

## **Writing Tip: The harmful effects of Rambling Rose**

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

*The gap between knowing and doing is greater than knowing and not knowing.*

Ken & Margie Blanchard

### **Do What You Know To Do In Your Life**

This gap is real in much of what we do. We know to stretch our muscles before playing sports. We know to buckle up *before* starting a car. We know to wash our hands before eating. We know to eat healthy foods and get daily exercise. We know doing these things prevents injuries and promotes a long, vital life. Yet, we often don't do them.



**Stan Berry**

### **Do What You Know To Do In Your Writing**

This gap is also real when business professionals write. We know that clear writing is clear thinking, framed for the reader, using plain language. To persuade our readers, we know to list key ideas and supporting facts before writing the draft. We learned how to outline ideas and write a paragraph in elementary school. But 99% of business professionals—from corporate presidents to interns—do not do it. They all know to do it—they just don't.

### **The Rambling Rose Process**

Instead, most people use what we call the Rambling Rose writing process. They type as they think through the content. For writers, the process generally looks like this, as they:

- sit down and bang out the draft
- read it
- rewrite it
- read it
- rewrite it
- close with, "If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me."
- send it off in the hope that the reader will figure it out

### **Process Drives Outcome**

In everything we do, the process we use determines the outcome. For example, well-trained motorcyclists know that when they look at an object in the road, they are more likely to hit it, because a motorcycle goes where the rider is looking. The same process-drives-outcome experience is true in writing. When people type as they think, there are predictable outcomes for the writer, the draft and the reader.

### *Outcome for the Writer*

People often procrastinate, so they bang out the draft as they think it through. Rambling Rose causes an endless string of emails—the *tag-you're-it* syndrome—where busy people fire off emails in the hope that something gets done. The problem is that our documents are difficult to read and are easily misinterpreted.

### *Outcome for the Draft*

Drafts written with the Rambling Rose writing process look the same. They usually begin with background information, bury the purpose in the most difficult-to-find place, hide lists of key points, and lack transitions that tie ideas together into a cogent, memorable message.

### *Outcome for the Reader*

Inadvertently, and unintentionally, the game Rambling Rose plays is “Let the readers figure it out.” The reader must quickly figure out the answers to three compelling questions:

- How does this affect me? What do you want me to do?
- What are your key points?
- What is the urgency?

### **An Example of Rambling Rose**

You can see these outcomes in almost all emails of 100 words or longer. You can see these outcomes for the draft and reader in this example.

#### **Subject:** SNA and Bulk Data Training

As we are approaching the scheduled time for installing SNA and Bulk Data capabilities on our CP2000, I've been examining the need for training in these areas. We can send one person from Seattle to an SNA class put on by a training company such as the American Banking Institute. The cost of these classes is about \$1,000 plus another \$1,000 for travel and expenses. We could have no formal training on either SNA or Bulk Data. In other words, it would be hands on and learn as we go. We could bring John Dorn to Seattle for about 3 days. He could cover SNA basics, Bulk Data, and even get into banknet. This would require us to pay his travel and expenses for the trip which might run up to \$1,000, depending on whether or not he would stay over a weekend. Bringing John here for the class is the best in my view. I am recommending we proceed. I've already run the idea by Jane and have her OK. I have budgeted for an SNA class for this year. With your approval, I will proceed with the arrangements.

## A Rewrite Using a Model from *Writing to Get Things Done*<sup>®</sup> (WGTD)

**Subject:** Request for Approval of SNA Bulk Data Training

Please approve bringing John Dorn to Seattle in the last quarter of this year. He would teach SNA and Bulk Data concepts to our technical staff. I've already run the idea by Jane and have her ok.

Here are three options we considered to meet our immediate training needs:

- Send one person to a training class put on by the American Banking Institute. The total cost would be about \$2,000.
- Have no formal training. It would be hands on and learn as we go.
- Bring John Dorn here. The total cost would be about \$2,500. I have this amount budgeted for this training.

I would appreciate receiving your approval by Friday. This will give ample time to effectively plan our training sessions.

### Shorten the Gap between Knowing and Doing—Do What You Know

In your personal life, remember to do those things that you know will prevent unnecessary injuries and promote a long, vital life. And in your writing, remember to do those things that you know will produce an easy-to-read document that gets things done.



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