# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Learning objectives ...................................................................................................5  
Before and after ........................................................................................................5  
Getting started...........................................................................................................6  
  The goal and why it’s important...........................................................................6  
  Practical principles of business writing (helpful assumptions)..........................6  
  Criteria for effective business writing.................................................................6  
Effective business writing fundamentals.................................................................7  
  Simple, purpose, audience, and effort .................................................................7  
Make your writing **clear** ......................................................................................8  
Make your writing **organized** ..............................................................................11  
Direct or indirect approach? ....................................................................................13  
Make your writing **concise** ................................................................................14  
  Short words ........................................................................................................14  
  Short sentences and short paragraphs ..............................................................15  
  Ruthless editing..................................................................................................15  
  Verb power.........................................................................................................17  
More tools for effective business writing..............................................................18  
  Pay attention to tone...........................................................................................18  
  Use inclusive, non-sexist language ....................................................................20  
  Create visual appeal ............................................................................................21  
  Pay attention to grammar ..................................................................................21  
  Pay attention to readability................................................................................24  
  When/when not to write, “So what?” test, the bottom line ................................26  
Writing sample #1: “Kitty Swindler letter” – Before .................................................27  
Writing sample #2: “Kitty Swindler” – After .............................................................28  
E-mail etiquette – 10 tips.........................................................................................29  
More e-mail tips.......................................................................................................30  
Just for fun: Periphrastics .......................................................................................31  
Personal action plan ...............................................................................................33  
References..............................................................................................................34
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The goal of this training is to help you make your writing quick and easy for your readers to read and understand.

As a result of participating in this course, you will be able to:

1. Describe the ten pointers from the plain language brief style guide.
2. Describe principles and fundamentals of effective business writing.
3. Describe techniques for enhancing the clarity of your writing.
4. Describe techniques for enhancing the organization of your writing.
5. Describe techniques for enhancing the conciseness of your writing.
6. Describe common style, usage, grammar, and punctuation rules and guidelines.
7. Differentiate between writing that is reader friendly and writing that isn’t.

BEFORE AND AFTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gobbledygook (Before)</th>
<th>Plain Language (After)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When the process of freeing a vehicle that has been stuck results in ruts or holes, the operator will fill the rut or hole created by such activity before removing the vehicle from the immediate area.</td>
<td>If you make a hole while freeing a stuck vehicle, you must fill the hole before you drive away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Readability Statistics</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>Readability Statistics</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Sentences: 0%</td>
<td>Passive Sentences: 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease: 26.3</td>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease: 80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 17.1</td>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Readability Statistics: Targets to shoot for

Passive Sentences: 15% or lower
Flesch Reading Ease: 60 or higher
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 8 or lower
GETTING STARTED

The Goal and Why it’s Important

**Goal:** To make your writing quick and easy for your readers to understand.

**Why:**
- Good business writing helps people be efficient and productive.
- Bad business writing causes people to be inefficient and unproductive.
- ________ % of business writing is written to ask others to clarify previous business writing or to provide that clarification.
- Our writing represents us, our programs, and our agencies.

Practical Principles of Business Writing (Helpful Assumptions)

1. No one wants to read it. ➔ Make it ____________.

2. Almost no one will read all of it. ➔ Make it ____________.

3. Almost everyone will misunderstand some part of it. ➔ Make it ____________.

Criteria for Effective Business Writing

Business writing is effective if it achieves three things:

1. **It gets read.**
   Readers read the message because it’s quick and easy.

2. **It’s understood.**
   Readers understand the message because it’s clear.

3. **It achieves the desired results.**
   Readers get from the message what the writer intended them to get.
1. MAKE IT SIMPLE

- Write to express, not impress.
- Write the way you talk.
- Use a conversational approach with the reader.
- Give your writing “SASSS.”
  Simple writing
  Active voice
  Short words
  Short sentences
  Short paragraphs

2. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

- Know your purpose and have a plan (adjust the plan if other ideas come up).
- Start your writing only after you have a clear idea of what you want to say.

3. WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

- Know your audience and tailor your writing to your audience.
- Four questions to ask about your readers
  (1) How much do they know?
  (2) How much do they want to know?
  (3) How much do they need to know?
  (4) How can I present my message so they find it quick and easy to read?
- Other characteristics of your readers to consider
  (1) Their beliefs and attitudes
  (2) Their group loyalties and norms
  (3) Their receptiveness—are they friendly, hostile, or indifferent?

4. PUT EFFORT INTO YOUR WRITING

- Good writing takes some work. It involves more than just writing and sending.
- Think about it. Write it. Read it. Edit it. Read it again. Edit it again. Check spelling and readability. Keep editing until you are satisfied. Proof it. Send it.
MAKE YOUR WRITING CLEAR

Poor clarity is one of the major problems in business writing today. Apply the following ideas to make your writing more clear.

1. DETERMINE PURPOSE

   ♦ Again, be clear in your own mind about your purpose. Why are you writing?

