

Dear Reader:

Thank you for your interest in *The Essential Handbook For Business Writing*.

This sample PDF offers a brief collection of pages from each section of the handbook. Page numbers reflect the actual numbers in the book and, for this sample, need not be sequential as in the original text.

To get an understanding of the scope of the handbook, please read the introductory pages and the Table Of Contents.

The actual book is 192 pages in length. It is comprised of the following five stand-alone sections:

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

The lesson-on-every-page format is intended to make learning instant. For clarity and simplicity, each topic has a brief explanation followed by numerous examples; for example, there are 30 writing samples included that can serve as templates.

I am happy to announce that *The Essential Handbook For Business Writing* is now on the reading list at Queen's University School of Business.

Sincerely,

Desmond Gilling



THE ESSENTIAL HANDBOOK
For
BUSINESS WRITING

REVISED EDITION

*communication excellence in English,
the language of business worldwide*



Desmond A. Gilling

Good writing is good business.

write clearly.....be understood
write concisely..... be direct
write confidently know your purpose
write creatively express your ideas
write convincingly be persuasive
write strategically generate business
write professionally make an impact

grammar basics ♦ principles of composition ♦ writing samples
usage ♦ proposals & reports ♦ résumé & cover letter ♦ design basics

“This writing handbook includes everything a person in business needs to produce excellent writing. I particularly like its simple, concise presentation and the numerous writing examples included. I will be introducing this handbook to our Hong Kong office.”

B. Soong, Vice President, McGraw-Hill Financial

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

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

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

C. Pollock, Financial Advisor, Sun Life.

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

J. Earle, C.A., Scotiabank

ISBN 978-09880938-1-2

THE ESSENTIAL HANDBOOK
For
BUSINESS WRITING

Revised Edition

Desmond A. Gilling

The Essential Handbook For Business Writing, Revised Edition.

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“Good composition is like a suspension bridge—each line adds strength and takes none away.”

Robert Henri

“I have made this [letter] longer, because I have not had the time to make it shorter.”

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)

“At painful times, when composition is impossible and reading is not enough, grammars and dictionaries are excellent for distraction.”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

“Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say 'infinitely' when you mean 'very'; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something really infinite.”

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

“I try to leave out the parts that people skip.”

Elmore Leonard

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

William Cobbett

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

James Michener

“Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.”

Author Unknown

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“Language is the dress of thought.”
Samuel Johnson

COMPOSITION BASICS

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

To write successfully you must have command of the following:

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

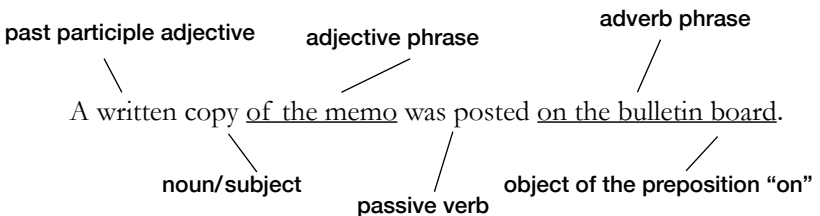
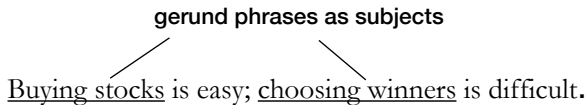
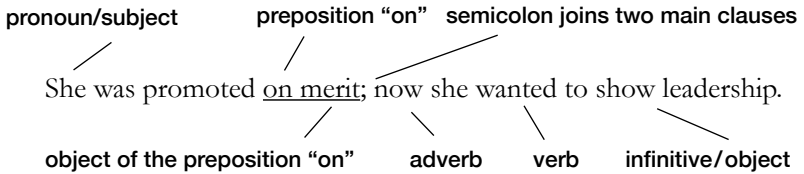
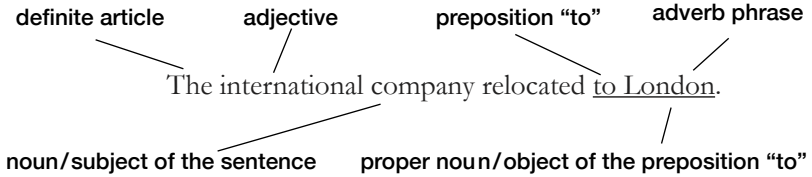
Once you’ve mastered the above areas, you can concentrate on creating compelling sentences and unified, coherent paragraphs.

Follow these basic rules in all correspondence:

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

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

BASIC PARTS OF SPEECH



VERBS: Active and Passive Voice

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

The company president delivered a speech.

(subject) (verb) (object)

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

The speech was delivered by the company president.

(subject) (verb)

The active voice—which is more forceful and direct—is usually preferred over the passive voice. The passive voice could suggest indifference or a lack of responsibility. However, if the subject of the verb is unknown or of less importance than the action itself, the passive voice works well.

In these examples the passive voice is awkward.

Active Voice: He **remembers** his university days fondly.

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

Active Voice: She **examined** the files for inconsistencies.

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

In this example the passive voice creates ambiguity.

Passive Voice: He **was impressed** by the director; he was thorough.

(To whom does the second *he* refer?)

In these examples the passive voice is unambiguous and works well.

Passive Voice: He **was impressed** by the director who was thorough.

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

Active Voice: The director who was thorough **impressed** him. (better)

In the next two examples the passive voice is preferred.

Passive Voice: The meetings **were put** on hold.

(The *passive voice* is used with an unknown subject: the verb is more important.)

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

(The *passive voice* puts emphasis on the receiver of the award.)

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

RELATIVE PRONOUNS: who, whom, whoever, whomever

Choosing which of these terms to use is problematic because there is the issue of grammatical correctness as opposed to familiar usage. To some, the objective case (whom or whomever) is archaic; consequently, this usage is slowly being eliminated from spoken language. Simply put, *whom* and *whomever* do not always roll off the tongue easily.

Whom did you report to in the foreign office? (formal and correct)

versus

Who did you report to in the foreign office? (casual usage)

To solve this usage issue assume a compromise. When composing business correspondence be formal and grammatically correct: *who* as a subject and *whom* as an object. When speaking casually use the term most natural to your tone.

In the examples below, sentence (2) is grammatically correct, but sentence (1) might be preferred orally, particularly in casual conversation.

- 1) **Who** will you get legal advice from regarding the dispute? (casual)
- 2) From **whom** will you get legal advice regarding the dispute? (formal)

In sentence (3) below, *whom* is object of the verb *prefers*; in sentence (4) *who* is subject of the verb *will change*.

- 3) The sales manager is not **whom** the president prefers to promote.
- 4) The president **who** will change policy shows leadership.

In sentence (5) below, *whoever* is the subject of the verb *was capable*; in sentence (6) *whomever* is object of the preposition *to*.

- 5) He assigned the task to **whoever** was capable.
- 6) He assigned the task to **whomever** he thought capable.

Confusion occurs over the use of **who** and **whom** following a preposition making the pronoun the subject of a verb in a clause.

- 7) The manager offered the position to **who whom** applied. (subject)
- 8) The manager gave the job to ~~whoever~~ **whomever** personnel recommended. (object)
- 9) The manager gave the job to ~~who~~ **whom** he preferred. (object)

PRONOUN-VERB AGREEMENT

Indefinite pronouns are nonspecific and can be either singular or plural. This presents a problem because some of them may seem plural, but are grammatically singular.

SINGULAR INDEFINITE PRONOUNS: use singular verb

Singular Indefinite Pronouns

another	everyone	nothing
anybody	everything	one
anyone	much	other
anything	neither	somebody
each	nobody	someone
either	no one	something

- 1) Everyone on staff **is** attending a training seminar. (singular)
- 2) Each of the proposals **has** merit. (singular)
- 3) Neither of the clients **was** happy with the service they received.
- 4) Of the two proposals, either **works** well.

INDEFINITE PRONOUNS: singular and plural verbs

Plural Verb Only

all	most
any	none
more	some

Singular or Plural Verb

both	others
few	several
many	

- 1) Of the candidates who applied, **several** are qualified. (plural verb)
- 2) Two people applied and **both** were hired. (plural verb)
- 3) **All** of these candidates show promise. (plural verb)
- 4) **All** the planning for the interviews is complete. (singular verb)
- 5) **Most** of the discussion was about compensation. (singular verb)
- 6) **Most** employees occasionally receive overtime pay. (plural verb)
- 7) **Some** suggestions were valid, but **most** were discarded. (plural verbs)
- 8) **None** of the information is relevant. (*none* is singular)
- 9) **None** of the customers are satisfied with the products. (*none* is plural)

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THE COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE

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

(*Dependent clauses* are in italics.)

