

# Reporting on progress in English – Principles 11 to 15

Many of us continue to work remotely and it matters that we produce concise and effective progress updates to our customers, colleagues and other contacts. This article focuses on a set of best practice principles designed to inform the writing of effective progress updates. Part three of our series covers principles 11 to 15. Please refer back to my previous articles for the first 10 principles.

## **Principle 11. Using (but not overusing) the passive voice to provide efficient updates**

Using the passive voice to highlight completed actions, can be a clean and efficient way of communicating progress. It gives focus to the product, process, system... in situations where the subject is not so relevant.

**Example:** The new sales platform was successfully launched.

**Example:** 56 customer requests were answered to time.

However, in keeping with our previous articles, don't over use the passive voice. It can come across as too cold and detached in a progress email. A combination of the active and passive voice ensures a more personal but still efficient progress update.

**Example:** Absence rates have remained low in the last three months. I am really proud of the team in how they have dealt with these exceptional circumstances.

## **Principle 12. A good way to start a progress update**

If you are providing a progress update to a senior manager or somebody you don't communicate with every day, we recommend

using a polite opening expression. Some examples are highlighted below. If you work very closely with the contact, you may consider going directly to the *intro to subject*.

### Examples:

- **Opener:** I hope you remain well in this difficult period.
- **Opener:** I hope your week is starting well.
- **Intro to subject:** Please find a summary of my/our performance against our targets, objectives, KPIs in preparation for our meeting on...
- **Intro to subject:** Please find an update on/overview/summary of our progress over the ...
- **Intro to subject:** Please find a review of the last month, quarter, 12 months, etc...

### Principle 13. Achieving continuity in the middle of your progress update

It is important that your progress email is focused and concise. There are a range of good expressions you can use to highlight information and metrics. Please find some examples below.

- **Main:** I would like to highlight/to focus on/to draw attention to ...
- **Main:** Overall, on average, the overall trend is, the underlying trend is...
- **Main:** I believe the reason for this, I would suggest this is caused by, this can be explained by..
- **Main:** We have successfully achieved/delivered against/met our targets.
- **Main:** We had a number of issues that prevented us achieving...
- **Main:** It has been a successful, positive, productive, challenging, demanding, month/quarter year, etc.

## Principle 14. Ending your progress email well

In similarity to how you start an email, you need to judge how polite the end transition should be. However, whether the context is semi-formal or formal, we recommend a closing phrase to give the email a professional tone.

### More formal examples:

- **Finish:** If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me.
- **Finish:** I look forward to talking this through in more detail.
- **Finish:** If you need any further information, please do let me know.

### Semi-formal examples:

- **Finish:** If you have any questions do get back in contact.
- **Finish:** Let me know if any further info is needed.
- **Finish:** I look forward to catching up.

## Principle 15. Judging the tone of your email.

In judging the tone of your email these two expressions need to be used very carefully, if at all, in a progress update.

### 'Sorry'

- Avoid overusing the expression 'I am sorry', in the wrong context it can sound too emotional.
- Consider using 'I/we would like to apologise for...'

### 'Promise'

- Avoid overusing the expression 'I promise', in the wrong context it can also sound too emotional.
- Consider using 'I/we would like to assure you that...'