

Writing Tip: Avoid worn-out clichés in your closing sentence

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

Productivity Tip

To clearly communicate a deadline, timeline or schedule for what needs to get done, avoid worn-out clichés in your closing sentence.



Stan Berry

Give Readers What They Need to Get What You Want

Before readers can do what you want to get done, they need to know when you want it. They need to know the urgency, deadline, timeline or schedule. Everything in business is time driven. Without knowing the urgency, readers wait with good intention for your follow-up. Think about deadlines as making your email real—readers do.

Avoid These Closing Phrases

Do you keep your readers dangling in never-ever land with these abstract closing sentences?

Your prompt attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

We would appreciate your response to this matter as soon as possible.

Please advise at your earliest convenience.

Awaiting your reply.

How'd We Get into This Mess

If you close your emails with these phrases, you're not alone. Most people do. In fact, it's a rare business email that doesn't end with a vague closing phrase. In the writer's mind, it's just a pleasant, polite way to end. Business professionals learn to use these phrases in the same ways they learn to use worn-out clichés in opening paragraphs, by:

1. Following their supervisor's example.
2. Taking an academic business writing class.
3. Emulating what other people do.

In reality, these phrases are nothing more than the exit strategy for the Rambling Rose writing process, the default process of the masses. People type at the keyboard as they think through the email, and when they finally get to the purpose, they need to bring closure to the process. So to be courteous, they end with a time-tested cliché. As a result, readers unwittingly return the favor—without a definite deadline, they wait for one.

Here's How to Get Out of This Mess

Here are three ways to put your deadline in your closing paragraph. The one you choose depends on the tone you wish to create.

1. Ask a question.
“Can you send me the report by April 15th?”
2. Make a definite statement.
“Please meet with Joan next week and call me with the results on Monday.”
3. Extend good will.
“Thank you, John, for making the changes to the system before testing begins in September.”

When you remember to plan content around writing to getting things done, you have no use for these worn-out cliché's. Instead, you make the purpose stated in your opening paragraph real for the reader by tactfully sharing the deadline for action at the end of the email.

Before You Hit the Send Button

Replace these empty platitudes (for the reader, at least!) with a clear deadline or timeframe for when things needs to get done. For some of you, this will be difficult—it's like saying good-bye to old friends. Think of it as opening a window for fresh air—to keep your closing sentence fresh, clear and useful!



Stan Berry has devoted the past 34 years to improving the writing skills of over 55,000 business and government professionals. After completing his Master's degree from Yale University, he co-authored five books on writing that he uses in his seminars. He's been a member of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) since 1975 when he served as the newsletter editor and on the Board of Directors for the Twin Cities Chapter. Stan can be reached at www.BerryWritingGroup.com or 612-578-1487.



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