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

The following paragraph contains the basic types of sentences.

Sentence (1) is **simple**.

Sentence (2) is **complex**.

Sentence (3) is **compound**.

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

(1) The decision of the Board of Directors regarding expansion to China was pending further investigation. (2) Although the facts originally presented seemed conclusive, there was concern that the cost of expansion was too high. (3) However, cost was not all that was standing in the way of a final decision and the Board was aware of this. (4) Even though the expansion needed to be initiated in a timely fashion, the Board of Directors decided to hire a consulting firm to do a feasibility study, and the findings will be discussed with Chinese affiliates.

CONSIDERATION FOR YOUR READER

- ◆ Use *simple*, *compound*, *complex*, and *compound-complex* sentences.
- ◆ Vary the length of sentences.
- ◆ Use long sentences to keep related information together.
- ◆ Use short sentences for emphasis and relief for the reader.
- ◆ Use short sentences to highlight key points.
- ◆ Be clear, concise, and grammatically correct.

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

Mathew Arnold

PHRASES AND CLAUSES

PHRASES

Phrases and **clauses** are integral to forming clear, well-constructed sentences. **Clauses** in a sentence allow the writer to accentuate key ideas by altering the order in which these ideas are presented.

The simple difference between a phrase and a clause is that a phrase does not contain a subject and a verb whereas a clause contains both. There are two kinds of phrases: **prepositional** and **verbal**.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositional phrases begin with prepositions such as *after, at, before, during, from, in, on, to*, and are followed by a noun. Generally, adverb phrases answer the questions *how, when, or where*; adjective phrases answer the questions *what* and *where*.

(**Prepositional phrases** are in bold.)

- 1) She invited questions **during the presentation**. (adverb phrase)
- 2) The work **of the panel** resulted in policy change. (adjective phrase)
- 3) The documents **on the desk** should be stored away. (adjective phrase)

VERBAL PHRASES

There are three kinds of verbal phrases: **participle**, **gerund**, and **infinitive**. The **gerund phrase** takes on the role of a noun acting as subject or object in a sentence; the **participle phrase** acts as an adjective; the **infinitive phrase** can act as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

(**Gerund phrases** are in bold.)

- 1) **Hiring new staff** is necessary for business growth. (subject)
- 2) She preferred **allocating work** instead of **doing it herself**. (objects)
- 3) The clerk **working late** was alone in the office. (adjective)
- 4) She reviewed the details **outlined in the office memo**. (adjective)

(**Infinitive phrases** are in bold.)

- 5) **To solve a problem** can be satisfying and rewarding. (subject)
- 6) Professional training is one way **to advance in business**. (adjective)
- 7) If paid extra, she wants **to serve on the committee**. (object)
- 8) The director is eager **to get information**. (adverb)

PHRASES AND CLAUSES IN SENTENCES

Not only do phrases and clauses add information to a sentence, they allow the writer to arrange these elements strategically.

(*Dependent clauses* are in italics; phrases are underlined.)

Simple Sentences

noun phrase

The Board of Directors
made the final decision.
All department managers
received copies of the
documents.

adjective phrase

Compound Sentence

adjective phrase

Most employees of the bank
preferred to take long adverb phrase
weekends in the summer, but
some chose regular holiday
time.

noun phrase

Complex Sentences

dependent clause

While he was driving to work,
he listened to an audio
book.

independent clause

independent clause

The plane arrived late *because*
the weather was bad.

dependent clause

Compound-Complex Sentence

dependent clause

Although the stock market is
currently underperforming,
investments in Resources
remain brisk and the
outlook is positive.

compound independent clauses

dependent compound clause

Before the annual report is
published and before managers
examine its contents, the
director will do a final
review.

independent clause

NOTE: A dependent clause appearing first in a sentence is separated from the independent clause by a comma; however, if the dependent clause is short, a comma separating the clauses is not necessary.

Example: If they work hard they will succeed. (no comma)

CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES (colon, semicolon, clauses)

In business writing, **semicolons** and **colons** should be used sparingly. However, when there are two closely related sentences of equal weight and the writer wants a tight, efficient construction, a **semicolon** works well. A **colon** introduces a conclusive thought or an expansion of the main idea of the sentence.

1) The board meeting came to an abrupt close; none of the major issues were resolved.

In sentence (1), the *abrupt close* and the *major issues* are closely related. By joining these sentences with a **semicolon**, the sentence structure is tight and emphatic.

A **colon** is used when the statement that follows completes the initial thought.

2) The corporation had one focus: expansion worldwide.

The two words *expansion worldwide* bring a forceful completion to the sentence.

3) The corporation's main focus was expansion worldwide.

Although sentences (2) and (3) state the same thing, sentence (3) does not have the same impact as sentence (2). In business writing, however, excessively dramatic endings are best avoided.

ARRANGING CLAUSES

A **dependent clause** appearing first in a sentence will introduce or qualify the main idea to follow; it may also ease the reader into the message.

(**Dependent clauses** are in bold.)

1) Because of a slow economy and shrinking market share, the company will be considering a reduction in operations.

(The **dependent clause** appears first to act as a qualifier for the news of a possible “reduction in operations”.)

2) The plant will be closed within a month because of a slowdown in production.

(Above, the **main clause** comes first while the **dependent clause** that follows adds an explanation.)

“A perfectly healthy sentence is extremely rare.”

Thoreau, 1841

CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES

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

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

Consider the following for composing effective sentences:

- choice of words: plain, direct language is vital for clarity and tone
- types of sentences: *simple, compound, complex, compound-complex*
- syntax: strategic order of sentence parts for clarity and emphasis
- punctuation: the comma, colon, semicolon, and dash for strategically arranging sentence parts

SENTENCE COMBINING: a strategy for creating sentences

- Phrases and clauses can be arranged strategically to clarify and accentuate information.
- Short sentences can be joined by a conjunction, a semicolon, a colon, or a dash, or by making one sentence a *dependent clause*.
- A *dependent clause* may be placed first in a sentence to qualify the *independent clause* that follows. When the main idea (*independent clause*) is more important, it should be appear first.
- Phrases should always be positioned close to the word they modify. An adjective phrase should be next to its noun and an adverb phrase should be close to the verb or adjective it modifies.

COMBINING SENTENCES

The two simple sentences below are combined five ways.

- (a) The sales staff worked very hard.
- (b) The sales staff exceeded their quota.

- 1) The sales staff worked very hard **and** they exceeded their quota.
(The sentences are joined by a **conjunction**.)
- 2) The sales staff worked very hard**;** they exceeded their quota.
(The sentences are joined by a **semicolon**.)
- 3) The sales staff exceeded their quota**:** the result of hard work.
(A completing thought follows the **colon**.)
- 4) The sales staff exceeded their quota—a result of hard work.
(The statement following the **dash** refers to the initial idea.)
- 5) Because they worked hard**,** the sales staff exceeded their quota.
(A **dependent clause** introduces the main clause.)

Below, three short sentences are combined three ways.

- (a) She is now Director of Asian operations.
- (b) She is a solid performer in the Asian office.
- (c) The position demands extensive travel.

- 1) Because she is a solid performer in the Asian office, she is now Director of Asian operations**:** a position demanding extensive travel.
(Above is a **complex** sentence with a completing thought after the colon.)
- 2) She is now Director of Asian operations because she is a solid performer in that region. This position demands extensive travel.
(The above sentences consist of a **complex** sentence and a **simple** sentence.)
- 3) As Director of operations for Asia—a promotion received because of her solid performance in that region—she will travel extensively.
(One sentence becomes **parenthetical**.)

NOTE: As evident in the examples above, there are many choices when constructing sentences. Writers must clearly and concisely convey the main point of their message.

MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

Descriptors (adjectives, adverbs, and phrases) are used for descriptive purposes and should be placed close to the terms they describe to avoid confusion.

(The **problem** areas are in bold.)

Weak: He works to **catch up on weekends**.

(Is he catching up on *work* or on *weekends*?)

Better: He works on weekends to catch up.

Weak: They bought laptops from a small outlet **that cost \$450.00**.

