

Business Writing

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Developed by: Vic Weatherall

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Vic Weatherall

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About this document

Use this document as a reference guide for all of your business writing. This document was developed as a supplement to a 1-day business writing seminar. All of the main points in the seminar are covered here.

A general knowledge of the English language is required to understand this information.

For ease of use, this document generally follows the organization of the seminar:

1. Chapter 1 introduces the basic concepts required for effective and efficient business writing.
2. Chapter 2 describes the contents of memos, letters, short reports, and electronic mail (e-mail).
3. Chapter 3 describes a process for planning and writing your business documents.
4. Chapter 4 provides the tools you need to write your draft document.
5. Chapter 5 provides some guidelines on how to edit effectively and how to use your computer to help you edit.
6. Chapter 6 discusses some of the major “tricks and traps” of business writing.
7. The appendix contains a basic style guide to aid you in your writing.
8. The bibliography lists some useful writing resources available in print and on the internet.

You will probably find “Appendix: A style guide” to be the most useful part of this document because it contains many examples of problems you encounter every day.

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Chapter 1: The basics

This chapter introduces the basic concepts required for effective and efficient business writing:

1. key principles and approaches to business writing
2. various forms of written communication
3. “Seven C’s” of business writing

Key principles and approaches to business writing

The key principles and approaches to business writing are as follows:

- All writing is basically the same—good communication is universal to all forms of writing.
- Always plan your writing.
- Good writing requires good background material—you cannot turn garbage into gold.
- Collect all of your information *before* you start writing.
- Learn or develop writing standards and follow them consistently.
- Edit ruthlessly—conciseness is the goal.
- Do not worry about making it perfect the first time around—get the content right first.
- Obtain a standard dictionary for your personal use. Your dictionary should have extensive definitions and include a section on punctuation for quick reference.
- The only way to become good at writing is practice, practice, and more practice!

Forms of written communication

There are many forms of written communication:

- memos
- letters
- reports
- e-mail
- books
- newspapers and newsletters
- magazines
- journals
- scripts
- brochures and flyers
- coupons
- fact sheets
- signs and posters
- forms
- invoices and statements
- instruction sheets
- user and technical manuals
- technical specifications
- training materials such as tutorials
- web pages

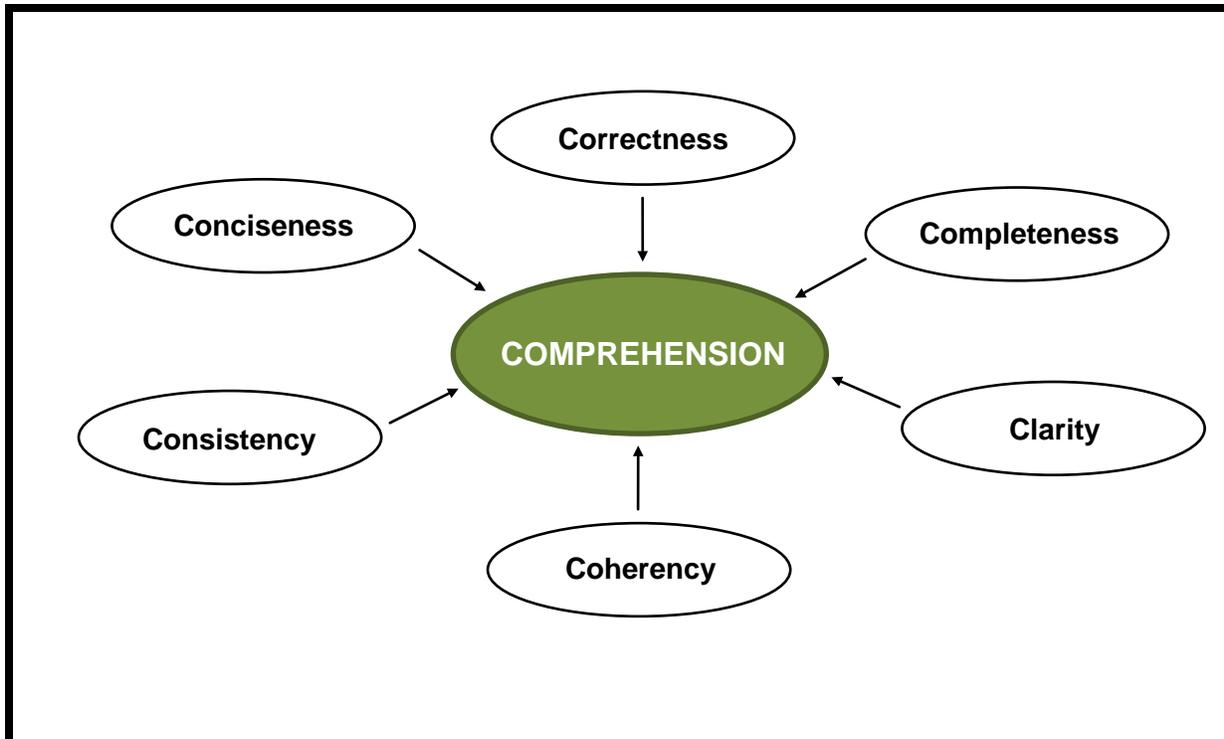
This document course covers the first four: memos, letters, short reports, and e-mail. The contents of these common business documents are described in the next chapter. However, what is covered in this document is directly applicable to most forms of writing—the basic skills are the same.

The “Seven C’s” of business writing

The ultimate objective of all forms of communication—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste—is *Comprehension*: the capacity for understanding fully. Comprehension is the first of the “Seven C’s” (see Figure 1) and is enabled when the other six C’s are properly and fully employed. The other C’s are, as defined in *Webster’s* dictionary,

- *Correctness*: conforming to fact, standard, or truth.
- *Completeness*: having all the necessary parts, elements, or steps.
- *Clarity*: the quality or state of being clear (free from obscurity or ambiguity; that is, it is easily understood).
- *Coherency*: a systematic or logical connection or consistency.
- *Consistency*: agreement or harmony of parts or features to one another or a whole.
- *Conciseness*: marked by brevity of expression or statement; free from all elaboration and superfluous detail.

Figure 1—The Seven C’s of business writing



Chapter 2: Memos, letters, short reports, and e-mail

There are four common types of business documents: memos, letters, short reports, and e-mail. This chapter describes basic contents of these documents. However, you need to understand the general organization of business documents first.

Organizing a business document

In general, organize your main content as follows:

- 1. Summary**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Discussion**
- 4. Conclusion**

1. Summary: give the main message.
2. Introduction: give information to “set the scene” by identifying the circumstances leading up to the situation described in your document.
3. Discussion: provide the facts or details.
4. Conclusion: identify the expected outcome.

The conclusion includes the main result(s) or any effects the facts have had or will have. It may also suggest what needs to be done.

Memos

Correspondence within an organization—called inter-office memoranda or memos—conveys information to company employees and is seldom seen by outsiders.

Memos must be clear, accurate, and well written because they transmit information important to the operation of the organization and are often kept as official records.

Use a memo to

- give information
- state a position
- make a request or demand
- clarify a conversation
- provide confirmation

Some advice on writing memos:

- Try to build goodwill even when being firm.
- Do not be nasty, arrogant, silly, or sentimental.
- Be direct and clear.
- Write in an informal or formal tone depending on the subject and audience.
- Wherever possible, use vertical lists to make reading easier.

The format of a typical memo is as follows (see Figure 2):

1. Letterhead: provide the company's or organization's name with the word "Memorandum" or "Memo."
2. Headings: include the basic addressing information—To, From, Subject, and Date. In the subject line provide an accurate yet brief description of the memo's topic.
3. Main body: organize the text as described above in "Organizing a business document."
4. Reference initials (if any): identify the typist using the typist's initials in lowercase letters.
5. Enclosure: identify any attached documents.
6. Signature block: you do not normally sign a memo—initials are sufficient (some organizations repeat the name in type beneath the initials). You can also initial next to your name in the "From" line.

Figure 2—A typical memo

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Memo

To: John Salmon
From: Griswald Behr
CC: Jack Wolffe
Date: August 4, 2013
Subject: Cleanliness of the lunch room

I have received several complaints about the cleanliness of the lunch room following the lunch break. For example: the sink was left full of unwashed cups and spoons, and newspapers were scattered over the tables. One person remarked, “It looks like a bear’s cave in here!”

One of your chief duties as lunch room caretaker is to ensure that the room is left tidy following lunch. Please investigate this situation and report back to me by the end of this week.

Enc. Memos of complaint

Griswald Behr

Business letters

Letters are used to communicate between people in different companies and organizations.

The format of a typical business letter is as follows (see Figure 3):

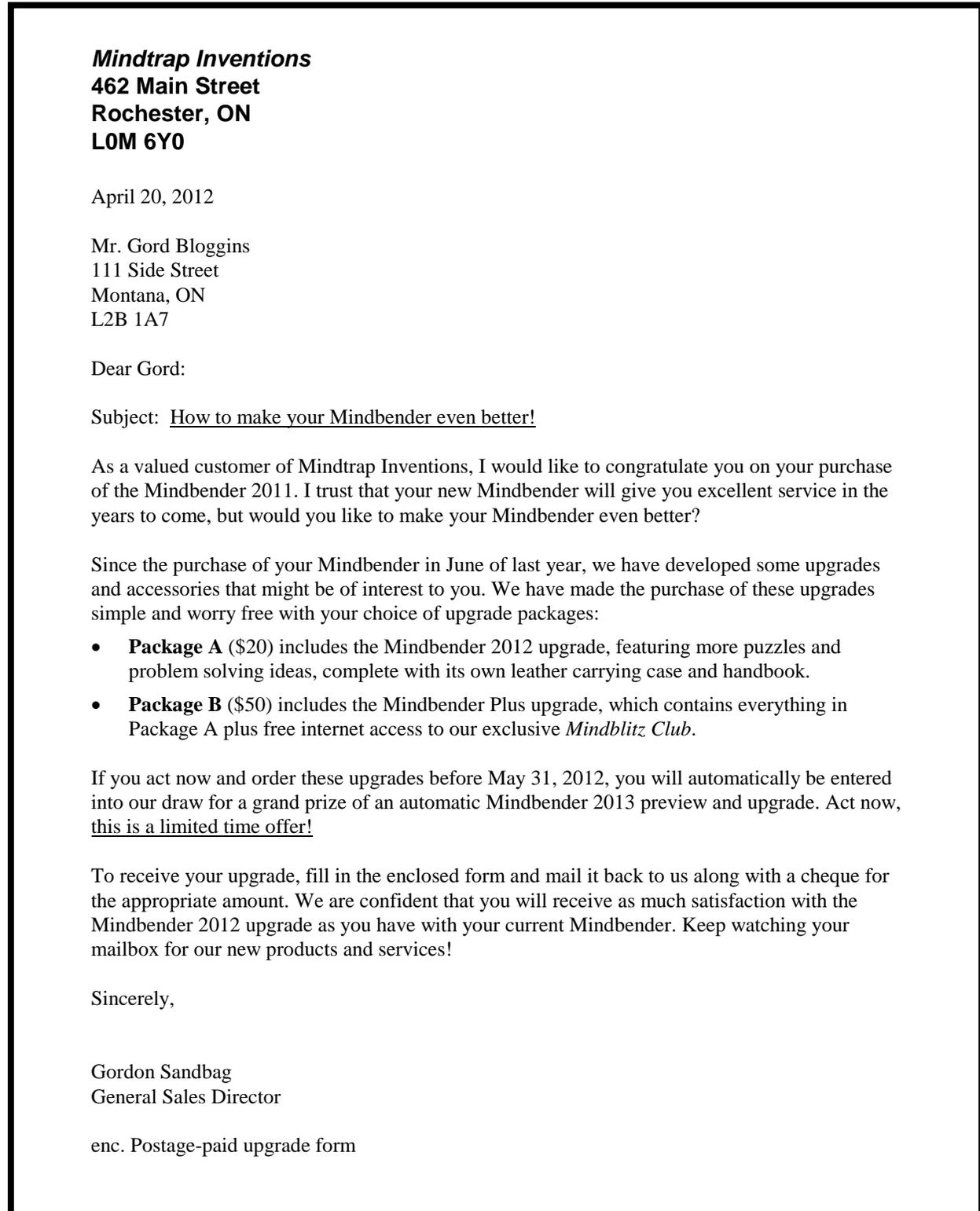
1. Letterhead: provide the company's or organization's name, address, and logotype.
2. Date.
3. Delivery address.
4. Salutation: use first names when they are known; otherwise, use their formal name.
5. Subject: provide an accurate yet brief description of the letter's topic
6. Main body: organize the text as described above in "Organizing a business document."
7. Signature block: sign your name above your typed name and title.
8. Reference initials (if any): identify the typist using their initials in lowercase letters.
9. Enclosure: identify any attached documents.

There are several types of letters:

- good news or bad news
- thank you
- complaint
- inquiry
- promotional
- instruction

Some advice on writing each type follows the example letter.

Figure 3—A typical business letter



Good news letter

In a good news letter,

- Tell the good news immediately.
- Supply any required details: date, places, times, and conditions.
- End the letter by repeating the good news.

Bad news letter

In a bad news letter,

- Delay the bad news a bit with a sincere buffer statement. Avoid clichés and overwriting.
- Announce the bad news.
- Suggest an alternative, if appropriate.
- Close in a friendly fashion.

Thank you letter

Write a thank you letter soon after the event. In a thank you letter,

- Be brief and sincere.
- Be specific: recall the specific even, gesture, or service that you found the most helpful.

