture your verbal eloquence.

To do it, Heinrichs recommends recording yourself talking about your topic and transcribing the recording. Compare your transcript to the draft document you've written. Wherever the words and sentences in your transcript sound clearer and flow better, align your draft with them.

For example, you describe your project in writing as  
*“migrating our physical files to a database/shared drive to facilitate easier employee access,”*

and out loud as

*“moving our files online—like a digital library—so everyone can access them.”* You could bring the clearest and most helpful parts of your verbal description into your writing, while keeping your sentence precise:

*“We’re migrating our files to an online database—like a digital library—so employees can access them more easily.”*

#### 5. When in doubt, check how to use a word or phrase.

You're writing to the big boss. You want to demonstrate polish and intentionality. But then you run into the problem:

*How exactly do I use “intentionality?” Or a phrase like “benefits administration system?”*

One misused word or phrase (e.g., “whenever” instead of “when”) or grammar mistake (e.g., “Sarah assigned the work to Teddy and I”) can make your whole document seem amateur. Because of this risk, “Some people get the ‘grammar jitters,’” Heinrichs says. If you're unsure, take a moment to look up grammar and word usage to check that you're using the right words in the right way. For people writing in English, Heinrichs recommends referring to Bryan Garner's [Modern English Usage](#).

And of course, [before you share your writing](#), run a spelling and grammar check and read it over once more to catch any typos or other errors (e.g., “please sends your best technnician”) that could make you look careless.

For more, see [5 grammar goofs that can harm your credibility](#) and [4 writing and speaking habits that can harm your credibility](#).