

# Emails that get shit done!

*Because if they're not doing their job, they're just wasting your time...*

Shelly Davies   
writing joy & badassery

How many emails a day are  
you sending?

# The writer-switch

## **Writers think about:**

- Tone
- Level of detail required
- Sounding professional
- Accepted conventions
- “Getting it right”

## **Readers want:**

- Answers to their questions
- (Easily found)
- Concise
- Skim-readable
- No bullshit

To write for modern readers  
(and all the research supports this),  
we need to  
**WRITE LIKE A READER**



So you can't write an email in the way YOU feel comfortable.

**It has to realistically address reader needs and behaviour.**

So what does that look like?



[www.shellydavies.com](http://www.shellydavies.com)

Hi Mike

How's the week starting for you?

The architect got hold of me last week and gave me some information I think you might be interested in. It has implications which need to be considered by everyone in the project. As you know, we are continually looking for areas where we can find cost reductions and pass on the benefit to you. Some examples of those have been the stiffened raft slab and the considerations of the building enclosures.

At last week's meeting we made what we thought were the final decisions so that we could move to phase two. Even though we thought we had made all the necessary decisions and settled and agreed collectively on those, this new information has potential implications across the board. I think there's value in getting us all around the table again to revisit those decisions based on the new information.

What do you think?

Should we invite the entire project team or do you think we could be more selective and just have certain internal and external stakeholders? I am keen to hear your thoughts as I'm concerned there may be some frustration about this request. Can you let me know some windows of availability you have next week?

Kind Regards

John

Hi Mike

Hope all's well.

Can you let me know some windows of availability you have for a meeting next week?

**Why we need another meeting**

- The architect gave me some information late last week
- It has potential implications for the entire project
- We need to reconsider our decisions in light of the new info

**The new info**

- [Insert high level technical info here]

**Can you please**

- Let me know when you're available
- Give me your thoughts about who else needs to be invited

Thanks mate

John



# To make this change:

1. Greet
2. Connect
3. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
4. Create structure with headings and bullets
5. Be human and brief

# The process

1. Greet: Hi Mike
2. Connect: Hope all's well.
3. BLUF: Can you let me know some windows of availability you have for a meeting next week?

# Getting the headings right

Can you let me know some windows of availability you have for a meeting next week?

**Why we need another meeting**

**The new info**

**Can you please**

# Conversational, concise bullets

## **Why we need another meeting**

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**Can you please**

- Let me know when you're available
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Thanks mate

John

# Before (a pissed off email)

Hi Hugh

I appreciate that Acme has policy that directs your response, however my problem is that I have difficulty in understanding why we as developers, and ultimately the consumer who the cost is passed onto, needs to contribute to the cost of developing your network. Is this because you have a monopoly in the Timbuktu area and can do whatever you feel is right? On the point passing on the cost, we are providing homes to first home buyers and the homes we sell are capped at \$450,000 by regulation and are unable to pass on the cost.

If we are expected to provide capital for your growth where do I as a developer get a return on my investment?

Our company is not in the business of supplying power and do not want to invest in your business. Please explain why it is felt that we should be providing you capital to grow your business. There must be something wrong with your business model if you have to rely on forcing others to pay for your growth.

Perhaps Acme might be in a position to assist our goal to provide affordable housing by reviewing its policy and in this instance waive the design fee and reduce the "contribution" being asked.

Hi Hugh

I'm writing to request that Acme assist our goal to provide affordable housing by reviewing its policy and in this instance:

1. waive the design fee, and
2. reduce the "contribution" being asked.

### **The basis of this request**

- We're not able to pass on the cost.
- Our buyers are first home buyers and the homes we sell are capped at \$450,000 by regulation.

### **Your goodwill as the owners of your own policies**

- I appreciate that your response is directed by policy.
- As the authors of your policy, Acme can also choose to change or make an exception to that policy.
- You have the monopoly in Timbuktu – we have no alternative provider.
- I appeal to your goodwill, to support the development of affordable housing (and therefore social improvement and wellbeing) in Timbuktu.

### **Another possible benefit**

- If you chose to, this expression of goodwill could also provide great positive media exposure for Acme.

I look forward to your consideration of this request, and to working with you on this development.

# The psychology of how humans engage with text

We know a lot about how readers behave:

- We skim read (98% of us)
- We come with questions
- We don't keep reading unless we HAVE TO



# So what's stopping us?

We're worried about what's RIGHT and how we'll sound.

We're thinking too much about ourselves, and not enough about our readers



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(and all the research supports this),  
we need to  
**WRITE LIKE A READER**

So you can't write an email in the way YOU feel comfortable.

