

BUSINESS WRITING ESSENTIALS



How To Write Letters,
Reports and Emails

CLARE WHITMELL

Contents

[Title page](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: Planning and Writing Objectives](#)

[Common objectives](#)

[Planning](#)

[Chapter 2: Writing Letters](#)

[Structure of letters - layout](#)

[Correct salutations, titles and punctuation](#)

[Other useful writing phrases](#)

[Chapter 3: Writing Emails](#)

[Structure of emails](#)

[Guidelines for writing emails](#)

[Language and punctuation](#)

[Writing concisely](#)

[Chapter 4: Writing Reports](#)

[Structure of reports - planning](#)

[Structure of reports - layout](#)

[Structure of reports - report sections](#)

[Language of reports](#)

[Chapter 5: Correspondence Examples](#)

[Templates](#)

[Asking for advice](#)

[Asking for clarification](#)

[Asking for confirmation](#)

[Asking for information](#)

[Auto-responders](#)

[Bad news and threats](#)

[Booking a hotel room](#)

[Complaints and apologies](#)

[Condolence](#)

[Confirming orders and prices](#)

[Giving information](#)

[Good news](#)

[Invitations](#)

[Making an appointment](#)

[Making requests](#)

[Replying to requests](#)

[Thank you letters](#)

[Spelling and editing](#)

[Chapter 6: Linking Words and Phrases](#)

[List of linking words and phrases](#)

[Usage notes - giving examples](#)

[Usage notes - adding information](#)

[Usage notes - giving a reason](#)

[Usage notes - giving a result](#)

[Usage notes - contrasting ideas](#)

[Usage notes - sequencing / summarizing](#)

[Other referencing expressions](#)

[Chapter 7: Writing Clearly](#)

[The importance of clarity](#)

[Three ways to write concisely](#)

[10 rules for writing easily understood English](#)

[Chapter 8: Vocabulary Choice and Style](#)

[What makes a text formal or informal?](#)

[Style factor 1: Active or passive](#)

[Style factor 2: Using contractions](#)

[Style factor 3: Personal pronouns](#)

[Style factor 4: Sentence length](#)

[Style factor 5: Punctuation](#)

[Style factor 6: Vocabulary](#)

[Informal and formal equivalents](#)

[Keeping style consistent](#)

[Using a range of vocabulary](#)

[Avoiding style mistakes](#)

[Cliches](#)

[Chapter 9: Tone](#)

[Avoiding rudeness](#)

[Using modal verbs](#)

[Other ways of sounding polite](#)

[The right voice](#)

[Some tips for writing politely](#)

Chapter 10: Punctuation

Capital letters

Comma

Full stop / Period

Colon

Semi-colon

Apostrophe

Hyphen

Dash, brackets

Quotation marks

Other punctuation

Punctuation - sentence length

Final words

Business Writing Essentials

by Clare Whitmell

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Earn more with good writing skills

Study after study confirms that if you can write well, you're more likely to earn more and keep your job than people who struggle with their writing.

Bad writing costs businesses every year in unhappy customers, lost revenues and missed opportunities. So if you're looking for promotion, impress your boss with excellent writing skills.

Make sure you're the best writer you can possibly be.

- Get all the phrases and vocabulary at your fingertips to write business reports, emails and letters quickly, confidently and accurately
- Cut the time it takes you to write office correspondence by using the templates and examples
- Learn how to write with your reader in mind so you never unknowingly upset customers
- Get to grips with difficult areas of English such as punctuation



Clare Whitmell

Chapter 1: Planning and Writing Objectives

Why are you writing?

Make it easy for your reader to understand why you are writing by putting your objective at the beginning of your message. The clearer your reason for writing, the easier it is for your reader to reply or act.

Common objectives

The following are all common reasons for writing (whether in formal letters or in more informal memos and emails.)

To confirm

I am writing to confirm our appointment on ...
This is to confirm next week's meeting at your offices.
I would like to confirm the details of my order.

To ask for confirmation

Following our meeting yesterday, *I would be grateful if you could confirm the following points.*
Please could you confirm the date of ...?

To inform

Please note that the office will be closed from ...
I am writing to inform you that ...
Please be informed that, due to restructuring, the Sales Dept will...
It has come to our notice / attention that ...
Please be advised that the office will close from
I am writing to advise you that the office will close from ...

To ask for information or advice

I am writing to inquire (enquire BrE) about vacancies in your company for ...
I would be interested to find out more about ...
I would be interested to receive further details about...
Please could you give us some information / details on your range of ...
I would appreciate your advice concerning ...
I would be grateful for your advice concerning

To explain or to clarify

I am writing to explain the company's new procedure concerning
In response to the questions in your letter of ..., I am writing with further

information.

I would like to clarify our policy regarding ...

In response to your recent inquiry, I hope that the following information clarifies ...

To suggest or advise

In response to your complaint concerning ..., may we suggest that you contact ...

Following your inquiry regarding ..., I would like to make the following suggestions.

With regard to your email about ..., we advise you to contact ...

We would like to advise all (our current authors) to ...

In response to your letter, we feel that it is advisable to...

To make an announcement

It has been decided that ...

Due to ..., we have decided to ...

We are happy to announce ...

To ask someone to do something

I would be grateful if you could send me further information about....

I would greatly appreciate it if you would ...

Your help would be appreciated in planning...

Please would you sign

Kindly check ...

Please make sure that ...

Please ensure that ...

To reply to someone's request

As you requested, I am enclosing ...

As you suggested, I am sending you ...

In answer to your inquiry, I ...

As promised, I am sending you...

To thank

*Thank you for your letter of February 15.
I greatly appreciated your assistance during ...*

To enclose something

*Please find enclosed the brochure you requested.
Enclosed please find an order form.
Enclosed is / are ...
I am enclosing a ...
I have enclosed ...*

To attach something

*Please find attached a route description.
Attached please find this month's order.
Attached is / are ...*

To complain

I am writing to complain about ...

To apologize

*Please accept our apologies for the delay.
On behalf of the company, I would like to extend our sincerest apologies for
...
We were very sorry to hear about your recent problem with ...*

To give good news

We are delighted to inform you that...

To give bad news

*Unfortunately, we are unable to ...
Regrettably, we are unable to ...
We regret that we cannot ...
Due to circumstances beyond our control, we are not able to ...
We are sorry to inform you that ...*

Condolence

I was very sad to hear the news of John' s death.

To make a threat

It appears from our records that payment is overdue. *We have no option but to refer this matter to our legal team.*

Planning

Make a plan before you start writing. Plans help you to structure your ideas, making it easier for your reader to follow you. Making a detailed paragraph plan (where you decide what you will include in each paragraph) also makes the actual writing easier and quicker.

In your plan, aim to:

- group your ideas logically;
- keep your text relevant, and focused on your objective;
- avoid repetition.

How to plan – the brainstorming approach

1. Decide on your objective - why are you writing? What information does the reader need to know?
2. Consider your reader. Is your reader an expert in the subject, or will you have to simplify technical language or concepts?
3. List everything you want to write - jot down your ideas as you think of them. Then, decide which ideas are relevant and which ideas you can leave out.
4. Make a paragraph plan – order your ideas into logical paragraphs, and decide what linking words / phrases you'll need such as "Firstly, secondly, finally" or "However", or "In addition".
5. Write, following your plan, and then check what you have written against your plan. Have you included everything? Will the reader know what the next step is?

Putting your ideas into paragraphs

If ideas fit together, they can be put together in one paragraph. However, if many ideas fit together, think about how you can separate them.

We regret that we have no vacancies at the moment for computer programmers. However, we have vacancies for graphics designers as well as for database managers. We are interested in applicants who have at least two years' experience in graphic design and who have had some project management experience. For the database management posts, we are particularly interested in applicants with substantial background in database programming, application and maintenance. We would be especially interested in hearing from applicants with good working knowledge of php and MYSQL.

This text could be separated into these paragraphs:

We regret that we have no vacancies at the moment for computer programmers.

However, we have vacancies for graphics designers as well as for database managers.

We are interested in applicants who have at least two years' experience in graphic design and who have had some project management experience.

For the database management posts, we are particularly interested in applicants with substantial background in database programming, application and maintenance. We would be especially interested in hearing from applicants with good working knowledge of php and MYSQL.

Chapter 2: Writing Letters

Making sure your letters look and sound professional

Although emails are used for most business situations, there will be situations when a letter is more appropriate. Letters tend to be more formal than emails, but there are standard guidelines and expressions that will help you write accurately and professionally every time.

Structure of letters – layout

Most companies use headed notepaper, so you do not have to write your company name and address. The reader's name and address generally comes under your company details on the left hand side of the paper. Underneath this put the date of the letter. Reference details go under the date of the letter. Not all letters need references, although large companies tend to use them for correspondence.

Some formal letters have a subject heading. If a heading is necessary, this comes under the opening (Dear X) and it is normally in bold.

Paragraphs are not normally indented in modern business correspondence. Instead, all new paragraphs are double spaced.

Example

Your company name and address, telephone and fax numbers; email address and website URL

Recipient's name

Recipient's address

Date of this letter

Reference (if applicable)

Your ref: AD/600/22

Dear Mr / Ms Recipient's surname

Subject of your letter

Body of the letter starts here, with reference to why you are writing.

New paragraph starts here – no indentation.

New paragraph starts here.

Closing (Yours sincerely, etc)

Your signature

Your name printed

Your position in the company

Enc: (If applicable)

Writing the date

It's much clearer to write the date out in full, such as 10 November 2014, November 10, 2014 or November 10th, 2014.

Avoid 10/11/2014 or 11/10/2014 as these can be potentially confusing. In British English, the order is date, month, year. In American English, the order is month, date, year.

Structure of letters – contents

Letters often contain:

- An opening
- Reference to previous contact or reason for writing
- (The background to the letter - optional)
- Main point or idea
- (Development of the main point - optional)
- (Additional points - optional)
- Asking for action / reference to the future
- Closing remarks

Example

Dear students

1. I am writing to inform you about some recent changes to the courses we currently run.

2. As you are probably aware, there have been some changes in funding over the last year. These changes will affect the duration of some of our courses.

3. The day-release courses in printing and publishing are funded by the Local Education Authority. This means that employers will be reimbursed for the courses that their employees complete. I would like to stress that course participants must attend a minimum of 70% of the course to qualify for this funding.

4. There is no limit to the number of any courses that any student can register for. However, admittance to courses is regulated by a pre-course assessment.

5. Some of the courses we co-run with the Freemans Technology Institute are held on their campus. For more information on course location, please refer to the enclosed prospectus which gives details on the new academic year.

6. I hope that this information answers any questions you may have. However, if you have any further queries, please feel free to contact me.

Rebecca Beale

Academic Registrar

Enc: Prospectus

Notes

1. Paragraph 1 - say why you are writing. You can often use a reference sentence to show the reference to a previous contact, such as a previous

letter or phone call. If you don't have any previous contact, use the first paragraph to state why you are writing: to confirm, clarify or ask about something, for example.

2. Paragraph 2 - background to the letter. The background gives more information and helps the reader become more familiar with the subject of the letter.

3. Paragraph 3 - main point

4. Paragraph 4 - development of main point

5. Paragraph 5 - additional points

6. Paragraph 6 - final paragraph. This paragraph generally closes the letter with an offer of further help, or invites a reply. In this paragraph you can also briefly mention the most important points again.

Correct salutations (openings and closings) in British English

Friends (first-name basis)

Dear Sarah
Best wishes (or Kind regards)

Semi-formal business relationships

Dear Mr Brown
Yours sincerely

Dear Ms Smith
Yours sincerely

Formal letters, where the name of the reader is unknown

Dear Sir (or Dear Sirs)
Yours faithfully

Dear Madam
Yours faithfully

Dear Sir / Madam
Yours faithfully

Correct salutations (Openings and closings) in American English

Dear Mr. Robertson
Sincerely (or Sincerely yours)

Dear Sir (or Gentlemen)
Truly

Titles

1. Women

Women are generally addressed as 'Ms'. Only use 'Mrs' if you're sure that the woman is married and that she uses her married name. Avoid using 'Miss' unless you know that you're writing to a young girl (under the age of 16) or to a much older woman who never married. To be on the safe side, most writers use 'Ms', the female equivalent of 'Mr'.

