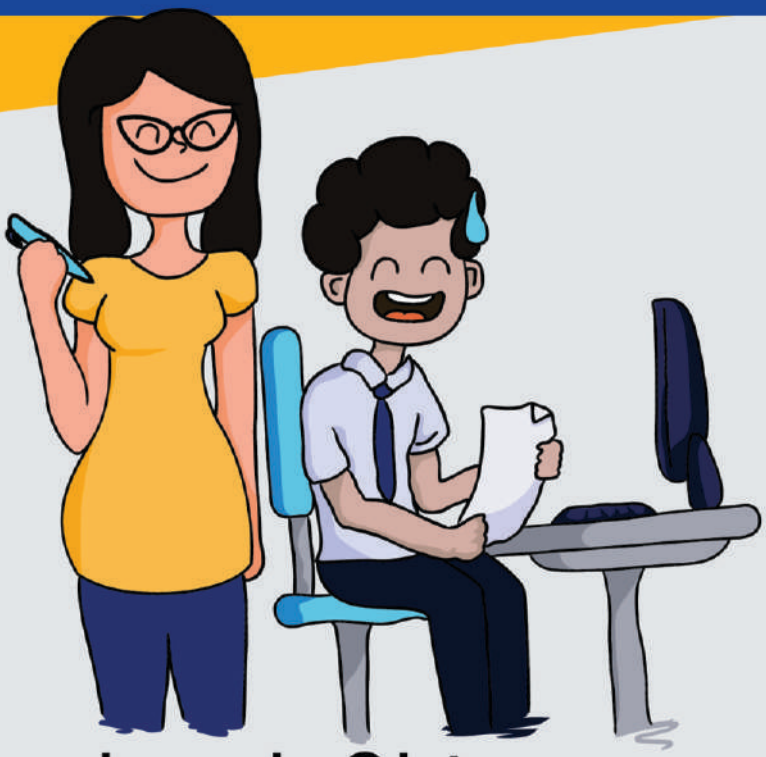
Business writing? It's not as hard as you think!

BUSINESS WRITING BLOOPERS:

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID



Jonah Chipeco

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my mom, who has supported me since Day 1 when I started as a business writing trainer. I wouldn't have the confidence to pursue my dreams without you, Mom.

I'm proud of you, and I love you.

Business Writing Bloopers: Common Mistakes to Avoid

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Telfax: +63 2 77483551 | Mobile Number: +63 905 2160836

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Editor and Designer: Kath C. Eustaquio-Derla

Illustrator: Jose Marie Chipeco

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WELCOME NOTE

Before becoming a business writing trainer, I worked as a marketing practitioner for 10 years. Moving up the ladder and getting yearly promotions were easy for me. How? There's ONE CORE SKILL that served me well throughout the years: communication.

I have always loved writing since grade school. I remember creating short stories and starting my novels at the age of eight. I was also a natural at winning speech contests! Fast forward after college graduation, my passion for communicating was the basis for all the work I chose. But between speaking and writing, writing skills opened more opportunities for me.

My first job was as an FM radio announcer. I had an accreditation from the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas. Besides hosting radio programs, my boss gave me a chance to write client proposals and get advertising clients. Through this, I was able to earn extra income and commissions.

A year later, I explored applying as a receptionist at a multinational company. I realized that I like meeting people, so I pursued the job instead of continuing as a DJ. The entrance test included an exercise to write a sales letter, which I did well. The hiring manager recommended me for a higher position in the sales department, and I got accepted the same day.

Two years later, I became a first-time supervisor at 23 years old. My new role included writing process manuals and reports for our department. Thank God, I had the skills! If not, I think I would not have the patience to complete many documents required from my team.

I managed four officers and 21 associates, and not everyone was as efficient in writing as I was. Our company accommodated training to improve their skills in selling or customer service. But not in business writing.

Most employees follow templates from their managers, and it would be up to their team leaders to check if their correspondences have grammar or spelling errors. That time, learning to write has not been something that directly affects work productivity.

However, this perception eventually improved. Communication skills, including writing, have moved up to the third spot as criteria for recruitment managers, regardless of the job position.

Do not wait for your boss or your company to send you to a writing training. Initiate to learn. And since you grabbed a copy of this book, you're on the right track!

It's not as hard as you think.

You may have this impression that writing an effective correspondence requires skills and years of practice. Business writing would indeed be more comfortable as you create more documents, but this idea can bring fear to professionals who are just starting or shifting to an office-based career. You may be asking yourself these questions:

- What's the best way to start a sales letter?
- Did I compose my email correctly?
- Should I use the memo template available in the office?
- Did I get my message across?
- How do I proofread my document?

The questions in your head could have stopped you from taking a writing task or creating your first draft. However, it would help if you got your job done faster.

How will you deal with this without having someone to correct your work? You don't want your boss to be doing all the proofreading.

In one of the companies where I worked, I had a direct report named Gary (not his real name). He stood out as one of our best sales representatives because of his ability to acquire clients through face-to-face conversations. One of his weaknesses, however, was writing correspondences. His co-workers would approach me to complain about his mistakes in subject-verb agreement. Clients often misunderstood his emails because of grammar and spelling errors.

Gary had asked me to check his business letters and emails before forwarding them to his contacts. Whenever I had the time, I would teach him some principles he could use in the future. But not all supervisors would review your work and correct it as I did.

Gary appreciated my guidance, yet he knew that he also must invest and learn on his own. He is one of my inspirations in writing this book. Like him, I applaud you for your willingness to learn. I'm sure you're an excellent worker and want to improve your skills.

Through this book, I desire to help you build your confidence in writing and overcome your insecurities like Gary. We will do this by debunking common mistakes in business writing, which I fondly call "bloopers"—because I don't want you to take yourself too seriously.

Why focus on mistakes?

Andy Wills, a psychologist from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom, mentions that "We learn from our mistakes rather than our successes." In a study published in the Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience[1], Wills' team has established that the mind works to help us avoid repeating mistakes.

In the study, volunteers were put into a test to give predictions based on information read by scientists on a computer screen. Then, they received new information that made many of the initial predictions incorrect. The participants had to learn from the mistake to give more accurate predictions.

This is why in this book, I added real, embarrassing, funny, and memorable stories of random business writing bloopers to help you remember the tips that I'll share.

But before that, let me help you instantly remove a roadblock that hinders you from improving your writing skills—lack of confidence.

In my experience holding business writing seminars among professionals from various industries, almost all my students would

[1] Jeanna Bryner, "Study Reveals Why We Learn From Mistakes," July 1, 2007, https://www.livescience.com/7312-study-reveals-learn-mistakes.html.

rate their writing skills lower than their actual capabilities. In general, they think that they are not doing well.

However, when I check each of their work, I can identify only two or three patterns in their writing, making it ineffective. If someone would only pinpoint repeated mistakes in your output, I know you can write better in an instant!

So, this book aims to help you recognize common mistakes in business writing and equip you to act as your editor and proofreader. Before your client or boss catches your errors, it would be awesome if you could watch out for yourself.

I organized the ideas in the simplest way possible to cover the basic style guide in business writing. I also consolidated the content into bite-sized pieces for you to easily digest and apply.

You can read this book as many times as you want. You can even make it your reference checklist when reviewing your work.

Enjoy reading and learning!

Your Business Writing Coach,

Jonah Chipeco

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Normally, you imagine someone looking like Miss Minchin from the 1985 Japanese anime series *Princess Sarah* (or even the movie) to teach about this topic. I'm not that kind of textbook-oriented guru. Let's keep the tone casual and fun, shall we?

This book is divided into three parts. The first is about business writing basics. This gives you a background before I discuss the main part about the common mistakes in business writing, which is the second part. The third part is a compilation of embarrassing, relatable stories from professionals like you. The last section contains tips on frequently asked questions.

In between the pages, you'll find these three markers to help you stay alert while reading:

Tricks – I will share quick tips that you may find handy to aid you in your writing tasks.

Tweetables – I love collecting inspiring and witty quotes from expert writers. Feel free to tweet these or take a photo and share away!

Activities – Duh. You grabbed a business writing book. It won't hurt if you try some written exercises.

Unlike other business writing textbooks that you've grabbed before, I'd like your reading experience to be memorable. If you purchased the printed book, feel free to write on the margins, or highlight important ideas. If you bought a PDF or Kindle file, I suggest using a separate notebook to write on as a companion while reading.

When you're able to finish from cover to cover, don't forget to leave a quick review of this book by sending me an email at **admin@writinghacksacademy.com**.

DISCLAIMER

While I try my best to keep the information up-to-date and correct, some recommended websites may have moved to different domains by the time you read this. Rules and guidelines in writing may also be updated over time and not mentioned in this edition.

The anecdotes in this book were published with written permission from the contributors. Some parts from their actual story may have been revised, omitted, or rewritten for comprehension purposes.

You're responsible for your actions as a reader. We do not claim liability for any loss or damage following any advice listed in this book. For example, if you got into an argument with your boss because of some tips you got here, please don't take it personally against my publisher and me.

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PART 1: BUSINESS WRITING BASICS

Why do you need to learn business writing?

Let's start setting your learning goals by clarifying your purpose. Why are you studying business writing? What benefits can it give you? Here are some of them:

Communication skills are sought by hiring managers.

A 2020 article by Indeed.com titled *Top 11 Skills Employers Look for in Candidates*[2] named communication skills as the number one skill employers look for in prospects. It's the foundation of getting work done and recruiters would naturally prefer a job candidate who can express their thoughts clearly in conversation and writing.

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[2] "Top 11 Skills Employers Look for in Candidates." Accessed December 16, 2020. https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/skills-employers-look-for.

Research[3] among recruiters from companies with more than 50,000 employees also discovered that communication skills is one of the decisive factors for hiring managers.

"When I interview someone for a job, I judge their writing skills because it will affect me. I care less about people's interpersonal skills; I don't need to be friends with them, but I'm stuck if they can't write well." – Alicia Phillips Mandaville, Vice President for Global Development Policy and Learning at InterAction.

Good writing skills display your ability to think clearly.

Writing effectively means that you have the ability to think clearly. You understand what you want to say and articulate it. Not all intelligent people have this skill. In fact, smart ones can be relatively poor writers because their desire to show off can blur the message.

Effective writing skills build credibility.

Your business writing skills make you dependable and increase your chance of being given responsibilities in the workplace. It provides a professional impression to your co-workers, superiors, and even clients.

Putting consideration in your writing details means that you will likely do the same in face-to-face interaction and want to convey that same kind of trust.

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[3] "Factors Affecting Poor Communication Skill on Stude Essay - 1365 Words," Study Mode, accessed December 16, 2020, https://www.studymode.com/essays/Factors-Affecting-Poor-Communication-Skill-On-598543.html.

Writing skills help ensure tasks will be carried out smoothly.

Communication is crucial in successful project implementation, especially for remote jobs. Roles that coordinate with different functions would often relay messages through writing or email. And this information can be used to draw out plans and make decisions.

Josh Bernoff wrote a piece recently for The Daily Beast titled *Bad Writing Costs Businesses Billions*[4]. The article grabs an amazing statistic: bad writing costs American businesses close to $400 billion every year. Companies are spending as much as $3.1 billion on remedial writing training annually to compensate the loss.

Business writing skills can help attract clients.

If your prospective client receives several meeting requests or sales letters via email, how will yours stand out? Business writing skills are helpful, especially when you're in the field of sales and marketing. You can craft your messages not only to get their attention but to express your offer or proposal into something comprehensive and convincing.

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[4] Josh Bernoff, "Bad Writing Costs Businesses Billions," October 16, 2016, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/10/16/bad-writing-costs-businesses-billions.html.

Business writing skills can help boost productivity.

If you lack the required written communication skills, you'll spend a lot of time choosing the right words and editing your correspondences. It would be unproductive to work on a single document for almost one-third of your working day. This time affects costs. Thus, poor writing skills would also mean higher expenditure for a company.

Business writing skills will increase your chance of getting a promotion.

Aspiring employees struggle in rising through the ranks because of poor communication skills. Senior management positions generally favor someone with competitive business writing skills if asked to choose between two candidates.

What is business writing?

Business writing is a form of written communication using standard structure and style, addressing internal and external audiences' needs in the workplace[5].

Let me break down this definition and explain the underlined words for you to understand it more clearly.

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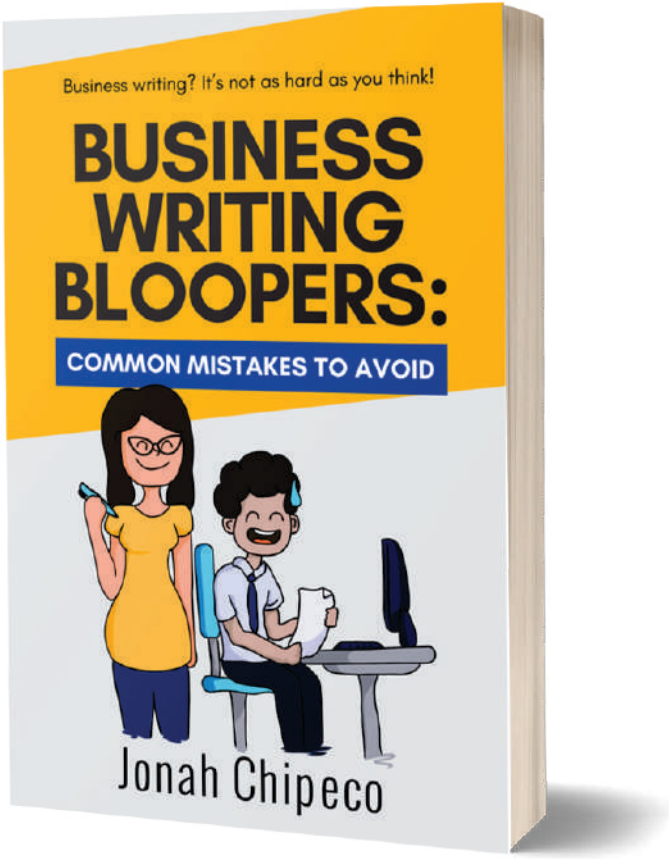
[5] "Effective Business Writing: Top Principles and Techniques" published March 25, 2014. Retrieved March 12, 2016 from http://www.englishgrammar.org/effective-business-writing/



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What is communication?

Newman and Summer defined communication as an exchange of facts, ideas, opinions or emotions by two or more persons.[6] Communication is merely passing information between the sender and receiver, aiming for understanding.

There are two basic types of communications: non-verbal and verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication happens using signs and symbols that do not involve spoken or written words. It may also be transmitted using colors, gestures, or expressions. An example of this is traffic signs. Drivers are familiar with how the colors red, yellow, and green call for different actions.

On the other hand, verbal communication conveys a message using spoken or written words.

