

# Elegant E-mail™



*No one cares how  
much you know,  
until they know how  
much you care...*

*By Matt Weilert,*

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"Beyond Reengineering...The Systems Way"*

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# Introduction

Elegant E-mail™ will help you write more effectively, dress with more flair and sing on key. Well, ok, at least the first one is true, if you will apply the “rich cream of local context to the skim milk of regular e-mail.”

Study and apply the lessons this workbook teaches then use the accompanying chart to apply this new layer of knowledge to the messages you send to prospects, current customers, family and friends on distance shores.

Astute readers will soon notice there are no footnotes. Very extensive endnotes are keyed to passages within the text so the flow is not interrupted for experienced e-mailers, while those hungry for more can slake their appetite at the back of the book.

Good eating from the Rock Eel Café!

MW  
Bastrop, Texas  
4 June 2002

## Let's Get Acquainted with E-mail!

Are you a firm believer in e-mail? Would you say, like so many do "Why do I need to get acquainted with something I've been using for years; it's just like talking." Yes, it is and that's a two-edged sword. How many people that you personally know *like* public speaking? There are stories of military researchers recording fighter pilots vital signs during live-fire dogfights and again later while giving the debriefing lectures. These battle-hardened pilots *were more scared* (higher pulse, more sweating) *during public speaking than under gunfire!*

In civilian life, according to *The Book of Lists*, most people rate giving a speech more fearful than dying! Ancient data (1993) from *Inside Netware* notes that most corporate netizens process 25 or more e-mails daily. More recently, Tally Systems' Randy Britton estimated that the average employee clocks in at 40 minutes a day handling e-mail. From the same article, Forrester Research and Creative Networks estimate an annual lifecycle cost of \$300 to \$4200 per employee for medium to large businesses. As a side note, isn't it interesting that computing is the only arena where being a user is considered a good thing?

When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do

If you're a travel agent targeting affluent travelers for trips to Curaçao in the Netherlands Antilles, wouldn't you appear just a wee bit more authentic if you spell it the way the natives do?

If you're a high tech manufacturer, zeroing in on Nordic OEM prospects, who have the highest technology adoption rates in the Western World, wouldn't a letter addressed to Böðvar Þórisson have more credibility than Mr. Thorisson?

The difference between Frank and François, or Captain Thorbjörnsson and Captain Þorbjörnsson is basically the difference between "good enough" and *rapt attention to a colleague who rewards*

*your effort with his continued patronage, loyalty and good recommendations to others. Which one would you rather have?*

In this case, we are proposing that “good enough” is the enemy of the best. It’s tough enough building effective, durable business relationships these days, especially when cultural and language differences are involved. Long-term relationships are built on trust—in business and in life—and trust can’t be rushed. Trust takes time, the very thing lacking in the lives of supposedly “busy” people. The layout and formatting of the Elegant E-mail™ chart are designed to leverage your ability to create the right atmosphere, one of trust and confidence.

Why and how does this chart build trust? Using the right characters in someone’s name, town, company or product, shows that you’re putting them first. For those addicted to sound bites, we say that “Elegant E-mail™ layers on the rich cream of local context to the skim milk of traditional e-mail.”

Granted none of this makes any difference if you’re not proud of or confident in your product. Elegant E-mail™ (Eemail) is not *the way*, it’s a mile marker *along* the way. Eemail is as much a part of a mature systems thinkers’ toolkit as protocol standards are part of a diplomat’s. The strength of systems thinking is a process for optimizing wholes rather than just a collection of optimized parts.

Because communication must treble for productivity to double, e-mail will be an increasingly vital part of your total communications spectrum in the months and years ahead.

As reported in *The Computer Industry Almanac, March 2002*, internet use projections include:

- Asia, and parts of Europe leading growth in internet use
- US share dropping from 52 percent (1998) down to 29 percent by 2005

*2001 Basis year: 533 million internet users*





That 1998 prediction may have been conservative, as the US share of global internet use currently stands at around 28% in Spring 2002. The Irish firm Nua Research posts continuing updates of global internet subscribers on their website, and tallies the February 2002 total as 544.2 million, with 8.96 per cent of our world on-line.

