FUNDAMENTALS OF BUSINESS WRITING

AT THE

WORKPLACE

Effective Business Content, Organization, Tone, Style, Format

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INTRODUCTION
Good business writers should write messages that are *considerate, complete, and clear*.

*Trends in the world of work emphasize the importance of good communication skills. The ability to write well is necessary for success on the job.* This class focuses on developing basic writing skills for memos, letters, e-mails, and newsletters that play an important role in creating a business’s, and an employee’s, reputation.

Writing Considerately
- Considering the genre and tone
- Understanding the audience
- Focusing on the purpose
- Maintaining the process

Writing Completely
- Integrating a “you” focus
- Honoring business document format
- Enhancing layout

Writing Clearly
- Choosing clear language
- Including active voices
- Proofreading and editing
**Writing Process**

For business formats, the following process for writing is suggested:

1. Establish your purpose
2. Define your audience
3. Outline key points
4. Write a rough draft
5. Allow for time away from the draft
   a. time will allow “cooling” to help avoid venting discourteous emotions
   b. time will allow “forgetting” to help us notice errors
6. Edit
7. Proofread and revise
8. Write the final draft

**Know Your Genre, Audience, and Purpose (GAP)**

**1. Establish Purpose**

**First:** Consciously identify your purpose for writing. Nearly all workplace writing is done for one or more of four purposes:

1. to create a record
2. to request or provide information
3. to persuade
4. to entertain

My primary purpose is to ___________________________ so my audience will

__________________________________________________________

This purpose statement makes it clear to you as a writer as to **what you want to accomplish** in your correspondence and **what action you want your audience to take.**
2. Define Audience

Second: “Who will read what I have written?” A thorough audience analysis is necessary before you start to write. This is extremely important because audience determines language, content, and tone. Consider the following topic written to two different audiences: Cancer

Audience 1: Readers of Ladies Home Journal
Audience 2: Readers of American Medical Association Journal

What do you need to know about each audience so that the article is written appropriately for both?

You need to answer the following questions before attempting to write your message:

- Who is my audience?
- Am I writing to one person or more than one?
- What do I want my audience to know, believe, or be able to do after reading my message?
- What are the job titles of the audience?
- What is the level of education of the audience?
- What do they already know about the topic?
- Why do they need this information?
- What factors might influence their response?

*Upward communications – writing to your superiors
*Downward communications -- writing to those subordinate to your position
*Lateral communications – writing to those at your own level
*Outward communications – writing to those outside of your workplace
3. Outline Key Points
Once you determine why you are writing and to whom you are writing, you must then determine what you want to say. Most journalists answer the 5 W’s in writing:

- **Who**
- **What**
- **Where**
- **When**
- **Why**

*(and sometimes How)*

Generating and gathering information to answer the 5 W’s will help you get started in planning what to say. Organize your ideas in a list and then refine the list to meet the needs of your purpose and audience.

4. Write Rough Draft

- Demonstrate the “you” attitude in your writing.
  a. Never forget that your reader is a real person and keep the reader at the forefront of your message.
  
  b. A reader-centered approach promotes diplomacy and goodwill no matter what the message. As much as possible, the message should be all about the reader, not the writer.
  
  c. “YOU” focus – all about the readers! What’s in it for them?

- Keep the message courteous and positive.
  a. Remember to use tactful, considerate language.
  
  b. Avoid negative words such as: no, not, never, difficulty, problem, you claim.
  
  c. Always begin the message with something positive, and bury bad news later in a paragraph or the message.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Wording</th>
<th>Positive Wording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We cannot process your claim because the necessary forms have not been completed.</td>
<td>Your claim will be processed as soon as you complete the necessary forms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Use the correct tone for your business document genre
  a. Most e-mail messages, business letters, memos, and newsletters should AVOID a pretentious tone or one that is too casual.
  
  b. Maintain a professional tone.
Practice 1  \textit{Revise the following to be “reader-centered” and tactful.}

1. We offer a CD language course that we are convinced will be rewarding if ordered immediately.

2. Our warranty becomes effective only when we receive an owner’s registration.

3. To enable us to update our stockholder records, we ask that the enclosed card be returned.

4. I have granted you permission to attend the communication seminar.

5. We cannot ship your order until June 1.

5. \textbf{Allow for time away from the draft}

Time spent away from the draft will allow “cooling” to help avoid venting discourteous emotions. This time will also allow the brain to “forget” what it was trying to communicate. This “forgetting” makes spotting errors easier.

6. \textbf{Edit}

Check for organization!

The focus for the written communications in this session will be on e-mails, memos and business letters and newsletter articles, but no matter what you are writing, the message should be divided into three parts:

1. the opening

2. the middle (the body)

3. the ending (conclusion)
E-MAIL

Even though e-mails seem informal, they are still “official” when used as business correspondence. It is important, therefore, to write the e-mail thoughtfully, efficiently, and correctly.

E-mail usage guidelines:
1. Use e-mail only when necessary. Communicating by telephone or face-to-face are viable options. And more formally, a written memo or letter is preferred.

2. Be careful of replying to “reply all” unless there’s a valid reason to do so. Reply only to the sender.

3. Remember that in sensitive situations, e-mail is only partially able to convey “tone.” Often there is a privacy issue as well. “Don’t put it in an e-mail unless you don’t mind it being on the front page of your local newspaper.” Assume that all e-mail is monitored and is therefore not confidential.