(Did the *laptop* or the *outlet* cost \$450.00?)

Better: They bought laptops that cost \$450.00 from a small outlet.

Weak: The client **nearly requested** a whole new marketing strategy.

(Was it nearly a *request* or nearly a new *marketing strategy*?)

Better: The client requested nearly a whole new marketing strategy.

Weak: The manager spoke of **necessary changes in the meeting**.

(Is it the *meeting* itself that requires *necessary changes*?)

Better: In the meeting, the manager spoke of necessary changes.

Weak: The files are in the **cabinet that we use** to complete the report.

(Are the *reports* completed by using a *cabinet*?)

Better: The files we use to complete the report are in the cabinet.

IMPROPER USE OF MODIFIERS

1) Customer Service handled complaints ~~quick~~ quickly.

2) His boss thought that his work was completed ~~real~~ really well.

3) Once the report was submitted, the results were assessed ~~different~~ differently than before.

4) Her estimate of the stock value increase was ~~near~~ nearly perfect.

COMPARISONS (Use *more* or *better* for comparison of two; use *most* or *best* for comparison of more than two.)

1) She is **more** creative than he is and the **most** creative on staff.

2) The private investor was **more** informed than his financial advisor.

3) Of the three salespersons, she is the **most** productive.

4) He was considered the **best** of all the managers at the firm.

5) Buying stocks was a **better** decision than buying property.

“This morning I took out a comma and this afternoon I put it back.”

Oscar Wilde

COMMA USE

Next to the full stop (the period), the **comma** is the most used punctuation; unfortunately, it is also the most misused. Too often commas are sprinkled throughout a document with little regard for the rules of comma use. Primarily, the comma clarifies and gives order to a statement. It is also a handy tool for strategically arranging sentence elements to express ideas clearly.

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

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

NOTE: Some writing style guides eliminate the comma (referred to as the Oxford Comma) before the “and” that introduces the final item in a list. For the sake of clarity, this comma should always be included. (See Oxford Comma, page 39.)

b) Use a comma between adjectives preceding a noun.

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

NOTE: With concurrent adjectives, test for correct comma use by replacing the comma with the word “and” between adjectives; if “and” fits, then the original comma placement is correct.

It was a bold, clever plan. = It was a bold **and** clever plan.

c) Use a comma to set off words in apposition.

A word or phrase in apposition has the same meaning as the term to which it refers. (The *appositions* are in italics.)

- 1) The chairperson, *Susan Weston*, convened the meeting.
- 2) The main issues, *funding and staffing*, will be priorities.

d) Use a comma to set off a contrasting idea.

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

e) Use a comma to set off a transition.

- 1) On the contrary, the board meeting was of vital importance.
- 2) Nevertheless, new software would increase productivity.
- 3) After further thought, he decided to go with the original plan.

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

- 1) Although the market is down today, the future looks bright.
- 2) To date, there has been no improvement in productivity.

g) Use a comma to separate the two parts of a compound sentence when the second part of the sentence expands the main idea or when clarity is needed. Also, place a comma before the conjunction “and” that introduces an independent clause.

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

NOTE: When introductory clause or phrase is short, a comma is not needed.

“When they arrived the meeting began.” (No comma needed.)

h) Use a comma with dates.

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

i) Use a comma with numbers or similar words in succession.

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

j) Use a comma to set off the terms *also*, *but*, *no*, *so*, *well*, *yes* when these terms begin a sentence.

- 1) Well, we have reconsidered the offer and we must refuse.
- 2) No, there has been no change in our plans.
- 3) Yes, we anticipate that her appointment will be announced.
- 4) So, from now on the managers will assist with direct sales. But, they will let their staff take the lead. Also, managers will schedule frequent sales meeting.

k) Do not use a comma if *well* or *why* appears within a sentence.

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

l) Do not place a comma in front of a verb unless it is part of the punctuation for a parenthetical term or for a term or phrase in apposition.

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

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

Correct: The manager and her staff attended the meeting.

Correct: The manager and her staff, at the request of the CEO, attended the meeting.

A case for the Oxford Comma (the final comma in a series):**1) He presented the idea to his partners, Juan and Sophia.**

Sentence (1) suggests that the partners are made up of Juan and Sophia and that possibly the “idea” was presented only to those two.

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

Because of the comma after *partners*, sentence (2) means that the idea was presented to the partners and to Juan and Sophia—all three.

COLON, SEMICOLON, DASH

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

THE COLON

a) Use a colon to introduce a list.

- 1) The Purchasing Agent ordered the following items: photocopy paper, printer cartridges, file folders, and pens.
- 2) According to the consultant, the three factors for success are as follows:
 - i) Continuing Education
 - ii) Mentorship
 - iii) Professional Development

b) Do not use a colon after a verb.

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

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

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

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

d) Use a colon to introduce a quotation or formal statement.

- 1) The consultant stated: “There is no substitute for hard work.”
- 2) One of the principles of the corporation was written as follows: Every employee has the right to be treated with respect.

NOTE: If a complete sentence following a colon stands on its own, it may begin with a capital letter.

- 1) English is the language of business worldwide: It is, for example, the secondary language of Singapore.

NOTE: Quotation marks go inside a colon:

- 2) She referred to the article “The Benefits of Free Trade”: a timely stimulus for discussion.

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

- 1) There is only one thing that matters to the CFO: making money.
- 2) Making money is the only thing that matters to the CFO.
(The second sentence above is less emphatic than the first.)
- 3) The college has one goal: the success of all students.
- 4) The success of all students is the one goal of the college.
(The sentence above is less emphatic the third sentence.)

THE COLON: (other uses)

f) Use a colon with time and ratio.

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

g) Use a colon with a salutation.

Dear Ms. Smith: Ladies and Gentlemen:

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

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

THE SEMICOLON

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

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

b) Use a semicolon instead of a colon when introducing a list that begins with the following terms: *for example*, *for instance*, and *namely*.

- 1) The seminar will address actual sales situations; namely, market research, client solicitation, and the consultative approach.
- 2) There will be a new meeting schedule posted soon; for instance, our regular Monday morning meeting will be moved to Tuesday afternoon.

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

Semicolons are used when there is internal punctuation in a series.

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

Semicolons separate names with titles in a list.

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

Semicolons separate names with addresses in a list.

3) Invitations to the company dinner will be sent to the following: Mr. Richard Desousa, Toronto; Paulo Rinaldi, Montreal; Susan Wong, Vancouver.

Semicolons separate coordinating clauses.

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

NOTE: Semicolons are often misused two ways:

1) in place of a comma 2) in place of a colon

Incorrect:

The administration made numerous changes; which included office renovations and flexible work hours.

Revised:

The administration made numerous changes, which included office renovations and flexible work hours.

Incorrect:

The agenda included a video presentation; a guest speaker; and a discussion period.

Correct:

The agenda included the following: a video presentation, a guest speaker, and a discussion period.

THE DASH

A **dash** is less formal than a colon and is used primarily for the emphasis or the clarification of a preceding statement in a sentence. A dash is also used to indicate an abrupt interruption in a sentence or to express a spread in time (1960–1980). Dashes may also set off a parenthetical construction.

Like a colon, a dash may introduce a finishing statement that clarifies a previous point made in a sentence. Colons, on the other hand, tend to be stronger finishers that introduce a conclusive idea. In business writing, dashes should be used sparingly.

There are **two** kinds of dashes:

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

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

They took the London–Paris express train.

b) Use the *m* dash to set off a word, a phrase, or a clause in apposition.

Canada—land mass nine million sq. km—is second to Russia in size.

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

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

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

The following countries are poised for economic growth: South Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam. (The same list preceded by a colon.)

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

(Commas are often used to set off a parenthetical construction, but a dash is more emphatic.)

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

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

e) Use a dash when a parenthetical segment includes commas.

1) Our international business locations—Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai—are expanding exponentially.

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

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

PARENTHESES, BRACKETS, QUOTATIONS, ELLIPSES

PARENTHESES

A **parenthetical element** is additional information not necessary to the main idea of a sentence, but too important to leave out. Parentheses can be used to indicated information that adds comments and clarifications to previous statements.

a) Use parentheses to indicate additional information.

- 1) The report (bound in hardcover) was given to each manager.
- 2) The corporation applied for an extension of credit (soon to be approved), which will fund the building of a new plant.

b) Use parentheses with letters or numbers in a list.

