

"If getting your message across matters to you, this is the way to do it."
—ARIANNA HUFFINGTON, founder & CEO, Thrive

Smart Brevity

THE
POWER
OF SAYING
MORE
WITH LESS

CO-
CREATORS
OF AXIOS &
POLITICO

Jim VandeHei, Mike Allen
and Roy Schwartz

Smart Brevity: Writing for Busy Readers



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Words > (Time + Attention)



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344+

daily phone checks

125+

business emails

17 ms

to make a decision

26 sec

average read time

1 in 3

**critical emails
unread**

“It’s no wonder the old ways of communicating fail to land amid this unfolding chaos.”

- Smart Brevity

There's a great power in words, if you don't hitch too many of them together.

- Josh Billings, author

BREVITY = CONFIDENCE

(Length = fear)

**Say what matters.
Make it easy.**

01 SHORT ISN'T SHALLOW

02 ORGANIZE IDEAS SMARTLY

03 STRONG WORDS. SHORT SENTENCES

04 KEEP VISUALS SIMPLE

05 AUDIENCE BEFORE EGO

Smart Brevity Basic Tenets



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Smart Email Tenets



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1

SHORT SUBJECT

Strong short subject line



2

MAIN POINT FIRST

Main point revealed in strong first sentence



3

WHY IT MATTERS

Tell why message is important to reader



4

FORMATTING

Bullets, white space, bolding



5

CLEAR HEADERS

Smart Brevity style and headers

***Clutter is the disease
of American writing.***

William Zinsser, writer &
editor



6

words or fewer

CLARITY

> Cleverness

SHORT WORDS

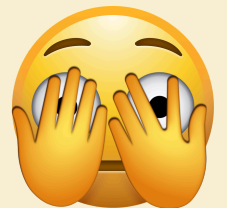
= Strong Words

GRAMMAR

Forget (Some) Rules

EMOJIS?!?

Use With Purpose



Smart Subject Lines



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CC
CATHOLIC
COMMUNICATORS
COLLECTIVE

Do you have a few seconds for an important update?