   ♦ Is your purpose to inform, instruct, request, persuade, analyze, recommend, get attention, gain approval, give praise, or something else?

   ♦ Sometimes, you may want to state your purpose right at the start. For example, “The purpose of this e-mail is to…”

2. USE CONCRETE, SPECIFIC, PRECISE WORDS

   ♦ Avoid vague, fuzzy language.
   ♦ Use words people can visualize.
   ♦ Prefer specific words over general words.
   ♦ Use numbers and percentages.
   ♦ Avoid jargon. If there is any chance your reader will not understand an acronym or technical term, define it the first time you use it, or find another way of saying it. Also, avoid inflated, “puffed up” language, e.g., “functional logistical capability.”

   She loved that _____________________. (Choose one: animal or horse or colt.)

   She ________________ across the room. (Choose one: moved or walked or stumbled.)

   She saw the ________________ sink. (Choose one: boat or ship. If it was a ship, was it a battleship or a freighter?)

   Specific words limit meanings and create clarity—they “paint a picture.” Also, choose precise words. A boat is different from a ship, is it not?

   Use numbers and percentages.

   * Not this: Significant fiscal impact is a probable outcome.
   * Instead:

Page 8
Plain Language Plus – Participant Packet – Rev 1.doc
MAKE YOUR WRITING CLEAR (Cont.)

3. PRESENT ONE IDEA PER SENTENCE

- A sentence should hold one idea or concept.

4. PRESENT ONE IDEA PER PARAGRAPH

- A paragraph is the place to develop one idea. Reveal the topic in the first sentence. Develop the topic in the rest of the paragraph. Start a new paragraph when you change the topic.

Writing Sample from a Professional Personnel Journal

Source: Public Personnel Management Journal

Article: Maximizing Performance Appraisal System Acceptance: Perspectives from Municipal Government Personnel Administrators

Excerpt: The first paragraph from the article

Employee acceptance is a critical component of an effective performance appraisal system. Research in organizational behavior clearly demonstrates that employee attitudes influence behavior, and participant attitudes toward performance appraisal systems are no exception. The attitudes of system participants play a key role in both the short and long term success of a performance appraisal system. The goal of this research is to identify the characteristics of municipal government performance appraisal systems that are associated with perceived employee acceptance as reported by a national sample of municipal government personnel officials. Performance appraisal systems are but one component of an overall system of human resources management that is designed to enhance employee effectiveness. The key is the proper design and administration of the system in order to benefit both employees and management. Performance appraisal systems are employed to serve a host of administrative and developmental purposes from providing specific performance feedback to generating information for merit pay, promotion, demotion and other personnel decisions.

Readability Statistics

Passive sentences: ______%

Flesch Reading Ease: ______

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: ______
5. START STRONG

- Capture interest, state your purpose, and get to the point. The first few lines can make or break your message.

- Start with you—not we or I—if you want to show you’re focused on the reader’s needs.

- Avoid a long synopsis of previous correspondence.

- Avoid cliché, old-fashioned, or stilted beginnings:

  - Not: Pursuant to our agreement… Instead: As we agreed…
  - Not: This is in reference to… Instead: Thank you for your letter…
  - Not: Enclosed please find… Instead: I’ve enclosed…

6. FINISH STRONG

- Summarize, make a definitive statement, make a courteous request for action, thank the reader, or end on a personal note.

- Avoid worn-out endings:

  - Not: It has been a pleasure… Instead: I enjoyed working with you…
  - Not: Hoping to hear from you soon… Instead: Please respond by…
  - Not: Please feel free to call… Instead: Please call…
MAKE YOUR WRITING ORGANIZED

Poor organization is another major problem in business writing today. Poorly organized writing does not make for easy reading. Apply the following ideas to achieve a logical organization and flow that helps your readers understand your message.

1. DETERMINE PURPOSE

Once again, ask yourself, “What’s my purpose?” Are you asking, telling, or acknowledging? Is there a deadline or timeframe? Your purpose will help you determine the best way to organize your writing.

2. DEVELOP YOUR IDEAS OR CONTENT

Think before you write. Organized writing comes from organized thinking. Before you start to write, develop your ideas or content. Here are three ways:

   (1) Ask and answer the “5 W’s and 2 H’s.”
   - Who?
   - What?
   - When?
   - Where?
   - Why?
   - How?
   - How much?

   (2) Use brainstorming or mind-mapping to flush out main points and supporting ideas.

   (3) Outline and sequence your ideas in a logical, linear fashion.

3. SELECT AN ORGANIZATION THAT FITS YOUR PURPOSE AND CONTENT

Here are several ways to organize your writing:

   (1) Priority

   - Put the most important information at the beginning, then follow up with the details later. But, provide just the information needed.
   - You make it easy for the reader if what matters most comes first.
   - This applies to documents, paragraphs, and most sentences.
   - In other words, get to the point.

