

**For many large firms, what is said and what is heard are two different things. Write succinctly, actively and from your readers' perspective so they will understand what you are saying and know what to do next.**

How do you avoid some of the pitfalls of poor communication and make sure your messages are interpreted as intended?

**Write with the reader's perspective in mind.** Always keep your readers in mind when you are writing. You, as the author, know all the details of what you are talking about; but remember your readers may not. What may be common sense or well-known to you, may not be the case for your readers. Think about how they will process the information you are communicating and make sure it makes sense from their perspective. Take the time to include references or explanations to avoid confusion. By writing it well initially, you will avoid a lot of back and forth – and wasted time – down the road.

**Have someone else proofread it.** It's always a good idea to have a second set of eyes take a look at your work. And ideally, find someone who may not know the topic you are covering as well as you do. If he or she understands what you are saying and can explain it back to you in his or her own words, you have done a good job of communicating. If not, go back and rewrite, using their input for guidance. And remember, while spell check is a beautiful thing, it misses a lot of errors too.

**Don't try to communicate too many messages at once.** We are all bombarded by tons of emails every day, so sometimes we want to communicate everything we need to say to the reader in one fell swoop. But here's the problem, if the message you are trying to get across is important and needs a response, it can get lost in all the other things you are saying. If it is vital that your reader pay attention and respond promptly, say that up front, and stick to that one message.

**Keep it simple.** I'm sure you spent a lot of money getting your law degree, but here's the thing, sometimes using those big legal words only makes you look pompous and dilutes your message. I'm not saying that you should always write at a 3rd grade level, but again, keep your readers in mind when you are writing. If they are likely to need a dictionary to figure out what you are saying, you are not communicating, you are annoying, and your message will get completely lost.

**Make it active.** The same goes for passive language. If there is a way to make it active, do it. Rather than saying, "I think that you may find potential value in perusing the attached article," instead say, "This article makes some great points. Enjoy." Many of us were taught to write passively so we don't sound pushy, and many law firms write this way because they are concerned about "giving advice." But ultimately, it makes you sound unsure about what you are saying and dilutes your message. If you have something to say, say it clearly and actively.

So, what do you think? What are some of the pitfalls you see on a regular basis? What changes have you made to ensure your messages are communicated – and received – in the way you want?