2. Academic

Other titles commonly used are 'Dr' if you are writing to either a medical doctor, or someone who has a doctorate. Bachelor or master degree holders are normally addressed as either 'Mr' or 'Ms'.

3. Esq

British English writers sometimes use 'Esq.' in place of 'Mr'. For example, an envelope could be addressed:

John Smith, Esq.

4. Military titles

Maj. (Major)

Col. (Colonel)

Lt. (Lieutenant)

5. Religious titles:

Rev. (Reverend)

Fr. (Father)

Sr. (Sister)

Punctuation

1. Commas

Some people put commas after both the opening and the closing:

Dear Sarah,
Best wishes,

It is also correct to leave out the comma after the opening and the closing:

Dear Mr Smith
Yours sincerely

2. Full stop / Period

In British English, there is no full stop / period after Mr or Ms. In American English, the period is important – leaving it out can give the impression that you're careless:

Dear Mr. Brown
Dear Ms. Richards

I or We?

You can start your correspondence with "I" or with "We". If you're writing on behalf of your company, "We" is a good choice. If you're writing in a more personal style, you can use "I".

Starting correspondence

In your first paragraph, make a reference to previous correspondence, or say why you're writing.

Making reference

I am writing with reference to your letter of 6 November.

With reference to your letter (of date), I...

In response to your request, I can confirm...

With regard to your memo, I...

Following our conversation this morning, I.....

Further to your letter of....., I (Further to tends to sound over formal for most correspondence.)

Thank you for your letter of June 14th.

After the reference expression you must always have a comma and a second part to the sentence.

With reference to your letter. (Incorrect)

With reference to your letter, I can confirm that the invoice has been paid. (Correct)

Making reference to something your reader knows

As we discussed, the sales meeting will be on...

As you may already know / have heard, the Director of the company is ...

Referring to many points raised in a letter

Avoid a shopping-list statement in response to a number of requests, as in "In response to your letter in which you asked for a brochure, requested information on discounts and suggested a meeting, I would like to confirm that...."

Instead, start with Thank you.
Thank you for your letter of (date).

Explaining your connection

Your name was given to me by ...
My colleague, Sarah Smith, suggested that I write to you ...
I have been advised to contact you regarding ...
I am the content co-ordinator of an education website and *I am contacting you* to ask if you would be interested in...

Ending correspondence

Saying thank you

If you did not start your correspondence with "thank you", you can end with "thank you".

Thank you for your interest in the company / for your help.
Thank you in advance for your advice / understanding / co-operation.
May we take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support.
(Using May we... is formal.)

Offering help

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance / if I can help you further.
If you would like any more information, *please do not hesitate to contact me ...*
Please feel free to contact me again if you have any more queries.
Should you have any further questions, we would be delighted to hear from you. (Using should you... is formal.)

Standard closings

We look forward to hearing from you soon.
I look forward to your reply.

Referring to a meeting

I look forward to seeing you / meeting you on January 12.
(see note 1 for more information on "look forward to")

Asking for action

I would be grateful if this matter could be settled immediately.
I would appreciate further information on ...
I would be grateful for further advice.
I would be grateful if you could invoice us by...

(see note 2 for more information on using grateful / appreciate)

Asking for the return of documents

Please sign the enclosed and return to us before...

Apologizing and rectifying a problem

Please accept our apologies for this misunderstanding.
We apologize (apologise BrE) for the mistake / oversight and would like to take this opportunity to assure you that it will not happen again.
We deeply regret any inconvenience / distress that this misunderstanding has caused you.

Expressing urgency

As this matter is now urgent, we would appreciate a prompt reply.
As we hope you will appreciate, this matter is now urgent. We would therefore be grateful if you could reply to us within (three days).
We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.
Due to the urgency of the situation, I would appreciate a reply as soon as possible.

Giving recommendations or suggestions

We strongly recommend that you follow these instructions.
It is recommended that you read the instructions carefully.
May we recommend that you notify the manufacturers.
You might like to consider taking legal advice.
We would suggest the smaller model.

We suggest that you invest in real estate.

It would perhaps be wise to delay a decision until after his return.

(see Note 3 for the grammar rules for "recommend" and "suggest")

Note 1

"Look forward to" is followed by either a noun or a gerund:

"I look forward to the meeting." (noun)"

"I look forward to seeing you." (gerund)

Incorrect

"I look forward to hear from you."

"I look forward hearing from you."

Correct

"I look forward to hearing from you."

Note 2

"I would be grateful" is followed by either if + sentence or for + noun:

"I would be grateful if you could instruct the shipping company to dispatch the goods."

"I would be grateful for your assistance."

"Appreciate" is followed by a noun or a gerund.

"I would appreciate your advice."

"I would appreciate meeting you at the earliest opportunity."

You can also use "appreciate + it + if + sentence".

"I would appreciate it if you could look into this matter immediately."

Incorrect

"I would appreciate if..."

Note 3

The verb "recommend" (like suggest and propose) can be used in three ways:

1. With a noun

"We recommend the Ford Toyota model."

2. With a gerund

"We recommend taking further action."

3. With "that + you + infinitive without to"

"We recommend that you take legal advice."

Other useful writing phrases

Giving instructions

Please make sure / ensure that ...

In future, please put all used paper in the recycling bin.

Giving opinions

We think it would be advisable to ...

In our opinion, the threat of legal action should be sufficient.

As far as we are able to judge...

We think that ...

Our opinion is that ...

Making, accepting and declining offers

We would like to offer you a 6% discount.

We are unable to accept your offer of ...

Making, accepting and refusing invitations

We would like to invite you to the launch of ...

Would you like to come to our party?

Thank you for your invitation. I would be delighted to attend.

Thank you for your invitation. I regret that I will be unable to attend.

Making generalizations

Generally, we request pre-payment.

These components tend to wear out quickly.

These components have a tendency to ...

In most cases, we are able to find lost luggage within a few days.

Expressing importance

It is essential / crucial / vital / extremely important that we ...

You can also use a verb after these adjectives:

It is essential / crucial / vital to ...

Expressing certainty, probability and possibility

It is bound to work.

There will definitely be a market for...

It is (highly) likely that the plan will succeed.

It is (highly) likely to succeed.

It is (quite) probable that

It is possible that the market will expand.

It may be the case that

Perhaps the market will recover.

It would seem unlikely that we could ...

There probably won't be a demand for ...

There definitely won't be a rise in prices.

Chapter 3: Writing Emails

How to make sure your email is read and acted on

Guidelines for email structure, language and conciseness.

Structure of emails

Emails are by far the most common method of communication for internal office correspondence, and they are fast replacing letters in all but the most formal business situations. Most people in companies use emails for a wide range of purposes: to confirm appointments and meetings, request help or action, provide information, etc.

Differences between letters and emails

Letters can be formal, while emails tend to be less formal in tone and style.

Letters use conventions for opening and closing a letter, while emails have few standard conventions.

Letters start with "Dear (name)". Emails often start without a name, or with "Hello" or "Hi".

Letters provide a permanent, written record, while emails can be easily deleted.

Letters tend to be longer, while emails are better for brief responses or notices.

Letters tend to have a clear paragraph structure, while in emails, the paragraphs tend to be shorter.

Letters are used more for external correspondence, while emails are suitable for internal memos and messages.

Structure of emails – layout

Emails are generally shorter and more informal than letters. Unlike letters, emails don't have conventional openings and closings and a variety of salutations can be used. Because emails are often written quickly - sometimes as an immediate response to a request or query - they can often look like notes, with short one-sentence paragraphs and abbreviations.

An email may contain:

- Subject line
- (Salutation - optional)
- Reason for writing
- Main point
- (Development of point - optional)
- (Additional points - optional)
- (Closing - optional)

Example

From: Terry

To: Anna

1. Press release

2.. Could you take a look at the attached draft?

3. I've included most of the main ideas from the jacket blurb, but we're still waiting for the pub date. The production dept will have a better idea of this next week.

4. If you think it's appropriate, I can send it to JD for approval.

5. Many thanks

Terry

Notes

1. Subject line.

Make it brief and informative. If the email is a reply, there is a default subject line Re:

2. Reason for writing.

Reduce this to one sentence.

3-4 Middle paragraphs.

Make these concise.

5. Closing.

A variety of ways to end the email.

Guidelines for writing emails

Be brief

Get straight to the point with your reason for writing. Edit carefully so that your email contains only the most important information. Less important information can be sent in a separate email.

Be clear

Use a descriptive subject line that tells your reader what your email is about. If necessary, change the original subject line if it's too vague or if the conversation has moved on to other areas.

Don't write your email in dense paragraphs. Shorter paragraphs (even if only one line long) help your reader to easily scan for information.

Plan

For longer emails, a plan helps you focus on the objective of your email and keeps your ideas linked and concise.

Be accurate

Use your spell check to eliminate spelling or typing errors.

Delete previous emails

Delete original emails if they are long or unconnected to your present email. Instead, refer to parts of the previous email with angle bracket keys: < and > or << and >>

Example:

From: Support Team

Subject: Glitches

Thanks for your email highlighting the glitches in the system.

<< it is impossible to remove the address field from the database.>>

In fact, you can alter any field by clicking on "field" and then...

Use a plain background

It is better to use black text on white background to be sure that your email

is easy to read. Patterns or motifs in the body of the email risk making you look childish or immature – stick to a plain white background.

Be polite

Avoid writing sarcastic or angry comments. It's far better to delay sending an email until after you've had time to cool off, than send something you might later regret.

Starting an email

You don't need to write "Dear ..." at the beginning of the email, especially if you are writing to people within your company. As the name of the person you are writing to appears in the *To:* box of the email, you can start writing your message immediately. If you're writing to people outside your company, or to friends, you can use "Dear..." to create a friendly tone.

In some situations, for example when you are emailing a group of people, you can leave out "Dear ...(name)" and start with the objective of the email.

Examples:

"Please find attached the memo we have sent to all our suppliers."

"A new security code for the front door will be in operation from January 12th."

Ending an email

There are a variety of ways to end your email. If you start with "Dear..." you can choose one of the endings used also in letters:

The email starts "Dear Mary".

The email ends "Best wishes" or "Kind regards".

The email starts "Dear Mr Johnson".

The email ends "Yours sincerely" or "Sincerely" in American English.

If your email did not start with "Dear" and a name, then you can use any of these endings:

"Best wishes"

"Thanks"

"Thanks and regards"

"Kind regards"

"Yours"

"Cheers" (very informal, particularly British English meaning "Thanks")
"All the best" (British English meaning "Best wishes")

If you're writing an email to someone within your company, you can leave out an ending:

For example:

From: Clare

Subject: Forms

I've attached the forms for you.

Clare

Punctuation in emails

Capital letters

Use capital letters only where necessary, such as for names, places and days of the week. Don't write the whole email in capital letters as this looks as if you're shouting at your reader. However, remember to capitalize 'I' when you are writing about yourself. It's distracting for the reader to see i.

Abbreviations

Some email writers abbreviate as much as possible, making their emails difficult to understand. You should avoid using 'wld' for "would", 'cld' for "could", 'plse' for "please", 'thks' for "thanks", 'rgds' for "regards" or 'wkr' for "with kind regards". If you abbreviate words down to consonants, your reader may not understand your email. Using too many abbreviations looks as if you can't be bothered to write words out in full.

However, there are some standard abbreviations which are generally understood, such as:

asap = "as soon as possible"

etc = "et cetera"

i.e. = "that is to say"

e.g. = "for example"

re = "regarding" (about)

Language of emails - writing concisely

Emails tend to be shorter than letters, and the points you make in your email will be more concise. Letters often contain 'standard' phrases, which you can rewrite in a shorter form in emails.

Here are some common examples:

I regret to inform you (*letters*)

Sorry to tell you (*emails*)

I would be grateful if you could... (*letters*)

Could you... (*emails*)

Regarding... (*letters*)

About... (*emails*)

I would like to confirm... (*letters*)

Just to confirm (*emails*)

We look forward to seeing you on... (*letters*)

See you on... (*emails*)

Thank you for your attention (*letters*)

Thanks (*emails*)

In response to your letter, (*letters*)

Following (*emails*)

Please confirm (*letters*)

Please let us know (*emails*)

Chapter 4: Writing Reports

Reports are critical business documents for presenting information and findings, or for proposing action and strategy. However, they can also be long and complex. Here are guidelines for structuring and language to make the writing process easier and quicker.

