The
Essential
Handbook
For
Business
Writing

communication excellence in English, the language of business worldwide

Desmond A. Gilling



# Good writing is good business.

"This writing handbook has all the ingredients necessary to write well. I particularly like the graphic presentations and the numerous writing examples. I will be introducing this handbook to our Hong Kong office."

B. Soong, Vice President, McGraw-Hill Financial

"From now on, before we put together a document, we will refer to this comprehensive handbook exclusively."

M. Heydon, Manager & Sr. Account Executive, Manion Wilkins

"This perfect writing handbook would instill confidence in a business writer at any level. Indispensable. A must for every business employee."

K. Duncan, Director, Mason Group

"Finally, a concise, meaningful business writing instruction book. The lessons are quick and easy making learning instant. I wouldn't consider using any other book with my classes."

W. Struthers, Professor, Business English, Centennial College

"I intend to refer to this handbook often, particularly when putting together a sales letter or proposal. I don't think there is a better writing handbook on the market anywhere. I will be recommending the training sessions they offer."

C. Pollock, Financial Advisor, Sun Life.

"I certainly could have used this in business school. Great writing handbook. Everything you need to know is at your fingertips."

J. Earl, C.A.

ISBN 978-09880938-0-5



# Excerpts from The Essential Handbook for Business Writing

There are five colour-coded sections in The Essential Handbook for Business Writing:

- 1) Composition Basics 2) Business Writing 3) Usage
- 4) Proposals and Reports 5) Visual Basics

In this PDF sampler, you'll find exact pages from each section specially selected to give an overview of the detailed and inclusive content of *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing*.

The Composition Basics section focuses on grammar including punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and sentence structure. This section provides a solid foundation for the rest of the text. For some, this may be nothing more than a review of the principles of grammar that they are familiar with; for others, it may be much-needed lessons in writing basics.

The **Business Writing** section outlines the process of composing business communication and offers precise examples of business letters that can act as templates.

The **Usage** section deals with frequently misused or confused terms. Proper usage is critical for producing clear and precise communication. Many of these problem areas are instantly recognizable, even for the seasoned writer.

The **Proposals and Reports** section outlines the purpose and structure of these types of documents with examples (in brief) of both. Each component of a proposal and a report is explained in detail enabling the writer to duplicate the process and produce an official proposal or report.

The Visual Basics section offers hints on how to produce attractive, visually enhanced documents. The basic principles of using fonts, images, and creative page layouts are explained with examples.

The full text of *The Essential Handbook For Business Writing* (192 pages) is designed to offer a lesson on every page. Instructions are brief, examples are plentiful, and learning is instant. Written from the experience and perspective of a long-time teacher of English, the text is devised to make learning the skills of professional business writing simple and straightforward.

\*\* The full Table of Contents is included in this sampler.

# The Essential Handbook for Business Writing: an overview

# **Composition Basics**

- ~ grammatical terms
- ~ parts of speech
- ~ pronouns
- ~ verbs
- sentence structure
- ~ types of sentences
- ~ sentence structure errors
- punctuation
- ~ capitalization
- ~ spelling

#### Sample Business Letters

- persuasive writing
- ~ sales letters
- ~ letters of complaint
- ~ response to a complaint
- → letters of refusal
- → the press release
- ~ e-mail messages
- ~ the memorandum
- ~ the newsletter

# Proposals & Reports

- components of a proposal
- components of a report
- ~ sample proposals
- executive summary
- introduction
- ~ letter of transmittal
- → body text
- ~ conclusions
- recommendations

### Visual Design

- ~ creating a document
- ~ working with fonts
- ~ art in a document
- balancing design elements
- charts and graphs

#### Usage

- ~ frequently confused terms
- ~ problem usage
- ~ terms often confused

The Essential Handbook for Business Writing, First Edition.

Copyright © 2013. Published by Greenlink Consulting.

Printed in Canada. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be transmitted, translated, or reproduced in any manner, mechanical or electronic including photocopying and recording without the written permission of the publisher and the author.

ISBN 978-09880938-0-5

Corporate and educational quantity pricing available.

Inquiries should be addressed to: essentialbusinessenglish@gmail.com. (011) • 1 • 416 • 400 • 8407

Printed and bound in Canada.

- "Good composition is like a suspension bridge—each line adds strength and takes none away." Robert Henri
- "I have made this [letter] longer, because I have not had the time to make it shorter."

  Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)
- "At painful times, when composition is impossible and reading is not enough, grammars and dictionaries are excellent for distraction."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

"Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say 'infinitely' when you mean 'very'; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something really infinite." C. S. Levis (1898–1963)

"I try to leave out the parts that people skip."

Elmore I conard

"One of the greatest of all faults in writing and in speaking is this: the using of many words to say little." William Cobbett

"I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter."

[James Michener]

"Proofread carefully to see if you any words out."

Author Unknown

"A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?"

George Orwell (1903–1950)

# **CONTENTS**

# **COMPOSITION BASICS**

Principles of Composition	2
Basic Parts of Speech	3
Verb Tenses	7
Mood of a Verb	9
Problem Verbs	9
Active and Passive Voice	10
Subject–Verb Agreement	11
Types of Pronouns	13
Relative Pronouns	14
Pronoun Confusion	16
Pronoun Antecedent and Verb Agreement	17
Relative Pronoun Subjects	19
Vague Pronoun References	20
More on Pronouns	21
Types of Sentences	22
Phrases and Clauses	24
Constructing Sentences	28
Sentence Fragments	31
Comma Splice	32
Fused and Run-on Sentences	33
Parallel Structure	34
Wordiness	35
Redundancy	36

Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers37
Comma Use38
Colon, Semicolon, Dash41
Brackets
Quotation Marks46
The Apostrophe48
Capital Letters50
Numbers
Spelling Rules54
Frequently Misspelled Words
Compound Words and Hyphenation58
Compound Business Terms60
British / American / Canadian Spelling61
BUSINESS WRITING
Principles of Business Writing63
Structure64
The Outline Process65
The Draft66
The Topic Sentence67
Organizing Ideas68
Sample Paragraphs69
The Business Letter70
Sample Business Letter71
The Art of Persuasive Writing72
Sample Persuasive Letter

The Sales Letter	79
Sample Sales Letters	82
Letter of Complaint	90
Response to a Complaint	91
Sample Letter of Complaint	92
Sample Letter: Response to Complaint	94
Announcement and Invitation Letters	96
Sample Announcement Flyer	97
Sample Invitation Letter	98
Refusal Letter	99
Inappropriate Letter of Refusal	100
Appropriate Letter of Refusal	101
Letter of Appreciation	103
The E-Mail Message	104
The Memorandum	106
Meeting Agenda and Minutes	112
The Press Release	116
The Mission Statement	120
Newsletters	122
PROPOSALS AND REPORTS	
Proposal and Report Writing	126
Formal Proposal and Formal Report	127
Business Proposals	128
Components of a Formal Proposal	130
Sample Proposal	133
Business Reports	142

Components of a Formal Report	144
Memo Reports	147
Sample Progress Report	148
Sample Recommendation Report	149
USAGE	
Commonly Confused Words	150
Common Problem Usage	152
Terms Frequently Confused	158
VISUAL DESIGN BASICS	
Creating a Document	167
Creating a Document	
_	168
Working With Fonts	168 171
Working With Fonts	168 171 172
Working With Fonts  Art in a Document  Page Design	168 171 172 175

#### **COMPOSITION BASICS**

"Language is the dress of thought." Samuel Johnson

In business, when you submit a piece of writing you hold yourself up to scrutiny. If your message is unclear, if your grammar is weak, if your vocabulary is imprecise, you could be judged harshly. But if you write concisely, clearly, and with sufficient creativity to make an impact, you will be considered a highly valued asset to your company.

To write successfully you must have command of the following:

- basic grammar
- precise vocabulary
- syntax (the arrangement of words to form a sentence)
- sentence structure (the arrangement of sentence elements)
- · paragraph construction

Once you've mastered the above areas, you can concentrate on creating compelling sentences and unified, coherent paragraphs.

Follow these basic rules in all correspondence:

- ◆ Use plain English and avoid jargon.
- ◆ Vary the length of your sentences.
- ♦ Divide your written message into unified paragraphs.
- ★ Keep each paragraph to a single topic.
- Introduce each paragraph with a strong topic sentence.
- ◆ End each paragraph with a concluding thought.
- Use transitional words and phrases to unify sentences and paragraphs.
- ◆ Select the communication format that best suits your message.
- ◆ Use a professional tone at all times.

The general objective of all business writing is to produce clear, concise, coherent communication.

#### BASIC PARTS OF SPEECH

#### **Verbals**

Technically, a **verbal** is a derivative of a verb and not a part of speech. Verbals are important elements in constructing sentences and come in three forms: gerund, participle, and infinitive.

Note: Misuse of a verbal can sometimes result in a sentence fragment (see p. 31).