4. Keep in mind that e-mail can be used as a legal record for your company.
   o Observe the standard rules of e-mail etiquette aka “Netiquette”
     ▪ respond promptly
     ▪ use tactful language
     ▪ give readers a chance to reply before resending
     ▪ avoid long strings of forwards
     ▪ include a signature block

5. External vs. internal – salutation and complimentary close
E-mail writing format:

1. Follow the formula for writing an e-mail.
   a. Use a clear subject line - **Very specific**, short and not a complete sentence. Prepare the reader for what is to follow clearly and accurately.
   b. Include salutation:
   c. The first sentence of the first paragraph should repeat the point of the SUBJECT line. The first paragraph should be concise, including only the most important details.
   d. The next paragraph(s) should convey the specific details; Provide correct dates, times, locations, costs and other details (5Ws)
   e. The final paragraph should be a brief conclusion – summary, call to action, recommendation or prediction.
   f. Include signature.
   g. The length of the memo is determined by its purpose and audience.

2. **Follow the standard English rules governing capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar.**

3. Use simple, clear language.

4. Always provide a one- or two-sentence summary of an attachment if you are sending one with an e-mail.

5. Use design to improve the readability of messages.
   a. Remember to use paragraphs with topic sentences, not just one long continuous paragraph
   b. Include headings
   c. Use bullet lists to simplify information
   d. Choose common, easy-to-read fonts that all people can open

6. Consider cultural differences.
   a. Level of personal information and questions
   b. Idioms and locational expressions

7. Double-check all facts and proofread before hitting the *Send* button.
INTERNAL E-MAIL SAMPLE*: PRACTICE

1. Comment on anything the in email that you like or would change.
2. Mark the phrase(s) in the email that describe.
   - Purpose
   - What
   - “You” focus
   - Who
   - Why
   - When
   - How

Subject: Project Team Volunteers Needed

Dear Employees:

Using the document created by Reed McKenzie’s Web Smart Strategy team, we have a solid foundation from which to build a successful Web Knowledge Curriculum for the DPI group. Building on this backbone, I would like to find a group of people to help me design a curriculum that excels in its creativity, design and functionality.

As a volunteer for this project, you will have the opportunity to determine the solution that keeps deployment on the forefront of web technology. For the purpose of the project, I would like to get the widest possible participation from the teams within DPI. As a result, please volunteer yourself, or recommend someone who can truly add value; someone whom you trust to design your professional development. I’d like a participant from each group, Desktop, Functions, ABA and BPA as well as balanced representation between Chicago and Sarasota.

If you’d like to think HUGE, present ideas that are outrageous, and develop solutions that are unparalleled, you belong on this team. Let’s make an impact together. Please respond to me via a reply to this email by Monday, February 2, 2015.

Thank you,
John Roberts

*Source: http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/college/olcsupport/locker1/examples/email.html
MEMORANDUM (MEMO)

- Simple, clear language
- An appropriate tone, neither too conversational nor too formal
- No typos, mechanical errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar

A memo traditionally is used as an internal means of communicating within the workplace. The usual purpose of the memo is to inform, but it also creates a written and printed record for a request or any other message. It often explains policy, procedures, and guidelines. It makes an announcement or follows up on conversations.

A memo is direct in its approach and normally covers one topic. An introductory sentence or two is appropriate to orient the reader; however, the writer should come to the point quickly. The message may come in one, two, or three paragraphs, but a good memo zooms in on what the reader needs to know. If the memo is a request for something, the writer should be sure to include a specific method of replying.

Memo Format

- The word “Memo” or “Memorandum” or an equivalent term at the top of the page
- Guide words aligned correctly at the top of the page:
  - To: All Employees
  - From: Human Resources Department
  - Date: May 26, 2012
  - Subject: Company Picnic

- The TO line includes the name and often the title/department of the recipient.
- The FROM line includes the name, title, or department of the sender. It is common for the sender to write his/her initials after the name.
- The SUBJECT line identifies the topic. **Very specific**, not a complete sentence. Prepares the reader for what is to follow.
- The first sentence of the first paragraph should repeat the point of the SUBJECT line. Include WHY you are writing.
- Often, one paragraph is enough, but if the memo is more than one paragraph, the additional paragraphs should be concise. Discuss what CAUSED the subject you are discussing and other details (5Ws dates, times, locations, costs, etc.)
- The final sentences should be a brief conclusion telling readers specifically what you need them to do. The length of the memo is determined by its purpose and audience.
Practice 1  Based on information thus far, explain what you would rewrite and why.

To: Ruth Silvers, Manager  
From: Troy Corey, Human Resources  
Subject: Misunderstanding

We had no idea last month when we implemented new hiring procedures that major problems would result. Due to the fact that every department is now placing Internet advertisements for new-hires individually, the difficulties occurred. This cannot continue. Perhaps we did not make it clear at that time, but all newly hired employees who are hired for a position should be requested through this office.

