Professional Skills Development 101
Business Writing

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Business Writing

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Presented by
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Choosing a Correspondence Mode

- Letters
- Memoranda
- E-Mail

Each mode of correspondence has a different effect on the reader.

Letters and Memos

- Provide a paper trail
- Seem more personal than e-mail
- Make your project more visible to colleagues
- Include a signature—may be legally binding
E-Mail

- Fast becoming the preferred mode of communication
- Least formal of the three modes

Letters

- Used with external recipients
- Used to initiate correspondence
- Used to formally acknowledge the transmittal of information
- Used with lay readers (vendors, clients, stakeholders, shareholders)
- Use of abbreviations and acronyms usually defined
Letters

- Ideally one page (more than three, consider a report format)
- Delivery – three days to a week
- Security – protected by privacy laws

Memos

- Use for internal correspondence
- Use with someone with whom you already have an established relationship
- Create a paper trail
- Audience is mostly business colleagues
**Memos**

- Abbreviations and acronyms allowed
- Length – generally limited to single page
- Delivery – depends on in-house mail procedures
- Security – depends on ethics of co-workers and whether memo was enclosed in an envelope

**E-Mail**

- Used for both internal and external correspondence
- Limit to one visible screen (no scrolling)
- Used when speed of delivery is important (Can be delayed by malfunctioning equipment or excessively large attachments)
E-Mail

- Security – HUGE issue!
  Can be tampered with/read by others
  Can be sent/forwarded to many
  May be recorded in company’s back-up system
  Is company property

Which Mode?
Letter, memo, or E-mail?
Planning Considerations

- Purpose – What do you want to happen?
- Audience – What do your recipients want? What special biases or concerns might they have?
- Writing Technique – What approach should you take (direct, persuasive, etc.)? No matter what mode of correspondence you choose, plan it first!

Appearance Counts!

You want the reader’s first impression to be a good one. Is your letter or memo properly formatted?
Commonly Used Letter Formats

• Block style
  All letter parts begin at the left margin
  Time efficient style
  Open or mixed punctuation

• Modified block style
  Date and closing lines begin at center point
  Open or mixed punctuation

Memo Format

TO:   Forms Steering Committee
FROM:  Allgood Day
DATE:  March 2, 2017
SUBJECT:  New Agenda Form

The agenda form drafted at our last meeting is attached and is ready for testing. As we discussed, please use the form for several of your meetings to see if it meets your needs. When we meet again in July, we will discuss any needed modifications.
Five Cs of an Effective Document

• Clear
• Concise
• Correct
• Courteous
• Complete

Clarity

Are your thoughts presented logically using familiar words?

Have you conveyed the message you intended?

Compare the following:

No Parking: Reserved for Our Customers

No Parking Reserved for Our Customers
Clarity

Are your thoughts presented logically using familiar words?

Have you conveyed the message you intended?

Compare the following:

Love people. Cook them good food.

Love people. Cook them. Good food.

Man asked to clean up after dog pulls gun.
“...let the words flow out naturally and informally in phrases and sentences with the general tone and rhythm of the language actually used by men [and women] rather than stuffed shirts.”


Which of the following is easier to understand?

- A substantial segment of the population
- Fully cognizant of
- Effectuate (or implement) the policy
- Interrogate him
- Pursuant to your request
- Many people
- Know well
- Carry out the policy
- Ask him
- As you requested
Conciseness

• Conciseness is saying what you have to say in the fewest possible words without sacrificing completeness and courtesy.
• Conciseness and brevity are not the same. A document may be brief without being concise. It may also be concise without being brief.

Ways to Achieve Conciseness

• Avoid trite expressions.
• Avoid unnecessary repetition and word expressions.
• Include only relevant facts.
• Avoid stating things the reader already knows or that are obvious.
• Change your wording—when a single word works, use it rather than a clause.
What Can You Cut?

• Permit me the opportunity to thank you for your letter which I just received. In reply, I wish to state that we shall be very glad to send you the Noise Ordinance in accordance with your request.
• Enclosed is the Noise Ordinance you requested.

What Can You Cut?

• buying new machines which are expensive
• buying expensive new machines
• using processes that are outmoded
• using outmoded processes
• saving work that does not need to be done
• saving unnecessary work
Correctness

• Have you verified all dates, numbers, and names?
• Have you checked your document to be sure it is mechanically correct by checking
  – Spelling?
  – Punctuation?
  – Grammar?
  – Word choice?

Spelling

• Do not rely on your word processing spell checker to find all of your spelling errors, but always use it.
• Using spell check is not a substitute for proofreading your document.
• Shortcuts U use in text messages R not acceptable 4 business writing.
• If possible, have someone else read your document before you send it.
But I Used the Spell Check!