#### Gerunds

A **gerund** is an *ing* noun-form of a verb.

Examples: (gerunds as nouns are underlined)

- 1) Selling products overseas presents a logistical problem. (subject)
- 2) Management encouraged <u>buying</u> updated software. (object)

# **Participles**

Participles are either present participles or past participles, and both can be used as adjectives.

Examples: (participles as adjectives are underlined)

- 1) The failing marketing plan will be revised. (present participle)
- 2) She produced a <u>written</u> copy. (past participle)

#### Infinitives

An infinitive is the *to* form of a verb. Infinitives can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

Examples: (infinitives are underlined)

- 1) She decided to resign as chairperson of the committee. (noun)
- 2) Lunch was a good way to end the morning meeting. (adjective)
- 3) The manager took a course to improve his skills. (adverb)

**Note:** Avoid splitting an infinitive; however, at times a split infinite works for clarification or for emphasis.

- 1) She wanted to boldly go far afield. (acceptable)
- 2) She wanted to directly fly to Hong Kong. (incorrect)
- 3) She wanted to fly directly to Hong Kong. (correct)

# **BASIC PARTS OF SPEECH**

(phrases are underlined)



She was promoted on merit; now she wanted to prove herself.

object of the preposition "on" adverb verb infinitive / object

Buying stocks is easy; choosing a winner is difficult.

gerund phrase as subject gerund as subject

A written copy of the memo was posted on the bulletin board.

noun / subject passive verb object of the preposition "on"

#### VERBS: Active and Passive Voice

In the **active** voice the subject performs the action.

The company president delivered a speech.

(subject) (verb) (object)

In the **passive** voice the object receives the action.

The speech was delivered by the company president.

(subject) (verb)

The active voice is usually preferred over the passive voice. The active voice is more forceful and direct; the passive voice might suggest indifference or a lack of responsibility on the part of the performer of the action (verb). However, if the subject of the verb is unknown or of less importance than the action itself, the passive voice works best.

# In these examples the passive voice is awkward.

Active Voice: He remembers his university days fondly.

Passive Voice: His university days are fondly remembered by him.

Active Voice: She examined the files for inconsistencies.

Passive Voice: The files were examined by her for inconsistencies.

In this example the passive voice creates ambiguity.

Passive Voice: He was impressed with the director—he was thorough. (To whom does the second *he*, after the dash, refer?)

In this example the passive voice is unambiguous.

Passive Voice: He was impressed with the director who was thorough.

(No ambiguity: director is the antecedent of who.)

Active Voice: The director who was thorough impressed him.

In these examples the passive voice is preferred.

Passive Voice: The meetings were put on hold.

(passive voice: unknown subject)

Passive Voice: The executive was given the CEO of the Year Award.

(passive voice: emphasis placed on receiver of the action)

**Note:** The passive voice is often preferred in technical or scientific writing where the process described is more important than the subject of the action.

#### PRONOUN CONFUSION: than I, than me, as I, as me

The words *than* and *as* are either conjunctions or prepositions—a distinction that is critical to the meaning of a sentence. As prepositions they would be followed by an object pronoun; as conjunctions they would be followed by a subject pronoun.

Note: The choice of object or subject pronoun can alter the meaning of the sentence.

#### Examples: (two different meanings)

- 1) She likes sales more than **me**. (compares *me* to *sales*)
- 2) She likes sales more than **I**. (than *I like sales*)

In example (1) than is followed by the object pronoun me, which might seem correct when spoken, but is faulty. The problem is that the object pronoun suggests a direct comparison between me and sales. Reversing the sentence to "She likes me more than sales" illustrates the nonsensical comparison of sales to me. Sentence (2) makes more sense as it means that she likes sales more than I do.

Note: When in doubt, test that the sentence makes sense by adding the "understood" words before choosing the pronoun.

# Examples: (two different meanings)

- 3) Management relied on me more than him. (comparison)
- 4) Management relied on me more than he. (than he relied on me)

In sentence (3) the comparison of *me* to *him* is obvious. In sentence (4) add the word *did* after *he* to avoid confusion: "Management relied on me more than *he did*."

# Examples: (two different meanings)

- 5) I enjoy working with her as well as him. (working with him also)
- 6) I enjoy working with her as well as he. (as well as he does)
- 7) He doesn't work as hard as me I do.

In sentence (5) the subject enjoyed working with both *her* and *him*. In sentence (6) both *I* and *he* are subjects of the verb *enjoyed* and both enjoyed working with *her*. In sentence (7), the objective case (me) is clearly incorrect if the verb *do* is included (as *me* do).

#### Types of Sentences

There are four basic types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. Make your business message more engaging by using these sentence types to create variety.

(See the section on clauses, pages 24–27.)

#### THE SIMPLE SENTENCE (also referred to as an independent clause)

The *simple sentence* conveys one main idea consisting of the following: a subject (performer of the action), a verb (the action), descriptors (adverbs and adjectives), and, in some cases, an object (receiver of the action).

# Example

The accounting department will conduct a detailed audit.

subject: accounting departmentobject: auditverb: will conductadjective: detailed

#### THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

The compound sentence consists of two independent but related clauses.

# Examples: (conjunctions joining independent clauses are in bold)

- 1) Sales were up this year at the European office **and** the marketing staff from that region will receive a bonus.
- 2) The main plant will be hiring this spring, **but** it is not yet known how many new positions will be offered.

#### THE COMPLEX SENTENCE

The *complex sentence* consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.

### Example: (dependent clause in italics cannot stand alone)

Although there was disagreement, a consensus was reached.

(When a dependent clause appears first, it is usually followed by a comma.)

# Example: (independent clause in italics can stand alone)

Investment in foreign countries can be very profitable even though there may be a margin of risk.

(When an independent clause comes first, no comma is needed.)

#### **NOTE:** Terminology

independent clause = simple sentence (stands alone)

dependent clause = subordinate clause (cannot stand alone)

#### THE COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE

The compound-complex sentence consists of two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

# Examples: (dependent clauses in italics)

- 1) Although it will be costly at first, expansion into global markets is necessary **and** the firm will investigate this option.
- 2) Employees will be moved to the fifth floor **and** they will share workspace *because their regular office is under renovation*.

The following paragraph contains the basic types of sentences.

Sentence (1) is simple. Sentence (2) is complex.

Sentence (3) is compound. Sentence (4) is compound-complex.

(1) The decision of the board of directors regarding expansion to North America was pending further investigation. (2) Although the facts originally presented seemed conclusive, there was concern that costs were too high. (3) However, cost was not all that was standing in the way of a final decision and the board knew this. (4) Even though the expansion needed to be initiated in a timely fashion, the board of directors decided to hire a consulting firm to do a feasibility study and then they intended to discuss the findings with North American affiliates.

#### CONSIDERATION FOR YOUR READER

- ◆ Use a variety of sentences: simple, compound, complex, compound-complex.
- ◆ Vary the length of sentences.
- ◆ Use long sentences to keep related information together.
- Use short sentences for emphasis and to provide relief for the reader.
- ◆ Use short sentences to highlight a key point.
- ◆ Introduce your paragraph with a strong topic sentence.
- ◆ Be clear, concise, and grammatically correct.

"Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret."

Mathew Arnold

#### **CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES**

Business writers should be aware that when creating a document there are many options for constructing sentences and developing unified and coherent paragraphs. A simple sentence may be all that is needed to convey a single idea; a more complex sentence may be required to transmit more detailed information. Varying the types of sentences ensures that emphasis will be properly placed and that the purpose of the message will be clear to the reader.

NOTE: A simple sentence is also referred to as an independent clause.

To compose effective sentences, consider the following:

- · choice of words: plain, direct language is vital for clarity and tone
- types of sentences (simple, complex, etc.): these must suit both content and purpose
- strategic order of sentence parts: clarity and emphasis attained
- punctuation: the comma, colon, semicolon, and the dash have a function in strategically arranging sentence parts

# SENTENCE COMBINING: a strategy for creating sentences

Short sentences covering a common topic can be combined various ways (see p. 30). Phrases and clauses within a sentence can be arranged strategically to best present information.

Short sentences can be joined by a conjunction, a semicolon, a colon, a dash, or by making one sentence dependent on the other (dependent and independent clauses).

A dependent clause may be placed first in a sentence to qualify the independent clause that follows. When the main idea is most important, place it first followed by the dependent clause that gives supportive details.

Phrases should always be positioned close to the word they modify. An adjective phrase should be next to its noun; an adverb phrase should be close to its verb.

#### **FAULTY SENTENCE STRUCTURE**

Faulty sentence structure is intolerable in business writing. To avoid structural errors, it is important to have a thorough knowledge of the major structural errors:

1) comma splice 2) sentence fragment 3) fused or run-on sentence

#### SENTENCE FRAGMENT

A sentence fragment is not a sentence because it either lacks a subject or a verb, or it is a dependent clause that requires the support of an independent clause. A dependent clause may contain a complete thought, but is not structurally a complete sentence.

