

Welcome to Say What?! Episode 6

This week, the second episode in our new series: Ten Quick Tips for Terrific Email

Today is Quick Tip #9 – Writing is a conversation.

Close your eyes for a moment. Unless you're driving.

And open your imagination.

I invite to you to imagine you just walked in to a coffee shop, and you notice someone sitting at a table over by the window.

Is he looking at his phone, or reading a newspaper, or working on his laptop?

Do you know this person well? Or is he someone you recently met?

Or is this the first time you have ever seen this person?

Now imagine you approach the table.

How does he react? Does he look up? Does he smile?

You pull out the chair, and sit across from him.

Does he say your name? Or does he introduce himself?

Do you say anything? If so, what do you say?

Is there a certain reason you came to meet this person today?

Is there something in particular you want to tell this person?

How do you feel at that moment? Are you happy to be there? Or are you uncertain, and maybe even uncomfortable.

How does the other person feel?

Do you imagine he is happy to see you?

Ok. You may open your eyes now.

The scene you just imagined is very much like what happens in our lives every day.

We spend a good part of our time approaching people, and interrupting them, and asking them to pay attention to us.

Except we're usually not face-to-face. We're often sitting at our desks.

And we call that interaction email.

And one disadvantage of email interaction versus face-to-face, is that we can't hear each other, and we can't see each other.

But from now on, when you write an email, I'd like you to imagine you *can* hear and see the other person.

I'd like you to think about how that other person sounds, and how the person looks when you're speaking to him.

And I encourage you to imagine that person will have questions, and will make comments, and will react to things you say.

Just like people do when we're having conversations face-to-face, or over the phone, or even during a Zoom conference.

And if you think about this idea of having a conversation with your reader, it will actually help you write better email.

So if you don't know the person who will read your email, think about the conversation you would have in that imaginary coffee shop.

The person would wonder who you are, and why you just sat down at his table.

So, you might begin your email by introducing yourself. You might let the person know why you've sent this email.

Or, if you do know your reader well, you'd probably skip an introduction and just say "Hi, how are you?" Then get right to the point.

You'd likely let him know what you came to talk about, and why.

So, when you begin your next email, think about your relationship with your reader, and that person's perspective on your topic.

And imagine the conversation you would have with that person.

Start every email with a reader benefit, something of value for your reader.

Often, that is simply identify who you are, and why you're writing.

And be clear about the reason you are writing.

Does your email ask the reader to do something, or make a decision?

Are you asking for something from your reader?

Does the person need any background or context about your topic before you ask him for something?

Think about the best way to communicate with this reader about your topic.

Are there emotions or difficult decisions involved?

Or, are you simply informing the reader about something that doesn't require much explanation.

In either case, pay attention to the your tone, and word choice.

Do the words you use help support your message, and the meaning you want to communicate, or feeling you want your reader to have.

Use your words with intention. Just like you do in face-to-face conversations.

You use different words and different tone with different people, depending on your relationship with them. Certain words with your coworkers, other words and tone with your manager, and then different words and tone with family and friends.

So in your email conversations, your goal is to focus on the information you want your reader to know, or the action you want your reader to take, or a decision you want your reader to make.

And leave out everything that does not help you achieve that goal.

So this week, as you write your many emails, think of each one as a conversation with the reader.

Who knows? You might just discover more than you imagined.

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.