

# Writing for Business

## **Level 1**

### Instructor Key

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## Section 1: Introduction to Business Writing

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### ***Why Business Writing?***

Strong, clear business writing is more important now than ever. In today's business world, "face time" (time spent communicating verbally face-to-face) is hard to come by. Flex-time, telecommuting, geographically dispersed co-workers, and pressing time commitments make it hard to spend as much time as we'd like speaking with one another directly.

Written business communications:

- Allow us to communicate with many people at once.
- Help us communicate with individuals in different locations.
- Verify and acknowledge verbal communications such as conversations and meetings.
- Can be copied and forwarded to provide information to others.
- Create a permanent record of the communication (for reference or to comply with business processes and procedures).
- Ensure that information is received accurately and consistently by all recipients.

### ***What Can You Accomplish with Business Writing?***

Business writing can help you accomplish a variety of business goals. By using effective business writing, you can:

- Inform others
- Make a request for approval, support, funding, or purchases
- Persuade other people to purchase a product or service, follow a course of action, or approve a plan
- Create goodwill for you and your organization



*"What we write and how well we write it will be a major factor in sustaining public interest and involving parents, educators, and local officials in our efforts. In short, we want to put a new face on the Department's regulatory documents."*

—Gene Hickok, Under Secretary of Education, 2002

## Section 2: Style in Business Writing

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Effective business writing is very different from the kinds of informal communication you may use in your personal life.

- It is *clear* and *precise*. Good business writing avoids using words or terminology that can confuse the reader. It leaves nothing to the imagination.
- It is *concise* and *gets to the point*. Business writing doesn't waste time on words or details that are irrelevant to the main points or ideas. Good business writing addresses the main points quickly and directly.
- It takes a *tone* that is confident, courteous, and positive. It speaks to the reader's interests, motivations, and needs.
- Modern business writing is *gender-neutral*. It treats men and women equally and doesn't make assumptions about gender.

This section will help you write in a way that is clear, concise, gender-neutral, and has an appropriate tone.

### Writing Clearly

In their book *How to Write First-Class Business Correspondence*, Baugh, Fryar, and Thomas tell us that “clear writing involves choosing the best words to express your ideas and arranging those words to help your readers understand your ideas. The more you practice ‘getting the words just right’ the more skilled you will become in communicating your message to the reader.”

Your writing will be clearest if you maximize your use of *active voice* (vs. *passive voice*) and *concrete writing* (vs. *abstract writing*) in your business communications. Let's start by looking at active and passive voice.

### Active and Passive Voice

A sentence written in active voice has the subject performing the action. When it is written in passive voice, the subject is acted *upon*.

Active voice makes it clear who is performing the action. It is almost always clearer, more direct, stronger, more concise, and more energetic. Passive voice tends to sound weaker and wordier.

Examples:

*I rang the bell.* (active)

*The bell was rung by me.* (passive)

*This office completed the report.* (active)

*The report was completed by this office.* (passive)

Overuse of the passive voice is one of the biggest offenses in business and government settings. It makes business writing sound bureaucratic because it's often unclear exactly who is making decisions. Do the following sentences sound familiar to you?

*It has been determined that all purchases must be approved by the division director.* (Who determined this?)

*The suggestions have been reviewed and cannot be approved at this time.* (Who reviewed the suggestions?)

### When to Use Passive Voice

However, there are cases where passive voice is the best choice. Edward Bailey suggests in *The Plain English Approach to Business Writing* that you use it in three specific situations:

1. When you don't know the actor:

*John was murdered.*

2. When the actor is not important to the point you're making:

*The Congressman was re-elected.*

3. When the emphasis is not on the actor but on the person or thing being acted upon:

*What happened to the little girl? The little girl was rescued.*

Some sources suggest a fourth situation to use passive voice: when you have to deliver bad news and want to draw attention away from the decision-maker.

*Based on your credit history, your loan application cannot be approved at this time.*

This is actually a special case of example #3, above. The writer is emphasizing the action (rejecting the loan request) rather than the actor (the loan officer or whoever declined the loan application).

You, the writer, will have to use your judgment when choosing active or passive voice. However, you will find that your writing will be clearer and have more impact if you use active voice as much as possible.

**Exercise: Active or Passive Voice**

The following sentences are written in passive voice. Read each one and first determine whether it's OK as-is (in other words, if it's covered by one of the three situations where you *should* use passive voice). If not, use the space provided to rewrite the sentence in the active voice.

(Check if  
OK as-is)

This important element was discovered by a team of dedicated researchers.

*OK; the element is the focus of the sentence*

The letter was written by the manager.

*The manager wrote the letter.*

The accounts were balanced by the CPA.

*The CPA balanced the accounts.*

A duplicate sales slip was issued by the clerk.

*The clerk issued a duplicate sales slip.*

This regulation will be explained to each new employee.

*OK; actor is not known*

A disturbance was caused by the children in the front row.

*The children in the front row caused a disturbance.*

It is requested that this report be submitted by June 30.

*OK; actor is not known*

We were instructed by the new manager to eliminate overtime.

*The new manager instructed us to eliminate overtime.*

The exhibits were described more fully in the brochure.

*Could be OK (focus on exhibits); could re-write: The brochure described the exhibits more fully.*

Equipment was transferred by the movers into the new laboratory.

*The movers transferred the equipment into the new laboratory..*

## Concrete and Abstract Writing

*Concrete* writing uses specifics—facts and figures—to make things clear to your readers. When you use concrete writing, you help your readers understand exactly what you mean.

*Abstract* writing can be vague and often leads readers to ask questions like “How many?” or “Which ones?” Readers are likely to make assumptions or jump to conclusions to fill the gaps and can easily misinterpret abstract writing.

### Examples:

*Employee turnover declined by 35% in the last fiscal year. (concrete)*

*Employee turnover declined substantially in the last fiscal year. (abstract)*

*ABC Company is considering Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky for the new automotive plant. (concrete)*

*ABC Company is planning to build the new automotive plant somewhere in the Midwest. (abstract)*

*Our team delivers on time, on budget, anywhere in the world. (concrete)*

*Our team does good work. (abstract)*

*A fire in our print shop on March 2<sup>nd</sup> has delayed our shipments 10-14 days. (concrete)*

*We have had difficulties with our shipments. (abstract)*

Remember, you can't stand over the reader's shoulder to answer questions when something is unclear. Concrete writing answers the reader's questions **in advance**.



Just as there are times to use passive voice, there are times to use abstract language. Abstract writing is often used to summarize points and draw conclusions. When you really need to use abstract writing, make sure that your ground your points with plenty of concrete facts and examples.

In the example below, the author has used concrete examples to back up an abstract summary (underlined).

