

Alright Isn't All Right in Business Writing

Basic business writing (letters, memos, emails) today is supposed to be informal and conversational. “Write more like you talk” is the advice frequently given by business writing experts.

Many of the grammar rules that we learned in school either no longer apply or have been altered to fit the times. American English is based on common usage, which means that even if something is done incorrectly according to the rules, if it's done often enough and by enough people, it becomes acceptable, much to the chagrin of most high school English teachers.

One rule that is “on the cusp” regards the word *alright*, a nonstandard form of the words *all right*. American Heritage dictionary defines *all right* as an adjective: *acceptable, correct, average or fairly healthy*, and as an adverb: *adequately, yes or without a doubt*.

The usage note on the American Heritage definition page says,

Despite the appearance of the form alright in works of such well-known writers as Langston Hughes and James Joyce, the single word spelling has never been accepted as standard. ... Consequently, one who uses alright, especially in formal writing, runs the risk that readers may view it as an error or as the willful breaking of convention.

If you're writing a conversation in a short story or novel, *alright* may have its place. Give it another twenty years or so, and *alright* may become acceptable in business writing.

But for now, stick with what your English teacher told you: *Alright is never all right*.

MARY WARD MENKE is owner and president of WordAbilities, LLC, a writing and editing services company. Visit her website, www.WordAbilities.com

©2007 Mary Ward Menke. You may reprint this article as long as the source is kept intact.

(submitted to ezinearticles.com 5/26/07)