   Focus the message around the facts (who, what, where, when, why, how).

   Include only relevant information.
MAKE YOUR WRITING ORGANIZED (Cont.)

(2) **Chronology**
- In time sequence, from past to present to future.

(3) **Policy Model or Completed Staff Work**
- State the issue.
- Describe the options with pros, cons, and costs.
- Recommend a decision or action.

(4) **Problem, Cause, Solution**
- What’s the problem?
- What’s the cause of the problem?
- What’s the fix for the problem?

(5) **Compare and Contrast**
- This is good for evaluating two or more factors on the same criteria.

(6) **Advantages and Disadvantages**
- This is similar to “Compare and Contrast,” and works well for evaluating a single factor or issue.
- Considers the positives and negatives.
- It may help a reader understand if you explain why not (negatives) as well as why (positives)

4. CONSIDER THE BEST APPROACH: DIRECT OR INDIRECT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMAT</th>
<th>USES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| DIRECT | (1) Asks for action, tells decision, makes recommendation, or draws conclusion  
(2) Explains or analyzes the subject  
(3) Closes by elaborating on the action, decision, or recommendation, or uses a goodwill message | ♦ Answering a request  
♦ Positive or congratulatory messages  
♦ Non-controversial messages  
♦ Summaries or familiar information |
| INDIRECT | (1) Introduces the subject  
(2) Explains or analyzes the subject  
(3) Asks for action, tells a decision, or makes a recommendation | ♦ Bad news  
♦ Complex explanations  
♦ Persuasive messages  
♦ Controversial Messages  
♦ Unfamiliar material |
DIRECT OR INDIRECT APPROACH?

The direct approach is appropriate for some kinds of writing. The indirect approach is appropriate for other kinds of writing.

Two examples of job applicant rejection letters follow. For each example, identify whether it uses the direct or indirect approach, and whether it is appropriate.

EXAMPLE ONE

Dear Bob:

You were not the most qualified person who applied for our specialist position.

Thank you for your interest in our organization.

Sincerely,
Iam Blunt

Approach? Direct _____ Indirect _____
Appropriate? Yes _____ No _____

EXAMPLE TWO

Dear Bob:

Thank you for the considerable time and energy on your part in applying for our specialist position.

We were fortunate to have a highly qualified, impressive group of applicants. It was difficult making a decision. We regret to inform you that you were not selected for the position.

Once again, we appreciate your participation in this process. We encourage you to apply again should a specialist position become available in the future.

Sincerely,
Iam Softer

Approach? Direct _____ Indirect _____
Appropriate? Yes _____ No _____
MAKE YOUR WRITING CONCISE

Wordiness is another major problem in business writing today. Documents that are longer than they need to be, tax the reader’s time and patience. Wordiness is a bad habit that many of us have picked up over the years. You can unlearn these bad habits by applying the following ideas. They will make your writing more concise and help you help your readers move along quickly.

1. SHORT WORDS

- Prefer and use short, simple words over long, complex words.
- Use one and two syllable words as much as you can.
- Don’t use a long word when a short word will do the job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilize</th>
<th>Modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Endeavor</td>
<td>Expeditiously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance</td>
<td>Terminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate</td>
<td>Emphasize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessity</td>
<td>Optimum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TO: All Employees  
FROM: Windy Burpo  
DATE: July 23, 2002  
SUBJECT: Writing for Easy Reading

In promulgating your esoteric cogitations or articulating your superficial sentimentalities, and amicable philosophical or psychological observations, beware of platitudinous ponderosity. Let your conversational communications possess a clarified conciseness, a compacted comprehensibility, a coalescent consistency, and a concatenated cogency. Eschew all conglomeration of flatulent garrulity, jejune babblement, and asinine affectations. Let your extemporaneous descantings and unpremeditated expatiations have intelligibility and voracious vivacity without rodomontade or thrasonical bombast. Sedulously avoid all polysyllabic profundity, pompous prolificacy, ventriloquial verbosity, and vain vapidity.

What does the above memo say? Say what you mean. Mean what you say. And don’t use such big words.
MAKE YOUR WRITING CONCISE (Cont.)

2. SHORT SENTENCES

- Prefer and use short, readable sentences over long sentences.
- Shoot for an average sentence length of 15-17 words, or fewer.
- Vary the length of your sentences. Inject short ones (1-6 words), and occasionally, inject long sentences in your writing.

1. Some indication should be given me now as to your intentions regarding the problem of telephone usage.

2. In the event that you find utilization of the form is necessary, do not hesitate to initiate such a step.

3. It is our contention that the necessary modifications should be made to make the machine operational because its complete replacement is economically prohibitive.

3. SHORT PARAGRAPHS

- Prefer and use short, readable paragraphs (five sentences or less) over long paragraphs.
- Remember, a paragraph develops one idea.