This is right in line with Harry Dent's discussion of the "S-curve" of technology innovation. Look for global internet use to break 10% between summer 2002 and the end of 2003. Wireless internet access via PDAs and web-enabled cellular phones will climb to nearly half of all internet use, the Almanac predicts.

The way to respect this diversity is to learn a little and grow a little. Elegance is nothing more than *dinky doses of daily discipline*, applied whether you feel like it or not. Good is the enemy of the best.

In European alphabets, symbols that reflect a diversity of heritage far beyond the letters *a through z* are represented by *extended character sets*. In tabletop talk, this basically means the second half of the character map, those with values above ASCII 127. For arcane reasons, values 128, 129, 141-144, 157 and 158 are undefined or blank in the defining international standard. For most people, the MS-Windows operating system defines values 130-140, 145-156 and 159 for them, since these are not officially a part of the standard, but rather added by Microsoft. Imagine that, a private company attempting to alter or extend a consensus standard. Hmmm...

Now can you start to see the wisdom of having a graphic representation to aid you in using the right values? The handy table created just for you, the Elegant E-mail™ Chart, is your ticket to ride on the information superhighway without creating cultural road rage.

The trademark symbol you see throughout this booklet is one such example of an MS-added character or glyph, at value 153. Starting with ASCII 160 through the end of the table, ASCII 255, the International Standards Organization, ISO, has codified Western Latin characters in the character map ISO 8859-1, the flagship of our Elegant E-mail™ library.

Words carry responsibility

Just as there are good speakers and poor speakers, there are responsible e-mailers and irresponsible e-mailers. One of the revolutionary aspects of e-mail networks was how they flattened the corporate pyramid. Suddenly, Joe.Mailboy@company.com had access to the same communications power that the executive suite had wielded for years. If a CEO was going to give a public address in pre-internet days, it was reviewed, honed and polished until it shone.

The wartime adage was that “loose lips sink ships.” Today the reverse is true. We’re drowning in tidal waves of information, much of it not worth the time it takes to decide whether to read it or toss it! Not to worry, grab a cup of your favorite beverage, such as pickled beet juice, roll up your sleeves and let’s learn about effective e-mail together.

To learn what we want, it helps to know what we don’t want. The excerpts below, from an actual e-mail of a fairly successful *direct mail* (!) company owner, first made me double up with laughter, then recoil with amazement; he’s way off the chart on the loss of credibility scale:

- > garenteeing
- > recal a proposal
- > I beleve we mentioned
- > fack that we would
- > we fount another vender.

Without his partner or staff to filter his communication, he had no idea of the impression he was making. The direct access that internet culture encourages means he’s got to master a whole new (for him) dimension of communication. Internet savvy is not better or worse than street savvy, it’s just different; it helps to know the rules of the game before you start playing.

In daily terms, e-mail is a step above a letter and below the telephone. This trade-off between speed and responsiveness can be leveraged as an advantage. We all know how often we’ve called “just to leave a message” and unexpectedly connected directly with the person before we were really ready to talk to them. Many studies have reported that what we say is only 7% of what we communicate. Because the content delivered is not the total experience, in terms of tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures, e-mail has less information richness.

### Rich Media

As with so many things, form follows function. E-mail’s plain characteristics are a feature of the original need to keep bandwidth requirements low, which is Grandma’s two dollar way of saying it takes a smaller pipe to send a note in simple text than it does to send a Russian novel with flowery descriptions and fancy formatting.

We’ve come a long way from Claude Shannon’s original article in the *Bell System Technical Journal*. It is an amusing paradox that as our communication medium grows richer, as the availability of

broadband connections expand, we must focus ever more tightly on the content and the context. It's almost as if we must relearn lessons our grandparents took for granted. Those interested in the fascinating background to the Shannon-Weaver model can learn more in Jeremy Campbell's excellent work, *Grammatical Man*.

The first information explosion was movable type, and next came a common rate of postage independent of distance. Telegraph, then wireless followed. Long-distance, auto-switched phone calls added a new option and yet again, communications soared. E-mail has been yet another communications "explosion" so one hopes it's becoming clear that the nature of progress is anything but linear.

Innovation occurs in fits and starts, bringing with it more options and entirely new ways of talking about our world and relating to those in it. Kuhn's famous paradigm quote can be amusingly corrupted as "shift happens." Perhaps his most significant contribution from the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is the framework for understanding innovation and the predictable pathways along which it will succeed and the predictable resistance a new technology or process will face.