Communication through writing allows the sender to edit information, deliver the intended message to the recipients, and receive appropriate feedback. This is why verbal communication is the preferred means of delivering messages in business.

Before discussing common mistakes, I'd like you to familiarize yourself with the communication model shown below. This model proposed by Barnlund in 1970[7] gives you an idea of the elements you need to think about before you begin writing.

---

[6] Perry, Liam, and Tyler Miller. "Nature of Business Communication." Essay. In Business Communication: Skills and Techniques, 60. Scientific e-Resources, 2018.

[7] Seligman, James. "Chapter2: Effects." Essay. In Effective Communication, 14. Lulu.com, 2016.

There are six elements in the Basic Communication Model according to Barnlund: sender, message, channel, noise, receiver, and feedback. Let's go through these quickly!

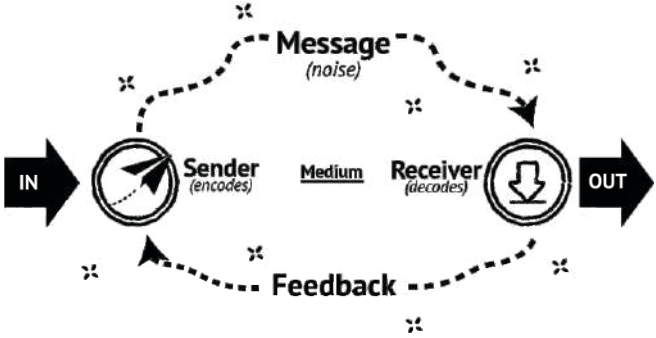

Figure 1. Basic Communication Model

Sender

The sender is the source of your message and the starting point of your communication. Consider asking the following questions about your writing task:

1. Who are the people or organizations you should approach to get information about your message?
2. Do you need to follow a specific tone or adapt your message to the brand of your sender?

Message

Your message contains the information that a sender wants to convey. It answers the following questions?

1. What main points do you need to include in your writing?

2. What will the communication be about? Be sure to include important details.

Channel

Your channel refers to the means or pathway of transmitting your communication.

1. What will be the means of sending your message?
Will you send it via email or postal mail?
2. Is your written document in the form of a memo or letter?
3. Are there templates you can use?

Noise

In the framework, a noise refers to anything internal or external that hinders the receiver in understanding the sender's message.

Think about this: are there possible mistakes in your writing that can cause your reader to misinterpret your message?

Receiver

In writing, your receiver or reader serves as the audience whom your message is intended for.

1. Who are your target readers?
2. What are their needs?
3. What language should you use for the receiver to best understand your message?

Feedback

Feedback is the emotion, result, or action that you'd like your receiver to have or perform after reading your message. Starting with a goal in mind is as important as writing your message. Remember the Basic Communication Model as your guide in writing business correspondences.

Should you deliver a message in person or in writing?

Business communication isn't always in writing. Reflect if an in-person or phone conversation is a better approach to deliver your message.

For example, if you want to clarify an email instruction from a co-worker, you may be able to resolve it faster through a call than going back and forth to exchange email threads.

It's important to also learn the communication style of people around you. Some supervisors may not like receiving an SMS or they respond to emails only within a blocked time.

What are the typical types of business documents?

Here's a quick list of commonly used documents to get an idea about which types of correspondences fall under business writing.

1. Electronic Mail or Email

Emails are the most used communication in business writing. This

has replaced face-to-face interactions and phone calls in most business scenarios.

2. Business Letters

There are different types of business letters depending on your purpose and target recipients. Here's a quick list:

a. Apology Letter – Use this type of letter when acknowledging a mistake, such as missing an appointment, a technical error, or any situation when you messed up and need to say sorry.
b. Inquiry and Request Letter – Send this letter when asking for information, giving a course of action, or inquiring about a product or service.
c. Sales Letter – Introduce your business to potential clients through a letter of intent or a meeting request with a company profile and a list of your products or services.
d. Social Business Letter – This can include recommendation letters, thank you letters, acceptance of an invitation, congratulatory messages, or sending condolences.
e. Termination Letter – Send this out when you want to cancel agreements or terminate partnerships.

3. Memos

Memos differ from business letters in the sense that the target recipients should be within the same company or organization.

Here are the common types of memos:

a. Request Memo – Use this to gain a favorable response about a proposed action.

b. Confirmation Memo – This memo confirms in writing a course of action agreed upon or verifies the information. For example, a university dean posts a memo listing of approved scholars for the next semester.

c. Directive Memo – Directive memos provide instructions such as new policies to be followed by a team or organization.

d. Periodic Reports – These are memos written on regular intervals such as monthly sales reports, etc.

e. Persuasive Memo – This type of memos outlines recommendations to change or improve upon existing systems or policies.

f. Technical Memo – Technical memos can serve as a summary of reports about ongoing studies or reviews of initiatives.

4. Meeting Agenda

A meeting agenda is used as an outline to prepare for the meeting. Include the following information when writing one:

- Topics to be discussed
- Meeting time, date, and venue
- The names of all the meeting attendees
- Preparation needed for the meeting such as reports to review or things to bring
- Brief summary or notes of the previous meeting (for regular meetings)

The agenda of the meeting varies depending on any of these purposes:

a. Brainstorming and planning – Meeting participants reflect upon existing procedures or performance then discuss possible ways to improve.

b. Information sharing – A guest resource person or assigned team member shares information about product innovations or new skills to adapt to changes. Tools like PowerPoint presentations and videos may be used.

c. Problem solving – In this meeting, the group discusses challenges, possible solutions, and outcomes of each course of action.

d. Status update – Regular team and project meetings aimed to align the team and talk about updates on progress, challenges, and next steps.

e. Team building – This type of meeting aims to create a stronger bond with team members and promote company culture.

5. Minutes of the Meeting – This document records what transpired during the meeting. Information includes:

- Topics discussed and important notes for each such as action steps and the person assigned
- Meeting time start and end time, date, and venue
- Names of all the meeting attendees, including those who are absent

- Schedule of the future meeting

What is the business writing process?

It's ideal to go through three stages in writing business correspondences: prewriting, writing, and revising. Here's a brief description and ideal time spent for each.

WRITING STAGE	DESCRIPTION	IDEAL TIME SPEND
Prewrite	▸ Clarify your goals. ▸ Identify your target reader. ▸ Gather and organize your ideas.	50%
Write	▸ Write your first draft. ▸ Put your thoughts into words. ▸ Choose your words, craft your sentences, and arrange your paragraphs.	20%
Revise	▸ Rework the text and edit it to make it more readable. ▸ Check spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and paragraphs. ▸ Read your document from the recipient's point of view.	30%

Trick: Use your creative brain first.

Writing is really a science and an art. It's an activity that uses both the left and right brain. During the prewriting and writing stages, remember to use your creative mind. Let your organized persona step in only at the last stage for revisions.

If you're the type of person who wants to skip the prewriting stage but still gets it done, that's okay. Not everyone is wired to follow the writing process as it is. Resources such as the Hermann Brain Dominance[8] Instrument (HBDI) or the Myers Briggs Test[9] points out that personalities are either left-brain or right-brain dominant. Those who usually have trouble getting started or committing writer's block are left-brained individuals who would like to be organized and logical. They typically get trapped editing their work as they go along because of their eye for detail.

On the other hand, the right-brain dominant folks efficiently use their creative flow and do not have a problem translating their ideas into words. However, they may have written too much, skipping the editing and proofreading part.

What are the guidelines in structure and style?

While having some similarities with other forms, business communication is different from academic, journalism, and creative writing. Concentrate on these five areas: audience, clarity, conciseness, tone, and correctness.[10]

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[8] "The HBDI®," accessed April 18, 2021, https://www.herrmann.com.au/the-hbdi/.

[9] "MBTI Basics" accessed April 18, 2021, https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/home.htm.

[10] Thurman, Susan. "Business Writing and Technical Writing." Essay. In Everything Grammar and Style Book: All You Need to Master the Rules of Great Writing. Avon, MA: Adams Media Corp, 2008.

These are the basic elements of styles of writing business documents. The ten common mistakes that we will discuss are related with these.

Other things to consider aside from elements of style are structure and content. Your documents' structure, including layout and format, are easy to look up through existing templates on the internet.

Content, on the other hand, is being given to you in advance before you start writing. What you need to figure out eventually is how your content would resonate with the purpose of your communication. In short, you must determine the feedback you want to receive.

We will start your training in this book by concentrating on style elements in business writing because more than content and structure, common mistakes of writers involve style. The Seven Cs of Communication details the style we need to use in business writing:

1. Complete
2. Clear
3. Concise
4. Considerate
5. Concrete
6. Cohesive
7. Correct

Having a basic knowledge of mistakes in each will eventually help dispel your fear of writing and then you can practice correcting yourself. This is the main idea we'll discuss in this book.

The Seven Cs of Communication[11] originated from the book Effective Public Relations by Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center published in 1958. It was the first textbook in the field of public relations.

How can I ensure that my message is complete?

Business writing starts with the prewriting process. Gather information by answering the questions covered within the communication model. Alternately, you can use the simple 5Ws and 1H formula:

- **W**ho is your audience?
- **W**hat is your message?
- **W**here will you get the content of your document?
- **W**hen is the deadline? When do you need to send out your correspondence?
- **W**hy are you writing? What purpose would you like to achieve?
- **H**ow will you forward it out to the recipients?

These questions encourage the business writer to plan out not only what information to be included in the correspondence but where to get resources or how the message will be delivered.

Note that the 5Ws and 1H question may mean differently when used in journalism where the "when" and "where" usually points out to

[11] Cutlip, Scott M., and Allen H. Center. Effective Public Relations Scott M. Cutlip Allen H. Center. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1958.

the time or location an event takes place. However, you can use the same formula if your message pertains to a business event.

For example, if you are sending an email invitation to an applicant for a job interview, your 5Ws and 1H questions may be rephrased this way:

- **W**ho is my recipient?
- **W**hat is my message to this person?
- **W**here is the interview going to be?
- **W**hen is the interview going to be?
- **W**hy am I inviting this person to the interview?
- **W**hat expertise can he or she contribute?
- **H**ow will the interview go? Can I give the questions in advance?

Note that completeness in business writing isn't always achieved by saying too much information. Sometimes, the classic 5Ws and 1H as guide isn't enough. Your intention in writing should be clear. The facts you include in your message should only correspond to the feedback you want to reach.

How can I write more clearly?

When you relay your message, you want to avoid being misinterpreted. Before sending your communication, ask the following questions:

1. Will the reader understand the meaning of my message?

2. Did I convey what I want the reader to do exactly?

Generally, there are two types of meanings. A denotative meaning explains the descriptive definition of a word according to dictionaries. On the other hand, connotative meaning is how the receiver of the message will interpret it based on his or her background, knowledge, and experience.

Your goal as the writer is to help the reader understand your intended meaning correctly. This chapter will discuss two proven tips to help you achieve this: using simple words and avoiding jargons.

Why is business writing concise?

Time is an essential commodity among professionals. Time means money. Written communication is just an entry point to the real discussion or negotiation like face-to-face meeting or getting a job done.

This is why business correspondences have to be brief.

What does it mean to be considerate in writing?

Consideration is empathy or feeling how it is to be "in another person's shoes." An effective communicator takes note of his audience. He considers the audience background, points, mind-set, educational attainment, etc.

As the message's sender, deal with your audience in a polite, just, reflective, and eager manner. Being courteous is part of being considerate. It raises your self-awareness for you not to write based

on impulse.

The following are the components of considerate communication:

1. The focus of your message is anchored on the "you" approach.
2. Show interest towards your audience to provide a positive atmosphere for you and them.
3. Focus on the possibilities instead of the negatives.
4. Use positive words such as cheery, dedicated, thanks, heartfelt, well, help, etc.

Trick: Write from the readers' perspective. Instead of writing about you and what you have to offer, show what's in it for them.

What does concrete writing mean?

Concrete communication shows assertiveness and particularity instead of vagueness and fuzziness. Concreteness improves confidence. It emphasizes that you're on point, specific, clear, and precise.

The following are the components of concrete communication:

✓ Your message is supported by verifiable information (facts and figures).

✓ Your message uses clear and tangible words that build one's credibility.

✓ Your message is not prone to misinterpretation.

What is cohesiveness?

Cohesion or coherence[12] is the intangible glue that holds words, sentences, and paragraphs together.

Having good coherence in writing means that ideas flow smoothly so that readers can easily understand where you are taking them.

Coherence and use of transition words also play an important role in structuring your message. In business communication, we can use the inverted pyramid approach in organizing our paragraphs to achieve cohesiveness. This is a similar formula used by journalists in news writing.

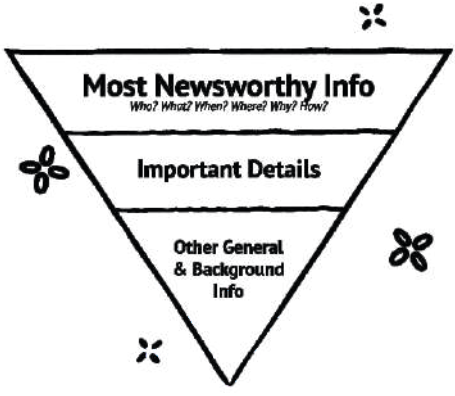


Figure 2. Inverted Pyramid Style in Newswriting

[12] Retrieved March 12, 2016 from www.clarkson.edu/writingcenter/docs/cohesion.pdf

Most correspondences such as memos, request letters, replies to requests for information, and emails uses this technique.

Business writers and readers prefer the most important to least arrangement to see the purpose of the communication immediately.

In news writing, the Inverted Pyramid opens with the 5Ws and 1H as the lead. For business communication, you can state your main points or intention in the opening paragraphs right away. Choosing what goes in this part is based on importance. Often, you can mention your "call-to-action" immediately. Supporting details can follow in the next paragraph serving as the body of the content. The least important information is found on the tail.

Tweetable

"We live in the age of short attention spans and skim reading. The inverted pyramid doesn't bore the reader. It gives them what they want straight away. And apparently we now have an attention span shorter than a Goldfish.[13] "

- Callum Sharp,

Writer at The Writing Cooperative

What does it mean to write using correct language?

Correct messages impact and boost your poise as its sender.

[13] Sharp, Callum. "How to Structure an Article: The Inverted Pyramid." Medium, The Writing Cooperative, 2 July 2019, writingcooperative.com/how-to-structure-an-article-the-inverted-pyramid-8fa0c165fcae.

It elevates the trust that exists between the sender and the receiver. Correct language is vital in effective communication. You may ask the following questions to ensure correct communication:

1. Are the details in my message precise and accurate?
2. Have I given attention to grammar, meaning, and logic?
3. Are all names and titles spelled correctly?
4. Did I use an appropriate language that matches the knowledge and background of my reader?