Do not submit your advertisements for new employees directly to an Internet job bank or a newspaper. After writing them, they should be brought to Human Resources, where they will be centralized. You should discuss each ad with one of our counselors. Then we will place the ad at an appropriate Internet site or other publication. If you do not follow these guidelines, chaos will result. You may pick up applicant folders from us the day after the closing date in an ad. You must comply!!!!

If your memo is longer than one page…

- Include a summary that recaps your key points. Short memos do not require a summary.
- Use headings to make it easier for the reader to understand and follow your discussion.
- Use figures or tables. Trends are easiest to visualize when data are represented graphically.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists. Lists are easier to scan than paragraphs.
  - Use bulleted lists if the information is of similar importance.
  - Use numbered lists whenever one point is more important than another point (relative hierarchy).
STYLE: MAKING LISTS

To write effective lists—

1. **Provide a lead that applies to all the items on the list.**
   When your lead is a complete sentence, follow it with a colon (:
   
   **Ex:** We need the following items for the class:
   a. pens,
   b. paper, and
   c. textbooks.

   When your lead is a partial sentence, follow it nothing or with an em dash(—)
   
   **Ex:** The letters that we wrote were for—
   *requests
   *refusals
   *information.

2. **Use the same grammatical form for each item.** Don’t confuse your reader by making some items full sentences and others just parts of sentences. Be consistent! Parallel structure is important in writing with lists.

3. **Punctuate all items on your list in the same way.** Don’t put commas or semi-colons after some, periods after others, and no punctuation at all after still others. Again, be consistent!

4. **Put white space between items on your list.** By doing so, you make each item stand out. You give each visual impact.

5. **Begin each item with a verb to gain even more impact.** If you do this, however, make sure that you use a lead that ends in an appropriate subject for each of the verbs you put on the list.
   
   **Ex:** During the class, we will—
   *study grammar,
   *learn punctuation, and
   *practice writing letters.

**Practice** Explain how you would rewrite the following list.

Keep these safety tips in mind as you work on your car:

- Wear safety goggles when working under the hood, especially when dealing with the battery.
- The engine should be operated only in a well-ventilated area.
- Fans and belts are dangerous when moving—you or your clothing could get caught in them.
- Avoid contact with hot metal parts, such as the radiator and the exhaust manifold.
BUSINESS LETTER

Unlike memos, business letters are used for *external* communication—communicating from one company to another. They are also more formal in tone and structure.

- Letters represent your company’s public image and your own competence.
- Letters promote goodwill.
- Letters are more personal than a report, yet more formal than memos or e-mails.
- Letters constitute a **permanent legal record** of an agreement. (prices, dates, etc.)
- Letters follow up on telephone calls and other types of oral communications.
- Letters can prompt action.
- Letters are efficient for targeted mass mailings.

The same process for writing other business documents memo should be used in writing a letter: establish your purpose, analyze your audience, consider your tone, outline your thoughts, do necessary research, write a rough draft, revise, edit, and write the final copy.

Be sure to answer these four critical questions before starting to write:

1. Why am I writing?
2. To whom am I writing?
3. What information or message must I convey?
4. What results do I want?

**Business Letter Format**

Most companies decide on the consistent format needed for their letters. They may decide to use the full-block method, modified-block method, a salutation or no salutation. The easiest to implement is a full block format with a salutation.
If your letter is more than one page…

- Do not number the first page because it contains either your business’s letterhead or your contact details.
- Include a header at the top of all subsequent pages.
- The header usually (but not always) contains the name of the addressee, the page number, and the date.

EXAMPLES:

Mr. Andrew Hopkins  Page 2   October 24, 2015

Mr. Andrew Hopkins  2   October 24, 2015

Mr. Andrew Hopkins
Page 2
October 24, 2015

Mr. Andrew Hopkins
October 24, 2015
Page 2
FULL-BLOCK WITH SALUTATION FORMAT:
Letterhead (or your own address) - followed by two hard line enters (double space)

Date – (spell out the month, September 26, 2012 not Sept. 26th, 2012) - followed by four hard line enters

Name, title of recipient
Street address of recipient
City, State ZIP (Use two letter capital postal abbreviation for state) – [followed by a double space]

Dear Ms. Recipient: – [followed by a double space]

Introductory paragraph –include WHY you are writing; mention why it is important to the reader; acknowledge any previous meetings, calls, or correspondence. [followed by a double space]

Body paragraph – use the most significant point of each paragraph as the topic sentence. Use factual support, key details, and needed descriptions as supporting sentences. [followed by a double space]

Body paragraph – Keep sentences short and concise. Keep paragraphs to 3-5 sentences or 6-7 lines. Tone should be credible, courteous, and professional. Focus on “you” attitude. [followed by a double space]

Concluding paragraph – Thank readers. State clearly what specific actions readers are to do next, how to complete then, and by when. If no action is needed you may want to include what to expect next from you. End cordially and professionally. [followed by a double space.]

Complimentary close, (capitalize only the first word Ex: Sincerely yours,) [followed by four hard enters]

( your hand written signature will fill this space)

Typed name, title – [followed by a double space]

Enclosures (3) – [followed by a single space]
cc: (names of other people you sent it to)
Standard Business Letter

This letter is shown in block style with standard punctuation.

Date Line: Date the letter is typed.

Inside Address: Name and address of the person to whom you're writing.

Salutation: Greeting.

Subject Line: Topic of the letter.