4. RUTHLESS EDITING (get rid of unnecessary words)

- “When you write, travel light.”
- Cut out words that add nothing to meaning or reading ease.
- Look for and eliminate redundancies. Be a word chopper.

Our consensus of opinion is …
It is absolutely essential that we …
They are the exact opposites when it comes to …
We need to stick to the basic fundamentals …
Advance planning will help us succeed …
Our past experience tells us …
**EDITING EXERCISE**

Editing is a process that removes all those unnecessary words that take up large amounts of space but add nothing of any real significance to the meaning of a message.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inefficient Phrase</th>
<th>Efficient Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At the present time or at this point in time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the event that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In view of the fact that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each and every</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At an early date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the sum of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are of the opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With reference to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of or due to the fact that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the month of August</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to the start of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until such time as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, avoid “weasel” words and phrases: kind of, in a way, sort of, a little, pretty much, rather, a bit, quite, sometimes, maybe, etc.
5. VERB POWER

- Verbs tighten up, enliven, and strengthen your writing. Use lots of them.

- Replace forms of the verb “to be”—is, am, was, were, etc.—with action verbs. For example, change “Our agency is customer service focused” to “Our agency focuses on customer service.”

- Prefer and use active voice (verbs) over passive voice (verbs). Why? Active voice clearly shows who’s doing what. It’s also more concise, and clear, concise language makes for easier reading.

1. **Active Verbs**
   - The subject performs the action. The subject is the “doer.”
   - Example: John (subject) wrote (verb) the report (object). ➔ 4 words
   - The “active voice” is more direct and positive.
   - The subject of the sentence is doing something.
   - It puts the actor first, the action second, and anything acted upon last.

2. **Passive Verbs**
   - The subject is acted upon. The subject is the receiver of the action.
   - Example: The report (object) was written (verb) by John (subject). ➔ 6 words
   - The “passive voice” is indirect and wimpy.
   - Something is done (perhaps by something).
   - It puts the thing acted upon first. It may leave the actor out.

3. How can you recognize the passive voice or verbs?
   - A past tense main verb is preceded by a “to be” verb, e.g. “was written.”
   - Often the word “by” precedes the “doer” or subject, e.g. “by John.”

4. When is it appropriate to use the passive voice or verbs?
   - When the “doer” is unknown. Example: The house was built in 1918.
   - When the “doer” is unimportant. Example: The materials were shipped on Thursday.
   - When it’s tactful to leave the “doer” unsaid. Example: A mistake was made on the application.

Use present tense and active voice.
MORE TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING

1. PAY ATTENTION TO TONE

You've heard the expression, “It’s not just what you say, but how you say it,” right? This expression refers to tone. Keep these ideas in mind when you write:

- Review and edit your documents for tone. Does your message come across the way you want? Have someone else read your documents to check for tone.

  Test your message.

- Be respectful and polite. You wouldn’t insult a person face-to-face. Don’t do it in writing either.
  - Some terms can come across as demeaning, e.g., always, in no case, never, all, or not one.
  - Underlining, bolding, or italicizing the “don’ts” can be like shouting.
  - The phrase of course, could be interpreted “as any idiot knows.”

- Decide on whether the tone should be formal or informal. In most cases, we want our tone to be informal, i.e., conversational. (But there may be times when you want the tone to be formal.)
  - We prefer human-to-human contact. Do your documents sound like a friendly human wrote them? Or do they sound like they were spewed out by an indifferent or non-caring bureaucratic institution?
  - Use personal pronouns—I, me, you, we—to personalize your writing. Business writing need not be stuffy and impersonal.
  - Use common contractions. It’s okay to use we’ll, don’t, and it’s in place of we will, do not, and it is.
  - Avoid stuffy suffixes. Look for –ance, -ive, -ity, -ality, -ation, -ize, -ization, and -ational. Too many of these make writing stuffy.

  Fit the writing style to the message.

- Accentuate the positive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>We cannot send your stationery until we receive the back order.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>When we receive the back order, we will send your stationery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>It is impossible for us to process your request because you failed to complete the form.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>When you complete these three lines on the form, we can quickly process your request.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, replace negative “trigger” phrases with positive phrases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>The regulations state…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>We ask that…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>You can’t…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>You can…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>It’s obvious that…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>We noticed that…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>You are mistaken…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>Did you know…?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Test the Tone of Your Text

To help you attune your ear, compare the tone of your writing with the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Tone Scale</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Text language</td>
<td>Thx 4 yr txt;-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Got your note and liked it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chatty</td>
<td>Thanks for your note. I’ve read it with interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Formal yet friendly</td>
<td>Thank you for your letter and the comments you made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Official</td>
<td>I have received your letter and noted the matters you raise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Officialese</td>
<td>Receipt is acknowledged of your recent communication, whose contents have been noted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Legalese</td>
<td>Acknowledgement is hereby made of your communication (hereinafter the ‘letter’) by the undersigned who has apprehended its matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>19th century</td>
<td>Your esteemed favor to hand of the fourth ultimo; the contents of same have been duly appraised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ceremonial</td>
<td>Let it be hereafter promulgated that said missive has been gazetted and cognizance raised pursuant to its substance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Biblical</td>
<td>I receiveth unto me thy epistle, and its wisdom escapeth me not.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where does your writing score? Are you at the heavy end of the middle, somewhere between official and legalese? If so, consider whether you might be able to lighten your tone to somewhere around the formal but friendly level. On the other hand, does your text sit low on the tone scale, somewhere closer to informal? Might this be a bit too informal for your readers?