After the original seven Cs mentioned, various versions and other styles were included such as:

1. Capability of the Audience
2. Channels
3. Content
4. Context
5. Continuity
6. Consistency
7. Credibility
8. Courtesy

Who are the audiences in business writing?

In any business setting, the audience is more important than the writer or sender of the message. Remember, while you're concerned about showing off or appearing as a professional, you're only

successful in communicating if the recipient will respond to you.

There are two types of audience in business writing: **Internal audience** are recipients within your company while **external audience** can be clients, prospects, and suppliers outside your business.

The most common internal audience for your writing is your supervisor. Consider his personality, age, communication style, and status. This will affect his or her preferences when it comes to business communication.

Your audience may consist of individuals or teams. In the latter case, even when an organization or department consists of people with different knowledge levels, it's important to write as if you're writing to one person.

Unlike journalism and other forms of written communication, your audience in business writing are individuals who will directly respond to your document. This debunks a common myth in writing business correspondences: writing in a formal tone.

Your language should be conversational. Aside from considering whether your recipients are internal or external readers, your content and delivery protocol's structure may depend on their roles.

Think about these three levels: superior, peer, direct report or associate.

	INTERNAL	**EXTERNAL**
Superior	▸ Your Boss ▸ Management ▸ Board of Directors	▸ Customers or Clients ▸ General Public ▸ Government and Regulatory Bodies ▸ Investors

	INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
Peer	▸ Co-workers from your team or other departments with the same level as you	▸ Suppliers ▸ Business Partners ▸ Business Contacts
Direct Report or Associate	▸ Team members you manage ▸ Entry-level personnel	▸ Representatives from partner companies, suppliers, etc.

Audiences in Business Writing

Part of planning your message and delivery is knowing whom you're writing to, based on the chart. For example, if you're a manager writing a cold meeting request to an external company CEO, starting your email with information that connects with your reader can increase your chance to be considered. Mention something that you have in common or may call his attention:

- A person who referred you to him
- An event that you both attended or where you met or heard him deliver a talk
- A common goal between the prospect's company and yours

Request your CEO to sign a business letter that you'll send as an attachment to be in the same level as your recipient. You can reach out to a "peer", a representative from the prospect company department with the same level as you, to ensure that your message goes through. Your peer can be an executive assistant or manager who can forward the letter to their CEO and recommend it.

ACTIVITY: KNOW THYSELF

Woah! These previous pages are only part of the introduction and I got too excited to share! We will clearly pinpoint the 10 common mistakes in writing and tips on fixing them in the next part of this book. For now, I want you to reflect on these questions:

1. Have you been using the writing process? If not, can you map out what the process looks like for you? Write – edit – write–edit, and go in circles?

2. How many minutes does it usually take you to write a 500-word document?

3. What positive and negative comments have you received from others about the way you write? If none, maybe it's time to share a sample work with someone!

PART 2: 10 COMMON MISTAKES IN BUSINESS WRITING

How to Learn From Your Mistakes

Consider a recent mistake you made in communicating at work. Perhaps, you received negative feedback about a typographic error or a pronoun misuse in one of your emails or letters. There could be many since we're human after all!

Usually, our minds would be alert in the beginning to correct our errors and edit our work. However, we need to make an effort not to repeat our mistakes.

In this book, I listed ten common mistakes in business writing that most professionals commit. But before we go through it, let me share a few tips.

1. Acknowledge your mistakes.

There's nowhere to hide if you distributed wrong information through a memo or sent an email with an incorrect recipient's name. It's okay to apologize and work on a solution rather than covering up your mistake.

A little warning, though: sometimes, a small error can make you people guilty. You don't need to announce your mistake to everyone, even people who are not involved. Don't be too hard on yourself.

2. Analyze what you did wrong.

In her 2007 book Mindset, Carol Dweck shares that by adapting a growth mindset, we can evaluate our experiences as opportunities to develop an action plan, change strategies, and try again[14]. Review your mistakes objectively by asking these basic questions:

- What was my intention?
- What went wrong?
- How did it happen?

[14] Dweck, Carol. "The Mindsets." In Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. New York: Random House, 2016.

- Why did it happen?
- What can I do to avoid this in the future?

3. Practice what you learned.

After evaluating your mistakes, it's now time to study and apply what you learned. Look for tools or resources that will keep you from repeating your errors.

Remember: Acknowledge your mistakes, analyze what you did wrong, and practice what you learned. This chapter will help you shed light on possible mistake patterns you have when it comes to business writing.

Mistake #1 Unclear Goals

Still remember the basic communication model? The sender should be intentional about what feedback to obtain from the rear behind every written communication.

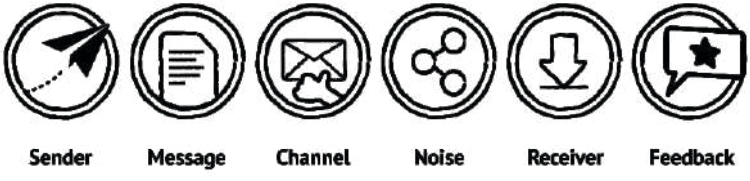


Figure 3. Elements of the Communication Process

When you get the feedback that you want through your written communication, it means that you're effective.

In sending letters, emails, and memos to an intended recipient, the writer should be able to determine his purpose. Is it to inquire? Inform? Inspire? Influence?

What are the goals in business writing?

Writing in general covers one of these five goals: inform, inquire, inspire, instruct, and influence. It's easy to remember these because it all starts with the letter "I".

GOAL	FORM OF WRITING	SAMPLE DOCUMENTS
Inform	Business Writing	Memos, minutes of the meeting, business letters, email announcements
Inquire	Business Writing	Inquiry letters or emails, request for quotation
Inspire	Creative Writing	Poetry, speeches, features
Influence	Business Writing Copywriting	Sales letter, cover letter for job applications, email introduction to a new prospect client, advertisements
Instruct	Technical Writing	Instructional manual, reports, long-form proposals

When you have identified the goal behind your communication, it would be easier to consider the words and information you will use in writing your message. As much as possible, choose one goal at a time when writing your message. This will help you to write your message clearly and give the complete information you need to get your desired feedback.

Here's an example of an email with unclear goals:

Dear Guest,

Thank you for letting us serve you here at Mabuhay Hotel and hope that you're enjoying your stay. Our records show that you are scheduled to depart tomorrow, and we wish to point out that your check-out time is 12 noon the latest. Please contact our front desk if there are any changes with your booking.

Also, please let us know if you need help for your airport transportation so we can reserve one of our luxury limousines. By the way, we attached a copy of your updated charges so that you may review them at your convenience and process speedier check out.

We wish you a pleasant journey in advance and hope that you'll be back in our hotel in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

Maligaya Santos
General Manager

Is the hotel's goal to bid the guest goodbye, offer transportation services, or have the updated charges checked?

Sometimes, you would want to cramp all our messages into one communication to save time. This is not a good practice.

Imagine being in the shoes of the reader. If the hotel's intention was to make the guest feel relaxed and prepare for a smooth checkout, wouldn't the reader worry about the many other questions they had to confirm? The messages in the second paragraph can be asked through a phone call or at the checkout counter.

Writing to Inform

In business writing, I use the acronym "ESP" to remind me of how I'll approach structuring my content for the purpose of writing to inform.

- **E**xplain
- **S**imple words
- **P**resent facts

The information we send out fall into three categories: bad news, good news, and neutral messages. I shared some tips on the next pages about how we can approach each.

Bad News

A bad news message in business writing can be a letter, memo, or email that relays unpleasant or negative information. This includes

rejections, poor performance evaluations, termination letters, or announcements of unwanted policies.

Tweetable

"It is much, much worse to receive bad news through the written word than by somebody simply telling you, and I'm sure you understand why. When somebody simply tells you bad news, you hear it once, and that's the end of it. But when bad news is written down, whether in a letter or a newspaper or on your arm in a felt tip pen, each time you read it, you feel as if you are receiving the bad news again and again."

- Lemony Snicket
Horseradish: Bitter Truths You Can't Avoid

The book Business Communication for Success[15] published in the open library of The University of Minnesota shared a sample script you can use when writing bad news information.

[15] [Author removed at request of original publisher]. (2015, November 25). Delivering a Negative News Message. Retrieved September 06, 2020, from https://open.lib.umn.edu/businesscommunication/

PARTS OF THE NEGATIVE NEWS MESSAGE	EXAMPLE
Buffer or Cushion	Thank you for your order. We appreciate your interest in our product.
Explanation	We are writing to let you know that this product has been unexpectedly popular, with over 10,000 requests on the day you placed your order.
Negative News	This unexpected increase in demand has resulted in a temporary out-of-stock/ backorder situation. We will fulfill your order, received at 11:59 p.m. on 09/09/2022, in the order it was received.
Redirect	We anticipate that your product will ship next Monday. While you wait, we encourage you to consider using the enclosed $5 off coupon toward the purchase of any product in our catalog. We appreciate your business and want you to know that our highest priority is your satisfaction.

I use the Kiss-Kick-Kiss (KKK) formula as an alternative to Buffer-Explain-Bad News-Redirect approach shared earlier. Write the bad news in between two positive remarks.

For example, start with a sentence that compliments the other party. Then mention that you're disengaging from a previous agreement. You do not need to be very transparent if the reasons are

personal or negative. If you're quitting because you are not satisfied with the other party's performance, mention it privately to a point of contact or bring it up in a meeting.

Template: Partnership Termination

Dear Mr. Agustin,

We're grateful to have Printplex as a service provider for our printing needs in the last five years. Your team has been responsive and met our demands for marketing materials.

However, I regret that we need to end our service contract effective December 20, 2022. Our team will redirect our budget on digital promotions moving forward. Please bill our purchasing department for any outstanding balance.

Thank you for your understanding.

Romelle Orteza

Good News

Unlike the bad news messages, good news can be delivered using a direct approach with a positive tone. There are different types of business correspondences carrying good news such as thank you and congratulatory messages, acceptance, and recommendations.

Neutral Messages

Neutral messages are also called deductive messages and do not provoke emotion. An example of this is when your recipient receives your job application letter or responds to your inquiry email.

Trick: The "bottomline" style is commonly used when writing to inform. When writing good news and neutral messages for memos, emails, and letters, put your main point upfront instead of building up your main idea. This helps the readers save time. Only bad news information requires a buffer or cushion.

Writing to Inquire

Let's say you're a procurement officer sending an email inquiry for a printer quote. You can get a faster response from a sales officer when you:

- Give a specific requirement (example: giving predetermined specifications when requesting a quotation)
- Use a company email address with an official e-signature stating the designation and contact details to establish credibility

- Create urgency by mentioning the target date when information is needed
- Sound pleasant and professional with choice of words despite the pressure of finding a supplier right away.

Aside from these tips, a key reminder to be effective in writing requests uses the acronym: **PICS - Pleasant, Important, Credible, Specific.**

Tweetable

"A goal properly set is halfway reached."
– Zig Ziglar

Writing to Influence

In his book Influence: *The Psychology of Persuasion*, Dr. Robert Cialdini shares six universal principles that can help you influence others in both written and oral communication in the workplace.[16]

1. Liking. People need to like you to listen to you. Build rapport and establish common grounds.

2. Authority. We tend to follow expert advice so building credibility is important.

[16] Cialdini, Robert. 2014. Influence: The Psychology Of Persuasion. Harper Collins e-Books.

3. Consistency. People are looking for consistency in your words and behavior. When you mentioned in your business letter that you'll follow up in a week, make sure you've scheduled time to call your client as promised.

4. Consensus. People trust social proof and will most likely act when they see that other people are doing it.

5. Reciprocity. Offer something first before asking what you want.

6. Scarcity. It's important to let people know what they'll lose if they failed to act on your proposal.

These six are commonly used in copywriting. This writing style's main goal is to persuade others into action, such as signing up for a subscription or purchasing.

What's the difference between copywriting and business writing?

The different writing techniques vary because of their purpose and target reader.

Copywriting is often used for advertising and direct marketing with the goal of selling. Websites or landing pages where the readers have an option to purchase directly uses an enticing word to persuade potential customers into action. A single copy can be accessed or sent out to multiple recipients.

While business writing skills are applied in sales letters or cover letters for proposals, the end goal is usually to request for a meeting or a call. The sales process does not happen right away. There is also

a specific recipient of a communication because it's a one-to-one approach.

While Cialdini's six principles may also be helpful in business writing, I prefer a simple formula called C-B-A. **C**onnection. **B**enefit. **A**ction.

1. Connection

Start your communication by building rapport with your reader. How do you do that? Mention things you have in common. Have you been to a similar event or conference recently? Do you support the same corporate social responsibility efforts? Was the recipient referred by someone you know?

2. Benefit

Add a few sentences that would make the reader understand the benefit of your products or services. Why should they meet with your team? How can your business help them if they scheduled a call with you?

3. Action

A clear call-to-action will lead the readers to the next step you want them to take. An example of this would be leaving a contact number where a prospective client can reach you or asking for a response before a given due date.

Summary of Business Writing Goals

PURPOSE IN BUSINESS WRITING	ACRONYM GUIDE TO REMEMBER	KEYWORDS / TIPS TO MAKE YOUR COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE
Inquiring or getting information	PICS	Pleasant Important Credible Specific
Giving neutral information	ESP	Explain Simple words Present facts
Giving bad news or complains	KKK	Kiss Kick Kiss
Influencing	CBA	Connection Benefit Action

Goals in Business Writing

ACTIVITY: REWRITE YOUR PREVIOUS WORK

Retrieve an inquiry email that you composed and sent in the past. Assess if your words are pleasant, important, credible, and

specific. Practice and revise the email to improve word choice and tone. Write it on the space below.

Mistake #2 Complex Words

Some professionals tend to use pretentious words or phrases to impress their reader. Unfortunately, this complicates the reading process. For instance, let's take a look at this sentence:

> *It's a fragile and tedious procedure; however, the individuals who drive this forward are remunerated with something astounding.*

The sample sentence uses a lot of complex words. Not only does it contribute to a lack of clarity, but also the tone of writing is stiff and non-conversational.

Let's study the complex words and find simpler alternatives.

- Complex: Fragile and tedious
- Alternative: Delicate and tiring

The word fragile is often associated with items that are made of glass or require careful handling. Since we are describing a process, the word delicate is more appropriate.

When we attempt to impress and use difficult words, we can commit a mistake in word usage. Tiring, on the other hand, is a simpler alternative to the word tedious.

- Complex: individuals
- Alternative: workers or employees

"Individuals" is a generic term. In the context of the sentence, making it more specific would help the reader understand the idea clearer.

- Complex: drive this forward
- Alternative: carry it out

"Drive this forward" is a metaphor. While this is a valid phrase to use, "carry it out" is more appropriate for easier comprehension.

- Complex: remunerated with something outstanding
- Alternative: highly paid

Your reader may not be familiar with the word remunerated. Let's use compensated or paid to make it simpler. Astounding is a vague and complex adjective to use, too.

