



CONSULTING GROUP<sup>SM</sup>  
the people side of business strategy

# TiDbits on writing<sup>®</sup> part 4

## LETTER FROM TD

**W**e hope you enjoy Part 4 of our series, *TiDbits on Writing*<sup>®</sup>.

These practical tips will help you tackle some of the major stumbling blocks in writing on the job – whether preparing reports, proposals, or even e-mails. We'll cover issues like how to write with clarity, how to make subjects and verbs agree, and even how to use proper punctuation.

Enjoy! And happy writing!

— *Laura Winterroth*  
Managing Director



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## Compelling Lead

**W**ho can forget some of the great first lines in literature that hooked us to read more?

*Call me Ishmael.*

*It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.*

*Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.*

While business writers may not be creating epic novels or inspirational poems, they can follow the wisdom of great writers who taught us how to engage our readers from the very beginning.

- ◆ Start off strong; declare something.
- ◆ Incorporate your essential message, key point, or action needed as early as possible.
- ◆ Avoid dependent clauses.
- ◆ Engage the reader to stay with you.

Often, writers meander through a beginning paragraph – only to arrive at the most compelling information at the *end*. Why wait?

### Leading the Way

Let's analyze this paragraph from a recent e-mail:

*In our ongoing effort to increase traffic to your website, we have already identified key words and phrases for search engine optimization (SEO). After*

*running the latest SEO report, there are four key questions on which we need your input before our meeting on Friday.*

Our paragraph violates the rules of a compelling lead. The first sentence declares nothing. In fact, it restates what I, the reader, already know. Next, it begins with a dependent clause so I have to hunt for the subject and verb – that's too much work to ask of a reader. Finally, only when I get to the last sentence do I learn about the essential message or the action expected of me.

The e-mail writer should have flipped the sentences in this paragraph to engage me immediately – or, rather, eliminated the first sentence altogether. The new e-mail would read like this:

*Laura, please provide answers to the following four questions before our SEO meeting on Friday.*

This direct approach would have engaged me right away, told me exactly what was needed from me, and kept me reading.

The content in e-mails and other types of business writing might not always be as captivating as Melville's *Moby Dick*, or Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, or Longfellow's *Ride of Paul Revere*. But we can still write compelling leads to gain our readers' attention – and most important, make it easy for them to respond! □

## TiDbits

Published by TD Consulting Group  
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