

Chapter 1
Business Writing Style

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This chapter is intended to provide tips for effective business writing that can be applied to all forms of business correspondence such as: memos, faxes, reports, and e-mails.

Use these 12 tips to develop an effective business writing style:

1. Keep your purpose, readers and content in mind
2. Keep your sentences short
3. Use positive language
4. Use linking words
5. Use simple, familiar words
6. Use passive voice for specific reasons
7. Use bullet points and numbered lists correctly
8. Use tables and charts effectively
9. Use impersonal style when expressing opinions
10. Avoid outdated expressions
11. Avoid repetition
12. Avoid turning verbs into nouns

1. Keep your purpose, readers and content in mind

Before you start writing your e-mail, memo or report, consider the following points and keep in mind the PRC (Purpose, Reader, Content) Triangle (see fig 1.1 below).

? Purpose

What is my purpose?

- To inform
- To persuade
- To complain
- To appreciate
- To request
- To suggest or recommend
- To explain

† Readers

Who are my readers?

- Supervisors
- Trainees
- Managers
- Others
- Assistants
- Technicians
- Employees

📄 Content

- What information do my readers want?
- Will my readers understand technical terms?
- Would examples, details, or graphics help the readers to understand better?

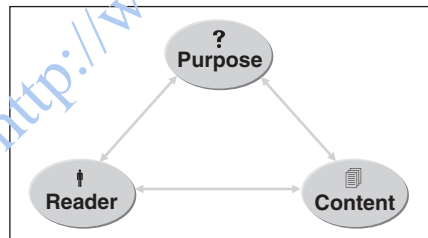


Figure 1.1 PRC Triangle



You should keep in mind the PRC Triangle when writing a memo, an e-mail or a report. This shows that the purpose, reader and content of a report are all equally important but that each is influenced by the others (see figure 1.1).

2. Keep your sentences short

In business writing, the fewer words, the better.

The following examples illustrate how to remove unnecessary words that do not add meaning to a sentence.

| Long | Short |
|---|---|
| One of the best things you can do for yourself to improve your writing is to learn how to cut words that are not necessary. 25 words | To improve your writing, cut out unnecessary words. 8 words |
| Make your employees sufficiently aware of the potentially adverse consequences involved regarding these chemicals. 14 words | Warn your employees about these chemicals. 6 words |
| In view of the fact that the motor failed twice during the time that we tested it, we are at this point in time looking for other options. 28 words | Since the motor failed twice during testing, we are now looking at other options. 14 words |
| To be sure of obtaining optimal results, it is essential that you give your employees the resources that are necessary for completion of the job. 25 words | To get the best results, give your employees the resources they need to complete the job. 16 words |
| Our intention is to implement the verification of the reliability of the system in the near future. 17 words | We want to verify the system's reliability soon. 8 words |

| Long | Short |
|---|--|
| <p>Let me know as to whether or not we can start drilling in view of the fact that the problem has not been fixed at the present time.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">28 words</p> | <p>Since the problem has not yet been fixed, let me know whether we can start drilling.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">16 words</p> |
| <p>We hereby advise you, as per your request, that we will be forwarding a copy of the contract to you in due course.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">23 words</p> | <p>A copy of the contract will be sent to you in a few days as requested.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">16 words</p> |
| <p>I will be unable to attend your May 6 meeting. I would like to say the reason is that I will be attending the leadership course in Dubai on the same day.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">32 words</p> | <p>I will be unable to attend the May 6 meeting as I will be attending the leadership course in Dubai.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">20 words</p> |
| <p>In this e-mail we have attempted to answer all of your questions and we hope that if you have any additional questions whatsoever, please do not hesitate to contact us immediately.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">31 words</p> | <p>If you have any additional questions, please call us.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">9 words</p> |



- Try to limit yourself to one idea per sentence.
- Break down longer sentences into simpler, shorter sentences.

3. Use positive language

In business writing it is important to use positive language in order to get the results you want.