The agenda was as follows:

- (a) Introductory Remarks
- (b) Guest Speaker
- (c) Productivity Workshop

He planned the following steps:

- (1) Contact potential new clients
- (2) Hold an information session
- (3) Arrange follow-up meetings

NOTE: If the parenthetical element is a complete sentence, the period goes inside the closing parenthesis. Example:

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

Commas, colons, and semicolons go outside a closing parenthesis. A question mark and an exclamation point go inside.

- 1) The Board of Directors made the final decision (this was expected); however, they still scheduled a meeting to discuss the issue further.
- 2) The managers were confused by the memo (how could they not be?), which was full of faulty information.

THE APOSTROPHE

POSSESSIVE FORM (shows ownership)

SINGULAR NOUNS

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

administrator's report chairperson's decision

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

Dickens's novels Forbes's business articles

PLURAL NOUNS

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

accountants' records employees' concerns

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

people's choice women's club

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

Bank of China's funds person-of-record's statement

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

Klein & Foster's Law Firm Smith & Weston's products

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

previous year's taxes several days' pay

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

Ford's, Honda's, and Subaru's new-car lineup

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

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

(2) the business's goals the goals of the business

(3) the office's window the window of the office

In example (1) the *of-phrase* avoids the ambiguity over whether the chairperson is being dismissed or is doing the dismissing.

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

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

PUNCTUATION WITH NUMBERS AND ACRONYMS

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

Note: **1960s** is *plural*; **1960s'** is *plural possessive*; **1960's** is *singular possessive*. (1960's, 1990's, etc., should not be used as a *plural*.)

1) The ~~1980's~~ **1980s** were a time of technological advancement. (plural)

2) The ~~1929's~~ **1929's** stock market crash wiped out millions. (possessive)

3) * They enjoyed '60s **'60s'** music. (possessive plural abbreviation)

* Better to write: *music of the sixties* in place of *'60s' music*.

4) He drove an **'97** BMW. (adjective, abbreviation of 1997)

5) The new condominiums are priced in the ~~\$300's~~ **\$300s**.

(Advertised prices of real estate are frequently given in the incorrect possessive form: for example, "Priced from the low **\$300's**." This should be: "Priced from the low **\$300s**." (The price refers to a range in the **\$300s** and therefore should be *plural* not *possessive*.)

6) The information was kept on ~~CD's~~ **CDs**. (plural abbreviation)

Note: With lowercase plural letters—**a's**, **o's**, **p's**, and **q's**, for example—use *'s* for plurals.

* To show a time span use an "en" dash between dates: 1970s–1990s.

PERSONIFICATION

Use *'s* with inanimate objects that are personified.

1) The Stock Exchange's revenge was swift.

2) NAFTA's agreement policies foster economic growth.

CONTRACTIONS

The apostrophe is used to create a contraction by replacing a letter or letters to combine words: cannot=can't; does not=doesn't; do not=don't; we will=we'll; will not=won't, etc.

Note: Contractions should be used sparingly in business writing.

FREQUENTLY MISPELLED WORDS

NOTE: Words that appear in the Commonly Confused Words section (pages 61–77) are not listed below.

A

absence
accessible
accommodate
acknowledge
advantageous
ancillary
argument
auxiliary

B–C

bankruptcy
beneficial
bookkeeper
campaign
commission
commitment
committee
competitor
conscientious
cooperation
copyright
copywriter

D–E

deferred
dilemma
dissatisfied
eligible
embarrassment
enforceable
environment
extraordinary

F–G

facsimile
fascinating
feasible
financeable

foreign
foreseeable
forewarn
forfeit
fraudulent
gauge
government
grievance

H–I–J–K

hierarchy
hindrance
independent
inferred
innocence
judicious
knowledgeable

L–M

legitimate
leisure
litigious
mediator
millennium
miscellaneous
misspell
misstatement
mortgage
myriad

N–O

negligible
noticeable
occurrence
omission
omitted

P–Q

pamphlet

parallel
personnel
plausible
possession
questionnaire
quite

R–S–T

receipt
receive
recommend
recurrence
reenactment
remembrance
remittance
renown
schedule
seizure
separate
serviceable
tendency
transmittal
truly

U–V

unconscious
undoubtedly
unmistakable
upheaval
vacuum
vehemently
vendor
vulnerable

W–Z

warranty
weird
wholly
zealous

RULES FOR FORMING COMPOUND WORDS

a) Use hyphens to combine two words used as an adjective; but do not hyphenate words used as adjectives when one of them is either an adverb (ending in *ly*) or a comparative term *more*, *most*, etc.

- 1) He referred to an **up-to-date** case study. (adjective)
- 2) She is now a **full-time** employee. (adjective)
- 3) The executive always booked a **first-class** flight. (adjective)
- 4) He executed a **perfectly planned** strategy. (no hyphen with *ly*)
- 5) She was the **most** quoted business consultant. (comparative term)
- 6) On his corporate **credit card**, he had a large **credit-card** debt. (noun and adjective)

NOTE: In the above examples, the compounds used as adjectives are hyphenated. Do not hyphenate words when one term ends in *ly*.

b) Use a hyphen for generally accepted word combinations.

fact-finder, father-in-law, not-for-profit, x-ray, fund-raising

c) Do not use a hyphen for chemical terms.

Hydrogen peroxide solution

d) Do not use a hyphen for terms mixed with numbers or letters.

Type 2 Diabetes

e) Use a hyphen for words beginning with *all*, *ex*, *inter*, *self*.

all-inclusive, ex-president, self-improvement

g) Hyphenate numbers written as words (twenty-one to ninety-nine).

one-fifth, sixty-six, twenty-three, etc.)

f) Use a hyphen to clarify meaning.

re-sign *versus* resign; re-creation *versus* recreation

(*Resign* means to quit but *re-sign* means to sign again; *re-creation* means to create again but *recreation* refers to a leisure activity.)

h) Do not use a hyphen with the following prefixes.

anti, *bi*, *co*, *counter*, *de*, *dis*, *hyper*, *in*, *inter*, *mega*, *micro*, *mis*, *non*,
out, *over*, *post*, *pre*, *re**, *semi*, *un*, *under*.

* See example *f*, above.

“England and America are two countries
divided by a common language.”

George Bernard Shaw

The British, American, and Canadian spelling of numerous terms differs. Canadian spelling generally follows British rules especially with the “our” instead of the “or” ending. For the two endings “ize” and “ise” (British), Canadian spelling follows the American rule using “ize”. Terms that always take the “ise” ending are listed on the next page.

BRITISH	AMERICAN	CANADIAN
acknowledgement	acknowledgment	acknowledgement
aeroplane	airplane	airplane
amortisation	amortization	amortization
analyse	analyze	analyze
apologise	apologize	apologize
authorise	authorize	authorize
behaviour	behavior	behaviour
calibre	caliber	calibre
cancellation	cancelation	cancellation
candour	candor	candour
capitalise	capitalize	capitalize
catalogue	catalog	catalogue
categorise	categorize	categorize
centimetre	centimeter	centimetre
centre	center	centre
characterise	characterize	characterize
cheque	check	cheque
civilisation	civilization	civilization
colour	color	colour
commercialise	commercialize	commercialize
computerise	computerize	computerize
critise	criticize	criticize
customise	customize	customize
defence	defense	defence
defendant	dependent	dependant
dialogue	dialog	dialogue
economise	economize	economize
endeavour	endeavor	endeavour
enrolment	enrollment	enrolment
familiarise	familiarize	familiarize
favourite	favorite	favourite

BRITISH**AMERICAN****CANADIAN**

finalise	finalize	finalize
flavour	flavor	flavour
fulfil	fulfill	fulfil
generalise	generalize	generalize
grey	gray	grey
harbour	harbor	harbour
honour	honor	honour
humour	humor	humour
industrialise	industrialize	industrialize
initialise	initialize	initialize
instalment	installment	instalment
jewellery	jewelry	jewellery
judgment	judgement	judgment
kilometre	kilometer	kilometre
knowledgeable	knowledgeable	knowledgeable
labelled	labeled	labelled
labour	labor	labour
legalize	legalize	legalize
licence	license	licence
likeable	likable	likable
litre	liter	litre
liveable	livable	livable
minimise	minimize	minimize
moveable	movable	movable
manoeuvre	maneuver	manoeuvre
marvellous	marvelous	marvellous
maximise	maximize	maximize
mediaeval	medieval	medieval
metre	meter	metre
neighbour	neighbor	neighbour
neutralise	neutralize	neutralize
organisation	organization	organization
personalise	personalize	personalize
prioritise	prioritize	prioritize
* programme	* program	* programme
realise	realize	realize
recognise	recognize	recognize
saleable	salable	saleable
signalling	signaling	signalling
sceptical	skeptical	skeptical
specialisation	specialization	specialization
totalling	totaling	totalling
unionise	unionize	unionize
utilise	utilize	utilize
visualise	visualize	visualize

Below is a list of words that have the **i-z-e** sound but are always spelled with the **i-s-e** ending.

advertise
advise
apprise
arise
compromise
demise
despise
devise
disguise
excise
franchise
improvise
incise
merchandise
revise
rise
supervise
surmise
televisé

* In British, American, and Canadian spelling, the term "program" is used for computer reference.