Sentence with simple words:

> *It's a delicate and tiresome procedure; however, the workers who carry it out are highly paid.*

Ready for a second example? Find out the complex words in the following sentence:

> *A government with a good enough handle on what information gets disseminated to the people could make it look good for at least the first year or so.*

Instead of using the word "spread", the writer used the word "disseminated". While both words have the same meaning, the writer used a longer and unfamiliar word.

Here's a simpler version of the sentence:

> *A government with a good enough handle on what information gets distributed to the people could make it look good for at least the first year or so.*

Much easier to understand now, isn't it? But wait, there are still

vague words up there. The phrases "good enough handle" and "could make it look good" uses simple words. We need to find concrete alternatives for you to be clearly understood.

How about this version:

> *A government with a competent agency, who decides which information the people may access, could build good publicity, at least the first year or so.*

Trick: Be mindful of using jargons or unfamiliar acronyms.

Sadly, there are popular business jargons that have been around for so long that people in your workplace may continue using these in spoken or written language. Often, jargons can be misinterpreted. In writing, the rule is to use words that are simple enough that career starters or newcomers in the office would understand.

Here are commonly used business jargons you should avoid:

1. Actionable

Intended meaning: Something that you can take action on.

Sample sentence usage #1:

Please think of an actionable solution to the problem.

Alternative word or phrase: realistic, possible

Sample Sentence Usage #2:
His behavior, though offensive, was not actionable.

Alternative word or phrase: Prohibited, illegal

2. Deep dive
Intended meaning: Examine in detail to find specific information.

Sample sentence usage #1:
Can you take a deep dive at this year's report in the file room?

Possible misinterpretation:
The word "dive" is often associated with swimming. A new employee unfamiliar with this term may actually expect a pile of papers that he need to literally sink into.

Alternative word or phrase: review, examine

3. Gain Traction
Intended meaning: Become more popular or gain acceptance

Sample sentence usage #1:
Our new brand ambassador helped us gain traction on social media.

Possible misinterpretation:
If the person you're talking to is new in using marketing language, he may think of how the tires grip on a road.

Alternative word or phrase: popular

Revised sentence:
Our new brand ambassador helped us become popular on social media.

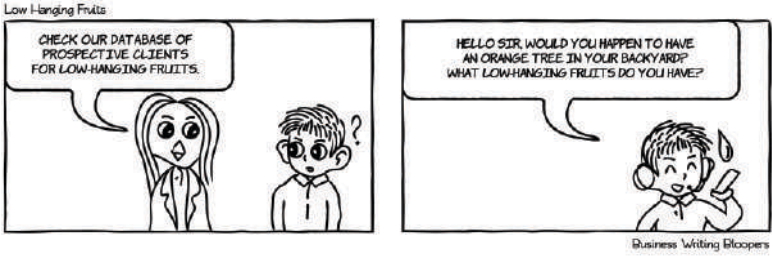
4. Low-hanging fruit

Intended meaning: Easy target or goals you can easily reach with less effort.

Sample sentence usage #1:
Check our database of prospective clients for low-hanging fruits.

Possible misinterpretation:
Your new assistant may search for mangoes or apples…a list of fruits that your potential clients like.

Revised sentence:
Check our database for prospective clients who are most likely to purchase before the end of the month.



5. On the same page

Sample sentence usage #1:
Are we on the same page about the decision to end our contract?

Intended Meaning: in agreement, understanding

Possible misinterpretation:
Your reader may look for the papers and ask you exactly what page of a file you are talking about.

Revised sentence:
Do we have the same point of view about the decision to end our contract?

Tweetable:

"My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way."

— Ernest Hemingway

ACTIVITY

Find the complex word in each sentence and write a simple alternative word to replace it.

1. It is advantageous for professionals to undergo a business writing workshop.

Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

2. Are you cognizant that your writing skills need improvement?
Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

3. Commence the meeting immediately.
Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

4. Avoid eating food that deteriorates your body.
Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

5. Please disseminate the memo to the staff who arrived late.
Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

6. Make sure to deliver the document expeditiously.
Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

7. Her note-taking proficiency has improved.
Complex Word:
Alternative Word:

Find the answers at http://blog.writinghacksacademy.com/tcm-answer-key/

Mistake #3 Vague Phrases

From finding complex words, we move on to vague phrases. The key we should remember here is to use concrete words.

Test your knowledge through this example:

> *After conducting a three-year study on public housing units, management concluded that drying laundry indoors is accompanied by scary health hazards.*

Underline the phrase that needs revision.

> *After conducting a three-year study on public housing units, management concluded that drying laundry indoors is accompanied by scary health hazards.*

The sentence initially points out that drying laundry indoors can be hazardous to human health because the process emits air pollutants. However, it only mentions that laundry-drying is accompanied by "scary health hazards" and not their nature.

When reading out of context, a health hazard could be anything from getting clawed by a bear, to getting struck by a meteorite, and more.

Here's the revised sentence:

> *After conducting a three-year study on public housing units, management concluded that drying laundry indoors to save*

energy is accompanied by an emission of hazardous air pollutants.

Need a headstart in improving the choice of words and making your communication concrete? Avoid cliché.

Clichés indicate a lack of thought and originality from the writer which makes the readers disinterested. These should be avoided and replaced with other words to convey a clear message. Here's an example:

Time heals all wounds.

The above sentence carries a cliché statement or quotation. The phrase means that all problems go away with time. This statement could work for creative or feature writing but not for business writing. If we will write the same sentence in the business language, this is how it will sound like:

All problems go away as time passes.

Like the cliché sentence, we have developed several clichés in business writing that we often write as a beginning or closing statement. We use them over time without thinking that we can reword them to become clear, concise, and conversational.

The book *Business Writing: What Works, What Won't*[17] refers to these templates or cliches as "retiring sentence starters or closers. "

[17] Davidson, Wilma. Business Writing: What Works, What Wont. St. Martin's Publishing Group, 1994.

CLICHÉ	ALTERNATIVE
Opening Lines: Please be advised that your new executive assistant will be on board next Monday.	Your new executive assistant will be on board next Monday.
Attached please find our monthly sales report...	The attached monthly sales report indicates...
In reference to the above subject, I have the following suggestions...	I have the following suggestions about...
Closing Lines: Should you have any questions or require further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.	As always, please call me if you have questions.
Thank you for your help in this matter.	Thanks for your help.

Cliche Statements in Business Writing

Mistake #4 Ineffective Subject Lines

Like vague statements, most professionals write unclear subject lines for business emails or memos. For instance, an email concerning service charges would typically carry a subject, such as, "Service Charges for Previous Month."

The subject does not capture at one glance what action the reader has to perform. Is it a recommendation to be reviewed? Is it merely a report? Does the sender intend to say that the service charges are unpaid?

Trick: Use verbs for practical subject lines

Your subject line in emails and memos should get your reader's attention and move their minds to their thinking direction. It doesn't merely state a broad idea. Think of journalism headlines! Intrigue your reader.

Vague Versus Clear Subject Lines

VAGUE	CONCRETE
Marketing Meeting Schedule Changed	Marketing Meeting Moved Next Week
Promotional Discount Scheme	Recommended Discount Scheme Adjustments
Report from Finance Committee	Need to Cut Back on Printing Expenses

Let me clarify: Not all subject lines have to include verbs. There are also different ways how you can write it, especially for marketing emails.

Tips for Writing Effective Email Subject Lines

1. Start with a "how to" phrase or explain concepts.
Example: How to Increase Productivity

2. Use Numbers.
Example: Seven Steps to Increase Productivity

3. Use an "ing verb".
Example: Increasing Your Productivity

4. Create a need.
Example: The Need to Increase Your Productivity

5. Use a whole sentence in either declarative, interrogative, or imperative form.
Example: How can you increase your productivity?

ACTIVITY: CONCRETE SENTENCES

Rewrite these sentences to make them concrete:

1. This year's sales campaign was successful.

2. We had many attendees at the event.

Find the answers at http://blog.writinghacksacademy.com/tcm-answer-key/

Mistake #5 Redundancy

Sentences with redundancies have two words or phrases that mean the same. If you can remove a word from a sentence, do it. Making a sentence long only takes more time for the audience to read.

For example, in the phrase, "the reason why," the word "why" is redundant. It holds the same meaning as "the reason", and is not necessary for the sentence.

Now, try to find the redundant phrase in this example:

Looking down into the pushchair, I saw a young baby drifting off to sleep.

This sentence mentions that the writer looked down into a pushchair and saw a "young baby" drift off to sleep. Babies are always young. That's why they're called babies! The adjective young is not necessary.

More Business Writing Examples:

Redundant: The manager considered the second mobile plan an unneeded luxury.
Correct: The manager considered the second mobile plan a luxury.

The word luxury means it is not a necessity. You don't need to write the word unneeded.

Redundant: The test showed conduction activity that was peculiar in nature.
Correct: The test showed peculiar conduction activity.

The phrase "in nature" may be deleted in the sentence and still keep its meaning.

Trick: Manage your time.

The point of being concise in writing is to save other people's time. Likewise, put importance on managing yours as a professional.

Did you mention sending a proposal or document on a specific date? Promised to respond to an email within the day?

Be smart and realistic with how much time you'll need to work on a written project so you can stick to your word. Let people know when you're behind schedule and give an update on the new target date of response or submission.

Mistake #6 Long Sentences

Be mindful of your sentences' length. Sometimes a long or complicated sentence can be broken down into two or more instead of just separating dependent clauses with a comma.

Examples of Wordy Sentences and Concise Revisions:

The examples below show how you can eliminate extra words. Most of these are found at the beginning of sentences. Delete some unnecessary phrases and use concrete language.

WORDY	CONCISE
In my first three years of working in the company, I realized how significantly an employee's enthusiasm can be destroyed merely by the behavior of his superiors.	In my first three years at work, I realized how an employee's enthusiasm can be ruined by insecure superiors.
The economic situation of Carla Rapada was a crucial factor in the formation of her character.	Carla Rapada's poverty helped form her resilience and character.
Frequently, a chapter in a book reveals to the reader the main point that the author desires to establish during the course of his discussion.	A chapter's title often reveals its main point.

What steps can I do to make my communication concise?

✓ Stick to the point.
✓ Use short and straightforward sentences.
✓ Remove repetitive words.

A concise message is appealing to the audience and only highlights the main idea.

Your letter, memo, or email will be more appreciated if it won't take much time to be read and understood.

The following mistakes are connected with delivering concise messages.

WHAT PEOPLE OFTEN WRITE	WHAT THEY MEAN
Despite the fact that	Although
As far as we're concerned	We believe
The volume of the demand	The demand
Do a study of the effects of	Research

Look at what happens when we write the same message concisely.

First Version

Hi Patrick,

I wanted to consult you about the Facebook advertising campaign we launched last week. I really think that our target market would definitely want to see our philanthropic efforts in Cebu than the business expansion efforts in the area. I think that could make a big impact and would stay in their minds longer than a sales pitch.

For instance, if we talk about our company's efforts to become sustainable and community development projects in the area,

the people that we want to attract will remember our message more. What are your thoughts about it?

Louie

Revision

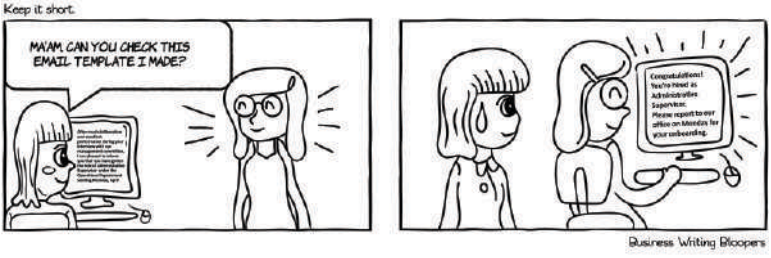
Hi Patrick,

Can we change the Facebook ad campaign we launched last week to highlight our social responsibility efforts in Cebu? This is more focused on our audience than highlighting our company expansion.

What do you think?

Louie

The revision example is direct to the point with shorter sentences and paragraphs.



How can I write shorter sentences?

Avoid repeating your point several times in different ways. You can also combine ideas from two sentences into one.

Using sentences in active voice is also preferred since this has fewer words than a passive voice sentence.

Do I need to keep a maximum word count in a sentence?

There's no need to count the maximum number of words in each sentence. However, you can use the "**two-line rule**".

If your sentence takes up two or more lines on your computer screen, delete or rephrase unnecessary words. If you still need most of the information in the sentence, consider breaking it into two shorter sentences.

Tweetable

"Errors lurk in the middle of long sentences.
Keep them short!"

– Shirley Taylor

Mistake #7 Passive Than Active Voice

According to Purdue University, most non-scientific writing, including business correspondences, uses the active voice rather than the passive.[18]

[18] Purdue Writing Lab. "Tone in Business Writing." Purdue Writing Lab. Accessed December 17, 2020. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/tone_in_business_writing.html.

Why is active voice more powerful? The active version of the sentence better explains the intended meaning to the reader. It is shorter and faster to read and is relatively easier to understand.

However, statements in passive voice also have a purpose. In scientific writing, the passive voice is used so researchers can avoid personal pronouns and specific names. This helps the writing remain fact-based and objective.

Write with active verbs whenever possible. The verb "be" has many forms (is, am, are, were, was) and it indicates a state of being, rather than an action. Using these weaken an active sentence and, in some instances, may indicate passive voice.

Passive: The proposal is waiting for your approval.

Active: The proposal awaits your approval.

ACTIVITY: REWRITE THE SENTENCES BELOW FROM PASSIVE VOICE TO ACTIVE

Write your answers in the space provided.

1. The plumber has already been paid by my brother for his service.

2. He was taught French and issued a certificate.

3. By whom was it written?

4. I had already been offered a job at the agency.

5. The uninvited guest was requested by security to leave the party.

6. All the snacks had been eaten before they finished the meeting.

7. A special edition for his fans has been published by the author.

8. Were you offended by him?

9. A huge hole was cut in the steel door by the thief.

10. The furniture will be displayed by the organizers until Saturday.

Find the answers at http://blog.writinghacksacademy.com/tcm-answer-key/

Mistake #8 Lack of Coherence

Coherence between words can be established by parallel structure. Parallelism is used for a list of consecutive words. For example, if the verb uses the gerund form (-ing), the succeeding verbs should also be in gerund form.

Examples of incoherent sentences:

The director requested his assistant to be in charge of reviewing, submitting, and file the report.

The underlined word should use the gerund form "filing".

The associate volunteered to do the drafting and submission of the design.

The underlined words are not parallel.

Examples of coherent sentences:

The director requested his assistant to review, submit, and file the report.
The associate volunteered to draft and submit the design.

How can I apply coherence between sentences and paragraphs?