Body: Text of the letter.

Complimentary Closing: Parting farewell.

Writer's Identification: Name and/or title of the writer.

Reference Initials: Initials of the person who typed the letter (if other than the signer).

Notations: Indications of items being enclosed with the letter, copies of the letter being sent to another person, special-delivery instructions, and the like.

Grammar and Mechanics Notes

The arrows indicate how many lines or inches to space down before typing the next part. For example, ↓ 4 after the complimentary closing means to press Enter four times before typing the writer's name.
LETTER PARTS
Most letters contain either three or four parts as necessary:
- an opening
- the main message
- a statement of results desired
- the closing

The Opening – get the attention of the reader

Four critical seconds—business correspondence specialists report four seconds is the average length of time you have to get the attention of your reader.

The opening contains your topic sentence—your reason for writing. A dull opening suggests a dull letter—one that may not even be read, let alone generate a response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Openings</th>
<th>Improved Openings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have received your letter of March 25, 2007, confirming your plans to speak to our group. [Obvious fact: if you had not received a letter, would you be writing this letter?]</td>
<td>Thank you for confirming your plans to speak to our group. [Combines a warm thank-you with a brief statement of the purpose of the letter.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This letter is to inform you of the upcoming Executive Committee meeting. [Don’t talk about it---do it!]</td>
<td>The Executive Committee will meet on Thursday, June 3, at 2 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom of the Concourse Hotel. [Gives the reader the important facts in the first paragraph.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Main Message

The main message contains all the necessary information and details you need to convey. It can be taken directly from a carefully written letter plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Main Messages</th>
<th>Improved Main Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane Doe was an honors student at UWM during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s.</td>
<td>Jane Doe attended UWM from Sept.1988 through June 1992. She graduated magna cum laude from the School of Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Verifies the fact that she was enrolled at the University but gives few additional—and needed—details.]</td>
<td>[Gives detailed information about Jane’s college experience.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Morgan is a former employee of Magna Corporation. His work was always excellent.</td>
<td>Jon Morgan was employed by the Magna Corporation as a systems analyst from June 15, 1998, to July 1, 2006. Jon’s individual work was always superior, and his teamwork was excellent. We were sorry to lose Jon, but we understood his reasons for seeking another position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Verifies his employment without giving any details. Would not be helpful to a potential employer.]</td>
<td>[Gives detailed information about Jon’s employment. Adds a warm, personal note in the final sentence.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Action or Results

When appropriate, state what information you are seeking or what results you desire. Be specific. Do not leave your reader wondering what it is you want.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request for Action or Results</th>
<th>Improved Requests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please confirm your appointment as soon as possible.</td>
<td>Please confirm your appointment by calling my administrative assistant at Extension 2655 no later than Friday, July 15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[States request vaguely. Does not give the reader the information needed to comply with the request.]</td>
<td>[States the action desired in definite terms.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Closing

The closing of your letter may take any of several forms, as determined by the nature of the letter. It may be a summary of the major ideas, a simple statement of good will, or a clincher to motivate the reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Closings</th>
<th>Improved Closings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you in advance.</td>
<td>Thanks so much for your patience in this matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[A presumptuous closing. Never assume the reader’s action.]</td>
<td>[Combines an always appropriate thank-you with a specific comment.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can order this special communications package by calling us today.</td>
<td>A phone call from you will enable you to enjoy the advantage of on-line communications immediately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[The reader knows nothing the product does to clinch the deal.]</td>
<td>[This closing has the reader in mind. It’s to the reader’s advantage to place an order—a good clincher.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readers find the opening and closings of letters most interesting and often read them first. Make them count!
LETTER STRATEGIES
The content of the message will determine which writing strategy you use. The two most common strategies are the Direct or Indirect approach.

Direct Strategy…
If your message is sharing good news, making a request, stating a claim, supplying any positive news, the direct strategy is appropriate. Readers want to learn the good news immediately. That means you state in the first paragraph what the message is. It also means that you use courteous and positive language.

Examples:

Good news

Dear Mr. Walters:
Congratulations! Your request for a home equity loan has been approved.

Making a request

Dear Mr. Walters:
Can the MGM Grand Hotel provide meeting rooms and accommodations for about 250 DCC sales representatives from May 25 through May 29?
Indirect Strategy…
Communicating bad news is sometimes necessary in the workplace. When you must do so, presenting bad news or refusals indirectly is often more effective than presenting them directly. It is generally more effective to present bad news indirectly, especially if the stakes are high for the reader.

Ineffective rejection letter:

Dear Ms. Smith:

Your application for the position of dental hygienist has been rejected. We have found someone more qualified than you.

The letter is concise and uses the “you” attitude, but it is also short and rude. The pattern for this letter is (1) bad news, (2) curt explanation, (3) close. A better pattern for this bad-news message is (1) context or “buffer,” (2) explanation, (3) bad news, (4) goodwill.

Effective rejection letter:

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you for your time and effort in applying for the position of dental hygienist at the Southtown Dental Center.

Because we need someone who can assume the duties here with a minimum of training, we have selected an applicant with over ten years of experience.

I am sure that with your excellent college record you will find a position in another office. We wish you good luck in your employment search.