As you can see in the examples below, the column on the right turns the negative words into positive words to obtain a positive reader response.

| Negative | Positive |
|--|---|
| We are unable to promote you to supervisor because you do not have the skills and experience required for this position. | We will be able to promote you to supervisor when you meet the experience required for this position. |
| We will not start repairing your test equipment until we receive a deposit. | We will begin repairing your test equipment once we receive a deposit. |
| This is the second time that you do not bother to follow and stick to the duty roster. | This is to remind you again that your attendance is required. |
| If you fail to provide the specifications by the May 1 deadline, the project will fail . | By providing the specifications by May 1, you can be assured that the project will be on time. |
| You cannot reconnect without logging on again. | Log on again to reconnect. |
| The corporation will not pay unless employees also contribute. | The corporation will pay only if employees contribute. |

| Negative | Positive |
|---|--|
| You neglected to send us your passport copy and therefore we cannot process your request. | We will be able to process your request as soon as we receive a copy of your passport. |
| It is bad not to review the spare parts availability before submitting a work request. | It is good to review the spare parts availability before submitting a work request. |
| I hope that you will not be disappointed with the quality of our report. | I am sure that you will be delighted with the quality of our report. |
| The parts your company sent us the last time were the wrong size. Do not do this again. | We hope the parts will arrive as ordered. |
| We cannot send your order from our store until June 1, 2004. | Your order will be sent to you on June 1, 2004. |
| You failed to include your company number, so we cannot process your application. | We will be glad to process your application as soon as we receive your company number. |
| This problem would not have happened if you had connected the wires properly in the first place. | This problem may be resolved by connecting the wires as shown in the handbook. |



- Write with a positive attitude by paying attention to the words and expression you choose to get the results you want.
- Sentences should be positive unless there is a reason to stress the “not,” “no” or “never.”

4. Use linking words

Linking words help establish clear connections between ideas and ensure that sentences and paragraphs flow together smoothly, making them easier to read.

The following table summarizes the most common group of linking words used in business writing:

| Function | Signals | Examples |
|----------|--------------------|--|
| Addition | And | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Your salary adjustment has been reviewed and approved by the operations committee. |
| | In addition | <ul style="list-style-type: none">In addition to cleaning the valve, the entire machine was inspected. |
| | Also | <ul style="list-style-type: none">The parts are cheap and they are also well made. |
| | Moreover | <ul style="list-style-type: none">The supplier will deliver the unit. Moreover, he will supervise its installation on site. |
| | Furthermore | <ul style="list-style-type: none">You are requested to submit the drawing for the Gas Project. Furthermore, inform us of the starting date. |

| Function | Signals | Examples |
|------------------|---------------------|--|
| Cause and Effect | Because (of) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The flight was delayed <u>because of</u> fog. |
| | Due to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet users had a hard time accessing the web <u>due to</u> the international hacking competition yesterday. |
| | Therefore | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pay rate is not clearly defined. <u>Therefore</u>, it is recommended that the contract should not be signed yet. |
| | As a result | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The morale and overall capabilities of our trainees have shown a remarkable improvement <u>as a result</u> of your efforts. |
| | Consequently | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The spare parts did not arrive on time. <u>Consequently</u>, I contacted the suppliers. |
| | Hence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of trainees has been increased. <u>Hence</u>, we should monitor their attendance and performance. |

| Function | Signals | Examples |
|----------|--------------------|---|
| Contrast | But | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The software is expensive, but it meets our requirements. |
| | However | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meeting scheduled for Monday was cancelled. However, we will meet sometime next week. |
| | Yet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is acceptable, yet it could be better. |
| | Although | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although no complaints have been received, we think that the use of the internet must now be monitored. |
| Purpose | In order to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are writing to you in order to clarify certain confusing points. |
| | So that | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new employees must be trained in a practical hands-on manner so that we can bring their performance up to acceptable levels. |
| | So | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our office printer is running low on ink, so please refrain from printing unimportant documents for the time being. |

| Function | Signals | Examples |
|--------------|----------------------------|--|
| Concession | Despite | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite being issued a warning letter, your attendance record has not improved. |
| | In spite of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In spite of previous memos, private car owners are still parking their cars in the administration building areas. |
| Alternatives | Either ... or ... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We plan either to adjust your salary or to promote you to operations supervisor. |
| | Neither ... nor ... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have neither the spare parts nor the manpower to carry out this task. |
| | Or | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you need to receive your order in one day or in three days? |

5. Use simple, familiar words

We write to express, not to use every word in the dictionary. Avoid using big words to convey your meaning clearly. For example, instead of “magnitude and configuration,” say “size and shape.”

