

Getting Down to the Business of Writing

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What You'll Learn

- Common business writing mistakes
- Business communication formats
 - Basic letter
 - Basic memo
 - Email

Six Common Business Writing Mistakes

- Writing to impress
- Forgetting your audience
- Writing in passive voice
- Using abstract terms
- Omitting topic sentences
- Mentioning specific objective last

Write to Communicate vs. Impress

- Use simple rather than complex terms
- Communicate understanding of subject
- Don't confuse length with quality
- Write in clear, concise style

Write to Communicate vs. Impress (Example)

Original: What I propose to do is identify the equivalent conditions in the two analyses and then explain the importance of these conditions. (22 words)

Rewrite: I propose to identify the equivalent conditions in both analyses and explain their importance. (14 words)

Focus on Your Audience

Who are you talking to?

- Demographics
- Education level
- Skills, passions, interests

What must they know?

What do they know about subject?

What do I want them to do?

Write in Active Voice

- Write from first person point of view
- Use strong active verbs

Write in Active Voice (Example)

Original: An improvement in test scores has been noted leading to the decision being taken to raise standards for entrance criteria. (20 words)

Rewrite: Improved test scores lead to higher entrance criteria. (8 words)

Write in Specifics

- Guard against vague, general statements
- Present audience with clear, concrete images

Write in Specifics (Example)

Original: Good writing is important to effective communication.

Rewrite: Writing in a clear and concise style can build rapport with your clients and vendors.

Use Topic Sentences

Include key information regarding topic

- State objective for document, as well as for each paragraph
- Eliminate sentences that do not develop topic

Lead with Your Objective

- Begin with main point, conclusion or recommendation
- Enable reader to quickly get message
- Backup with supporting facts and views
- Topic sentences typically make good headlines

Basic Letter Format

- Inside address
- Salutation (if unsure of recipient's name, use attention line)
- Body text
- Closing
- Enclosures

Basic Letter Format

Address before you write:

- To whom am I writing?
- What do I wish to achieve?
- What are the facts?
- What does reader need to know?
- What is my relationship with reader?
- How will reader react to letter?
- What do I want reader to do?

Basic Memo Format

- Company or department name
- To:
- From:
- Re: (regarding) *or* Subject:
- Date:
- Memo content describing particulars

Basic Memo Format

Address before you write:

- Stick with one central point or idea.
- Is memo's purpose clear?
- Does memo layout add to clarity?

Note: Informality defines most memo communications

E-mail

- Should be no longer than screen length (25 text lines or 230 words).
- Use short paragraphs with spaces in between (balance white space).
- Include a subject line to reveal subject matter.
- Use appropriate punctuation.

E-mail

- Use numbers or bullets to organize a list of topics.
- Include complete URLs on separate lines (use no punctuation immediately before/after URL).
- Use “threads” and weave original questions/comments into your reply.

Writing Resources

The Elements of Style (online), by William Strunk, Jr.

- <http://www.bartleby.com/141>

Professional Writing Handouts and Resources, Purdue University Online Writing Lab

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/>