Structure of reports – planning

Step 1

Start by writing the objective of the report, as this will help you decide what information to include and to leave out. If you know who is going to read the report, you can decide more easily which information is important to the reader.

Examples of report objectives

To analyze sales and suggest new markets.

To present research on e-learning.

To examine our financial situation and recommend a new strategy.

To suggest new ways of raising capital.

To evaluate current recruitment policies and to present new ways to plan staffing

The objective of your report can be incorporated into the title of the report itself or put in the introduction.

Step 2

Collect all relevant information. Depending on the purpose of your report, you may need to interview people, do some background reading, carry out experiments, or review other reports.

Step 3

Organize the information into sections.

You can plan the information in a number of ways. For example, you can write down everything you can think of onto a blank piece of paper, then try to group these ideas into subject or heading areas and eliminate the points

which aren't relevant or useful.

You can also 'mind map'. Write a subject word in a box in the middle of a blank piece of paper. Then write your ideas around the subject word and draw lines from your ideas to the subject word. Using lines to link ideas helps you to see related information and can help you decide how to group the information.

Structure of reports – layout

Make your text look readable and inviting by using a clear layout.

Text layout

1. Use headings and subheadings to split up the text. These help your reader to see how your ideas are connected and to find information quickly.
2. Use margins and spacing to separate blocks of text. You can indent paragraphs to make the text more readable.
3. Keep paragraphs short.

Numbering

Use either numbers or lists in long reports to break up the text and to make the information clear.

There are different ways to number paragraphs:

Either:

Section 1

Sub-section 1(a), 1(b)

Sub-sub-section 1 (a) (i), 1 (a) (ii); 1 (b) (i), 1 (b), (ii)

Or:

Section 1

Sub-section 1.1, 1.2

Sub-sub-section 1.1.1, 1.1.2; 1.2.1, 1.2.2

Bullet points

You can also use bullet points to show lists.

Type 1

Each point in the list is a complete sentence, so it starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.

The following conditions are necessary for fully-funded training:

- This is your first training course.
- Your employer must sign the enclosed form.
- You have a clean driving license.

Type 2

Each point in the list is short and so the points do not start with a capital letter and only the last point has a full stop.

The fees include:

- course material
- preparation time
- travel expenses.

Type 3

Each point in the list is part of a continuous sentence. The points do not start with capital letters and there is a semi-colon separating each point. Before the last point there is 'and' to show that it is part of a continuous sentence.

The courses are designed for trainees who:

- have a degree in accountancy;
- need work experience; and
- live in the London area.

With this type of list, be careful that the points coming after the introduction are grammatically consistent.

Correct version:

The people who:

- live in London;
- are over 25; and
- have a degree;

are eligible.

(Correct because "who live", "who are" and "who have" are all plural endings to match 'people'.)

Incorrect version:

The people:

- who live in London;
- who are over 25; and
- work in accounting;

are eligible.

(Incorrect because you need another 'who' in the third point to make a grammatically consistent sentence.)

Structure of reports – report sections

Reports are often written to examine a problem and to offer ways of solving it. For this reason, a report typically describes the current situation and examines the problem; then identifies potential solutions to the problem; and finally recommends a course of action.

The potential solutions are often presented and discussed in the *summary and conclusions* section, while your preferred course of action is included in the *recommendations* section of the report.

Sections in a report

There can be eight sections in a report, although some are optional, depending on the length and scope of the report. The eight sections are:

1. Title, or title page
2. Contents list or table of contents
3. Abstract
4. Introduction
5. Body of report
6. Summary and conclusions
7. Recommendations
8. Appendices

The order of the sections can vary. For example you can place both the summary and conclusions and the recommendations sections before the main body of the report.

Executive summary

This can be prepared and distributed instead of the whole report. An executive summary contains the summary and conclusions and the recommendations sections. The main advantage of the executive summary is that it saves time and paper. It provides the main information and people can ask to see the whole report if they want further information.

Section by section

Title or title page

Longer reports have a title page containing the title (and perhaps the objective) of the report; the author and the date.

Shorter reports (two or three-page reports) may only have the title and the objective.

Contents list or table of contents

A contents list acts like an index and contains all the headings and subheadings in the report with the page references. You only need a contents list in longer reports.

Abstract

The abstract is a summary of the entire report. Abstracts are only used with technical or scientific reports. They often appear in journals of abstracts and must therefore contain the essential information.

Introduction

The introduction gives the reader the background to the report. It can include the reason for the report, what the report includes or doesn't include (the scope and limitations of the report), where and how the information was obtained (the methods and procedures) and any acknowledgments of help.

Body of report

The body of the report is the main part and often the longest part of the report. In this part you give all the details of the work and structure them under headings and subheadings.

Summary and conclusions

This section sums up the purpose of the report and the conclusions. In this section you can outline any potential solutions. This section can lead on to your recommendations.

Recommendations

If you have more than one recommendation (or proposal), you should number them.

Appendices

This section includes any extra information, such as bibliographies, or in-depth charts and tables from the main body of the report.

Language of reports

To make your report easy to understand, follow the rules of clear writing:

1. Don't make your sentences too grammatically complex.

Avoid complicated structures. Only put one main idea in each sentence: extra information can be added in following sentences.

2. Use active rather than passive forms.

Where possible, use active sentences. (See also 'Writing objectively' below.)

3. Use everyday English.

Try not to use jargon and explain any technical terms. Use simple English wherever possible.

4. Write concisely.

Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs, and keep your sentences to 15 to 20 words.

Writing objectively

Technical and scientific reports tend to use objective language and passives are used instead of subject pronouns such as "I" and "you". However, it's often possible to avoid using passives by using the "third person". For example, "This report **outlines** the advantages and disadvantages of company pension schemes." Useful verbs to use in the "third person" are:

analyze (analyse BrE)

"This section analyzes the differences between the two models."

describe

"This report describes the procedures commonly used in specialist recruitment."

discuss

"This report discusses the implications of the new Health and Safety

regulations."

examine

"This report examines the factors involved in equity investment."

explain

"This section explains the decisions to close the Indonesian factories."

identify

"This report identifies the major market sectors for our cosmetic products."

illustrate

"This report illustrates the main difficulties in managing overseas subsidiaries."

outline

"This section outlines the need for outsourcing services."

review

"This report reviews the security of the buildings and premises."

summarize (summarise BrE)

"This report summarizes the financial results."

Chapter 5: Correspondence Templates

How to write effectively in more than fifteen common business situations.

Templates

Here are more than 100 examples of business writing that you can use as templates. Key phrases are in bold for easy reference.

Asking for advice

Example 1

Dear Helen

I would appreciate your advice concerning the University tender.

I believe that you have dealt with the university before and **I would be grateful if you could** give me the benefit of your experience.

Would it be possible for us to meet some time soon to discuss this?

With many thanks

Janice

Example 2

Dear Mr Sinclair

I would be grateful for your advice concerning debt default.

We have experienced a greater than average amount of debt default and we would appreciate some assistance in identifying potential bad debts before they occur. In particular, I would welcome your comments on the Debt Model, which is the system we are using at present to identify debt risks.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Edward Keene

Reply 2

Dear Mr Keene

Following your email regarding possible debt defaulters, I would like to make the following suggestions.

Firstly, as you probably know, the Debt Model is edited yearly. However, the monthly debt reports (published by the Risk Unit) form the basis of the Debt Model and are a much more up to date source of debt risk analysis. **I advise you to** study these debt reports before assessing the risk of accepting a new client.

Secondly, the Board feels that **it is advisable to** offer a preliminary contract to all new clients. This minimizes the risk of debt default by up to 50%. I have attached a copy of the preliminary contract which is used by our American office. (**May I suggest that you** ask the Legal Department to check it before it is released.)

I hope that this advice is of help to you.

Yours sincerely

Lewis Sinclair

Asking for clarification

Example 1

Charcoal Ltd
17A Basingstoke Rd
Swindon

September 1, 2012

Dear Mr Browning

We have received an invoice from you for goods totaling €3650. (Please see enclosed.)

However, **we have a number of questions relating to** this invoice.

Firstly, **could you give us more information regarding** our discount? We understood that we would be entitled to a 10% discount on the first €1000 of goods, and subsequently a 6% discount on the balance. However, it appears that we have only received a 6% discount on the total.

Secondly, **would you clarify the payment terms?** According to the terms of our contract, we have a 60 day credit facility with you. On the invoice, it appears we only have a 45 day agreement.

Finally, **we would like to draw your attention to** our contact details. Our correct address is 17A Basingstoke Road (rather than 17 Basingstoke Road).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

David Miles
Accounts Department

Reply 1

Paper Goods Ltd
10 Hasledown Way
Reading

September 5, 2012

Dear Mr Miles

With regard to the questions you raise in your letter, I would like to clarify certain points.

Firstly, the discount of 10% (and subsequent 6%) applies only to goods worth over €1000. As your invoice is for €860, we can offer you 6% only. I apologize if the terms were not made sufficiently clear to you.

Secondly, I am happy to confirm that you do have a 60 day credit period. This is a clause that should have been amended from the standard invoice.

I have amended our records to take note of your correct address details.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely
Clive Browning

Asking for confirmation

Example 1

Dear Mr Brown

Thank you for your letter of June 10, in which you explained your policy on returns.

However, as the goods were bought before the January deadline, I believe we are entitled to return them for credit.

I have a further question relating to your letter in which you stated that damaged goods would also be credited. **Can you confirm if** this applies also to goods that were damaged in transit?

Thank you for your assistance.

Mary Crowther

Reply 1

Dear Ms Crowther

In response to the questions in your letter of June 15, **I am writing with further information.**

I can confirm that those goods which were purchased before the January deadline can be returned and credited.

Secondly, only goods that were insured (and later damaged in transit) can be credited.

I have enclosed a booklet which sets out our terms and conditions in fuller detail.

I hope you will find the information useful, but please feel free to contact me should you have further questions.

Yours sincerely

Steven Brown

Example 2

Dear John

Following our telephone conversation this morning, **I would be grateful if you could confirm** the following points.

Firstly, we would like to know who has responsibility for overseas claims decisions. Secondly, **can you confirm** the payment structure for resellers?

Look forward to hearing from you.

Jane

Reply 2

Dear Jane

Thanks for your email.

This is just to confirm that the responsibility for overseas claims rests entirely with the local offices.

I've attached a copy of the payment structure for resellers.

Let me know if you need anything else.

John

Example 3

Dear Sue,

Please could you confirm the date of the next board meeting?

Thanks,

Lucy

Reply 3

Lucy,

February 12, Henkler Office at 14.00.

Regards,

Sue

Example 4

I would like to confirm the agenda for next week's meeting:

1. Minutes
2. Matters arising
3. Sales plan
4. Budgets
5. AOB

Look forward to seeing you all next Tuesday, at 9 am in the Board Room.

Sara

Example 5 – Memo

To all staff:

Re: Confirmation of the arrangements for the Christmas Office Lunch.

Like last year, the annual lunch will be held at the Dragon Hotel (Beak Street) and will start with drinks at 1 p.m. Lunch itself will be served at

1.30 p.m. in the Komodo Banquet Room and staff will be offered either a traditional turkey and trimmings lunch or the vegetarian option. Full menus and a preference list will be circulated next week.

The lunch will be followed by the Chairman's speech and at around 4.30 p.m., gifts will be distributed.

Hope to see you all there.

SC

(Events committee)

P.S. Fancy dress is not a requirement!

Asking for information

Example 1

Dear Mr Smith

Thank you for sending your new Winter wear brochure. **Could you** also send us the updated price list?

With many thanks

Sara Cotton

Reply 1

Dear Ms Cotton

Enclosed please find our updated price list. We are currently offering a seasonal price promotion on several of our winter lines. Those items marked with an asterisk are available at a "two for one" offer.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Smith

Example 2

Attn: Customer Services Department

I recently visited your website and I saw your offer for cheaper car insurance.

I would be interested to receive details about the no-claims bonus scheme. **In particular, could you tell me** if this scheme applies to all

drivers new to your insurance company, or only those who have held a policy with you previously?

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Charles Manners

Reply 2

Dear Mr Manners

Thank you for your email regarding our no-claims bonus scheme.