*In the last 12 months, we have lost half of our custodial staff and our two most senior maintenance technicians. The average length of service among our maintenance staff is only 16 months. Clearly, turnover is a major problem in our maintenance department.*

**Exercise: Concrete Language**

Rewrite the following sentences, providing more concrete language.

*Answers will vary. Participants will need to “invent” specifics.*

1. We provide excellent service.
2. We have been patient with your account.
3. We are terminating our contract with you because you have failed to meet our standards.
4. Your generosity has made a difference in our students’ lives.
5. We are tops in the field of bunk beds.
6. The restroom is not very clean.
7. That car goes pretty fast when merging.
8. The dog is not well behaved.
9. The baby didn’t sleep very much.
10. The ceremony was too long.

## Writing Concisely

Your business writing should be concise and get to the point immediately. If a word, sentence, or paragraph doesn't add to the point you're trying to make, take it out!

Studies show that:

- You have only 10 seconds to make your point—or the reader might *never* get it.
- An average of 3 out of 10 words in business letters is unnecessary.

This section will teach you how to streamline your business writing to make it more direct, powerful, and efficient.

### Cut Empty Phrases

Empty phrases duplicate information that's already implied in the sentence. The following examples are taken from *How to Write Business Correspondence* by Baugh, Fryar, and Thomas. Empty phrases are underlined.

*The desks are blue in color.*

*The desks are blue.* (more concise)

*It is a matter of prime importance.*

*It is important.* (more concise)

*The reason I take the train is that...*

*I take the train because...* (more concise)

*The Preston report, which was in two volumes, outlined the responsibilities that each executive was to assume.*

*The two-volume Preston report outlined the responsibilities that each executive was to assume.* (more concise)

*There are several flights that make the round trip from Newark to New York.*

*Several flights make the round trip from Newark to New York.* (more concise)

Most of the examples above had to be reworded in order to remove empty phrases. When you make a sentence more concise, be sure to re-read it to make sure it flows properly.




*"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."*

Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*



Phrases like "the reason is," "there is," and "which is" can usually be reworded more concisely.

## Prune Tangled Phrases

 You will find more examples of tangled phrases in section 9.12 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

Tangled phrases use many words to express simple ideas. Here is a list of common tangled phrases and concise alternatives.

| <b>Tangled Phrase</b>                       | <b>Concise Alternative</b> |
|---|----------------------------|
| Within a comparatively short period         | Soon                       |
| In the immediate vicinity of                | Near                       |
| At the present time                         | Now                        |
| On a number of occasions (or instances)     | Often/several times        |
| We would like to ask (or request) that      | Please                     |
| For the reason that                         | Because                    |
| Are of the opinion                          | Believe                    |
| For the purpose of                          | For/to                     |
| In view of the fact that                    | Since/because              |
| Despite the fact that                       | Although                   |
| In order to                                 | To                         |
| Subsequent to                               | After                      |
| With reference to                           | About                      |
| On the occasion of                          | When                       |
| During the course of                        | During                     |
| Succeed in making                           | Make                       |
| Make use of                                 | Use                        |
| Make a choice                               | Choose                     |
| Make a determination                        | Determine                  |
| Make a quotation                            | Quote                      |
| Make a provision for                        | Provide                    |
| Make a presentation                         | Present                    |
| Along the lines of                          | Like                       |
| Take into account, take under consideration | Consider                   |
| Take issue with                             | Disagree                   |
| With regards to, or reference to            | Regarding, about           |
| At the present time                         | Now                        |
| Close proximity                             | Near                       |
| Have a need for                             | Need                       |
| Offer a suggestion                          | Suggest                    |

## Watch Wordy Openers

Wordy openers are words or brief phrases, often set off by commas, which start sentences and add no meaning. Consider whether you really need to use openers like:

- Basically,
- At any rate,
- In general,
- Usually,
- For the most part,
- Often,
- Oftentimes, (you should never use this word. If you really need it, use *often* instead)

## Ban Mealy Modifiers

Writers often use mealy modifiers in an attempt to intensify or energize their writing. These words usually fall flat because they don't add anything. The following words are seldom needed in business writing:

- Absolutely
- Extremely
- Incredibly
- Very
- Highly

## Tighten Up Sentences


Sentences can follow all the rules above but still be cumbersome. Here are two examples (from Purdue University's *Online Writing Lab*, owl.purdue.edu) of wordy sentences and how they could be re-written:

*This manual of instructions was prepared to aid our dealers in being helpful to their customers.* (wordy)


*We prepared this instruction manual to help our dealers serve their customers.* (concise)

*It is the responsibility of our Production Department to see that it meets the requirements of our Sales Division.* (wordy)

*Our Production Department must meet our Sales Division's requirements.* (concise)

 Grammatically speaking, both wordy openers and mealy modifiers usually act as adverbs and modify the verb in the sentence by trying to answer questions like "How?" or "How much?" Learn more about adverbs in sections 5.11-5.15 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

They are also examples of abstract writing, which (as detailed on page 5) you should avoid whenever possible.

 Both of these examples show how prepositional phrases like "of instructions" and "of our Production Department" can be re-written to make sentences less wordy. Learn more about prepositional phrases in sections 5.31-5.33 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

**Exercise: Writing Concise Sentences**

Rewrite the following paragraph in your workbook, using concise sentences.

Dear Bill,

I find that at this point in time our students are reverting back to a bad, destructive attitude: they are forgetting the benefits of mutual cooperation. If the true facts be known, I think they need a curriculum in learning how to cooperate together, and you will find enclosed herein my suggestions that during the course of the summer we endeavor to plan in advance the basic fundamentals of determining just exactly how to get them to cease and desist in their spiteful attitudes toward one another. I am hopefully optimistic that we can advance ahead and resume again the important essentials of decency in the classroom. Please advise me of your opinion in regard to my proposal.

Answers will vary. Possible re-write:

Our students are reverting to a destructive attitude and forgetting the benefits of cooperation. They need a curriculum to learn how to cooperate and I have enclosed my suggestions to determine this summer how to change their spiteful attitudes toward each other. I am optimistic that we can advance and resume the essentials of decency in the classroom. Please provide your opinion regarding my proposal.

## Tone

Tone is the emotional content and attitude of your business message. Tone can help you create a relationship with your reader—or can destroy that relationship.

Tone can be formal, casual, condescending, helpful, or neutral, just to name a few possibilities. With experience, you'll learn to adapt your tone to the specific situation and audience that you're addressing. However, good business writing always takes a tone that is:

- Confident
- Courteous
- Sincere
- Helpful
- Positive
- Accessible

**and**

- Emphasizes “you” (the reader) instead of “I” (the author), and specifically highlights the *benefits* to the reader.