### Examples:

Fragment: Whenever there is spare time to read.

(A dependent clause is incorrectly used as a sentence.)

**Correct**: Whenever there is spare time to read, she enjoys fiction.

(An independent clause is added making the sentence complete.)

Fragment: Worked late into the night.

(The subject is missing.)

Correct: The sales staff worked late into the night.

(The subject "sales staff" is added.)

Fragment: Consultants from overseas meeting at the conference.

(The word "meeting" is a verbal, not a verb.)

Correct: Consultants from overseas are meeting at the conference.

(The verb are meeting is added.)

Fragment: Although leaving late. We arrived at the meeting on time.

(The verbal "leaving" is used in place of a verb creating a fragment.)

Correct: Although we left late, we arrived at the meeting on time.

(The fragment becomes a dependent clause.)

Note: Sentence fragments are sometimes used for emphasis. In advertising copy, for example, the statement "Simply The Best" is a fragment intended to highlight a selling point. A fragment is never acceptable in business writing. A fragment appearing in a document undermines the credibility of the writer.

#### **COMMA SPLICE**

A comma splice occurs when a comma is used to separate two independent clauses; however, if the independent clauses are short and closely related, a comma may be used (see example at bottom).

A comma splice can be corrected in the following ways:

- 1) Replace the comma with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, whereas, therefore, although, etc.).
- 2) Join closely related ideas with a semicolon.
- 3) Form separate sentences.
- 4) Make one clause dependent on the other.

# Examples:

Incorrect: The corporation is expanding rapidly, their product is now

sold worldwide. (comma creates a splice)

Correct: The corporation is expanding rapidly and their product is

now sold worldwide. (joined by the conjunction and)

Correct: The corporation is expanding rapidly; their product is now

sold worldwide. (joined by a semicolon)

Correct: The corporation is expanding rapidly. Their product is now

sold worldwide. (two sentences formed)

Correct: Because their product is now sold worldwide, the

corporation is expanding rapidly. (dependent clause set off by a

comma)

Note: If two independent clauses are short and closely related in content, they may be joined by a comma. Although this structure may have a dramatic effect and is technically acceptable, it is usually best avoided.

**Correct:** He does the page design, she does the writing. **Correct:** The stock value goes up, the investors are happy.

#### **FUSED AND RUN-ON SENTENCES**

A fused sentence occurs when two independent clauses are joined without punctuation or a conjunction separating them. In essence, a fused sentence is a comma splice without the comma. A run-on sentence is simply a lengthy fused sentence.

A fused sentence and a comma splice can be corrected the same ways:

- 1) Use a coordinating conjunction (and, but...); or, insert *and* after inserting a comma.
- 2) Separate the two independent statements with a semicolon.
- 3) Form separate sentences.
- 4) Make one clause dependent on the other.

Example: (the problem area is underlined)

Fused: The stock market <u>declined investors</u> were worried.

Correct: The stock market declined and investors were worried.

Correct: The stock market declined; investors were worried.

Correct: The stock market declined. Investors were worried.

Correct: Because the stock market declined, investors were worried.

Run-on: Make a summary of the <u>meeting send</u> a copy to all <u>departments have</u> the managers forward their comments.

**Correct:** Make a summary of the meeting and send a copy to all departments; then, have managers forward their comments.

(Join the first two clauses with and; add the third after a semicolon.)

Run-on: The photocopiers now in use are <u>faulty they</u> keep breaking <u>down and</u> it is costly and an <u>inconvenience with</u> a backlog of documents to be copied.

**Correct:** The photocopiers now in use are faulty and keep breaking down. With a backlog of documents to be copied, this problem is inconvenient and costly.

(Create two sentences.)

**Note:** Fused and run-on sentences are serious writing errors. A fused sentence lacks the punctuation needed to arrange ideas. A run-on sentence squeezes too many ideas into one sentence. Both of these errors make a sentence confusing.

#### PARALLEL STRUCTURE

A sentence is **parallel** when similar elements in the sentence are constructed in the same way. The reader can anticipate the meaning of the sentence because the similar elements are logically presented.

HINT: create parallels by repeating prepositions (*in, at, from*, etc.), articles (*a, an, the*), and the word *to* in the infinitive form.

He worked <u>in</u> Asia, <u>in</u> China, and <u>in</u> Thailand.

Representatives came from England, from Ireland, and from France.

Her job was to find clients and to monitor their accounts.

**Faulty parallelism** occurs when sentence elements have equal function but dissimilar form.

Examples: (the faulty parallel element is underlined)

Faulty Parallel: The director took responsibility for hiring, firing, and

recruits.

Correct Parallel: The director took responsibility for hiring, firing, and

recruiting. (gerund form is consistent)

Faulty Parallel: The company paid for professional development

courses in computer graphics, elements of design,

and technician trainees.

Correct Parallel: The company paid for professional development

courses in computer graphics, in elements of design,

and in technician training. (noun form repeated)

Faulty Parallel: She learned to write effective business letters and

contacting clients.

Correct Parallel: She learned to write effective business letters and to

contact clients. (infinite form repeated)

**Note:** For the sake of balance and clarity, it is often useful to write out the infinite form in full for each part of the parallel statement.

Example: She learned to write business letters, create presentations,

and deal with customers. Becomes...

She learned to write business letters, to create presentations,

and to deal with customers.

(The repeated infinite form is more formal and balanced.)

#### **COMMA USE**

Next to the full stop (a period), the comma is perhaps the most used punctuation; unfortunately, it is also the most misused. Too often commas are sprinkled throughout a document without regard for the rules of comma use. Primarily, the comma helps clarify and give order to a statement. It is also a handy tool for creatively expressing your ideas by strategically arranging sentence elements.

# Use a comma to separate words and phrases in a series.

# Examples:

- 1) The office administrator bought the following items: computers, scanners, and stationery. (See "Oxford Comma, p. 30.)
- 2) A good sales plan includes solid research, creative marketing, and the setting of realistic goals.
- 3) The board members reached an agreement by having an open discussion, by examining the documents, and by holding a vote.

Note: Some newspaper style guides eliminate the comma (referred to as the Oxford comma) before the "and" that introduces the final item in a list. For the sake of clarity, this comma should always be included. (See "Oxford Comma", p. 30.)

# Use a comma between adjectives preceding a noun.

# Examples:

- 1) The office tower was a modern, architecturally splendid building.
- 2) He gave an inspiring, informative presentation.

Note: With concurrent adjectives, test for correct comma use by replacing the comma with the word "and" between adjectives; if "and" fits, then the original comma placement was correct: It was a bright, sunny day or it was a bright and sunny day.

# Use a comma to set off words in apposition.

A word or phrase in apposition has the same meaning as the term to which it refers.

# Examples: (the apposition is underlined)

- 1) The chairperson, Susan Weston, convened the meeting.
- 2) The issues, <u>funding and staffing</u>, will be priorities.

# Use a comma to set off a contrasting idea.

#### Examples:

- 1) Business writing should be clear, not confusing.
- 2) The better route to a solution is analysis, not guess work.
- 3) The effective manager has precise goals, but keeps an open mind.

#### Use a comma to set off a transition.

### Examples:

- 1) On the contrary, the board meeting was of vital importance.
- 2) Nevertheless, new computers would increase productivity.
- 3) As a matter of course, he decided to go with the original plan.

Use a comma to set off a dependent clause or a prepositional phrase that begins a sentence.

# Examples:

- 1) Although the market is down today, the future looks bright.
- 2) In fact, the opposite reaction occurred when the market fell.

Use a comma to separate the two parts of a compound sentence when the second part of the sentence introduces a new idea or when clarity is needed.

### Examples:

- 1) For years the company had been planning to expand globally, and the executive committee has now decided to go ahead.
- 2) There were three companies bidding on the contract, but it was decided that these applicants were unsuitable.
- 3) The company president initiated new incentives, and the staff responded with increased proficiency in all areas.

**Note:** If the introductory clause or phrase is short, no comma is necessary.

- 1) When every one arrived the meeting began.
- 2) The decision having been made the proposal went forward.

Use a comma with dates.

# Examples:

- 1) July 22, 2012
- 2) August, 2012
- 3) May 2013 (It is also acceptable to leave out the comma.)

Use a comma with numbers or similar words in succession.

# Examples:

- 1) On January 15, 35 employees were laid off.
- 2) We must accept that what is, is right.

The terms yes, why, well, or no beginning a sentence should be set off by a comma.

# Examples:

- 1) Well, we have reconsidered the offer and we must refuse.
- 2) No, there has been no change in our plans.
- 3) Yes, we anticipate that her appointment will be announced.

If well or why appears within a sentence, a comma is not needed.

# Examples:

- 1) He presented his case very well.
- 2) They questioned why we would move forward with the proposal.

Do not place a comma in front of a verb unless it is the second comma of a parenthetic term or a term in apposition.