We are happy to confirm that this scheme applies to all drivers – new as well as existing customers. There are, however, some conditions attached for new drivers. In particular, we can only offer this special bonus to new customers who have not made previous claims with their existing insurance providers.

We look forward to being able to welcome you to our insurance company. I have attached a copy of our insurance form for you to fill out and send back. The details of the conditions are on page 5. Please read them carefully to ensure that you fit the necessary criteria for this policy. **However, if you would like further clarification on any of the points, or if you would like to make an appointment to discuss the policy with one of our advisors, please feel free to write to me again.**

Yours sincerely

Harry Evans

Customer Service Manager

Example 3

I have seen your Autumn catalog and I am interested in the "Reveller" couch on page 78.

Please could you give me some information on your delivery policies? In particular, I would like to know if delivery is free for one piece of furniture.

Many thanks in advance

Jennifer Ryan

Reply 3

Thank you for your interest in our range of home furniture.

I am delighted to confirm that delivery is free for one piece of sizable furniture, such as a Reveller couch.

I look forward to receiving your order. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Thompson

Example 4

Dear Sir / Madam

We would be interested to find out more about your range of office supplies and **we would very much like to receive** a brochure.

We are a mid-sized company and we intend to place sizable orders for paper goods and general office stationery. **Please could you give us the necessary details regarding your discount structure?**

Thank you for your prompt attention to our request.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Susan Jones

Reply 4

Dear Ms Jones

Thank you for your email of November 10.

I am pleased to enclose a brochure with the details of our range of office supplies.

We can offer you a discount of 5% on all purchases totaling more than \$300.

If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Thomas Wenger

Example 5

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am writing to request more information about your graduate training schemes. I would be grateful for any details concerning your admissions criteria.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Johnson

Reply 5

Dear Mr Johnson

Thank you for your recent email.

I am pleased to enclose an application form for our graduate training schemes.

Please complete the form and return it to me. We will be in contact within one month of receiving your application form.

Yours sincerely

Frances Evans (Training Officer)

Auto-responders

Simple version

Linda Steele is out of the office until (date).

More complex version

I am out of the office until (date). Please contact (name) for urgent assistance on (tel number) at (email address).

Bad news and threats

Example 1

Dear Mrs Pilkington

We are honored that you have chosen our firm to supply you with bathroom accessories over the last few years and we are grateful to have had this opportunity to build a business relationship with you.

We also recognize that cash flow can be a major source of worry for small or medium sized businesses. In the present economic conditions, we are all facing a lack of consumer confidence, and **unfortunately, for this reason, we are unable to extend your credit.**

I hope, however, that this decision does not adversely affect our trading relationship and we look forward to being able to serve you in the future.

Yours sincerely

Howard Robinson
Account manager

Example 2

Dear Mr Banthorn

Thank you for your order of 18 June for 2500 reinforced door seals, model LJ 380.

We regret that we cannot supply you with the quantities you require. However, we expect to have sufficient stock by the end of this month.

I apologize for any inconvenience.

Yours sincerely

Lucien Morin
Industrial Manufacturing Co.

Example 3

Memo to all staff

As you are no doubt aware, sales have been steadily falling since the beginning of the year. The combined effect of an economic recession and increased production costs have made our household appliances an expensive choice for many of our customers.

For this reason, we have decided to focus our efforts on a cheaper and narrower range of items. Inevitably, this will mean that some of the manufacturing jobs will be closed. Where possible, we will try to offer alternative employment to our staff.

Discussion with the union representatives will start from the beginning of next month. However, in the meantime, I would like to stress that all jobs are safe for the next six months.

We are all upset at the change in our company fortunes and to have to bring you such bad news. We will keep you updated on any developments.

Gerard Hilier

Example 4

Dear Mr Sampson

Thank you for your recent order.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control, we are not able to deliver orders until after the New Year.

I regret any inconvenience that this may cause.

Yours sincerely

Brendan O'Leary

Example 5

Dear Ms Baker

It appears from our records that payment is overdue and we would be grateful if you could settle your account within the next 14 days.

I have attached a copy of the invoice for your reference.

Yours sincerely
George Robbins

Threat 1

Dear Mr Stanley

I regret to inform you that as we have not yet received payment of invoice number 410096, **we have no option but to** refer this matter to our legal team.

You can avoid incurring additional legal costs by remitting payment immediately. Please see the attached invoice for instructions on how to pay.

Yours sincerely
Robert Tucker

Threat 2

Dear Mr Newson

We have written to you several times over the last six months requesting payment to bring your account with us current.

Unless we receive payment for the full amount within the next fourteen days, we will have no other choice but to turn your account over for

collection. Enforced collection may result in additional legal or court costs to you and may impair your credit rating.

We deeply regret taking such action, but we have no other alternative.

I look forward to receiving payment from you before October 4.

Yours sincerely
Richard Franks

Booking a hotel room

Inquiry

I would like to book a double room for the nights of June 15 and 16.

Could you confirm room availability?

Many thanks

Peter Morgan

Reply

Dear Mr Morgan

Unfortunately, all our double rooms are booked for June 15 and 16.
However, we have a twin room (with en suite bathroom) available.

Please confirm within 24 hours if you would like me to reserve this room for you.

Stella Napier

Confirmation

Dear Ms Napier

Thank you for your reply.

I would like to confirm my reservation of a twin room for the nights of June 15 and 16.

Many thanks

Peter Morgan

Complaints and apologies

Complaint 1

Dear Customer Services department

I am writing to complain about a Bravo Food Processor that I bought in your shop on January 5.

When I returned home, I found that the pieces of the processor were broken and that, furthermore, the guarantee and manual were missing.

I have a copy of the receipt and I would be grateful if you would look into this matter immediately.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Mrs M Jerrard

Reply 1

Dear Mrs Jerrard

Thank you for your letter of January 15.

I have looked into this matter and discovered that the food processor was due to be returned to the suppliers. Unfortunately, it had been misplaced and sold to you by accident.

Please accept our apologies for this. We will gladly replace the processor for you, or refund your money in full, should you wish.

Please telephone me on (tel number) to make the necessary arrangements.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Brown
Store manager

Complaint 2

Dear Sir / Madam

On September 3 I ordered a black leather suite (model C490) from your store in Milton Keynes. I have attached a copy of the credit card receipt for your records.

In October, my credit card was charged the cost of the suite (£1200). After two weeks, I telephoned to find out the status of my order and I was told it would arrive by the end of November. However, it still has not been delivered.

I find this level of service unacceptable and I would like a guarantee that the suite will be delivered within a week. Failing that, I would like a full refund.

Yours faithfully

Johannes Bruger

Reply 2

Dear Mr Bruger

On behalf of the company, **I would like to extend our sincerest apologies** for the non-delivery of your suite.

The problem was caused by a computer error, which has now been rectified.

I can guarantee you that your suite will be delivered within three working days. Please telephone me to arrange a suitable time for delivery.

Once again, **we deeply regret any inconvenience** that you have suffered as a result of our error.

Yours sincerely

Michael Holmes
Delivery supervisor

Complaint 3

Dear Ms Brown

I am writing to register my dissatisfaction with your account handing procedures.

Despite having settled my account in full on December 2, 2011, I have received three final demands from you.

Naturally, I have replied to each one (see attached correspondence) but have received no acknowledgment to any of my letters.

This whole process has caused me a great deal of inconvenience and I would like you to investigate this matter without further delay.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gilbert

Reply 3

Dear Mr Gilbert

Thank you for your letter regarding your account.

I have looked into this matter and can confirm that we received payment on December 2. I have now credited your account, and your balance stands at £2500.00

I apologize for our mistake and we would like to take this opportunity to assure you that it will not happen again.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Brown
Accounts Department

("apologise" in BrE)

Apology 1

Dear Mr Updike

Thank you for your letter requesting immediate payment of an outstanding account.

I am happy to confirm that payment has now been made. The delay was due to your correspondence being overlooked during a recent re-organization.

We apologize for this oversight and would like to assure you that every step has been taken to avoid such a situation from occurring again.

Yours sincerely

Brendan Hollis
Finance Director

Apology 2

Dear Mrs Miles

Your letter of February 9 has been referred to me by our sales department.

I was very sorry to hear about your recent problem with our data management system.

I have been able to locate the reason for the error and the problem has now been fixed.

Thank you for drawing this matter to our attention.

Yours sincerely

Robert Dawson
Technical Services Manager

Apology 3

Dear Ms Peterson

With reference to your email of October 10, **I would like to apologize for the partial fulfillment of your order.**

However, I am happy to confirm that the rest of your order has now been sent and you should receive it within two weeks.

I hope that this misunderstanding has not caused you too much inconvenience.

Yours sincerely

Adam Terry
Customer Services Manager

Condolence

Example 1

Dear Mrs Bennett

We were deeply saddened to hear of the sudden death of your husband, Edgar.

Edgar was a much-valued employee of the company, and all who knew him well remember his kindness and loyalty.

We are thinking of you and your family at this sad time.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Harrison

Example 2

Dear Mrs Easton

On behalf of Kings Brothers Ltd, **I am writing to express our deepest condolences on the death of** your husband, Roger.

We had known Roger since the company was founded, and we will always remember him with affection. **If there is any way that we can be of assistance in this sad time, please do not hesitate to let us know.**

Yours sincerely

Thomas Franks
Managing Director

Example 3

Dear Mr Evans

We are writing to express our sincere sympathy on your recent bereavement.

We will always remember Emily's courage in the face of her illness, which she bore with such dignity and strength. At Coopers Ltd, we will all feel her loss keenly.

Please convey our sympathy also to the rest of her family.

Yours sincerely

Mary Roberts
On behalf of Coopers Ltd

Confirming orders and prices

Example 1: order confirmation

Dear Mr Ayres

Following our telephone conversation this morning, **I am happy to confirm my order:**

1500 x Unit 05 @ US\$ 10.00

1000 x Unit 09 @ US\$ 5.00

I look forward to your invoice, which I understand will be subject to a 5% discount.

Yours sincerely

Brian Carroll

Example 2: price confirmation

Dear Frances

Thank you for your recent request for next year's price increases.

I can confirm that with the exception of children's books, all locally published titles will be increased by 5%. The prices of children's titles remain unchanged.

Imported titles will increase in price from between 2 and 4%. We are awaiting confirmation from our overseas suppliers regarding these price increases and we will inform you once we have heard from them.

I look forward to our continued business next year.

In the meantime, I would like to wish you and your colleagues a Happy New Year!

Robert Barnes

Example 3: order

Dear Mr Jones

Thank you for sending me your catalog.

I would like to order the following items:

2 Ladies Mountain Bikes (Item no: LL0129) \$500

2 Child Safety Seat (Item no: LJ 9825) \$80

Total: \$580

I am enclosing a check for \$600 which includes the packaging and postal costs.

Yours sincerely

David Harrison

Example 4: shipping confirmation

Dear Ms Janes

I am writing to confirm that your order was shipped on (date).

We expect it to arrive within a week. If, however, you experience any delays, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely

Richard Di Bello

Customer Services Manager

Example 5: order status / back order

Dear Mr Latham

Thank you for your order for 6 cps of Riding the Storm (ISBN 9138-881390).

This item is back-ordered and we expect delivery within a month.

Please accept our apologies for the delay.

Yours sincerely

Antony Betts

Example 6: order status / delay

Dear Ms Jared

Re: Purchase order 641P

Thank you for your order of 10 March.

Due to the enormous response we received after our summer promotion, **we are experiencing a delay in filling some orders.**

We will be able to ship your order within one month.

We apologize for the delay.

Catherine Tiptree
Customer Services Department

Example 7: order cancellation

Dear Mr Hewitt

Thank you for your email informing me of a three week delay in the fulfillment of my order, ref JK / 209.

Unfortunately, I am unable to wait any longer for the arrival of the goods. Please cancel my order.

Brenda Harris

Example 8: order cancellation

Dear Mr Lewis

Re: Our order of 16 November

We have received some of the items we ordered from you, but **notice that some items are out of stock.**

Please cancel our order for the out of stock goods and adjust our invoice accordingly for the goods received.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lampton

Example 9: pre-payment request

Dear Mr Leclerc

Thank you for your order of June 6.

Unfortunately we are unable to process this order as we require full payment in advance as well as shipping costs for overseas customers.