Letter of complaint

In a letter of complaint,

- State the problem precisely: include dates, times, and the specific issues of the situation of concern.
- Do not include pejorative words or unnecessary sarcasm.
- Appeal to the public image or reputation of the company, organization, or individual.
- Give a polite but firm outline of what you want and when it should be done.
- Do not threaten legal action unless you are fully prepared to carry it through: you are trying to solve a problem, not create a bigger one.
- Conclude the letter politely.

Letter of inquiry

In a letter of inquiry,

- Seek a favor, information, clarification, or service.
- The inquiry is either solicited (your opinion has been requested) or unsolicited (you want information).
- You may want to enclose a reply card or stamped and addressed envelope.
- Assure confidentiality.
- Ask pertinent and brief questions.
- Sell the reader on your subject.

Promotional letter

In a promotional letter,

- Clearly state what it is that you are offering.
- Explain why the potential customer should do what you request.
- Never provide false or misleading information.
- Enclose a reply card or stamped and addressed envelope.

Letter of instruction

In a letter of instruction,

- Provide clear background information to prevent confusion; for example, identify the specific version of software.
- Provide simple instructions for completing the task(s)—use vertical instead of prose lists.
- Use tables and basic diagrams if necessary.
- Test the instructions on several readers similar to your expected audience.
- Give your readers a telephone number so that they can contact your organization if they do not understand your instructions or if they have problems.

Reports

A report is data or an analysis of data transmitted by one person or a group to another. A report may be of the fill-in-the-blank variety or you may have to write it from “scratch.”

When writing a report, it is critical to

- Plan your document well.
- Write to your defined audience.
- Keep to your topic.
- Keep the report as short as possible while still communicating your information.

Short reports are usually written as memos or letters; therefore, their format is not described further here. Use simple topic headings to make your document easier to read.

There are many different types of reports; for example:

- incident
- progress
- feasibility
- project completion
- field trip
- inspection
- laboratory

All short reports are essentially similar in development and organization. Therefore, only the two most common reports, incident and progress, are described below as examples.

Incident reports

Incident reports (see Figure 4) describe noteworthy occurrences, for example, an accident. In the introduction, clearly describe the situation—who, where, why, and when. Discuss the facts of the situation in chronological order. In the conclusions, describe the results of the incident and what has happened since that time.

Figure 4—An incident report

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Memo

To: Tom Swaggman
From: Joe Bloggins
CC: Frank Long
Date: January 1, 2012
Subject: Accident report for the Super Widgets delivery to Micro Engineering

Pete Wolley and I were involved in a car accident in which company truck number 295 was damaged. We need a new truck to complete the delivery of the Super Widgets order to Micro Engineering by Wednesday, January 9.

The accident occurred at 6:00 A.M. this morning on Highway 17 about 2 km east of Antrim. I was driving normally when I encountered a bank of dense fog. As I slowed the truck, we were struck from behind by another driver, resulting in extensive damage to our truck's tail lights. The other vehicle, driven by Mr. Hank Henchel, sustained only minor damage. None of us were injured in any way. After exchanging insurance information with Mr. Henchel, we returned to Ottawa and reported the incident to my supervisor, Frank Long.

Due to the damaged tail lights, we need another truck to deliver the Super Widgets order to Micro Engineering. Please arrange for another truck to be available by Wednesday, January 9, at 8:00 A.M.

Joe Bloggins

Progress reports

Progress reports (see Figure 5) summarize the progress since the last report and make suggestions or recommendations for future activities. In the conclusions, provide a forecast of reasonable expectations for ongoing progress, including a discussion of anticipated problems. Also provide an updated schedule.

Figure 5—A progress report

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Memo

To: Tom Swaggman
From: Joe Bloggins
CC: Frank Long
Date: January 2, 2012
Subject: Progress report on the delivery of the Super Widgets for Micro Engineering

Final delivery of the Super Widgets order to Micro Engineering has been delayed until at least Friday, January 11. The delay is a result of the unavailability of a truck to deliver the order.

The rest of the items were scheduled for delivery on Wednesday, January 9; however, our inability to find a replacement for our only operating company truck has prevented us from completing the project. Our company truck was damaged in the accident on May 1 as described in my memo to you of the same date. We expect to have a new truck by tomorrow and have the delivery completed the same day.

Final delivery will be 2 days later than originally scheduled. I believe this type of problem can be prevented by either having more trucks available for critical projects such as this one, or by having a standing contract with a suitable courier.

Joe Bloggins

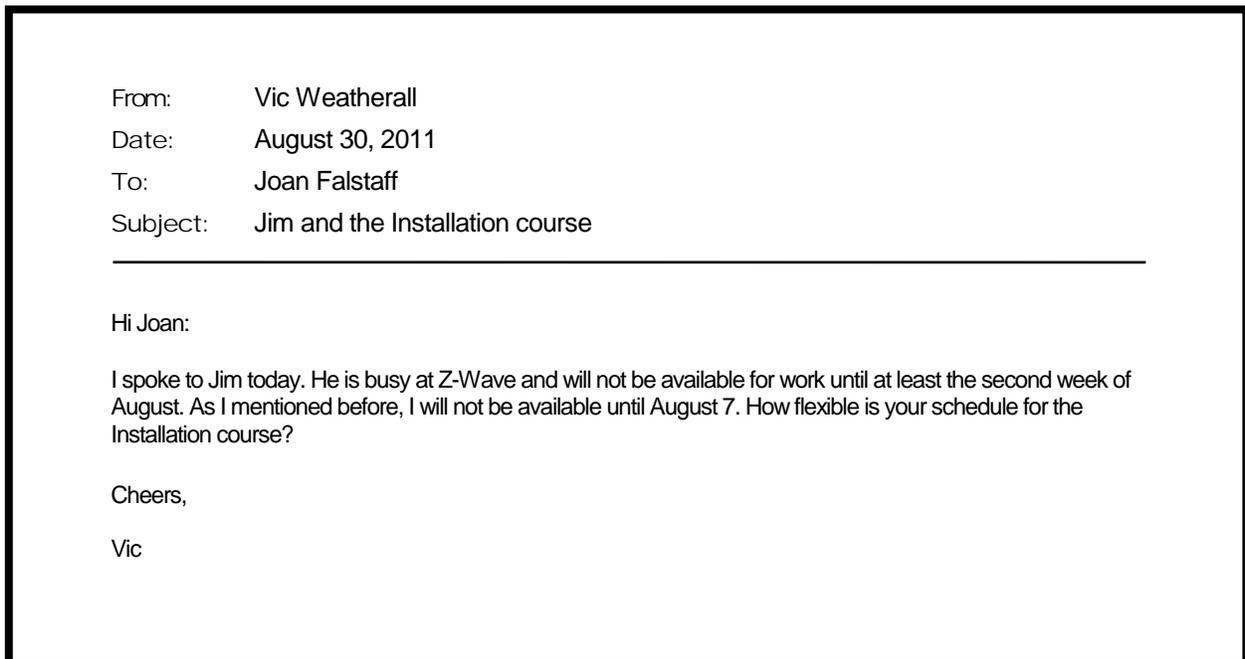
E-mail

E-mail is rapidly becoming a major form of internal and external business communication. Its chief advantages are speed of delivery, low cost, and the ability to transmit large amounts of data (as attachments).

E-mail messages are used and written in the same manner as memos, letters, and short reports. The delivery mechanism is the main difference. As well, the tone of the writing is usually more informal.

The format of an e-mail (see Figure 6) is essentially defined by the software package you are using. The heading information is very similar to that found in a memo.

Figure 6—A typical e-mail message



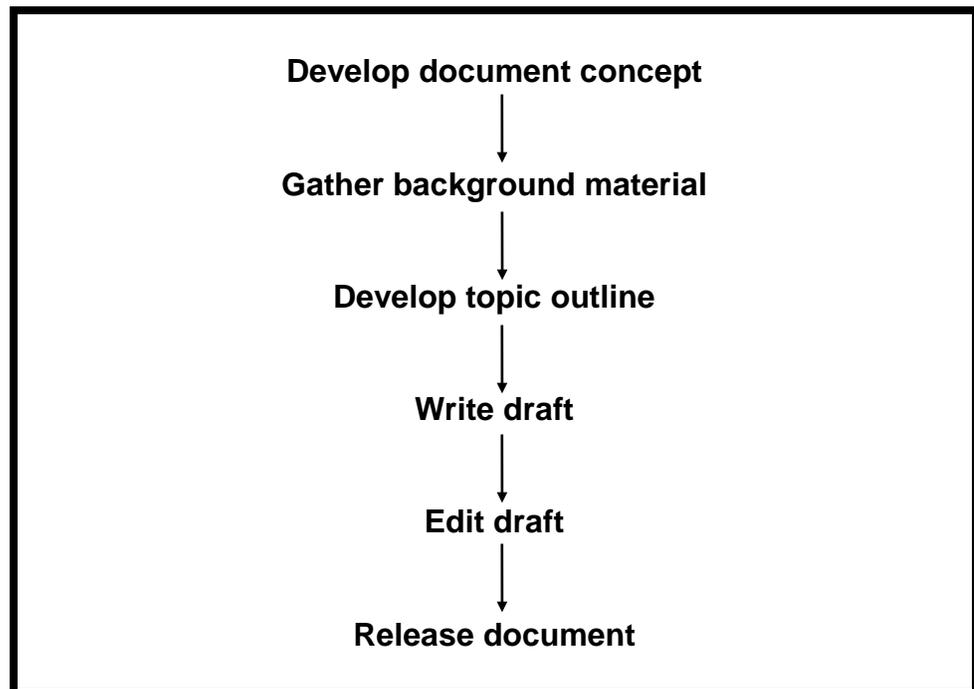
Chapter 3: Planning your document

Planning is, by far, the most important step in the process of creating your document. However, this step is usually given the least attention. This chapter describes a simple process for planning and writing business documents and gives important information on using standards to aid you in your writing.

A simple process for planning and writing business documents

Figure 7 shows a simple and efficient process for planning and writing memorandums, letters, short reports, and e-mail. Each of these steps is described in detail after the figure and in the subsequent chapters.

Figure 7—A process for planning and writing business documents



Developing your document concept

The first step in writing a business document is to develop its *concept*. This includes identifying its

1. purpose
2. audience
3. scope
4. related reading materials

Purpose

The most important action in planning any type of writing is to clearly identify the *purpose* or goal of your document; that is, describe what it aims to achieve. Without a well-defined purpose, your document cannot achieve any of the Seven C's of business writing.

Example purpose statements:

- to inform Mr. Smith his account is overdue
- to request financial assistance on the new dinosaur exhibit at the museum
- to inform all customers we now carry “Clean-it-all”
- to describe how to install the latest update for RapidBooks

Audience

Define the *audience* or intended readership of your document. Also identify the background knowledge required to understand your document.

Example audience statements:

- for the general public
- must understand basic Windows operations
- must be a technical subject matter expert

Scope

Define the *scope* of your document, that is, what it does and does not cover.

Example scope statements:

- for recording purposes only—payment is not required
- does not cover how to install Versions 2.0 or earlier

Related reading materials

Identify any additional reading your reader will need to fully understand your document.

Example related reading statements:

- readers need to refer to their owner's manual
- readers need to have their invoice on hand

Gathering your background materials

Gathering background or supporting information *before* writing is critical to successful business writing, especially in terms of correctness. Some key points on finding and using information are

- Locate and then copy or print everything you need to achieve your defined purpose.
- Use library resources, technical manuals, company or organization files, and any other materials available.
- Use material from reliable sources only.
- Pick out the relevant points only—keep within the scope of your document.
- Clearly identify all your sources.
- Be aware of possible copyright infringements (especially for graphics).
- Keep all your material on file for future use.

Developing your topic outline

Your topic outline is a list of general topics (in sequence) that fulfills the needs identified in your document concept. In general, organize your document as shown below.

- 1. Summary**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Discussion**
- 4. Conclusion**

This concept was covered in the previous chapter, but it is worth repeating:

1. **Summary:** give the main message.
2. **Introduction:** give information to “set the scene” by identifying the circumstances leading up to the situation described in your document.
3. **Discussion:** provide the facts or details.
4. **Conclusion:** identify the expected outcome.

The conclusion includes the main result(s) or any effects the facts have had or will have. It may also suggest what needs to be done.

There are two general approaches to developing your topic outline: traditional outlining and “mind mapping.”

Traditional outlining

Traditional topic outlining usually follows this sequence:

1. Write down, in any order, the rough topics to be covered.
2. Rearrange your topics into hierarchical order.
3. Add new topics and subtopics, as required, to fulfill the purpose and scope of your document (see Figure 8).