2. USE INCLUSIVE, NON-SEXIST LANGUAGE

Not everyone is a “he.” Nor is everyone a “she.” So a document for a mixed audience shouldn’t exclusively use he, his, and him. Nor should it exclusively use she and her. So what are the options? Here are a few:

- You could use constructions like he or she, he/she, s/he, his or her, or –person. But they’re awkward, so try to avoid them.
- In longer documents you could alternate gender by section. In section one, use he and his. In section two, use she and hers.
- Make the subject of your sentence plural so you can use the gender neutral plural pronouns, they and their.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>Each employee should complete his own form.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instead:</td>
<td>All employees should complete ____________ own forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each employee should complete the form.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some sources advise using they and their as singular pronouns, as in “Each employee should complete their form.” Other sources say they and their are strictly plural. It’s better to offend a picky grammarian than to needlessly discriminate on gender.

- Use gender-neutral words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not:</th>
<th>Instead:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chairman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spokesman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policeman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fireman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mailman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. CREATE VISUAL APPEAL

Make your documents visually appealing to the eye. Here are some ways:

- Create white space to avoid solid blocks of print.
- Use adequate margins.
- Use double and triple spacing.
- Use numbered and bulleted lists.
- Use headings and subheadings.
- Use outlines.
- Use indented text.
- Use graphs, charts, pictures, and illustrations.
- Use easy to read type-face (Times or Arial fonts).
- Use **bolding**, **underlining**, and *italicizing*.
- Use text boxes.
- Use a layout that spaces out paragraphs and sections.
- Use “preview” and “summary” paragraphs for longer documents and reports.

4. PAY ATTENTION TO GRAMMAR


- Improper grammar, spelling, and punctuation matter. They matter to the extent they:
  - Impair easy understanding of your documents.
  - Reflect poorly on you, your message, and your program or organization.
MORE TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING (Cont.)

Style, Usage, Grammar, and Punctuation

The rules of English grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling are numerous and often contradictory. Don’t be concerned about committing them all to memory. Do be aware that rules exist, and that sometimes there’s a right way and a wrong way. If you break a rule, it should be for a purpose, not out of ignorance. When you’re not sure what the rule is, know where to look it up. Here are a few tools every writer should use.

♦ The grammar and spell check function on MS Word.
♦ A dictionary. A heavy hardcover dictionary not only helps with the definition and spelling of words, but also often has features on usage, style, and punctuation.
♦ A thesaurus that helps you find just the right word.
♦ A comprehensive style guide that contains a collection of the rules of grammar, punctuation, style, and usage. Browse the writing reference section of the bookstore and pick up one of the many books on style and usage. Consider The Elements of Style, The Chicago Manual of Style, or The Gregg Reference Manual. The Elements of Style is available online at http://www.bartleby.com/141/.

Here’s a short quiz with some common style, usage, grammar, and punctuation errors. For each item, identify the rule that is broken and then correct it according to the rule. You can find the answers are on the next page.

QUIZ

1. I secured an office job soon after I was out of high school, which lasted all summer.
2. His eyes twinkling with suppressed laughter.
3. Please make all memos letters reports and articles concise.
4. Most of the work is done the rest I will finish later.
5. A group of employees are waiting for the announcement.
6. She told me to unplug the coffee pot and that I should lock the door.
7. This new policy will definitely effect our department.
8. I want to insure that nothing will go wrong tomorrow.
9. We will meet on February 12th at 8:00 a.m. to discuss our plans.
10. Irregardless of the situation, I vote to proceed.
11. Just between you and I, I think they will accept the proposal.
12. Please call myself or my assistant.
13. A diet cola has less calories than a regular cola.
14. Our section has it’s own meeting time.
15. Check to see if you any words out.
16. Last but not least, I want to thank you for your attention.
Quiz Answers

1. I secured an office job soon after I was out of high school, which lasted all summer.
   
   Rule: Keep subordinate clauses near the words they modify.
   
   Correct: Soon after I was out of high school, I secured an office job which lasted all summer.

2. His eyes twinkling with suppressed laughter.
   
   Rule: A sentence must contain at least one subject-verb sequence, or independent clause. If it doesn’t, it’s an incomplete sentence or sentence fragment.
   
   Correct: His eyes twinkled with suppressed laughter.