I would be extremely grateful if you would arrange for a bankers draft for the sum of USD\$950. (Details attached.)

I look forward to being able to help you in the near future.

Jeremy MacKenzie
Accounts Manager

Example 10: refund

Dear Mr Brown

Thank you for your email requesting a refund for the over shipment of order ref 12/06/04.

Please be advised that your account has been credited to the amount of \$350.

Yours sincerely

Karen Smith
Accounts Dept

Giving information

Example 1 - formal notice

Please be informed that we are moving offices at the end of the month.
Our new contact details will be:

16, Hope Crescent
Worthing
Sussex

Telephone / fax: 01987 333444

We would be grateful if you would amend your records accordingly.

Shirley Yip
Office manager

Example 2 - email to clients

In this busy time of year, it can often be a struggle to finish outstanding work before the year-end deadline. For this reason, **we would like to remind all our clients that** due to an exceptionally heavy workload, requests for printing and binding must be received before November 15th.

Work submitted before this date will be returned to you by December 18.
Please note that our offices will be closed from December 22 until January 3 inclusive.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued business with us.

Wishing you a very happy holiday season.

Dennis Ho
Sales and Marketing Manager

Example 3

Dear Mr Simmons

It has come to our notice that the invoice for \$480.24 sent on January 15 has not been paid.

If you believe the invoice to be in error, please contact us immediately. Otherwise, we would be grateful if the outstanding amount can be paid without further delay.

Your sincerely

Andrew Broughton
Account Manager

Example 4

Your order for 10 x units of R1014 has been received.

Please be advised that this item is temporarily out of stock. We expect new stock before the end of the month and we will ship your order then.

Many apologies for any inconvenience.

Louis Haslam
Shipping department

Example 5 – memo

It has come to my attention that video and audio downloads from the internet have resulted in a significant increase in network congestion.

Would all staff please refrain from downloading bandwidth-hogging files so that work activities can progress smoothly.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Jonathan

Example 6

Dear Ms Stewart

I am writing to inform you that the curtains you ordered have now arrived in our store.

Please telephone our customer sales representative on (tel number) to arrange a suitable delivery time.

Thank you for ordering from us and we hope to be able to serve you in the future.

Yours sincerely
Elizabeth Bracknell

Example 7

Dear Ms Stephenson

I am writing to advise you that your subscription to Homes and Interiors has elapsed.

As a long-standing reader of Homes and Interiors, I feel sure that you would be interested in a special price promotion for this magazine. We are offering our readers a 12 for 10 deal – 12 issues for the price of 10!

As this order is only valid for another month, **I have enclosed** a subscription coupon for your convenience. Please fill it in and enclose a check for (amount) in order to continue receiving your copy of Homes and Interiors.

Look forward to hearing from you!

Richard Stillman
Circulation Manager

Example 8 – memo

I am writing to explain the company's new guidelines on flexible working procedures.

As from February 19, employees will be able to request alternatives to the traditional office-based working week. There are various restrictions on the type of work that can be conducted outside the office, as well as health and safety regulations.

The attached file gives further information on this as well as on how to apply.

Human Resources Department

Example 9 - letter to customer

Dear Ms Whiting

Changes to ordering procedure

We're making some changes to our computer systems. This means that there will soon be some changes to the way you order from us. We've recently been trying to call you to let you know about these changes, but have not been able to get in touch. **The enclosed leaflet explains what is happening.**

If you have any questions, please call us on 0800 100 900 600 and a member of our team will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely

Peter Ebbers

Example 10 - letter to customer

Dear Ms Evans

Important changes to terms and condition for personal savings accounts

Following recent updates to our systems, **we have introduced some changes** to our personal savings accounts.

The enclosed leaflet gives you more details about the changes. Please read carefully the pages that are relevant to the accounts you hold and keep the brochure for future reference.

If you have any questions about these changes, please call our Customer Helpline on 04216 909011 where a member of staff will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely

Colin Backhouse

Example 11

Dear Mary

Just to let you know that we will come to Heathrow airport to meet you.

See you on the 10th!

Have a safe flight.

Josh

Example 12

Dear Gemma

I thought you might like to know that I've decided to take the job offer. This means that I'll be moving sometime in the summer.

In the meantime, thanks for all your advice. I'm really looking forward to being able to spend more time shopping with you!

Love

Carmel

Example 13

Dear Tom

I wasn't sure if you'd heard already, but I wanted to tell you that Jane and I are going to get married next year. It's only a small wedding – family and close friends – but we'd both be delighted if you and Anna could come. At the moment, we're thinking of dates in late Spring (probably May) but of course, we'll let you know as soon as we can!

All the best

Martin

Example 14

Dear Robert

As you may have heard on the grapevine, things haven't been going too well for the company recently.

In fact, last week I was laid off (along with about half the company) and I'm now considering my next step. Probably something in advertising, although I know the market is tight at the moment.

Anyway, I also wanted to thank you for your support over the last three years.

I'll email again when I've managed to clear my desk!

Best wishes

Ben

Good news

Example 1

Dear Steve

Congratulations on your promotion! **I was delighted to hear that** your hard work and dedication have been rewarded.

Wishing you every success in your future at Belles.

Harry Spiles

Example 2

Dear Customer

We are delighted to inform you that the summer sales have now started.

As a Johnsons Storecard holder, you are entitled to receive an extra 5% discount on all sales items.

The sales last until the end of August – be sure to take advantage of all our great offers!

Happy shopping!

Sylvia Merton

Example 3

Dear Ms Freeman

I'm happy to tell you that your application for the post of sales assistant has been successful.

I'd be grateful if you could reply to this email to confirm your acceptance of the post. If I don't hear from you within a week, I'll assume that you have found alternative employment.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy F. Hales
Human Resources

Invitations

Example 1 – impersonal

Dear Loyalty Cardholder

We would like to invite you to the launch of the new spring collection.

The launch will take place on Tuesday 10 March at 7.30 pm in our flagship store on Oxford Road, where you will have the opportunity to preview the new collection and pre-order items at a 10% discount.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Example 2 – corporate

Dear Dr Wilson

Grundy Publishing is celebrating 50 years of literary fiction publishing.

We are marking this event with a small party in the Royal Club, on December 4 at 6 pm.

We would be delighted if you and Mrs Wilson could attend.

Best wishes

Antony Grundy

Example 3 – informal

Hi Steve and Miranda

Would you like to come to our anniversary party? We're hiring the Potters Wheel club on Saturday 12 November to celebrate our 10 year wedding anniversary.

Could you let us know asap so that we can plan numbers?

Love

John and Alice

Example 4 - wedding invitation

Mr and Mrs Dawson **request the pleasure of Ms Jane Comley's company at the wedding of** their daughter Susannah to Mr James Brown on Saturday 17 June.

The wedding will take place at St Michael's Church, Lowestoft at 11 am, followed by a reception at The Waterside Inn, Lowestoft.

RSVP

Informal – colleagues

Hi Lucy

We're having a brief meeting to discuss the Evans project. **Can you make it** on Tuesday, at 10 am?

Pat

Accepting a wedding invitation

Dear Mr and Mrs Dawson

Thank you for your invitation to Susannah's wedding. **I would be delighted to attend.**

Jane Comley

Declining an invitation: example 1

Dear Antony

Thank you for your invitation. However, **I regret that I will be unable to attend.**

Wishing you all the best

John Wilson

Declining an invitation: example 2

Dear Mrs Hughes

Thank you for inviting me to the Second Annual Dinner Dance.

Unfortunately, due to a prior commitment, I will not be able to attend.

Wishing you every success with this event

Patricia Evans

Declining an invitation: example 3

Hi Pat

I'm sorry, but I'm not going to be able to make it on Tuesday.

Lucy

Making an appointment

Asking for an appointment

Dear Mr Salvo

I represent Holt Enterprises, one of the major suppliers of Italian ceramic tiles into the UK.

I will be in Rome during the week of March 8 – 12 and **I would be very interested to meet you** to discuss the import of bathroom and kitchen ceramics.

I would be grateful if you could indicate a convenient time to meet during this week.

I look forward to hearing from you.

James Prior

Accepting an appointment

Dear Mr Prior

Mr Salvo would be delighted to meet you to discuss the import of Italian ceramics. He will be available on March 10 at 11am.

Please confirm if this is a convenient time for you.

Yours sincerely

Claudia Romagna
(PA to Giovanni Salvo)

Confirmation of appointment

Dear Ms Romagna

Thank you for your email.

I am writing to confirm my meeting with Mr Salvo at 11 am on March 10.

Yours sincerely

James Prior

Postponing / changing an appointment

Dear Mr Stirling

Unfortunately, due to some unforeseen business, **I will be unable to keep our appointment** for tomorrow afternoon.

Would it be possible to arrange another time later in the week?

I apologize for any inconvenience.

Lucy Rogers

Accepting a postponement

Dear Ms Rogers

Thank you for your email.

I will be out of the office on Wednesday and Thursday, but **I will be available** on Friday afternoon.

Please confirm if this is a suitable time for you.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Stirling

Cancellation of an appointment (formal)

Dear Ms Harrison

Thank you for your letter of June 12 concerning your visit to Washington.

Unfortunately, I will be away on business during the week of July 7 – 12, so I will be unable to meet you then.

However, if you could be in Washington in the following week, **I would be glad to arrange a meeting** with you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sarah Wilding
Marketing Manager

Cancellation of an appointment (informal)

Dear Sasha

I'm afraid that I have to cancel our meeting on Wednesday, as **something unexpected has come up** in our Barcelona office.

Would you be free to meet early next week?

Best wishes

Frank

Reply (informal)

Dear Frank

Thanks for your email.

Would Tuesday suit you?

Sasha

Confirmation (informal)

Tuesday sounds fine. Shall we say around 3pm, in the Boardroom?

Frank

Making requests

Example 1 – email

Following increased virus attacks, **we would like to advise** all staff to update their anti-virus software monthly.

For technical support, please call me on extension 316.

Thanks,

Antony

Example 2

We are currently researching potential locations for our Sales Conference next year.

I would be grateful if you could send me further information regarding your facilities. In particular, I would like to know your room rates and details of your conference rooms.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Robert Last

Example 3 – memo

To: All staff

Re: Office security

As you are probably aware, there have been a number of break-ins recently.

We are stepping up our office security as a response to these events, but **your help would be appreciated in** assisting us to prevent burglaries.

The management team would greatly appreciate it if you would be vigilant and report any suspicious behavior to the Facilities Manager.

Thank you

Example 4 - informal email

Here is the draft of the new brochure.

Could you check it and send it to production before 26 June?

Many thanks,

Pete

Example 5 - formal fax

Attached is a copy of the online assessment.

Kindly fill it out and return to us within the next 24 hours.

Many thanks.

Example 6

Dear Ms Ferrar

I am delighted that you will be joining us at the beginning of October.

I have enclosed a copy of your contract. **Please would you** sign it and return it to me as soon as possible?

We are all very much looking forward to working with you.

Kind regards

Sarah Parnell
Personnel Department

Example 7 – memo

Memo to marketing and sales staff

Re: Travel claims

The accounts department have made a couple of suggestions in order to speed up the settlement of travel claims.

In the future, could all staff **please make sure** that their travel claims are supported by receipts? This will save time and mean that claims can be paid more promptly.

Please also ensure that claims are submitted before the end of the month. Failure to do this will mean that reimbursement is made in the following month.

Many thanks for your co-operation.

JC

Example 8

To the Marketing Department

I would be grateful if you could send me a copy of your free booklet "Speaking confidently" as advertised in the Evening Gazette.

With many thanks

Mrs Rebecca North

Example 9

Dear Mr Hardy

Please would you send me an inspection copy of "English Grammar"? We are thinking of changing our grammar textbook and we are particularly interested in this title.

Yours sincerely

Johnson Chan

Reply 9

Dear Mr Chan

Thank you for your letter.

I am enclosing a copy of "English Grammar" for your inspection.

I would certainly appreciate hearing your comments on this title, and I look forward to answering any questions you have about it.

Yours sincerely

David Hardy

Replying to requests

Example 1

Dear Mrs Jones

In answer to your inquiry, I am enclosing a brochure, which illustrates our range of curtain fabric.