Figure 8—Example traditional topic outline

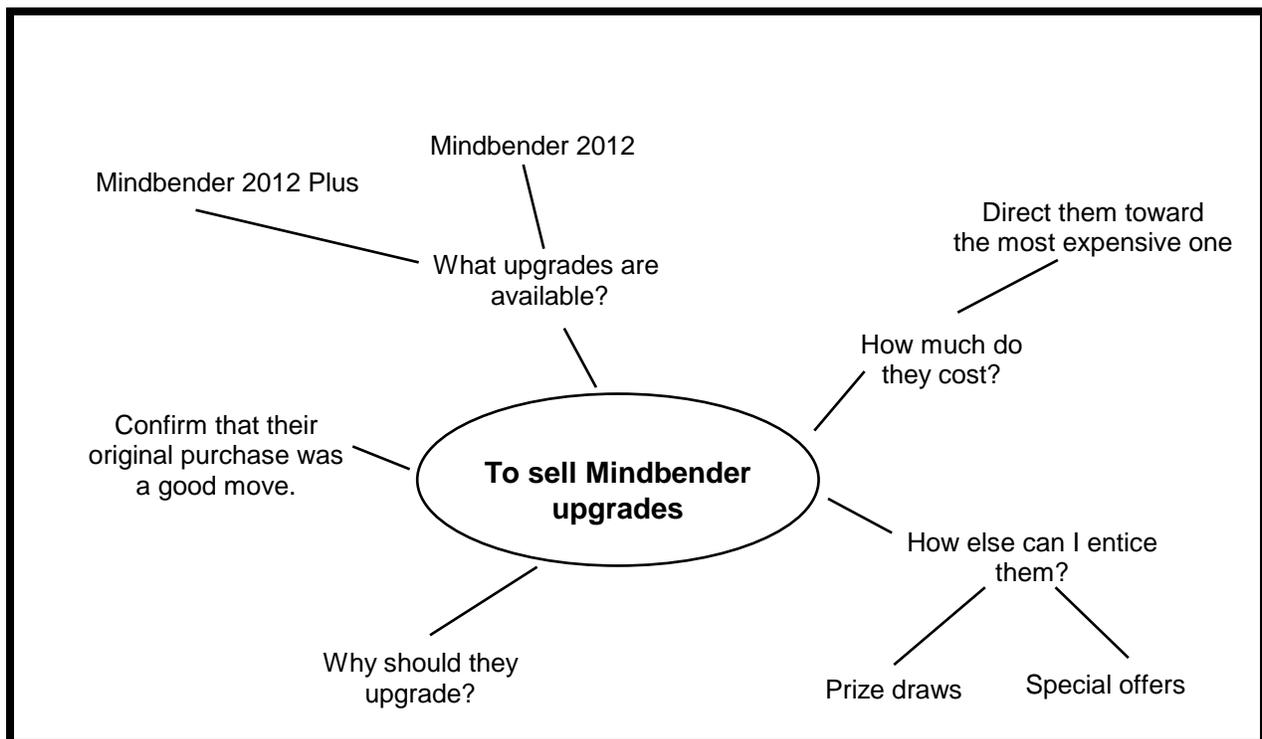
- **Summary** (write *after* finishing the draft)
- **Introduction:**
 - Congratulate them on their previous Mindbender purchase.
 - Lead in to upgrading their previous Mindbender purchase.
- **Discussion:**
 - Describe Package A, the Mindbender 2012 upgrade.
 - Describe Package B, the Mindbender 2012 Plus upgrade.
 - Describe the limited-time offer and prize draw.
 - Tell them how to order the upgrade.
- **Conclusion:**
 - Reaffirm their confidence in their current Mindbender, but direct them toward the upgrades.
 - Tell them to anticipate future products.

Mind mapping

“Mind mapping” enables a more natural, free-flowing, development of a topic outline. This technique is particularly useful in a group “brainstorming” session. To make a mind map, do the following:

1. At the center of a page, board, or chart, write down the purpose of your document (see Figure 9).
2. At one side of the purpose, write down the first main idea and connect the two with a path or branch line.
3. Around this main idea write down one or more related ideas and then connect them back to the main idea. Do not worry if they do not fit the scope of your document—let the ideas flow freely.
4. Continue branching-off ideas until you exhaust each path.
5. Write down your next main idea and then repeat Steps 2 to 4 until you have covered all conceivable ideas.
6. Review your mind map and then trim off the ideas that fall outside the scope of your document.
7. In a vertical list, write down the main ideas and their related ideas. These ideas become the main topics and subtopics, respectively.

Figure 9—Example mind map



Writing your draft

After analyzing the background material, write the draft by fleshing-out your topic outline and applying any established writing and format standards. Issues involved in writing the draft are covered in “Chapter 4: Writing your draft.” The key points in choosing a format are provided at the end of this chapter in “Using standards and templates.”

Editing your draft

Once you have completed the draft, edit it for content and conformance to writing and format standards. Issues involved in editing the draft are covered in “Chapter 5: Editing your draft.”

Releasing your document

After final editing, release your document according to your established procedures. Some typical issues are

- duplicate copies
- paper and electronic files
- security concerns
- delivery
- tracking
- update or revision procedures

Using standards and templates

Whenever they are available, use your organization’s established writing or style standards. For those who do not have such standards, the information contained in this document, particularly in “Chapter 6: Writing tricks and traps” and “Appendix: A style guide,” provides a solid base. The most critical document is probably a standard dictionary such as *Webster’s* or the *Oxford* dictionary.

Documents should always conform to established format or graphic standards. If such standards do not exist, take the time to develop them so that your documents will have a consistent look.

To develop new standards, compare many samples before you set down your rules. Because there are many situations where there are several possible correct options, define *one* way as the standard and follow it consistently. Always keep in mind the limits of your word processing, printing, and file management technologies.

You can use standard templates and their associated formatting styles to speed up document production and ensure compliance format or graphic standards. Most software packages allow you to modify existing templates and create new ones

File merging can greatly simplify document production, but avoid creating form letters that may give readers the feeling that they are simply numbers in your files.

Chapter 4: Writing your draft

Once you have gathered all the background materials you need and have fully developed your topic outline, you are ready to write your draft. Drafting is essentially fleshing-out your topics into complete sentences and paragraphs.

This chapter provides the tools you need to write your draft effectively and efficiently. It includes

1. tips on how to get started and stay on track
2. the basic concepts of sentence and paragraph writing
3. writing using the Seven C's

Some tips on writing your draft document

Some general tips on writing your draft are

- Work in a quiet place without distractions.
- Start as soon as possible because starting is the most important part, even if the right words do not come to you at first.
- Do not interrupt the flow of your writing to make the last sentence or paragraph perfect.
- If you cannot find the right word or phrase, use a similar one instead and highlight it for your future attention.
- Edit later as a separate activity (see “Chapter 5: Editing your draft”).

Writing sentences

A good sentence has a definite, clear organization, and has a single purpose—to explain, to describe, to narrate, or to further an argument. The ultimate purpose of the sentence is to support the work as a whole.

Writing paragraphs

A paragraph is a group of related sentences developing one idea. Individual paragraphs provide both a physical and a mental break for the reader. They allow readers to keep their place on the page more easily and they signal that one unit of thought has been completed.

Paragraphs typically include

1. a topic sentence (summary)—usually at the beginning of the paragraph
2. supporting sentences (providing full development of your topic)
3. a closing sentence (a conclusion, or link to the next topic, or both)

While there are no absolute rules for governing the length of a paragraph, keep them short in business writing. Single sentence paragraphs are often used for introductory statements or to add emphasis to a point. Make your paragraphs as short as possible while still achieving their goals.

Writing using the Seven C's

Write your draft to incorporate the Seven C's of business writing. Only when you have employed them will you have effective and efficient writing. As you may expect, there is a great deal of overlap in these principles and they are mutually supporting. If you ignore them, you weaken your writing.

Correctness

Correctness means conforming to fact, standard, or truth. This is critical in business writing. Get your facts right by fully researching your background information.

Incorrect information may result in a lost sale, an unhappy customer, or worse. Double-check your facts and ensure that your writing does not leave room for misinterpretation.

At the sentence and word level, be precise in what you say (see Table 1). Do not use vague replacements.

Imprecise and vague sentence:

It is considered that a fair percentage of the samples received from one of our suppliers during the preceding months contained a contaminant.

Revised:

We estimate that 60% of the samples received from CalChem Chemicals last June were contaminated with 0.5% to 0.8% mercuric chloride.

Table 1—Using precise words

Vague words	Descriptive words
While the crew was in town they <i>got</i> some spare parts.	they bought they <i>purchased</i> they <i>borrowed</i> they <i>requisitioned</i>
We have <i>contacted</i> the site.	We have telephoned ... We have visited ... We have written to ... We have spoken to ... We have sent e-mail to ...
The project will take <i>a long time</i> .	will last 4 months will require 300 hours will employ two clerks for 3 weeks

Completeness

Completeness involves having all the necessary parts, elements, or steps necessary to fulfill the task. The topic sentence in a paragraph defines how long the paragraph needs to be. Basically, it must be long enough to “do the job” but not so short as to omit vital detail. Some common ways to develop a paragraph are

- Present examples or illustrations.
- Cite data to corroborate or confirm—give facts, statistics, evidence, details, and precedents.
- Quote, paraphrase, or summarize the testimony of others.
- Relate an anecdote or event.
- Define connected terms.
- Compare or contrast items or issues.
- Explore causes and reasons for phenomena or situations.
- Explore the effects and consequences for phenomena or situations.
- Explain how something operates.
- Describe the person, place, or thing being discussed.

Inadequate development:

Trails left by tractors look like long narrow scars cut in the plateau. Many of them have been there for years. All have been caused by permafrost melting. They will stay like this until the vegetation grows in again.

Adequate development:

To the visitor viewing this terrain by airplane, the trails left by tractors clearing undergrowth for roads across the plateau look like long, narrow scars. Trails 28 years old are still clearly defined. The trails were caused by melting of the permafrost, which started when the surface moss and vegetation were removed, and will continue until the vegetation grows in again—perhaps in another 30 years.

Clarity

Clarity is the quality or state of being clear (free from obscurity or ambiguity; easily understood). To ensure clarity, it is essential make your point in an organized fashion while leaving out irrelevant detail. Clear writing must also have

- proper grammar and punctuation
- effective use of coordination and subordination
- appropriate transitions
- careful placement of modifiers

Proper grammar and punctuation

Grammar is described throughout this document and punctuation is covered in “Appendix: A style guide.”

Coordination and subordination

Coordination connects related ideas of equal importance. It is usually achieved using coordinating conjunctions and correlative coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *or*, and *so*.

Examples: The word *skunk* comes from Algonquian, and *moose* is from Narragansett.

Hortatio Alger wrote over a hundred books, but he died penniless.

Sometimes, a semicolon replaces the coordinating conjunction.

Example: The word *skunk* comes from Algonquian; *moose* is from Narragansett.

Faulty coordination occurs when the wrong coordinator is used or when items that should not be coordinated are connected.

Faulty: Grey Owl, a handsome Indian in buckskins, created a sensation as he toured England to lecture, *and* he was really an Englishman named Archie Belaney.

Revised: Grey Owl, a handsome Indian in buckskins, created a sensation as he toured England to lecture, *but* he was really an Englishman named Archie Belaney.

Do not overuse coordination—it can result in run-on sentences that will muddy your writing.

Subordination connects related ideas of unequal importance. This is achieved using subordinating conjunctions, correlative subordinating conjunctions, or relative pronouns that best express the relationships. Many kinds of relationships are possible:

- Identification: The llama, *which* is a member of the camel family, is native to South America.
- Time: *Until* the Spanish arrived, the most common beast of burden in Peru was the llama.
- Condition: A llama will refuse to budge *if* it is overloaded.
- Cause: The Quechua washed babies in llama urine *because* they thought it would keep evil spirits away.

Example subordinators:

- after
- because
- since
- as far as
- if
- when
- as if
- once

Faulty subordination occurs when the wrong subordinator is used or when one idea is incorrectly subordinated to another.

Faulty: They spent the entire day in the meeting room and even skipped their lunches, *in that* the project was due the next day.

Revised: They spent the entire day in the meeting room and even skipped their lunches *because* the project was due the next day.

Do not overuse subordination—it can result in run-on sentences that will muddy your writing.

Transitions

Transitional words add clarity by relating one part of a sentence to another. An improper transitional word sends a false or ambiguous signal.

Clear transitions are best achieved using conjunctive adverbs such as

- also
- at first
- finally
- for example
- however
- in addition
- indeed
- therefore
- thus

Examples: Cotton is cool; *however*, it needs ironing.

Cotton is cool; *in addition*, it is easy to wash.

Note that a conjunctive adverb is not a full conjunction. Therefore, a preceding comma is not sufficient when using one. Use a period or semicolon instead:

Incorrect: Cotton is cool, thus, it is a popular fabric in the summer.

Revised: Cotton is cool; thus, it is a popular fabric in the summer.

Revised: Cotton is cool. Thus, it is a popular fabric in the summer

There are some exceptions to this punctuation. See “Commas” and “Semicolons” in “Appendix: A style guide.”

Placement of modifiers

Modifiers should appear near the words they modify, but they should not interrupt the natural flow of the sentence. The most common problem occurs when the modifier splits the sentence. To correct this, move the modifying phrase to another position, preferably the beginning of the sentence.

Awkward: A retail store may, through a special division established for the purpose, also conduct a mail-order business.

Revised: Through a special division established for the purpose, a retail store may also conduct a mail-order business.

Coherency

Coherency means a systematic or logical connection or consistency. Coherent paragraphs and documents are made up of a series of points that lead logically from one to the next and that all contribute to the central premise. It is very difficult to discuss coherency without discussing unity—they are inseparable.

Unity refers to keeping all the elements of a piece of writing—section, paragraph, or sentence—centered on the primary topic. Your topic is often, but not always, introduced in a topic sentence. Do not include irrelevant ideas.

This sentence has two topics, resulting in disunity:

The copier should never have been placed in the general office, where those using it interrupt the work being done by the typing pool, which has been consistently understaffed since the beginning of the year.