### Tone to Avoid: No Exceptions

Regardless of the situation or your personal feelings toward the recipient, **never** use a tone that is:

- Angry
- Critical
- Indifferent



*“Tone in writing refers to the writer’s attitude toward the reader and the subject of the message. The overall tone of a written message affects the reader just as one’s tone of voice affects the listener in everyday exchanges.”*

—Scott Ober,  
*Contemporary Business Communication, Second Edition*



A tone that emphasizes the reader is known as the you attitude and is especially important in customer service, sales, and marketing communications—or any other time you’re writing directly to a customer.

## Examples of Good Tone and Poor Tone

| Poor tone  | Good tone  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>If you had completed the form correctly, we would be able to correct the misspelling of your name.</i><br/>(assumes the customer is at fault)</p>                        | <p><i>We will be happy to correct the spelling of your name. Please complete line 10 on the enclosed form and return in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.</i><br/>(positive, helpful, accessible)</p>  |
| <p><i>I know that my qualifications are less than ideal, but maybe you could give me an opportunity to prove myself in this new position.</i><br/>(lacks confidence)</p>       | <p><i>My qualifications are relevant and I am dedicated to developing the specific expertise you seek during my first year in this new position.</i><br/>(confident, positive)</p>   |
| <p><i>Your total lack of understanding of our need for privacy is making it impossible to do our jobs. This situation is absolutely intolerable!</i><br/>(angry, critical)</p> | <p><i>Our responsibilities require us to maintain confidentiality with our clients. Our department's temporary office location makes it difficult to maintain privacy and I would like to suggest the following changes in order to ensure confidentiality.</i><br/>(courteous, positive, helpful)</p> |
| <p><i>Your concerns are noted, but the fact is that we have too much on our plate to address them at this time.</i><br/>(indifferent)</p>                                      | <p><i>Thank you for your input. We share your concerns and intend to address them fully after completing the quarterly report.</i><br/>(positive, accessible)</p>  |

**Exercise: Tone**

Rewrite the following sentences to improve their tone.

*Answers will vary. Possible re-writes given below.*

1. You must follow the instructions on the form carefully and complete lines 9 and 10 if you expect us to review your claim and act upon it quickly.

*Please follow the instructions on the form carefully and complete lines 9 and 10 to ensure prompt review and action on your claim.*

2. Rest assured, we will investigate what you claim is an error of \$45.95 on your account.

*We will promptly investigate the \$45.95 discrepancy on your account.*

3. You obviously overlooked making your payment this month.

*We haven't received your payment this month.*

4. Your handwriting is so illegible in your letter that we are unable to decide exactly what the problem is with your computer's hard disk.

*Hand-written notes can be difficult to read, so we are weren't able to determine the cause of the problem with your computer's hard disk. Please call 555-5555 to discuss your issue directly with a technician.*

5. Please refrain from participating in office gossip.

*To ensure courtesy to all employees, please avoid discussing your co-workers' personal lives.*

## Delivering Bad News

Maintaining a positive tone is especially important when you need to deliver bad news. At the same time, though, you shouldn't try to disguise the facts when you're turning down a customer's credit application, your workgroup failed to meet its quota, or you've made an error and have to let someone know about it.

Here are a few guidelines for delivering bad news:

1. Keep "you" (the reader) in mind. Establish a connection with the reader before you deliver the bad news.
2. Use a gracious, sincere tone.
3. Stress what *is* rather than what *is not*.
4. Consider using the passive voice to draw attention away from the person making the decision, and toward the decision itself.
5. Suggest an alternative course of action, if possible.
6. If you have to address an individual's faults or poor performance, maintain a professional tone that focuses on the individual's behavior and not on their personal characteristics. Also, use concrete language rather than abstract: "This individual was tardy an average of three days in each of the last four pay periods" rather than "This individual is habitually tardy."

### Example of a bad news letter

Dear Mr. Smiley:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of June 5. We are aware that the nightclub adjacent to your apartment features live performances until 2:00 a.m. and understand that you are having difficulty sleeping due to the volume of music playing in the club.

Your apartment is located in a zone designated as an "entertainment district." This district was created in 1985 after extensive study, interviews with area residents, and an extended public hearing and comment process. Current regulations permit live entertainment until 2:00 a.m. that is audible to neighboring buildings, as long as it is not at a level which could cause hearing loss or other health issues.

If you feel the volume exceeds this threshold, you can schedule an audit with the city health department. Another alternative is to speak with a Zoning Board representative to find out if your area is scheduled for rezoning in the near future. Also, if music extends past the 2:00 a.m. deadline, you can call law enforcement officials to register a formal complaint.

We regret any inconvenience to you. Please contact our office if we can be of further assistance.

**Exercise: Writing a Bad News Letter**

Rewrite the following letter in the space provided, using appropriate language for bad news letters.

To: Client

From: Human Services Department

Dear Client:

After reviewing the medical information you sent us, it is determined that you are not disabled. Physicians and other professional medical personnel in our department who are trained to evaluate claims have reviewed your case, and the information you sent. You do not qualify.

If you have additional medical information you would like contained in your case file, or if you want to appeal, let us know.

You have thirty days to appeal or submit more information.

Answers will vary; possible re-write:

To: Client


From: Human Services Department

Dear Client:

Thank you for submitting your medical information. Our physicians and other medical personnel in our office have reviewed your case file and, based on the documentation we currently have, we are not able to approve your request for disability status.

If you have any additional medical information, we will be happy to review it and update your status accordingly. You can also appeal this decision by replying to this letter.

If you would like to submit more information or appeal this decision, please reply within thirty days. Thank you for your cooperation.

 Learn more about gender-neutral language in section 9.8 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

## Gender-Neutral Language

Gender-neutral language treats men and women equally. It makes no assumptions about the gender of the reader or the gender of other individuals whom you refer to in your writing.

### Don't Use: Gender Stereotypes

Avoid gender stereotypes in your business writing. Don't assume that all business executives are male, or that all nurses are female.

#### Examples

*If the salesman you're trying to reach is out, see if you can speak to his admin. She might be able to put you in touch with him.* (assumes the salesperson is male and the administrative assistant is female)

*I understand that your second-grader is having problems with his teacher. Are you planning to talk with her at the parent-teacher conference?* (assumes teacher is female)

*My IT department is clueless. Maybe your guys can help.* (assumes IT technicians are male)

### Don't Use: Generic Male Terms and Titles

Generic male terms and titles include words like *mankind*, *man-made*, *salesman*, and *chairman*. Use gender-neutral alternatives instead.

| Generic Male | Gender-Neutral               |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| Chairman     | Chairperson                  |
| Salesman     | Salesperson, sales associate |
| Mankind      | Humankind                    |
| Man-made     | Artificial, manufactured     |

**Do Use: Gender-Inclusive Language**

It can be challenging to include both men and women in your writing. When possible, try to rephrase sentences to avoid repeated use of *him/her*, *he or she*, and *his or hers*.