3. Please make all memos letters reports and articles concise.
   
   Rule: Use a comma to separate elements in a series. Some style guides recommend a comma before and, others do not.
   
   Correct: Please make all memos, letters, reports, and articles concise.

4. Most of the work is done the rest I will finish later.
   
   Rule: Independent clauses should be separate sentences. Together they are a run-on sentence.
   
   Correct: Most of the work is done. The rest I will finish later.

5. A group of employees are waiting for the announcement.
   
   Rule: Subject and verb should agree in number. If the subject is plural, the verb should be plural. If the subject is singular, the verb should be singular. A group is a single entity.
   
   Correct: A group of employees is waiting for the announcement.

6. She told me to unplug the coffee pot and that I should lock the door.
   
   Rule: Equal ideas should use parallel construction.
   
   Correct: She told me to unplug the coffee pot and lock the door.

7. This new policy will definitely effect our department.
   
   Rule: Effect can be either a verb meaning “to bring about” or a noun meaning “result, impression.” Affect is normally used as a verb meaning “to influence, change, assume.”
   
   Correct: This new policy will definitely affect our department.

8. I want to insure that nothing will go wrong tomorrow.
   
   Rule: Ensure means to make certain; insure means to cover with insurance.
   
   Correct: I want to ensure that nothing will go wrong tomorrow.

9. We will meet on February 12th at 8:00 a.m. to discuss our plans.
   
   Rule: When the day follows the month, do not use th.
   
   Correct: We will meet on February 12 at 8:00 a.m. to discuss our plans.

10. Irregardless of the situation, I vote to proceed.
    
    Rule: Irregardless is nonstandard English.
    
    Correct: Regardless of the situation, I vote to proceed.

11. Just between you and I, I think they will accept the proposal.
    
    Rule: Use me after any preposition.
    
    Correct: Just between you and me, I think they will accept the proposal.

12. Please call myself or my assistant.
    
    Rule: Myself should be used only for emphasis or clarity. Use it reflexively: I thought of that myself.
    
    Correct: Please call me or my assistant.

13. A diet cola has less calories than a regular cola.
    
    Rule: If it can be counted, use fewer. Otherwise, use less.
    
    Correct: A diet cola has fewer calories than a regular cola.

14. Our section has its own meeting time.
    
    Rule: Normally, an apostrophe is used to show possession. However, its is an exception. It’s is the contraction for it is.
    
    Correct: Our section has its own meeting time.

15. Check to see if you any words out.
    
    Rule: Remember to proofread your writing.
    
    Correct: Check to see if you left any words out.

16. Last but not least, I want to thank you for your attention.
    
    Rule: Avoid clichés. They lack freshness and appeal from overuse.
    
    Correct: Thank you very much for your attention.
5. PAY ATTENTION TO READABILITY

- Write at an easy reading level, i.e., an 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade level, or lower.
- Use the grammar check on Microsoft Word to check your document for readability.
- If your document scores at the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade levels, edit your document to make it easier to read. How? Replace longer words with shorter words. Break up long sentences into shorter sentences. Replace passive voice with active voice. Edit for redundancy. Use bullet lists.

### Notes on Microsoft Word Grammar Checker Mechanics

Automatic grammar checkers take time to run. They also give bad advice when they miss the context. Still, you need to run the grammar checker to get readability statistics. And, it can help you with your own problem areas. So, take a few minutes to customize your checker. Select the spelling and grammar options you want. And, select the readability statistics option. Follow the steps below.

First, set your checker. For Microsoft Word 2003, these are the steps:
- Select Tools, then Options, then Spelling & Grammar.
- Select Check grammar with spelling.
- Select Show readability statistics.
- Select OK.

Now, to check a document, just select Tools, and then Spelling and Grammar. It will check the spelling and grammar options you chose, and quickly give you readability results. To check just part of a document, select or highlight the part you want checked before you run the check.
MORE TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING (Cont.)

DAS STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Minimum Standard

The DAS minimum standard is a tenth grade reading level. In Microsoft Word this is a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 10.

Aim for These Ideals

♦ Passive sentences: 15% or lower

♦ Flesch Reading Ease: 60 or higher
  (60 ≈ 10th grade, 70 ≈ 8th grade, etc.)

♦ Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 8 or lower

Notes for Skeptics

You might think it’s demeaning to have to “write down” to a lower grade level. Not so. Plain language writing helps readers. It also helps writers. Putting things into simple terms helps uncover ideas and issues that we might otherwise miss. It brings out our clearest thinking.

What does it really mean to write to a tenth grade level? It means someone with tenth grade reading skills should be able to read what we write. But it does not mean a highly educated person will find us boring.

One last point. Even if we can write so only a doctoral level college student can grasp our meaning, why on earth would our readers want us to? The reason for writing to our audience using plain language is not because our audience is stupid or illiterate. It is to encourage the reader to read because it is easy. This is something we can all appreciate in our busy world.
MORE TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING (Cont.)