Always try to use the simplest word possible.

| Big word | Simple word |
|--------------|----------------------|
| accrue | add, gain |
| acquire | get, buy |
| alleviate | reduce |
| allocate | assign |
| ameliorate | improve |
| anticipate | expect, await |
| apparent | clear |
| apprise | tell |
| articulate | explain |
| ascertain | find out |
| attain | reach, meet, achieve |
| attributable | due to |
| caveat | warning |
| cease | stop, end |

| Big word | Simple word |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| cogitate | think |
| cognizant of | aware of |
| commensurate | equal |
| concur | agree |
| confront | face |
| consolidate | combine, join |
| consummate | complete or finish |
| contemplate | consider |
| convene | meet |
| deem | consider |
| designate | appoint |
| detrimental | harmful |
| dispatch | send |
| disseminate | give, issue, pass, send |
| encounter | meet |
| enumerate | list |
| facilitate | make easier, help |

| Big word | Simple word |
|---------------|------------------|
| furnish | send, give |
| inception | start |
| incombustible | fireproof |
| initiate | start |
| interrogate | question |
| manifest | clear, obvious |
| mitigate | reduce |
| numerous | many |
| obviate | avoid |
| peruse | review |
| possess | own |
| preclude | prevent |
| promulgate | issue, publish |
| ratify | approve, confirm |
| recapitulate | sum up |

| Big word | Simple word |
|------------|-------------------|
| reimburse | pay back |
| reiterate | repeat |
| remunerate | pay |
| render | give, make |
| retain | keep |
| reveal | show |
| scrutinize | inspect |
| solicit | ask for, request |
| strategize | plan |
| streamline | update, simplify |
| transpire | take place, occur |
| utilize | use |

As you write, remember that the goal of business writing is to communicate with your readers, not to impress them with your vocabulary.

Below are good examples of simple words to be used rather than difficult ones in order to convey your message clearly to your readers.

| Unclear | Clear |
|---|---|
| He discerned that the promulgated policy would work. | He knew the proposed policy would work. |
| As stipulated , we extrapolated the budget figures for two years. | As required , we estimated the budget figures for two years. |
| Will you utilize instruction manuals during the obligatory training period? | Will you use instruction manuals during the required training period? |
| We anticipate that most of the options will be fundamental enough to meet our needs. | We expect that most of the options will be basic enough to meet our needs. |
| Remember to incorporate all the other good writing principles you have learned in this course. | Remember to include all the other good writing principles you have learned in this course. |



Remember

Avoid using difficult words when simple words will communicate your message.

6. Use the passive voice for specific reasons

The choice between using active or passive voice in business writing is a matter of style. Most books recommend using active voice. However, there is an exception to this rule.

Sometimes passive voice can be useful in an effort to sound more diplomatic and when you do not want to highlight the subject of the sentence.

When to use the passive voice?

The passive voice is to be preferred in the following cases:

1. Use the passive voice when you do not want to identify who performed the action.



Examples:

- Smoking is prohibited.
- A new safety policy was introduced after the accident.
- The new offices were decorated last week.
- The error has been corrected.
- The centrifugal pump was installed on May 12, 20xx.
- Procedures have been written to ensure safety.

2. Use the passive voice to describe a mistake to avoid blaming anyone in particular.



Examples:

- Profits are down by 2%.
- The incident rate in ABC Field is increasing dramatically this year compared to last year.
- Computer sales dropped by 10 % during the summer.
- The monthly report was submitted late.

3. Use the passive voice when you don't know who carried out the action.



Examples:

- Three computers were stolen from the training center.
- The training room was left unlocked.
- The briefcase was stolen at the airport terminal.
- The photocopier is broken.

7. Use bullet points and numbered lists correctly

Since people have little time to read, set out important points in a numbered or bulleted list. This makes it easier to scan so your readers get the meaning without reading every word.

When to use bulleted and numbered lists

Use numbered lists when working with instructions that are to be carried out in sequence. If the sequence of items is not essential, use bullets.



Example 1: Using bulleted lists

We are still having problems with the five new computers we have purchased from XYZ Computer Company. The problems we have been having include:

- Two notebook computers won't boot up.
- One monitor continues to make a high-pitched, whining sound.
- Two desktop computers became infected with viruses.