**Examples**

*If an employee is tardy more than four times a month, he or she will be placed on immediate suspension.* (uses “he or she”)

*Employees who are tardy more than four times a month will be placed on immediate suspension.* (rewritten in plural)

*Don’t judge a man on the basis of his clothing.* (uses “man”)

*Don’t judge a person on the basis of clothing.* (rewritten as generic)

**Exercise: Gender-Neutral Language**

Rewrite the following sentences or phrases using gender-neutral language.

1. Join your fellow businessmen at the annual ABC convention!

*Join your fellow business professionals at the annual ABC convention!*

2. The development of polio vaccines by Salk and Sabin benefited all mankind.

*The development of polio vaccines by Salk and Sabin benefited all humankind.*

3. Each stewardess employed by Global Airlines is expected to provide her own shoes.

*Flight attendants employed by Global Airlines are expected to provide their own shoes.*

4. If there is a problem on the line, notify your foreman immediately.

*If there is a problem on the line, notify your supervisor immediately.*

## Section 3: Forms of Business Writing

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Business writing can take many forms. This course will focus on the three types of business writing you are most likely to produce:

1. Letters
2. Memos
3. Emails

### ***Business Letters***

Business letters are the standard form of communication in the business world. Letters are the best format to use when you need to:

- Communicate with individuals outside your organization, especially when you don't have a regular working relationship with them
- Present information to a superior
- Communicate with many people at once
- Present information in detail

### **Business Letter Formats**

The three most common formats of business letter are (from most to least common):

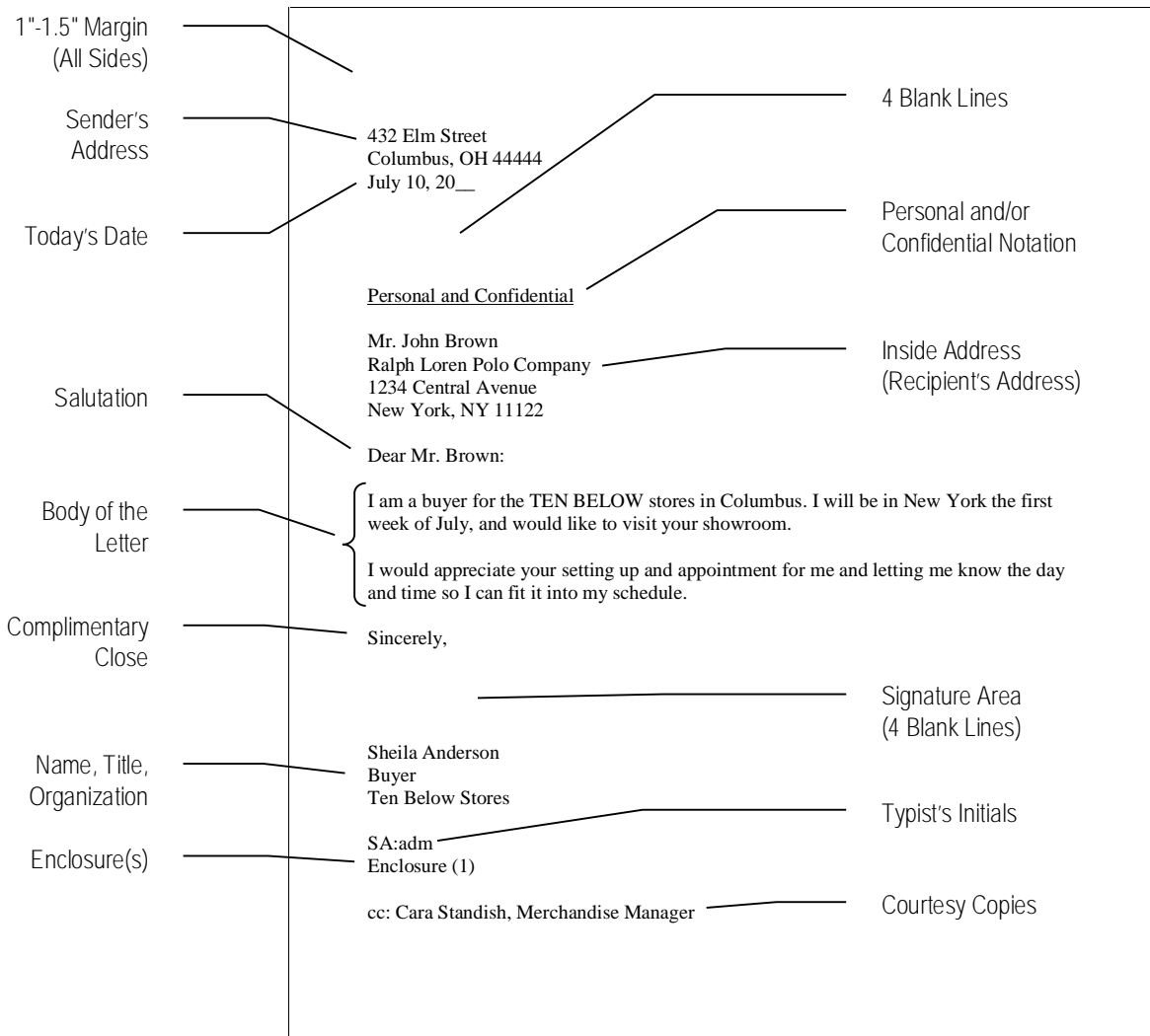
1. Full block
2. Modified block
3. Simplified

These three formats share many features in common. Since Full Block is by far the most common format, this manual will use it for all examples. To learn more about other business letter formats, refer to section 11 in the *Quick Reference Guide, Third Edition*.



Learn more about writing business letters in Unit 11 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

**Full Block Letter: Sample and Parts**



These elements are covered in detail in section 11 of the *Quick Reference Guide*, but here are a few tips on using them properly:

- **Sender's Address:** Omit this entirely if you are using letterhead. Never include the name or title of the sender, since this information should be typed after the signature.
- **Today's Date:** Spell out the month and use the American date format (Month Day, Year).
- **Personal and/or Confidential Notation:** There are several different standards for capitalization, underlining, and punctuation for personal and confidential notation. Find out which standard your organization uses and stick to it. Use this notation only when it is really needed.