Face-to-face communication is the richest, yet not the most effective, nor efficient medium for every transaction. Choosing the appropriate tool from your toolbox reflects mastery of your craft, as a samurai uses "just enough" force but no more. As Musashi says so often in *The Book of Five Rings*, "think deeply about this."

#### An Interim Solution

Elegant E-mail™ is a part of that framework for understanding innovation, a set of tools and processes for the interim period between bandwidth as a scarce commodity and holographic video-conferencing on-demand. George Gilder has made an entire industry of predicting and describing a future world of "infinite bandwidth." Yeah. Right.

Tell that to a small West Texas School District that prays for the day when the Telco actually installs new copper or at the outside hope, ISDN. Broadband? Dream on, less than 10% of the country (at this writing the figure is something above 3%) has reliable land-based (affordable) broadband access.

#### A Brief Rant

Just a side note to all those Outlook users out there. Do your entire address book a favor and delete your graphic "stationery" and

use straight text. Repeat after me: I will not forward virus warnings, AOL did not personally select me, and I won't lose all my friends, family and possessions in the next 15 minutes, if I break the chain by *not forwarding*.

Why not forward virus warnings? Simple. The most insidious virus is the one that attacks your time use and your business resources. Think. Ask. Urbanlegends.com is a good source for debunking virus hoaxes, and many other stories.

One way to avoid so many viruses is to install anti-virus software both at the server level (your IT people's job) and on the desktop (shared responsibility on many systems). There are lots of consumer-oriented choices and then there is stuff that works. Sophos is the only real anti-virus choice for people who are serious about remaining virus-free.

Another way is to have one of your technically inclined friends switch you to a real e-mail client such as Pegasus, Eudora Pro, Lotus Notes or cc:Mail. Why switch? Outlook is a petri dish... If you have to use Outlook because of an IT director who needs lithium supplements, have your friend show you how to setup Outlook to autoforward, and use your new client transparently.

Enough ranting. If you are looking for more specifics, please surf over to [www.eelhost.com/contactus.html](http://www.eelhost.com/contactus.html) and write up your question in the "details" box. We'll be sure to point you in the right direction, even if we haven't the time to give you a fully detailed answer.

Wireless Internet: the transitional solution

Are there solutions on the horizon? You bet, and Gilder's predictions are as savvy as any. His timing may not be. However, at the local level, wireless broadband can provide transitional solutions that give your local hospital, school, city government and library the speed you need with both economy and flexibility. Contact us or your local tech guru for details.

## 2

# First Things First: Begin with the Wind in Mind

## Comprehension is key

Our chapter title may sound similar to a well-known *highly effective* phrase yet it contains a crucial difference: you can tell from where the wind is coming, yet there's no guarantee where it will end up. A telegram is a great mental model to use in composing your message since you need to be concise yet clear so that your reader and those onto whom she passes it can grok it, or digest and comprehend it *as quick as the wind*.

The fifteen word economy limit of Western Union's bygone days would put most of us into the habit of thinking through what we say before we say it, surely a benefit. Responsible e-mail says only what needs to be said and no more. It always carries the address of whomever is actually sending it.

Repeat after me, "spamming is the mark of the beast." Well, that may be a little harsh, but the fact of the matter is, people are busy enough with valid e-mails without having to deal with hard-porn teasers, get-rich-quick schemes and stock-chasing tips filling up their in-box. Later, in chapter 3 we'll show how to avoid e-mail harvesters with an elegant flair.

## A Smiley a Day Keeps Confusion Away

Emoticons or smileys in common parlance, were actually not the first attempt to put some richness back in this grandson of the Teletype. A kind of freeze-dried phrasebook came into being during live-chat sessions of the bulletin board era where typing speed was a large part of the *being there feeling*. Such constructs as:

LOL      Laughing Out Loud  
IMHO     In My Humble Opinion

ROFL Rolling On the Floor Laughing  
YMMV Your Mileage May Vary

made me feel like I was heir to the secret handshake whenever I sat down to have a chat with my globally dispersed buddies. Today bulletin board systems have migrated onto the web. The newest action is coming from teens in Northern Europe using the short message system, (SMS) with its 160 character limit, communicating via cellphones, and portable digital assistants (PDAS). I suspect SMS phraseology will keep linguistics grad students busy for some time.