Another way to create coherence between sentences and

paragraphs is through transitional devices. Somehow, these are like signposts that tell the reader what is coming ahead and where the discussion leads.

Tweetable

"Coherence improves business flow; resilience makes business robust and anti-fragile."

– Pearl Zhu, Digital Hybridity

What are examples of transition words?

Transition words[19] and phrases, sometimes also called conjunctive adverbs, do the same work as coordinating conjunctions. They connect two words, phrases, or clauses together making the text easier to read.

The use of transition words varies depending on the purpose and relationship of given sentences and clauses. Check the next page for commonly used transition words and phrases.

[19] "Transition Words and Phrases." Retrieved March 13, 2016 from http://www.smart-words.org/linking-words/transition-words.html

ADDITION

- And
- Also
- Besides
- Further
- In addition
- In the first place
- Moreover
- Next
- Too

CONTRAST

- Although
- And yet
- At the same time
- But
- Despite
- Even though
- However
- In contrast
- In spite of
- Nevertheless
- On the contrary
- On the other hand
- Still
- Though
- Yet

GIVING EXAMPLES

- For example
- For instance
- In Fact
- Specifically
- Such as
- That is
- To illustrate

CONCLUSION

- All in all
- In conclusion
- In other words
- In short
- In summary
- On the whole
- That is
- Therefore
- To sum up

PLACE

- Above
- Below
- Beyond
- Close
- Elsewhere
- Farther on
- Here
- Nearby
- Opposite
- To the left or right

COMPARISON

- Also
- In the same manner
- Like
- Likewise
- Similarly
- Same As

SUMMARY

- All in all
- In conclusion
- In other words
- In short
- In summary
- Therefore
- To sum up

LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP

- Accordingly
- As a result
- Because
- Consequently
- For this reason
- Hence
- If
- Otherwise
- Since
- So
- Then
- Therefore
- Thus

TIME			
▸ After	▸ During	▸ Meanwhile	▸ Thereafter
▸ Afterward	▸ Earlier	▸ Next	▸ Until
▸ As long as	▸ Finally	▸ Since	▸ When
▸ As soon as	▸ Formerly	▸ Shortly	▸ While
▸ At last	▸ Immediately	▸ Subsequently	
▸ Before	▸ Later	▸ Then	

ACTIVITY:
ENCIRCLE THE CORRECT TRANSITION WORD OR PHRASE TO COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

1. The survey shows that the senator is the most popular presidential candidate. _____ , there are members of his own party who are uneasy with his approach.

However In particular For instance

2. There are slight variations in temperature, but _____, 26 to 27 °C should be expected.

consequently as a rule otherwise

3. The working hours of the nurses will be doubled. _____ , even fewer trainee nurses are expected to work in the hospital.

As a result So that Likewise

4. Sales of laptops have experienced a small but steady fall over the past months. _____ , tablets have seen an increase in their share of the market.

Above all Correspondingly In contrast

5. Management explained that it would be necessary to retain salary levels at their current level for all grades of staff because of the current financial condition and unexpected bad debts. _____ , no one is getting a raise.

Similarly In other words Nevertheless

6. The situation in Indonesia will improve only slowly. _____ the current economic problems in Vietnam, the outlook is slightly more optimistic.

Likewise Furthermore With reference to

7. In order to try to reduce traffic, the local government announced new policies on public parking spaces and _____, there will be a new tax imposed on individual car use.

in the same way in addition as well as

Find the answers at http://blog.writinghacksacademy.com/tcm-answer-key/

Mistake #9 Forgetting the Reader

Business writing has a conversational style aiming at a target reader. Sentences may also begin with pronouns and end with verbs. You may even start with "and," "but," and "yet." It makes writing sounds like a conversation between two people rather than a textbook.[20]

Writers can often ignore readers and proceed to talk about their own needs and experiences. It's not a surprise that most readers won't care. People are usually attracted to text that discusses them because they will experience a better sense of understanding.

A simple change in perspective can make the reader feel a deeper involvement with what the writer has to say. This will generate more significant interest in the readers and will keep them reading.

---

[20] Yuan, Zhi. "How To Write In Conversational Tone To Increase Readership" Retrieved March 13, 2016 from http://seopressor.com/blog/write-in-conversational-tone-ncrease-readership/

Here's an example:

I have to pay my agent, the buyer's agent and factor in some seller assistant to the costs.

Here, the writer talks about personal issues to explain extra charges for a product and service and have little concern for the reader. Your customers are most concerned about the quality they get and don't care about your inconvenience.

Improving your tone to be audience-oriented will make a big difference. Here's the revised example:

The extra cost will save you time and headaches coordinating with agents and suppliers. I will oversee transacting with them for you.

Trick: Focus on the reader.
Use more "you" in your sentences
instead of "I" and "we".

Here's an example of an email sent to retailer mall tenants about shopping hours extension:

"We" Attitude: I am delighted to announce that Super Santa Mall will be extending our hours this November. We're here to offer convenience for shoppers as well as drive sales for partner retailers and tenants.

"You" Attitude: Your patrons can shop from your store all night this November! Mall hours will be extended until midnight so that you can hit your sales goals and accommodate Christmas shoppers.

Take note, however, that merely inserting the word "you" several times does not ensure a "You" Attitude. You need to highlight the benefits that readers will get from your message.

Sample Email: [Non-Conversational]

Dear Mrs. Julaton,

With regards to our phone conversation last June 21, kindly refer to the attached brochure for your perusal. If you require more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,
Conrad Elefanio

Sample Email: [Conversational]

Dear Mrs. Julaton,

I attached the brochure you requested during our phone conversation last June 21. Let me know if you need more information.

Yours truly,
Conrad Elefanio

What's the proper tone in business writing?

Tone is the attitude reflected through your writing and affects the reader's emotions beyond the words you used.

Let's say you received a Skype message from your superior saying "Do you have a minute to talk?". You may get the impression that you did something wrong and need to be reprimanded.

If your boss rephrased the message into "Can we chat really quick?", this may sound more comfortable because of the shift in tone.

Here are a few examples of different tones that may surface in business writing. Assume that the scenario involves receiving an invitation for a conference:

- **Grateful:** Thanks for the invitation!
- **Informal:** See you next week!
- **Formal:** I'll be joining the conference next week.
- **Skeptical:** May I know why I have been chosen to join this?
- **Regretful:** Sorry, but I can't go.
- **Neutral:** Okay.

Business writing tones are generally friendly or courteous. You may use a neutral tone if the message you'll deliver contains negative feedback or a response to bad news. Avoid words that suggest compulsion, obligation, or suspicion.

NOT APPROPRIATE	CORRECT TONE
You claim that...	Your letter states...
You must have misunderstood our instructions...	Our instructions mentioned that...
You failed to sign the sheet.	The sheet was returned to us unsigned.

ACTIVITY: REWRITE THESE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS TO EMPHASIZE THE POSITIVE

The answer for number one is given as an example.

1. We don't refund returned items that are damaged.
Positive: We issue a refund when the returned item is in good condition.

2. It's impossible for you to open an account without a valid ID.
Positive:

3. You cannot join the business conference without budget approval from your superior.
Positive:

Find the answers at http://blog.writinghacksacademy.com/tcm-answer-key/

Mistake #10 Grammatical Errors

A few grammatical mistakes or typos immediately reduce the prospect of getting a job. In 2009, The Washington Post placed an article where one interesting poll was revealed. 30% of 150 senior executives said they'd throw a resume in the trash after spotting two mistakes. About 40% of them are even more rigorous about accuracy, disqualifying resumes with just a single typo.

Most of us already know the grammar guidelines taught by our university professor, but we may need to spend some time reviewing them. Here's a summary of ten common grammar mistakes to avoid:

1. Incorrect Punctuations

Comma (,)

Use a comma in a sentence if you want to add a pause on a phrase, separate items in a list, and use more than one adjective in descriptions.

Example: *The trainer, who teaches the basics of business writing, prefers to give a take-home exercise.*

Apostrophe (')

Use an apostrophe as a replacement for a missing letter or letters in a word (contraction), to show possession, and in the plural form of some abbreviations, letters, and numbers.

Example: *can't, doesn't, Erik's bride*

The group of years does not need an apostrophe.

Example: *2010s, 1990s, 2000s*

Colon (:)

Use a colon to introduce a series, an example, or put together two independent clauses where the second clause explains the first.

Examples: *I cried after Mikee boarded for his flight: my fiancée finds it hard to enter the departure area.*

For the upcoming Business Writing Training, please bring:

- *pen*
- *notebook*
- *confirmation slip*

Semi-colon (;)

A semicolon combines two independent clauses that could stand as simple sentences.

Example: *My friends choose the pecan pie; I have a slice of blueberry cheesecake.*

Use semicolons to replace commas within list items.

Example: *According to his itinerary, Quinn will visit the following: California, where he'll go to meet his brother who's enlisted in the U.S. Navy; Arizona, where he'll visit the tepees; and in Florida, where he'll go to Disneyland.*

Ampersand (&)

Use an ampersand for a company's formal name or a title; otherwise, don't use it to replace the word "and". It is not preferred in formal writing.

Example: *AT&T, Procter & Gamble*

Quotation Marks ("")

Use quotation marks for citing the exact words someone stated and direct references to a phrase or word.

Example: *"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." - Eleanor Roosevelt*

2. Lack of Parallel Structures

Parallel structure uses the same pattern of words to emphasize that two or more ideas are similar in their importance level. It occurs in words, phrases, and sentences. The correct parallel structure makes your sentence readable. It allows your paragraphs to flow smoothly.

Conjunctions connect parallel structures. Identifying a series helps you spot the correctness of your parallel structure. Series happen when sentences use coordinating conjunctions.

Remember the acronym **FANBOYS** to identify these coordinating conjunctions:

F – or
A – nd
N – or
B – but
O – r
Y – et
S – o

Apart from coordinating conjunctions, another type exists—it is called correlative conjunctions. Correlative conjunctions are words paired together.

Sentences with correlative conjunctions should have a parallel structure since they also link words, phrases, and sentences in a series. Some of its examples are the following:

- not only – but also
- neither/either or
- whether or
- as many as

Examples: *Gerunds (ing-form of words)*
Mari likes writing, editing, and proofreading.

Infinitive Phrases

Mari likes to write, to edit, and to proofread an output.
OR
Mari likes to write, edit, and proofread an output.

Trick: The main thing that you should remember about the parallel structure is uniformity. Uniform patterns in your writing bring clarity.

3. Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Misplaced Modifier

A misplaced modifier happens when a word, phrase, or clause is incorrectly separated from the word it modifies. Sentences with this error sound confusing and funny.

A misplaced modifier makes your sentence illogical. Correct this by moving the modifier next to the word that it describes.

Example:

INCORRECT

Anya found a silver man's watch on top of the coffee table.

CORRECT

Anya found a man's silver watch on top of the coffee table.

Dangling Modifier

Dangling modifiers are phrases or clauses that are not logically related to the word or words that they describe.

A dangling modifier cannot be corrected by moving its place in a sentence. Most of the time, it appears at the beginning of a sentence.

Example:

INCORRECT

When in college, my brother got his first airplane ride experience.

CORRECT

When he was in college, my brother got his first airplane experience.

4. Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence. It can be a group of words that do not convey a complete thought. It misses an essential part of a complete sentence. The missing element may be a subject or a predicate.

Often, they are punctuated as if they were complete sentences. An incomplete thought that serves as an extension of a prior thought is punctuated as if it was a separate sentence.

This mistake happens in explanations and examples. Delete the preceding period, add a comma (if needed), and change the capitalized letter to lowercase. Adding a subject or other needed word can also turn a fragment into a sentence.

Example:

INCORRECT

Shows no improvement in overall performance.

The editor using E.B. White's Elements of Style.

CORRECT

The new editor shows no improvement in his overall performance for the last three months.

The editor, who was using E.B. White's Elements of Style as his reference, got the highest score in assessment.

5. Run-On Sentences

Run-on sentences happen when two or more complete sentences are improperly combined. A splice is a common run-on sentence error. It occurs when a comma combines two or more simple sentences.

Here are several ways to combine simple sentences:

a. Use a period.
This change works well with longer sentences. Make sure that you won't create choppy sentences, though!

Example: *I love to write short stories. I will write one every week if my schedule permits.*

b. Insert semicolon between independent sentences.
It makes a grammatically correct sentence. Semicolon shows a close relationship between two sentences.

Example: *I love to write short stories; I would write one every week if my schedule permits.*

c. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction.
It emphasizes the relationship between the two clauses.

Example: *I love to write short stories, and I would write one every week if my schedule permits.*

6. Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Your subject and verb must agree in number. If your subject is singular, your verb must be singular as well. The same rule applies if your subject is in plural form.

Example:
The editor proofreads the manuscript.
The editors proofread the manuscript.

When your subject has two or more nouns or pronouns linked by "and", your verb should be in plural form.

Example: *The editor and the copywriter discuss the funnel's topic.*

If your sentence has one subject and more than one verb, the verbs in your sentence must agree with your subject.

Example: *Surveys are one of the ways to gather your market's insights and give you an idea of where you should improve your product.*

Collective nouns are considered singular and use a singular verb; however, the plural verb is used if the focus is on the persons in the group.

Examples:
The committee decides that the meeting is to be held every first Monday of the month.
The committee joins in various mastermind activities in their free time.

Noncount nouns go with a singular verb.

Example: *The information garnered from the customers was beneficial to include in the case study.*

7. Use of Prepositions

Use a preposition to modify a noun or pronoun in a sentence. You can use it to describe the:

- Position of an object
- Time when something happens
- Manner in which something is accomplished

Some prepositions are composed of more than one word. Prepositions are connecting words. They make it easy to create complex sentences that link one idea to another. Proper use of prepositions can help you to provide in-depth background information in your sentences.

They are considered as "closed class" because they do not accept new ones, unlike nouns, verbs, and adjectives. They signify unique relationships between persons, objects, and locations.

Types of Prepositions by Function

1. Time Prepositions
These prepositions describe the occurrence of an event.

Example: after, ago, at, before, by, during, for, from, in, on, since, to, until, past

2. Place Prepositions
These prepositions describe the location.

Example: *up, over, under, above, at, below, besides, down, by, in, off, on*

Understanding Prepositions
These six rules will help you to understand how you can use prepositions correctly:

a. Prepositions always have an object.
A "preposition" without an object is not a preposition at all.

Example: *They are in the huddle room.*

b. The prefix "pre" in the word preposition indicates that it appears before an object.

Example: *I put the documents on the long table inside the conference room.*

c. A pronoun that follows a preposition must be in its objective form.

Example: *This is from my co-worker and me.*

d. Some prepositions are complex in form. There are two or three-word prepositions.

Example: *according to, despite, on account of*

e. The preposition to and the infinitive verb to are different.

Example:
Preposition *to*
I'm excited to watch the carnival show.
They are frustrated to start with the project.

