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The Oxford Guide to

**Effective Writing
and Speaking**

The **Oxford** Guide to

Effective Writing and Speaking

How to communicate clearly

Third Edition

John Seely

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Preface to first edition

A book like this, which covers a wide range of topics, has to draw on the knowledge and experience of many different advisers. I have been fortunate to receive the help of readers who have given great time and care to commenting on early drafts of the manuscript and advising how it might be improved. In particular, I should like to thank Brigid Avison, Alison Baverstock, Tim Cracknell, David Elsmore, Jacky Hart, Caroline Hartnell, Andrew Heron, and Samantha Manning in the UK, while Dr Nelson Ong of New York offered an American perspective. They will probably recognize where their advice and comments have produced changes in the final text. For this I am deeply grateful, but, of course, the final responsibility is my own.

I should like to thank the staff at Oxford University Press who have patiently supported this project, in particular Kate Wandless and Kendall Clarke, for their encouragement and advice.

Closer to home, Katherine and Timothy Seely gave excellent and critical 'consumers' comments', especially about the communication needs of students and those seeking and gaining their first jobs. (I knew those long years of parenting would pay off eventually!) My debt to my wife, Elizabeth, is immeasurable. Although we have both worked as writers and editors for many years, I can only say that this time I was even more vague and abstracted than usual, but she bore it with great good humour. As ever, she read the manuscript with a critical eye and made many trenchant and invaluable comments, and it is with gratitude that this book is dedicated to her.

Preface to second edition

I have taken the opportunity of this new edition to make a number of changes. I have added a new chapter on emails, and have made extensive revisions to the chapter on job applications reflecting current practice. In addition, there are numerous small changes throughout the book designed to bring the text up to date.

Preface to third edition

In the revisions and additions for this edition I have focused on two areas in particular. The use of digital media for both informal and formal communication has taken over much of the territory where print media once held sway. This edition aims to reflect these developments, especially in Chapters 3, 24, and 27. I have also taken the opportunity of this new edition to rework the whole of Section D, with the aim of providing a more thorough and, I hope, realistic perspective on the processes of writing. Elsewhere, numerous changes have been made to update advice and examples.

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- A** comes from *The French* by Theodore Zeldin
B is from French Entrée website and introduces an article entitled *New auto-entrepreneur system for small businesses*
C comes from the *Rough Guide to France*

page 331

Sentence 1 presents us with a situation (the waitress showing us to a table in a restaurant) and a puzzle (what is going on inside her head as she does so?). The second sentence provides an amplification both of the situation (by describing Thérèse's manner in more detail) and, by implication, of the puzzle (if she is so self-possessed and 'all energy', what is she doing waiting at tables?). Sentence 3 develops the last two words of the second, by giving an example of her 'friendly solicitude'. Now that Thérèse's situation and manner have been established, the fourth sentence returns to the puzzle by providing a key piece of information: that she has an MA in Art History. Sentence 5 provides a kind of coded solution to the puzzle. Thérèse is highly competent because she is intelligent and well-educated; she works in this apparently lowly job because she gets something special out of it. It gives her a 'purpose in life'. And thus the writer sets up the succeeding paragraphs: they will explain just what that 'purpose in life' is.

Chapter 26

In the first part of the **manuscript**, most attention is focused on the relation between the first paragraph and the two bullet points that follow it. The changes are intended to make this as simple and clear as possible. The later changes are mainly a question of tidying up, but in the middle of the extract an important later addition is made to the point about correcting punctuation.

In the **word-processed version** the main change is that the order of the second set of bullet points has been changed. Other changes are quite small, but there is an attempt to rephrase the last sentence so that it is more accurate.

The ways in which I thought the text still needed improvement can be seen in the final version on page 276. You may not necessarily agree with me.

One important set of changes concerns the way in which the writer addresses the reader. In the previous draft I used 'we' throughout. This has now been changed to 'you'—in keeping with the general tone throughout the book. (There was a gap of nine months between the two drafts, during which the style and tone of the book had 'settled down' quite a lot. Revisions of material written early on had to take this into account.) The other main change is that the order of the original three bullet points ('Changes to the structure', etc.) has been rationalized by placing the biggest first and the smallest last. These three short sections of text have been upgraded from bullet points to short paragraphs, to make them easier to read.

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