Coherence involves the order in which the various elements are presented and the devices used to make clear the relationships between those elements. Coherence makes it easy for a reader to follow a writer's train of thought as it moves from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. It also reflects the writer's clear thinking by creating a perceivable order to the writing.

Disunited, incoherent sentence:

The Amron Building will make an ideal manufacturing plant because of its convenient location, which also should have good access roads, the advantage of its one-level floor, and it commands low rent.

United, coherent sentence:

The Amron Building will make an ideal manufacturing plant because of its convenient location, single-level floor, good access roads, and low rent.

To help achieve coherence,

- Repeat key words from sentence to sentence or use recognizable synonyms for key words.
- Use pronouns for key nouns.
- Use demonstrative adjectives, “pointing words” (for example, *this statement, that plan, these development, and those disasters*).
- Use conjunctive adverbs, “thought-connecting words” (for example, *however, moreover, also, nevertheless, therefore, thus, then, subsequently, indeed, and accordingly*—use simple words).
- Arrange the sequence of the sentences in perceivable order:
 - Time order—as in a narrative of what happened or in an explanation of a procedure.
 - Space order—as in the description of a physical object or a scene.
 - Logical order—such as cause to effect, effect to cause, general to particular, particular to general, whole to part, or familiar to unfamiliar.
- Use parallel structure throughout your document.

Time order

To achieve time order, organize your writing in chronological sequence.

Example: To process the incoming mail,

1. Obtain the day's mail from the reception area.
2. Sort the mail by recipient.
3. Deliver the mail.

Incoherent paragraph:

The accident occurred when Dick Friesen was checking in at the Canuck Airlines counter. Kevin Trane, a Canuck Airlines representative, took the details of the incident and will be calling you to discuss compensation. The damaged camera received a large crack across its back. When the passenger ahead of Dick removed a carry-on bag from the counter, its shoulder strap tangled with the carrying strap of the company camera and pulled it to the floor. Dick had placed the camera on the counter while he completed flight boarding procedure.

Coherent paragraph:

The accident occurred when Dick Friesen was checking in at the Canuck Airlines counter. He placed the company Polaroid camera on the counter while he completed flight boarding procedure. When the passenger ahead of him removed a carry-on bag from the counter, its shoulder strap tangled with the carrying strap of the camera and pulled it to the floor. Dick examined the camera and discovered a large crack across its back. Canuck Airlines representative Kevin Trane took the details of the incident and will be calling you to discuss compensation.

Space order

To achieve space order, organize your writing according to the spatial layout of the object in question. Describe it from top to bottom, left to right, or outside to inside.

Example: Organize the front desk, from left to right, as follows:

1. in-box
2. out-box
3. telephone
4. appointment book
5. computer monitor

Logical order—cause to effect

Cause to effect organization is the most common logical order used in business writing.

Example: If you work on your computer without periodically saving the file, you risk losing a great deal of time and effort.

Logical order—general to particular

Writing from general to particular is a commonly used form of logical order.

Example: Adobe buildings have three characteristics that make them susceptible to radon containments: lack of vacuoles for air exchange, high concentration of vapor for gas entrapment, and reduced surface area for transpiration effects.

Logical order—particular to general

Writing from particular to general is an infrequently used form of logical order.

Example:

Cognitive scientists have shown that the human mind experiences great difficulty in maintaining more than five to seven color elements simultaneously. Thus, the benefits of color in attracting attention, grouping information, and assigning value disappear if too many colors are used. To keep these benefits, limit the screen displays to six unique colors. The general rule, then, is not to overuse color.

Parallel structure

Parallel structure throughout a document is one of the most important features in business writing. It helps your reader follow your writing by giving them a familiar structure from which to extract information. It also makes your document much easier to write.

Parallelism in writing means “similarity of shape.” Readers generally do not notice when parallelism is present, but they do know when it is lacking. Good parallelism makes readers feel comfortable so that even in long or complex sentences because they never lose their way.

Parallelism violated:

In our first list we inadvertently omitted the seven lathes in room B101, five milling machines in room B117, and from the next room, B118, we also forgot to include 16 shapers.

Parallelism restored (restores sentence shape and clarity):

In our first list we inadvertently omitted seven lathes in room B101, five milling machines in room B117, and 16 shapers in room B118.

Sentence level parallel structure

Use parallel structure within sentences to present items of equal importance in the same grammatical form, especially verb forms:

Faulty: The engine is overheated, corroded, and it is damaged.
 Pete Woolley likes surveying airports and to study new construction techniques.
 His hobbies are developing new software programs and stereo component construction.
 You may either repair the test set or it may be replaced under the warranty agreement.

Revised: The engine is overheated, corroded, and damaged.
 Pete Woolley likes surveying airports and new studying new construction techniques.
 His hobbies are new software development and stereo component construction.
 You may either repair the test set or replace it under the warranty agreement.

Parallel structure and processes

When describing a process, it is very important to maintain parallel structure to help your reader follow the instructions. When writing a procedure, start each step with an active, imperative form of the verb.

Example: To install the program,
 1. Place “Disk 1” in the floppy disk drive.
 2. Press the “Enter” key.
 3. Follow the instructions on the screen.

Using parallel structure to organize a document

In short reports and longer documents, using parallel structure throughout makes it easier for your reader to retrieve information because the writing is predictable. Create parallel structure at the outline stage to put together related or contrasting ideas.

Consistency

Consistency means agreement or harmony of parts to one another or a whole. It is one of the hallmarks of good writing. Organization and key terms must be consistent. As well, sentences and paragraphs must avoid basic shifts in

- verb tense
- mood
- voice
- person and number
- tone and point of view

Shifts in verb tense

Use the present tense in your writing. Other tenses are sometimes used depending on the structure of your writing. Avoid unnecessary changes in verb tense.

Faulty:

When the two technicians *removed* the air intake valves from the combustion chamber, two testing methods *are repeatedly attempted*.

Revised:

After removing the air intake valves from the combustion chamber, the technicians used two methods to test them.

Shifts in mood

The text determines how the verb is used, but avoid shifts in mood.

Faulty:

Use the index to find the customer addresses. The addresses *are used* for the mailing list. (Imperative and indicative forms are used here. Also note the shift from active to passive voice.)

Revised:

Use the index to find the customer addresses for the mailing list.

Shifts in voice

Avoid using the passive voice wherever possible. Always avoid shifting between the active and the passive voice.

Faulty:

If the “automatic save” option is specified, the operating system will create file names. The “automatic save” description includes a limit on the file size. This number must be stated in bytes.

Revised:

If you specify the “automatic save” option, the operating system creates file names. The “automatic save” description includes a file size limit stated in bytes.

Shifts in person and number

Use first, second, or third person in the singular and plural forms consistently throughout a document. A change in person and number creates problems in subject and verb agreement and in pronoun reference. Attempts to avoid sexist language sometimes results in awkward shifts that are grammatically incorrect.

Faulty:

You can also move the cursor in other ways. *People* often hold the “Ctrl” key down and press the right arrow key, allowing *you* to move the cursor one word to the right. If a *person* wants to move quickly to the top of the screen, *he or she* should press the “Home” key and then the up arrow key.

Revised:

You can also move the cursor in other ways. You can hold the “Ctrl” key down and press the right arrow key, to move the cursor one word to the right. If you want to move quickly to the top of the screen, you can press the “Home” key and then the up arrow key.

Better:

You can also move the cursor in other ways:

- To move the cursor one word to the right, hold down the “Ctrl” key and then press the right arrow key.
- To move quickly to the top of the screen, press the “Home” key and then the up arrow key.

Shifts in tone and point of view

Be consistent in your tone and point of view.

Faulty:

During the detailed system investigation, the analyst should have gained a thorough understanding of the proposed new system. So you might want to get going on a prototype of the new system as you see the system design phase starting up. (Note the shift from third-person narration with a formal tone to second person informal tone.)

Revised:

You should gain a thorough understanding of the proposed new system during your detailed system investigation. Therefore, you might want to start developing a prototype of the new system when the system design phase begins.

Conciseness

Conciseness means marked by brevity of expression or statement and free from all elaboration and superfluous detail. It is a hallmark of good business writing. This issue is described in detail in “Chapter 5: Editing your draft.”

Comprehension

Comprehension—the capacity for understanding fully—is enabled by incorporating the first six critical qualities of writing described above. If you adhere to these qualities or principles, you will help your reader understand and remember your writing.

Chapter 5: Editing your draft

The purpose of editing or revising is to make your ideas and the words that express them as clear, accurate, and attractive as possible. Editing can also inspire you to improve your work. This chapter provides some guidelines on how to edit effectively and how to use your computer to help you edit.

Some general pointers on editing are as follows:

- Have someone else read your document, preferably someone similar to your target audience.
- Do your editing on paper, especially during the final rounds. It is very easy to miss problems on the computer screen.
- With practice you can do much of your editing while you write; however, there is no substitute for following a structured editing process.
- Use multiple-pass editing (see Table 2).

Table 2—Multiple-pass editing

Pass	Action
1. Reduction	a. Do all the major chunks of writing belong? b. Are there paragraphs and sentences I can live without? c. Are there cluttering phrases or words? d. Can some words be shortened or simplified?
2. Language check	Are the punctuation, grammar, and spelling correct?
3. Standards check	Does it follow established graphic and format standards?
4. Final check	Does it fulfill the Seven C's? (One last check.)

Achieving conciseness through reduction

While novice writers often try to use more words than necessary, experienced writers always look for ways to reduce them. The main goal of editing is to achieve conciseness by reducing the number of paragraphs, sentences, and even words while still communicating your information completely.

There are three levels of reduction to achieve conciseness: greater, lesser, and micro. These are described below.

Greater reductions

To make *greater* reductions, eliminate entire subject areas outside the scope of your writing. Keep to your topic as defined in your original concept.

Lesser reductions

To make *lesser* reductions, remove the clutter at the sentence and paragraph level. Ensure that every paragraph has a topic sentence and that all the sentences in the paragraph support the topic. Remove clutter using the techniques given below.

Avoid repetition.

Examples: Let us glance briefly at the facts.

The reason was because...

In addition to bananas, they also had pears.

Leave out extra words that do not change the structure or meaning of the sentence.

Example: *Both* the prime minister and the minister of finance...

<u>Use</u>	<u>To replace</u>
because	based on the fact that on the grounds that in as much as
about	a number of concerning the nature of in regard to with reference to
now	at this time at this point in time

Some other phrases that can be shortened are

- plan ahead for (plan)
- cancel out (cancel)
- actual experience (experience)
- for the purpose of (for)

Keep your sentences simple and short: they are easier to read and remember.

Do not mention irrelevant things—keep to the point.

Wordy: ... dressed in period clothing in the style worn about the time of the historic hall's members.

Better: ... dressed in period clothing.

Do not talk around the subject or say things the long way around.

Wordy: Her brother, who is a student at law school, loves to bring up controversial topics that everyone has a different opinion about.

Better: Her brother, a law student, loves to bring up controversial topics.

Avoid repetition unless you are using it specifically to emphasize a point.

Wordy: The Trident has a number of missile launchers aboard. Each launcher is capable of launching an MIRV.

For your information, we have tested your spectrum analyzer and are of the opinion that it needs calibration.

If you require further information, please feel free to telephone Mr. Thompson at (613) 489-9039.

Better: The Trident has a number of missile launchers capable of firing an MIRV.

We have tested your spectrum analyzer and consider that it needs calibration.

For further information, please telephone Mr. Thompson at (613) 489-9039.

Review idle, non-working words such as

- essentially
- basically
- ultimately
- inevitably
- and—when used too often
- there—when used *with, is, was, are, have been, had been*; for example, “there is something going on” changes to “something is going on”
- of—for example, “example outside *of* the office”

Micro-reductions

To make micro-reductions, work at the word level to replace long words with shorter ones. Use the simplest possible words to make your point; however, be careful not to give up precision:

- abatement (decrease)
- abbreviate (shorten)
- visualize (picture)
- voluminous (bulky)

Checking the language

Check the language used in your document including the punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Errors detract from the quality and credibility of your writing. Use “Chapter 4: Writing your draft,” “Chapter 6: Writing tricks and traps,” and “Appendix: A style guide” as guidelines.

Use your computer software to help you edit, especially to check spelling and grammar.

Spelling checkers

Always use electronic spelling checker facilities whenever they are available. However, your company dictionary provides the final decision on the correct spelling of a word. Most spelling checkers can also be configured to identify double word entries, incorrectly capitalized words, and other similar problems.

Grammar checkers

Grammar checkers can be very helpful in the final stages of editing. They can help identify possible problems such as the use of passive voice and incomplete sentences. They can also help find errors in basic composition, such as the wrong word spelled correctly; for example, “you” versus “your.”

Grammar checkers can be quite frustrating to use. Remember, it is up to you to make the final judgment. Use grammar checking software as a guide only.

Checking for adherence to standards

Check to ensure adherence to your writing or style, format, and graphic standards. Standards are described in “Chapter 3: Planning your document.”

The final check

On your final pass, make sure that you have fully incorporated the Seven C’s. Make sure your document is

- correct in its contents
- complete in detail
- clear and easy to read
- coherent
- consistent throughout
- concise
- comprehensible to your identified readers

When all of these criteria have been fulfilled, release your document.

Chapter 6: Writing tricks and traps

Business writing is unlike literary writing in that it requires a minimalist approach. Readers want to extract the information quickly. This chapter describes some of the “tricks and traps” of modern business writing. Use this information and that contained in “Appendix: A style guide” to help you achieve the Seven C’s of business writing.