This letter begins with a “buffer” (a positive opening) which provides a context for the subject and establishes a professional tone. The indirect method allows the writer to explain before announcing the bad news. Then the body provides an explanation by offering details or facts that lead to the negative decision or refusal. It gives the negative message simply, based on the facts, but it does not belabor the bad news or provide an inappropriate apology. The success of a negative letter depends on how well the explanation is presented. In giving bad news, your goal should be to establish for the reader that the bad news is reasonable given the circumstances. The conclusion provides a goodwill closing. It provides a courteous, pleasant, and forward-looking closing that doesn’t refer directly to the bad news.
**Persuasive Strategy:** Persuasion is used when you must change attitudes or produce action. The writing plan for a persuasive correspondence includes the following:

**Opening:** Obtain the reader’s attention and interest. Describe a problem, state something unexpected, suggest reader benefits, offer praise or compliments, or ask a stimulating question.

**Body:** Build interest. Explain logically and concisely the purpose of the request. Prove its merit. Use facts, statistics, expert opinion, examples, specific details, and direct and indirect benefits. Anticipate objections, offer counterarguments, establish credibility, demonstrate competence, and show the value of proposal.

**Closing:** Motivate action. Ask for a particular action. Make the action easy to take. Show courtesy, respect, and gratitude.

**Example:**

Dear Ms. Levy:

As a preferred customer and holder of our special Gold Card, you won’t want to miss our annual Savings Spectacular.

All the fine clothing pictured in the enclosed brochure has been marked down a full 25%! To take advantage of these incredible bargains, you need only complete the order form on the back cover of the brochure. Or if you prefer, you may simply telephone your order. Our operators are standing by.

Purchases totaling $300 or more are entitled to another 10% off! But you must act quickly! The sale---open to Gold Card customers exclusively---ends on May 10. Order now!

Sincerely,
Exercise: Explain how and why you would rewrite the following bad-news letter using the writing technique improvements we have discussed.

Dear Mr. Dodge:

We regret to inform you that the 22-inch Kleen-Kut mower and grass catcher is unavailable at this time.

However, we do expect to receive a shipment of mowers in a short time. When they arrive, we’ll send one to you.

These mowers are excellent products, and we are sorry that you are unable to buy one right away. Please accept our countless apologies for this delay.

While you’re waiting for your lawn mower, you might want to flip through our catalog, available at any local hardware store. Or ask us to send you one. At any rate, nearly all of our catalog items are in stock and can usually be ordered easily.

Sincerely,
“I always strive for originality because clichés are a dime a dozen,”

(A guest speaker who was never invited back to speak.)

Good writers use plain language to express clear meaning. They do not use showy words and ambiguous expressions. Plain-language guidelines stress that writers use language that is both uncomplicated and accurate.

*Affectation* is the use of language that is more technical or showy than it needs to be to convey meaning. The use of inflated language hides the real message of the correspondence. Take for example the following message:

**Inflated**

It is the policy of the company to provide the proper telephonic apparatus to enable each employee to conduct the interoffice and intrabusiness communication necessary to discharge his or her responsibilities; however, it is contrary to company practice to permit telephones to be utilized for personal employee communications. Personal cellular apparatus may be used for personal communications instead.

**Plain**

Your telephone is provided for company business; do not use it for personal calls. Instead, please use personal cell phones for personal calls.

**STYLE: EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE**

“If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.” George Orwell

Choose your words carefully when you write. Overusing certain words and phrases is a common problem in business writing. You want to develop the habit of selecting words that are precise and appropriate for your purpose. One way you can show your concern for language is to avoid slang, clichés, and pretentious or wordy expressions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wordy Expressions</th>
<th>Better Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to the law</td>
<td>legally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afford an opportunity to</td>
<td>allow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After this has been done</td>
<td>then/when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A greater length of time</td>
<td>longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Along the lines of</td>
<td>like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are found to be in agreement with</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrive at a decision</td>
<td>decide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sufficient number of</td>
<td>enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At all times</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At an early date</td>
<td>soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At that point in time</td>
<td>then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this precise moment in time</td>
<td>now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond a shadow of a doubt</td>
<td>doubtless, undoubtedly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring to a conclusion</td>
<td>finish/conclude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By the same token</td>
<td>similarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By way of illustration</td>
<td>for example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct an investigation into</td>
<td>investigate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus of opinion</td>
<td>consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates that there is</td>
<td>shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite the fact that</td>
<td>though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the time that</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate</td>
<td>help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an ability to</td>
<td>can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been shown to be</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it is assumed that</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important essentials</td>
<td>essentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inasmuch as</td>
<td>since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In conjunction with</td>
<td>with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In lieu of</td>
<td>instead of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In regard to</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In spite of the fact that</td>
<td>although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the amount of</td>
<td>for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the vicinity of</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this report is presented</td>
<td>this report presents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## WORDY EXPRESSIONS

In view/spite of the fact that
In view of the foregoing circumstances
It is apparent that
It is apparent therefore that
It may well be that
It would appear that
Make an approximation as to how
Make an adjustment to
Make an examination of
Make contact with
New innovation
On a regular basis
On two separate occasions
Over and above
Per annum
Period of time
Pertaining to
Pursuant to
Refer back
Repeat again
Shed light on
Subsequent to
Take into consideration
Two different kinds
Until such time as
Very unique
Which goes under the name of
With a view toward
With full approval
With the exception of
With the result that
Would seem to suggest

## BETTER EXPRESSIONS

because
therefore
apparently
hence/thus
perhaps
it seems
estimate
adjust
examine
meet
innovation
regularly
twice
beyond
yearly
interval
about/on
following
refer
repeat
clarify
after
consider
two kinds
until
unique
called
intending to
approved
except
so that
suggests
PRACTICE: Rewrite the following sentences to correct affected language usage.

