

Naming Best Practices

What's in a name? In short, everything. A strong name has the power to inform, educate and create an instant bond with your audience. A weak, overly-complex or inaccurate name creates confusion, disinterest and apathy.

1. LESS IS MORE.

Think about the speed at which you drive past a business, click through a webpage or walk down a street. Your audience needs to be able to read and comprehend who you are—whether they see your name as part of your logo signature, on a sign, online or in printed collateral—in the blink of an eye.

Quick fixes:

When it comes to organizational naming, removing the oft-used “Department of” or “Office of” not only cuts down considerably on the length of your name, but has little or no impact to your audience.

Examples:

- University Communications, instead of *Office of University Communications*
- Human Resources, instead of *Department of Human Resources*
- Institutional Research & Effectiveness, instead of *Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness*. Even better = *Institutional Research*.

When it comes to selecting a name, put yourself in the audience's position and ask “Is this necessary? Does it make sense?”

Example:

- *The Office of Advancement, Events, Community Engagement and Alumni Relations* may accurately describe who you are and what you do—but who wants to say (or read) that, when *Advancement* says the same thing?

Avoid jargon and acronyms in naming. Less may be more, but too little is even worse. Acronyms and industry jargon may be an acceptable shorthand when communicating internally, but externally they are almost always perceived as bureaucratic, elitist and nonsensical.

Examples:

- Using the group above, how memorable do you think it would be if they renamed themselves *OAECEAR*?
- CAPE = the *Center for Advancing Personal Excellence*. Based on their name, can you tell me what they do? Do they “own” “advancing personal excellence”?

Think long term. Take it from us: you only want to rename once. Every name change requires your audience to re-acquaint itself with you, and the public responds very slowly to change. Your name should stand the test of time—which makes the best practices above even more vital.