Infinitive *to*
They used to celebrate family reunions.
They are hesitant to build the coal power plant.

f. A noun ALWAYS follows a preposition. A verb NEVER follows it.

Example: *Anita placed her resignation under the stacked files.*

8. Vague Pronoun Reference

Vague pronoun reference happens when you write a pronoun that does not clearly and mainly refers to one specific noun. This noun is called an antecedent. Three vague pronoun references must be avoided in your writing:

a. Too many antecedents

A pronoun should belong to only one antecedent. Such an antecedent must be clear and accurate.

Example:

INCORRECT

Take the forms out of the envelope and fold them into three.

CORRECT

Take the forms out of the envelope and fold the forms into three.

b. Hidden antecedents

This happens when the pronoun-antecedent functions more like an adjective than a noun.

Example:

INCORRECT

The cookie jar was empty, but we were excited to eat some more of it.

CORRECT

The cookie jar was empty, but we were excited to eat some more cookies.

c. No antecedent

This happens when writers use a pronoun without providing any antecedent at all.

Example:

INCORRECT

The reporters called the main house, but they didn't reply.

CORRECT

The reporters called the main house, but the representative did not respond.

9. Wrong Word Use

Wrong word use happens when you choose an incorrect word that does not match your sentence's context. This happens when you are referencing the thesaurus and looking for a highfalutin word that would make you sound smart.

This isn't the best practice. It's better to use simple and clear words.

Spell checkers must be handled carefully. You may misspell a word, then the spell checker might modify a word that you intend to retain. Sometimes, you may have overlooked your writing because you are in a hurry.

Example:

INCORRECT

I sometimes want to do people watching, but definitely, I would like to do it with my friends.

CORRECT

I sometimes want to watch people, but definitely, I would like to do it with my friends.

Words and phrases can sometimes sound fine in your head and ears, but they can be incomprehensible when read. Committing even the slightest grammatical error in the documents you've written can affect your chances for career advancement.

10. Split Infinitives

Splitting your infinitive is not necessarily a mistake; it can be a form of stylistic option. English grammar does not recommend splitting infinitives when it comes to speaking and writing.

Seasoned writers sometimes split infinitives because it emphasizes the adverb. A split infinitive is composed of the preposition "to" followed by one or more modifiers before the actual verb.

It occurs when a word separates "to" and the base form of the verb. It is a form of stylistic choice because the grammar is not necessarily wrong. Advanced writers usually practice it for aesthetics.

Example:

INCORRECT

They seem to really enjoy their new assignment.

CORRECT

They really seem to enjoy their new assignment.

Why is English grammar so hard to learn?

English can be one of the most difficult languages for foreign speakers because of its countless rules. Even experts need a refresher course to review the rules!

But as I said in this book's introduction, you don't need to be an expert to perform your writing job well. Remember that checking your grammar only comes in at the last part of the business writing process when you're revising your work.

You have an option to consult an editor, ask a coworker for help, or subscribe to online proofreading tools such as **Grammarly** and **ProWritingAid**.

Don't be frustrated. Remember that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Just like there are some people who are not great at sports (that's me!), understanding and writing can be a challenge for some.

Tweetable:

Grammar is not a set of arbitrary rules; it is a compact between people who wish to understand each other.

-Robert Breault

If you need help, I can pinpoint your common mistake patterns and we'll send you resources for specific grammar rules you need to review.

You can email my team at admin@writinghacksacademy.com and inquire about our **Writing Skills Assessment Report**.

ACTIVITY: SPOT YOUR ERRORS

Now that you know some common writing mistakes, here are some steps you can do:

1. Retrieve some letters or correspondences you have written in the past.
2. Spot one error from your sample work based on one grammar rule we shared in this book.
3. Analyze several practical usage examples (sentences) illustrating that particular grammar rule. If what we provided is insufficient, search for articles online or in reference textbooks.
4. Practice by rewriting sentences and paragraphs from your original work while applying the grammar rule you studied.

PART 3: BLOOPERS

Story Time

If you think you're writing sucks and some of the mistakes I mentioned in this book happened to you in the past, you're not alone!

For fun, I gathered real-life bloopers from some of my students and subscribers. I added tips so we can turn these embarrassing experiences into lessons that may equip you in the future.

SIX HOURS TO DRAFT AN EMAIL

Jovelyn S. Calayo, Talent Acquisition Officer

"I'm in my first year on my first job and still not entirely confident with my email composition skills. My manager always checks my email draft for grammatical errors before sending it to my client. I always take time to write emails, and it is somewhat frustrating, especially when there is a need to explain something.

Once, I had to email my client, and my manager stepped in and wrote it. We were rendering six hours of overtime, and she knows I'm taking that much time to write the email! She wrote everything herself

while I'm by her side so we can go home already. I'm grateful yet embarrassed at the same time.

I always think that I must be polite and grammatically correct. Therefore, I'm taking too long to respond to my clients. Sometimes, it feels like my email is too aggressive, and the recipient might think I'm mad or too bossy. I do not want them to feel that way."

Business Writing Coach Says

Perhaps, you got a copy of this book because you want to create a remarkable impression like Jovelyn. There is nothing wrong with that. I cannot physically teleport myself beside you to craft an email the same as what her boss did. But I hope my advice will come in handy when you need them.

When I receive complaints from clients about their time spent writing, I first ask them if they're familiar with the writing process. Their usual answer is "No."

Writing, like any activity, has a systematized way of doing it.

Let's use cooking directions as an example. To create delicious dishes, we usually follow these steps:

1. Know what to cook and who you're cooking for
2. Prepare the ingredients
3. Follow basic cooking rules you've learned
4. Plate the dish and serve

Effective business writing also goes through a three-stage process: prewriting, writing, and revising.

The reason most professionals take too long to write is that they lack knowledge of this process. Thus, they're becoming too careful and fearful of making mistakes.

Like cooking, part of prewriting is knowing who your target reader is. Often, we spend more time working on a document if we want to please the recipient. For example, if you are a manager writing a business letter to a company president, you may be more meticulous than when addressing a memo to your team members.

However, this step will be easier if you're equipped for the second stage: writing your message. We choose our words and organize our paragraphs based on the purpose of our communication.

Editing and revising your work happen last. When you have written all the ideas you need to write for your message, it's easier to review your work for corrections. Doing this at the last phase saves you time.

DOUBLE-EDGED TEMPLATE

Jocelyn G. Cruz, Freelance Program Producer

"When I was still working as a program producer for a radio station's newsroom, part of my job is to invite people who can give us an angle to a news story. For example, if there is a proposed bill that is currently being debated on the congressional floor, I need to invite resource persons who have a stake in the said bill.

In writing the invitation, I already have an introduction template about the program and a short profile of my host. The things I need to supply are the 5Ws and 1H. However, there is one instance when I wasn't able to change the name of my recipient. I only realized my mistake when my email was sent back to me by a congressional representative's office with a note that says that I sent them the wrong mail. I really felt bad about it because, in my line of work, integrity is important. You cannot connect to a potential interviewee or guest if he or she is not comfortable with you.

How you handle your invites reflects how meticulous you are in performing your job. If this is not met, there would be distrust, and it won't be directed only to you but also to the program you are handling, the host that you work with, and the network you are connected to. It was actually just a simple mistake but, in our line of work, recklessness is an offense that could get you a suspension or a dismissal. We must be accurate all the time or else we may provide wrong information and mislead the public.

Today, it has become a habit to go over my written work at least once to check for mistakes and typographical errors before I release it."

Business Writing Coach Says

I regard templates as a double-edged sword. It can be a great tool to make your writing task easy for you. However, it can also make you too complacent, thus mixing up some information. Jocelyn only needed to supply the basic 5Ws and 1H information and edit her file, but she missed a congressional representative's correct name. This blooper usually happens when you are revising templates or sending emails to many recipients, so be careful.

I want to highlight the good point Jocelyn did: ensuring that her correspondence has complete information. This is important to communicate effectively with your target readers. You achieve this when the receiver gets all the important information he or she needs to make appropriate feedback.

EXPLOSIVE WORDS

Florlynn B. Dela Peña, Human Resource Practitioner

"Assigned in a department where everyone expects you to have proficient communication skills requires a lot of effort and is quite stressful. Our Human Resource Department has always been a place full of people, with many queries, complaints, and submission of tons of documents. However, we also need to ensure the welfare and stability of employees. Thus, we create programs and surprise activities beneficial to everyone.

There's this one time, we planned to throw a party for the

company owner. We know the usual time she arrives in the office; so we can make sure that we can prepare before she comes. Without our team knowing, one of our on-the-job trainees left a note at the entrance of our office the day before the event when our team was not around. The OJT wants the HR department to be the first to enter the office and prepare the surprise.

The following morning, that trainee was not able to come on time and he failed to notify the team about his note. No one entered the office and he started a great commotion. The note he left goes like this: 'Do not enter. There is an explosive surprise inside!'

So the early birds of the company called the security of the building to check whether someone placed a bomb inside or it is just a prank. When I arrived at the office, I immediately called the trainee and he told me that he placed that note so that only the HR team will be able to enter.

What he really meant was this, "Do not enter because there's a big birthday surprise inside." And because of his straightforward note and some misleading ideas, the whole company was put into trouble.

When the owner of the company arrived, she was surprised by the panic that was created outside the office and not with the party that our department had prepared. We had told her about the busted surprise to resolve the commotion.

She just laughed when we shared the whole story and even saw the note that our trainee had placed. We all realized how important it is to keep in mind that our written words convey our real intentions."

Business Writing Coach Says

Wow! This story made me burst into laughter. Kidding aside, the event posters you create for a supervisor's birthday or handwritten Post-its on office bulletins are not business correspondences. However, we may unconsciously commit the trainee's mistake when we write sensationalized headlines and skip presenting precise facts.

For example, imagine you're writing a sales letter offering printing machines to offices in Metro Manila: "Our partnership can contribute massive growth to your company's success!"

What partnership are you talking about? You are selling goods and this will be a buyer-seller agreement. Massive growth? How massive is massive? What form of success are we talking about?

Maybe reword it this way: "Our eco-friendly printing machines reduce electricity consumption by 15%, eliminate ink wastage, and help your company cut costs."

LETTER TO THE (WRONG) HR

Camille Baliwag, Accounts Receivable Team Lead

"Have you ever been so excited to send an email that you hardly double-check it before sending? I guess at some point, I was guilty of

this as well. Whenever there's a pop-up window saying that I haven't double-checked the email yet, I simply close it and hit send. I ignore the message simply because I know that it is pertaining to individuals in my email whose names or surnames are not recognized in the English dictionary. The pop-up window for me is just an inconvenience.

Little did I know that this pop-up window is like our safety net, which prompts us to really double-check everything before sending the email—not just the body of the email, but also the recipients as well. This is the lesson I have learned from being a recipient of a misaddressed email.

Out of the blue, I have received an email from a colleague containing a personal confidential email. It contains a resume which he wants to be reviewed and to be sent to another company ASAP. The problem is that I am not the intended recipient of the email, nor am I the sole recipient. Apparently, it was sent to our company's distribution group, with our HR included!

I still cannot imagine how he could have sent it to the wrong group. Was he in a hurry to send the email? Did the pop-up window not appear before he sent the email? I ran out of ideas as to what could have caused the accident. I have tried to imagine being in the same shoes and I do not know what to do if it ever happened to me. I never learned if he was given any disciplinary action, but one thing is for sure, he learned a valuable lesson the hard way—a lesson which I have learned as well.

From then on, I am much more careful in proofreading and double-checking my emails before sending them. Not that I use my work email to apply to another company."

Business Writing Coach Says

Put extra care in using the email heading fields. Not only when you're about to send an application to a different company, of course.

One trick I practice in sending an outgoing message is to write the recipient's email address last. If I accidentally hit the send button while drafting my email (which happens), my email won't be delivered yet.

A part of the email heading that you can work out and learn to improve on are subject lines. This is one area where you can apply what you learned about choosing concrete words.

MYSTERY SENDER

Nelson Espiritu, Site Acquisition Representative

"I was one of the 'lucky' roaming frontliners to have a job during the lockdown last April 2020. I was a part of a telecommunications company. My job is to talk and negotiate with mayors so that our company can install new cell sites in their municipalities.

One of my goals is to ask if any of the mayors' properties are available for leasing so that my company will no longer look for a local owner in their town. By doing this, we lessen the risk of having our intents and permits rejected, mainly because it's the property of the mayor we are leasing.

Some time ago, I had an appointment with a mayor in Ilocos Sur. I discussed with him about our company's cell-site project. Luckily, he

agreed to have his property leased. The deal was done. I told the mayor the requirements we need to collect, such as the photocopies or photos of his land title, tax declaration, tax receipt, and so on. He told me that he will send everything through email, which is all right. I gave him my email address.

After three days, I received the email from the mayor. It was written by his assistant. The mood of the email is courteous. It also contains some questions and further inquiries about the cell-site project. Attached to the email are the requirements I requested from the Mayor.

But a sentence caught my eye. It almost made me fall off of my seat.

Someone replied to the mayor's email using my email address and it was not me.

The reply: "Got it, thanks".

What?! "Got it thanks"?!

What the hell just happened?! Who in the world would do this to me? This is embarrassing!

I immediately told my boss about this and after some time, we learned that I left my email account open in one of the work laptops in Manila. I logged my account in and left it open to print something when I was there.

A colleague of mine admitted she's the one who 'accidentally' replied to the mayor's email. We asked her why she did it and she thought it's her email account she's using.

'Don't you even read the content of the email?! Are you out of your mind?! Don't you know how discourteous your reply to the mayor was?!' She was greatly scolded for the situation.

Lesson learned: log out immediately from your account if ever you needed to use someone else's computer. To my colleague and to people who are reading this, read everything before replying to emails. And make sure you're using your account!"

Business Writing Coach Says

While the email "Got it. Thanks!" is conversational and okay as a reply, responding using someone else's email address without them knowing isn't.

There will be occasions at work where we feel swamped and carry a heavy workload. This often leads to mistakes such as skipping to read correspondences before approving them or responding to them. Watch out for it.

More than developing soft skills at work, it's important to watch our attitude whether tired or not. I agree when Zig Ziglar said, "Your attitude, not your attitude, will determine your altitude."

There is no guarantee that you will not commit errors or offend coworkers in your journey as a professional. However, we can minimize this kind of situation. Rest when you need to because it will help you become more productive.

CAUGHT BY A GRAMMAR POLICE

Angelie-Ann Erum, Accounting Support Staff

"Three years ago, I joined our company's convention. I learned a

lot from the session and got excited posting about my experience on social media.

During our lunch break, I decided to share an inspirational quote related to what I have learned. I even consulted it with my learning buddy, I called it '*Mareng* Google' ever since. I edited and posted my Facebook status this way: 'Every accomplishments begins with the decision to try.'

