

Make Your Message Concise: Delete Information Clutter

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I ask participants in my seminars to describe the criteria they use to decide when to read an e-mail or document rather than delete, toss, or save it for later. The top two criteria are consistent: People read messages that are *concise* and that go directly *to the point*.

It's easy to declare that others should write concisely and directly. Making the messages you write confirm to these criterion is a more difficult matter. Perhaps the words of professional organizer, Patty Kreamer, can help: "Clutter is nothing more than unmade decisions." According to Kreamer, piles of papers are simply papers you've avoided tossing, filing, or acting upon.

Unnecessary information clutters a message in the same way that extra papers can clutter your desk. Get rid of information clutter by taking a few minutes to think of your message from the perspective of the receiver. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the reader need this information to understand the point?
- Does the reader care about these details?
- Could some of this background information be put into an appendix or accessed via a link?
- Have I removed excess information that obscures the main selling points of my idea or recommendation?

When the answer to any question is "No," make a decision to delete the material involved. Remove the clutter. You'll increase the odds that receivers will read and act on your message.

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