All the fabrics are available in small quantities. **Please note that** we do not stock bulk quantities of some of the fabrics and that we may need up to two weeks to fill bulk orders.

I look forward to being able to help you in the future.

Adam Johnson

Example 2

Dear Lawrence

I enjoyed meeting you at the Media Fair in London.

As you suggested, I am sending you my CV. I would be particularly interested in positions that combine marketing and product management.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Antony Lewis

Example 3

Dear Mr Keynes

Thank you for your recent inquiry regarding our range of upmarket kitchen appliances and accessories.

As you requested, I am enclosing a brochure which has details on our newest lines.

The Borders and Flowers lines are represented in the SmartCook chain of outlets and sell well to people with a keen interest in cuisine and food presentation. If your shop currently caters to such a clientele, I would be very interested to meet you to discuss business opportunities.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Richard
Business Development Manager

Example 4

Dear Jerry

As promised, I am sending you the new fabric swatches.

Let me know what you think.

Sarah

Example 5: Accepting an offer to tender

Dear Mr Hough

Thank you for contacting me regarding the Waterdowns Development Project.

On behalf of Better Homes Ltd, I would like to accept your offer to tender a proposal for this project.

I will be contacting you shortly with our completed proposal.

Yours sincerely

Philip Briggs
Better Homes Ltd

Example 6: rejecting a proposal / tender

Dear Mr Briggs

Waterdowns Development Project

Thank you for submitting your proposal for the above project.

Regrettably, we have awarded the contract to another building firm. We based this decision on the estimated length of time for development, as well as on environmental factors.

However, we would like to consider you for future building projects and we will contact you shortly.

Yours sincerely

Edward Hough
Chief Developer

Example 7: offering credit

Dear Mrs L Myers

We are delighted to tell you that you have been approved to receive a Goods Department Store charge card.

We have established a credit limit of £500 pcm. If you would like to change this limit, please call us and a member of our team would be happy to comply with your request.

Please sign the enclosed card on the back and read the brochure which explains the account and interest details. Of course, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.

We hope that you enjoy the convenience of your new charge card and we look forward to being able to serve you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Linda Roper
Credit Manager

Example 8: offering credit

Dear Ms Fanshawe

I am delighted to inform you that we have approved the Old Times chain stores for credit. **We hope that our new relationship will be mutually beneficial.**

As chief buyer for the Old Times chain stores, **you will be able to enjoy various trading privileges with us.** These are set out in detail in our Trading Partners brochure, of which I have enclosed several copies to be distributed among your colleagues.

As a gesture of our thanks to you for opening an account, we would like to offer you a special discount of 5% on all merchandise over the value of USD\$4000. This special offer is valid until the end of the year.

Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions regarding your account.

We look forward to doing business with you.

Sylvia Storer

Credit Manager

Thank you letters

Example 1

Dear David

Thank you for sending me those beautiful flowers. It was very thoughtful of you.

I have now made a complete recovery and I will return to work next week.

With much love

Sharon

Example 2

To all staff members

I greatly appreciated your assistance during the recent relocation.

Thanks to your efforts, the move went smoothly and there was minimum disruption to productivity.

To celebrate our new offices, we will be holding a small reception on Friday, at 17.30, to which you are all cordially invited to attend.

Roger Street

Managing Director

Spelling and editing

One of the best ways to improve your spelling is by reading. Seeing words in print helps fix the spelling in your mind. Read as much and as widely as possible.

Use a spell checker to help you identify and correct the words that cause you problems. Some words are always going to be difficult to spell correctly, so if you always have spelling doubts about a particular word, make sure that you run the spell checker and that you pay special attention to the "difficult" word.

Practice writing the words that you have difficulty spelling. If you use this word regularly, after a while you will start to write it correctly.

Use a dictionary. Good dictionaries will show you how to spell the word in other grammatical forms, as well as giving you an example of the word in context.

Spelling rules in English

1. i before e except after c (when the word rhymes with c)

Examples: believe, niece, piece, achieve.

After c: receive, perceive, deceive

2. When you use 'full' at the end of an adjective, drop one 'l'

Examples: wonderful, tasteful, grateful

Note that when you turn the adjective into an adverb by adding -ly, use both 'l'.

Examples: careful - carefully; grateful - gratefully

3. The letter 'e'

Words that end with the letter 'e' lose the 'e' before a suffix beginning with a vowel:

Examples: require - requiring; state – stating

But before a suffix that begins with a consonant, they keep the 'e':

Examples: state – statement; require - requirement

4. Using -our and -orous

In British English, when a word ends in -our (i.e. "humour") and we add -us, the -our becomes -or:

Examples: humour – humorous; glamour - glamorous

5. Using -y

When a word ends with a consonant and 'y', change the 'y' to 'i' before adding a suffix:

Examples: hungry - hungrier; try – tried; baby - babies

But if the word ends with a vowel and 'y', keep the 'y' before adding a suffix:

Examples: lay - layer; pay – payment

6. Single and double consonants

When a word ends in a single consonant, it is doubled when we add a suffix beginning with a vowel:

Examples: get – getting;

admit – admitted; admit - admittance

ship – shipping

Note: this rule also applies to travel – travelled / travelling in British English, but not in American English, where the 'l' is not doubled. ("Traveled" and "traveling" is correct in American English.)

The consonant is not doubled when we add a suffix beginning with a consonant:

ship – shipment (the suffix begins with a consonant)

Spelling differences between US and UK English

1. –or and –our

British English tends to use -our in adjectives, whereas American English uses -or:

For example: colour (GB) and color (US); neighbour (GB) and neighbor (US)

2. –er and –re

Some noun endings are -re in British English, but -er in American English:

For example: centre (GB) and center (US)

3. –ice and –ise

Some words have -ice ending for the noun and -ise ending for the verb in British English. For example: practice (noun) and to practise (verb).

However, in American English both noun and verb are spelled practice.

4. –l and –ll

In British English, when a word ends in a single consonant, it is doubled when we add a suffix beginning with a vowel: For example: traveller; levelled

However, in American English the 'l' is not doubled: For example: traveler, leveled

5. -ise and -ize

In American English, verbs end -ize (organize, apologize etc) while in British English either the -ize ending (or more commonly the -ise ending) is used.

6. Other common words

British English and American English have different spellings for certain words:

For example: cheque (GB) - check (US); programme (GB) – program (US)

If you are writing to an international audience, either American English or British English is acceptable.

Editing your work

Read through your writing to check that the ideas are logically structured, and that they flow naturally for the reader. Then check again for spelling and grammar mistakes.

A word of warning.

Many people use spell checkers, but although these can help, they also have limitations. For example, some English words have more than one correct spelling. For example, 'there' and 'their' are both correct, but you need to check that you have the right spelling, otherwise you might make a grammatical mistake.

Another problem with spell checkers is that they are set by default to either British or American English spelling. It doesn't matter which spelling system you choose, as long as you are consistent in your choice. For example, if your spell checker is set to an American English spelling system and you type the word "organisation", the word is shown as a spelling error. British English speakers normally (but not always) spell "organisation" with an 's'. If you are writing in British English, change the default setting so that your checker allows words such as "organisation".

Tips

Read your writing out aloud. This will help you to see what you have written through the eyes of your reader. Is there enough punctuation in your sentences? If you get breathless when you read one of your sentences, then you'll know you haven't put in enough commas.

Get a friend or a colleague to read through your writing for you - they might find something that you didn't see.

If you have enough time, leave your writing for a couple of days. When you come back to it, you might want to change some things.

Check for style and tone. Is your writing polite? There are many standard phrases we use in business correspondence to sound polite. Politeness goes a long way in English business and sounding too direct or impolite is a cultural mistake.

Editing checklist

Is it clear?

Does the reader know what to do next?

Is it concise and to the point?

Is it organized?

Are the ideas, sentences and paragraphs linked?

Is it simple enough?

Is it polite enough?

Is the layout easy to read?

Are the conventional expressions correct?

Is the punctuation correct?

Is the grammar correct? Check your articles, tenses, subject and verb agreement, referencing and spelling.

Chapter 6: Linking Words and Phrases

Linking words and phrases help you to connect your ideas and sentences, so that your reader can follow your ideas.

Example of a text which does not use linking words and phrases:

Dear Mr Green

Please find enclosed the brochure you requested. It contains information on the whole range of computers that we stock.

All our products come with a year's guarantee. You may like to consider buying insurance for some of the computers. We can give you favorable terms for insurance on laptops.

I hope that you find a computer suited to your needs. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further information.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely

John Higgins
Sales Representative

There are two main problems with the text. Firstly, because there are no linking words, the ideas appear unconnected.

The second problem occurs in the second paragraph, where the writer does not use a linking word to show the reader he is about to make a contrast between two sentences:

"All our products come with a year's guarantee. You may like to consider buying insurance."

As a result, the reader could find it difficult to see the connection between the two sentences.

Improved text:

Dear Mr Green

Please find enclosed the brochure you requested, containing information on the whole range of computers that we stock.

All our products come with a year's guarantee. However, you may like to consider buying insurance for some of the computers. In fact, we can give you favorable terms for insurance on laptops.

I hope that you find a computer suited to your needs. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further information or if you have any other questions.

Yours sincerely

John Higgins
Sales Representative

In this version, linking words have been used and the text is easier to follow.

Words such as "however" link two ideas and show a contrast between them. You could also write "Although our products come with a year's guarantee, you may like to consider buying insurance for some of the computers."

List of linking words and phrases

Giving examples

For example

For instance

Namely

Adding information

And

In addition

As well as

As well

Also

Too

Furthermore

Moreover

Apart from

In addition to

Besides

In fact

Giving a reason

Thanks to

Because

Because of

As a result of

Since

Due to / due to the fact that

Owing to / owing to the fact that

As

Giving a result

Therefore

So

Consequently

This means that
As a result

Contrasting ideas

But
However
Although
Despite / despite the fact that
In spite of / in spite of the fact that
Nevertheless
Nonetheless
While
Whereas
Unlike
In theory,..... in practice

Sequencing ideas

The former,... The latter
Firstly, secondly, finally
The first point is...
Lastly
The following

Summarizing ideas

In short
In brief
In summary
To summarize
In a nutshell
To conclude
In conclusion

Usage notes - giving examples

e.g

This is the abbreviated form of *for example*. It is used less frequently in formal writing.

"New distribution methods (e.g. those implemented from 2010 onwards) are helping us to cut costs."

Don't confuse *e.g.* with *i.e.* (id est) which means *that is to say* and which helps you to define something

"New distribution methods (i.e. via our website) are helping us to cut costs."

Namely

This reference word allows you to introduce names and to be specific.

"The top-performing markets, namely Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, have exceeded their budgets. Congratulations to all three sales teams!"

Usage notes - adding information

In addition

In formal writing, you should avoid using *also* at the beginning of a sentence. To start a sentence with an additional piece of information, use a phrase such as *in addition* or *as well as*.

"Profits have risen. In addition, our market share has increased."

"In addition to a rise in profits, our market share has increased."

Too

Too can go either at the end of the sentence, or after the subject of the sentence.

"The financial analysts were concerned, too."

"They, too, were concerned by the profitability."

Besides

This can mean *apart from*.

"Besides the problems in distribution, we also have to find a way of marketing such a new product."

Besides can also go at the beginning of a sentence to mean *and another thing* or *anyway*. This is quite informal and it should be avoided in formal writing.

"We can't go on a cruise this year - we don't have enough time. Besides, it's far too expensive."

Moreover

This is a formal word which adds to or supports an argument. It can be used at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence.

"The company needs to expand into Asia this year. Moreover, the market

conditions are extremely favorable for expansion."

"The company needs to expand and, moreover, the conditions are perfect."

Furthermore

A formal word to mean *in addition*.

"The company needs to expand into Asia. Furthermore, we need to consolidate our market position in North America."

Usage notes - giving a reason

Thanks to

This is used more in spoken English than in written English.

"We won the contract thanks to a last-minute change in the proposal."

Because / because of

Because of is followed by a noun.

"Because of the decline in demand, sales have decreased."

Because is followed by a clause.

"Because demand has declined, sales have decreased."

Since

Since is more informal than *because* and is more often used in spoken English.

"Since we don't have the money, we can't expand."

Usage note

The phrases *due to*, *owing to*, *despite* and *in spite of* must be followed by a noun.

"Due to engineering work, all trains will be delayed."