- **Inside Address:** Include a personal title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., etc) if known. If you know the recipient is female but don't know what title she prefers, use **Ms.**  
See *Quick Reference Guide* 4.26-4.29 and 11.34 for more information on specific titles, including appropriate titles for government officials and other notables.  
It's always best to address a business letter to a specific individual, but if you don't know this information it is acceptable to address the letter to a title (Sales Manager, Shop Supervisor, Division Director, etc.).
- **Salutation: Always** use a **colon (:)** after the salutation in a business letter—commas are **not** appropriate. As with the inside address, use the recipient's title if known. If you do use a personal title, include just the last name (*Dear Ms. Smith:*).  
If you don't know the recipient's gender or title, it is appropriate to address them by first and last name (*Dear Chris Wilson:*). And if you don't know the recipient's name, you can use a title (*Dear Sales Manager:*) or a generic salutation (*To Whom It May Concern:*).
- **Body:** The body section of the letter should contain at least three paragraphs: an introduction, the body, and a closing. See **Business Letter Organization**, below, for more information.
- **Complimentary Close:** *Sincerely*, or *Sincerely yours*, are appropriate in most situations. If the complimentary close is two or more words, capitalize only the first word. You will find a list of typical closes in the *Quick Reference Guide*, 11.24.
- **Typist's Initials:** There are many accepted formats for typist's initials. Again, research what format is preferred in your organization. The format in this example uses the sender's initials in all caps, a colon, and the typist's initials in lowercase. See 11.28 in the *Quick Reference Guide* for more examples.
- **Enclosures:** There are many accepted formats for enclosures. Some give the number of enclosures; others list specifically what materials are enclosed. Once again, find out your organization's standard and use it. The *Quick Reference Guide* lists more examples on 11.29.
- **Courtesy Copies** (formerly known as **Carbon Copies**): Include the name and title (if known) of individuals receiving courtesy copies of the letter.

## Business Letter Organization

Even a short business letter should contain at least three paragraphs: an **introduction**, a **body**, and a **conclusion**.

### Introduction

Use the first paragraph to explain your purpose and build the reader's interest. Keep your audience in mind. What do the readers need to know, and why should they be interested in what you have to say?

You may also want to provide a preview of the letter and what it contains, especially if the letter is longer than one page. The preview can take the form of a single sentence ("This letter describes the background of our customer service training program, followed by recommendations to improve it in the future"), a numbered or bulleted list, or even a full table of contents for a long, detailed letter.

### Body

The body is the main content of your letter. Concisely state the information you're sharing and your involvement with it. If the letter is long, consider using headings to break up the various points or topics. The body should be organized into one or more paragraphs, each expressing one main idea or point.

Elements like lists, tables, charts, and diagrams help add variety to the body of your letter and can often express information more concisely than standard narrative text.

### Conclusion

The conclusion of a business letter is all about **action and results**. What do you want the reader to do? What should he or she understand? What are you planning to do? Make sure that the reader is clear about what comes next.

Your closing should address topics or information you've already covered. Don't introduce new information in the closing of your business letter—this will just distract your reader from the points you've already made.



For more about writing effective paragraphs, see sections 6.45-6.57 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.


**Exercise: Write a Simple Business Letter**

Write a simple (3-paragraph) business letter on the next page, using the points below. Make sure you fill in elements like the sender's address, date, inside address, and complimentary close. Use the diagram on page 19 to help you if you need it.

- The letter is typed on regular paper, not letterhead.
- From: you, at your office
- Date: today
- To: Paul Wren, ABC Cleaners, 200 South Front Street, Columbus, OH 43215
- Your office has been contracting with ABC Cleaners for 5 years.
- Their service has been excellent until 6 months ago.
- Since that time, you've noticed that the cleaners haven't been paying attention to details like they used to. Desk surfaces are dusty, the break room tables are sticky, and sometimes trash is left in the restroom receptacles.
- You've mentioned these issues directly to the cleaning crew on three occasions but there has been no change.
- If the level of service doesn't improve, you're planning to bid the contract out to other local vendors.
- You expect a response within three business days.
- This note is being typed by your personal assistant, James Green.
- You are enclosing a copy of the current contract with ABC Cleaners for reference.

**Your Business Letter**

Letters will vary.

 Learn more about writing business memos in Unit 11 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

## Business Memos

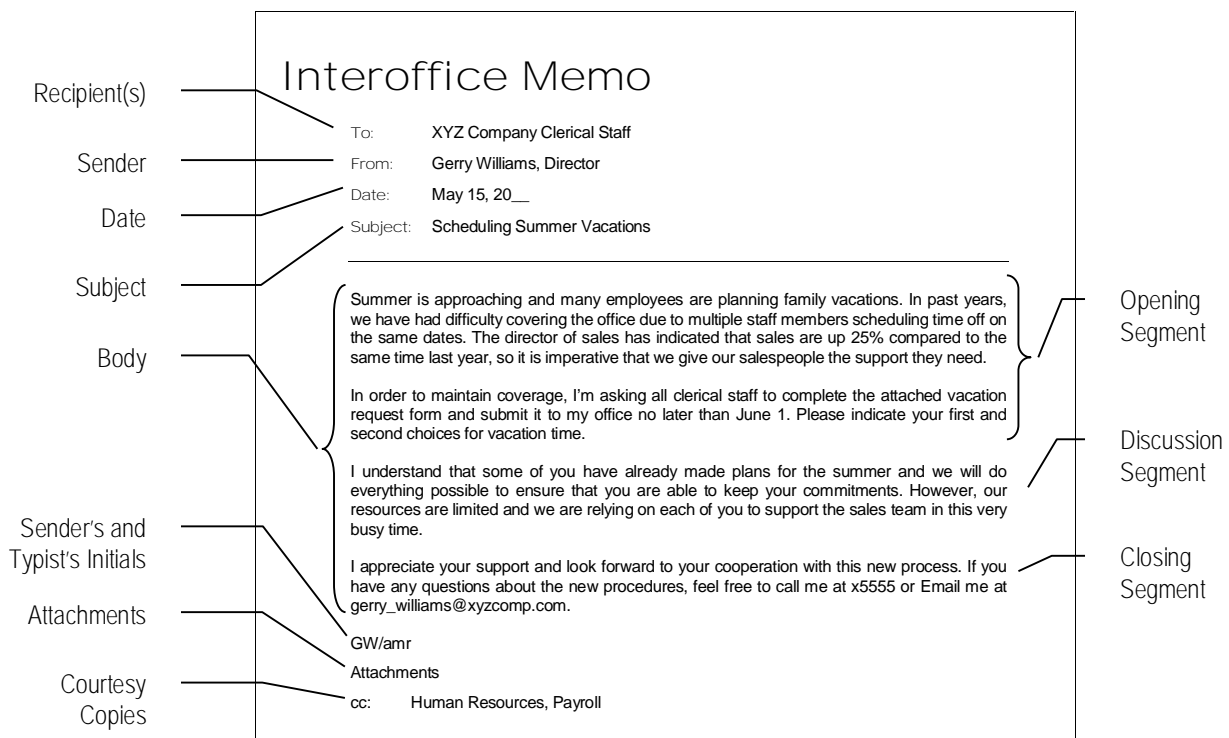
A business **memo** or **memorandum** is designed to get things moving. Memos are action-oriented documents designed to do one or more of the following:

- Inform the reader
- Persuade the reader
- Solve problems

Memos are usually internal documents but are occasionally used to communicate with outside parties. They usually focus on a single point, idea, or problem that needs to be solved. They are frequently used to communicate policy or procedure changes within an organization, and often communicate information to subordinates.