This chapter covers

1. commonly misused and misspelled words
2. direct address
3. humor
4. jargon
5. mood
6. noun strings
7. pronoun reference
8. subject-verb agreement
9. active and passive voice

Commonly misused and misspelled words

This section shows the proper use of several commonly misused or misspelled words.

A; an

Use *a* before a word or abbreviation when the *h* is sounded or if the vowel is sounded as *w* or *y*. Use *an* with a silent *h* or a vowel sound.

Examples:

- an hour
- a hotel
- an onion
- a European

A lot; alot; allot

Use *a lot* to mean much, many, or a great deal.

Example: A lot of people feel that way.

Because it is informal in tone, do not use *a lot* in formal business documents.

Alot is often used instead of *a lot*; however, there is no such word.

Use *allot* to mean distribute, assign, or give.

Example: The treasurer will allot \$30 to each member of the team.

Accept; except

Use *accept* to mean approve, receive, or tolerate.

Example: We will accept your application.

Use the verb *except* to mean excuse, exclude, or exempt.

Example: We except you from paying the GST.

Use the preposition *except* to mean other than.

Example: The courier picks up packages every day except Sunday.

Advice; advise

Use *advice* as a noun and *advise* as a verb.

Examples: His advice was sound.

She advised the driver to take a different route.

Affect; effect

Affect is only used as a verb and it means to influence or produce an effect upon.

Example: The weather affected the mood of the crowd.

The noun *effect* means the consequences or the result.

Example: The effect of the program was easily measured.

The verb *effect* means to bring about or to accomplish.

Example: The prisoner effected his escape by picking a lock.

Among; between

Use *among* to refer to three or more.

Example: The reward money was shared among five employees.

Use *between* to refer to two.

Example: The reward money was shared between two employees.

Assure; ensure; insure

Use *assure* when the meaning is to state with confidence that something has been or will be made certain.

Example: He assured the president that production would increase 8%.

Use *ensure* when the meaning is to make certain of something.

Example: The new toner cartridge will ensure better print quality.

Use *insure* when the meaning is to protect against financial loss.

Example: We insure our drivers.

Data

The word *data*, like the words *criteria* and *phenomena*, is a plural noun. Purists use the word with a plural verb; for example, "These data are not reliable."

However, its use with a singular verb is becoming more popular; for example, "This data is not reliable."

Farther; further

Use *farther* to indicate a greater distance.

Example: He traveled farther than the rest of the team.

Use *further* to indicate a continuation (as an adjective) or to advance (as a verb).

Examples: The promotion was a further step.

To further her education, she took a night course.

Fewer; less

Use *fewer* to refer to items that can be counted.

Example: Fewer people reported sick that day.

Use *less* to refer to general quantities.

Example: There is less water available than predicted.

In; into

In is a passive word.

Example: Ride in the car.

Into implies action.

Example: Step into the car.

Its; It's

Its is the possessive case of the pronoun *it*.

Example: The dog injured its leg.

It's is the contraction for *it is* or *it has only* and is not usually used in business writing.

Like; as

Avoid using *like* as a subordinating conjunction.

Example: At a party, he behaves like he does in school.

Use *like* exclusively as a preposition.

Example: At a party, he behaves like a clown.

As is the appropriate subordinating conjunction with clauses.

Example: At a party, he behaves as he does in school.

Of

Avoid using *of* in the place of *have*.

Wrong: Mr. Phillips should of measured.

Right: Mr. Phillips should have measured.

People; persons

Use *persons* to refer to a specific number of individuals.

Example: The lawsuit named six persons.

Use *people* to refer to a group of individuals too large to count precisely.

Example: Thousands of people demonstrated at Parliament Hill today.

Principal; principle

Use the noun *principal* to mean (1) the first one in importance, the leader; or (2) a sum of money on which interest is paid.

Examples: John was one of the firm's principals.

The invested principal of \$10,000 earned \$950 in interest last year.

Use the adjective *principal* to mean most important or chief.

Example: The principal reason for choosing the HL1020 laser printer was its low cost.

Use the word *principle* to mean a strong guiding, code of conduct, or a fundamental or primary source of information.

Example: His principles prevented him from taking advantage of the error.

Their; there; they're

Their is the possessive meaning belonging to them.

Example: The staff took their holidays earlier than usual.

There means in that place.

Examples: There were 18 desks in the office.

Put it there.

They're is the contraction of *they are* and should not be used in business writing.

To; too; two

To is a preposition that means in the direction of, against, before, or until. *Too* means as well. *Two* is the quantity 2.

That and which

Writers often confuse the words *that* and *which*, sometimes completely changing the meaning of a sentence.

Except when it is used as the object of a preposition (for example, "...from which you choose..."), the word *which* nearly always follows a comma and introduces a phrase that provides additional information *not essential* to the meaning of the sentence. When the phrase is a parenthetical statement, it should be enclosed in commas.

Example: The LANs, which connect the corporation's computers, need upgrading immediately. (This sentence tells something extra about all LANs, but they all do the same thing.)

Use *that* to introduce a phrase that is *essential* to the meaning of the sentence.

Example: The LANs that connect the corporation's computers need upgrading immediately. (This sentence tells what one type of LAN does, implying that there is more than one type.)

Direct address

Addressing readers directly is the most effective way of communicating with them. Wherever possible, avoid referring indirectly to your reader as "the reader" or "the user"; instead, use "you" or use imperative commands, whichever is appropriate for the type of document you are writing.

Give all instructions in the imperative mood.

Right: Prepare the cables according to standard procedure.

Avoid: The cables should be prepared according to the steps used in the standard procedure.

Humor

Humor is a matter of personal and subjective taste. Also, it is often culturally dependent and what amuses one person may insult another. Use humor carefully or not at all.

Jargon

Webster's dictionary defines jargon as

1. the technical terminology or idiom characteristic of a special activity or group
2. obscure and often pretentious language marked by circumlocutions and long words

While special terminology is sometimes necessary, it is important to distinguish between good jargon of the first definition and the bad jargon of the second definition. Any jargon used should be of the first type.

Use the following checklist to determine if a jargon word is acceptable:

- Is it necessary? Good jargon communicates either more accurately or more economically than ordinary English.
- Does it have a sound etymological (linguistic) basis? If there is no logical connection between the expression and the meaning assigned to it, the expression will not be easily learned or understood.
- Is it distinctive? Make sure that the expression does not have a meaning other than the intended one.

Mood

Use the present tense in the indicative mood to make ordinary, objective statements.

Example: The scanner also acts as a fax machine.

Use the imperative mood for instructions on the operation of equipment or to make requests (see also “Active and passive voice”).

Example:

To make sure the telephone works,

1. Lift the handset.
2. Listen for the dial tone.
3. Dial a telephone number.
4. Speak to the party who answers the phone.

Noun strings

Avoid using noun strings. Use commas and prepositional phrases to indicate the relationships among the nouns and modifiers.

Right: errors in the detection of metal fatigue

Wrong: metal fatigue detection errors

Try to limit the length of any noun strings to two modifiers.

You may use noun strings standard or common to your industry and familiar to the audience.

Pronoun reference

Make sure that all pronouns have a clear referent. If a pronoun does not have a clear referent, readers may assume that the pronoun refers to the closest preceding noun, which may not be the intended one.

There are several different types of pronouns (for a complete listing of pronouns, consult a grammar text):

- personal pronouns, such as *I, you, he, she, and it*
- possessive pronouns, such as *my, mine, hers, and theirs*
- relative pronouns, such as *who, whom, whose, which, and that*
- demonstrative pronouns, such as *this, these, those, and that*

Unclear: It was one of ten computers that Teletec Systems purchased when they were new. Testing has so improved software trouble-shooting that it can be confidently sold to customers.

Clear: It was one of ten new computers that Teletec Systems purchased. Testing has so improved software trouble-shooting that software can be confidently sold to customers.

Subject-verb agreement

Subject-verb agreement is fundamental to the readability of business communications. This section describes subject-verb agreement concerning collective, plural, and singular subjects.

Collective subjects

When dealing with collective subjects, use a singular verb when emphasizing a group as a single unit.

Example: The group was not available.

When dealing with collective subjects, you can use a plural verb to emphasize the units within a group. However, it is more common to specify the particular units. The following examples are both correct, but the first is the recommended usage.

Examples: The members of the team are agreed.

The team are agreed.

Collective nouns as well as expressions of time and quantities take either a singular or plural verb, depending on their intended meaning.

Examples: Three years is the time allotted to complete the study. (collective noun considered singular)

Three years are not enough to complete the study. (collective noun considered plural)

Use the following words with either a singular or plural verb, depending on the noun to which they refer:

- a part of
- a percentage of
- all
- any
- more
- most
- none
- one-half of
- some
- two-thirds of

Examples: One-half of the work has been done.

One-half of the telephones have been installed.

Use singular verbs with nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning.

Examples: A hundred feet of shelving is all we have left.

Telecommunications is a growing industry.

Plural subjects

Use a plural verb for a plural subject.

Use a singular verb when the subject is a sum or a number of units.

Example: Six dozen fuses is all that we have left.

Always use a plural verb when two or more subjects are joined by the conjunction *and*.

Example: The resistor and the capacitor need to be replaced.

Use a plural verb for a plural subject quantified by the following phrases or words:

- percentage of
- half
- none
- all
- many
- other
- any
- more
- part
- both
- most
- several
- few
- no
- some

Example: Most of our software developers have experience in JAVA.

The following words require plural verbs when they are used as a subject or as the modifier of a subject:

- both
- others
- few
- several
- many

Examples: Several are still available.

Many workers have received awards.

Singular subjects

Use a singular verb for a singular subject.

Use a singular verb for singular subjects joined by the following conjunctions:

- accompanied by
- in addition to
- nor
- and not
- including
- or
- as well as
- no less than
- with
- but

Example: The resistor, in addition to the capacitor, needs to be replaced.

Use a singular verb for singular subjects quantified by the following phrases or words:

- a percentage of
- all
- another
- any
- each
- either
- every
- half
- more
- much
- neither
- no
- none
- one
- part
- some

Example: Every handset needs to be tested prior to shipping.

Use a singular verb when any of the following are used as a subject or modifier of a subject:

- another
- anybody
- nobody
- anyone
- everyone
- one
- each
- much
- somebody
- either
- neither
- someone
- every
- no one

Example: Nobody knows the answer.

Active and passive voice

In business writing, use the active voice over the passive voice. Active-voice writing clearly tells your reader what the action is and who is performing it.

When a sentence is written in the active voice, the subject *performs* the action. When a sentence is written in the passive voice, the subject is *acted upon*.

The active voice gives writing a sense of strength and vitality

Example: Henry rang the bell. (Henry is the subject.)

Team 1 completed the job.

The passive voice slows the flow of the writing.

Examples: The bell was rung by Henry. (The bell is the subject.)

The job was completed by Team 1.

To determine if a sentence is in the active or passive voice, identify the subject of the sentence and then decide if the subject is doing the acting or is being acted upon. As well, passive-voice verbs always have a *to be* helping verb; for example, *are, been, being, is, was, and were*.

The passive voice can sometimes be helpful in situations requiring tact and sensitivity.

Examples: Your car has been damaged.

A major error was made on your last monthly statement.

The passive voice is often used in standards and similar guideline type documents.

Although the passive voice has its place in writing, its overuse is a major obstacle to clear communication.

Appendix: A style guide

Use this appendix as a basic style guide for your business writing. Most of the commonly encountered problem areas are covered here. This style guide describes how to use

1. abbreviations
2. capitalization and uppercase
3. examples
4. figures
5. footnotes in tables and figures
6. instructions
7. italics
8. lists
9. notes
10. numerical expressions
11. punctuation
12. tables
13. trademarks and trade names

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened forms of words, terms, phrases, or units of measurement used in place of the whole by convention, for convenience, or to save space.

Different types of abbreviations have rules to govern them. For instance, abbreviations of terms and phrases are written in uppercase letters, while abbreviations of words and most units of measure are written in lowercase letters.

Because of these differences, the rules described here are grouped according to the type of abbreviation to which they refer. However, some abbreviations do not necessarily follow the rules listed below because their form has been established through use.

Abbreviating terms and phrases

Abbreviate a term or phrase when it is lengthy and appears often in a work, where space is limited, or when the abbreviated version is more common than the full term.

Use the full term or phrase rather than its abbreviated form if the term or phrase is not used often.

Define abbreviations the first time they appear in the text of a work. Present the full term or phrase first, in lowercase, followed by the uppercase abbreviation in parentheses.

Example: File access is provided through the local area network (LAN).

There is no need to define abbreviations that have become an accepted part of the language and appear in the main body of your dictionary.

If the full term is a proper name, a trademark, or a trade name, write it with initial capitals.

Do not use periods in the abbreviation of a term or phrase. However, periods may be used if they are part of an official or registered abbreviation (for example, M.I.T.).

Make the abbreviation of a term or phrase plural by adding a lowercase *s*. Do not put an apostrophe before the final *s* in a plural abbreviation.

Right: ATMs

Wrong: ATM's

When using indefinite articles with abbreviations of terms or phrases, use *an* if the abbreviation starts with a vowel sound. Use *a* if the abbreviation starts with a consonant sound.

Examples: A LAN allows everyone to access the organization's files.

An ATM dispenses cash.

Usually, a sentence may begin with an abbreviation only when the abbreviation has become an accepted part of the language, or is an official product name or trademark. To avoid beginning a sentence with an unaccepted abbreviation, rewrite the sentence or write the term or phrase in full.

