

WIN 5.2 - Developing an Inclusive Writing Style

Lesson 5 - Sentences, Paragraphs and Punctuation

I think a lot of people - particularly professionals - tend to use overly long sentences, and tend to string a lot of ideas together, separated by semicolons and colons, and really to try to get a lot of information into one sentence. And I really think that simple sentences are best, particularly when communicating in the workplace, particularly when it's vital that the person who is reading your written communication understands what you're trying to communicate. I think short, simple sentences are really underrated, and people tend to try to use big words, obscure words, and long sentences, long convoluted sentences, to try to perhaps make themselves sound smarter, as kind of a badge of professionalism, and I really think that it does backfire; that short, simple sentences really communicate much more clearly and much more powerfully.

I think people tend to really gravitate towards run-on paragraphs, and paragraphs that go on for over a page; whereas I think the purpose of a paragraph is to contain information in sort of reasonable chunks, in chunks of information that are easily digestible and easily understood. And so frequent paragraph breaks are particularly helpful in organizing your writing, and in making sure that the reader isn't getting overwhelmed with a lot of information. A paragraph break gives the reader a chance to kind of pause for breath and reflect on what they've just read.

Correct punctuation is extremely important. Comma placement can change the meaning of a sentence. The use of apostrophes can also change the meaning of a sentence. And it's really important to proofread your work and make sure that the punctuation is correct. It also speaks to credibility. If I'm reading something that is filled with punctuation errors my faith in the accuracy of the information goes down a little bit because as a writer the person who has written that has lost a bit of standing in my eyes. If a writer can't punctuate correctly than I start to wonder if - what else they can't do - if their information is correct - so punctuation is very important.