



Advanced Business Writing

Designed to take your writing to the next level.



GSA Schedule
GS-02F-0097N

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Advanced Business Writing

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Advanced Business Writing

Workshop Objectives



This workshop will give you the tools you need to:

- Write and proofread your work for clarity, conciseness and completeness.
- Build great sentences and paragraphs.
- Use tips to make your writing simpler and easier to read.
- Determine how readable your work is.
- Save time and energy when writing e-mail.



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CHAPTER 1 - Becoming an Excellent Writer



This manual is for those who already are good writers. We all know what good writing is. It's the book we can't put down, the quote that we never forgot and the speech that changes the way we view the world. Good writing is the memo that gets action and the letter that says what a phone call can't.

In business writing, the language is concrete, the point of view is clear, and the points are well expressed. Good writing is hard work, and even the best writers sometimes get discouraged. However, it's just about using simple techniques to keep your writing current and targeted.

Not Much Good Writing Out There

Many would-be writers are defeated by the attitude that writing is an overwhelming task, so they do whatever they can to avoid it. These people do not have confidence in their skills and have not learned to trust themselves with language. Sometimes they go to their files to see what has been done in the past to try to make those documents fit their purpose instead of composing their own quality document. To overcome insecurities, they may even try to write to impress. They hunt for big words to sound like an authority on the subject. They pad their reports thinking that indicates thoroughness. But they actually may leave their readers wanting what's not there. Readers want to understand, use what they need and not be weighed down with an excess of words.

With a good attitude, a knowledge of how words work together and how usage techniques work, your writing can be clear, concise, complete, correct and hit the mark as easy to read.

Say what you mean in the simple language you would use with a colleague. Make adjustments in your wording until you're sure you are saying what you want to say, and then read it again to ensure your reader will understand what you are saying.

In taking your writing skills to the next level, here are some tips:

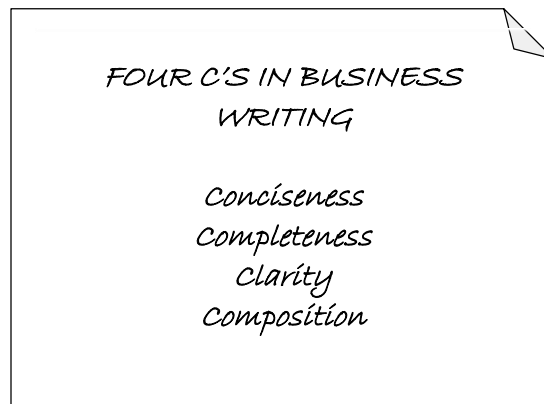
1. It takes practice to write well. Your tenth letter will be easier to write than the first few, and believe it or not, the tenth report will be easier to write as well.
2. Find personal reasons for wanting to write well and for wanting to communicate with others. Then, turn off the internal editor that's slowing you down and just write.

3. Get feedback to tell how you're doing. Is your writing working? **People don't learn to write well from being corrected; they learn not to write at all.** Look at feedback as an opportunity to find better ways to write, not as an affront to your delicate sensibilities.

Being familiar with the English language, you undoubtedly talk easily and well. Others, no doubt, understand you. So the leap from talking to writing doesn't need to be difficult if you think about what you're writing and what kind of message you want to share. Capture your talking on paper, at least the first draft.

The Four C's in Business Writing

Before putting pen to paper or going to the keyboard, there are several things to think about. They are things you think about whether you are talking or writing. They are the four principles of communication or the four C's. Attempt to write and edit with a keen eye on: **conciseness, completeness, clarity and composition.**



CHAPTER 2 - Conciseness

People are inundated with things to read. If you tend to pad your writing with extra words and phrases, readers will probably feel that they are wasting their time. Poorly written documents will go to the bottom of the pile and may never get read. Consider that a one-page letter may get read - two pages and not a chance.

Writing concisely means saying exactly what you mean in the fewest words possible. That means writing to the point.

Often, when you rewrite a sentence to make it more concise, it will also make it clearer. So concise writing includes only those ideas that readers need, and it gives those ideas no more words than they deserve.

Consider that office workers **read most information on a computer screen**. Many people use an even smaller screen like a smart phone or e-reader. The more scrolling you make your reader do, the less likely he or she will read your document.

If your document is going to be read on-line, the reader will be looking for an easy to read format. And don't forget, an attractive one too. Think about having a blend of white space and text, using easily readable fonts in a reasonable size and making your work look good.

Before you start writing, ask yourself a few questions to help you focus your writing on what's important to your reader. This keeps you from wandering. Consider these questions before writing:

CONCISENESS

*Eliminate wordy expressions
Include only relevant material
Avoid unnecessary repetition*

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE WRITING:

- What is my purpose?
- Who are my readers?
- What do they already know?
- What do they need to know?
- What don't they need to know?
- How and where will they read this?
- What results do I want from them?
- What will make it easy for them to understand or act?
- Do I need an appendix for people who want more detail?



Once you've decided what your readers need, the next step is to give your ideas no more words than you need. Prune paragraphs to sentences, sentences to clauses, clauses to short phrases, phrases to words, words that create pictures, or strike the ideas entirely. Keep only what contributes to the meaning.

Next are some common problems of wordiness that are easy to spot and avoid.

Watch Out for Adverbs

Adverbs can add unnecessary bulk to your sentences. In his writing essay, *On Writing*, Stephen King wrote, *"The road to hell is paved with adverbs."* Let nouns and verbs do the work. Words ending in *-ly* often over modify writing. They neither save weak ideas nor improve strong ones.