**It has to realistically address reader needs and behaviour.**

# Your challenge

1. Pause before you write
2. Know your BLUF
3. Invest the minutes up front to save the hours down the track
4. Use structure, *conversationally*

# Your reward

1. People read your emails soon after they arrive
2. They REPLY and ACT FASTER
3. You get a reputation for being easy to work with, no fuss, onto it
4. Plus a shitload more time

And to help with that...

<https://www.shellydavies.co.nz/plain-language-resource-library/>



www.shellydavies.com

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## SHELLY'S PLAIN LANGUAGE RESOURCE LIBRARY

<b>8</b> <b>Magic emails</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Standard email structure for success</li><li>How to deliver bad news - which would you prefer?</li><li>Stupid email example</li><li>Shelly's email examples</li><li>2 apologies received the same day<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Which would you rather receive?</li></ul></li><li>Subject lines that Get Shit Done</li><li>How to set tone with connecting statements<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>BLUF - put your emails to WORK</li></ul></li><li>Be a mindreader - pre-empt their questions</li><li>Putting it all together</li><li>10 steps to Get Shit Done emails</li></ul>	<b>9</b> <b>Technical writing examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Acronyms rewrite example</li><li>Jargon and clichés NZ Herald Newspaper</li><li>TextComms examples before and after - plain language rewrites</li><li>Technical examples before and after</li><li>SDOT/CI/IA/ID/IDM framing before and after</li><li>Examples - Planner writing to council</li></ul>	<b>11</b> <b>Plain language at-a-glance guides</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>CDC plain language checklist</li><li>Shelly's plain language infographic</li><li>Winston Churchill</li><li>10 simple steps</li></ul>
<b>13</b> <b>Statement headings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A government report that uses STATEMENT HEADINGS</li><li>Ourland 2018 - active voice and statement headings</li><li>NZ Mental health inquiry report 2019</li></ul>	<b>15</b> <b>Active voice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Grammarly bacon</li><li>Grammarly passive voice</li><li>McDonalds passive voice</li><li>MTE example (active voice) before and after</li><li>NZ Mental health inquiry report 2019</li></ul>	<b>14</b> <b>Useful apps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>www.temi.com</li><li>www.hemingwayapp.com</li><li>www.grammarly.com</li><li>www.wordzen.com</li></ul>
<b>16</b> <b>Executive summaries</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>BeCA Executive Summary guidelines</li><li>Sample Executive Summary - Governance Assessment</li><li>Tips on writing an effective executive summary</li><li>An executive summary example (technical)</li></ul>	<b>17</b> <b>Legal language</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>HS plain language example</li><li>Siegel Credit Card Agreement</li><li>UK consumer law 2015</li><li>Severability of provisions before and after</li><li>Plain Language Retainer</li><li>Notice to Witness before</li><li>Notice to Witness-Hereford</li><li>How stuff can get hidden - Amazon and zombies</li><li>Example terms of engagement</li></ul>	<b>1</b> <b>What being readercentric looks like</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>IM letter structured writing</li><li>SUPERU Evaluation Handbook Dec 2017 - winner, plain English 2017</li><li>Designing tables to be read not looked at</li></ul>
<b>18</b> <b>Planning and filtering tools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Chunking</li><li>Document Filter FlowChart</li><li>SIFT before you write (think first, write second)</li></ul>	<b>20</b> <b>Useful sites</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>www.plainenglishhwards.org.nz</li><li>www.plainenglish.co.uk</li><li>www.plainlanguage.gov</li><li>Federal Aviation Administration</li><li>The International Plain Language Federation</li><li>The Center for Plain Language (USA)</li><li>PLAIN - Plain Language Association International</li><li>Clarity (for plain legal language)</li><li>Securities and Exchange Commission</li></ul>	<b>19</b> <b>Before and afters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can you figure out what this document is?</li><li>3 legal before and afters from Andrew Pegler</li><li>Bad news - which would you rather receive?</li></ul>
<b>15</b> <b>Research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Oppenheimer study about using too many big words</li><li>A huge list of plain language research from around the world</li><li>It's easy to read, it's easy to do</li><li>80 years of plain language research and activities in the USA</li><li>Cognitive fluency and plain (legal) language</li><li>Considering plain language - issues and initiatives</li><li>Writing government policies and procedures in plain language</li></ul>	<b>21</b> <b>Visual tools for text documentation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rules for using text and visuals</li><li>Business communication and the importance of visuals</li><li>Importance of graphic design: 7 reasons with examples</li><li>Your guide to effective communication through visual collaboration</li><li>20 reasons good design matters to your business</li><li>Process infographic templates and visualization tips</li></ul>	<b>22</b> <b>Buzzwords, emoji, and hashtags</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Plain language and emoji</li><li>Emoji: An essential tool for innovative business communication?</li><li>The science behind emoji in business emails</li></ul>



And stay in touch!

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[www.shellydavies.com](http://www.shellydavies.com)