- The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast.
- A songfest was hell at the First Methodist Church on Wednesday.
- The Thursday night potluck supper will be followed by prayer and medication.
Punctuation

Proper punctuation helps in avoiding run-on sentences. A run-on sentence is two or more complete sentences that are run together without punctuation or with improper punctuation.

Example: Luke did not know what to say, he was completely caught by surprise.
Comma, Comma, Comma

• Use a comma between the clauses of a compound sentence when the clauses are joined by *and, but, or, nor,* or *for* if there are not other commas in the sentence.

• **Simple sentences:** John is the director. He supervises the workers.

• **Compound sentence:** John is the director, and he supervises the workers.

Comma, Comma, Comma

• A sentence with two verbs is not necessarily a compound sentence.

**Examples:**
She has gone through the good times and has put up with the not-so-good times.
The city and county have been bargaining since last summer but have been unable to come to terms.
Comma, Comma, Comma

• When one or both of the independent clauses that make up a compound sentence contain commas, a semicolon is used before the coordinate conjunction.

Example:
Bart Barton, the commission chairman, summoned reporters; and he announced that he had submitted his resignation.

Comma, Comma, Comma

• When one or both of the independent clauses that make up a compound sentence contain commas, a semicolon is used before the coordinate conjunction.

Example:
In 2005 the number of violations peaked at 2,345; but by the end of 2010, that number was cut in half.
Comma, Comma, Comma

• Introductory parenthetical words, introductory clauses, and introductory phrases of more than four words are set off by commas.

Examples of parenthetical words:
Accordingly, first, naturally, obviously, however, nevertheless, remember, finally, so far, on the other hand, in fact, yes, no

Comma, Comma, Comma

• Dependent clauses at the beginning of a sentence have a subject and verb, but they do not carry the main thought of the sentence. They are set off by commas.

Examples:
When the voting begins, there can be no discussion.
As you requested, we have cleaned up the debris.
Comma, Comma, Comma

• When the dependent clause comes after the independent clause, it is usually not set off by commas.

Examples:
There can be no discussion when the voting begins.
We have cleaned up the debris as you requested.

Comma, Comma, Comma

• All introductory phrases of more than four words and introductory phrases containing a verb, regardless of length, are set off by commas.

Examples:
At the beginning of the case, both attorneys seemed to have minor jitters.
Decided in 2012, the case had a sweeping impact on zoning violation cases.
Comma, Comma, Comma

• An introductory phrase of four or fewer words which does not contain a verb or verbal form is not set off by commas.

Example:
In 2010 a new Consent to Inspect form was introduced.

Comma, Comma, Comma

• Use a comma to set off explanatory words such as Inc., Jr., names of states when used with the city name, and the year when used with the month and day.

Examples:
Just Right, Inc., has been in business for 40 years.

In Peachtree City, Georgia, golf carts frequently share the roadway.

September 11, 2001, is a day that will not be forgotten.
Comma, Comma, Comma

• Use a comma to set off two or more adjectives (descriptive words).

Examples:
The loud, irritating sounds of the construction equipment kept the neighborhood residents awake until the wee hours.

The Neglected Semicolon

The semicolon marks a major break in a sentence—longer than a comma, but not quite as long as a period.

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses when there is no connective word.

Example:
Election returns are being reported now; we will know the winner soon.
The Neglected Semicolon

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb such as consequently, furthermore, so, however, etc.

Example:
Everyone agreed that the judgment was in order; however, the judge did not allow it.

The Neglected Semicolon

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses joined by transitional expressions. A comma follows the transitional expression.

Example:
Second and third marriages are becoming increasingly prevalent; accordingly, relationships among family members become extremely complex.
The Neglected Semicolon

• Use a semicolon to connect a compound sentence with a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for) which has commas within one of the independent clauses.

Example:
When you receive your registration form, please return it promptly; but do not send your check yet.

The Neglected Semicolon

• Use a semicolon to separate items in a series when the items contain internal punctuation.

Examples:
The meetings were held in Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; and Nashville, Tennessee.
The Zoning Board will hold meetings on April 25, 2017; May 13, 2017; and January 5, 2017.
The Neglected Semicolon

• When expressions *for example, that is*, *namely*, and *i.e.* join two independent clauses, use a semicolon before the expression and a comma after it.

**Example:**
The company will expand the number of models offered; for example, they will offer a small, low-cost import car.

Just Between You and *(I, Me)*, Let’s Get Personal in This Case

• A **pronoun** is a word used in place of a noun or more than one noun. The word to which a pronoun refers is the **antecedent** of the pronoun.