6. KNOW WHEN AND WHEN NOT TO WRITE

- Don’t write and fire off a message when you’re angry.

- Don’t write a message when it’s better to have a face-to-face conversation or make a phone call.

- Do write your message when:
  - You have to tell many people.
  - You have a lot of detailed information to convey.
  - You need a record.

7. REMEMBER THE “SO WHAT?” TEST

Make sure everything you write answers the question, “So what?” for the reader. This will help ensure you write for the reader.

8. REMEMBER THE BOTTOM LINE FOR WRITING FOR EASY READING

In business writing, style means clarity, conciseness, and readability more than eloquence. Business is about productivity, service, and efficiency. Business writing that is clear, concise, and easy to read promotes these outcomes. Reading e-mails, memos, letters, reports, policies, and procedures is not a leisure-time activity. Respect your reader’s time by saying what you need to say as simply, clearly, and concisely as possible.
An actual letter follows. (The names and dates have been changed to protect the innocent, and the guilty.) Read it carefully and be prepared to discuss it. Is it easy to read? To understand? Do you like the way it sounds? What does it say?

Description: Ida Noe, President of ABC Enterprises, asked her accountant to explain why her accounting bill doubled since last year. This letter is her accountant’s response.

April 21, 2008
Ida Noe
ABC Enterprises
123 Accuracy Way
Anytown, OR  98765

Dear Ida:

In response to your letter of April 1, 2008, enclosed please find Exhibit A. As you can see, the work performed for you this year is different then last year. In addition, the parameters of tasks increased since last year. Accordingly, due to this fact, and the fact that our billing rates were raised this year, it was necessary to increase our charges for professional services rendered. Hopefully, this letter offers some explanation as to the question you raised. If you require more additional information, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Kitty Swindler
XYZ Accounting Corporation

Readability Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These readability statistics are good. So, what’s wrong with this letter then?
Here's another version of Kitty Swindler’s response letter. Is it easy to read? To understand? Do you like the way it sounds? What does it say?

April 21, 2008
Ida Noe
ABC Enterprises
123 Accuracy Way
Anytown, OR  98765
Dear Ida:

I understand your concern, and I hope the following will answer your questions about the increase in your bill.

1. Last year we spent 12 hours (at $80 per hour) preparing two tax returns for you.
2. This year we spent 15 hours (at $100 per hour) preparing four tax returns for you.
3. This year we successfully represented you in an audit with the Internal Revenue Service (3 hours at $100 per hour).
4. This year we produced monthly financial statements for you, whereas last year we produced quarterly financial statements.

Please call me if you would like to discuss this further.

We value you as a client.

Sincerely,

Kitty Swindler
XYZ Accounting Corporation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readability Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences: 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease: 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These readability statistics are better. But what else makes this version better than the original letter?
E-MAIL ETIQUETTE - 10 TIPS

E-mail has become the memorandum of the 21st Century. But with it several problems have crept into the world of work that may hinder communication. E-mail is quick, but getting your message out quickly is not the only factor you should consider. Misunderstandings can occur when we do not use e-mail appropriately, or follow general etiquette. Additionally, employers (the state included) are liable for the actions of employees using e-mail. Be sure you know the rules and follow them (see DAS Internal Policy 107-01-010, Use of DAS Electronics Systems). Remember that all e-mail becomes part of the public record.

Using the following 10 tips for proper e-mail etiquette will help you gain a reputation for being a courteous, clear and succinct communicator:

1. Be concise. Lengthy sentences and lengthy e-mails are difficult to wade through.
2. Read your e-mail before sending. For subjects requiring extra care, get a co-worker to proof your message.
3. Use available tools such as spell check, grammar and punctuation. It only takes a moment to ensure you haven't missed a common mistake.
4. Be very careful about asking and answering questions. Use bullets or numbering for multiple questions. It is easy for recipients to miss questions when they are buried within a paragraph. Re-read an e-mail before answering. If multiple questions were asked, a single answer on your part may not be sufficient. Whenever possible, limiting e-mail to a single subject is helpful.
5. Send an answer the same day, but certainly within 24 hours. If a response requires more time, send an acknowledgment with an approximate timeframe for final response.
6. Don't discard the message thread.
7. Don't leave the subject line blank. Give thought to making the subject line clear and purposeful.
8. Control your emotions. Responding in anger will almost always get you into trouble.
9. Remember that once you hit "send" your message could be forwarded to anyone. Be very careful about discussing confidential or sensitive information.
10. Know when to not use e-mail. There are times when the best form of communication is to pick up the phone or talk face-to-face. This is especially true if an e-mail thread has gone awry and the conversation is escalating.
MORE E-MAIL TIPS