Do not abbreviate terms or phrases in headings and titles unless the abbreviation has become an accepted part of the language, or is an official product name or trademark.

Abbreviating simple words

Use the following English equivalents instead of their Latin terms:

- for example (e.g.)
- that is (i.e.)
- through, by means of, with respect to, for each (per)
- namely (viz.)
- by the way, by means of (via)

The abbreviation *per* may be used in mathematical formulas such as characters per inch.

Do not use *etc.*, *etcetera*, or its English equivalent *and so on*.

Use periods in an abbreviation only if the abbreviation could otherwise be confused with a word.

Examples: *fig.* for figure, *no.* for number

Use periods in abbreviations of titles.

Examples: Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr.

Abbreviating units of measurement

Abbreviations for the International System of Units (SI) units are called symbols. In the following rules, the abbreviation also refers to SI symbols.

Abbreviate units of measurement only when they are accompanied by a numeric value.

Example: The cabinet weighs 45 kg and is 2.5 m high.

Where space is limited (such as in a figure), a unit of measurement may be abbreviated even if it is not accompanied by a numeric value.

Abbreviations for units of measurement are written in lowercase letters. However, capitalize abbreviations derived from proper names (for example, Hz for hertz, N for newton, W for watt).

Do not begin a sentence with an abbreviated unit of measurement, rewrite the sentence to avoid doing so, or spell out the unit in full.

Do not use periods in the abbreviation of a unit of measurement. However, use them if the abbreviation would otherwise spell a word (for example, in. for inch).

Abbreviations for units of measurement do not take an *s* in the plural.

Leave a space between a value and the first letter of an abbreviated unit of measurement, and between abbreviations.

Right: -48 V ac

Wrong: -48Vac, -48 Vac

Do not leave a space between a value and an abbreviated unit of measurement in the case of degrees, minutes, and seconds of plane angles; and in the case of thermal degrees and their unit of measurement (for example, 4°K).

For more information on SI units and their use, see “Numerical expressions.”

Using symbols as abbreviations

Do not use symbols as abbreviations.

Right: The sum of the forces at the point was 100 N.

Wrong: The sum of the forces @ the point was 100 N.

The ampersand symbol (&) may only be used to mean *and* in official company names (for example, AT&T).

Symbols for SI units may be used when they are accompanied by a value.

Do not begin a sentence with a symbol, rewrite the sentence to avoid doing so, or spell out the symbol in full.

Do not use virgule constructions such as *and/or* to abbreviate a sentence.

Right: Use ammonium carbonate, or ammonium chloride, or both.

Wrong: Use ammonium carbonate and/or ammonium chloride.

Acronyms and initialisms

An acronym is a pronounceable abbreviation derived from the initial letters or from parts of a compound term.

Examples: NATO, LAN, laser, modem

An initialism is an unpronounceable abbreviation derived from only the initial letters of a series of words.

Examples: GST, CRTC

Because acronyms and initialisms are abbreviations, follow the same rules when using them.

Capitalization and uppercase

A term is said to be capitalized when only the first letter of the term is in uppercase. Capitalize words according to convention, not to emphasize their importance.

Capitalization

Capitalize the first word of each sentence.

Always capitalize proper nouns. A proper noun is a specific person, place or thing (for example, Ottawa).

In headings, capitalize only the first word.

Capitalize the first letter of a trademark or trade name.

Do not capitalize trade names of products that have become common nouns, as identified in a dictionary (for example, nylon). A common noun is a noun that names one or more members of a large class of things (for example, aspirin). Where possible, avoid using trade names as generic nouns or adjectives. For example, use *adhesive tape* instead of *Scotch tape*.

Capitalize the first word in the caption of a table.

Example: **Table 1**—Yearly sales forecast

Capitalize the first word in a table entry.

Do not capitalize SI units when writing them out in full (for example, watt). However, capitalize the non-SI temperature unit Celsius when spelling it out in full.

Uppercase

Use uppercase for acronyms, initialisms, and the abbreviations of terms and phrases, except where they have become an accepted part of the language.

Examples: File access is provided through the local area network (LAN).

If your modem fails, restart your computer.

Examples

Use examples to help your reader understand complex or easily misunderstood material. Make them clear, concise, and directly relevant to the material they support.

Separate complex examples from the surrounding text by placing them on their own lines.

Introduce examples properly and clearly identify the material being supported.

Example: You can modify any aspect of page layout. Some examples are

- margin width
- indents and tab stops
- page orientation
- headers and footers

Use a comma before and after such terms as *for example* when they are used within a sentence to introduce an example that follows immediately (see also “Punctuation”).

Example: Teletec Systems developers have, for example, developed a user-friendly graphical interface for the Teletec 2007.

When the term introduces an independent clause, precede it with a semicolon instead of a comma.

Example: Teletec Systems developers have written leading-edge programs; for example, the Teletec XZ is the fastest database on the market.

Use a colon after the introductory word or statement to an example if the word or statement is separated from the preceding text.

Example: This is an example of an example.

Use a colon following a one word introduction such as *Example* or *Compare*.

Example: Example: five chairs, two desks, and two telephones.

Many examples require prose or vertical lists; therefore, read “Lists” in this appendix to understand the special requirements for their punctuation and format.

Figures

A figure is any graphic that is not a table, for example, line drawings, photographs, charts, graphs, and screen captures. Place in an attachment any long figures that disrupt the flow of your document.

There are two types of figures: informal and formal. Informal figures are small, simple figures which do not warrant a caption (title). Formal figures are more important graphics; therefore, they require a caption.

Because figures are used to support text, ensure that they are properly introduced and referenced in the text.

Figures may also use callouts (labels) to point out important features.

Footnotes can be used to give more information about a specific item on the figure. See “Figure and table footnotes” below.

See the example figure below.

Figure 17—Front view of a typical older model PC (example figure)

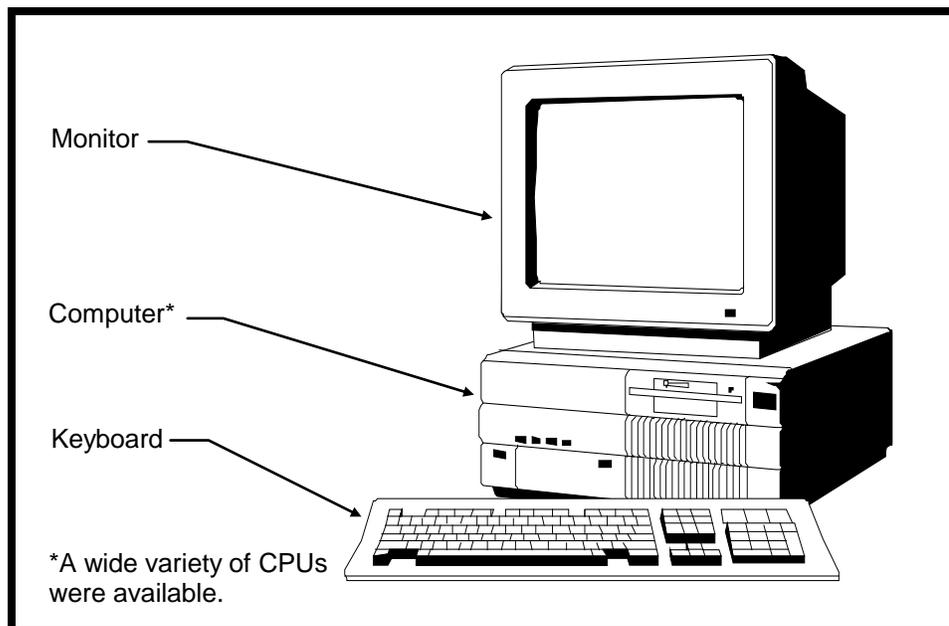


Figure and table footnotes

Use footnotes for providing explanatory text and comments in figures and tables. Make them concise and directly relevant to the items they support.

In a figure, position footnotes in a common place inside the figure frame. In a table, position footnotes inside the bottom of the table frame.

Use symbols to reference footnotes. The standard footnote reference symbols, in order of precedence, are as follows:

- asterisk (*)
- dagger (†)
- double dagger (‡)
- section mark (§)

Place the symbol immediately after any punctuation (except a dash) following the last word of the material to be footnoted.

Example: Disconnect the power cable.*

In the footnote, place the explanatory information immediately after the reference symbol.

Example: *The power cable is described in detail below.

See the examples in “Figures,” above, and in “Tables” at the end of this appendix.

Instructions

Poorly worded instructions for operating a piece of equipment may result in confusion for the user, or incorrect operation of the device, or both. Pay close attention to the structure and readability of all instructions.

Instructions can be presented in either a prose or vertical list. Use a prose list only for very simple instructions. Use a vertical list for more involved instructions. For more information, see “Lists.”

To enhance the readability of instructions, construct them so that the result of the action appears before the action.

Always word instructions in the imperative mood and whenever possible, start each step with a verb.

Example: To install the latest version of RapidBooks, do the following:

1. Insert the CD into your computer.
2. Click on “Install RapidBooks” when the icon appears.
3. Follow the instructions on your screen.

If a step requires a special warning, ensure that you provide it *before* the step.

Italicization

Use italics to identify key terms in a discussion, terms with special meaning, or terms to which your reader’s attention is directed. Do not overuse italics.

Italicize a term on its first use only.

Example: The brochure is organized so that the pictures are shown on the facing page.

Use italics to provide emphasis where it cannot be conveyed by the order or choice of words.

Example: Why was *he* chosen to chair the committee?

Italics may be used to identify a technical term, especially when it is accompanied by its definition. Italicize a term on its first use only.

Example: The address line displays the current web site’s *URL*.

Italicize words, letters, and figures when referred to as words, letters, and figures.

Example: The word *receive* is often misspelled.

Italicize punctuation marks, except parentheses, that immediately follow italicized text or numbers.

Example: There are several interpretations of the word *receive*:

Lists

Lists are used to present a series of words, phrases, or short sentences. There are two types of lists: prose and vertical.

Vertical lists are generally much easier to read than prose lists because the information is more visually accessible; therefore, they are preferred in business writing.

Prose lists

The prose list format is most useful for presenting short, unordered series of words or phrases about three items in length. Items that form complete sentences do not belong in prose lists. Put in vertical list format long lists, lists with complicated technical items, and lists with items that form complete sentences.

When using prose lists to name items, do not include lengthy descriptions of the items in the same sentence because they can disrupt a reader's attention. Instead, describe the items immediately following their listing, and in the same order they were listed.

Maintaining parallel structure

Maintain parallel structure from item to item. Begin each item with a word of the same grammatical kind (noun, verb, or preposition).

Example: The committee head chairs the meetings, acts as a liaison between the committee and Teletec Systems, and obtains approval for the field trial site.

Use the active or passive voice consistently throughout.

Maintain the same verb tense throughout.

Punctuating prose lists

Punctuation in prose lists falls into two areas: punctuating the introductory text and punctuating the items in a list.

Punctuating the introductory text

Following the introductory text to a prose list, use a colon, a comma, or no punctuation at all.

Use a colon following the introductory text when it is a grammatically complete sentence (often containing language such as *as follows* and *the following*) and introductory words such as *namely*, *for example*, or *that is* do not appear.

Example: Air is largely composed of the following gasses: oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen.

Use a colon following a one word introduction such as *Example* or *Compare*.

Example: Example: five chairs, two desks, and two telephones.

Use a comma or a semicolon before introductory words (such as *namely*, *that is*, *for example*, or *for instance*) and a comma afterward when the introduction is a complete sentence and there are three or more items in the list.

Example: The cabinet holds several types of media; for example, CDs, cassettes, and videos.

Use a comma before the introductory words if there are fewer than three items.

Example: The cabinet holds different types of media, for instance, videos and cassettes.

Use a comma when the introductory text is a dependent clause or phrase (that is, it is grammatically incomplete).

Example: Before you start, clear your work area, read the instructions, and obtain all the necessary tools.

Use no punctuation after the introductory text when it would separate a preposition from its object. Prepositions show the relationship of a noun or pronoun to some other word in the sentence.

Some common prepositions and prepositional phrases are

- as
- at
- because of
- between
- by
- concerning
- for
- from
- in
- in spite of
- instead of
- on account of
- out of
- over
- regarding
- to
- with
- under

Example: Each table is made with two shelves, four legs, and a drawer.

Use no punctuation when it would separate a verb from its complement (a word that completes the meaning of a verb).

Example: Each desk requires a computer, a printer, and a wastebasket.

For more information, see the applicable sections in “Punctuation” in this appendix.

Punctuating the items

To prevent ambiguity in a list of more than three items, use commas to separate the items, even before the final *and*.

Right: The development organization is supported by three groups: Manufacturing, Administration, and Finance.

Wrong: The development organization is supported by three groups: Manufacturing, Administration and Finance.

Use semicolons instead of commas to separate items in a list if any item already contains a comma.

Example: Bids were offered by three companies: Smith and Smith Company, Calgary; Jones and White Company, Toronto; and Central Builders, Ottawa.

In a prose list, use a comma or a colon between a word and its definition. Use a comma when the definition is a simple appositive (a word—with or without modifiers—that follows a noun and identifies it). Use a colon for a more involved construction.

Example: The newly elected officers of the committee are John Hancock, president; Tom Smith, vice-president; Edward White, treasurer; and Fred Crown, secretary. (simple appositives)

Numbering items

The items in prose lists are numbered if their order is important. Enclose them in parentheses, followed by one space.