Weak

I absolutely believe

we certainly agree

when totally complete

Strong

I believe

we agree

when complete

Rephrase a sentence to target adverbs:

The cat moved much more quickly than the dog.

The cat moved quicker than the dog.

Don't be Redundant

Have you ever seen a sentence like, *"I watched the colorful sun set in the west,"* or, *"I took off the blue colored shirt?"* Now, if the sun were setting in the east, that would be something to comment on, but we all know that the sun sets in the west. Likewise, you can safely assume that your readers know that blue is a color.

Similarly, watch out for words that mean the same: *"The mechanic drained and emptied the gas tank,"* could be replaced by, *"The mechanic emptied the gas tank."*

These doublings seem to satisfy a yearning for symmetry. Don't be fooled. They are redundant. Here are additional examples:

Pleased and delighted

Stimulating and interesting

Review and comment on

Help and support

REDUNDANCIES

aid and abet
absolutely complete/conclusive
advance planning
advised and informed
all finished
any and all
ascend up
attach together

baffling dilemma
beck and call
bits and pieces
brown in color

capitol building
check into
clear and simple
close proximity
combine together
complete monopoly
completely unanimous
congregate together
consensus of opinion
continue to persist
continue on
cooperate jointly/together
cover over

depreciate in value
disgrace and dishonor

each and every
enclosed herewith
enter into
entirely complete
expired and terminated

fair and just
fewer in number
final completion
follow after
free gift
future plan

gather together
general custom
goals and objectives

9 A.M. in the morning
adequate enough
advance warning
a long period of time
anxious and eager
appoint to the position of
assembled together

basic fundamentals
big in size
brief in duration

cease and desist
circular in shape
climb up
coalesce together
commute back and forth
complete destruction
complimentary gift
consequent results
contemporary in time
continue to remain
contracting officer by occupation
courthouse building
current status

descend down
doctorate degree

eliminate entirely
end result
entirely absent
exact identical

fellow partner/colleague
final outcome
first and foremost
free and clear
full and complete

general rule
general public

immediately and at once

join together

large in stature

leading protagonist

major breakthrough

merge together

more preferable

my own

name to the position of

necessary essential

never at any time

new innovation

old patterns

opening gambit

pair of twins

part and parcel

penetrate into

pick and choose

prejudge in advance

ready and willing

rectangle in shape

reduce down

reiterate again

report back

return back

right and proper

safe and sound

serious crisis

small in size

still remains

sufficient enough

temporary reprieve

time period

this particular instance

troublesome predicament

true facts

two different kinds

ultimate end

unless and until

very unique

whether or not

important essentials

last will and testament

local resident

may possibly

midway between

mutual cooperation

neat in appearance

necessary requisite

never in the past

null and void

one and the same

original prototype

passing fad

past history/experiences

personal opinion

pre plan

present incumbent

recall back

recur again

refer back to

repeat again

resultant effect

revert

same identical

skirt around

spell out in detail

sudden eruption

sum and substance

ten pounds in weight

the reason is because

total annihilation

true and correct

twelve o'clock midnight

unexpected surprise

vitality essential

Be Consistent

Consistent words promote a better understanding. Inconsistency forces readers to figure out whether different words and actions mean the same thing. Using the same words allows readers to read sentences quickly. A pattern is set and from then on followed. How easy is that?

"There really are no true synonyms." Do you agree with that statement? Is there a difference between *"daring"* and *"reckless?"* Among *"famous," "notorious"* and *"infamous?"* While we do want to use words that others understand, if the word you want to use is more precise, your writing becomes clearer by using that word.

Eliminate Wordy Expressions

Instead of adding impressive bulk to writing, wordy expressions clutter it by getting in the way of the words that do the important work. Phrases like in order to (to) and a number of (some) are minor ideas that deserve no more than a word apiece. Below are a few common wordy expressions:



Instead of

a number of
at the present time
due to the fact that
for a period of
for the purpose of
in accordance with
in a timely manner
in order to
in the amount of
in the near future
on a quarterly basis
the month of June

Use

some
now
because
for
for, to
under, by
promptly, on time
to
for
soon
quarterly
June

Know If and When to Use Contractions

Contractions give a shorter, snappier rhythm to your writing. They sound more like spoken language and help readability. Use them when you want your document to sound more natural. Just ensure that the contractions are appropriate to your document type. And double check your use of *"its"* and *"it is"* since it's a common mistake.

Exercise: Replace the wordy phrase with a more concise word or phrase.

Wordy Phrase	Simpler Phrase
at this point in time	
inasmuch as	
in the event that	
please do not hesitate to let me know	
I wish to take this occasion to express my thanks	
the early part of next week	
the check in the amount of	
it is quite probable that	
incumbent upon	
in consonance with	
there is no doubt that	
most of the time	
in the same way	
during the time that	
remember the fact that	
not in a position	
in view of the fact that	
until such time	
be responsible for	

Exercise: Practicing conciseness, rewrite the following sentences.



1. In the event that payment is not made by January, your license will be revoked without further consideration.
2. The invoice was in the amount of \$5,000 for billing.
3. He ordered desks for the office that were of the executive type.
4. There are several rules of public speaking which should be observed when delivering a speech.
5. The department budget can be observed to be decreasing each new year due to a fledgling economy.

Notes