After an hour, I visited my newsfeed and my college English professor sent a message telling me that my post's grammar was wrong.

He corrected me with this statement: 'Every accomplishment begins with the decision to try!!!' With three smiley faces and added that 'every' is singular, the subject 'accomplishment' must be singular.

After I read his message, it felt like I joined the talent search *The Voice* and the judges voted 'NO'.

That English professor gave me the highest grade back then, and now, I felt ashamed to receive his remark. Golly! I checked on Google and found out he is right. I should not include the letter 's' on the word 'accomplishment'. Now I really hate that letter!

Kidding aside and accepting my mistake with a smile, I replied to him saying, 'Done editing sir, I got overwhelmed and thank you for the correction.' With two smiley faces.

I now realize that sometimes life is so overwhelming that we cannot notice our mistakes. We just want to express ourselves and feel the freedom of typing away without being conscious."

Business Writing Coach Says

I'm honestly less strict with grammar mistakes on social media and will comment privately only if the person is close to me. This way, I can be considerate.

Most of the time, I let go of criticizing other people's English because I make random errors, too. However, I'm watchful with the content of what we share. Make sure it isn't fake news and we're not harming others with our posts.

We cannot avoid having people who will comment about our grammar or whether we typed a message with incorrect spelling. Instead of feeling insecure with the correction, thank them and move on just like Angelie-Ann did."

OUT OF BREATH

Genevieve Jao, Student

"On-the-job trainees must also write an application letter and resume addressed to their prospect companies. Our OJT coordinator gave this instruction before our deployment to various government and private organizations within Davao City.

Without any experience in writing such documents, my classmates and I did what normal students with internet connections do: copy and paste content from Google. A little edit for the names of persons involved, office addresses, personal information, and position of work applied—and we're done!

But one of us edited his application letter without noticing the missing and misplaced punctuations, commas, and periods! Our program head returned it to him and left the comment 'I'm out of breath' at the bottom. The letter also includes corrections on where to put the missing and misplaced punctuations correctly.

What happened made me realize the importance of having the proper punctuations at the right places. Lesson learned: put a comma to things you want to continue and a period to things that should end."

Business Writing Coach Says

In one chapter, we mentioned that punctuations are important for smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs.

Checking these seemingly minor details also contributes to error-free communication.

TWEETABLE

"You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it."

- Octavia Butler

OOPS! WRONG ONE

Aprilyn Dela Roca, Teacher

"Imagine sending the wrong email to your boss. How would you feel?

It was the end of the school year. Teachers were told to send forms to their academic coordinator. In teaching, doing school forms is really time-consuming and nerve-wracking to the point that we are like zombies because the deadline is coming. When I was done, I immediately hit the 'send' button without reviewing the email content. I said to myself, 'Thank God, I can relax now!'

But within a few minutes, I received a message. Our coordinator said, 'Ma'am, the name of students included was your last year's advisory.'

Immediately, I reviewed the email that I sent and confirmed that I sent the wrong file. I apologized and sent the right one right away.

At work, we can never avoid making some mistakes. But remember that before we hit the 'send' button, we should make sure that it is the right one to prevent misunderstanding."

Business Writing Coach Says

Even teachers can commit mistakes. As a writing coach, I still commit some errors, too. However, these are not reasons for my confidence to waiver and it won't stop me from sharing what I know.

As professionals, we need to be more resilient and have the humility to acknowledge when we are wrong and learn from the experience.

COPY-PASTE RESIGNATION

Jenepher Fajilan, Mompreneur

"It was like Independence Day for me. Alas! I got a new job. Goodbye waking up too early to travel to work, goodbye long hours of travel. In short, goodbye traffic!

These were my reasons why I had to leave my three-year job in Makati. I was holding a piece of paper that meant freedom from my daily wars of traffic. It was my letter of resignation. I was very thankful to myself for being smart to get a new job before leaving my current work. To give you an idea how less stressful the new job was, the new office was only 15 minutes away from my home.

When I felt the time was right to approach my supervisor, I fixed my smile and politely gave my letter. After a few minutes of silent reading, my supervisor looked back at me sharply.

'Are you serious with this?' his voice revealed his strict character.

I replied honestly, 'Yes, sir. I got a new job.' He smiled crazily, 'This is rushed!'

I explained courageously, 'My new job is requesting me to start next week.'

He answered me with a crazy smile, 'That's not what I mean!'

'Sorry. What do you mean?' I was clueless.

'It's not your name written in this letter," he replied with a teasing, wide smile.

I was shocked! I forgot to edit the most important part, the signature of the letter.

Everything happened very fast. I got a new job and had to start very soon so I failed to create a personal resignation letter. Instead, I asked for a softcopy from my officemate.

Overflowing joy blinded me in recognizing the wrong name written in my letter. My earlier excitement turned to embarrassment.

'I'm very sorry. I'm in a hurry. I will change it,' I said shyly. I left the room with my copy-paste resignation letter."

Business Writing Coach Says

Besides Jenepher's excitement in writing her resignation letter, it's safe to say that everyone is rushing!

I guess most employees look forward to finishing their work for the day to head home to their families. Time is important. In business, time equals money. That's why you'll often hear a common statement from managers, "Give me the bottom line."

This doesn't mean you can skip proofreading your work. Communication is a two-way street. Your reader also wants to save time so being direct with your message is helpful.

A NEAR-FATAL STORY OF MISCOMMUNICATION

By Mary Ann Ong, retold to her by a former employee from the Philippine Embassy in London

"This incident happened in a UK suburban hospital where some Filipino nurses are working. A patient in ICU almost died because the nurse on duty did not administer his pills to him at the right time.

When the hospital administrator investigated, they knew that the patient was prescribed a brand of medicine by the doctor. As per the usual protocol, the doctor will endorse the nurse on duty, who will write down the new instructions on their logbook for the next nurse on duty to read.

The first week went by okay. By the second week, there was a change in shift, and here comes this Filipina nurse. She should have written down: 'X doctor is giving X medicine to X patient at X hours.'

Instead, she wrote: "X doctor is given X medicine to X patient at X hours."

When the nurse from the next shift came in (an English nurse), she saw that the Filipina had written 'is given', so she assumed this was in the past tense. Therefore, the English nurse on duty did not give medicines to the patient anymore.

The result? This Pinay nurse was sent home, and the rest of the foreign nurses have to take an English aptitude test."

Business Writing Coach Says

I agree with the action of the hospital to give English aptitude tests to their nurses. When the purpose of communication is to instruct, transition words, same as verb tenses can be as crucial. Misuse can lead to misunderstanding.

PART 4: BONUS TIPS

Frequently Asked Questions

Aside from my intention to meet the required number of words for this book, I thought about sharing the commonly asked questions I receive from my students out of generosity.

Maybe, you grabbed a copy to get any one of these answered so enjoy this chapter!

Writer's Block

How can I overcome writer's block? - Witty Winona

Writer's block happens when you're having a hard time starting your document. You don't know what to write. You may have an idea about the topic, but how you write the message and the exact words are up to you. And you're just lost.

Jeff Goins of Goinswriter.com cited three common reasons for not being able to squeeze ideas from your brain and put them on

paper right away[21]:

1. Bad timing. Your idea may need more brewing so you can serve it as great content.
2. Fear. Putting yourself out there and publishing your work makes you subject to criticism.
3. Perfectionism. You just want everything to be flawless.
And there are ways to address all these.

Let me share a scenario. Did your boss give you a writing task but you couldn't start because you do not have all the details you need? Were you asked to write a memo then realized you don't know the effectivity date of a new policy or who your recipients are after all?

Wait, have you ever thought of asking when the deadline for submission is?

Some managers forget to mention that. You may be writing slowly, assuming it's due tomorrow, only to find out your manager expected you to send it in an hour.

The chances of getting a "frostbite," a.k.a writer's block, and not submitting your work on time will be higher if you don't have the necessary information.

If you have been going through the same experience repeatedly, the first practical and most important tip I can give you is to gather information by listing all the questions you need to cover.

This step is part of the prewriting process mentioned in the firsT

[21] Goins, Jeff. "How to Overcome Writer's Block: 14 Tricks That Work," April 6, 2018. https://goinswriter.com/how-to-overcome-writers-block/.

part of this book. Answer the basic 5Ws and 1H questions to draft your message efficiently.

1. **W**ho is your audience?
2. **W**hat is your message?
3. **W**here will you get the content of your document?
4. **W**hen is the deadline? When do you need to send it out?
5. **W**hy are you writing? What purpose would you like to achieve?
6. **H**ow will you forward it out to the recipients?

Simple, right? When you have these questions covered, you will have a more precise direction when you write. How to overcome writer's block will be easier for you. Structuring your content will be much easier.

Let me share some more tips:

1. Start anywhere.

Forget about writing your introductory paragraph first. Write with bullet points, or you can even do a mind map. Once you jot down the parts that come naturally to you, the rest will start to flow.

2. Create a deadline or set a timer.

Setting a timeline pushes you to complete the task rather than procrastinate. You can even use a timer and write until your work assignment is finished.

I try to compose business emails for five to 15 minutes. When I exceed this time limit, it could mean that I'm overthinking.

3. Research for resources or a template.
Sometimes, nothing's coming out on your paper or laptop screen because you don't know enough about your topic. If that's the case, do a bit more research and then return to writing.

4. Look for an inspiring place to write.
Make a list of places you can go to and concentrate or seek inspiration before you even start to write. It may be the local park or coffee shop—anywhere you can reach in a reasonable amount of time. Whether people-watching or alone-time is your goal, you should list a variety of places that might jumpstart your imagination when you're in a tough spot creatively.

Writing Clear Emails

How can I write clear emails? -Beginner Bob

Ryan, an operations manager of a construction company, wanted his assistant, Lisa, to route a memo. Ryan was working in the field, so he sent a quick email from his mobile device.

Bob received the following message:

Bob,

Please expedite the dissemination of the policy memorandum to ensure harmonious compliance with the procedure.

Ryan

Lisa paused for a few seconds and had to Google some words before she understood the instructions.

"Noted," she replied.

Bob received the email at 3:00 P.M. and prepared printouts of the memo to be signed by her co-workers the next morning. She thought she had done well until Ryan called her at 6:00 P.M. inquiring if the note had been routed the same day.

In short, there was a miscommunication. Bob and Ryan had different expectations.

Like Bob, you may have received a letter or email with words that you hardly understand. Yes, the message sounded intelligent and you had to reach out for a dictionary. However, you miss getting the job done because it lacked one crucial thing—clarity.

You can be intimidating when you sound too smart with your words. Being a credible professional doesn't mean you have to be impressive when you communicate, whether through speaking or writing. You only have to be precise.

Business Writing Coach Says

Ryan used the word "expedite," but he could have given the exact time he wanted the task to be completed. Giving a deadline is a way of being specific. He could also mention if he preferred the memo to be sent out via email as a faster alternative to a printout. If the message is urgent, it's best to give the instructions via call than email.

When your message is unclear, it serves as a noise that hinders the receiver from understanding you and giving appropriate feedback. Clarity is a two-way street. On Bob's part, he could have asked questions to clarify the instructions if he was unsure.

Basic Email Etiquette

Are there dos and don'ts that I need to remember in sending emails?
-Rookie Ruth

Email etiquette refers to the rules you need to follow when writing or responding to email messages. We all aim to work faster and more efficiently. But alongside this, we should always abide by the social rules that accompany whatever form of communication. Here are some to consider.

1. It's okay to introduce yourself briefly.
Do you know how to introduce yourself in an email properly? This is particularly important if you are new to a role that requires constant communication with clients, or even colleagues.

Treat the first email you're sending to a professional contact or potential client as critical as the first impression you make in a personal meeting. It can be disastrous when gone wrong.

So how do you not mess it up? Check the next page for the three things to keep in mind when drafting your first email.

A. Don't expect the person receiving your email to know who you are.

Especially if you're sending a cold email, mention who you are and how you're related to the person you are reaching out to. Relation doesn't mean that you have to come from the same office or family. Think about common places you've both been to, like a conference, the person who referred you to the contact, or any cause you both support.

You don't have to provide a formal and extensive biography of yourself. Sometimes, as simple as giving your name and job title would do the trick.

B. After you introduce yourself, clearly state your purpose in an engaging, polite, and professional manner.

For salespeople, your first intent is usually either a request for a meeting or a phone call. Do not sell on your first email. Remember, we're still in the introduction phase.

C. Don't forget to proofread and spell-check your message before sending it.

Yes, this is a universal rule in sending emails, but there's no better time to emphasize this than when you're crafting your first email.

2. You don't need to mention "gentle reminder".

Have you ever come across emails that include the phrase "gentle reminder" in the subject line or as the phrase preceding your request? This may seem like a polite and straightforward

way to remind or follow up on your recipient.

But to most recipients, this can be perceived as a subtle way of telling them that they're not professional enough to handle healthy workplace interaction. So you're trying to tone down and be gentle on them.

What we want is for the email recipient to comply and accomplish the task that we're trying to remind them about. And we want to do that without being pushy and too demanding.

The good thing is, there are compelling and professional ways to write a reminder. And when done right, a gentle reminder is a useful tool in running a business.

So what can you do if you aren't sure how to follow this email etiquette?

Consider creating or using email templates for different situations. This should include a model for following up. This way, you don't have to stop and think back if you might have written anything that can be taken against you.

Also, use a standard subject line when doing follow-up. You may use "Response Required" to immediately get their attention when they see your email.

3. Be careful with confidential information. Know when not to send an email.

In our typical day-to-day work, we may have gotten used to reading emails, hitting reply, and clicking the send button.

As a matter of fact, the routine has become too familiar that we hardly pause and think, "Am I sending this information to the correct recipient?" Or, "do I really need to send this email?"

There are situations when you:

- MUST NOT discuss information through email
- Don't need to send an email

Information such as salary, tax information, or details of a highly sensitive business project is considered confidential. Be mindful when attaching documents that contain these, and if you must, ensure to include only the concerned recipients.

You have to remember that there are dangerous, even legal consequences when this confidential information gets into the wrong hands. So this email etiquette is something that should not be taken lightly.

There are also times that sending an email is not a practical option. For example, if you need an urgent response to your concern, it's better to pick up the phone and discuss or schedule a meeting if it's not that urgent. Perhaps you want to request a raise, it's better to do that in person. In these scenarios, a personal or virtual meeting is the more sensible action.

4. Send or copy others on a need-to-know basis.

When sending an email to various recipients, you have to understand the roles they play as to why you're sending or copying them in the correspondence.

Just imagine waiting for a reply from one of the persons to whom you sent out your email. He was one of the recipients, but you never got the response you required. What could be the problem?

This is the purpose of the "To" and "CC" fields.