*So when do we get to the heart of this elegant e-mail thingie already?*

If you can't wait, the actual step-by-step instructions start in chapter three. Although, it may be wise to point out, elegance is built upon a foundation of patience and understanding, both of which take time. Relax, there's a cold carrot cocktail right here with your name on it, enjoy! Our legal beagles made us say this: it's Elegant E-mail™.

Why Bother with Elegant E-mail™?

Well, if you're having good luck with your pigeons, I would not change a thing. If, however, and this is an if only you can decide, you want to join the new millennium elite who recognize that getting your

- prospect
- client or
- friend

interested in your

- ideas,
- services or
- products

starts with becoming genuinely interested in them; *then* as a valued player in this transactional economy which is ultimately based on interpersonal interaction, it might be wise to consider the tips herein, and share our Elegant E-mail™ web address

[www.skerja.net/eemail.html](http://www.skerja.net/eemail.html) with others so they can get their own copy. Three things are at the heart of all interpersonal interaction: you, me and the union as our wordplay on page 9 indicates.

# inter

personal  
action

## Why I Need Elegant E-mail™

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## My Most Important Interactions:

Daily:

Weekly:

Fortnightly:

Monthly:

Quarterly:

Semi-annually:

Yearly:

Biennially:

## In summary

The business communication hierarchy can be summed up as:

1) **Face to face** with a timed agenda, when the matter requires interaction and the politics of the situation require the nuances of presence. **Video-conferencing** can be an acceptable substitute in many cases. Often, politics and egos are what drive the need for presence.

2) **Telephone** with a timed agenda, when either economics or geography (or both) preclude face-to-face or video-conference.

3) **E-mail** that is written, edited and spell-checked prior to sending. Yes, you may need to answer mail in the airport waiting lounge, especially now that you've got more time than ever to wait since the tragedies of September 11th. Some things never change: better done right the first time than done over.

All that being said, the need for proximity will never go away. We are a species that is hard-wired for community, the need to belong, the need to be "in communion" with one another. E-mail management, no matter how effective, is not leadership. Even academic researchers recognize that. Henry Mintzberg remarks that "...while systematic data create the foundation for our theories, it is the anecdotal data that enable us to do the building ... We need to be 'in touch.'"

E-mail is perfect for things like providing background to a diverse audience without killing a forest. Sorry, Kinko's®, not everyone needs a copy. While personal e-mail need not exercise the same rigour, it's helpful. Elegant E-mail™ is an aspect of systems thinking and as such, drives knowledge-based solutions from the heart of the enterprise to its sometimes fuzzy edge, and back again.



Systems thinking helps firms throughout the customer value chain with solutions that address the effectiveness, hence the profit, of operating wholes, rather than just optimizing the parts. As painful as it was, the Enron debacle reinforced timeless truths that had fallen out of favor. Systems thinking solutions stand in polar opposition to accounting make-believe or Band-Aids® that supply quarterly fiction to placate FirstCall. For a brief introduction to systems thinking mindsets and methods, visit [www.skerja.net/systhink/](http://www.skerja.net/systhink/) and feel free to send any questions to [inquiry@eelhost.com](mailto:inquiry@eelhost.com).

DO NOT  
COPY



# Pre-coding E-mail Responses in HTML

## Our First Example

*This example explains the basics of pre-coding e-mails to lower the threshold of effort for reader interaction. By providing our human-style name as well as the often cryptic e-mail address, we coax more thoughts out of the brain, through the fingers into the mail, where we can learn from them. Knowledge not shared is effectively lost.*

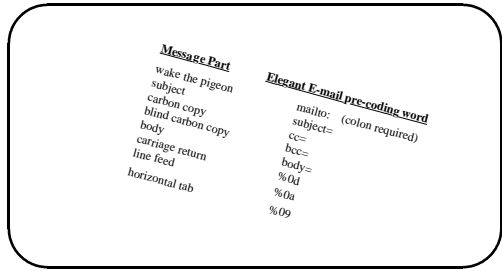
*We welcome your comments as you learn individual ways to incorporate Elegant E-mail™ concepts into your work and your web sites. Send your comments to [comments@eelhost.com](mailto:comments@eelhost.com) and [register](#) for member access to the Rock Eel Café, world's first systems thinking virtual coffeehouse. Visit the Café by pointing your browser to: [www.eelhost.com/login.html](http://www.eelhost.com/login.html)*