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

This section deals with commonly confused terms including homonyms (word pairs that sound the same but have different meanings). Ten frequent usage errors are listed below. Additional frequently confused terms are listed on pages 63–77.

TEN COMMON USAGE ERRORS

accept/except

Accept is a verb meaning to agree to receive something; *except* is either a preposition or a conjunction.

- a) He will gladly *accept* his annual bonus pay. (verb)
- b) All staff *except* management will be under review. (conjunction)

and/& (ampersand)

Avoid using the ampersand (&) in place of the word *and*. Reserve the ampersand for titles and corporate names: AT&T, Smith & Wesson, Standard & Poor's.

bad/badly

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

- a) He felt *bad* about missing the sales quotas. (feeling)
- b) She performed *badly* in the debate. (adverb)
- c) The stock market reacted to the *bad* news of inflation. (adjective)

can/may

Can refers to ability; *may* refers to permission.

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

good/well

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

- a) He gave a *good* presentation. (adjective)
- b) Because she was now feeling *well*, she returned to work. (adverb)
- c) Sales were going *well* throughout the second quarter. (adverb)

I/me

I is subjective; *me* is objective.

- a) The assignment was given to my manager and *me*. (objective)
- b) My manager and *I* accepted the assignment. (subjective)

TEN COMMON USAGE ERRORS

it's/its

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

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

less/fewer

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

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

their/there/they're

Their is a possessive pronoun showing ownership; *there* is an adverb stating a location; *they're* is the contraction of *they are*.

- The managers submitted *their* reports. (possessive)
- She placed her desk over *there* by the window. (location)
- They're* interested in the attending the sales conference. (*they are*)

shall/will

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

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

Note: ~~ir~~regardless / regardless

Irregardless is the nonstandard of *regardless*. Avoid. Use *regardless* or *irrespective*.

PROBLEM USAGE: terms often confused

A

ability/capacity

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

and/& (ampersand)

Do not use “&” in place of the conjunction *and* in a sentence.

actual/actually

These terms are rarely needed. “The ~~actual~~ time is five o’clock.” “He ~~actually~~ arrived today.” The basic information is precise on its own.

AD/BC

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

advice/advise

Advice is a noun; *advise* is a verb.

all alone

Use *alone*.

all that

Avoid using *all that* as a noun.

allude/refer

Allude is vague; *refer* is specific.

almost never

Avoid. Use *hardly ever* or *seldom*.

along with

Avoid.

also/and

Avoid using *also* in place of *and*. “She worked in marketing ~~also~~ *and* in sales.”

alternate/alternative

Alternate means every other; *alternative* means another choice.

and/or

More often used in legal or official text. “Politicians *and/or* diplomats will attend the summit.”

angry at (with)

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

appreciate

Often incorrectly used to mean *understand*. “Do you ~~appreciate~~ *understand* the consequences?”

as well as

Not to be a substitute for *and*. “They sold computers ~~as well as~~ *and* printers.”

assemble together

Use only *assemble*.

a while/awhile

To use *awhile* as a noun is incorrect. “She will work in Asia for ~~a while~~ *a while*.” (noun) “She also worked *awhile* in Europe.” (adverb)

B

back again

Avoid. Use only the word *back*. “She is ~~back again~~ from England.”

both/alike

Both refers to two persons or things. *Both alike* is redundant.

THE PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS WRITING

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

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

STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WRITING

**prepare**

define purpose, audience, scope, medium

**arrange**

create order, structure, layout, design

**draft**

write first copy from outline

**revise**

add or delete information

**proofread**

polish final copy

Prepare a document by addressing the following questions:

What is the purpose of the communication?

How much detail is needed?

For whom is the communication written?

What is the best format to clearly convey the message?

What action or outcome is expected?

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence introduces the **controlling idea** of a paragraph and may comment briefly on that idea. A paragraph should focus on one topic only, and should develop that topic through additional sentences within the paragraph. A topic sentence does two things:

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

A topic sentence usually appears at the **beginning** of a paragraph, but it can also be found in the **middle** or the **end**. A topic sentence at the **beginning** of a paragraph would be supported by sentences that follow. If a quotation from an authority or an important fact introduces the main idea, the topic sentence may appear in the **middle** of the paragraph and act as a transition between sentences in the beginning and those at the end. When the topic sentence appears at the **end** of a paragraph, it acts as a conclusion or as support for ideas already presented.

A topic sentence may take the form of a question: a method that immediately engages the reader. The subsequent sentences would respond to the topic sentence with explanations, details, facts, and evidence. In business writing, this method should be used sparingly and only when it is the most advantageous way to introduce a topic.

The Topic Sentence = main idea + elaboration

(See topic sentences, pages 90–92.)

- 1) Our company's increased production this year is due to the efforts of employees working the weekend shift.

topic sentence = increased production + weekend shift

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

topic sentence = three locations + global initiatives

NOTE: Introduce only the main idea in the topic sentence; do not include details that will be part of the body of the paragraph.

ORGANIZING IDEAS

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

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

METHODS OF PRESENTING IDEAS

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

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

General to Specific: With this method, a general idea is presented first followed by specific details and supportive information.

Example

To date, expansion into Southeast Asia has been ignored.

(This topic sentence is **general** and would be followed by specific details.)

Specific to General: With this method, a specific idea is presented first followed by more general information about the idea.

A consulting firm will be hired to assess the viability of business expansion into the Southeast Asian market with particular emphasis on the ratio of cost to profit.

(This topic sentence is **specific** and would be followed by general details.)

SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

The paragraphs below illustrate examples of **logical** and **chronological** formats. Each begins with a clear topic sentence (controlling idea). The body of each paragraph contains sentences that give important details elaborating on the main idea. (Topic sentences are in bold.)

Logical Order

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

topic
sentence

ideas
arranged
in logical
order

topic
sentence
repeated

Chronological Order

The company's increased production this year is due to the efforts of employees working the weekend shift. At the beginning of the year the company was seeking ways to increase productivity without incurring unmanageable expense. At a general meeting for all employees, the addition of a weekend shift was discussed and later voted on. After an overwhelming vote of acceptance, it was decided that a weekend shift would be made available to anyone wishing to earn overtime pay. This shift was then assigned, on a rotating basis, to those employees who applied. By year's end, we found that productivity had increased substantially as a direct result of the work of the employees on the weekend shift.

topic
sentence

ideas
arranged in
chronological
order

topic
sentence
repeated

THE BUSINESS LETTER

Each type of business correspondence has a specific design, tone, format, and level of formality suited to the purpose of the message and to the intended audience. Business letters are always formal. The format consists of letterhead, date, inside address, salutation, subject line (if necessary), complimentary close, and signature. Business letters should be clear, concise, and void of slang and jargon. Consisting usually of three or four paragraphs, business letters follow a set design where each paragraph deals with one idea and begins with a topic sentence that introduces that idea.

The sections of a Standard Business Letter (block Format)

Company Letterhead

Date

Inside Address

Salutation (Dear...)

Subject Line

Note: The writing samples included in this book use block format. Business letters have *left-aligned* text; reports, proposals, memos, and press releases have *justified* text.

Paragraph One states the purpose of the letter.

Paragraph Two outlines specific details.

Paragraph Three addresses issues and may suggest action.

Paragraph Four requests action or a response.

Complimentary Close and Signature

“To be persuasive we must be believable;
to be believable we must be creditable;
to be creditable we must be truthful.”

