K.I.S.S.

Applying the K.I.S.S. Principle to Advanced Business English in Higher Education

Rachel Lindner
University of Paderborn
The teaching context

Paderborn University: http://www.uni-paderborn.de/
The principle of K.I.S.S.

- Keep it Simple, Stupid!
- Keep it Short and Simple!

Kelly Johnson
Lockwood Skunk Works
http://www.wvi.com/~sr71webmaster/kelly.htm
The principle of K.I.S.S.

‘Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.’

Leonardo da Vinci

Google images
The principle of K.I.S.S.

‘It seems that perfection is reached not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.’

Antoine de Saint Exupéry
The principle of K.I.S.S.

‘Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler.’

Albert Einstein
Brevity

‘The concise and exact use of words when speaking and writing.’

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary
Brevity

‘The concise and exact use of words when speaking and writing.’
*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*

‘The report is a masterpiece of brevity.’

‘It is far better to write a well-structured paper marked by brevity than to compose a long but poorly constructed piece.’

‘When it comes to giving a well-constructed speech or sermon, brevity is often the order of the day.’

‘Newspapers often edit letters to the editor for clarity and brevity.’
Brevity

‘Brevity is the soul of wit’
Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2
Brevity

‘He that uses many words for explaining a subject, doth, like the cuttlefish, hide himself for the most part in his own ink.’

John Ray, 1692
Situated professional English

- First impressions (rapport building, small talk, interviews etc.)
- Briefing
- Pitching
- Marketing message
- Executive summaries
- Internet presence
- Correspondence
What skills does brevity require?

- Ability to reformulate, paraphrase, summarise etc.
- Precision of language
- Clarity of language
- Ability to distil the main message to its essence
- Ability to select essential information
- Editing skills
- Focussing in rather than out
Task types

Elevator pitch

- Sell a product, an idea, market yourself for a job in as long as it takes for the elevator to get to the top floor
Task types

Dragon’s Den

Convince a team of investors (the other students) to invest money in their business model. 5 minutes with props.
Crowd funding
People looking for investment have to convince potential private investors with the help of a 3-minute video to invest in their product.
Task types

Pecha Kucha: 20 Powerpoint slides at 20 seconds per slide rolling on automatic so students have to be time perfect. 6 minutes 40 seconds.
Task types

Science slam

- Present your research in 5 minutes
- 4 slides only!
Task types

Writing abstracts

The skills of reducing your research transparently in 180 words.

See Swales and Feak, 2009

Research exposés. A 400-word document describing your research motivation and intentions.

Article reviews. A 300-word review of an academic paper
Task types

- Blog
- Forums
- Twitter

Online writing with word limits
Key characteristics of brevity activities

Scaffolding

Word counts

Time limits

Every Word Counts!

DEADLINES don’t KILL.
Student responses to tasks

• ‘Having to present complicated themes within a few minutes was a *challenging task* and it helped to improve my *time management*.’

• ‘Students often include too many facts for brief summaries. *During my army time I learned that you often do not have much time to make a decision or to give an order, especially in critical situations. I expect this to be rather similar in a business context* and I think working to time and word limits should be done more often for this reason.’

• ‘Even though I consider myself to have good skills, I almost find it *more difficult to write short texts like abstracts than longer papers*. It was really important for me to practise editing for smaller word counts.’

• ‘I think through these shorter presentations it was *easier for me to reflect and to work on improving my skills* in a following presentation.’