**With a little bit of clever coding, you can save your on-line reader some time & effort. Isn't that what Customer Service is all about? This example is how to pre-code e-mail responses for the three major browsers, Netscape, Opera and Internet Explorer. Your mileage may vary on alternative browsers such as Konqueror.**

An on-line asset

Surf to [www.skerja.net](http://www.skerja.net) and choose a news release from the press room. Click on the address link in the upper left and viola! up pops a ready-to-complete message pre-addressed with Name, Subject and of course, shoe size and frequent flyer seat selection...

The keys to this nifty trick are the ASCII code equivalents of the space and the right & left brackets. We'll cover three distinct uses for the Eemail Chart: text, html construction and web page e-mail pre-formatting. In the contact block there is a link that started life as an ordinary mailto:-style link. Let's take it apart:



*Piece by piece*

Since the last shall be first, we'll start with e-mail pre-formatting codes.

**mailto:** the prefix that sends a wake up call to the browser

*Harold, wake up, he's going to send the pigeon...*

**Name%20or%20Title%20of%20Office**

The % tells the software that "the next character is going to mean something special, so pay attention." As we can read from our *Elegant E-mail™* chart, %20 is the hexadecimal value for a space. This is the heart of elegantly e-mailing: invoking the minor flourishes of good manners. Spaces, punctuation and language-specific characters show respect and attention to detail for your recipient.

**%3caddress%40ndomain.com%3e**

The sequence of characters that encloses the e-mail name or title, such as "csr" (short for "customer service representative"), serves as a "container." The *Elegant E-mail™* chart tells us that hex(adecimal) 3c, the less-than symbol, "<" opens the container, while hex 3e, the greater-than symbol, ">" closes it. Using hex 40 instead of the @ sign will keep web-sniffing robots programmed to search for "@" from harvesting your address. At least until the buggers learn and adapt.

Confused? Well, we'll solve that: along the left side of the chart, look under the Hexadecimal column, which we'll refer to as hex from now on, and find the "3x" entry. It's the second one down from the top. Hex is a base-16 number system, instead of the base-10 we're used to in daily life.

So when the language designers needed single digit values to represent 10-15, they chose letters. Why not 10-16? Math people are funny that way, they start with zero instead of one, meaning that sixteen places runs up to the number 15. In hex, "a" through "f" replace 10 through 15. Web wizards encounter this daily in the hex

“triplet” color selections of red, blue and green which they use in their web pages.

Finishing up with the container brackets, decimal 48 (left side, second row) plus decimal 16 equals decimal 62, which in hex, or base-16 is 3e. Converting between the two is easy:

*Base-10 (Decimal) to Base-16 (Hex)*

1. Divide by the base into which you’re converting.

$$62/16 = 3.875$$

2. Discard the mantissa, which is that part to the right of the decimal point, the fractional part, leaving us with 3, which corresponds to the 3x of our second row.

3. Multiply this quotient by the base.

$$3 \cdot 16 = 48$$

4. Subtract from our original number the value in #3.

$$62 - 48 = 14$$

5. Read across the top (or from memory eventually)

$$\text{dec } 14 = \text{hex } e$$

6. Put the parts together

$$3 \text{ and } e = 3e$$

*Base-16 (Hex) to Base-10*

1. Expand each placeholder

hex 3e will be processed as hex  $3 \cdot x^n$  and hex  $e \cdot x^{n-1}$  where  $x = 16$  in this case, the base from which we are converting.

2. Multiply each placeholder by 16 raised to the appropriate power of 10 corresponding to its position.

$$3 \cdot 16^1 + 14 \cdot 16^0 \text{ (noting that anything to the$$

“zeroth” power is equal to 1), so:

3. Sum the total

$$(3 \cdot 16 = 48) + (14 \cdot 1) = 62$$

## ?subject=Fabric%20of%20Facts

*Our example subject line provides an important rationale for pre-coding our e-mails to be elegantly processed by servers of all flavors.*

The newest edition of the Hypertext protocol approved by the World Wide Web Consortium, w3.org, correctly processes spaces and has more descriptors for individual language alphabets, so sometime

in the future, our ASCII chart won't be required. The heart of elegance is making others look good even when they don't know what they're missing. It's beyond common courtesy, it's actively caring.