Incorrect: The manager and her staff, attended the meeting.

Correct: The manager and her staff attended the meeting.

Correct: The manager and her staff, who were all presenters, attended

the meeting.

# A case for the "Oxford comma" (the final comma in a series)

1) He presented the case to his partners, Juan and Sophia.

Sentence (1) suggests that the partners are made up of Juan and Sophia and that <u>possibly</u> the "case" was presented to only those two.

2) He presented the case to his partners, Juan, and Sophia.

Sentence (2) means that the case was presented to the partners and to two other persons—Juan and Sophia.

# COLON, SEMICOLON, DASH

The colon, semicolon, and dash are used to arrange information logically, to clarify the main idea of a sentence, or to add emphasis.

#### THE COLON

Use a colon to introduce a list.

# Example:

The Purchasing Agent ordered the following items in bulk: photocopy paper, printer cartridges, file folders, and pens.

#### Example: (with a numbered list)

According to the seminar presenter, the three factors for success are as follows:

- 1) Continuing Education
- 2) Mentorship
- 3) Professional Development

Do not use a colon after a verb.

# Example:

Incorrect: The seminar presenter used: graphs, charts, and samples.

Correct: The seminar presenter used graphs, charts, and samples.

Do not use a colon if the list is closely connected to the verb.

# Example:

The factory workers requested better safety equipment, improved lighting, and overhead fans. (no colon after *requested*)

Use a colon to introduce a quotation or formal statement.

# Examples:

- 1) The consultant stated: "80% of success is planning."
- One of the principles of the corporation was written as follows: Every employee has the right to be treated with respect.

Note: If a complete sentence follows a colon, it begins with a capital letter.

Use a colon to highlight an appositive that further explains a statement or restates an idea.

# Examples:

- 1) There is only one thing that matters to the CFO: making money.
- 2) Making money is the only thing that matters to the CFO. (Sentence [2] merely makes a statement without emphasis.)
- 3) The college has one goal: the success of all students.
- 4) The success of all students is the one goal of the college. (Sentence [4] states the same idea, but is less emphatic.)

THE COLON: (other uses)

Use a colon with time and ratios.

**time** 2:30 p.m. **ratio** 4 to 1 becomes 4:1

Use a colon with a salutation.

Dear Ms. Smith: or Ladies and Gentlemen:

Use a colon after the abbreviation for example (i.e.).

Most mornings we begin work at 9:00 a.m., but sometimes it varies, i.e.: on Tuesdays we have a staff meeting at 7:00 a.m.

#### THE SEMICOLON

Use a semicolon to join independent clauses (sentences); a semicolon precedes transitional terms such as *however*, *nevertheless*, *although*, *but*, and *for example*.

# Examples:

- 1) The figures indicated a banner year; next year could be better. (Above are two short sentences with a common topic.)
- 2) Management worked hard; thus, their bonuses were generous. (*Thus* is a transitional term that follows the semicolon.)
- 3) The company has offered to pay for training courses for employees; however, failure to succeed in a course will result in withdrawal of financial support; this, it is felt, is a fair condition of the funding.

(In sentence [3], two semicolons join three related independent clauses.)

Use a semicolon to separate items in a series when there is internal punctuation, when names have titles or addresses, and when coordinating clauses are long or contain commas.

#### Examples:

# (internal punctuation in phrases in a series)

1) The MBA course covers areas of study such as: the need for inhouse professional development; new business development, including overseas expansion; formal communication—for business purposes—in the workplace and beyond.

# (names with titles)

2) The speakers at the seminar were R.L. Singh, Business Communications; David Wise, CEO, Greenlink Consulting; Ana Zahili, Director of Personnel, Stitko Precision Systems.

#### (names with addresses)

3) Invitations to the company dinner will be sent to the following: Mr. Richard Desousa, 221 Balsam Road; Paulo Rinaldi, 43 Nicholas Street; Susan Wong, 216 Carriage Road.

# (separating coordinating clauses)

4) An excellent business writer does not use jargon or slang; follows format guidelines; makes sure that the message is clear.

Use a semicolon instead of a colon when introducing a <u>list</u> that begins with the following terms: *namely*, *for instance*, *as for example*.

#### Examples:

- 1) The presentation will address actual sales situations; **namely**, market research, client solicitation, high-tech presentations, and the consultative approach.
- 2) There will be a new meeting schedule posted soon; **for instance**, our regular Monday morning meeting will be moved to Tuesday afternoon and the Wednesday end-of-day meeting will be moved to Friday morning.
- 3) Summer work hours are being reviewed for next year; **for example**, many employees would like extended daily hours leading to a four-day work week.

#### THE DASH

A dash is less formal than a colon and is used primarily for the emphasis or the clarification of a preceding statement in a sentence. A dash is also used to indicate an abrupt interruption in a sentence or to express a spread in time (1960–1980). Like a colon, a dash may provide a finishing statement that clarifies a previous point made in a sentence. Colons, on the other hand, tend to be stronger finishers that introduce a conclusive idea. In business writing, dashes should be used sparingly.

There are two kinds of dashes:

- 1) the en dash, roughly the width of the letter n (-)
- 2) the em dash, roughly the width of the letter m (—)

Use the *n* dash to join words showing distance.

# Example:

The London-Paris express train.

Use the *m* dash to set off a word, a phrase, or a clause.

# Example:

The report—bound in hardcover—was given to each manager.

Use the *m* dash after a series when the main clause follows the list.

(The reverse of this structure would have the main clause appear first and introduce the list with a colon.)

# Example:

South Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam—these are countries poised for economic growth.

Use a dash to highlight a parenthetical section in a sentence.

Commas are often used with a parenthetical construction, but a dash highlights the parallel or the additional information.

# Example:

The late stock market rally—much to the delight of investors—indicated substantial gains.

**Note:** The *en* and *em* dashes ( –,—) are usually found under "special characters" in a word processing program. Microsoft and Apple operating systems have short keys for both types of dashes.

Use a dash when a parenthetical segment includes commas.

#### Example:

Our international business locations—Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai—are expanding at an exponential rate.

Use a dash before an end word or phrase that adds a degree of emphasis or explanation to the main idea.

#### Examples:

- 1) There was one final consideration—how to invest the profits.
- 2) He has only one person to blame—himself.

# PARENTHESES, BRACKETS, QUOTATIONS, ELLIPSES

#### **PARENTHESES**

A parenthetical element is additional information not necessary to the main idea of a sentence, but too important to leave out.

Use parentheses to indicate additional information.

# Examples:

- 1) Canada (land mass nine million sq. km) is second to Russia in size.
- 2) The corporation applied for an extension of credit (soon to be approved), which will fund the building of a new plant.

Parentheses may be used with letters or numbers in a list.

# Examples:

- 1) The agenda was as follows:
  - (a) Introductory Remarks
  - (b) Guest Speaker
  - (c) Productivity Workshop
- 2) He planned the following steps:
  - (1) contact potential new clients
  - (2) hold an information session
  - (3) arrange follow-up meetings

**Note:** If the parenthetic element is a complete sentence, the period goes inside the closing parenthesis:

Australia has a population of 21.5 million. (It ranks 54th in the world.)

# BRACKETS []

Add brackets within a quotation to give explanation or a comment not written by the author of the original text. Also, use [sic] following an error (such as a spelling error) in a quotation.

# Examples:

# 1) adding explanatory information not included in the original text

The mayor stated: "This great city [New York] is the entertainment capital of the world."

# 2) indicating a spelling error in original text

The text stated: "The population of Malasia [sic] is close to 29 million." (Malasia is incorrect; it should be spelled Malaysia)

# 3) inside parentheses, use brackets only

Hong Kong is designated as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) and has a free market economy (highly dependent on foreign trade [see appendix A]).

### QUOTATION MARKS ""

Quotation marks are seldom needed in business writing; however, they are required in the following cases:

- 1) to indicate a direct quotation that encloses the exact words of an outside speaker or writer
- 2) to indicate a quoted word or to highlight a technical term or unusual terminology
- 3) to indicate a title of a report, a chapter within a book, an essay, a periodical, or an article (book titles are written in italics)

# Examples:

- 1) The guest speaker stated: "Fiscal prudence is the key to the progress of an emerging economy."
- 2) The uses of "accept" and "except" are often confused.
- 3) The speaker referred to the article "Modern Economics" to support his main idea.
- 4) English is now the "de facto" language of business.

# ELLIPSES: Use end punctuation plus ellipses to end a sentence.

Ellipses (...) indicate that words have been left out of a quotation: "...yet the market responded positively....But, investors are wary."

# THE APOSTROPHE (1)

# POSSESSIVE FORM (shows ownership)

#### SINGULAR NOUNS

To form the possessive of a singular noun, add 's.

administrator's report

chairperson's decision

To form the possessive of a singular noun ending in s, add 's.

