Effective Written Communication

Working to support our military veterans in cooperation with Accenture

Published May 19, 2014

Business writing

Business writing is the writing style used by businesses for internal and external communications.

Business writing is characterized by the following attributes:

- Direct, formal or semi-formal tone
- Concise structure
- Economy of words
- Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Typically avoids slang, colloquialisms or regional vernacular (with the exceptions of writing for advertising, marketing or sales)

If done well, business writing will use clear and concise language to quickly convey ideas, actions or requests.

Good business writing is a direct reflection of the author's skill and professionalism and, in turn, the quality of the company that he or she represents.

To create a good impression, you can learn to be an effective business writer.

Keys to effective business writing

To convey your intended message effectively, abide by the following four keys to writing in the business world:

Know the purpose of the communication.	Know the point you want to make when you are communicating and get to the key messages/questions as clearly and concisely as possible. Are you providing information, asking a question or making a request?
Make your message fit your audience.	Tailor your message to your audience (the person or people receiving the message). To do this, ask yourself two questions: What does my audience already know? What does my audience need to know?
Use appropriate tone and language.	Always use appropriate language for your audience. Never swear in the workplace and avoid being too casual or familiar with coworkers and customers.
Use good grammar and proofread for errors.	Always use good sentence structure, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Be sure to write in full sentences without using acronyms and jargon. Proofread and spell-check your writing to make sure it is error free.

Know your audience

Before starting to write any business communication, there are four essential characteristics you should know about your audience:

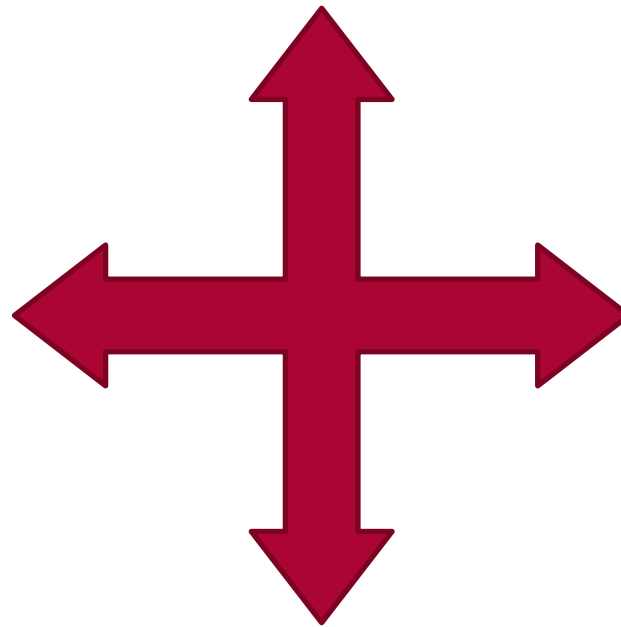| **Member diversity**	**Group composition**	**Topic knowledge**	**Issues of concern**
Understand the age, gender and nationality of your audience members.	Identify the business groups, seniority and responsibilities of your audience members.	Adapt the content and style of writing to your audience, based on members' prior knowledge of the subject.	Address the audience's reason for reading what you have written.

Tailor your tone

Choosing the correct tone of communication is very important in business writing. The following are the four most commonly used tones in the business world:

Direct

Economical and to-the-point; used for superiors.

Informal

Casual, but professional tone; used for peers and coworkers.

Formal

Serious, respectful tone; used for customers, clients and the public.

Instructional

Clear about expectations and actions to take; used for subordinates.

Email tips to remember

All emails sent in a business setting are professional documents and need to use the appropriate tone, language and content. The following are some important do's and don'ts when writing and sending professional emails:

Things to do	Things not to do
✓ Address and close the email appropriately.	✗ Write an email as if you are having a conversation.
✓ State your intent before going into details.	✗ Forward emails with confidential data or inappropriate content.
✓ Call out actions the recipient needs to take.	✗ Use slang or terms unfamiliar to the recipient.
✓ Use good sentence structure, punctuation, grammar and spelling.	✗ Use emoticons (symbols expressing emotions) or chat room terms in business messages.
✓ Proofread and spell-check.	✗ Use all capital letters, exclamation points, underlining or bold type to convey a stern message.
✓ Use lists and formatting to call out important points.	

Email reminders

When writing emails, remember the following:

- Do not assume that email is private or secure. An email can be forwarded to anyone without your knowledge or consent.

- Only use approved methods for communicating secure information to colleagues and customers.

- Avoid sending large file attachments, spam or personal emails to your colleagues.

- Do not select **Reply All** to emails with a large list of recipients.

- Before clicking **Send** on an email, be sure to re-read your email for grammar and messaging, and verify that you have the correct recipients included.

- Do not put anything in an email that you would not want somebody to see.

Instant messaging (IM) in the workplace

IM is best used for brief, text-based communications (for example, asking a coworker if they are available to meet with you). When using IM at work, remember the following:

- Obey all corporate policies on the use or downloading of instant message applications.

- Act accordingly because you are still in the workplace.

- Do not post away messages that are not professional; use standard "Away," "Busy" and "In a Meeting" messages.

- Do not use IM to communicate personal or confidential information — IM conversations are often tracked by companies.

- Double-check each message before it is sent — nothing good can come of sending a message to the wrong recipient.

- Turn off notifications and sounds.

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Final tips

Professional writing is key to conveying information and opinions, demonstrating authority, and representing your organization favorably. Keep in mind the following tips when writing in the workplace:

- Thinking from your audience's perspective will help you tailor your message based on how members will receive and interpret it.

- Demonstrating strong grammatical skills can establish credibility with your audience and strengthen your message.

- Use the appropriate tone for your audience.

- Work email and instant messaging tools should only be used for professional communication.