

come up with a new marketing strategy for Vegemite and to present it at the next board meeting

Good minutes keep it simple, but they name names. See what *The Little Red Writing Book* says about who-does-what sentences (chapter 2), and try to write those. In addition, then, to writing actively and favouring simple sentences that stay concrete and specific and refer to people and employ clear verbs of action,

- name the person responsible for each action decided upon
- if there's a task, put a due date on it
- if a number of views are expressed, if there's debate, try to summarise each, and who held it
- keep everything as trim as you can, but above all be very clear

Meetings with any degree of formality will generally follow an agenda. If you're writing the minutes of a meeting with an agenda, use the agenda as your template. The meeting might not follow the agenda entirely, but some meetings do, and if they don't, that's something that really ought to be recorded, too. Was there a legitimate deferral of an item, did the meeting descend into chaos, did the chair fall asleep?

If you like, you can construe minutes minimally, as a notation of key decisions, performed mostly to comply with statutory requirements. On the other hand, you might choose to use the minutes as a management tool. In that case, the chair needs to make it clear that this is an agreed approach, and ensure that the minutes are written—and read—as guidelines to key actions.

By all means use dot points, but favour orthodox sentences. Minutes are not meant to be like jottings; they're pieces of writing, often crucial ones. And the unit that makes the fastest and fullest sense in writing is the sentence.

Write minutes not just to please the people who attended the meeting—your only duty to them is to write the truth; write so that the minutes might be clear five years down the track, to an interested outsider, or a court of law.

As a matter of procedure, some minute-takers circulate draft minutes to the people (or some of them) who attended the meeting. This is a good idea, but it can make it hard to settle on a final agreed form of words. The chair of the meeting is the person who needs to sign off on the minutes, so confer closely with her or him. But whatever else you do, write the minutes so they make good sense fast, and not only to the people who were at the meeting.

Good minutes include action points. For each item. Here's a tip: settle the action points first and circulate them as soon as possible following the meeting; don't wait till you've wrestled the minutes into shape and won final approval for them in all their glory. It's amazing how quickly things can be forgotten or remembered in a different light.

7 Media releases

Write a media release as though you were a journalist unassociated with your company. Practise detachment; step back from your habitual tropes, your corporate idiom; contemplate the organisational triumph, the mass sacking, the merger, the profit result, the conclusions of your audit, the results of your experiment, the sales numbers, the move of your manufacturing operations offshore ... from the point of view of a detached observer.

Write the story you want the press to run—word for word, if you can. But know that they won't (they shouldn't, and you shouldn't expect them to) run it in the way you might write about it in-house—triumphal, evasive, managerial, bureaucratic, academic, legalistic, or scientific; don't write it in the kind of prose the briefing documents you received were

probably written in. They're not running your business or doing your bidding; they're informing and entertaining the public, which is their business. So they'll run your story, if they run it at all, in the sort of language stories need. And if you don't like the language (or the politics behind it) with which the press tell stories, write the story better. Look at it from their perspective; they're busy, deadlines are looming, they've got a page to fill, and a compelling, well-written story that's going to resonate with their readers suddenly lands, fully formed, on their desk. What's not to like? And a word of warning: stories in bureaubabble just don't play.

A press story is a lead followed by some vivid detail. A lead is what your thing amounts to in a sentence. Not some lofty abstraction, not the fact that your research breaks new ground—what new ground, how, why, when and where and for whom and why that matters. In a sentence. The rest of the story is whatever numbers, quotes, explanations, expert opinions, examples and illustrations you need to offer to ground, justify and flesh out the lead.

Here are some leads that work.

Paying the lowest price for your website isn't always the most cost-effective way to reach your customers, according to experienced marketing specialist Jane Dear.

A new guide, launched today by the Minister for Small Business Development, removes the guesswork from hiring freelancers.

As reported recently in numerous media outlets, many companies are struggling with the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. Green Dreams is proud to offer a range of solutions for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

Banks, the regulator and Storm Financial's founders are at a road block about who should be accountable for the failure of margin lending calls to reach margin loan borrowers.

And remember: if you're sitting on a lead, a thing you'd rather not, for whatever reason, say in so many words, you can be sure the press will—and you can be sure the way they report it won't be as pretty as you might make it. So say it your way and try to stop them spinning it in a way you may like less. We're talking PR 101 here, we know. Don't try to fool the press or the public, but by all means write the lead the way you think the story really runs. It's okay to manage the message, but even though they're sometimes lazy, like the rest of us, the media are not, on the whole, stupid.

Your purpose isn't to spruik or cover up or crow or blame or shame: it's to find and tell the story of the facts. A little detachment will help. And if you don't want the media to muck it up, or get it wrong, get it right and write it so well they stick to your script.

8 Newsletters

When you write a newsletter, you really do write the news. Only, the news, as with a website, is not the real point. The stories you tell, the information you offer are a cover for the real enterprise, which is marketing—making connections, developing relationships, keeping yourself and your work in the market's mind. Newsletters are for branding; in particular, they're for building and maintaining community. They're for making and sustaining connection with one's constituencies: Businesses, public and private, use newsletters, delivered online or in the old-fashioned paper-based way, to stay in the hearts and minds of their customers and their employees—their external and internal stakeholders.

By spreading the word across your catchment about what you've done, what your people have succeeded at, what fun you've all had, what new products and ideas you've got to offer, how you've contributed to the welfare of the community, you're really advancing the story of who you are and, by implication, why you'd be good to form or sustain a relationship with.