Sally said *she* was not feeling well. Sally *is* the antecedent of the pronoun *she*. 
Personal Pronouns

• Refer to
  – First person (I) Speaking
  – Second person (you) Spoken to
  – Third person (it, he, she) Spoken about

• Have gender
  – Masculine
  – Feminine
  – Neutral

Personal Pronouns

• Have number
  – Singular (I, you, he, she, it)
  – Plural (we, you, they)

• Have case
  – Nominative (I, you, he, she, it)
  – Objective (me, you, him, her, it)
  – Possessive (my, mine, your, yours, his, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs)
### Nominative Case – Pronoun acts as subject of the verb

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>We</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td>He, she, it</td>
<td>We, you, they</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Objective Case – Pronoun acts as object of verb or preposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>Us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td>Him, her, it</td>
<td>Us, you, them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possessive Case – Pronoun shows possession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td>My, mine</td>
<td>Our, ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>Your, yours</td>
<td>Your, yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td>His, her, hers, its</td>
<td>Their, theirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pronouns as Subjects

- The subject of a verb is in the nominative case. To determine the correct pronoun form in a compound subject, try each subject separately with the verb, adapting the form as necessary.

**Incorrect:** Sally and me will be leaving.
**Correct:** Sally and I will be leaving.
Pronouns as Subjects

• When a pronoun is used with a noun (as in *we girls*), say the sentence without the noun.

  Incorrect:  Us girls enrolled in the seminar.
  Correct:    We girls enrolled in the seminar.

Pronouns as Predicate Nominatives

• A predicate nominative is a noun or pronoun that refers to the same thing as the subject of the sentence; the nominative case of the pronoun is used.

• Common forms of the verb *be* (am, is, are, was, were, have been, had been) are followed by nominative pronouns (I, he, she, we, they, who).
Pronouns as Predicate Nominatives

• Common forms of the verb be (am, is, are, was, were, have been, had been) are followed by nominative pronouns (I, he, she, we, they, who).

Examples:
Was it he who won the grand prize?
It was I who answered the call.
If it had been he, I might not have talked to him.

Pronouns as Objects of Verbs

• The object of a verb is in the objective case.
• The object answers the question “what?” or “whom?” after an action verb.

Examples:
They called him. (called whom?)
They wrote her a letter. (wrote whom?)
The team selected her. (selected whom?)
Pronouns as Objects of Verbs

• With compound objects, use the pronoun alone to help you distinguish the correct pronoun.

Incorrect: They consulted my brother and I.
Correct: They consulted my brother and me.

Incorrect: Mom sent he and she gifts.
Correct: Mom sent him and her gifts.

Pronouns as Objects of Prepositions

• The object of a preposition is in the objective case. Try each object separately with the preposition to distinguish the correct form.

Commonly Used Prepositions:
  about, since beside, toward, between, over, after, within, from, but (meaning except)
Pronouns as Objects of Prepositions

Incorrect: Andrea will ride with you and I.
Correct: Andrea will ride with you and me.

Incorrect: Will you do a favor for Laura and he?
Correct: Will you do a favor for Laura and him?

Compound Personal Pronouns

• Compound personal pronouns are those that end in “self” or “selves.” Examples include myself, himself, herself, itself.
• They are either reflexive or intensive.
• They are never used as the subject of a verb.
Reflexive Pronouns

• Refer to subject and direct the action of the verb back to the subject.

Example:
Sara enjoyed herself at the party.
He asked himself if the money he made was worth the effort.

Intensive Pronouns

• Emphasize a noun or another pronoun
• Consider eliminating when writing concisely

Example:
Did you decorate the room yourself?
Did you decorate the room?
Compound Personal Pronouns

NOTE: Never use “hisself” for “himself” or “theirselves” for “themselves.”

Collective Nouns - name a group of words or things that are considered to be a unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One fourth</th>
<th>Jury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>One fourth</td>
<td>Jury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>Two thirds</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee</td>
<td>Gang</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>Duo</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Panel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collective Nouns

• Most collective nouns take singular verbs because the group is acting as a unit.
• Plural verbs are used when it is clear that the members of the group are acting individually rather than as a group.
• When in doubt, use a singular verb.

Examples:
A herd of goats is running through the yard.
A flock of geese were screeching noisily.
The committee is meeting tonight.
The group were filling out applications, and each would be interviewed.
The orchestra were putting on their uniforms.
Commonly Confused Words

- accept (verb)—receive willingly, agree to, consent to
- except (preposition)

- I will accept the assignments that are given to me.
- Everyone except John attended the meeting.

