Whither Whether?

English is replete with words that seem innocuous but can completely change the meaning of a sentence if used incorrectly. This issue of *KB CommEntary* considers two such words: *if* and *whether*.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including employee communications, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Writing and editing marketing and employee communications for an academic research organization
- Formatting and revising technical reports and manufacturing standard operating procedures, work instructions, forms, logbooks, and batch records for a pharmaceutical company
- Coordinating document preparation and approval for manufacturing of a new pharmaceutical product
- Drafting, reviewing, and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of pharmaceutical companies

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

If vs. *Whether*

We often see *if* and *whether* used interchangeably. Sometimes this is perfectly OK, but there are situations in which your choice of *if* versus *whether* can change the meaning of the sentence. Here are some tips for using these two words correctly.

First, the formal rule: Use *if* when you have a conditional sentence, i.e., one in which more than two alternatives are possible. Use *whether* to indicate that only two alternatives are possible.

At quickanddirtytips.com, Grammar Girl provides great examples of how your choice of words can change the meaning of the sentence. In the following example, *if* and *whether* can be used interchangeably:

> Squiggly didn't know whether Aardvark would arrive on Friday.

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In either sentence, the meaning is clear: Aardvark may or may not arrive on Friday. But here is an example where the words are *not* interchangeable:

> Squiggly didn't know whether Aardvark would arrive on Friday or Saturday.

Because *whether* is used, you know that there are only two possibilities: Aardvark will arrive on Friday, or Aardvark will arrive on Saturday. But note how the sentence has a different meaning when you use *if* instead of whether:

> Squiggly didn't know if Aardvark would arrive on Friday or Saturday.

Now in addition to arriving on Friday or Saturday, it's possible that Aardvark may not arrive at all; the use of *if* indicates more than two possibilities.

See how that works? Carefully consider what you mean to say, and choose *if* or *whether* accordingly.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

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KB COMM

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