Example 2: Using bulleted lists

I raised your difficulty about arriving for work on time. I pointed out that:

- your managers had done their best to take account of your travel problems; and
- you had agreed with them that Dubai was the most convenient place for you to work.

However, your initial improvement was short-lived. Over the past two months your punctuality has dropped to a totally unacceptable level.

By using bulleted lists, you draw your reader's attention to important items.



Example 3: Using numbered lists

To: Amar Jones
From: Khaled Mohamed
Date: March 5, 20xx
Subject: Procedure for Handling Payroll Advances

There is a new procedure (to reflect updated policies) for obtaining payroll advances. Our employees will find it an improvement on the old confusing procedure. The new procedure is as follows:

1. Obtain form for Payroll Advance from your supervisor.
2. Complete the form by filling in all the blanks in the Employee Section form.
3. Get approval from your immediate supervisor.
4. Pick up your check from the cashier's office.



Example 4: Using numbered lists

To: All Employees Using XP 2000 Computers
From: Head of Information Technology
Date: March 5, 20xx
Subject: Computer Security Problem

Your cooperation is urgently needed to solve a serious computer security problem. To enable you to keep your files and those of the entire company secure, please follow these two actions:

1. Keep your password private and do not share it with anyone.
2. Log on to the computer manually.

Your adherence to the above is much appreciated.

By using numbers, you are directing your reader to carry out instructions in sequence.

Put lists of items in parallel form

Use parallel form to improve the clarity of your writing. To make your writing parallel, use the same grammatical form for all items in a list. In other words, match nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, and phrases with phrases.



Example: Parallel form in lists

Here are two versions of a passage. The first ignores the guidelines; the second follows them.

| Weak List | Improved List |
|--|---|
| <p>I left my job for several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long hours• Poor pay• I found the work tedious• Equipment was dangerous | <p>I left my job for several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long hours• Poor pay• Tedious work• Dangerous equipment |
| <p>The following preliminary work is required before work-over:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Remove pen-fold fence.2. Removing crash barrier.3. Clear cellar of sand.4. Remove safety valve.5. Master valves need to be checked for leakage. | <p>The following preliminary work is required before work-over:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Remove pen-fold fence.2. Remove crash barrier.3. Clear cellar of sand.4. Remove safety valve.5. Check master valves for leakage. |

Remember



- If the sequence matters, use a **numbered** list.
- If the order does not matter, use a **bulleted** list.
- Use parallel form to achieve balanced writing.

8. Use tables and charts effectively

Tables, charts and other graphs are quick, effective ways for your reader to get information. People don't always read everything in a report, but they often look at the visuals.

In this section, we will concentrate on when to use tables and charts effectively to enhance your written presentation and to draw your readers' attention.

Tables

Use a table to present data and facts to improve clarity.



Example:

| Department | Current Month | Year to Date |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| Drilling | \$ 2,000 | \$ 5,000 |
| Inspection | \$ 1,200 | \$ 4,300 |
| Operations | \$ 3,300 | \$ 10,000 |
| Safety | \$ 1,200 | \$ 2,500 |
| Technical | \$ 3,000 | \$ 5,200 |
| Total | \$ 10,700 | \$ 27,000 |

Table 1.1 Overtime expenses for all departments

Charts

The following charts are commonly used in technical reports:

- Line chart
- Pie chart
- Bar chart
- Flow chart

Line chart

Use a line chart to show trend data over extended time periods.