Commonly Confused Words

- advice (noun)—opinion, counsel, aid, help
- advise (verb)—to offer opinions, recommendations, or advice

- He did not pay attention to the advice of his father.
- I advise you to contact your attorney immediately.
Commonly Confused Words

- affect (verb)—to influence
  - How will this affect my evaluation?

- effect (noun)—result, outcome
  - The effect was not the one intended.

- effect (verb)—to cause to happen
  - We will effect the change when the new equipment arrives.

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Commonly Confused Words

- among—use for three or more
  - The awards were divided among the clubs participating.

- between—use for two
  - The Member of the Year Award competition was between Sally and Jim.
Commonly Confused Words

• farther (adjective)—physical distance
  • It is farther from your house to the gym than from mine.

• further (adjective)—additional
  • We need to research this further before we come to a conclusion.

Commonly Confused Words

• irregardless—NOT A WORD!
  • Regardless of what we think, the board will decide as it wants.

• regardless (adverb)—without regard for objections; anyway
Commonly Confused Words

- its (adjective)—possessive form of the pronoun “it”
- it’s (noun/verb)—contraction for “it is”
- The stress is taking its toll on the workers.
- It’s too late to be concerned about the weather.

Commonly Confused Words

- can (verb)—to express ability
- may (verb)—to express permission
- You can take the interstate now that it is no longer closed.
- You may travel at higher speeds on the super highway.
Commonly Confused Words

- sit (verb)—to be seated or to rest
- set (verb)—to place or put something

• Please sit in the chair closest to the door.
• He set his cell phone on the table, but he did not use it.

Courteous Correspondence

“Kindness is the oil that reduces friction between people.”

Major causes of discourtesy:

- Anger – “We cannot understand why . . .”
- Accusations – “You neglected to . . .”
- Unflattering implications – “Work you claim . . .”
Courteous Correspondence

• “Please” and “thank you” are always appropriate.
• Try to find a positive way to deliver your message, even if the message is negative.
• Have a co-worker read your message and evaluate the tone.

Courteous Tone

• Negative
  Since you failed to respond on time, your group’s request could not be placed on the agenda.

• Positive
  Your group’s request can be placed on the agenda for the next meeting on May 15.
Courteous Tone

• Negative

We cannot pay this bill in one lump sum as you requested.

• Positive

We can clear up the balance in six months by paying you in monthly installments of $20.

Courteous Tone

• Negative

We are not open on Saturday and Sunday.

• Positive

We are open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Friday.
Completeness

• Does your document have all of the essential components?
• Have you included the necessary details?
  – Who?
  – What?
  – When?
  – Where?
  – Why?

A celebration of 30
Thursday, April 25
First Baptist Church
751 Green St., NW

$25 individual reservation
$250 designated table for eight
$1,000 sponsorships (organizations or individuals)

5:30 Reception, book signings, exhibits, fellowship

JOIN US! Bring others! Receive a copy of Bruce Gourley’s new

Please make your reservation by calling 1-87
Completeness

• Does your conclusion
  – Tell the reader what to do next and when?
  – End positively?

Gender-biased language is language that, either in grammatical use or direct statement, omits women or men and/or enforces masculine and feminine stereotypes.
### Gender-Fair Use of Language

#### Exclusionary Examples
- Chairman/chairwoman
- Congressman/congresswoman
- Policeman/policewoman
- Mailman

#### Inclusionary Alternatives
- Chair, coordinator, moderator, chairperson
- Congressional representative
- Police officer
- Postal worker, letter carrier

### Gender-Fair Use of Language

#### Exclusionary Examples
- Mankind
- A man’s job
- The common man
- Man the controls

#### Inclusionary Alternatives
- Humanity, people, human beings
- A difficult task, an arduous job
- The average person
- Work the controls
CHECKLIST FOR CLEAR WRITING

Use this checklist to critique your documents before distributing them.

CONTENT

_____ All necessary information is included (everything the reader needs to know).

_____ Information is accurate.

_____ Numbers and dates are correct.

_____ Names are spelled correctly.

_____ Reader action is specified (i.e., what do you want the reader to do?).

_____ Message is a good representation of my department.

HOW WRITTEN

_____ Includes no unnecessary words.

_____ Easy to follow.

_____ Logical flow to sentences and paragraphs.

_____ Positive language is used.

_____ Gender-neutral language is used.

_____ Conversational tone.

_____ Correct grammar.

_____ Correct sentence structure.

_____ Correct punctuation.

_____ Correct spelling.
Have you read your document at least twice—once for meaning and a second time for correctness of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and word choice?

Does your document answer the Ws that readers may want to know (who, what, when, where, and why)?
Thank You!