Dickens's novels

Forbes's articles

#### PLURAL NOUNS

To form the possessive of a plural noun ending in s, add '.

accountants' records

employees' concerns

To form the possessive of a plural noun not ending in s, add 's.

women's club

people's choice

To form the possessive of a compound noun, add 's to the last word.

Bank of China's funds

person-of-record's statement

To form the possessive of noun pairs, add 's to the last noun.

Standard & Poor's rating Klein and Foster's law firm

To form the possessive of nouns of time or money, add 's or'.

previous year's taxes several days' pay

To form the possessive of individual words in a series add 's to each.

Toyota's, Honda's, and Subaru's new car lineup

NOTE: Use an "of-phrase" in place of an apostrophe to avoid ambiguity, for ease of expression, and with inanimate objects.

(1) the chairperson's dismissal the dismissal of the chairperson

(2) the business's goals

the goals of the business

(3) the office's window

the window of the office

In example (1) the *of-phrase* avoids the ambiguity over who is being dismissed and who is doing the dismissing.

In example (2) the of-phrase makes the sentence easier to express.

In example (3) the of-phrase is used with an inanimate object.

# THE APOSTROPHE (2)

#### NUMBERS AND ACRONYMS

There are two schools of thought regarding the apostrophe with dates and acronyms. Some writers prefer to use the apostrophe to denote the plural, which can cause confusion over whether the possessive or the plural is intended. Except for lower case letters, it is best to use *s* instead of *s* when forming the plural.

\* To show a time span use an en dash between dates (1970s–1990s).

#### Example:

1960s is plural 1960's is possessive

(1960's, although incorrect, is sometimes accepted as a plural; however, it could be mistaken for the possessive form and should be avoided.)

The 1980s were a time of technological advancement. (plural)

The **1930's** were a difficult time economically. (often used for plural)

They enjoyed '60's music. (possessive and short form of 1960)

He drove an '97 BMW. (adjective, short form of 1997)

# Example:

ABCs (preferred) or ABC's (often used, but not preferred)

a's and o's, p's and q's (must use i as with all lowercase letters)

### **PERSONIFICATION**

Use 's with inanimate objects that are personified.

The Stock Exchange's revenge was swift.

#### **CONTRACTIONS**

Contractions are formed by combining words and substituting an apostrophe for the letters removed.

cannot – can't let us – let's will not – won't does not – doesn't was not – wasn't would not – wouldn't it is – it's who is – who's you will – you'll

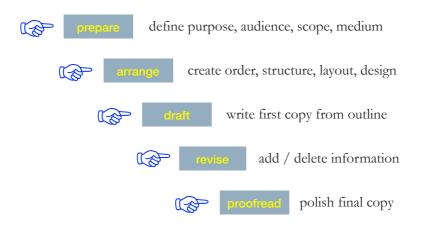
Contractions are common in informal writing and in conversation. In business writing, contractions are best avoided when possible.

### THE PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS WRITING

Business writing takes many forms each suited to a specific purpose. All business writing must be clear and concise with simple, straightforward language.

In the business world, poorly written communication is unacceptable. Every letter, memorandum, report, or announcement must be composed for maximum effect and to suit both the purpose and the intended audience.

### STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WRITING



What is the purpose of the communication?

How much detail is needed?

For whom is the communication written?

What is the best format to clearly convey the message?

What action or outcome is expected?

#### THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence introduces the main idea of a paragraph and may include a brief comment about that idea. A paragraph should consist of only one topic, and should develop that topic through the sentences that follow.

### The Topic Sentence = main idea + elaboration

### Examples: effective topic sentences

1) The collective effort of all employees was the reason for our company's success this year.

topic sentence = collective effort + company's success

(The developing sentences would elaborate on the *efforts* and the *success*.)

2) To facilitate our global initiatives, three new locations— Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul—have been identified for business expansion.

topic sentence = three locations + global initiatives

(The developing sentences would elaborate on *locations* and *initiatives*.)

**Note:** In the topic sentence, introduce the main idea only. Do not include details that will be part of the body of the paragraph.

# Example: ineffective topic sentence

3) The three new locations—Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul—have been targeted for business expansion, and in these locations we intend to set up distribution outlets to serve Southeast Asia.

Example (3) contains too many ideas and gives details that should be reserved for the body of the paragraph. Example topic sentence (2) is much more succinct and functional. It tells just enough to introduce the paragraph.

Note: Unify the paragraph by making sure each sentence in the paragraph relates to the main idea. A rephrased (not a repeated) topic sentence may be included at the end of a paragraph for emphasis and to reinforce the main idea.

#### ORGANIZING IDEAS

A paragraph or a section of a document is **coherent** when its elements blend making it easy for the reader to follow the main idea. Coherency also means consistency in tone and subject.

#### METHODS OF PRESENTING IDEAS

Chronological Order: In a chronological presentation, information is presented in sequence. Though a technique typically used in narrative writing, chronological order might be used in business writing to clarify a specific order of events or to explain a process: for instance, the sequence of events leading up to a business deal.

Spatial Order: Frequently used in descriptive writing, spatial order, like a camera moving around a room, finds a starting point and then moves around focusing on details or key points as they appear.

Logical Order: This technique is particularly suited to business communication as it arranges information to suit logical associations. It also allows the freedom to present illustrations, explanations, causeand-effect relationships, and problem-solving action. Two arrangements of presenting ideas lie within this category:

- ♦ general-to-specific (See p. 72-74).
- ◆ specific-to-general

In a **general-to-specific** arrangement, the topic sentence presents a general idea that requires elaboration or explanation. The sentences that follow expand on the topic sentence.

In a **specific-to-general** arrangement the topic sentence states the controlling idea of the paragraph and the supporting information the paragraph will give.

A topic sentence does two things:

- 1) **introduces** the main (controlling) idea of a paragraph
- 2) **restricts** the paragraph to a single (controlling) idea

#### SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

The paragraphs below are examples of logical and chronological order, and each begins with a clear topic sentence (controlling idea). The body of each paragraph contains sentences that give important details elaborating on the main idea.

(Topic sentences are written in blue font.)

# **Logical Order**

Three new locations have been identified for business expansion that will facilitate our global initiatives. These locations—Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul—have a collective population of over 22 million and represent a significant opportunity for inroads to business in Southeast Asia. The plan is to set up printing operations in China and distribution outlets in each of these cities. These three new locations are ideal starting points for business expansion as each has a large population and a strategic geographic proximity to other Southeast Asian countries.

topic sentence

ideas arranged in logical order

topic sentence restated

# **Chronological Order**

The collective effort of all employees was the reason for our company's success this year. At the beginning of the year we were seeking ways to increase productivity without incurring unmanageable expense. At a general meeting with all employees, the possibility of adding a weekend shift was discussed and later voted on. After an overwhelming vote of acceptance, it was then decided that the weekend shift would be available to anyone wishing to earn overtime pay. It was further decided that this shift would be available on a rotating basis assigned equally to those interested. By year's end, we found that productivity had increased substantially as a direct result of the efforts of the employees on the weekend shift.

topic sentence

ideas arranged in chronological order

topic sentence restated

# THE ART OF PERSUASIVE WRITING

"Rhetoric...the faculty of discovering the means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatsoever."

Aristotle

In business, persuasive writing is integral to sales letters and proposals, as well as any other correspondence that attempts to convince a reader. Persuasive writing is a specific skill distinguished by the writer's ability to establish and prove a clear argument. If the reader is to be convinced, he or she must be immediately aware of the premise the writer is trying to prove. Next, the writer must present a series of proofs to support the main premise.

The topic sentence usually appears at the beginning of a persuasive paragraph and must clearly state the main premise. The writer will then, in logical order, present sentences containing the points of proof.

# Topic Sentence (1): general premise

Lack of proficiency in written English for business is a widespread problem in today's corporate world.

# Topic Sentence (2): specific premise

Many corporations understand the need for excellence in business writing and have taken action to increase the proficiency of their staff in this area.

# Topic Sentence (3): general premise

Today, English is the worldwide de facto language of business.

# Topic Sentence (4): specific premise

With English as the de facto language of business worldwide, it is critical that companies ensure that their employees are proficient in business writing.

Although the above topic sentences are related in premise, they differ in content. Each **general** premise would be followed by sentences that support and expand upon the broad idea of the topic. Each **specific** premise is more confined to a narrowed idea.

## PLACEMENT OF THE TOPIC SENTENCE

In most cases the **topic sentence** is the first or second sentence in a paragraph. However, when composing a persuasive letter or report, the placement of the topic sentence depends on the strategy for developing the argument.

If the paragraph begins with a **topic sentence**—a statement of the assertion or proposition—it should then be followed by sentences that expand upon and prove that premise.

Consider the following premise to be argued:

Because English is now the language of business worldwide, international companies will be intent on initiating in-house training that will increase the business-writing proficiency of their employees.

# Topic Sentence introducing a paragraph:

English is now the language of business worldwide and companies with nonnative English speaking employees are intent on improving the English writing skills of these staff members. According to the HSBC bank, five times more people are learning English in China than there are people in England: This is a clear indication of the worldwide trend towards English language literacy.