Edward R. Murrow

THE ART OF PERSUASIVE WRITING

In business, persuasive writing is integral to sales letters and proposals, as well as any other correspondence that attempts to convince a reader. Persuasive writing is a specific skill distinguished by a writer's ability to establish a clear premise and to present a series of proofs to support that premise.

A topic sentence containing the main premise usually appears at the beginning of a persuasive paragraph. The writer will then, in logical order, follow with sentences that both prove and support this main premise.

Examples:

Topic Sentence: general premise

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

Topic Sentence: specific premise

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

Topic Sentence: general premise

Today, English is the language of business worldwide.

Topic Sentence: specific premise

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

Although the above topic sentences are related in premise, they differ in content. Each **general** premise would be followed by sentences that, through specific references, support the topic. Each **specific** premise, more confined to a narrowed idea, would follow with sentences broadening the scope of the topic.

THE POWER OF SUBORDINATION (See Types of Sentences, pages 21–22.)

Below is a sample statement of argument:

It is important that the corporation makes progress in creating markets in Indonesia.

The writer can qualify this premise by introducing it with a subordinate clause that might also address an anticipated objection. The premise is set apart when placed after a subordinate clause.

(*Although, because, once, and therefore* act as subordinating conjunctions introducing the subordinate clauses.)

Examples: (*Subordinate clauses* are in italics.)

1) *Although the corporation has not yet established a corporate base in Indonesia*, it is still important that progress be made in creating markets in that region. (Subordinate clause addresses a concern upfront.)

2) Southeast Asia is a densely populated region *therefore establishing markets there is a priority*. (Subordinate clause is a qualifier.)

3) *Because Indonesia—a region of 250 million people—has the fourth largest population in the world*, it represents an ideal region for market expansion. (Subordinate clause appears first as an introduction.)

4) *Once a corporate presence has been established in Indonesia*, a full-blown marketing initiative will be implemented.

(Comma sets off the subordinate clause that appears first.)

5) A full-blown marketing initiative will be implemented *once a corporate presence has been established in Indonesia*.

(When an independent clause appears first, a comma is not needed.)

Examples (4) and (5) state the same idea; however, sentence (4) highlights the establishment of a corporate presence whereas sentence (5) highlights the idea of implementing a full-blown marketing initiative.

Which sentence construction is most effective? The answer lies in the writer's intent, which may depend on the original focus of the premise. To keep the reader engaged, vary the length of sentences. Excessive subordination can be tiring for the reader; alternatively, consider interspersing short, crisp sentences that make strong statements.

SAMPLE PERSUASIVE LETTER
(with components of a persuasive message)

subject line
introduces
the topic

Dear Mr. Singh:

Subject: English, The Global Language of Business

quotation,
statistics,
facts set up
premise

Levitt and Dubner, co-authors of *Freakanomics*, stated: “There are now more nonnative English speakers than native English speakers.” In China, for example, there are currently over 400 million people learning English. The top-ten English-speaking countries in the world have a total of 742 million people who have English as their secondary language. Of the seven billion people in the world, over half will soon have the need to become proficient in English. To address this growing trend and stay competitive, foreign companies and multinational corporations must make training in English business writing a priority.

topic
sentence and
premise

points of
argument

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

personal
touch:
writer as
authoritative
voice

Recently I toured Southeast Asia with stops in Bangkok, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hanoi. A significant educational movement was occurring in these cities with the learning of English at the core. Businesses were encouraging their employees take English proficiency tests and partake in English writing classes.

evidence
to support
premise

The need for training in English business writing is not restricted to foreign countries. Corporations in English-speaking countries are discovering a surprisingly low level of writing proficiency among employees, including university graduates. This may be because of an educational shift in the 1970s where the basics of grammar and composition were, in many cases, removed from school curricula.

reinforces
premise

Regardless of language orientation, culture, or geography, English is now firmly established as the language of global business. Progressively minded corporations are initiating strategies to increase the English business writing skills of their employees. Good writing is good business.

Regards,
Karen Carothers

“Sales letters are the life blood of most companies.”

J. Venolia

THE SALES LETTER

Professional sales letters are so important that many companies hire writers or agencies to compose them. However, it is useful for staff members to have the skills and confidence to write their own persuasive sales letters.

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

THE SALES FORMULA

Attention

Open with a statement of fact, a statistic, or a newsworthy announcement about your product or service. Indicate your in-depth knowledge of the client's business and ask questions to indicate that you have the client's interest in mind.

Interest

Deliver a strong sales message: outline the benefits of the product or service; offer testimonials from satisfied clients; offer sales samples or free products; suggest use of the product or service for a trial period.

Desire

Motivate the client by showing that the product or service you are offering creates profit, efficiency, and savings: benefits with strong appeal.

Action

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

“Knowing something about your customer is just as important as knowing everything about your product.”
H. Mackay

THE SALES LETTER

HINTS:

- ◆ Grasp the reader’s attention with a strong opening sentence.
- ◆ Use specific language to describe your product and its benefits.
- ◆ Offer proof of the benefits of your products or services.
- ◆ If price is a strongpoint or if a special discount is available, highlight this.
- ◆ Give the potential client a reason to consider the next step.
- ◆ Suggest a definite course of action.
- ◆ Initiate the delivery of a free sample; offer to conduct a presentation; arrange to send additional information. Make these offers available with a request response.

BUT:

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

Give a brief summary of your product or service. Focus on the client’s needs, which will create interest in moving to the next step.

SAMPLE SALES LETTER C: (BUSINESS TO BUSINESS)

Company Letterhead

Date: January 7, 2014

To: Raymond Liu, Assets Manager

From: Brent Adams, Account Manager

Subject: Greenlink Information Systems (GIS)

Dear Mr. Liu:

As an Assets Manager you understand the need for timely and accurate financial information. Our company is in the business of providing up-to-the-minute financial data to support the research and analysis required for sound investing.

At GIS we have sophisticated software tools that instantly connect our clients to our information base. Our unequaled resources come from the 5,000 employees in 15 countries who work round the clock daily to update critical financial data. With our user-friendly software platform, streaming pertinent information is a point-click away. In addition, our information technologists are always available to ensure that the informational needs of our clients are met immediately.

Our existing clients are from a variety of financial sectors: banks, investment houses, pension fund management companies, private equity firms, and others. These clients will attest to the sophistication and reliability of our information technology and to the extensive support we provide.

If you would like to talk about how GIS would enhance your research and data procurement capabilities, I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience. In the meantime, please visit our website (www.gis.rtl) to view our client list and testimonials.

Regards,
Brent Adams
Account Manager, GIS

memo format

states
purpose of
the letter

states precise
description of
service being
offered

persuasive
tone; details
of GIS
Systems

refers to
existing client
base as a
testimony

call to action;
website given
for further
details

RESPONSE TO A COMPLAINT

Respond swiftly to a letter of complaint. In the interest of retaining the customer or client, it is imperative to handle the complaint efficiently and professionally. Think of the response to a complaint as a public relations opportunity.

HINTS:

- ◆ Respond promptly and offer an apology.
- ◆ Thank the client upfront for his or her patience; reassert that the problem is rare and that it will be addressed immediately.
- ◆ Reinforce that your company values the client and will do whatever is necessary to resolve the complaint.
- ◆ Refer to the complaint including specifics such as time, date, reference numbers, and other important details.
- ◆ If the client is correct in the complaint, acknowledge this; if you believe the client to be in error, do not state this directly.
- ◆ If the client is incorrect in the claim, offer clarification; reassure the client that issuing a complaint was the right thing to do.
- ◆ Refer to company policy to set up guidelines.
- ◆ Outline the options for rectifying the problem.
- ◆ If possible, give a date by which the issue may be resolved.

BUT:

- ◆ Avoid reviewing all the details of the complaint and focus on the solution.
- ◆ Don't appear reluctant to solve the issue: be an enthusiastic problem solver.
- ◆ Don't make any references to legal liability in the initial response.

Note: the letter of refusal on page 110 provides an additional example of a response to a complaint (or request).

