

## Welcome to Say What?! Episode 5

This week, we begin a series called Ten Quick Tips for Terrific Email

And today is Quick Tip #10 - Begin with the end

Start every email with a reader benefit. The idea you want your reader to remember should be the subject line, and/or the first sentence in your email.

There's no doubt information is plentiful throughout your organization. We have fast, easy access to more information than ever before.

But how we *communicate* that information is critical – especially when writing an email. Which most of us do all day long.

And we send 115 emails, then wipe our brow and sigh “whew, I accomplished so much today.”

But we didn't. Not really. We started many tasks. But we didn't necessarily finish them.

Now, email is a wonderful invention.

Search the web and you'll find some controversy about who actually created it, but Ray Tomlinson is generally considered its inventor.

In 1971, when he worked for the Department of Defense, he created a message system to let employees communicate with multiple people, at multiple computers, at the same time.

I'll post a link to brief story about him on the podcast page on my website.

So, most of us are busy every day writing and replying to email.

And when we get busy, we can get careless. Even lazy!

As a result, email can be a blessing, and a curse. There's too much of it, yet we can't seem to live without it.

That's why, it's important to turn the information you want to communicate into knowledge your reader can use.

To cut through the clutter, let your readers focus on your message, and often, compel them to make a decision, or take action.

So consider beginning your email with the end.

Is there a decision you want your reader to make? Put it in the first sentence.

Is there a change to your project schedule? Put that in the subject line.

This lets your reader judge its priority and determine what action to take.

Let your readers know if your email needs their attention now, or if it can wait.

Send it now if you need action now.

Better yet, if you do need an answer right away, perhaps writing email is not the best way to get it.

Maybe pick up the phone, or walk down the hall instead.

Keep your subject line and in fact, all your email, focused on your message.

I would never recommend you think about length or word count. But rather, give your reader what your reader needs to know, and leave out all the rest.

That will help you determine how long your email should be.

Or, if you should be writing more than one email. Maybe you can keep part of your email and send it in a few days, if that will be better for your reader.

Or maybe you're writing to a team, and different people need to know different things. You might send separate emails if everyone doesn't keep to be kept in the loop on all the content.

So consider avoiding the all too common habit of “reply all with a vague answer”

Like Elmore Leonard famously said when asked what makes his books best sellers: “I leave out the parts my readers skip.”

Tell the reader what you will do, or what you expect him to do.

Instead of a vague subject like a quick question

Use something like What’s the new delivery date for product X

Instead of a vague subject like yesterday’s meeting

You could write Answers to Smith Company’s questions

Instead of a subject like info you request. I’d write Proposal from John Sturtevant

Actually, several years ago client suggested that one. She told me she scans her email subject lines and decides what to read first based on their priority.

So ask yourself:

Can the reader learn why I'm writing and what I want, from the subject line and/or the first sentence?

So this week as you're writing emails, why not begin with the end?

Who knows? It might just be the start of a something brilliant!

That's Say What?! For this week. Thanks for listening!

The music on today's episode is from guitarist Robbie Sturtevant. His band, The Quins, are one of the hottest new groups coming out of Boston. Check them out at <https://www.thequinsband.com/> and on Facebook and Instagram @thequins.

Invention of email article

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