## A More Involved Example

*For our younger viewers: don't try this @ home...  
...Just kidding!*

Here we cover multiple addressees and body copy. As in the first example the question mark “?” serves as the lead-in to multiple message parts, just as the colon “:” provides the initial addressee lead-in. By connecting other message parts with “&” quite complex pre-formatting is possible.

<u>Message Part</u>	<u>Elegant E-mail™ code</u>
wake the pigeon	mailto: (colon required)
@ sign	%40
subject	subject=
carbon copy	cc=
blind carbon copy	bcc=
body	body=
carriage return	%0d
line feed	%0a
horizontal tab	%09

### Step by step

*Let's make up a tasty morsel (to be served as your final exam) from an elegant e-mail recipe.*

Nearly any brief message can be constructed as an elegantly pre-formatted e-mail.

The latest innovation in on-site contractor management is the rather wacky-sounding acronym CUCOO. What it lacks in press appeal it makes up in organizational efficiencies spanning departmental boundaries, even where linguistic differences may exist.



them, these nations are poised for the most explosive growth of the decade as these economies overcome the seventy-year mistake of tunnel-vision central planning and Communist economies. Thankfully, browsers come equipped with multiple character sets to accommodate multiple alphabets.

If your browser offers the option, choose “Unicode-8” for the most universal coverage. For much of Eastern Europe, the ISO Latin-2, or more distinctly speaking, ISO-8859-2 character set provides these glyphs for values 160 to 255. Excellent background is available from <http://sizif.mf.uni-lj.si/linux/cee/charset.html>, the opening screenshot of which is reproduced on page 19.

Since our goal is an international audience with consistent HTML construction, we have issued our ISO-8859-1 character map first. The write-once, run-anywhere features of Sun Microsystems Javascript and the standards-compliant sister product, ECMAScript, have standardized on the Latin-1 charset rather than Unicode. More well informed is more well prepared, so use what is most appropriate for your local context and target environment.

Very briefly, let’s cover the other two obvious aspects of the Eemail charmap:

*Text Input*

For text input during normal writing, hold down the alt key while entering the decimal values from the chart. Use leading zeros as necessary to input four places.

*Web page or html construction*

Use the decimal values from the chart, yet envelope them as follows: `&#value;` where the ampersand is just like the mailto: and the decimal values do not have leading zeros. When using entity names rather than entity values, drop the number sign and use only the opening ampersand and closing semi-colon.

*Show your creativity!*

Have you found a novel use for the Eemail Charmap? Send your examples to [chart@eelhost.com](mailto:chart@eelhost.com) and we’ll review them. Nifty applications which receive our panel’s thumbs up will get an Elegant E-mail™ logo shirt or cap.





# A Ć Š Ő Ł Ü Đ

## Latin 2 Fonts

**Disclaimer: The information is provided as is. Please report any corrections and additions to the maintainer.**

**What is ISO 8859-2?**

The latest innovation in on-site contractor management is the rather wacky-sounding acronym CUC00. What it lacks in press appeal it makes up in organizational efficiencies spanning departmental boundaries, even where linguistic differences may exist. The Common Unit Connector Operating Organisation has these outstanding characteristics (etc, etc, etc) - Your point of contact for European Union East branch is B086vor P086laxson.

Save: CUC00's the Word Not B000 in % of all Gov't Contracting

The latest innovation in on-site contractor management is the rather wacky-sounding acronym CUC00. What it lacks in press appeal it makes up in organizational efficiencies spanning departmental boundaries, even where linguistic differences may exist. The Common Unit Connector Operating Organisation has these outstanding characteristics (etc, etc, etc) - Your point of contact for European Union East branch is B086vor P086laxson.



