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the people side of business strategy

TiDbits on writing[®] part 11

LETTER FROM TD

We hope you enjoy Part 11 of our series, *TiDbits on Writing*[®].

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 such as how to write with clarity, how to make subjects and verbs agree, and how to distinguish “who” from “whom.”

Enjoy! And happy writing!

— Laura Winterroth
Managing Director



For back issues of *TiDbits on Writing*[®] or to order *Editor's Secrets: 10 Keys to Stronger Writing in 30 Minutes* (\$12.95), go to www.tdgroupusa.com

TiDbits

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Dot That “i”

We may not be able to make the topic of punctuation enticing — “Commas Gone WILD!” or “Colon: A Love Story” — but without these essential symbols, our writing would be incoherent. Unpunctuated stream of consciousness may have worked for James Joyce, but for the rest of us, nothing can be more refreshing than a precise *hyphen*, a bold *period*, a welcome *dash*.

Oodles has been written on punctuation, so we’re just going to pinpoint several common issues that give people the biggest headaches.

Commas

Commas indicate a pause — just as in speech. That’s why it’s good to read your prose aloud to *hear* where to put them.

Whether you believe it or not, the Democratic Primary will end.

Owen, my nephew, is graduating.

One place where people forget to put commas is before the word *and* in a *series* of items — many of us were mistakenly taught to leave these out!

Steve played squash, football, and basketball.

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are misplaced constantly, but the rule is simple: Place them *after* periods, question

marks, commas, and exclamation points. Put them *before* colons and semi-colons.

Loretta asked, “Where is my car?”

Wendy caused a stir when she referred to her boss as a “tyrant.”

Carla didn’t like to call Sam her “boyfriend”; they’d only gone out twice.

Semi-Colon

While semi-colons serve several purposes, they are often underutilized when it comes to connecting two closely-related ideas. Linking *complete* sentences that belong together brings clarity to writing.

Profits soared despite the problems with the technology; financial analysts were stupefied.

Dashes

These little lines — coming into greater use in today’s business writing — separate out key ideas from the rest of a sentence. They are similar to commas in usage, except they make what’s inside them stand out.

Use dashes — as in the sentence in the above paragraph — to highlight text you want your reader to notice.

And one last thing: if you use an exclamation point, use it only once! □