1. As per your request the undersigned is happy to inform you that we are sending you forthwith the brochures you requested.

2. Pursuant to your letter of the 12th, please be advised that your shipment was sent June 9.

3. The undersigned respectfully reminds affected individuals that employees desirous of changing their health plans must do so before December 30.

4. Kindly be informed that your vehicle has been determined to require corrective work.

5. Our attorney ascertained that we must compensate the consultants despite perplexing results.
Six Basic Uses of the Comma (,)

Use 1: Use a comma to separate items in a series. Including a comma before the conjunction is optional.

Ex. Students who get enough sleep are more rested, alert, and focused than those who do not.

Practice 1  In each of the following sentences, insert commas where they are needed.

1. Our muscles relax during light sleep relax even more in deeper sleep and stop activity completely in what is called “dream sleep.”

2. Have you ever seen the puffy blue circles under the eyes of people who regularly go without sufficient sleep?

3. The need for sleep varies according to age: ten to twelve hours for children nine hours for teenagers seven and a half hours for adults up to age sixty and about six and a half hours for those over sixty.

Use 2: Use a comma along with a coordinating conjunction to combine two simple sentences (also called independent clauses) into a single compound sentence.

Ex. Olive oil is a very common ingredient for cooking, but people do not realize the range of differences among the many kinds of olive oil.

Practice 2  In each of the following sentences, insert commas whenever they are needed.

1. You may choose an inexpensive olive oil from your supermarket or you might buy a bottle for as much as $35 at a specialty shop.

2. Most good olive oils are from Italy yet there are fine oils from other countries.

3. You can attend free demonstrations where different olive oils are being presented and sampled but you will definitely want to buy a bottle before you leave.
Use 3: Use a comma to follow introductory words, phrases, or clauses.

Ex. For many schools, a dress code is not even an option.

Practice 3 In each of the following sentences, insert commas where needed.

1. Yes the more casual atmosphere of the classroom is a welcome change for many people.
2. To keep in step with the times school administrators want to appear flexible.
3. If an employee wants to “dress down” on a certain day the new rules allow this freedom of choice.

Use 4. Use commas surrounding a word, phrase, or clause when the word (or group of words) interrupts the main idea.

Ex. We feel, however, that a class transfer would be appropriate.

Practice 4 In each of the following sentences, insert commas wherever they are needed.

1. Your course Mr. Takeda has been cancelled.
2. Cynthia Felix our former office manager has taken a different job with the Madison College.
3. Terry Thomas who is a student at Madison College has been hired as a student intern.
Use 5. Use a comma around nouns in direct address. (A noun in direct address is the name or title used in speaking to someone.)

Ex. The families, Mrs. Jones, appreciate your help.

Practice 5 Add commas wherever needed in the following sentences.

1. I hope dear that you assist whenever you can.
2. Susan your forms need to be signed.
3. Did you know Timothy that more claims were filed this year than last?

Use 6. Use commas to set off titles of people, addresses, place names, and dates when they are part of a sentence. (Do not use commas if it is not a complete, specific date.)

Ex. It was on March 1, 2013, that our department last updated its website.

Ex. I started my first English 1 course in August 2013.

Practice 6 Add commas when they are needed in the following sentences.

1. Mayor Jones mayor of Madison will attend.
2. The office’s address is 131 East Washington Avenue Madison WI 53703. (Note: Do not put a comma before a zip code.)
3. On Thursday March 22 1981 we signed the closing papers.
4. Janet has lived in Milwaukee Wisconsin for two years.
5. Steve Meyer Lead Casting Director has worked in Hollywood CA since April 1995.
Two Basic Uses of the Semi-colon (;)

Use 1. The semicolon is a punctuation mark most commonly used to join two closely related sentences.

Ex. Jeff is an excellent communicator; many consider him one of our best managers.

Jeff is an excellent communicator; in fact, many consider him one of our best managers.

Practice 1  Add semicolons to the following sentences as needed.

1. Inside teller service at our branch ends at 3 p.m. outside ATM service is available 24 hours a day.

2. Everyone arrived on time however, no one could work because the electricity was not functioning.

3. Mike rose from intern to vice president then he retired from the organization.

Use 2. The semicolon is also used to separate items in a series when the items contain commas.

Ex. The new offices will be located at 1212 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL; 566 Center St., Indianapolis, IN; and 1318 S. 4th St., Columbus, OH.

Practice 2  Add semicolons to the following sentences as needed.

1. Only the company branches in Wilmington, Delaware Tucson, Arizona and Cincinnati, Ohio are showing substantial profits.

2. The staff members who attended are James Miller, an accountant Sharon Thomas, a social worker and David Winters, a vice president.
Four Basic Uses of the Apostrophe (‘)

Use 1. Use an apostrophe to show possession.