Big News: I'm Moving

Some follow-ups for Monday to discuss later today at meeting



TWO important updates

Product sprint recap for us to review – some new templates to explore



Sprint recap: 7 new templates

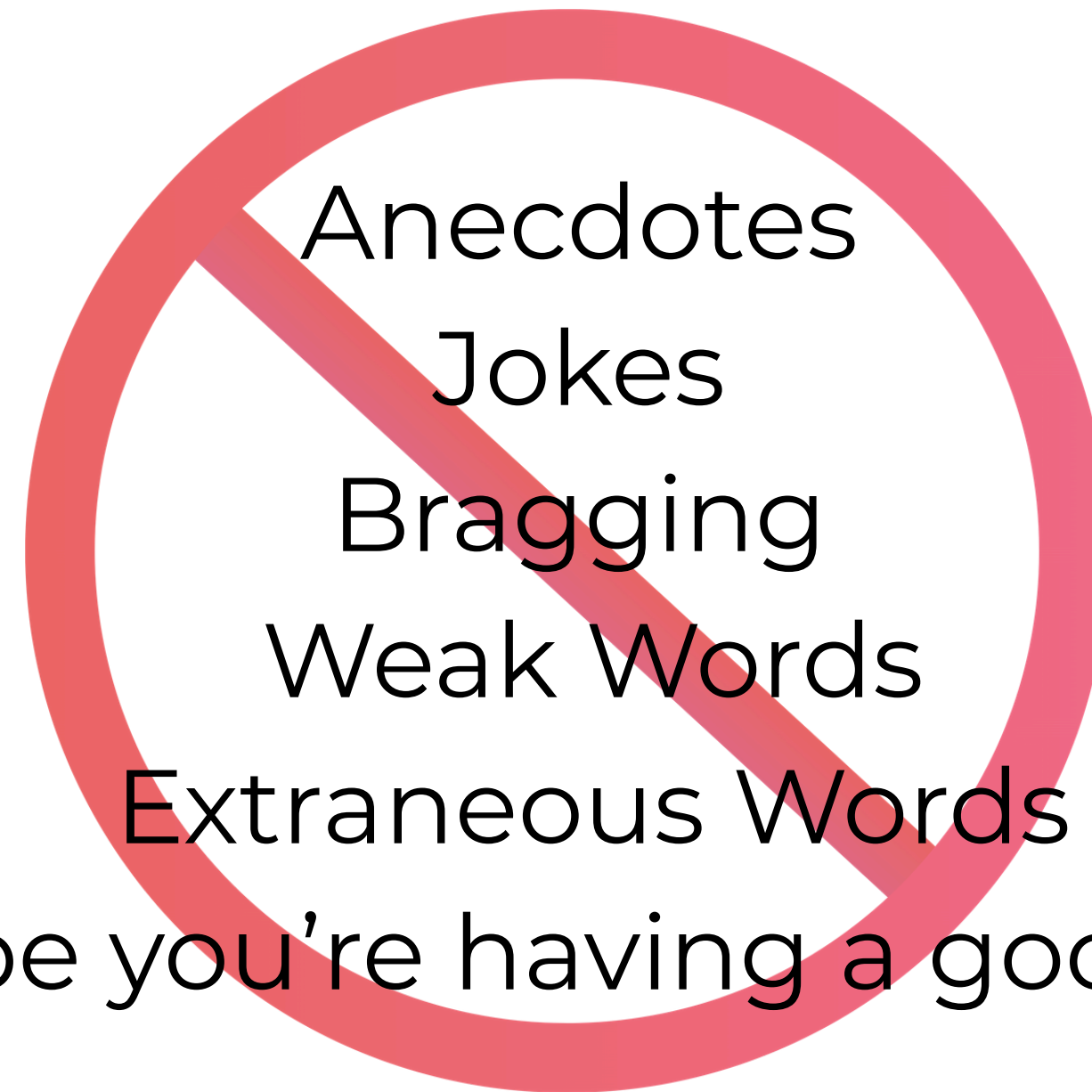
Smart Subject Lines



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**Identify the most important point.
Say it in one strong sentence.**



“I hope you’re having a good day.”

The One Big Thing



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I know you are busy and have so much on your plate, but I was hoping to let you know that I am throwing a party and hoping to get a live band to play at it and might need your help pulling some stuff together.



I'm throwing an epic bash with a live band.

The One Big Thing

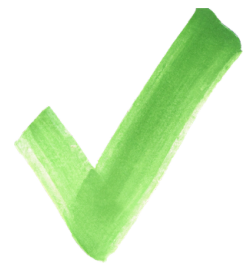


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Subject: Update on our work-from-home plans in 2021

We continue to closely monitor the impact of COVID, and we are writing today to provide an update on our plans for the rest of the year.



Subject: Remote work option extended

Everyone will have the option – but not the requirement – to work from home for the rest of 2021.

The One Big Thing



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You have their attention now...what's next?

Completing your Email with Smart Brevity Subheads

- Why It Matters
- Go Deeper
- Other Smart Brevity subheads



#1 SM Subhead: Why It Matters

The “Why It Matters” section...

- indicates **why your opening sentences are important**.
- adds **explanation** and **perspective**.
- **avoids restating** the opening.
- is ideally **limited to 1 or 2 sentences**.

If it takes a lot of words to say what you have in mind, give it more thought.

Dennis Roch, politician
and educator

#1 SM Subhead: Why It Matters

Subject: Staff update to share with you when you're free...

Sorry to bother you, but as you know, Jim Dandy has been doing a terrific job leading two of our most important accounting projects. Well, he just informed me that he will be quitting and taking a new job elsewhere in a few weeks. Ugh. Big blow. It looks like he is headed to our competitor. We will scramble to get a controller but these things take time. I guess I can step in and cover some of his duties.

One Big Thing + Why It Matters

Subject: Our controller resigned

Jim Dandy just informed me that he's leaving for a new job.

WHY IT MATTERS: Jim's leading two of our three most important accounting projects. I will step in to handle things while we quickly find his replacement.



#2 SM Subhead: Go Deeper

The “Go Deeper” section...

Signals readers that they can **stop now or read on** to learn more. **Likely the longest section**, so consider:

- bullet points
- generous paragraph breaks
- links, attachments
- charts, graphics



One Big Thing + Why It Matters + Go Deeper

GO DEEPER

HR, IT, and Facilities have been informed that Jim's last day will be Nov. 7. By end of week, I'll:

- send a revised job description/salary range to Talent Acquisition by end of week and ask that the position be posted immediately. (For context, when the role was posted in 2019, it took 2.5 months to fill.)
- meet with my team to discuss an interim plan to divide duties.
- inform affected vendors and customers that I will be their point-of-contact effective Oct. 8.