"There will be delays due to engineering work."

If you want to follow these phrases with a clause (a subject, verb and object), you must use the fact that.

"Due to the fact that there has been little demand for the Navigator Robot, we have decided to discontinue this product."

"Despite the fact that costs have fallen by 25%, the company has made a loss in the first quarter."

Where possible, it is better to use due to + noun than due to the fact that + clause, as the second choice can make your text over-wordy. There are occasions, however, when the clause is so long that it is impossible to turn it into a noun.

"Petrol prices rose, so inflation grew." This can be changed: "Due to the rise in petrol prices, inflation grew."

"Petrol and food prices rose, so inflation grew." This can also be changed:

"Due to the rise in petrol and food prices, inflation grew."

But in sentences with complex or longer clauses, it becomes more difficult to change them into a noun.

"Petrol and food prices rose in Europe and North America, although not in the Middle East and Gulf States, so inflation grew in the former but not in the latter."

If you change this to a noun, you get the over-wordy:

"Due to the rise in petrol and food prices in Europe and North America, although not in the Middle East and Gulf States, inflation grew in the former areas but not in the latter."

This could be written in a simpler way:

"Due to the fact that petrol and food prices rose in Europe and North America, although not in the Middle East and Gulf States, inflation grew in the former areas but not in the latter."

Due to

This is one of the most frequently used phrases to give a reason. It can come either at the beginning of the sentence, or in the middle of the sentence.

Owing to

This means the same as *due to* and the same grammar rules apply - it must be followed by a noun, or by *the fact that*.

"The match was called off, owing to the bad weather."

However, *owing to* should not be used after the verb *to be*. Instead, use *due to*.

"The company's problems were due to a poor cash-flow situation."

As

This is a good alternative to *because*.

"As the samples are not yet ready, we cannot decide on a packaging."

Usage notes - giving a result

So

This is a more informal word than *therefore*.

"I need some help with the launch, so I'd be grateful if you could print some labels for me."

Consequently, as a consequence

These are more formal than *therefore*.

"The collective labor agreements are to be enforced. Consequently, all labor disputes should be referred to the Arbitration Committee."

Thus

This is extremely formal and is best avoided.

"The company was declared bankrupt and thus it was unable to repay its debts."

Hence

This is similar to *thus*.

"The train was late; hence the delay."

Consequently and *hence* cannot be introduced with a comma:

"The company made a profit. Consequently, they expanded."

"He felt enormous pressure to resign; hence his dilemma."

Usage notes - contrasting ideas

However

However can be used at the beginning or end of a sentence and is more formal than *but*.

"The company is expanding. However, it is not very profitable."

"The company is expanding. It is not very profitable, however."

However can also be preceded by a semi-colon.

"The company is expanding; however, it is not very profitable."

However can also be used to "interrupt" a sentence.

"You can't tell the boss. You can, however, tell me."

Although

This introduces an idea of contrast. There must be two parts of the sentence, but the other part of the sentence cannot start with *but* or *however*.

"Although the company was making a profit, it closed down the factory in Indonesia."

"They closed down the factory in Indonesia, although they were making a profit."

Even though

Like "although", there must be two parts to the sentence.

"He became CEO of the company, even though he was only 26."

"Even though he was only 26, he became CEO of the company. "

Despite

This is another way of introducing contrast. Be careful not to make the common error of writing "despite of".

"Despite their price increases, the company made a loss."

"They made a loss, despite increasing their prices."

In spite of

"In spite of falling demand, the company made a profit."

"The company made a profit in spite of falling demand."

For the grammar rules of despite and in spite of, see the usage note for 'due to'.

Nevertheless

This is a little more formal than despite or in spite of.

"The climate is warm and sunny. Nevertheless, it can get cold in the evenings."

Note

Like however and nonetheless (see below), nevertheless cannot be used as a conjunction with a comma before and a comma after. It can be preceded by either a full stop or a semi-colon:

"He likes chairing meetings, nevertheless, he does not do it very often" -
INCORRECT

"He likes chairing meetings; nevertheless, he does not do it very often." -
CORRECT

"He likes chairing meetings. Nevertheless, he does not do it very often." -
CORRECT

Nonetheless

This is another more formal word for "in spite of" or "despite".

"Venture capital has dried up over the last few months. Nonetheless, the number of entrepreneurs in search of funding has more than doubled."

Whereas

While and **whereas** are slightly different in meaning, but they are generally used interchangeably.

"Food is cheap in supermarkets, whereas eating out is expensive."

Unlike

This is also used to show how two things are different.

"Unlike his father, John was not interested in a career in insurance."

In theory, in practice...

This expression shows that although one thing is expected, another thing generally happens instead.

"In theory, all details should be input into the database. In practice, there really isn't the time to input the minor details."

Alternatives to this are "in principle... in practice" and "on paper... in practice".

Usage notes - sequencing / summarizing

The former...the latter

This is a useful way of referring to two things you have already mentioned, without mentioning their names again.

"Germany and Italy are our top performing markets. The former is a mature market for us, while the latter is a new market for the company."

Firstly ... secondly ... finally / Lastly or first, last

These are useful words if you want to list ideas.

Be careful: a common error is to use at first or at last instead of firstly and lastly.

"There are three main points I'd like to cover in my presentation. Firstly, I'd like to consider the market. Secondly, I'd like to look at the competition. Finally, I'd like to examine strategies to increase our market share."

The first point... the second point

As it is unusual to write "fourthly", or "fifthly", write instead the first point... the second point... the third point... the fourth point and so on.

"There are five main objections to cutting our budget. The first one is that our budget is too small to cut. The second point is that without a substantial budget, we cannot promote the new range of greetings cards. The third and fourth points are related to our competition: we are facing enormous competition from cheaper imprints and our market is becoming increasingly price-sensitive. The fifth point is that we will have difficulties with the unions if we have to make staff redundant."

The following

This is a good way of starting a list.

"The following subjects should be discussed at the next meeting:

recruitment, corporate accounts, budget cuts and the new office procedures."

In a nutshell

This is more common in spoken English.

"Our cashflow is negative. In a nutshell, we have no money."

Other referencing expressions

Who / which / that / whom

Who/whom refers to people and *which / that* refer to things.

"The problem which / that occurred with printing has now been solved."

"The customers who first noticed the problem have been thanked."

Whom is the object form of *who*, although it is rare and only used in formal writing.

Generally, English speakers tend to avoid using *whom*. For example:

"I would be grateful if you could indicate to whom I should address the letter. "

This sounds over formal and would be more naturally expressed as:

"I would be grateful if you could indicate who I should address the letter to."

Whom must be used after a preposition:

"There were many suppliers present, some of whom I already knew."

"The company with whom we have a partnership has just gone into receivership."

It is also possible to use *some of*, *none of* and *all of* before *which* and *whom*.

"They manufacture a wide range of paper products, some of which are extremely expensive."

"He showed me the new products, none of which I had seen before."

"There are several potential problems, all of which will need considering before the launch."

"The Board of Directors is composed of experienced managers, none of whom is under 70 years old."

"The management team have appointed five new sales executives, all of whom are multi-lingual."

Chapter 7: Writing Clearly

Why is it important to write concisely and clearly?

The main purpose of your writing is to communicate. The most effective way of doing this is by using widely-understood vocabulary, eliminating jargon or "technical words" and keeping your sentences and paragraphs short. Keeping your text concise and clear means that your reader is more likely to understand your message on the first reading.

In addition, many people are deluged with emails, messages and notices. If yours is concise and clear, it's more likely that your reader can act quickly on it.

An example of an unclear text:

"The unprecedented context of internationalization now presents many corporate trainers with a challenge: to train in an environment that is multicultural and where the lingua franca is English...."

"Our trainers are sensitive not only to the corporate and social intercultural differences that exist in such environments but can translate this sensitivity into communication strategies that help trainers optimize the opportunity to cope with intercultural differences."

Rewritten version:

"The increase in international contacts means that corporate trainers now have to work in a multicultural environment where English is the main language."

"Our trainers understand cultural differences and can develop communication strategies to help them cope with these differences."

Explanation

"to train in an environment that is multicultural and where the lingua franca is English" becomes "a multicultural environment where English is the main language".

Where possible, avoid too many relative pronouns. Instead of defining "environment" with "that is", use an adjective + noun combination. ("multicultural environment")

"Our trainers are sensitive not only to the corporate and social intercultural differences that exist in such environments but can translate this sensitivity into communication strategies that help trainers optimize the opportunity to cope with intercultural differences."

becomes:

"Our trainers understand cultural differences and can develop communication strategies to help trainers cope with these differences."

The four problems in the original text

1. Structures that make sentences excessively long, such as "not only, but..."

To avoid making sentences too long, focus on "subject verb object" word order principles:

Our trainers (subject)

understand (verb, replacing "sensitive to cultural differences")

cultural differences (object)

develop (verb, replacing "translate this sensitivity...")

communication strategies (object)

2. Repetition of ideas

"...that exist in such environments" is redundant. The reader knows that the text is referring to multicultural environments.

3. "Puff" (words or phrases that make the text sound more important than it is)

"...optimize the opportunity to ..." can be replaced by a simpler "help trainers to..."

4. Use of cliches or jargon

"social intercultural differences" means "cultural differences" - "social inter..." doesn't change or add any meaning to "cultural".

Three ways to write concisely

1. Avoid using over-formal words in general business English.

In the following list, the first words should be avoided in general business writing. Instead, you can use the more concise alternative.

above-mentioned = above

aforesaid = the earlier

below-mentioned = below

thereof = of that

hereof = of this

therein = there / in that (place)

herein = here

hereto = to this

herewith = here

hereby = here

henceforward = from now on

henceforth = from now on

hitherto = up to now

thereby = therefore

2. Only include necessary words and phrases

Avoid using cliched expressions and be careful that you do not repeat words or ideas. See also the page on avoiding "flowery writing" in Chapter 8: Style.

The first expressions in the following list use more words than necessary.
The alternative words express the ideas more concisely.

as of the date of = from

by means of = by

in the final analysis = finally

at this moment in time = now

in order to = to

so as to = to

at the end of the day = finally / in conclusion

each and every = each / every

for the duration of = during

for the reason that = because

for the purpose of = in order to / to / for

further to = after / following

if and when = if / when

in connection with = about / concerning

in respect of = about

in view of the fact that = because

in the near future = soon

in the event that = if

to be of the opinion = to think

on the understanding that = provided that / providing

with a view to = to

with effect from = from

the fact of the matter = the fact is

all things being equal = (nothing)

under the impression that = think / believe

3. Use modal auxiliary verbs

Modal verbs (such as *can*, *must*, *might* and *should*) are a concise way of adding meaning to the sentence without using long phrases.

it is possible to = we can

it is necessary for you to = you should / must

it is unlikely to happen = it might not happen

it is logically impossible = it cannot

it is necessary for you to = you need to / you have to / you should

it is permissible = you can / you may

I have no possibility to = I can't

I am obliged to = I must

10 rules for writing easily understood English

In most general business situations, your reader should be able to understand everything on the first reading: the objective of the text, the information presented in the text and what he / she should do next.

Many native English speakers would not understand the following text on the first reading:

"We recognize ... that the cash reserves currently do not provide the cushion we would like to enjoy as we fund operations to profitability.

To address this concern, we'll continue to diligently reduce cash expenses and identify means to monetize other non-core assets."

What does this mean?

"We know that we do not have enough spare money at the moment to fund out activities. So we will cut our costs and try to sell off our non-essential assets."

It's essential to think about the effect of what you write on your reader. It's better to keep what you write simple and clear, rather than to obscure the meaning in long sentences containing complicated words, jargon or idiomatic English.

Here are 10 ways to make sure you write easily understood English.

1. Keep grammar simple

- use active rather than passive sentences
- avoid complicated structures like inversion ("Never have I seen" etc)
- avoid subclauses

"We know that we do not have enough spare money at the moment to fund out activities. So we will cut our costs and try to sell off our non-essential assets."

2. Keep vocabulary simple

- use concrete words rather than abstract nouns ("chair" instead of "seating apparatus")
- avoid using long nouns in place of verbs ("use" rather than "utilization")

3. Only use jargon if you are sure that your reader understands it

Jargon (=words and language used by people in a particular industry) can be difficult to understand by readers who do not share the writer's knowledge. For this reason, only use jargon if you know your reader will understand it and when it is the best or shortest way of explaining something.