Example of line chart

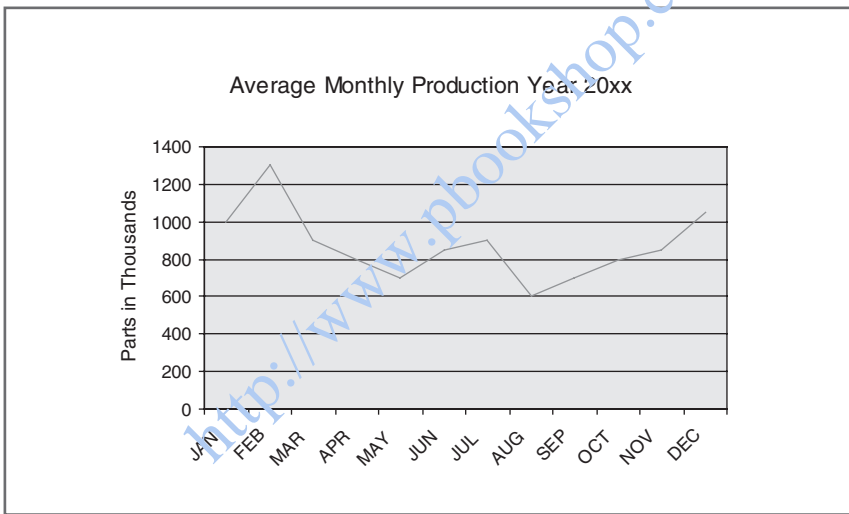


Figure 1.2 Line chart

Pie chart

Use a pie chart to show percentage or distribution of a whole.



Example of pie chart

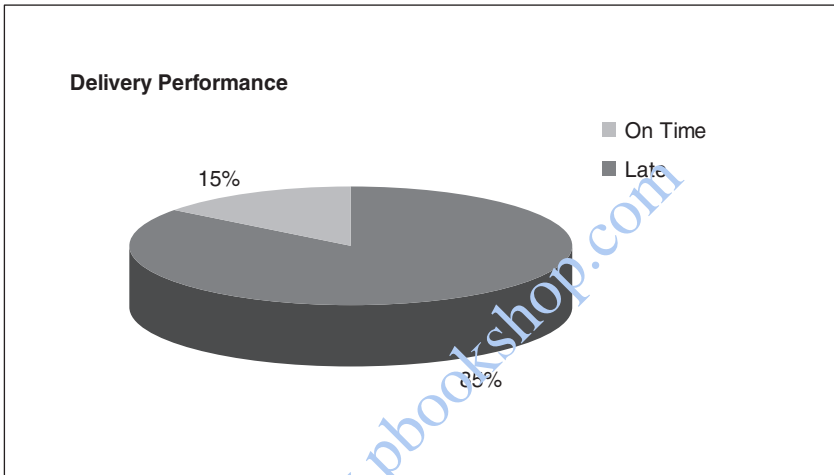


Figure 1.3 Pie chart

Bar chart

Use a bar chart to compare items with one another.



Example of bar chart

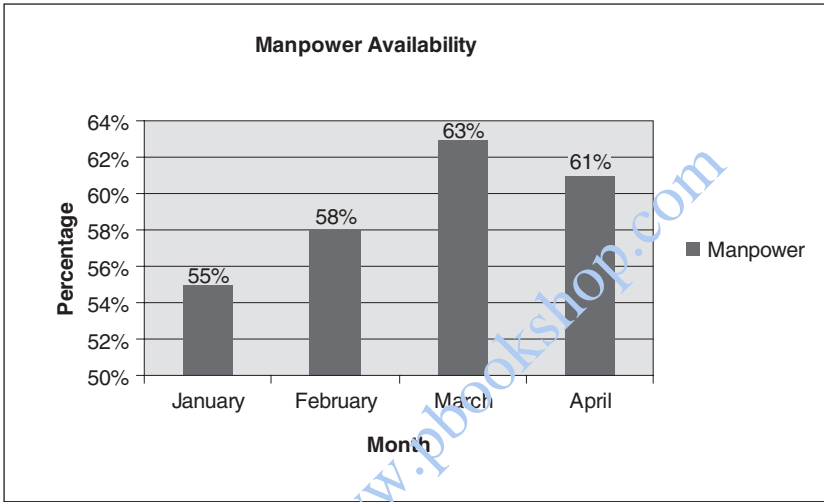

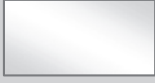




Figure 1.4 Bar chart

Flow chart

Use a flow chart to show a series of steps from beginning to end (e.g. procedure or process).

Flow chart symbols

| Name | Symbol | Meaning |
|-------------|---|--|
| Oval |  | Start or end of the task |
| Rectangular |  | Steps |
| Diamond |  | Decisions |
| Flow line |  | Used to connect symbols and indicate the flow of logic |



Example of flow chart

Figure 1.5 shows the major steps in the procedure for issuing a high voltage electrical certificate using flow chart symbols.