### Parts of a Business Memo

The structure of a memo is not as formalized as a business letter, but the figure below shows a typical memo and its parts. More detail is available in the *Quick Reference Guide*, section 11.40.



Memos are usually internal documents, so they generally omit the sender's address, inside addresses, and company name. They are also less formal than business letters, so there is no need for a salutation, complimentary close, or signature. Unlike a business letter, a memo states the subject in its heading segment.

### **Memo Organization**

Memos can be quite brief; many are only one paragraph in length. For longer memos, the body is typically organized like the example above:

- **Opening Segment:** Provides the context or background, the task at hand, and the purpose of the memo.
- **Discussion Segment:** Includes supporting details and any additional relevant information.
- **Closing Segment:** Summarizes the memo and reminds the reader what action to take.

### **Tips to Make Your Memos More Effective**

- Memos are very concise, action-oriented forms of business communication. Include only information that is relevant to the task at hand.
- Make sure your purpose is clear.
- Make it clear to the reader what action you want them to take.

**Exercise: Write a Simple Business Memo**

Write a simple business memo on the next page, using the points below. Make sure you include elements like the recipient, sender, date, body, and initials. Use the diagram on page 24 to help you if you need it.

- **From:** you
- **Date:** today
- **To:** Office Staff
- **Subject:** New Color Copier
- Your office has a new color copier, in addition to the black-and-white copier. Both of the copiers are in the office common area.
- Based on use of supplies, the color copier costs three times as much to operate as the black and white copier (even when making black and white copies), so please continue to copy routine materials on the B&W copier.
- The color copier should be used for departmental presentations and customer materials.
- If there are questions about the copier, contact Jim White at x893.

**Your Business Memo**

Memos will vary.



Some writers refer to electronic mail as "email" and others as "e-mail." Both spellings are correct.

## ***Writing a Business Email***

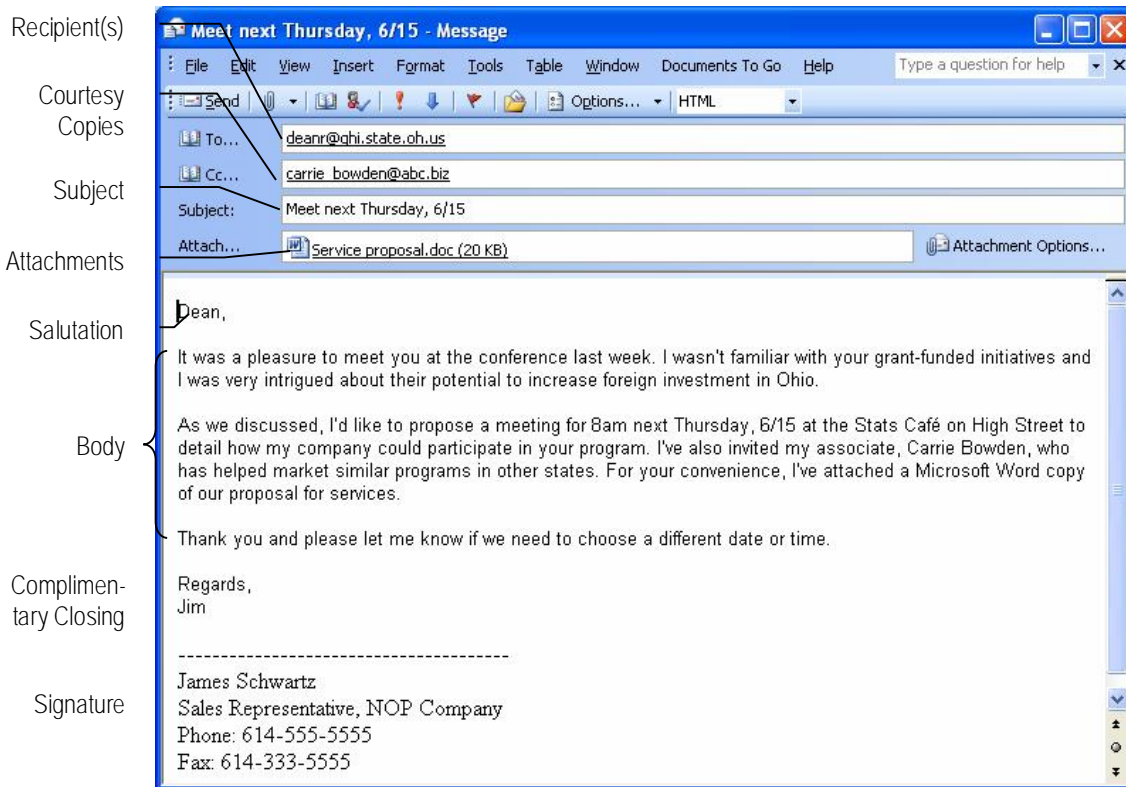
Email is one of the most efficient forms of business communication. Emails make it easy to send messages to multiple recipients, reply to messages, forward messages, and send attachments.

Unfortunately, emails are also the most misused form of communication. Keep the following in mind when writing emails in a business environment:

- Emails are *written communications*, not spoken communications. Although they are the least formal type of written communication, you need to pay attention to tone, style, organization, grammar, and spelling, just as you would in any other form of written communications.
- Business emails are *public*, not private. Your employer has the right to monitor your business emails, and many do so regularly.
- You don't always know who's going to read your email. Emails can be printed, forwarded, copied and pasted into other documents, or simply left on the screen for anyone to see. Also, supervisors routinely give "proxy" access to their support staff. Your "confidential" email could be seen by everyone in your organization.
- Anyone can fire off a curt reply in seconds by email. The speed and convenience of email can lead people to send hasty, thoughtless, or ill-conceived messages that they would never consider sending as a letter or memo.

## Parts of an Email

Email systems vary widely, but the messages they send generally have the same elements. However, you don't have control over how those elements appear on the recipient's screen or printer. The example below depicts an email composed in Microsoft Outlook.



Many of the fields are self-explanatory to anyone who has used email systems. Here are some tips to use them effectively:

- **Recipients and Courtesy Copies:** These are usually straightforward if you're composing a new message. But watch out for:
  - § **Autocomplete:** most email systems fill in names from your address book based on the first few letters you type. Make sure that the recipient is correct before you click "Send."
  - § **Reply All:** When you "Reply to All," you are sending a message back to everyone that received the original message. Make sure that you *really* want all those people to receive your response.
- **Subject:** Write a relevant and specific subject so the recipient has an idea what's in the message before opening it. At the same time, keep it brief—the recipient's inbox may only display a few words.