The topic sentence above is followed by a thought-provoking statistic. Proof sentences would follow with facts, quotations, and more evidence.

# Topic Sentence appearing second in a paragraph:

In a recent advertisement, HSBC bank made this statement: "There are five times more people learning English in China than there are people in England." Since English is now the language of business worldwide, international companies will be focusing on improving the English literacy skills of their employees.

The opening statement above offers a compelling statistic that sets up the topic sentence. Proof sentences would start with the third sentence of the paragraph and continue to the end.

In some cases the topic sentence is the last sentence of the paragraph. This only works when the proof sentences lead to a conclusion that is, in fact, the topic sentence. This approach tends to be dramatic and should be used cautiously.

## SAMPLE PERSUASIVE LETTER

bold heading sets up the premise

thoughtprovoking introduction

product introduced in detail in a persuasive tone

strong closing premise

value-added offer

# EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS WRITING IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Every piece of written communication that leaves a company acts as a corporate ambassador. Improper communication can cause confusion, may result in misleading information, or worse: legal consequences. Excellent communication, however, can result in increased business, improved client relations, and a highly respected corporate image. It is imperative for corporate employees to write accurately and professionally. It is just good business.

To address the pressing need for Business English proficiency, we proudly offer *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing*—our comprehensive training textbook for written business communication. Whether an employee writes daily or periodically, this handbook is an invaluable tool. Not only does the handbook offer writing instructions and samples, it is an easy-to-use reference that covers major and minor problems encountered with everyday written communication. Think of it as an indispensable, self-educating instrument to improving writing skills; think of it as personal professional development. Improvement in writing begins with the first use of the handbook.

To help start your staff on the road to improved Business English writing, we will conduct a complimentary in-house seminar on the use of the handbook. Ongoing additional instruction is available upon request. I look forward to providing your company with *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing* and to working with you towards business writing excellence.

Sincerely, Claire Rogers Essential Business English

#### THE SALES LETTER

"Sales letters are the life blood of most companies."

J. Venolia

A company is always selling something whether it be a product or a service or simply its own image. The professional sales letter is so important that many companies hire professional writers or agencies to compose these letters. However, when time is of the essence, it is useful to have the skills and confidence to compose your own convincing sales letters.

- ◆ Know the needs and motivation of the potential client.
- ♦ Know your product and its key selling features.
- ◆ Anticipate objections and focus on value and benefits.
- Know your competition.

#### THE SALES LETTER FORMULA

## **Attention**

First, you must peak the client's interest. Open with a statement of fact, a statistic, or newsworthy announcement about your product or service. Follow by indicating your in-depth knowledge of the client's business. Ask questions to show you have the client's interest in mind.

#### Interest

Deliver a strong sales message: outline the benefits of the products or service; offer testimonials from satisfied clients; offer sales samples or free products and trial periods.

## Desire

Indicate ways your product or service differs from similar ones. Stimulate the client by showing that the product or service you are offering creates profit, efficiency, and savings—benefits with strong appeal.

#### Action

Motivate the client to take the next step: order the product, accept a sample, agree to a meeting, partake in a demonstration. Be proactive. If price is a selling point, include it. If price is a deterrent, accentuate value and benefit.

## THE SALES LETTER

"Knowing something about your customer is just as important as knowing everything about your product."

H. Mackay

#### HINTS:

- ♦ Grasp the reader's attention with a strong opening sentence.
- ◆ Use specific language to describe your product and its benefits.
- ◆ Don't try to close the sale in the sales letter; simply create interest in moving to the next step in the sales process.
- Offer proof of the benefits of your products or services.
- If price is a strongpoint or if a special discount is available, highlight this.
- ◆ Try to keep the prospect actively involved in the sales process.
- ◆ Give the potential client a reason to consider the next step.
- ◆ Suggest a definite course of action.
- ◆ Initiate the delivery of a free sample; offer to conduct a presentation; suggest a trial period of use; arrange to send additional information. Make these offers available with a request response (fill out a requisition form, make contact by e-mail, call for a free sample, etc.).

## BUT:

- Don't overload the initial sales letter with too much information.
- Avoid superlatives and excessively exuberant language.
- Keep your information simple and straightforward; the prospect may know little about your product or service so include key details.
- ◆ Avoid the use of jargon.
- ◆ Don't use a negative approach: "Without this product your company will fall behind your competitors." Stress the positive and concentrate on benefits.

# SAMPLE SALES LETTER (A)

## Company Letterhead

Date

Inside Address

Dear Ms. Cordoba:

# A Business English Professional Development Program

With English as the de facto language of business worldwide, proficiency in business English has become essential for conducting global business. For this reason we have developed a comprehensive writing workshop designed to meet the communication needs of corporations such as yours.

The Essential Business English writing workshop may be of particular interest to you as a Professional Development coordinator. We offer an affordable, effective, and stimulating professional development business writing in-service. Our mandate is to provide thorough, well-structured instruction for managers and general staff that will produce immediate results. With our proven method, participants become confident, skilled writers of business correspondence enabling them to communicate professionally in a global environment.

Our highly qualified instructors have exemplary academic and professional qualifications and extensive college-level classroom experience enabling them to offer expert instruction in writing for various business requirements.

Consider partaking in our program and giving your staff the highest level of training in business writing available. Each of your staff members attending our workshop will receive a copy of our text, *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing*—an invaluable business writing reference book. I have enclosed a complimentary copy for your perusal.

Please visit our website (essentialbusinessenglish.com) for further details and contact me at your convenience to discuss how we can be part of your professional development initiatives.

Sincerely,

Mark O'Keefe

Mark O'Keefe

Director of Marketing, Essential Business English

#### RESPONSE TO A COMPLAINT

When responding to a letter of complaint it is important to act promptly and conscientiously. Think of the response to a complaint as a public relations opportunity. Also, in the interest of retaining the customer or client, it is imperative to handle the complaint efficiently and professionally. Responding to and acting upon a complaint is not a burden, it is an opportunity.

#### **HINTS:**

- Respond promptly: express understanding, sympathy, and regret.
- Thank the client (in advance) for his or her patience; reassert that the problem is rare and that it will be addressed immediately.
- ◆ Reinforce that your company values the client and will do whatever is necessary to satisfy his or her request.
- ◆ Refer to the problem or issue including specifics such as time, date, reference numbers, and other important details.
- If the client is correct in the complaint, acknowledge this; if you believe the client to be in error, do not state this outright.
- If the client is incorrect in the claim, explain why; reassure the client that issuing a complaint was the right thing to do to rectify the problem.
- ◆ Refer to company policy to set up guidelines.
- ◆ Outline the options for rectifying the complaint.
- If possible, give a date by which the complaint may be resolved.

## **BUT:**

- ◆ Avoid reviewing all the details of the complaint—focus on the solution.
- Don't appear reluctant to solve the issue; rather, be an enthusiastic problem solver.
- ◆ Don't make any references to legal liability.

## THE E-MAIL MESSAGE

"And once sent out, a word takes wing beyond recall."

Horace, 65 BC

The tone of e-mail communication is often conversational and may invite questions and answers as ongoing dialogue. However informal in tone, an e-mail must adhere to the basic rules of good writing.

### Is it "e-mail" or "email"?

Technically, "e-mail" is correct as it is short for "electronic mail"; however, "email" is widely used and accepted today.

#### HINTS:

- ◆ Be brief and get to the point of the message.
- ◆ Include a subject line that gives the main idea of the message.
- ◆ A friendly opening is acceptable: hello or good morning.
- Avoid excessively formal language; use jargon sparingly and only when called for within a specific industry.
- ◆ Double check the recipient list; be careful of sending an unintended *reply to all*.
- Proofread before sending: once gone, it's gone.

# NOTE: Before sending your e-mail message, check for the following:

- 1) The date and subject of the message should be included.  $\checkmark$
- 2) The salutation is formal, but the tone is friendly.  $\checkmark$
- 3) There should be single spacing between sentences and double spacing between paragraphs. ✓
- 4) The message must be grammatically correct. ✓
- 5) The complimentary close is formal, yet friendly. ✓
- 6) The message is going out only to intended recipients. ✓

#### THE MEMORANDUM

"Talk of nothing but business and dispatch that business quickly." A. Manutius

The term memo is short for memorandum. The plurals are memoranda and memos, and the now popular memorandums.

The memo was originally conceived to provide short, precise, direct communication to employees within a company without using the conventional openings and closings common to a business letter.

A memorandum will name the writer, the person or group being addressed, and the date and subject of the message.

