

Write Better E-Mail, Only \$2,000 a Day

When is a simple English lesson not elementary?
When it's high-tech.

Millions of dollars flow daily into new high-tech companies: for example, in 1995, venture capitalists poured nearly \$1 billion into software alone. It's not only 20-something tech geeks who are cashing in. Leslie O'Flahavan and Marilynne Rudick, two former teachers, are the co-founders of e-write, a Maryland-based consulting firm that teaches companies to compose better e-mail. O'Flahavan and Rudick admit they have no technological expertise, but they sure know how to exploit the cyberboom. They get \$2,000 for a day's worth of advice on how to tighten sentences and shorten paragraphs on-line. "Writing is a new skill when it's applied to new technologies," say the pair.

The drill goes something like this. O'Flahavan and Rudick sit down with employees at companies like Lockheed Martin and Cable & Wireless, in international telecommunications company, and offer such tips as "Always organize before writing" or "Use a format that facilitates reading" or—our favorite—"You can't hide poor writing." If it all sounds a lot like Mrs. Bunmaster, your tenth-grade English teacher, don't be surprised: that's what a number of executives surveyed said, too. As Joanne Serling, an account manager at Wilson McHenry in New York, notes, "If you can't write, you've got bigger problems than any e-mail course can fix."

So why are companies willing to shell out big bucks for e-write's "expertise"? Malcolm CasSelle, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who had no trouble finding several million dollars in funding for his own start-up on-line service, understands it completely. "If you ride a fad, you can write your own price tag." Perhaps. But we thought the prudent manager might appreciate a few alternatives to \$2,000 a day for simple instructions. That's what we're here for.

e-write

- E-mail writing seminar, four hours
- Est. cost: \$100 per person (on-site), \$150-200 per person (off-site)

U.C. at Berkeley

- Doctoral program in English, six years
- Est. tuition per day (out of state): \$52

The Career Center, N.Y.

- Internet class, four hours
- Cost: \$59

Univ. of Iowa Guided Correspondence Study

- Correspondence course, nine months
- Est. cost per day: \$1

Emily Post's Etiquette, by Elizabeth L. Post

- Book includes tips on writing better e-mail: "E-mail should follow the form of typewritten memos and be succinct and professional."
- Cost: \$30