



From the editor

Memos: Somewhere between obsequious and hateful

Several years ago, I read an article explaining that Japanese communication has at least three and probably six distinct “politeness levels.” English, of course, has no explicit politeness levels, but the article got me thinking about English communication’s implicit politeness levels.

Since then, my most important discovery in the field of politeness studies is related to memos. Almost nobody remembers the content of my memos for more than 24 hours, but they remember their tone for years. This, of course, is consistent with Freud’s observation that certain emotional reactions remain forever alive in the subconscious.

Based on my discovery, I developed a rating scale called the Cincinnati Politeness Scale for Memos (CPS-m). When writing memos in my department, I generally try for about a 5.0—stupid and bureaucratic—although I believe that everything over 2.5 has its place in some context or other. Editorials can probably be rated on the same scale, as they resemble memos from the editor to the reader. For my editorials, I usually try for about a 7.0—polite—while most medical journal editors seem to try for about a 6.0—formal and reserved—and others seem to aim considerably lower.

For memos, and probably for all other forms of human communication, the politeness level is at least as important as the content. So let me know if you approve of the style, content, and politeness level of this month’s editorial (hillarjr@email.uc.edu). Feel free to offer constructive criticism of anything else in CURRENT PSYCHIATRY, but please keep it to a level of at least 4.0. Thanks.

CINCINNATI POLITENESS SCALE FOR MEMOS (CPS-m)

9. Obsequious
8. Excessively polite
7. Polite
6. Formal and reserved
5. Stupid and bureaucratic
4. Curt
3. Inconsiderate
2. Rude
1. Hateful

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