Example: To answer the telephone, (1) pick up the receiver, (2) say “hello,” and (3) listen for a response.

Vertical lists

The vertical list format is most useful for presenting long and detailed items, lists of four or more items, or a series of steps in an operation. Also, it is used for presenting items that form complete sentences.

Because it is common to have a list (vertical or prose) nested within a vertical list, the two levels must be differentiated easily. Therefore, a normal vertical list is referred to as a first-level list and a nested list as a second-level list. Each level of list is identified differently (see “Identifying items in a first-level list” and “Identifying items in a second-level list” below).

Do not use more than two levels in a vertical list.

Introduce all vertical lists (including second-level lists) with explanatory lead-in text.

Generally, when using a vertical list to name items, do not describe the items at length in the list. Instead, describe the items immediately following their listing, and in the same order they were listed.

Maintaining parallel structure

Items in a vertical list should be all single words, all short phrases, or all short sentences.

Maintain parallel structure from item to item. Begin each item with a word of the same grammatical kind (noun, verb, or preposition).

Use the active or the passive voice consistently throughout.

Maintain the same verb tense throughout.

Identifying items in a first-level list

Use bullet characters (•) to identify the items in a first-level list when the order of the items is not important. However, use numbers to identify the items if the sequence is important.

Examples: Four parts of a common shoe are

- tongue
- heel
- sole
- toe

The core assembly has four layers (from top to bottom):

1. outer casing
2. protective barrier
3. inner casing
4. core

Identifying items in a second-level list

Use dashes to identify the items in a second-level list when the order of the items is not important. However, use lowercase letters to identify the items if the sequence is important (as shown below in the second example), or if the letters are used in a corresponding table or explanation.

Examples: Each team was tasked to bring back four items:

- Team 1 (John and Mary):
 - five apples
 - one pencil
 - one clam
 - six grapple grommets
- Team 2 (Mike and Bob):
 - 15 cups
 - ten paper clips
 - 20 erasers
 - one three-hole punch

The components and subcomponents of the two core assembly casings are as follows (see the attached drawing):

1. outer casing:
 - a. nonmagnetic protective coating
 - b. metallic shell
2. inner casing:
 - a. secondary protective barrier
 - b. fibrous shell

Multiple-column lists

The items in a vertical list may be placed in multiple columns only when the items are single words or very short phrases whose sequence is not important. Also, there must be more than four items in the first column before a second column is made.

Example: The database allows

- data entry
- file generation
- report generation
- file modification
- database conversion
- self-duplication

The number of columns depends on the length of the items; however, a maximum of three columns may be used.

Never create a one-item column; balance the number of items in the columns as required. If necessary, make the farthest right column the shortest one.

Punctuating vertical lists

Punctuation in vertical lists falls into two areas: punctuating the introductory text and punctuating the items in the list.

Punctuating the introductory text

The rules for punctuation following introductory text in a vertical list are generally the same as those in a prose list (see “Prose lists”). There are two exceptions: do not introduce a vertical list with a comma and do not use a colon when the introductory statement to the list is a complete sentence and is followed by another complete sentence.

Example: The main points of the plan are shown below. The specific details of each point are described afterward.

Punctuating the items

Neither capitalize nor end-punctuate the items in a vertical list unless they are complete sentences or at least one item in the list is a complete sentence.

Examples: The administrative assistant is responsible for

- handling telephone calls
- booking patients

- processing payments
- keeping the lobby tidy

At the end of the day, the administrative assistant must

- Call the patients for the next day.
- Call the patients who missed their appointments.
- Prepare the bank deposit.
- Enter the daily transactions in the accounting software.

Note: Capitalization in vertical lists is a common area of dispute.

Notes

Use notes to draw your reader's attention to important specific details or differences. Place them immediately after the information to which they apply.

Make notes simple and concise. They are not a crutch for poor information flow. Use negative instructions in a note only when it is important that something *not* be done.

Place a colon immediately after the word *note* and then follow with the descriptive text. Capitalize and italicize the word *note* and capitalize the first word of the descriptive sentence that follows.

Example: *Note:* To place an outside call, dial **9** before the usual number.

When notes are placed consecutively, place them in order of importance. Number them in ascending order starting at one: place the number designator after the word *note* and separate them with a space.

Example: *Note 1:* To place an outside call, dial **9** before the usual number.

Note 2: If you hear a busy signal, hang up and try again.

Numerical expressions

This section describes how to write numerical expressions for

1. numbers in text and tables
2. SI units
3. symbols in text
4. dates and clock times
5. telephone and fax numbers

Using numbers in text

Use digits for all measurements, times, dates, percentages, amounts of money, decimals, and fractions.

In prose, spell out numbers *one* through *ten*. Write numbers *11* and greater as digits.

Always spell out a number that begins a sentence.

In prose, spell out the ordinal numbers *first* through *tenth*. Write the ordinal numbers *11th* and greater as digits.

When numbers both over and under *ten* are used in the same sentence, write all numbers as digits.

For very large numbers, use digits for the prefix and spell out the suffix.

Examples: 20 billion, 3 million, 42 trillion

If a phrase has two consecutive numbers, spell out the first one.

Examples: two 50-lb bags

two hundred and seventy-five 35-mm cameras

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) recommends using a space rather than a comma in numbers with five or more digits, except for amounts of money. However, commas are still commonly used in both cases. Until commas in nonmonetary figures become less common, they are acceptable. Position the comma or space between groups of three digits.

Right: 1000; 10 000; 10,000; 100 000; 100,000; \$40,000

Wrong: 1 000, \$40 000

Precede decimals of a value less than one with a zero.

Example: 0.57

When a number is an approximation, spell it out and precede it with the qualifier *roughly* or *about*.

Hyphenate between a number and its unit of measurement when together they modify a noun.

Example: 3-kg cable housing

Using numbers in tables

Use digits for all numbers in tables.

Use units for all measurements, times, dates, percentages, page numbers, and amounts of money. Enclose the units in parentheses and position them below the variable titles, not with the data.

In tables, round off numeric values to two decimal places. However, do not round off numeric values that specify measurements of very small items, for example, electronics components.

Within a column in a table, keep the number of decimal places constant.

Example: Table 1 shows the company's first quarter sales.

Table 18—First quarter sales (example table)

Month	Sales (\$)
January	12,025.98
February	7589.04
March	9870.23

In numbers with five or more digits, separate the digits into groups of three using the same rules that apply to numbers in text.

Precede the decimal of a value less than one with a zero.

Example: 0.57

In tables, break up long columns of data at regular intervals with blank lines.

Omit a column in a table if all of the entries are the same. Footnote the omission.

In tables, distinguish among zeroes, missing data, and data that are not applicable.

Using the International System of Units

Always use SI units of measure and their symbols (see Table 3).

Note: The SI has not altogether displaced older units and modes of expression in all places and branches of science. If the subject area you are documenting uses units other than the SI, use the older units and modes of expression as required (for example, horsepower).

Do not capitalize SI units when writing them out in full.

If the Imperial units are required, put the equivalent SI units in parentheses after the Imperial. Some examples of Imperial units are inches, feet, yard, ounces, and pounds.

Use millimeters or meters to express length. Do not use the centimeter as a base unit.

Table 3—Units of the International System of Units

Quantity	Unit	Symbol
Amount of substance	mole	mol
Capacitance	farad	F
Electric current	ampere	A
Electric potential	volt	V
Electrical resistance	ohm	Ω
Energy	joule	J
Force	newton	N
Frequency	hertz	Hz
Length	meter	m
Luminous intensity	candela	cd
Mass	kilogram*	kg
Power	watt	W
Pressure	pascal	Pa
Quantity of electricity	coulomb	C
Thermodynamic temperature	kelvin	K
Time	second	s

*For historical reasons, the kilogram rather than the gram was chosen as the base unit for mass. However, prefixes are applied to the term gram (g) instead of the official base unit.

Use SI prefixes whenever possible (see Table 4).

Table 4—Prefixes for the International System of Units

Factor	Prefix	Symbol
10^{18}	exa	E
10^{15}	peta	P
10^{12}	tera	T
10^9	giga	G
10^6	mega	M
10^3	kilo	k
10^2	hecto	h
10^1	deka	da
10^{-1}	deci	d
10^{-2}	centi	c
10^{-3}	milli	m
10^{-6}	micro	μ
10^{-9}	nano	n
10^{-12}	pico	p
10^{-15}	femto	f
10^{-18}	atto	a

Use only numbers between 0.1 and 1000 in expressing the quantity of any SI unit. For example, the quantity 12 000 meters is written as 12 km, not 12 000 m.

Using symbols in text

Use abbreviations rather than symbols in numeric expressions, except for the following symbols:

- dollar (\$) and pound (£) signs for money
- degree sign (°) for temperature
- percent sign (%) in figures
- mathematic and scientific signs in equations and formulas

Use symbols and abbreviations consistently. Each symbol or abbreviation should represent only one thing.

Writing dates and clock times

Use a consistent system for reporting date and time values.

Examples: 4:30 P.M., 4:30 in the afternoon, 16:30 hours (24-hour clock)

10 o'clock or 10 P.M.; not 10 o'clock P.M. (redundant)

July 1, 2007; not July 1st, 2007

1 July 2007 (military form)

2007-03-29 (international standard form for March 29, 2007)

Writing telephone and fax numbers

Use digits for all telephone and fax machine numbers.

For toll-free 800 and similar numbers, separate each number group with a hyphen.

Example: For technical problems, call toll-free 1-800-123-4567.

For normal numbers, place the area code in parentheses followed by a space and then the local number separated with a hyphen.

Example: For all other problems, call (403) 237-9500.

Punctuation

This module provides some basic guidelines for the use of common punctuation marks based on American English usage. Consult your company dictionary for additional detail.

Apostrophes

Use an apostrophe and an *s* to indicate the possessive case of a noun or indefinite pronoun. Add only an apostrophe to words ending in *s* or *z* sounds when adding another *s* would make pronunciation difficult.

Examples: The product's life span is 5 years.

Teletec Systems' product line is expanding.

An apostrophe often forms plurals of letters, figures, and words referred to as words.

Examples: No *and's*, *if's*, or *but's*.

Do not put an apostrophe before the final *s* in a plural abbreviation.

Right: ATMs

Wrong: ATM's

Colons

Use a colon to introduce a clause or phrase that explains, illustrates, amplifies, or restates what has gone before.

Example: The sentence was poorly constructed: it lacked both unity and coherence.

Use a colon following the introductory statement to a list or an example when the introductory text is a complete sentence (usually containing language such as *as follows* and *the following*) and introductory words such as *namely*, *for example*, or *that is* do not appear.

Example: Senior managers should read the following: *Introduction to Qualitec, Human Resources Policies and Procedures, and Payroll Policies and Procedures.*

Use a colon following a one word introduction such as *Example* or *Compare*.

Example: Example: five chairs, two desks, and two telephones.

Use a colon to separate hours from minutes and the first part of a ratio from the second.

Use a colon to separate words that rhyme or compare.

Examples: doom:gloom and black:white.

Use a colon to express a ratio.

Example: 2:1 (2 to 1)

Use a colon following the salutation in formal correspondence.

Place colons before closing quotation marks only when they are part of the quotation; otherwise, place them after.

Leave one space after a colon in prose text except between items in a ratio or words that rhyme or compare. Spacing in other situations may be based on standard tab settings.

Commas

Use a comma to separate a long introductory phrase or clause from the main body of a sentence.

Example: Although they are new to fiber optic technology, their experience with standard transmission media gives them a solid base of knowledge.

If an introductory thought is short and no confusion will result, the comma may be omitted.

Use a comma to separate a dependent clause from an independent clause that follows it.

Example: When the job was complete, the president of the company gave each employee an extra week of vacation.

If a dependent clause falls at the end of a sentence, precede it with a comma only if the clause is an afterthought.

Examples: The project will be completed by September 27, if you approve.
We contacted you immediately after finding the problem.

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses. Coordinating conjunctions include

- and
- but
- for
- or
- so
- nor
- yet

Example: We are known for our laser printers, but we also do make photocopiers.

Use a comma after a conjunctive adverb that begins a sentence. Conjunctive adverbs include

- also
- accordingly
- consequently
- furthermore
- hence
- however
- indeed
- moreover
- nevertheless
- still
- then
- therefore

Example: However, use the old photocopier for small jobs.

Use a semicolon instead of a comma to separate independent clauses that are joined by a conjunctive adverb or by introductory transitional terms or phrases such as

- that is
- namely
- for example
- in other words

Example: No changes are necessary; that is, you merely have to start the computer.

Use a comma or a semicolon before the introductory words and a comma afterward when the introduction is an independent clause and there are three or more items in a list.

Example: The cabinet holds several types of media; for example, CDs, cassettes, and videos.

Use a comma before the introductory words if there are fewer than three items.

Example: The cabinet holds different types of media, for instance, videos and cassettes.

Use a comma following the introductory statement to a list or example when the introductory text is a dependent clause or phrase (that is, it is grammatically incomplete).

Example: Before you start, clear your work area, read the instructions, and obtain all the necessary tools.

Place a comma between each item in a prose list or series, even before the final *and*.

Example: The development organization is supported by three groups: Manufacturing, Administration, and Finance.

Use semicolons instead of commas to separate the items of a prose list if any item already contains a comma.

Example: Bids were offered by Jones and Jones, Toronto; Teletec Systems, Ottawa; and IQ, Montreal.

Use commas to set off parenthetical expressions and nonessential descriptive clauses. Do not use commas if the clause they isolate applies to the entire subject.