# Writing as a Technology that Transforms Thought

## Content Still Rules

The title of this chapter is drawn from a lecture series that Walter Ong, S.J. gave as a Diocesan workshop in Sacramento Calif, back in the fall of 1989. While it's beyond the scope of this little booklet to summarize Fr. Ong's day-long workshop, keeping a few simple goals in mind can drastically improve one's ability to communicate, which is what Elegant E-mail™ is all about.

- Write less, say more
- Write like you mean it
- Know your audience, write directly to them, not at them, below them, or above them.

Write less, say more

Fr. Ong's seminars, discussions and books focus almost entirely on communication, with an emphasis on how writing has transformed societies. This is not just reiterating the timeless messages in Strunk and White, although those need to be continually reviewed and applied. This is a far bigger bird.

Writing transforms sound into semi-permanence, and takes an event, a moment in time, and captures it. Regular e-mail is not interactive, one can only respond to writing by writing; that is unless you're one of those who talks back to a book, or a tv set, etc. Fr. Ong's startling thesis, that love is essential to communication, captivated all of us. Right there in public, he used the L-word. I couldn't believe it. After the rest of the talks and reading much of Ong's work, I can believe it. Watching it in action in dozens of environments across three continents, *it has transformed my life*. He is very forceful that languages direct thoughts and thoughts direct actions. Without

this love, Ong contends, and I agree, you may hear each other, yet you won't "connect" in the manner than inspires hope, trust and confidence. All the things a leader does which the organization requires are delivered as words, yet ring hollow if not fulfilled by human action. You speak with the mind, you communicate with the heart.

On the one hand, leaders should write with passion. Staff members and individual contributors, on the other hand, can take the good advice of Admiral Bob Inman, to "write like your superiors' speak." Avoid writing in the passive voice, not only is it deadly (boring), it lies: people make commitments, have responsibilities, and execute actions. Titles and committees don't.

**Write like you mean it, *and mean it!***

My hunch is that within ten words of an e-mail, someone can tell how you feel about them. Even fewer in person, where perhaps no words at all are spoken! The point? People do business with people they like, when they have a choice. When they don't have that choice, get ready for a backlash. Another sound bite we frequently use at Rock Eel Café is "treasure people and exploit tools" since tools don't hold grudges or work harder to please.

This is basic Grandma stuff: please and thank you, say what you mean and mean what you say. When you have to make a correction, make it about the action or the event, not the person. Someone who reviews your letterbook, or your correspondence logs should find three to five times more praise than reproof.

If your people are messing up, are you guessing why? Really? Find out if they haven't been given the tools to succeed, perhaps don't know what constitutes success, or they know exactly what they're doing and you're seeing the result.

GH McKnight's studies have shown that 25% of all spoken English conversations consist of only nine words, and 50% is captured in a vocabulary of only 43 words. When the Nielsen-Norman Group recommends cutting print content roughly one-third for on-line use, the need for excellence in grammar and syntax should be more clear than ever.

The solution is so obvious many overlook it: one becomes a better writer by writing. Learn the craft as you would learn any other. Make your day-to-day assignments your syllabus, since the last thing any of us needs is more to do.

## **Write to your audience**

Walker Gibson's very useful book, *Tough, Sweet and Stuffy*, is one of the few places I've found content and construction analyzed in a manner that can be adapted by nearly any personality. Go to your local library, use interlibrary loan if you have to, or patronize your local used bookstore and review Gibson's many examples. Gain an understanding of the how-and-why to adjust your writing style to the purpose at hand. Take your own strengths and hone them, rather than trying to reinvent who you are.

One of the driving reasons to make the effort to become a better, more effective communicator is simply because "what goes around, comes around." As mentioned at the outset, we are awash in information today. If you do your part to reduce the torrent to a gentle rain, everyone wins. Keep the Western Union economy rate 15-word limit in mind, write as if you had to pay for every word.

A compact message takes less time to read, less time to understand and after all, "time is money." It was true twenty-two centuries ago, when Diogenes Laertius quoted Theophrastes, "Our costliest expenditure is time." It's just as true today, when *Fast Company* Magazine quoted Thornton May, "The key questions are 'Where do you spend your time?' and 'Where do your customers spend their time?'...you want more of their time." A way to get it is to demonstrate you respect it by using it wisely.



