

Chapter 5 Professional Writing in an Electronic Environment

Case 1 What's Wrong With "Let me know what yous' guys are up too!"

"Oh, my goodness. Will you look at this?" exclaimed Gretchen Duerrstein. Ana Viti looked up from her computer to see her co-worker shaking her head incredulously.

"What is it, Gretchen?" she asked, curiously.

"Come, Ana, and look at this. I can't believe someone would write this kind of an email message here at work!" She pointed to her screen and beckoned for Ana to come over and read the message that was open on it. Gretchen explained, "I asked Chris to figure out why that link was sending customers to the home page rather than the secure server order page." The web design team at Majestic Toy and Gifts had recently redone the company website and some glitch in the system prevented customers from getting from the inventory pages to the order page. It was a serious problem and needed the web master's immediate attention. Unfortunately, Beau Drury was on vacation, leaving his assistant, Chris Maxwell, a recent hire, as the only person with enough knowledge of the site and the technology to correct the problem. Ana read Chris' email, reproduced in Figure 5.1. As she read she wondered what the big deal was. She couldn't see a big difference between what Chris had written and the way she and her friends communicated all the time on instant messenger or when texting a message. Best not to say that though, judging by Gretchen's response.

hey chicky,
i'll take a look at the website and see what we can do!!
Bo's vac not end till Fri. Not my fort but with luck somthing could work!! Looks like hardware issue but might be string bad characters in source code. what a surprise!! :-) 3 things to try but gotta keep ++ attitude. Chatd to Sommerville re. new name brand software and he finly sez yeah. sometimes you can talk until you are blue in the face, and then, they decide that there might be something to what your talking about and low and behold they try it and wala!!! presto!! life is better! :-)
talked to jon re. ur other issue. he sez purchaser in van orderd ur stuff. Shld be here end of next week. gluttons for punishment!! :-) at least u have CD backup there.
let me know what yous' guys are up too! :-)
-chris

Figure 5.1 Email from Chris Maxwell answering two queries from Gretchen Duerrstein.

"Can you believe the informality?" Gretchen asked. "Hasn't anyone told him that work is not the same as talking to your friends on MSN?"

Ana shrugged, "I guess not. You are saying that he should write this differently here?"

"Of course he should write it differently!" Gretchen exclaimed. "This is a professional situation. Everyone who reads your email will judge your competence as an employee based on what you write in even the most insignificant communication. Chris makes

himself look uneducated, sloppy, and illiterate when he sends a message written like this to me!”

“I see what you mean,” responded Ana, slowly, rereading Chris’s message from the perspective of someone who had never met him, who wouldn’t necessarily be entertained by his droll and ironic sense of humour. That was Gretchen: she felt fun should never get in the way of a good day of work.

“Not to mention the fact that I still don’t know when he’ll have the problem with the inventory links fixed! I can’t understand all of those abbreviations and spelling mistakes. In the meantime, we’re losing money because people can’t place their orders.”

“I think he means that he’s ordered some software that might help fix the problem,” Ana offered, carefully.

“Ordered software? We don’t have time to wait until software comes in. That link needs to be fixed today, actually yesterday. I guess I’d better go over to Beau’s office and have a little chat.” Gretchen pulled her purse from the drawer of the desk and slung it over her shoulder.

“You want coffee?” she asked Ana. Ana nodded vigorously.

“I’ll be back in half an hour,” said Gretchen and marched out the door.

Ana returned to her desk. She saw her own email message open on the screen that she had been composing to her supervisor’s boss, and she reread it guiltily. It wasn’t nearly as bad as Chris’ message for informality and abbreviations, but Ana was suddenly hyper-aware of the impression her writing would make on Oscar Koerber. She tinkered with it a bit, Gretchen’s words echoing in her head, and then she decided to cancel the message altogether and start over. She opened a new word processing file and jotted down a list of what she wanted to communicate. She realized that she hadn’t been making as good an impression on her readers as she should in previous email communications. But she could change that, starting right now.

Exercise 3: Rewrite the email from Chris Maxwell to Gretchen Duerrstein

Your roommate, Chris Maxwell, has asked you to help him rewrite his email to Gretchen Duerrstein. When you asked him to write down the points he wanted to make in his email, he gave you the list reproduced in Figure 5.3. Use the information in the list, as well as the discussion in this chapter (and earlier chapters, where relevant) to compose a clear, comprehensible and professional response to her requests (see Figure 5.5 for her original email). Manage your tone, organization, sentence structure, and word choice so that they are appropriate to the professional situation.

Audience: Gretchen Duerrstein, mid-level employee at Majestic Toy and Gifts

Purpose: Primarily, to answer Gretchen’s questions clearly, concisely, and appropriately; secondarily, to demonstrate his ability and competence as an employee at Majestic Toy and Gifts.