Examples: These accounts, some of which are outstanding, must be taken care of first. (nonessential descriptive clause)

The accounts that are outstanding must be taken care of first.
(essential descriptive clause)

They did, however, take the money from the cash box.

Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that equally modify the same noun.

Example: Both Teletec 2007 and Teletec 2008 are powerful, fault-tolerant systems.

Use commas to separate items in dates and addresses.

Examples: Contact Teletec Systems, Ottawa, Canada, for details.

The project is due April 12, 2008.

Use commas to separate a proper name from a following corporate, academic, honorary, governmental, or military title.

Example: Mr. Jones, President, Teletec Systems.

Use commas in numbers with five or more digits. For numbers other than amounts of money, spaces may also be used. Place the commas or spaces between groups of three digits.

Right: 1000; 10,000; 10 000; \$10,000

Wrong: 1,000; 10000; \$10 000

Always place any commas before closing quotation marks, even when they are not part of the quotation.

Do not use commas with question marks or exclamation points.

Leave one space after a comma except before closing quotation marks.

Dashes

Em dashes (referred to as dashes throughout this document) usually mark an abrupt change or break in the continuity of a sentence. Dashes are more emphatic than commas or parentheses and should be used sparingly.

Use dashes to interrupt a sentence for insertion of thoughts related to, but not part of, the main idea of the sentence. In this way, explanatory information can be emphasized within a sentence.

Example: The quotes—especially the last one—were well received by our prospective customers.

Use dashes to link explanatory or concluding thoughts to the rest of the sentence.

Example: Reliability and value—that is we offer.

Use dashes to introduce a summary statement that follows a series of words or phrases.

Example: Manufacturing, high technology, and agriculture—these are the prime factors in Ontario’s economy.

Place dashes before closing quotation marks only when they are part of the quotation; otherwise, place them after.

Do not leave a space before or after a dash.

Exclamation points

Exclamation points are not often used in business writing; however, if you need to use them, follow these guidelines.

Use an exclamation point to terminate an emphatic phrase or sentence.

Example: Get out of here!

Use an exclamation point to terminate an emphatic interjection.

Example: More!

Do not use a comma or period with an exclamation point.

Right: “Halt!” said the policeman.

Wrong: “Halt!”, said the policeman.

Place exclamation points before closing quotation marks only when they are part of the quotation; otherwise, place them after.

Do not leave a space before or after an exclamation point unless it ends a sentence. In this case, leave one space after the exclamation point.

Hyphens

This section describes some general rules for using hyphens. For more detail on hyphenation, refer to your company dictionary.

Do not leave a space before or after a hyphen.

Hyphenating compound modifiers

Hyphenate two or more words that combine to modify another word only if they precede the word they modify.

Example: This is a well-run company.

Do not hyphenate when a compound modifier follows the noun.

Example: This company is well run.

Hyphenate compound modifiers with a numerical first part and write out the number.

Example: three-binder set

Write the numerical part of a compound modifier as a digit if it qualifies a unit of measurement.

Example: 4-m pipe

Do not hyphenate if a compound modifier is comparative or superlative.

Examples: lowest level reading
most quickly

Do not hyphenate if the first word of a compound modifier ends in *ly*.

Example: This is a brilliantly conceived plan.

Do not hyphenate compound modifiers when they are chemical terms.

Example: copper oxide rectifier

Hyphenating numeric data

Use a hyphen to join a whole number or fraction to its unit modifier when they are used as a compound modifier.

Examples: 4-m pipe, 3/4-in. hose

When a mixed number is part of a comparative modifier, hyphenate between the whole number and the fraction, but not after the fraction.

Example: 2-1/8 in. pipe

Hyphenate compound numbers from 21 through 99 when they are written out in full (that is, only when they begin a sentence). When numbers greater than 99 begin a sentence, hyphenate only those parts of the number that are between 21 and 99.

Examples: Eighty-one telephones were installed.

We installed 81 telephones.

One hundred and five chairs were bought.

Three hundred and twenty-four people attended the press conference.

Dividing words

The conventions governing word division are complex and change as the English language grows. For this reason, consult your company dictionary for current usage.

Some general guidelines for dividing words are

- Do not divide the last word on the last line of a page.
- When using a hyphen to break a word at the end of the line, break the words between syllables.
- When using a hyphen, do not break a word where only two letters would either precede or follow the hyphen.

Hyphenating prefixes

Do not hyphenate prefixes unless the root begins with a capital letter (for example, *non-Teletec Systems*, *un-Canadian*), or the combination spells a different word (for example, *un-ionized*).

Right: cooperate, reentry, reissue, nonvolatile

Wrong: co-operate, re-entry, re-issue, non-volatile

Hyphenating between numbers and dates

Use a hyphen in place of the phrase *up to and including* in time spans.

Examples: the decade 1990-1999

Use hyphens in dates.

Example: 2007-02-27

Use hyphens to separate the number groups in toll-free 800 and similar telephone and fax machine numbers.

Example: For technical problems, call toll-free 1-800-123-4567.

Use a hyphen in the local number of a normal telephone or fax machine number.

Example: For all other problems, call (613) 726-0011.

Parentheses

Use parentheses to enclose additional information serving to explain, amplify, or provide comments on adjacent material.

Parentheses are generally used for words that are less closely related to the rest of the sentence than material that would be set off by dashes or commas.

Do not use an initial capital or end-punctuation within a phrase enclosed in parentheses when the parentheses appear within a sentence.

Example: The system requires 64 megabytes (MB) of RAM in order to operate.

Put the closing punctuation inside the parentheses when the parentheses enclose a sentence.

Example: (The actual value of the service is \$20.)

Use parentheses when indicating alternative forms and omissions (as in forms).

Example: Indicate the printer(s) used.

Use parentheses to enclose the area code of a normal telephone or fax machine number.

Example: For more information, call (613) 555-1212.

Leave one space before an opening parenthesis and one space after a closing parenthesis. However, when a complete sentence is enclosed within parentheses, leave one space before and after the enclosing parentheses.

Periods

Use a period to close a sentence.

Do not use periods to end table entries unless they are complete sentences.

Do not use periods in the abbreviation of a term or phrase unless the periods are part of an official or registered abbreviation (for example, M.I.T.).

Use periods to end-punctuate items in a vertical list when at least one item is a complete sentence.

Use a period to end-punctuate text in parentheses only when the parentheses enclose a complete sentence.

Use a period after a number or letter used to identify an item in an ordered vertical list.

Always place any periods before closing quotation marks, even when they are not part of the quotation.

Do not use periods with question marks or exclamation points.

Leave one space after a period when concluding a sentence within a paragraph except before closing quotation marks.

Question marks

Use a question mark after a direct question.

Example: How tall is the window?

Do not use a period or comma with a question mark.

Right: “Are you ready?” he asked.

Wrong: “Are you ready?,” he asked.

Place question marks before closing quotation marks only when they are part of the quotation; otherwise, place them after.

Do not leave a space before or after a question mark unless it ends a sentence. In this case, leave one space after the question mark.

Quotation marks

Use double quotation marks for quoting material that is not your own.

Do not use quotation marks to emphasize words.

Do not use quotation marks to enclose text that is clearly identified as being separate, for example, they are indented.

If a quotation is embedded in another quotation, use single quotation marks for the embedded quotation.

Example: The witness said, “I distinctly heard him say, ‘Do not be late.’ ”

Do not use apostrophes to enclose the embedded quotation.

Wrong: The witness said, “I distinctly heard him say, 'Do not be late.’”

Always place any commas and periods before closing quotation marks, even when they are not part of the quotation.

Place colons, semicolons, dashes, question marks, and exclamation points before closing quotation marks only when they are part of the quotation; otherwise, place them after.

Examples: He spoke of his “little collection of tools”; he might better have called it a hardware store.

Have you read “The Canadian Style”?

Have you read “Why Me?”

Leave one space before and after enclosing single or double quotation marks when they end a sentence.

Leave one space between a single and a double quotation mark.

Semicolons

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction.

Example: He wrote a long document; if he had had more time, he would have written a shorter one.

Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses that are joined by a conjunctive adverb or by transitional terms or phrases (see “Commas”).

Conjunctive adverbs include

- accordingly
- hence
- nevertheless
- also
- however
- still
- consequently
- indeed
- then
- furthermore
- moreover
- therefore

Example: Copying software without permission is illegal; therefore, buy the proper number of software licenses for your company.

Transitional terms or phrases include

- that is
- namely
- for example
- in other words

Example: No changes are necessary; that is, you merely have to start the computer.

Instead of using a semicolon to separate independent clauses that are joined by a conjunctive adverb or transitional term or phrase, write the second clause as a new sentence.

Example: Copying software without permission is illegal. Buy the proper number of software licenses for your company.

Use a comma or a semicolon before introductory words (such as *namely*, *that is*, *for example*, or *for instance*) and a comma afterward when the introduction is a complete sentence and there are three or more items in a list.

Example: The cabinet holds several types of media; for example, CDs, cassettes, and videos.

Use a comma before the introductory words if there are fewer than three items.

Example: The cabinet holds different types of media, for instance, videos and cassettes.

Use semicolons to separate the items of a prose list if any item already contains a comma.

Example: Bids were offered by Jones and Jones, Toronto; Teletec Systems, Ottawa; and IQ, Montreal.

Place semicolons before closing quotation marks only when they are part of the quotation; otherwise, place them after.

Leave one space after a semicolon except before closing quotation marks.

Virgules

Use a virgule (oblique) to represent *per* in abbreviations.

Example: 20 m/s

Use a virgule to separate successive divisions (as months or years) of an extended period of time.

Example: We led the fiber optic field in fiscal year 2006/2007.

Do not use a virgule to separate alternatives to abbreviate a sentence.

Right: Use a dictionary, or thesaurus, or both.

Wrong: Use a dictionary and/or thesaurus.

Do not leave a space before or after a virgule.

Tables

Use tables to compile data for purposes of comparison. There are two types of tables: informal and formal. Informal tables are simple tables that do not warrant a caption.

Readers prefer to scan column headings rather than row headings for information; therefore, lay out tables so that you do not need row headings. If necessary, tables can also be organized like matrices with their column and row headings as the variables. An example table is located at the end of this section.

Capitalize the first word of a column or row heading, but do not end-punctuate.

Make all table entries as concise as possible. Capitalize the first word in each table entry unless a specific form is required. The other rules of capitalization still apply.

The use of numbers and dates in tables is described in “Numerical expressions.”

Because tables are used to support text, ensure they are properly introduced and referenced in the text.

Make table captions that are concise and accurately describe the intent of the table.

Do not use abbreviations in captions unless they have become an accepted part of the language or are official product names or trademarks.

Capitalize the word *table* and the first word in a caption.

Separate the table number and caption with a dash.

To make tables easier to read, break up long columns of data at regular intervals with blank lines.

Omit a column in a table if all the entries are the same. Footnote the omission. Also footnote any entry that requires special explanation. See the example table below. See “Figure and table footnotes.”

If a table is continued on a following page or number of pages, repeat the table number and caption and place the word *continued* in parentheses following the caption. Also, repeat the column headings.

Table 20—Standard priority numbers and names (example table)

Priority number	Mnemonic	Description
1	RN	Routine
2	MN	Minor
3	MJ	Major
4*	CR	Critical

*During a Priority 4 alarm, the operator must contact the Shift Supervisor immediately.

Trademarks and trade names

A trade name is a name under which a concern does business whether it is the name of a corporation, a partnership, or an individual. A trademark identifies goods, or services, or both. However, a trade name can be registered as a trademark, but only if it is used as one. As well as words and numbers, logotypes may be registered as trademarks. Identify and present trade names and trademarks as described below.

Use uppercase for the first letter of a trade name or trademark. However, do not capitalize trade names of products that have become common nouns, as identified in the main body of a dictionary (for example, nylon). Also, do not identify the users of trade names that have become common nouns. Where possible, avoid using trade names as generic nouns or adjectives; for example, use *adhesive tape* instead of *Scotch tape*.

Do not mark or identify trade names in a work unless they are registered as trademarks.

The first time you use a registered trademark in a document, mark it by placing the registered trademark symbol (®) immediately after it; thereafter, do not use the symbol.

Examples: Access to the Teletec 2007 is protected through a logon password.
(unregistered trademark)

The system is built on the flexible Odin® database, which supports both hierarchical and relational structures. (registered trademark)

Identify all general trademarks used in your document using the basic formats “(Trademark) is a trademark of (trademark owner),” for unregistered trademarks, and “(Trademark) is a registered trademark of (trademark owner),” for registered trademarks.

Examples: Teletec 2007 is a trademark of Teletec Systems.

Odin is a registered trademark of Teletec Systems.

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Internet resources

Take the time to look at these valuable internet resources:

- *Merriam-Wester Online*: dictionary and thesaurus: www.m-w.com/netdict.htm
- *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*: [/www.grammarbook.com](http://www.grammarbook.com)
- *Ottawa University's Hypergrammar* project: www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/grammar.html
- *Purdue University's Online Writing Lab*: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- *Bartleby.com* (many online books such as *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White): www.bartleby.com
- *Guide to Grammar and Writing*: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>
- *Duncan Kent & Associates Ltd*: online writing and style guides (highly recommended) www.techcommunicators.com/publications/index.html
- *Online Technical Writing*: Online Textbook: www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/
- *Garbl's Writing Center*: <http://garbl.home.comcast.net/>

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Vic Weatherall