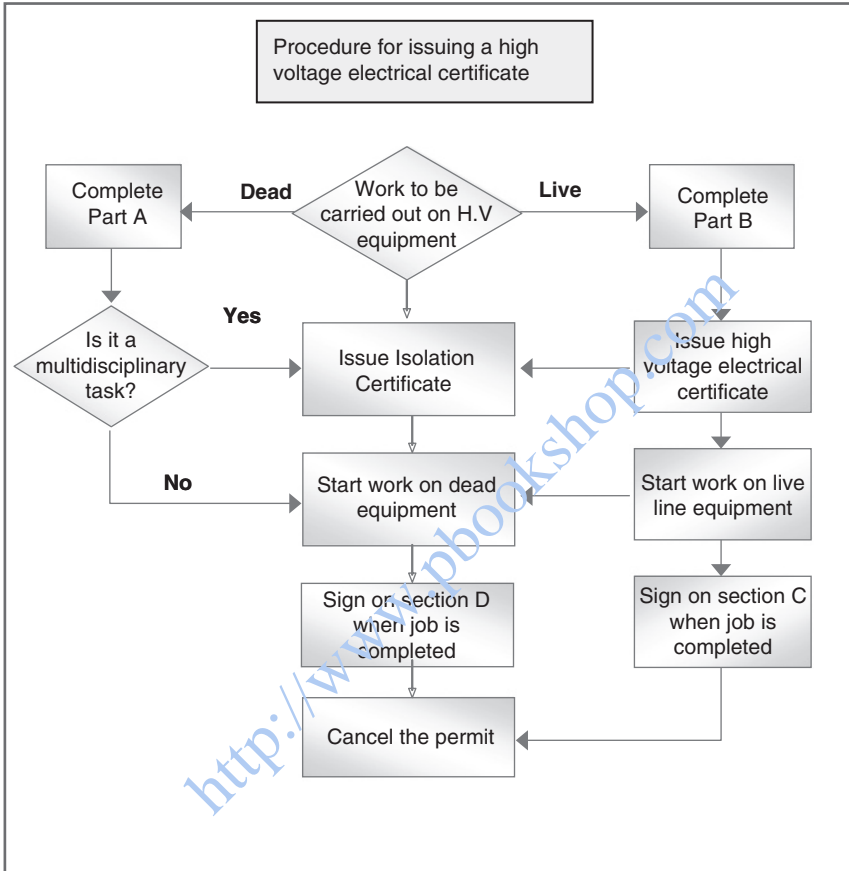


Figure 1.5 Flow chart

9. Use impersonal style when expressing opinions

Expressions like “I think” or “I feel” are rarely used in business reports because they are too personal. Managers are not looking for your personal opinion and feeling; they are looking for professional opinions.

| Personal Style | Impersonal Style |
|--|--|
| I believe a bonus for our employees should be based on employees' performance. | The bonus for our employees should be based on employees' performance. |
| I expect that the use of computers will make it easier to compile our monthly production report. | The use of computers will make it easier to compile our monthly production report. |
| I feel certain that the new plan is better than the old method. | The new plan is better than the old method for the following reasons: |
| I think that by taking this course, it will help improve my writing skills. I know that I will learn how to use skills that are good to know in any job. | This course should improve my writing skills, teaching me skills that are good to know in any job. |
| I would like to recommend that everyone wear safety boots in the Power Station. | It is recommended that everyone wear safety boots in the Power Station. |

10. Avoid outdated expressions

Here are some classic examples of outdated expressions to be avoided in business writing. Use modern language instead which is shorter and clearer.

| Instead of this . . . | Try this . . . |
|--|--|
| Please send your comments not later than (date). | Please send your comments by (date). |
| Please find attached herewith . . . | Attached is . . . |
| Enclosed please find . . . | Enclosed is . . . or I have enclosed . . . |
| Please feel free to contact the undersigned on . . . | Please call me on . . . |
| As per your request . . . | As requested . . . |
| In accordance with your request . . . | As you requested . . . |
| We are hereby acknowledging receipt of your order . . . | We received your order . . . |
| Please be good enough to advise me . . . | Please let me know . . . |
| I would be glad if you could advise me when . . . | Please let me know when |
| Pursuant to your e-mail . . . | According to your e-mail . . . |
| I am writing this e-mail to convey my warmest congratulations on your promotion to . . . | Congratulations on your promotion to . . . |