- **Attachments:** Large attachments may take a long time to send and receive, or may be blocked entirely by corporate email filters. Check the file size before you send it. If it's over 2 megabytes (2000 KB), your recipient may never see it.

Use an obvious file name for your attachments and reference the file and type of file in the body of the message (as shown in the example). Be sensitive to the types of files you send as attachments:

| These attachments can be read by most recipients:   | These attachments require special software that many recipients don't have:  |
|---|--|
| § Microsoft Office:<br>Word (.doc)<br>Excel (.xls, .csv)<br>PowerPoint (.ppt)<br>§ WordPerfect (.wpd)<br>§ Adobe Acrobat (.pdf)<br>§ Common picture formats (.jpg/.jpeg, .gif)<br>§ Text (.txt) | § Page layout and graphics (InDesign, Illustrator, CorelDRAW, Quark Xpress, Pagemaker, Print Shop)<br>§ CAD/CAM (Computer-Aided Design) software<br>§ Flowcharts (Visio)<br>§ Databases (Access, Paradox, FileMaker)<br>§ Project management (Microsoft Project) |

- **Salutation:** Most routine emails address the recipient with first name and comma. If you need to be more formal (especially if you don't have an ongoing working relationship with the recipient), use the same salutation that you would in a business letter to that person (see page 20).
- **Body:** Make it concise and to-the-point. If you need to type a long email, use the organization tips that we reviewed in the Business Letters section.
- **Complimentary Closing:** The most common usage in contemporary business email is *Regards*, followed by a comma and the sender's first name. The closing should match the salutation in level of formality. Refer to the complimentary closings detailed in the Business Letters section.
- **Signature:** All email systems can be configured to add a signature automatically. Some organizations recommend or even mandate standards for acceptable signatures. Check your organization's identity/style guide or ask your supervisor before composing your own signature.

Email signatures typically include some or all of the following:

- § A separator that sets off your signature from the body of your email
- § Your name
- § Your title
- § Your organization
- § Your phone, fax, toll-free, mobile, or other contact numbers
- § Your organization's web address (URL)
- § A slogan, "call to action," or other short phrase that pertains to your business ("Call now for a free estimate").

- § **Think twice** before including other elements (especially quotes) in your signature. You run a serious risk of offending others when you include material pertaining to politics, religion, or moral values. **If it could (even potentially) offend a recipient, leave it out.**

## Organizing and Formatting the Body of Your Email

Like memos, emails should be action-oriented and get to the point quickly.

### Organizing Your Email

Organize your emails in three parts:

- **Opening Segment:** Provides the context or background, the task at hand, and the purpose of the email.
- **Discussion Segment:** Includes supporting details and any additional relevant information.
- **Closing Segment:** Summarizes the email and reminds the reader what action to take.

If you're writing a long email, consider including a summary or table of contents and use headings to break up sections.

### Formatting Your Email

Email was originally developed as a text-only method of communication. Today, most email systems allow “rich formatting” including fonts, bold, italic, colors, and graphics.

Unfortunately, different email systems have different formatting capabilities and an email might look very different to the recipient than it did to the author. The only way to know for certain is to test your systems: compose an email, have the recipient print it out, and compare it to your original.

If there is any question about the receiver's capabilities, stick to plain text. Even if you're sure your recipient can read rich formatting, avoid using columns, tables, borders, unusual fonts, and large graphics—many email systems don't support these elements.

If it's important that the recipient see the message *exactly* the way you're formatting it, create the document in a word processing application and attach it to the email. Include a summary in the body of the email and make a reference to the attachment.

## Email Etiquette

Email etiquette boils down to this: **email is a form of written business communication, just like letters and memos.** If you stick to the same standards that you use when writing other forms of business messages, your emails will be professional and appropriate.

## Flaming

Never engage in **flaming**, or venting emotion online. Emotionally-charged emails are always inappropriate in a business context.

| Flaming Language  | Appropriate Language   |
|---|--|
| <i>This project is so useless. The boss is nuts if she thinks we're going to have this done by the end of the month! She needs to get a clue.</i> | <i>This project is coming at a busy time. It will be challenging to finish it by the end of the month.</i> |

If you are flamed by a co-worker, **never** respond in kind. In most cases, **any** immediate response (even a rational one) will simply escalate the conflict. The best course of action is usually to let the other party “cool off” and then hold a face-to-face meeting (or at least a telephone conversation) to discuss your differences and clarify the situation.

## Other Inappropriate Email Techniques

**Avoid** other inappropriate usage like the following:

- **IM-speak:** extremely informal language frequently used in instant messaging and mobile text messaging. IM-speak often:
  - § Omits punctuation and capitals
  - § Uses shortcut spellings, such as the number “2” for the words “to,” “too,” or “two”
  - § Uses emoticons or “smileys”
  - § Uses non-standard spellings such as “z” in place of “s” (especially among younger users)

### **IM-speak has no place in business emails.**

- **ALL CAPITALS:** using all capitals is interpreted as “shouting” in email.
- **cc everyone:** Co-workers may advise you to “Cc everyone in order to C.Y.A.” In reality, most professionals already have more email in their inbox than they want and excessive copying will, in the long run, discourage others from opening your emails. Copy only individuals that *really* need to see what you’re sending.

## When Not To Send an Email

There are a number of situations where paper or verbal communications are better choices than email.

- Disciplinary action
- Concerns about co-workers
- Complaints
- If you've traded two or more emails trying to clarify a point, and it's obvious that something is being misunderstood or is still unclear

### In-Class Exercise: Appropriate Email Usage

The example below is a reply to the original email pictured on page 29. It contains several instances of incorrect or inappropriate email usage. Review this email, referring back to the original email, and discuss as a class how you would revise it.

The screenshot shows an email client window titled "Stats - Message". The email header includes:

- To: james.schwartz@nopcompany.com
- Cc: carrie\_bowden@abc.biz
- Subject: Stats
- Attach: grant.mpp (20 KB)

The email body contains the following text:

hey jimmy,

the meeting you mentioned sounds gr8. i don't know about having carrie there, I wasn't 2 impressed with her when I met her last year.

Here's the 411 on the grant. It's a schedule that I put together in Project.

laterz.

d

Below the email text is a box titled "Issues:" containing a list of problems with the email:


- § Inadvertently replied to all: obviously didn't mean to send this to Carrie
- § Vague subject line
- § Attachment filename is vague and is in MS Project format, which recipient probably can't read
- § Improper capitalization throughout
- § Overly casual salutation when compared to the original email
- § IM-speak (gr8=great, 2=too, laterz=see you later, etc.)
- § Comment about Carrie may not quite be a "flame," but is inappropriate
- § Improper complimentary closing


## Section 4: The Three Stages of Writing

Now that you've reviewed the mechanics of business communications, we will learn how to compose a letter, memo, or email from scratch.