- The "To" field is where you list recipients to whom you are directly addressing your email. They are the ones who need to take action or the ones who need the information/document sent out to them.
- Meanwhile, the "CC" field is where you list the names of persons who need to be on the loop but are not required to take action. They are only being sent a copy as FYI.
-

So before you hit "Reply All' or include all names on the "To" or "CC" lines, double-check and determine if they really need the information or document you're about to send them. If they don't, why do you have to send it?

5. Maintain privacy by using the BCC field.

When you receive an email that contains multiple email addresses, you can see everyone the email was sent to.

What if the person who received it has an evil intention?

He may try to find details about a specific recipient online. He may sell the email addresses to people who send out spam emails. In some cases, he could attack one or more of the recipients by harassment, threat, scam, or hack.

That is why an email address is one of the many pieces of information about a person that needs to be secured and remain private.

So when sending a message to a group of people, how do you ensure that their data is protected?

Aside from the "To" and "CC" fields, you may have noticed the "BCC" field. This field is for recipients whom you want to inform or require an action, but you want to keep their addresses a secret. They will not be able to know who else received the same email. Another benefit of using the "BCC" field is that "Reply All" is disabled so you can't reply to everyone even if you accidentally click it.

6. Use proper sign-off.

The last line of your email and your signature is your email sign-off. It is the last thing your recipients see after reading your message. Your email sign-off could motivate how quickly they will respond or if they will respond at all.

Email sign-offs, when well-constructed, can leave the reader with a positive impression.

To do this, create an electronic signature. You can find this in your email's settings.

Your email signature should contain your name, job role, office address, and phone number. This is really important primarily when you communicate with someone new.

Ending your email with a proper sign-off allows your recipient to get to know you better. Not to mention, it leaves a good impression.

Even if you and your recipient already know each other, these details can come in handy should your recipient choose to get in touch with you aside from sending an email.

So think of your email sign-off as an ending to a conversation. You have a better chance of receiving a positive response when you use polite, friendly, yet professional language when signing off your email.

7. Your email reflects you.

In the age of the internet, most, if not all, of our work communications are through email. We email our clients and colleagues more often than we speak to them over the phone or in person.

In an email, it is more difficult to adequately express the essential aspects of style, attitude, and personality. This is in direct contrast to face-to-face communication wherein you can see how they speak, their facial expressions, and their mannerisms.

Be mindful of how your writing style reflects your personality. Every email you send affects your credibility.

When you send an email that is disorganized and with plenty of mistakes, what do you think your recipient will think of you? You wouldn't want to be deemed as careless and disorganized right? Poor grammar and loosely constructed sentences reflect low IQ and academic intelligence. On the other hand, the absence of typo error is a sign of diligence.

In the professional world, other people's opinion matters. And how they perceive you is critical to your success.

Subject Lines for Job Applications

I want my job applications to stand out. Any suggestion on what effective email subject lines to use? – Jobseeker Jessa

When recruitment managers receive your application online, the subject line of your email creates a first impression. You want to be sure that this is clear and error-free.

It's important to include the job title of the position you're

applying for. This is helpful if the recipient wants to scan and filter the applications they receive. Keep it short and simple.

Here are some examples of subject lines you may use for job applications.

- [Position You Are Applying For] – [Insert Your Name]
- Finance Officer Position – Ramil Perez
- Sales Director Application – Rochelle Toledo

Resignation Letters

What's the best way to write resignation letters? - Thoughtful Tessa

Say that you're leaving. A brief reason will do and it doesn't have to be concrete like what you learned in the earlier chapter. Sometimes, "personal reasons" or "taking new direction" are accepted. You don't need to be transparent about your reason for leaving. If you are writing to your boss and have suffered five years in the company under his leadership, a written letter is not a good way to say it.

Compliment or thank the company. Mention how grateful you are over the last months. Include details such as your target last day at work, offer help with the transition, or ask for instructions if you're not familiar with company protocols. Close on a positive note.

Tweetable

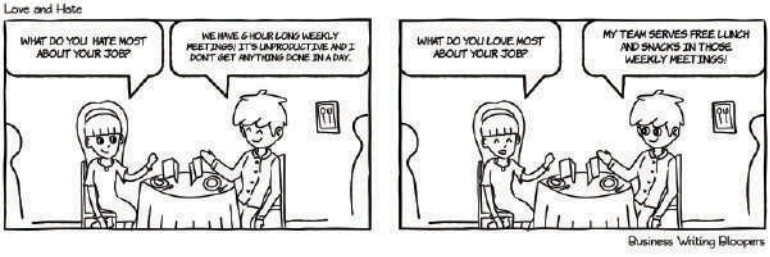
"Always keep the door open, because you never know when you may want to return or even work with other colleagues in a future role elsewhere."[22]

- Pat Roque

Meeting Agenda

How can we apply writing in a considerate manner when creating a meeting agenda? – Meticulous Maria

In the United States, an average of 11 million meetings takes place each day. An office employee spends over five hours sitting in meetings and more than four hours preparing weekly.[23]



[22] Schooley, S. (n.d.). Writing a Job Resignation Letter. Retrieved December 17, 2020, from https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/8975-sample-resignation-letter.html

[23] Chang Chen, "Shocking Meeting Statistics In 2020 (That Will Take You By Surprise)," Otter.ai (Blogs - Otter.ai, January 5, 2021), https://blog.otter.ai/meeting-statistics/.

A day in a week spent on meetings doesn't sound too bad, right? Especially if the discussions will lead to getting more clients and running projects smoothly. However, this is not always the case. *Harvard Business Review*[24] published an online survey among 182 senior managers from various industries, and here are key results:

- 71% said that meetings are often unproductive and inefficient.
- 65% said meetings keep them from completing their own work.

I somehow agree because I've sat in several meetings set for one hour but extended up to three hours. I wished I could sneak out of the room to get back to work. Here are some tips for redeeming your time spent in meetings and become more productive at work:

1. Prepare an agenda.

The first responsibility of the meeting facilitator is to prepare an agenda. This is a simple document that summarizes the meeting's goals, duration, and key points to discuss.

In your agenda, remind meeting participants what to bring or review before the meeting. If others will be asked to present, set expectations about the allotted time so that you have a basis to cut them off when they exceed their presentation's set time limit. There's always an option to schedule another meeting for topics that were not discussed because of time constraints. You can also ask the presenter to send copies of documents or references for participants to review.

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[24] Leslie Perlow, Constance Noonan Hadley, and Eunice Fun, "Stop the Meeting Madness," Harvard Business Review, June 26, 2017, https://hbr.org/2017/07/stop-the-meeting-madness.

2. Limit the number of meeting participants

According to a *Harvard Business Review* report, meetings with fewer than eight people tend to be more effective than those with many participants.[25] Along those lines, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos never holds a meeting where two pizzas couldn't feed the entire group.[26]

3. Assign a Note-Taker and a Timekeeper

Before you begin the meeting, assign a note-taker and timekeeper. Logging the minutes of the meeting will help ensure that action will be taken on the matters discussed.

When your session is not documented, there will be a higher chance that meeting participants will forget assigned tasks. This means everyone's time has been wasted.

On the other hand, the timekeeper should be firm enough to remind the participants about your agreed time for the meeting.

Following the schedule to begin and end is a sign of respect. It may be a challenge at first to be mindful of the time but setting this rule could help your team members get used to this culture.

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[25] "The Most Productive Meetings Have Fewer Than 8 People". 2020. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2018/06/the-most-productive-meetings-have-fewer-than-8-people.

[26] Connley, Courtney. "Jeff Bezos' 'Two Pizza Rule' Can Help You Hold More Productive Meetings." CNBC. CNBC, April 30, 2018. https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/30/jeff-bezos-2-pizza-rule-can-help-you-hold-more-productive-meetings.html.

Tweetable

"Be someone who genuinely seeks to understand, and you will be wise. Be someone kind, someone considerate, and you will be admired. Be someone who values truth, and you will be respected. Be someone who takes action, and you will move life forward."

- Ralph Marston

Use of Vocabulary

We were taught in college to read books and widen our vocabulary. Why can't I flaunt my writing in business? I'm confused. – Wordsmith Wally

The style of writing we got used to at school is academic writing for research papers or essays. Professors usually give us word counts we should meet; thus, we strive to write as long as we can. The goal of the assigned task is to develop critical thinking and encourage the student to form different point of views. Students also get recognized when they use new words or impressive language.

This is different from what is required in business. Time is important in the workplace, so we strive to be clear and on-point.

Sales Proposals

Any tips in writing sales letters and proposals? - Sales Savvy Sheila

In a previous chapter, I mentioned using the C-B-A formula in writing to influence. Here are more tips you can apply for your next sales proposal to increase your chance of converting your reader into a customer.

1. Connection

Before saying anything about your product or what you're offering to your reader, you must first establish a connection.

How can you do this? There are different ways to build a connection with your reader, and you might need to do a little research. You can start by mentioning a common friend or acquaintance. Bringing up a similar interest or hobby is also a great strategy.

If you have time to do more research and read some of your prospect's accomplishments, you can praise them for it. Your goal is to make them feel noticed or appreciated. You'll be surprised how effective this is.

2. Benefits

You should include your product's benefits in your initial sales

letter, introduction, and cover letter. You need to answer this question: How will my reader benefit from the product or service I'm offering?

This is more important than highlighting how many years you have been in the business or your accomplishments. Why? Because your readers don't care about your background that much. Instead, they want to know what they can get from you and what kind of result they should expect. If you have a list of products and services you want to show them, turn that into a separate attachment.

3. Call-To-Action (CTA)

Your sales proposal won't be complete without a crystal clear call-to-action. What do you want your target reader or a prospective client to do after reading your proposal? Do you want them to schedule a phone call with you? To sign up for your online course? Or to visit your sales page and check out your product?

You need to be specific about your CTA and make sure that you include one in your sales proposal.

Project Proposal Checklist

I'm working on a project proposal for a client. Is there any framework I can follow in making one? - Project Manager Pat

Maybe you're a new member of your marketing team and have received handed-down proposal templates used by your colleagues. Templates will help you write and work on your client presentations faster. However, the document you inherited may be outdated and ineffective. Run through this simple checklist to assess if your proposal needs an upgrade. We will only discuss the content for now.

1. Cover Letter or Executive Summary

Your cover letter briefly explains the intent of your proposal. Check if the content answers the question: Why do I need your product or service?

Summarize the benefits for the prospective clients and the problem you wish to address. You may include a sentence or two about your company achievements to establish credibility. However, details, including your awards or list of clients, can be included in the latter part.

Remember, the cover letter is about "what's in it for the client" and not about you.

2. Problem and Solution

Assign a page or two to discuss your prospective client's problem and the results you wish for them to achieve through your products or services. Do your research. Customizing the information based on what you know about your prospects will

give the impression that you care about what they do and understand their situation.

3. Proposal

Outline the core of your proposal by mentioning how your product or services will achieve your target client's desired result. This part may contain the steps to roll out the project or corresponding features and benefits of the product.

Note the difference between features and benefits. Features may be technical for your reader, and they'll be more concerned if you rephrase the words as benefits instead.

For example, if you're selling office chairs, highlighting the features will use these words:

Twenty-four cushioned, powder-coated stainless steel with leather backrest and wheels.

If you describe the same product focused on the benefits, you can say:

Our sturdy office chairs let you sit comfortably for hours and move around your workspace swiftly.

Find a way to keep your descriptions balanced.

4. Testimonials

Gather reviews from previous clients or photos from past projects you've successfully launched. Testimonials will help the reader perceive you as a credible company. It's also practical that you position yourself well because you're disclosing about the costs next.

5. Cost

Your cost may be stated in the proposal or discussed through a face-to-face meeting if your rates are subject to negotiation. You have an option to include a comparison chart for different packages but limit the possibilities to three.

6. Call-To-Action (CTA)

End your proposal with a call to action, including ways for your prospective client to reach you.

Closing

Being a confident writer begins by having the ability to learn something new, which you did by reading this book. Congratulations!

Now I want to leave you with encouraging words about growing your acquired confidence.

Have you watched the game show *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire*? The contestants are usually offered three lifelines during

tight questions:

- **Call A Friend** – Talk to someone who can give you their opinion. If you're lucky, that person could be a subject matter expert that you need!
- **Ask The Audience** – The game show host will ask the game show audience to vote for the right answers.
- **50-50** – The game show host will eliminate some of the wrong answers on the board to help you decide better.

The first two lifelines have something to do with connection. If you want to be confident in business writing, it helps if you have people you can ask whenever you need to check a document or validate a writing rule. It can be a mentor, a co-worker, or a friend who is knowledgeable about grammar and style. Even expert authors need editors to review their work, so why shouldn't you? Having one could help instantly boost your confidence.

Joining a community of writers or professionals can also help, just like the game show's Ask The Audience lifeline. If you're part of a private Facebook Group of Sales Managers for example, you can ask them to give their feedback between two sales letter drafts you're working on.

Next is the use of apps and tools. We're in the digital age and nothing can't be solved by a simple Google search. Did you know that there are online tools and websites that can proofread your work? How about checking the capitalizations of your subject lines or formatting a resume? Are there any tools that allow clients to sign proposals and contracts online? Yes, yes, and yes!

Business writing can be more fun when you know that online tools can back you up. But of course, you'll still need knowledge and not totally rely on technology to do the work for you.

If you don't know the correct steps or process in doing a task, you will become hesitant. You'll only have the confidence to claim that you're an excellent business writer if you're familiar with business writing guidelines. Guess what? Grabbing this book is a great start to fill you in with knowledge.

Lastly, experience builds confidence. Knowledge works best when applied. This is how you'll get the experience. Regardless of how many rules you know about the proper style and structure in writing business emails, you'll still lack the confidence if you haven't tried making one!

Think of the acronym **CAKE** to make all these four as easy as a piece of cake for you to remember.

Your mission, after reading this book is to nurture yourself in all four areas. That's something to look forward to, yeah?

Tweetable

"The reason business writing is horrible is that people are afraid. Afraid to say what they mean because they might be criticized for it. Afraid to be misunderstood, to be accused of saying what they didn't mean, because they might be criticized for it."

- Seth Godin

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asia's Writerpreneur Jonah Chipeco merged her passion in writing and entrepreneurship to deliver information products that clients can learn from, use, or sell.

Jonah is a Mass Communication graduate from the Lyceum of the Philippines University. Before her achievements as a resource speaker and writer, she has worked as a direct marketing practitioner for ten years in multinational companies. She eventually established her writing empire in 2017 as the CEO of the online school **Writing Hacks Academy**.

Since then, Jonah has delivered public seminars with credible training institutions. She became a thought leader featured by media organizations such as *Inc. Southeast Asia, Marketing in Asia, Business Mirror, When In Manila, Eagle News Philippines,* and *DWBL 1242 AM*.

Learn more about Jonah's writing courses at **writinghacksacademy.com** or email **admin@writinghackscademy.com**.