Other SB Subheads



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- The Big Picture
- What's Next
- What We're Hearing
- The Bottom Line
- The Backstory
- Catch Up Quick
- By the Numbers

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and educator

Subheads as Time Savers



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Weak Opening Phrases

Here's what's important to know...



A trend we've been observing...



Let's take a look at the numbers...



In conclusion...



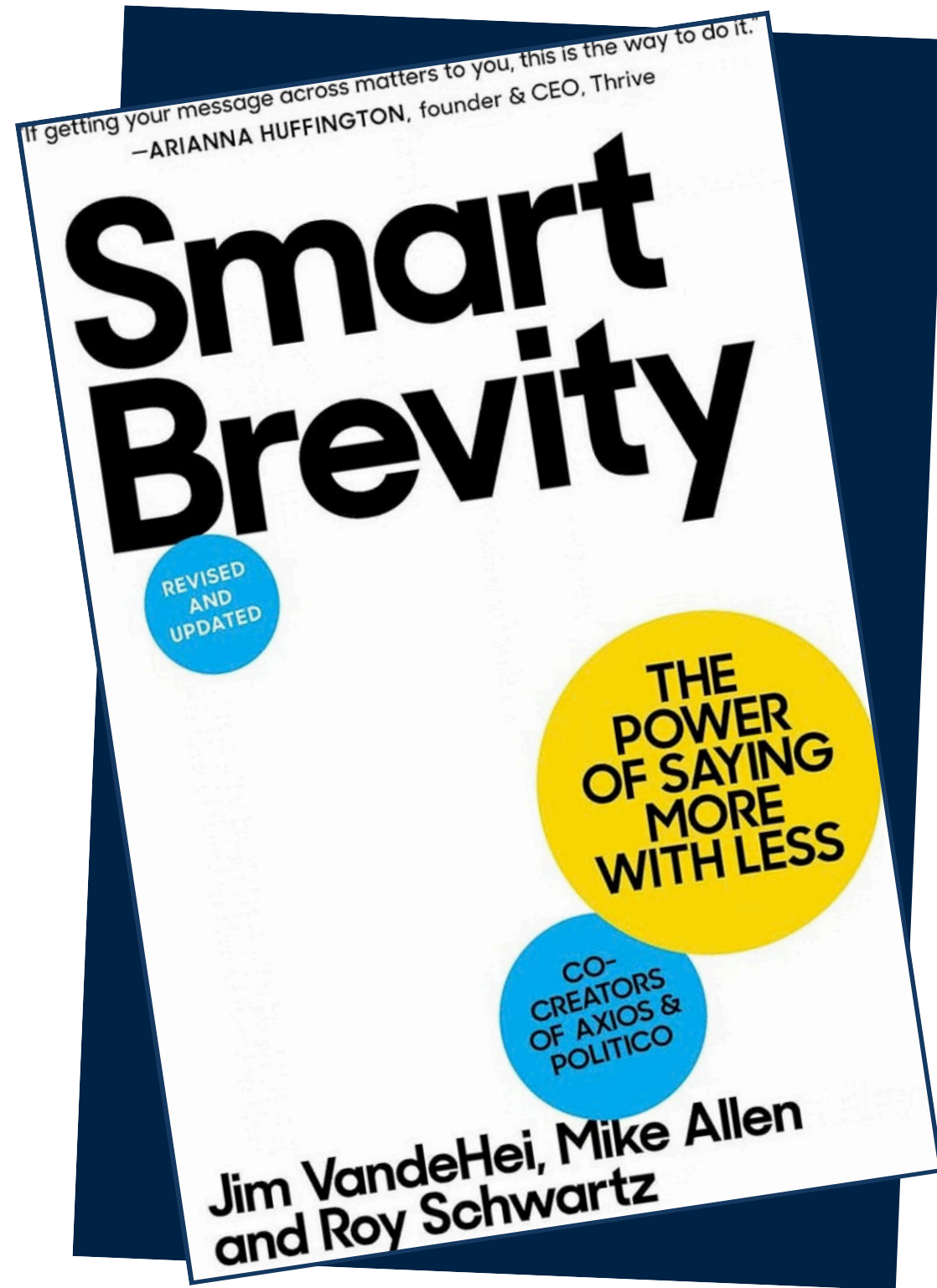
Strong Subheads

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Smart Brevity on Amazon
Hardcover \$15.65
Kindle \$13.99



About the Book



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