- add 's to the singular form of the word (even if it ends in -s):

  Ex:  the owner's car

  Ex:  James's hat

- add 's to the plural forms that do not end in -s:

  Ex:  the children's game

  Ex:  the geese's honking

- add ' to the end of plural nouns that end in -s:

  Ex:  two cats' toys

  Ex:  three friends' letters

- add es’ to plural, proper nouns that are possessive:

  Ex:  The Williamses' presentation was good. (Stan and Sue Williams are a husband and wife consultant team.)

- add 's to the end of compound words:

  Ex:  my brother-in-law's money

- add 's to the last noun to show joint possession of an object:

  Ex:  Todd and Anne's apartment
Practice 1  *Add apostrophes or ’s where needed to show ownership.*

1. The company’s employees were pleased with their contract negotiations.
2. The bus headlight had malfunctioned.
3. The plumbers were called into the women’s restroom to fix the dripping faucets.
4. I made a donation to the children’s playground improvement fund.
5. The employees’ lunches were delicious.
6. Mike and Jan’s conference call proved beneficial.

Use 2. *Apostrophes may take the place of omitted numbers.*

Ex. Bill is a graduate from the Class of ’57.

Use 3. *Apostrophes make a singular noun plural, specifically to alleviate any confusion with single numbers or letters.*

Ex. Sometimes my p’s look like my q’s.

Use 4. *Apostrophes replace the omitted letters in contractions.*

Ex. We aren’t able to attend the annual meeting in Milwaukee.
Practice 2  *Place apostrophes as needed in the following sentences. Some sentences offer you two spelling choices with or without the apostrophe. Choose the correct spelling/usage.*

1. The school's tape recorder was not working correctly.
2. If (your/you’re) late for class one more time, (your/you’re) grade is in jeopardy.
3. The fires extreme heat melted the telephones in the office.
4. Members of the parents association constructed a maze made of old tires for the children's playground.
5. In the summer of 66, several of us took a roadtrip to California.
6. (Were/We’re) hoping to keep our customers happy; (it’s/its) important for the growth of our business.
7. Mr. Jones desk is a mess.
8. If you can't find your report on my desk, it might be on Mr. Jones.
9. In Madison, there are several (YMCA’S/YMCAs).
10. The (soldier’s/soldiers’) platoons had to meet at a designated spot.

*From Lois and Selma DeBakey’s collection of bad medical writing: “The receptionist called the patients names.” (How does the omitted apostrophe alter the meaning?)*
Three Basic Uses of Quotation Marks (""")

Notes on using quotation marks with end punctuation

- Place commas and periods inside quotation marks.
- Place semi-colons, colons, and dashes outside quotation marks.
- Place exclamation marks and question marks inside quotation marks when they are part of the quoted material or outside quotation marks when the sentence itself is a question or exclamation.

Use 1. Use quotation marks around someone else’s words.

Ex: Mr. Smith, who was working at the hospital that morning, said, "The waiting room requires new tables, chairs, shelving and other furniture."

Note: If all the words of a direct quote are not needed, you may omit part of the quote. Replace the missing words with an ellipsis.

Ex: Mr. Smith, who was working at the hospital that morning, said, "The waiting room requires new … furniture."

Note: If you add words to improve clarity of the direct quote, enclose the added material in brackets.

Ex: Mr. Smith, who was working at the hospital that morning, said, "The waiting room [on the first floor] requires new tables, chairs, shelving and other furniture."

Use 2. Use quotation marks to set off words used in special context.

Ex: Jones described the technology as "a giant step forward"; other doctors disagreed.
Use 3. Use quotation marks around titles of short pieces in larger works. (Use italics or underlining for the larger work.)

- Songs
- Short Stories
- Essays
- Short Poems
- Chapters in books
- Articles in newspapers, magazines, or journals
- Episodes of television and radio series

Practice 1 Place quotation marks as needed in the following sentences.

1. Be sure to read How to Sell Using Listening in this month’s issue of Fortune.

2. Contact is an overused word.

3. We all make mistakes sometimes, the letter states.

4. Where did you put the Harnet files? he asked.

5. Do you remember who said And away we go?

6. I can’t believe that she doesn’t know how to find, as Dr. Frankel puts it, sufficient resources.

7. Whom do you think Time will select as its Man of the Year?

8. Bah! Humbug! said Scrooge.

9. The term up in the air means undecided.
COORDINATION (COMPOUND SENTENCES)

Option 1 Independent clause , for independent clause 
, and 
, nor 
, but 
, or 
, yet 
, so
Ex: George likes classical music, but he prefers jazz.

Option 2 Independent clause ; independent clause
Ex: George likes classical music; he prefers jazz.

Option 3 Independent clause ; consequently, independent clause 
; further, 
; however, 
; indeed, 
; in fact, 
; therefore, 
; then, 
; thus,
Ex: George likes classical music; however, he prefers jazz.

SUBORDINATION (COMPLEX SENTENCES)

Option 1 Independent clause after dependent clause 
although 
as 
because 
if 
while
Ex: George likes classical music while he prefers jazz.

Option 2 After dependent clause
Although 
As 
Because 
If 
While
Ex: While he prefers jazz, George likes classical music.
What is a Fragment?