Experienced business writers develop their communications in three stages:

1. Pre-writing  
In **pre-writing**, you start with the **3W's**: your **purpose** (**Why** am I writing this?), your **audience** (To **whom** am I writing?), and your **information** (**What** am I writing?).  
After you've captured the 3W's, trim the list and organize your thoughts to set the stage for writing the first draft.
2. Writing the first draft  
Some writers consider this to be the easiest part of writing! Simply let your ideas flow based on the list or outline you created during pre-writing.
3. Revising  
In the final stage, you re-write to ensure your writing follows the **6C's**: it should be **correct, complete, concise, clear, courteous, and consistent**.


 Pre-writing and writing the first draft are covered in Unit 8 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

 Learn more about revising in Unit 9 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

### Stage 1: Pre-Writing

Pre-writing consists of five steps:

1. Know your **purpose**: **why** am I writing this?  
All forms of business communications are action-oriented: make sure you know why you're writing. Do you need to:
  - § Inform someone?
  - § Persuade someone?
  - § Request something?
  - § Approve something?
  - § Get clarification or more information about something?
 Starting with a clear purpose will help keep you on task.
2. Know your **audience**: to **whom** am I writing?  
Good business writing always keeps "you" (the reader) in mind. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - § Who is my intended reader for this message?
  - § Who else might read this message?
  - § What biases or preferences do they have?
  - § Are they going to be receptive, neutral, or hostile to your message?
 When you're writing, always try to put yourself in your reader's place.

 The person (or people) you intend to read your message is known as the primary audience. Other people who might read your message are the secondary audience.

3. Collect the **information** you need: **what** am I writing?

Start by jotting down the points you want to make. Then review your notes to see where you need more information. Make sure you include all the facts and figures you need! If necessary, go find the specific information you need to make your points (see the sidebar for possible sources of information).

Review your points once more. Did you cover everything?

4. **Trim** the list.

In step 3, you were making sure you didn't leave anything **out**. Now, review your points and see if you need to leave everything **in**. Are there any points that are outside the scope of what you're trying to communicate? If so, take them out. Trim your points to the bare essentials.

5. **Organize** your information.

For most routine business communications, you can use a simple list to put your points in order. For longer, more complex documents, you may need to create an outline organized into headings, points, and sub-points.

-  Here are just a few potential sources of information:
- § Your own knowledge
- § Your organization's literature and data (reports, files, minutes, electronic library/IMS, intranet, databases)
- § Other people (co-workers, supervisors, suppliers, experts)
- § Industry or government publications (trade journals, publications, reports—either printed or online)
- § The Internet
- § Libraries (The Columbus Metro Library's Business & Technology section is a great resource!)

**Exercise: Pre-Writing**

You are going to write a brief (half-page) business memo persuading others in your workgroup to take this business writing course. Follow the five stages of pre-writing and copy your completed, organized list of topics in the space below. Be sure to mention at least two things that you didn't know before today.

Exercise will vary.

## **Stage 2: Writing the First Draft**

Notice that this stage refers to a *first* draft. Very few writers can create a polished document in one draft; most professional writers do two or three.

Work from your list or outline and let your thoughts flow. Don't worry too much at this point about spelling or wording.

When you're done, let your work rest—overnight if possible—so you can come back to it with a fresh eye. If you try to revise immediately, you will tend to read what you *think* you've written rather than what you've *actually* written.

### **Exercise: Writing the First Draft**

Write a first draft of your business memo in the space below. Work from the outline you prepared on page 35.


Exercise will vary.


### Stage 3: Revising

The **6C's** (**Complete, Concise, Clear, Courteous, Consistent, and Correct**) will guide you in revising your draft.

- **Complete:** Are all the facts included?
  - § Ask yourself, “what will the reader need?”
  - § Include any copies needed or mentioned in your document.
- **Concise:** Is the message too wordy?
  - § Cut out any unnecessary words and phrases.
  - § Don't repeat information already given.
- **Clear:** Can your message be misinterpreted?
  - § Specify the time, place, directions, attendees, or any other information that will help make the message clear.
  - § Check for unnecessarily abstract language and make it concrete.
  - § Double-check key words for any possibility of misinterpretation.
- **Courteous:** Does it meet business standards?
  - § Treat readers courteously regardless of their rank and position.
  - § Use gender-neutral language.
  - § Courtesy is reflected in the tone of your message.
- **Consistent:** Is the message uniform?
  - § Treat amounts and measurements in the same manner. If you used “in.” somewhere in your document, don't use “inches” elsewhere.
  - § Don't write Mr. Smith in the address, and then Dr. Smith somewhere else in the letter.
- **Correct:** Are there any errors? **Nothing** undermines a reader's confidence in your work more than spelling and factual errors.
  - § Proofread for any errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization number usage. Use spell-check, but check spelling yourself as well!
  - § Check for misused words.
  - § Check page numbering, if used.
  - § Check facts and figures.

The Appendix contains a revision checklist reprinted from Kenneth G. Brown's *Brief Guide to Business Writing*. It covers the 6C's as well as other points that are important in revising your documents.

 Learn and use proofreader's marks to make your editing more efficient. You will find a chart of proofreader's marks on section 9.15 of the *Quick Reference Guide*.

 The *Quick Reference Guide* includes a spelling and hyphenation guide for frequently-used words in business in section 7.15.

Do you know the difference between principle and principal? Precede and proceed? You will find a list of commonly misused words in section 7.25.

**Exercise: Revising**

Revise your first draft using the 6C's and rewrite below.

Exercise will vary.

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## Appendix: Revision Checklist

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- The paper is written with the primary and secondary audiences in mind.
- The correct format has been chosen. (Letter, Memo, or E-mail)
- Jargon and acronyms are not overused.
- No words have been misused. (Especially any of the commonly misused words)
- I know if the audience is interested in the topic or not.
- I know if the audience has a positive or negative bias towards my message.
- I have considered any audience interest and bias and I have tailored my communication accordingly.
- The introduction is effective.
- The introduction sets up the rest of the document.
- There is a table of contents. (If needed)
- Paragraphs start with a general topic sentence or heading.
- Transitions between paragraphs are appropriate and clear.
- Each sentence is complete.
- The subject and a verb of each sentence agree in number.
- I have correctly used punctuation throughout the document. (Including commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes)
- The active voice is used.
- Each sentence is concise.
- The conclusion is effective for the type and length of document.
- I have made effective use of layout and white space in the document.
- I have spell checked the entire document.

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