| Instead of this . . . | Try this . . . |
|---|--|
| Thanking you in advance . . . | I appreciate your . . . |
| Please give your attention to the contents of enclosed brochures. | Please see the enclosed brochures. |
| I would be very happy if it would be possible to send me . . . | Please send me . . . |
| It may be of some concern to you to learn that your pump is ready for testing. | Your pump is ready for testing. |
| Your attention is directed to the contents of enclosed brochures. | Please see the enclosed brochures. |
| Thanking you in advance for cooperation in this matter. | Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. |
| Pursuant to your request, two contracts are attached hereto. | As you requested, two contracts are attached. |
| Should you require any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned. | Please call me if you have any questions. |
| Please furnish details. | Please send me details. |

| Instead of this ... | Try this ... |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| I regret to inform ... | I am sorry ... |
| Permit me to say | (never use) |
| Let me take this opportunity | (never use) |
| As of this date in time | Now |
| In light of the fact that... | Because or Since |
| In view of the fact that | Because or Since |
| In the event that | If |
| Per diem | Daily |



Try to write in similar fashion to the way you speak in a business meeting. The clarity of your writing will improve and you won't sound boring.

11. Avoid repetition

Repetition means saying the same thing twice. The following examples indicate that it is a good idea to edit your writing to look for repetition and redundant words.

| Repetition | Without Repetition |
|--|--|
| I think the reason why Lucas has been promoted to operations manager is because of his performance. | Lucas has been promoted to operations manager because of his performance. |
| We do not have the manpower to carry out the major overhaul of the gas turbine or the spare parts to carry out the major overhaul of the gas turbine . | We have neither the manpower nor the spare parts to carry out the major overhaul of the gas turbine . |
| I ask the question whether trainees can attend the gas turbine course. | I ask whether trainees can attend the gas turbine course. |
| Each individual operator will receive a bonus for completing the task on time. | Each operator will receive a bonus for completing the task on time. |
| Our Human Resources department is planning in advance a meeting to review the effectiveness of the new appraisal system. | Our Human Resources department is planning a meeting to review the effectiveness of the new appraisal system. |
| The August 8 meeting has been postponed to a later date . | The August 8 meeting has been postponed . |

12. Avoid turning verbs into nouns

Using the noun form of the verb takes more words than using a strong verb. For example, instead of saying “make a decision” it is more effective to say “decide.”

| Noun Form | Verb Form |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| give instructions to | instruct |
| make a classification | classify |
| carry out an investigation of | investigate |
| perform an assessment | assess |
| make an observation | observe |
| conduct a review of | review |
| make adjustments | adjust |

In the following examples, notice how much more straightforward and easy to understand the sentences are when presented with a strong verb form.



Examples

| Instead of | Use this |
|---|---|
| The police conducted an investigation into the matter. | The police investigated the matter. |
| Our intention is to perform an audit of the records of the program. | We intend to audit the program. |
| My boss has an expectation that I will attend the Power and Gas Exhibition. | My boss expects me to attend the Power and Gas Exhibition. |
| Authorization was given by the Planning manager to purchase new computers. | The Planning manager authorized the purchase of new computers. |
| We hope you're willing to undertake serious reconsideration of your position. | We hope you will reconsider your position. |
| The function of this handout is the improvement of wordy writing. | This handout improves wordy writing. |
| The committee made the decision to reward all employees in the Production section. | The committee decided to reward all employees in the Production section. |
| The implementation of the plan was successful. | The plan was implemented successfully. |
| Take into consideration the cost of maintaining the data. | Consider the cost of maintaining the data. |



Remember

Rely on the **verb** to do the work.

Summary

These tips provide the basics of good business writing and will always keep your written communications sharp and effective.

To produce effective documents, please use these tips every time you write.

1. Keep your purpose, readers and content in mind
2. Keep your sentences short
3. Use positive language
4. Use linking words
5. Use simple, familiar words
6. Use the passive voice for specific reasons
7. Use bullet points and numbered lists correctly
8. Use tables and charts effectively
9. Use impersonal style when expressing opinions
10. Avoid outdated expressions
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12. Avoid turning verbs into nouns