Every sentence must have a subject and a verb and must express a complete thought. A word group that lacks a subject or a verb and does not express a complete thought is a fragment. The following are the most common types of fragments that people write:

1. Dependent –word fragments

   Ex. After I cashed my paycheck. I treated myself to dinner.
   To correct: Add the fragment (dependent clause) to the other sentence (independent clause.) Corrected: After I cashed my paycheck, I treated myself to dinner.

2. Subject is missing

   Ex. Covered the road.
   To correct: Add a subject. Corrected: Snow and ice covered the road.

3. Verb is missing

   Ex. The bus to the school.
   To correct: Add a verb. Corrected: The bus drove to the school.

4. Subject and verb are present but the words do not express a complete thought

   Ex. The bus reached.
   To correct: Add a complete thought. Corrected: The bus reached the gym hours late.

Practice 1 Correct the fragments in the following exercises by rewriting them into complete sentences.

1. Trying to keep the fire burning.

2. The skiers found.

3. After answering the telephone and taking the message.

4. Falling on the ice and breaking his leg.

5. A place where the computer would fit.
What is a Run-on or Comma Splice sentence?

Run-ons or comma splices present the most common punctuation errors made in writing sentences, and both are incorrect ways of joining two independent clauses together.

A run-on sentence occurs when two independent clauses are joined together with no punctuation.

Ex. She woke up late she made it to work on time.

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined together with a comma which is NOT an appropriate punctuation mark in that situation. An example of this is

Ex. She woke up late, she made it to work on time.

How do you make a complete sentence from a run-on or comma splice?

1. Make two sentences with end punctuation:

   She woke up late. She made it to work on time.

2. Make a compound sentence using one of the three methods of coordination:

   She woke up late, but she made it to work on time.
   She woke up late; she made it to work on time.
   She woke up late; however, she made it to work on time.

3. Make a complex sentence using one of the two methods of subordination:

   She made it to work on time even though she woke up late.
   Even though she woke up late, she made it to work on time.

Practice 1 The following message has errors in sentence structure including fragments, run-ons, and comma splices.

   To improve budget planning and to control costs. Please follow the new procedure described below. For submitting future requests for outside printing jobs. In our business, of course, printing is a necessary expenditure, however, our bills seems very high lately. Particularly those from PrintMasters. For future requests first determine your exact printing specifications, then secure two estimates for the job, submit the two estimates to Kelly. Place the order after receiving approval. Following this new procedure will result in more competitive pricing, it may even provide you with new creative printing options.
USE PARALLEL SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Parallelism is when words or sections of a sentence that are similar in function have similar grammatical forms. By balancing the items in a pair or a series so that they have the same kind of structure, you will make the sentence clearer and easier to read. Sentences that are not parallel are awkward to read and sometimes unclear.

Examples:

Nonparallel  My job includes checking the inventory, initializing the orders, and to call the suppliers.
Parallel    My job includes checking the inventory, initializing the orders, and calling suppliers.

Nonparallel  We ordered Larry a desk, chair, a credenza, and lamp.
Parallel    We ordered Larry a desk, a chair, a credenza, and a lamp.

Nonparallel  This letter mentions Janet’s efficiency and also how reliable she is.
Parallel    This letter mentions Janet’s efficiency and reliability.

Nonparallel  The writing process includes planning, organizes, do a draft, revising, then edit.
Parallel    The writing process includes planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing.

Practice 1 Make the following sentences parallel.

1. At the body shop, the car was sanded down to the bare metal, painted with primer, and red enamel was sprayed on.

2. The politician trusted no one, rewarded loyalty, and was dependent only on his own instincts.

3. Seeing a problem is easier than it is to solve a problem.

4. We expected that we would be disappointed and to reject the proposal.

5. The desk is small, sturdy, and costs very little.
CONSISTENCY: VERB TENSE

Verbs Do not shift verb tenses unnecessarily. If you begin writing in present tense, do not shift suddenly to the past tense.

Inconsistent: The singer performs perfectly as always and enchanted the audience.
Corrected: The singer performed perfectly as always and enchanted the audience.

CONSISTENCY: POINT OF VIEW

Pronouns (Shift in Person) When writing, you should not shift your point of view unnecessarily. Be consistent in your use of first-, second-, or third-person pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I (my, mine, me)</td>
<td>we (our, us)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-person</td>
<td>you (your)</td>
<td>you (your)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person</td>
<td>he (his, him)</td>
<td>they (their, them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>she (her)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it (its)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inconsistent: One of the benefits of my job is that you can use a company car.
Corrected: One of the benefits of my job is that I can use a company car.

CONSISTENCY: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Inconsistent: The group of administrative assistants write beautifully.
Corrected: The group of administrative assistants writes beautifully.

Inconsistent: When an employee receives a raise they are happy.
Corrected: When an employee receives a raise she is happy.
Practice 1  _Correct the following sentences which contain shifts in tense and person._

1. While driving in heavy traffic, the bus driver was blinded by the sun and strikes a parked car.
2. After we make the change on your application, we placed a copy into your file.
3. It’s hard for us to pay our health insurance, but you don’t dare go without it.
4. The Jeep swerved around the corner, went up on two wheels, and tips over on its side.
5. One of the things I love about my new job is that you can dress casually.