LETTER OF REFUSAL (B)

Company Letterhead

Date

Inside Address

Dear Mr. Stuart:

gentle
opening
expressing
appreciation

Thank you for taking the time to forward the detailed letter of appeal regarding the request for extended health coverage for your mother, Mrs. Dorothy Stuart.

soft lead-in

At XYZ Inc. customer service is of the utmost importance to us and we do everything in our power to satisfy the needs of our clients. Our claims department submitted your appeal to the Policy Holder who reached a final decision based on the following conditions for a medical claim:

two key
points
highlighted

- 1) The services requested are on the advice of a physician.
- 2) The services requested are medically necessary.

explanation
for refusal
is clear and
detailed

The doctor's recommendation letter that you provided satisfies the first condition for a claim. However, the additional care you request is not medical in nature, and, therefore, not medically necessary. It is clear by your detailed account of your mother's condition that she is in need of additional care, but this care is custodial and does not require the services of an RN or RNA. Therefore, the extra care requested for Mrs. Stuart does not qualify under the rules of her benefit plan.

emphasis
on care
being given

Please note that Mrs. Stuart will continue to receive nursing care mornings and afternoons covered by her existing plan. We at XYZ Inc. are sympathetic to your situation, but must adhere to the rules of the benefit plans we administer.

pleasant,
helpful tone
in closing

If we can provide additional information or answer any further questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Martha Crawford

Martha Crawford

Benefits, XYZ & Associates

TEXT MESSAGING FOR BUSINESS

Although text messaging has become the preferred format for short, direct communication in the wider business community, it is not a replacement for e-mail messaging; instead, it acts as an instant messaging convenience or as a complement to a more detailed e-mail message.

However, no formal rules for business text messaging exist. Therefore, the distinction between personal text messaging and business text messaging is unclear. Below are guidelines to follow to ensure that business text messages adhere to the commonly accepted rules of business communication.

- Avoid the use of emoticons and abbreviations.
- Compose business text messages with formal grammar and sentence structure.
- Keep the text message clear and concise.
- Address the text message recipient by his or her last name. If there is a close, less-formal relationship with the business associate, addressing by first name is acceptable.
- Use text messaging for specific short communication only.
- Choose the appropriate time to send a text message. Text messages should not be interruptive or be sent during nonbusiness hours. (Excessive, persistent text messaging is annoying and intrusive.)
- Do not use text messages for complex communications. In these cases, text messages may be used to alert the recipient that a detailed message will follow by e-mail.

Note: In sensitive situations, text messaging is a poor substitute for a phone conversation where the speaker's tone may be important to the spirit of the message.

Appropriate uses of a business text message:

- ✦ a request for a meeting
- ✦ a confirmation of a meeting time or of the receipt of a message
- ✦ a request for information needed immediately
- ✦ an alert to a detailed message or important document being forwarded
- ✦ a request for a convenient time for a phone conversation
- ✦ an alert to a sudden situation requiring immediate attention
- ✦ a request for a brief business conversation

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

THE MEMORANDUM

The **memo** was originally conceived to provide short, precise, direct communication to employees within a company without using the conventional formality common to a standard business letter. A memorandum will state the writer, the person or group being addressed, and the date and subject of the message.

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

HINTS:

- ◆ State the purpose of your memo in the subject line.
- ◆ Make the subject line clear and precise.
- ◆ A formal salutation and complimentary close are not required.
- ◆ Be concise and use short, direct sentences.
- ◆ Avoid jargon unless needed for an industry-specific message.
- ◆ Try to keep the length to one page, two if necessary.
- ◆ Include lists, graphs, and charts as supportive material.
- ◆ Address any anticipated objections at the close of a memo.
- ◆ If required, end the memo with a call to action.

NOTE:

- 1) In some cases, an initial beside the name of the person who wrote the memo is expected as verification of its author. Do not use signature-style font for initials. Add the actual initials, photocopy or scan the memo, and then distribute it.
- 2) List recipients of a memo according to a hierarchy of rank if this is expected. Otherwise, list recipients alphabetically.
- 3) Send a letter instead of a memo for formal external correspondence.

MEETING AGENDA AND MINUTES

THE MEETING AGENDA

Business meetings are an opportunity for live, interactive presentations in an atmosphere of collaboration. Creating a clear and inclusive **meeting agenda** is critical to the success of a business meeting.

AGENDA CHECKLIST

- ✓ Is the purpose of the meeting clearly stated?
- ✓ Has a list of attendees been created?
- ✓ Has a convenient time and place been arranged?
- ✓ Is the location of the meeting fully equipped and comfortable?
- ✓ Has a person been designated to take Minutes?

THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

Once the focus of the meeting is clear, consider the following:

- 1) actions and responses of the attendees during the meeting
- 2) general outcomes that are expected
- 3) follow-up activities or future action to be taken by attendees

THE ATTENDEES

Business meetings should be scheduled to ensure that key people can attend. People who cannot make a meeting may be able to arrange “virtual” attendance. Also, a person unable to attend may be invited to submit, in writing, concerns and opinions to be shared at the meeting.

TIME AND LOCATION

Strong consideration should be given to both the **day** and the **time** to ensure productivity. Mondays suit meetings that plan for the week ahead; Fridays are best for meetings that reflect on the summation of a week’s work. Breaks during the meeting should be planned to keep participants fresh. The **location** of a meeting should be convenient to the attendees and be fully equipped for presentations and discussions.

THE AGENDA

The agenda helps prepare attendees for a meeting. It should contain all the pertinent information about the meeting and be handed out at least two days in advance.

THE PRESS RELEASE



Most companies may, on occasion, have to produce a press release to inform the public or the business community of a special announcement or important corporate event. A company may have their own press release template and assign someone in-house to write the release or they may use the services of an outside agency.

A press release has to be newsworthy to spark the interest of the media. To accomplish this, the writer must think like a journalist because writing a press release is essentially a journalistic enterprise. Journalists are often assigned to special departments (travel, technology, etc.) and welcome press releases. However, if a press release is poorly written or uninspiring, the media may not be interested.

Unlike most written business communication that is often solely informational, a press release requires an element of creativity to peak the interest of a broad audience. If a press release is not intended for general release to all media, the appropriate media group should be chosen to suit the nature of the announcement.

Some press releases cultivate widespread interest because of their subject matter. For example, a breakthrough cancer-fighting drug, the merger of major corporations, or an innovative advancement in technology may be of great interest to both the business community and the general public. Some announcements are of interest only to a specific industry or sector; however, with a little creativity, these too can be made informative and interesting to a broader audience.

It is critical that the facts in the press release be accurate and that a “release of information” be obtained. Submitting inaccurate or false information could seriously undermine the credibility of the company.

Note: A press release may not always be of interest to a journalist or a media outlet. Journalists like press releases that offer a compelling story that sparks the interest of the business community or the general public. If the announcement is only of medium interest, then it is the writer’s job to compose a well-written, properly formatted press release with an angle that creates excitement.

SUMMARY:

- ◆ If possible, address the application letter to a specific person; if a direct recipient is not known, use titles such as “Hiring Manager” or “Director of Personnel”, etc. (Avoid *Dear Sir/Madam*.)
- ◆ If necessary, add a Subject Line for clarification.
- ◆ Avoid using one generic letter for all applications; compose a specific letter for each job application.
- ◆ Keep the application letter to one page.
- ◆ Use standard letter format with inside address, a formal salutation, and paragraph structure.
- ◆ In the opening paragraph state the job for which you are applying and where the job was posted.
- ◆ Mention a mutual contact if relevant.
- ◆ Take the *here's why you need me* approach rather than simply stating you are seeking employment.
- ◆ Show that you are knowledgeable about the company to which you are applying.
- ◆ Be concise but inclusive: highlight key aspects of the accompanying résumé and any personal details that may be of interest.
- ◆ Lengthy facts and superlatives about your abilities and accomplishments are not interesting and should appear subtly in the résumé; instead, include more instinctive statements of ability with examples.
- ◆ Start and finish strongly. Catch the reader's interest in the beginning and end with a definite follow-up plan.
- ◆ Proofread for spelling and grammar errors; check the cover letter for wordiness or redundant statements.

PROPOSAL & REPORT WRITING

This Proposal & Report Writing section includes:

- 1) steps for writing a proposal and a report
- 2) types of proposals and reports
- 3) a comparison of a proposal to a report
- 4) an outline of the components of a proposal and a report
- 5) a sample of a proposal and two samples of short reports

NOTE: Due to space restrictions, full-length proposals and reports are not offered; however, the basic structure of a proposal and a report is illustrated. Certain parts of a proposal and a report are common to both; for convenience, these have been repeated in the two respective sections.

A formal proposal may be **external** or **internal**. An internal proposal is often less formal and, in some cases, written as a memorandum. The basic purpose of a proposal is to persuade. The amount of detail in the proposal will vary according to its scope.