#### HINTS:

- ◆ State the purpose of your memo in the subject line.
- → Make the subject line clear and precise.
- ◆ Formal salutation and complimentary close is not required.
- ◆ Be concise and use short, direct sentences.
- ◆ Try to keep the length to one page, two if necessary.
- ♦ Use lists, graphs, and charts as supportive material.
- ◆ At the close of a memo, address any anticipated objections.
- If required, end the memo with a call to action or a request for a response.
- Do not use jargon unless useful for an industry-specific message.
- ◆ Send a business letter instead of a memo for formal correspondence being sent outside your corporation.

#### SAMPLE INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

#### INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** August 23, 2012

TO: All Staff

FROM: Paula Richards, Office Manager

SUBJECT: OFFICE RENOVATION AND RELOCATION

#### RENOVATIONS

Because of inadequate workspace, we have decided to make extensive office renovations. Presently, we have cramped work stations, unsuitable meeting space, and inconveniently located equipment. These inadequate working conditions will be further exacerbated by the growth in employment anticipated over the next three years.

#### RELOCATION

The date set for our office renovations is October 10, 2012; prior to that date, all staff members will have to relocate to an alternate facility. We are currently negotiating space on other floors in this building. We are also attempting to secure space in the adjacent building that is accessible through the indoor passageway.

Please take care of the following before October 6:

- 1. Pack up or remove all personal belongings.
- 2. Place all old files in special file boxes available from the mailroom.
- 3. Save all documents on the company server.
- 4. Empty desks and store computers, printers, and software.

We are aware that this move will be inconvenient and time consuming, but the benefits are substantial. Once the renovations are complete, each of you will have an adequate, comfortable work station with easy access to all equipment and services.

The relocation will take place in the first week of October (exact date to follow). Staff will not be expected to report to work on moving day.

# SAMPLE INTERNAL MEMO (with graphs)

#### -INTERNAL MEMORANDUM -

DATE: December 2, 2012

TO: Sales Staff

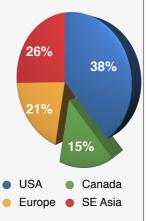
FROM: Janice Chu, Sales Manager SUBJECT: Year-End Sales Review

DIVISION OF INTERNATIONAL SALES: Year End 2012

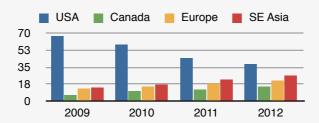
Please review the following graphs in preparation for our meeting on December 8, 2012.

We will be focusing on two main issues:

- 1) Broadening our distribution channels
- 2) Evaluating international sales patterns



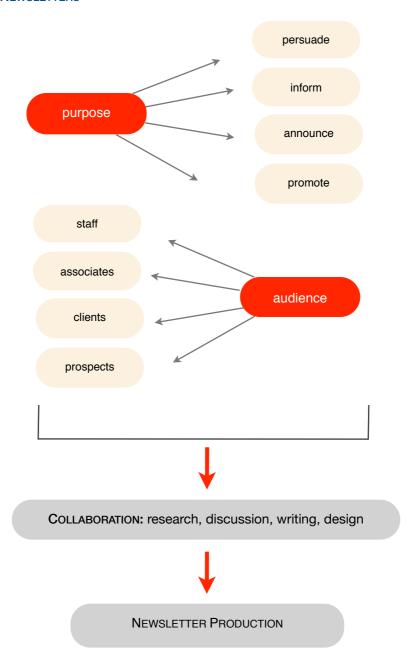
The bar graph compares sales by region over a four-year period.



Please review the graphs and prepare to discuss sales trends. We will also be focusing on the patterns of change with particular emphasis on new markets: Japan, Australia, South America, and Mexico.

The meeting is on Thursday, December 8, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

## **N**EWSLETTERS



# SAMPLE NEWSLETTER (B)





# TCT Newsletter

Spring 2012

Issue #3

#### TORONTO CONSIDERS A LIGHT-RAIL ALTERNATIVE

# Light Rail in Toronto?

After tireless lobbying and campaigning by TCT members, Toronto City Council may revisit their intent to expand the existing subway system. Consideration for light rail as an alternative is now possible.

TCT member Ross Snetsinger, in a letter to the mayor, stated: "Comparing subways and light rail (LRT) is like comparing apples to oranges without ever having seen an orange." Snetsinger explains further that light rail passengers can see the sky, parks, and

shops: they become closely connected to their city.

City Hall is adamant about building a subway extension of the evidence proving that such an extension is fiscally imprudent.

A number of pro-LRT groups

are preparing for a long battle with a city council that they claim is sorely lacking in vision.

TCT will gather further evidence supporting light rail and continue to lobby city council before the next council session.
TCT members stay tuned: There is more to come.

# Features of Sample Newsletter (B): (newsletter is abbreviated)

- 1) full photo to draw attention to the subject
- 2) newsletter title is placed in middle of page
- 3) four-column justified text: Helvetica titles, Garamond text

# A Comparison: the formal proposal and report

The following lists compare the components of a **formal proposal** to those of a **formal report**. Generally, the purpose of a proposal is to solicit business; the purpose of a report is to give information. Both a proposal and a report may be devised for internal distribution.

Proposals fall into two categories: solicited and unsolicited. A government body might put out a tender, which is a request for proposal (RFP), inviting submissions from companies vying for the business requested. An **unsolicited proposal**, because it is an attempt to garner business that hasn't been requested, would be just as thorough in content as a solicited proposal, but, like a sales letter, highly persuasive in tone.

Reports are as detailed as the scope of their subjects. They give information but are not intended to persuade. Recommendations may develop as a result of a report, but are not usually included. Reports are objective in message and tone.

#### FORMAL PROPOSAL

# Prefatory Section

- title page
- request for proposal
- transmittal letter (for solicited proposals)
- · table of contents
- · list of illustrations
- executive summary

# **Body Section**

- introduction
- body
- closing

# Supplements

• appendix

#### FORMAL REPORT

# Prefatory Section

- title page
- · table of contents
- transmittal letter
- list of illustrations
- executive summary
   Body Section
- introduction
- body
- conclusions
- recommendations

# Supplements

- references
- appendix
- · glossary of terms

#### SAMPLE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This proposal examines the feasibility of expanding the distribution of *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing* and the development of complementary products to markets in China and Southeast Asia. It also outlines the various target markets and the financial benefits of such expansion.

#### RESEARCH TO DATE

In June 2011, an initial study of the Southeast Asian region was completed to ascertain the following:

- 1) The nonnative English-speaking population in China and SE Asian countries
- 2) The existing English-language proficiency
- 3) The need for Business English training in multinational corporations
- 4) Countries and cities as initial target markets
- 5) Colleges and Universities in China and Southeast Asia
- 6) The cost of expansion to China and Southeast Asia

#### POPULATION OF CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

There are 10 countries including 11 major cities being considered for expansion in this region with a total population over 1.7 billion. In addition, there are hundreds of multinational corporations active in this region that would represent a direct market. There are close to 1,000 post-secondary educational institutions where *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing* would be marketed as a textbook.

#### BUSINESS REVENUE POTENTIAL

Considering the size of the market and the need for our products and services in both the corporate and education markets, it is estimated that revenues from this region could reach up to five million dollars (US) within a three-year period.

To achieve these revenues, it is necessary to procure investment capital and to establish a sufficiently staffed base of operations in Southeast Asia. Subsequently, a full-blown marketing campaign should be devised to target this region. The timing for such expansion is in keeping with the growing worldwide demand for English writing proficiency.

states purpose

subheading

key points from body section

persuasive message

creates urgency

# SAMPLE PROPOSAL BODY TEXT (1)

#### **CURRENT DISTRIBUTION**

At present, the distribution channels for *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing* are limited to North American markets.

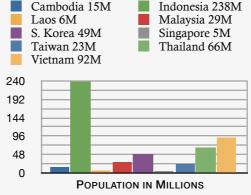
#### **PROBLEM**

To date, only one market is being tapped for the sale of *The Essential Handbook for Business Writing*, and this revenue stream is limited. We have identified two large, untapped markets that should be pursued aggressively.

#### NEW MARKETS IN CHINA AND SE ASIA

The chart below shows the population distribution for nine countries in Southeast Asia (China not included).

#### POPULATION BY COUNTRY



Total population of SE Asia (as above): 523 M

Population Of China: 1.25 Billion

Total Target Population: 1.78 Billion

COMPARATIVE MARKETS (2011)

NORTH AMERICA: 355 MILLION INDIA: 1,2

states current status and problem

graph inserted as visual aid and to give information

additional statistics

#### **BUSINESS REPORTS**

#### **STEPS**

**Examine previous reports.** If you are asked to write a formal report, the first thing you should do is examine the content and format of your company's previously written reports. Since these reports have been accepted by management, they will provide a proper blueprint or template.

Be aware that reports range in style. Reports may be in memo format, sent by e-mail, or produced in hard copy with a formal cover and binding. Annual reports, for example, are often professionally designed, bound, and printed. Besides giving important information, annual reports present a corporate image and should be attractive and professional looking.

**Understand that reports will vary.** A report may be as short as a single page or as long as 100 or more pages. The length is determined by the scope of the subject and the detail of the information included.