- Choose and use your subject line wisely. This is your opportunity to make a professional statement about yourself and a great first impression. Take care in word selection and be certain this opening line is spell checked and grammatically correct.
- Use honorifics. Even after invited to address someone by their first name, be careful using first names in e-mail correspondence. Be absolutely certain that anyone who happens upon this e-mail is okay knowing you call the company president by their first name.
- Include a personal greeting and a salutation to add warmth to impersonal e-mail communication.
- Respond promptly.
- Consider communications public domain, regardless of what is stated concerning confidentiality. E-mail can be and is forwarded freely.
- Do not use e-mail correspondence in business communications to share jokes, chain mail, or other non-business-related banter.
- Do not send anything in an e-mail correspondence you would not post on a billboard in Times Square; there is no such thing as confidentiality.
- "Delete" never means gone forever. Be aware that even deleted e-mail is retrievable. Be sure all e-mail content is business appropriate.
- When using e-mail to schedule a meeting or resolve conflict, the rule is to revert to a more direct form of contact, such as the telephone or a personal visit after three exchanges on the same topic.
- Be sensitive to the fact that misunderstandings are common in e-mail communication. Be slow to take offense and quick to pick up the telephone. Know that e-mail may be misinterpreted or come across as crass, screaming, or lacking enough information.
- Do not use all capital letters UNLESS YOU WANT YOUR READER TO BELIEVE YOU ARE SCREAMING.
- Assume nothing. In this day of firewalls and spam filters, it is not unusual for an e-mail to be lost, undelivered, or inadvertently deleted. Do not assume lack of response is the response to your original message. Be prepared to follow up by another format such as telephone or fax if you are unsure.
- Never send an e-mail when angry. It is too easy to send a knee-jerk retort that is capable of having lasting ramifications and unwelcome repercussions. Although it is important to be prompt in responding, if an e-mail raises your blood pressure, wait 24 hours before replying and hitting "send." You may find the passage of the day cools your temper and allows for a more tempered response.

JUST FOR FUN: PERIPHRACTICS

Circumlocution is a verbal vice opposed to the virtue of brevity. It consists of making the simple complex, the obvious obscure—and at times—the familiar enjoyably strange. Here are several circumlocutions—known as periphrastics. See if you can unravel them.

1. A mobile section of petrified matter agglomerates no bryophytes.

2. Desist from enumerating your fowl prior to their emergence from the shell.

3. Scintillation is not always identification for an auric substance.

4. Products of ingenuity are the offspring of exigency.

5. A plethora of culinary specialists has a deleterious effect upon the quality of purees, consommés, and other soluble pabula.

6. A chronic disposition to inquiry deprived the domestic feline carnivorous quadruped of its vital quality.

7. Immediately upon the absence of the domesticated carnivorous feline, the common house rodent proceeds to engage in sportive capers.

8. Persons deficient in the faculty of determining values move with impetuosity into places which purely spiritual beings view with trepidation.

9. If John persists without respite in a constant prolonged exertion of physical or intellectual effort, he will develop into a youth slow and blunted in perception and sensibility.

10. It is in the realm of possibility to entice an equine member of the animal kingdom to a source of oxidized hydrogen; however, it is not possible force it to imbibe.
PERIPHRASTICS - ANSWERS

Circumlocution is a verbal vice opposed to the virtue of brevity. It consists of making the simple complex, the obvious obscure—and at times—the familiar enjoyably strange. Here are several circumlocutions—known as periphrastics. See if you can unravel them.

1. A mobile section of petrified matter agglomerates no bryophytes.
   Answer: A rolling stone gathers no moss.

2. Desist from enumerating your fowl prior to their emergence from the shell.
   Answer: Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

3. Scintillation is not always identification for an auric substance.
   Answer: All that glitters is not gold.

4. Products of ingenuity are the offspring of exigency.
   Answer: Necessity is the mother of invention.

5. A plethora of culinary specialists has a deleterious effect upon the quality of purees, consommés, and other soluble pabula.
   Answer: Too many cooks spoil the broth.

6. A chronic disposition to inquiry deprived the domestic feline carnivorous quadruped of its vital quality.
   Answer: Curiosity killed the cat.

7. Immediately upon the absence of the domesticated carnivorous feline, the common house rodent proceeds to engage in sportive capers.
   Answer: When the cat's away the mice will play.

8. Persons deficient in the faculty of determining values move with impetuosity into places which purely spiritual beings view with trepidation.
   Answer: Fools rush in where angels dare to tread.

9. If John persists without respite in a constant prolonged exertion of physical or intellectual effort, he will develop into a youth slow and blunted in perception and sensibility.
   Answer: All work and no play makes John a dull boy.

10. It is in the realm of possibility to entice an equine member of the animal kingdom to a source of oxidized hydrogen; however, it is not possible to force it to imbibe.
    Answer: You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.
PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

List a few ideas of value that you learned or rediscovered in this training that will help you with your plain language, reader friendly writing.

---

Writing is hard work—there's no secret. If you dictate or use a pen or type or write with your toes—it is still work.

---Sinclair Lewis
REFERENCES


8. *The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University*. [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)