# Epilogue

## Actively Caring is the Heart of eLEGANCE

We distinguish ourselves from the masses by working smart and working hard, rather than by our massive advertising budgets attempting to convince you that the *bug* is really a *feature*. We solve most of the flaws on our end, so that our recipient gets a message that's much easier to read, so it's much easier to understand. Creating understanding among your clients, whether it's your boss, your patient, your spouse or your kid sister, is just about the best systems thinking lesson anyone can teach.

No matter what your public-school upbringing may have told you, the Golden Rule has never been disproven or repealed. It is the best business course ever written. In nine words, "Do Unto Others As You Want Done Unto You", summarizes three economic classics, *The Wealth of Nations*, *The Road of Serfdom* and *Compassionate Capitalism*, at a savings of let's say, a couple of thousand pages total, in these three works. So in addition to learning Elegant E-mail™, you learned time management and speed reading as well.

Keep the faith,



**Matthew E. Weilert**  
Kaffihús Skerjasteinbítur





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15 word econo my limit ...

for those who are rabid about reading every single reference, be sure to e-mail us for the amusing story of an English officer's one-word

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**<http://www.knowledgeproducts.net/know-products/wealofnat.html>**

# Glossary

**Bandwidth:** The capacity of a transmission line to carry signals. More bandwidth means the line, whether copper (used for traditional analog phone lines), or glass cables (used for fibre optic transmissions), can carry more information in total and often implies a higher traffic threshold (volume per unit time) as well.

**Broadband:** High-capacity transmission lines, either delivered over coaxial cable, fibre optic cable, or sometimes via satellite, which are an order of magnitude faster than dial-up connections.

**Browser:** Software that displays integrated text, audio, video and still graphics, in a visual user interface with hyperlinks through the interconnected computers that we collectively call the internet. One “surfs” the ‘net with a browser. Netscape, Opera, Internet Explorer have Windows, Mac, Linux and other flavors, while Konqueror is open source, focused on Linux.

**Bulletin Board System (bbs):** a text-based messaging system that predates “live-chat,” “real-time chat,” “instant messaging” and the like. Typically, there was a two or more panel layout on the screen where you typed in the bottom and read the group transcript in the top.

**Emoticons:** see Smileys.

**FirstCall:** Thompson FirstCall is an “earnings reporting service” for publicly held companies. While it has established itself as the defacto standard in Wall Street earnings estimates reporting; it is a curious bird that should be fed salt then plucked...*IMHO!*

**Glyph:** the graphical representation of a letter, sometimes used interchangeably with *letterform*.

**Grok:** a term arising out of Unix labs and popularized by Doug Englebreit, among others. It means to understand immediately; little or no ambiguity.

**Harvest:** In an internet context, to extract an e-mail address from a web page.

**Portable Digital Assistant (PDA):** Hand-sized or palm-sized devices, most often using the Palm® operating system, that provide word-processing, spreadsheet, e-mail and in some instances, voice and internet capability, with the capability to link to other PDAs and full-size computers to share or “synchronize” information.

**Short Message System (SMS):** Packet messaging fixed at 160 characters long, that are transmitted between cellular (mobile) phones or PDAs. Often SMS messages are not charged air-time fees, making them similar to instant messaging services.

**Smiley:** the sideways combination of characters, such as colon, hyphen, parentheses :-) that resembles a sideways face. There are hundreds of smileys in use today, they serve as the tone of voice, the raised eyebrow or the smirks of face-to-face communication. This is a fine example of the necessity of “Information Richness,” as Daft & Lengel describe in their paper cited above.

**Spamming:** in internet terms, refers not to the Hormel Corporation potted meat product, Spam®, but rather is defined as sending one or more (typically many, often in the thousands) unsolicited electronic messages. Unlike camping days of yore, you can’t grill this type of Spam® and enjoy it between crackers. The phrase was adapted from a Monty Python skit.

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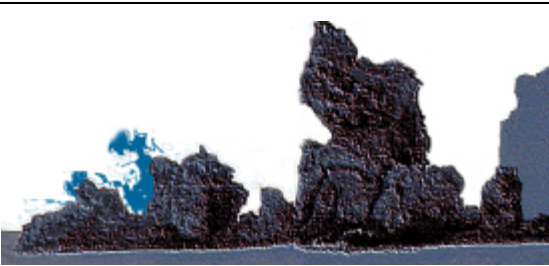


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