The length of a formal report depends on the scope of the subject. A corporate annual report, for example, may be over 100 pages in length and may be professionally designed and bound. On the other hand, an internal report may be simply a one-page memo written by an employee and distributed throughout a company by e-mail.

If you intend to compose a detailed external formal proposal or report, it is advisable that you refer to a resource that deals specifically with formal proposals and reports.

This section includes examples (in brief) of the following:

- 1) a formal proposal
- 2) a progress report (internal)
- 3) a recommendation report (internal)

SAMPLE PROPOSAL: Executive Summary**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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

states
purpose

RESEARCH TO DATE

In December 2013, an initial study of the Southeast Asian region was conducted to ascertain the following:

subheading

- 1) Countries and cities as initial target markets
- 2) The nonnative English-speaking population of Southeast Asian countries
- 3) The English-language proficiency in these regions
- 4) The need for training in English business writing in multinational corporations in major cities of this region
- 5) The number of colleges and universities in Southeast Asia
- 6) The cost of expansion throughout Southeast Asia

key points
from body
section

POPULATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

In this region, seven countries including nine major cities are target markets with a total population of 512 million. The population of the major cities in this area is approximately 54 million. Hundreds of multinational corporations are active in this region representing a direct market for EBE products and services. In addition, there are more than 1,000 post-secondary educational institutions where *The Essential Handbook For Business Writing* would be marketed as a textbook.

BUSINESS REVENUE POTENTIAL

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

persuasive
message

To achieve these revenues, it is necessary to obtain investment capital and to establish a sufficiently staffed base of operations in Southeast Asia. The timing for such expansion is in keeping with the growing worldwide demand for English writing instruction.

creates
urgency

VISUAL DESIGN BASICS

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

CREATING A DOCUMENT



write copy

composition

create headings and subheadings



create text layout (grids)

arrangement

use justified or left-alignment for body text



enhance document with images

images and graphics

integrate text and art in harmony



select serif and sans serif fonts

design

create contrasts: art, space, text



proofread copy

revision

check appearance: balance of graphics and text

MEMORANDUM REPORTS

For internal reports, memo format is preferred. Dividing the information into sections with headings and subheadings will arrange ideas logically and make the document easy to navigate.

HINTS:

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

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

A PROGRESS REPORT

A **Progress Report** is usually an update of ongoing activity. It gives a detailed description of the current situation and states the work underway. It may also outline existing or foreseeable problems and describe future action.

A RECOMMENDATION REPORT

A **Recommendation Report** is analytical in nature and may be written to offer a solution to a problem, to create a change in strategy, or to institute a new business initiative. Consisting of carefully reviewed information, the report may make several recommendations.

NOTE: The examples of reports on the next two pages are abbreviated examples. Actual memo reports may be several pages in length.

THE IMPACT OF ART IN A DOCUMENT

Used properly, art is a creative and efficient communication tool that supports and reinforces textual information. For example, adding a chart or a graph to complement text presents easy to comprehend facts and figures.

Adding art enhances a document in the following ways:

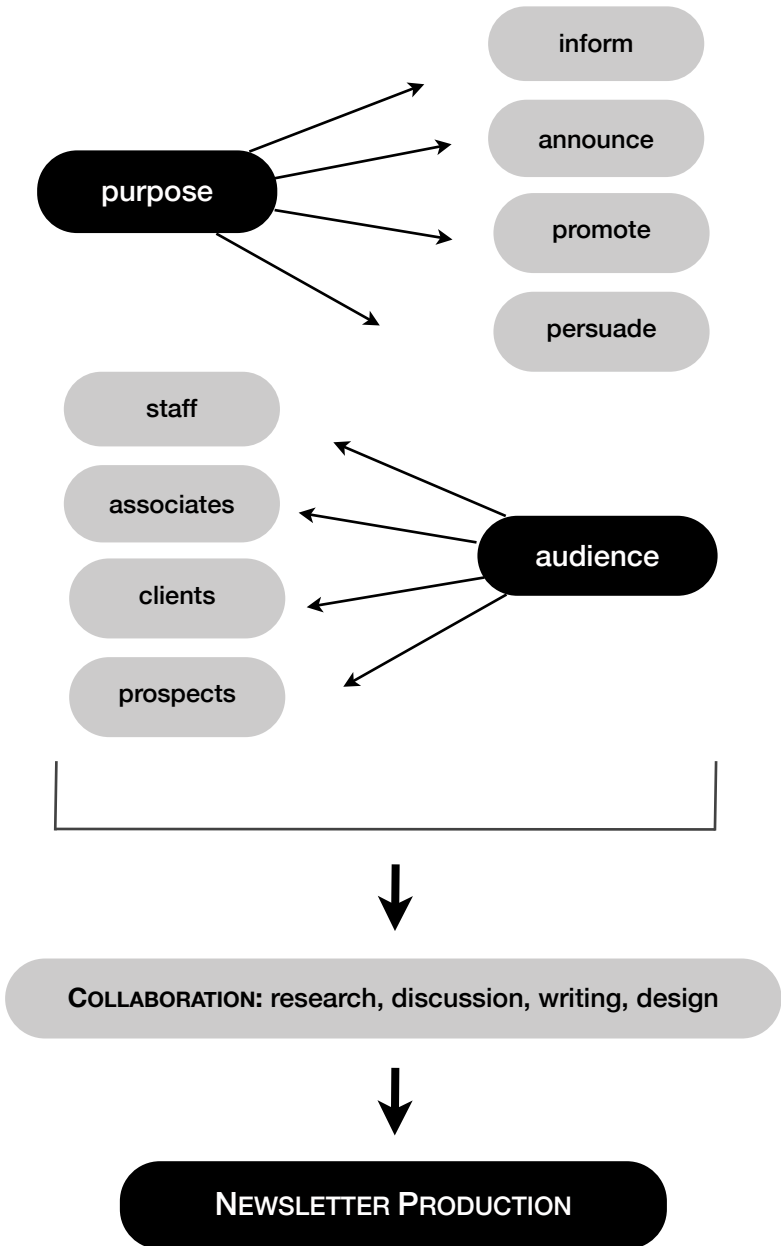
- Art creates a visual communication of information.
- Art complements textual information.
- Art relays large amounts of information instantly.
- Art creates eye-catching displays.
- Art breaks up a text-heavy document.

To use art effectively, two elements must be considered: the information content and the appearance.

- 1) The **information content** of an image should clarify or define the information in the body text.
- 2) The **appearance** of an image depends on its size, its shape, and its orientation on the page. Tone and contrast effect the way the reader reacts to the image. With simple photo adjustment tools, images can be altered to suit.

The merging of text and art must appear seamless. An image should blend with the text creating a logical association between the two. There are three elements to combining text and art:

- 1) **POSITIONING:** An image should be placed close to the corresponding text.
- 2) **VISUAL FIT:** The integration of the image into the text should be balanced.
- 3) **SIZE:** An image should be in proportion to the page.

NEWSLETTERS

NEWSLETTERS

A newsletter is an important communication tool for making an announcement, featuring a new product or service, updating staff and clients on new developments, or simply keeping in touch with associates within an industry. Newsletters are often composed in-house by staff and may consist of more than one page. PDF format is standard for newsletters sent by e-mail.

Deciding on the best design depends on your message and your audience. Consider the following:

- Is a photo or image useful to explain the main idea?
- Which layout best conveys the message?
- How many text columns make for easy reading?
- Which text alignment presents best in the layout?
- Which fonts best suit the message?
- Are charts and graphs useful to support a main idea?
- What should be the balance between text and graphics?

Newsletters generally fall into two categories:

- 1) **Corporate Newsletters:** These are sent to employees, clients, or members of a common group.
- 2) **Promotional Newsletters:** These are intended to promote or solicit business by targeting a database of potential clients, subscribers, or purchasers.

The design and content of a newsletter depends on the nature of the information and the intended audience. If a special newsletter is created to announce a new product or service, a single photo or a collection of photos may be included. Financial newsletters are often heavy on text with the addition of charts or graphs to illustrate specific data. To be consistent with regularly sent newsletters, many companies create a template with logo and defined text boxes, columns, and layouts.

NOTE: Newsletters are seldom the work of one person. Collaboration on research, writing, and design is standard, and sometimes includes outside consultants.