

That First Draft Is for You! Don't Send It!

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Speaking to an audience of aspiring presenters, radio personality Jack Bogut said, “The story gets shorter in the telling.”

Bogut was reminding his audience of the benefits of rehearsing out loud. If you run through a story out loud before a presentation, you'll stumble over details that are relevant to you but not to the listener. You'll hear “clutter” that will distract the listener and dilute the impact of your story. Once you remove the clutter, the story will become shorter and more powerful.

A similar principle works in written communication. The first draft of an e-mail, letter, or report reflects the perspective of the writer. It also reflects the investment of the writer in the subject. The message naturally starts at the beginning of the issue and carries on to the end, including details about a project's background or evolution.

A percentage of the information in any first draft is irrelevant to the reader. The first draft serves the purpose of getting the story out of the writer's head and onto paper or a screen. The first draft is for you, the writer, to help you organize your thoughts.

Often, the reader doesn't need the beginning or even the middle of a story. The reader needs to know the conclusions, the benefits (from a reader's perspective), actions requested, and deadlines. Most everything else is clutter.

The information overload in your mail is exacerbated by the clutter that comes when people send their first drafts. Improve *your* communication by making a commitment to avoid sending your own first drafts. Keep that first draft for yourself. Send the second or third draft—the one that's shorter and more powerful.

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