Note: Writing a formal report can be a daunting task. But like all written communication the formal report can also be an opportunity to display to management your excellent writing skills and your attention to detail.

# Reports are written for a variety of reasons:

- ♦ to indicate areas of concern within a company
- ◆ to prove compliance with government regulations
- to document progress on projects or initiatives
- ♦ to gain acceptance for proposals, plans, or new projects
- ◆ to outline implementation of policy or procedure
- ♦ to monitor and manage company activity
- ◆ to explain the details of an accident or an incident
- ◆ to guide a decision-making process

The motivation for writing a report may be as follows: to persuade, to give information, to evaluate, to solve a problem.

Regardless of the type or the purpose of your report, you should follow the three basic steps of writing:

Prewriting Writing Revising

## **MEMO REPORTS**

For internal reports, memo format is preferred. Dividing the information into paragraphs with headings arranges ideas logically and makes the document easy to navigate.

#### **HINTS:**

- ◆ Write a SUBJECT line to clarify the purpose of the report.
- ◆ Compose separate paragraphs for each topic within the report.
- ◆ Use single spacing between lines in each paragraph.
- ◆ Use headings in bold to introduce the topic of each paragraph.
- ◆ Consider who will read the report: know your audience.
- State the reason for the report with proper background information.

The following pages offer two abbreviated examples of an internal report: 1) a progress report 2) a recommendation report.

## A PROGRESS REPORT

A Progress Report is usually an update of some ongoing activity. First, it describes the current situation with details; then, it states specifically the work currently underway, outlines existing or foreseeable problems, and gives details of future action.

## A RECOMMENDATION REPORT

A Recommendation Report is analytical in nature and may be intended, for example, to solve a problem, to create a change in strategy, or to institute a new business initiative. Based on carefully reviewed information, the report may make several recommendations.

Note: The reports that follow on the next two pages are intentionally brief to serve as samples only. Actual memo reports may be several pages in length.

# **COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS**

This section deals with commonly confused terms including homonyms (word pairs that sound the same but have different meanings). Ten common usage errors are listed below. A further list of frequently confused terms are listed alphabetically on pages 152–166.

#### TEN COMMON USAGE ERRORS

## accept / except

Accept is a verb meaning to agree to receive something; except is a conjunction meaning not included.

- a) He will gladly accept his well-deserved bonus pay.
- b) All staff except management will be under review.

# bad / badly

*Bad* is an adjective; *badly* is an adverb. *Bad* will often be used to describe a feeling; badly describes an action.

- a) He felt bad about missing the sales quotas.
- b) She performed badly in the debate.
- c) The food at the airport tasted bad.
- d) The airport food was badly prepared.

# can / may

Can refers to ability; may refers to permission.

- a) If I have the correct information, I can write a report.
- b) His manager told him that he may take extended vacation time.

# good / well

*Good* is an adjective; *well* is an adverb, and can also be used to mean health.

- a) He gave a good presentation.
- b) Because she was now feeling well, she returned to work.
- c) Sales were going quite well until the second quarter.

#### it's / its

*It's* is a contraction of *it is*; *its* is a possessive pronoun showing ownership.

- a) It's necessary to keep strict accounts of expenditures. (it is)
- b) The corporation took care of its employees. (possessive)

#### TEN COMMON USAGE ERRORS

#### less / fewer

Use *less* for quantity measurement that cannot be counted; use *fewer* for things that can be counted (units).

- a) She had far less work to do after the holidays. (quantity)
- b) There were fewer jobs because of the recession. (units)
- c) There is less time to complete tasks. (quantity)
- d) There are *fewer* hours to complete tasks. (units)

#### than / then

Than is used for comparisons; then denotes time of occurrence.

- a) She is a more effective leader than I am. (comparison)
- b) First they held a meeting; then they voted. (when)

# there / their / they're

There is an adverb stating where; their is a possessive pronoun showing ownership; they're is a contraction of they are.

- a) She placed her new desk over there by the window. (place)
- b) The visitors had valet service park their cars. (possessive)
- c) They're interested in the overseas conference. (contraction)

#### shall / will

Use *shall* with first person and *will* with second and third persons to indicate the future tense; reverse this to indicate determination or need. (This distinction is being ignored with growing frequency.)

- a) I shall attend the meeting. (future)
- b) They will attend the meeting. (future)
- c) They shall never agree with administration. (determination)
- d) We will overcome all obstacles and succeed. (determination)

# your / you're

Your is a possessive pronoun; you're is a contraction of you are.

- a) Your analysis of current issues was impressive. (possessive)
- b) You're a well-respected business analyst. (contraction)

# Note: irregardless / regardless

Irregardless is now listed in major dictionaries including The Oxford English Dictionary. However, it is considered nonstandard. Use regardless.

#### PROBLEM USAGE: terms often confused

## Α

## ability / capacity

Ability is the skill to be able to do something; capacity refers to power to absorb or contain.

# actual / actually

These terms are rarely needed: "The actual time is five o'clock." He actually arrived today." The basic information is precise on its own.

#### AD / BC

Place *AD* before the year and *BC* after the year: 62 BC and AD 25.

#### advice / advise

Advice is a noun; advise is a verb.

#### all alone

Use alone.

#### all that

Avoid all that in formal writing.

## allude / refer

Allude is vague whereas refer is specific.

## along with

Avoid.

#### almost never

Avoid. Use hardly ever or seldom.

## also / and

Avoid using *also* in place of *and*. "She worked in marketing *also* and in sales."

## alternate / alternative

Alternate means every other; alternative means another choice.

#### and / or

More often used in legal or official text: "Politicians and/or diplomats will attend the summit."

# angry at (with)

Use *angry at* to refer to an occurrence; use *angry with* to refer to a person.

## appreciate

Often incorrectly used to mean *understand*.

"Do you appreciate understand the severity of the situation?"

#### as well as

Not to be a substitute for *and*. "They sold computers as well as *and* printers."

## assemble together

Use only assembled.

#### a while / awhile

To use *awhile* as a noun is incorrect. "She will work in Asia for awhile a while." "She also worked *awhile* in Europe."

#### В

# back again

Avoid. Use only *back*. "She is *back* again from England."

#### both / alike

Both refers to two persons or things. Both alike is redundant. "The managers were both alike in work ethic."

# VISUAL DESIGN BASICS

All documents require an element of design, which can be as simple as selecting an appealing and functional font or as detailed as creating balance and distribution on a page. The task of design may also include constructing sections with titles and subtitles and inserting graphic elements (graphs, charts, illustrations, etc.).

# **CREATING A DOCUMENT** write document composition copy choose design font and tones create arrangement layout edit copy and revision redesign

# **WORKING WITH FONTS**

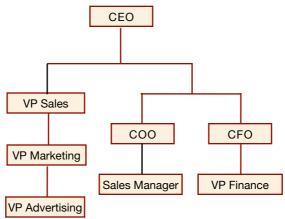
With hundreds of fonts to choose from, selecting the right font for a document can be difficult. Below are lists of commonly used fonts. Although all these fonts are 10 point in measurement, they differ in size. (See next page.)

serif	sans serif		
Baskerville	Abadi		
Bell MT	Arial		
Bodoni	Bell Gothic		
Book Antique	Century Gothic		
Bookman Old Style	Futura		
Courier New	Geneva		
Garamond	Gill Sans		
Georgia	Helvetica		
Goudy Old Style	Lucida Sans		
Hoefler	Microsoft Sans Serif		
Palatino	Tahoma		
Times New Roman	Verdana		

Note: Major corporations choose the following fonts for their websites: Lucida (Apple); Verdana (Amazon); Tahoma (Microsoft); Arial (IBM); Helvetica (Twitter); Lucida (Facebook).

## **CHARTS AND GRAPHS**





Charts and graphs are clear and simple ways to illustrate relationships. The above flow chart shows the hierarchal order of a corporate structure. Flow charts can also define the order of events in a work project. Below is a bar graph illustrating the top ten English-speaking countries in the world.

# ENGLISH-SPEAKING POPULATION: top 10 countries



## **TABLE CHART**

The table below is ideal for displaying and comparing information. A legend is included to complement the short form names of the countries listed.

# TOP TEN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

Country	% English Speaking	Eligible Pop. (millions)	Total English Speaking (millions)	English First Language (millions)	English Other Language (millions)
USA	95	281	267	226	42
IN	12	1,210	125	0.25	350
PK	49	181	89	N/A	89
PH	79	97	76	3	73
NG	53	148	79	4	75
UK	98	61	60	58	2
DE	56	82	46	0.25	46
BD	18	163	29	N/A	29
EG	35	28	28	N/A	28
CA	85	33	25	18	8

#### **LEGEND**

USA...United States IN......India PK.....Pakistan PH.....Philippines NG.....Nigeria UK...United Kingdom DE...Germany BD...Bangladesh EG...Egypt CA...Canada