Look at this example of jargon (taken from the Plain English Campaign website. www.plainenglish.co.uk) It is a letter from a local council's head of waste management services when a member of the public complained at the removal of can recycling skips.

"Cessation of can recycling

Whilst expenditure reductions have been essential in recent years, and, indeed, have affected a whole range of services, the Council is still fully committed to waste minimisation and the recycling of waste and has within the last few weeks approved, in principle, a revised strategy encompassing the introduction of material recycling facilities for post-refuse collection and pre-final disposal.

Bank systems and house-to-house collections have, for the most part, proved to be both inflexible and expensive and certainly unlikely to permit achievement of the 25% waste recycling target being pursued by the Council. This approach will facilitate the best utilisation of current and future options.

I hope you will find this information informative."

What the writer meant was:

"Despite essential cuts in spending, we are still committed to reducing and recycling waste.

As can banks and house-to-house collections have been inflexible and expensive, we will introduce new recycling plants to achieve our target of

recycling 25% of waste.

I hope this information is useful."

4. Avoid idioms and phrasal verbs

Idioms and phrasal verbs (verbs with a particle, such as "take off" or "live up to" can be difficult to understand by non-native speakers of English.

Very often, the meaning is not connected to the individual meaning of the words. For example, the idiom "to have egg on your face" means "to look stupid", but "to egg someone on" means "to urge someone to do something". Knowing the meaning of "egg" will not help you understand the overall meaning of the idiom.

Avoid idioms and phrasal verbs to help you write more clearly and make your writing easier to understand.

5. Keep sentences short

Avoid long sentences with lots of sub-clauses which will make it difficult for your reader to follow you. Each sentence should have only one main idea, with supporting ideas in following sentences, introduced by an appropriate linking word.

6. Use a clear layout

Don't put large blocks of text on the page without spacing

Use visuals, such as tables or charts to help your reader understand, and headings or subheadings to separate dense text.

7. Use punctuation

Within sentences use commas or semi-colons to separate lists or clauses.

8. Define words and phrases if necessary

If you need to include technical or specialist vocabulary, make sure your reader will be able to understand it by including a definition the first time you use the word. You might also need to explain acronyms (words made up of initial letters, such as the *BBC*, or the *EU*.)

9. Get someone else to read your text

It may be clear to you, but if someone else does not understand the purpose of the text, you may need to rewrite it.

10. Edit what you write

Read a second time to check both for grammatical mistakes and for clarity.

Chapter 8: Vocabulary Choice and Style

Before you start writing, think about the situation you are writing in. Is it formal or informal? Are you writing to a colleague, a customer or your boss? All these factors affect the style of your writing and your choice of language.

This is important. If you are too informal, your reader could think that you are not showing respect. It's also important to avoid writing in an over-formal style, which could make your writing appear pompous or unnecessarily confusing.

Example of inappropriate style in a covering letter to a CV:

12A Leighton Gardens

Camden

London NW3 0AT

(Tel: 010 711 9043)

16 April 2012

Hi all,

Enc. you will find my CV. Pretty impressive, huh!!

I'd really, really like a job in your company – I'm really interested in the post of Financial Director, having got a few years' experience plus a head for figures.

Lemme know what you think – you can give me a call any time.

Thanks for your consideration.

Harry Liddell

Major problems

1. Inappropriate salutation ("Hi all")
2. Abbreviations ("enc" for enclosed; "thanks" for thank you)
3. Repetition ("really, really")
4. Idioms ("head for figures")
5. Extremely informal style (Spoken English, such as "lemme" for "let me"; use of "huh")
6. Punctuation (use of dashes and exclamation marks)

What makes a text formal or informal?

There are six factors that determine style (formality or informality) in writing.

1. Active or passive (personal or impersonal)
2. Use of contractions
3. Use of personal pronouns
4. Sentence length
5. Punctuation
6. Vocabulary choice

Formal or informal? Examples of texts

In the following texts, the style varies according to the formality of the situation.

1. Formal memo - a manager writing to inform staff of changes

MEMO

From: CJ Harris

Date: 22 September

To: All personnel in sales and warehouse

cc: Tony Wills, Mary Jackson

It has recently come to my attention that orders are not being fulfilled within our target delivery time of three weeks. As we are now approaching our peak selling season, we must ensure that all orders are dispatched within the agreed delivery times.

In order to assist you with the increased workload, three additional warehouse assistants have been appointed. Tony Willis will now assume responsibility for timely order fulfillment.

Should there be unforeseen problems with orders or deliveries, please contact him and copy me.

2. Informal email - An employee emailing a colleague for help.

From Sarah

Subject: Attached report re delivery times

Hi

Could you take a look at the attached report? It's to be sent to CJ re the delivery times. If you think it's OK, or if you think I should change it a bit, please let me know. Sorry to rush you, but he needs it next Tues am.

Many thanks

Sarah

3. Apology letter to a customer

Unit 3A, Harlsden Estate, Reading RU17 0TH

Tel: 0134 906712 Fax: 0134 907714

info@kempproducts.co.uk www.kempproducts.co.uk

18 July 2012

Dear Mr Jones

We would like to apologize for the delay in delivering the goods that you ordered (Ref. Y2/0188). This delay was due to technical problems arising from the installation of our new computerized order-processing system. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the system misplaced your order.

We sincerely regret this, but would like to assure you that the technical problems have now been rectified. To compensate for the inconvenience this has caused you, we would like to offer you an additional 5% discount on any orders that you place before December 31, 2012.

We look forward to being able to serve you in the future.

Yours sincerely

G Davis

Customer Services Manager

Style factor 1: Active or passive

If you write in the passive voice, your style of writing is more impersonal than if you write in an active, personal form.

Examples of passive voice

Orders are not being fulfilled. (See Memo 1)

The problems have now been rectified. (See Letter 3)

Passive forms change the focus of a sentence from the person doing the action, to the action itself.

For example, "This man bought the tickets" (focus on "**this man**") and "The tickets were bought by this man" (focus on "the tickets **were bought**").

Use passives if you do not want to make it clear who did the action. In Letter 3, the customer does not need to know who rectified the problems, but what is important is that the problems will not happen again. In Memo 1, the manager does not want to "point the finger" and say who is not fulfilling the orders. The question of "who" is unimportant. What is important is the result - that orders are not being sent on time.

When passives are used

1. To avoid "pointing the finger" or appearing hostile or unfriendly.

Instead of "You didn't follow the instructions properly" you could write "It seems as if the instructions were not followed properly" or "There seems to have been some ambiguity in the wording of the instructions."

"You don't understand" can be expressed as "There seems to have been a misunderstanding."

2. To avoid having to take the blame for something when it goes wrong.

Instead of "The warehouse man sent out the wrong order", you could write "The wrong order was dispatched by mistake."

3. If you do not know who did something.

"Five people have been chosen." (We do not know who chose these people.)

4. If it is so obvious who did something, that you do not need to name them

"The man was arrested." (... by the police)

Note:

Some writers overuse the passive form because they think that it makes their writing more formal and serious. But it is often easier to understand a text with personal pronouns ('I', 'you' and 'we') than a text which is less direct.

Consider:

1. "We took action immediately." (4 words, easily understood)

"Action was immediately taken by us." (6 words and clumsy)

2. "It is recommended that..." (4 words and formal-sounding)

"We recommend that..." (3 words and clear - it is obvious who the subject is)

Style factor 2: Using contractions

Tues am (Email 2)

re the delivery times (Email 2)

Formal writing avoids contractions. For example, instead of writing "We can't offer a money-back guarantee" (informal) write "We cannot offer a money-back guarantee" or "We are unable to offer a money-back guarantee."

Other informal contractions

asap (as soon as possible)

e.g. (for example)

i.e. (that is to say)

re (regarding, about)

Style factor 3: Use of personal pronouns

We sincerely regret (Letter 3)

If you think I should change it (Email 2)

Although it is common to use 'I' in business correspondence, using 'we' makes your writing more distant. For example, "I cannot help you" could be changed to "We are unable to help you." By using 'we', you give the impression that you are not personally responsible for the bad news, and that the bad news is due to external factors.

Other examples

Instead of "I will take legal action" you could write "We shall be forced to take legal action."

"My only choice is to..." becomes "We have no option but to..." or "We have been compelled to..."

When you are writing for other people, or for the company, you can use "on behalf of".

For example: "On behalf of Media Positions Ltd, I would like to thank you for attending the recent presentation on Consumer Confidence."

Style factor 4: Sentence length

Generally speaking, the longer your sentence, the more formal in style it is.

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the system misplaced your order.
(Letter 3)

Formal sentences can start with some background information, or an apology.

"We regret that..."

"Due to..."

"Unfortunately, ..."

"Regrettably, ..."

Note the difference between the formal style above and the shorter, more informal sentences:

"Because there were technical problems, we could not fulfill all the customer orders. However, we have now put these problems right."

Style factor 5: Punctuation

Impressive, huh!! (Letter 1)

Exclamation marks are rarely used in formal writing. You should also avoid excessive use of capital letters when you write formally, as in the following example:

PLEASE TELL ME WHEN DELIVERY IS.

THANKS

CLARE

Using too many capital letters is difficult to read. Use both capital and lower case letters.

Please tell me when delivery is.

Thanks.

Clare

Style factor 6: Vocabulary

As we are approaching (Memo 1)

To approach = to get close to

In order to assist you (Memo 1)

To assist = to help

Vocabulary choice is one of the most important factors in style. There is often a wide choice of words and phrases that you can use and each word or phrase can be either neutral, formal or informal in register.

Phrasal verbs and Latin origin verbs

Phrasal verbs are more informal than Latin origin verbs.

For example:

to put up with = to tolerate

to put off = to dissuade or to postpone

to take on = to employ

to ask about = to inquire

Idioms and slang expressions

Idioms are most often used in spoken English. Avoid them when you write formal English.

Length of word

Generally, if there are a choice of words, the longer one is more likely to be formal.

Informal: a lot of

Formal: a number of

Informal: give

Formal: donate

Informal: keep

Formal: maintain

Informal: eat

Formal: consume

Informal and formal equivalents

This list gives the formal and informal equivalents of commonly used words and expressions with examples. The first word is the informal version, while the second is the more formal version.

a bit **(informal)**

We need a bit more time.

a little **(formal)**

We would require a little more time.

a lot **(informal)**

We need a lot more money.

We need a lot more discount.

He talks a lot about you.

much, substantial, a great deal **(formal)**

We would require much more money.

We would require a much more substantial discount.

He talks a great deal about you.

a lot of (countable plural nouns) **(informal)**

We have had a lot of complaints.

a number of, numerous **(formal)**

We have had a number of complaints.

We have had numerous complaints.

about **(informal)**

I'm calling about the interview.

concerning / regarding **(formal)**

I'm calling concerning the interview.

about **(informal)**

The journey takes about two hours.

approximately **(formal)**

The journey takes approximately two hours.

agree (to do) **(informal)**

We agree to supply these services.

undertake **(formal)**

We undertake to supply these services.

agree with **(informal)**

We agree with your opinion.

concur **(formal)**

We concur with your opinion.

aim (goal) **(informal)**

Our aim is to expand.

objective (**formal**)

Our objective is to expand.

allow / let (**informal**)

Please allow me to explain.

Please let me explain.

permit (**formal**)

Please permit us to explain.

answer (**informal**)

In answer to your question...

response (**formal**)

In response to your inquiry...

as soon as possible (**informal**)

Please return the contract as soon as possible.

at your earliest convenience (**formal**)

Please return the contract at your earliest convenience.

ask about (**informal**)

I am writing to ask about your prices.

inquire (**formal**)

I am writing to inquire about your prices.

ask for **(informal)**

We are asking for a discount.

request **(formal)**

We are requesting a discount.

aware of **(informal)**

We are aware of the problem.

conscious of **(formal)**

We are conscious of the problem.

to back **(informal)**

We fully back the proposal.

to support **(formal)**

We fully support the proposal.

be at (go to) **(informal)**

I will be at the meeting next week.

attend **(formal)**

I will attend the meeting next week.

before **(informal)**

Before joining us, Mr X worked at...

prior to **(formal)**

Prior to joining us, Mr X worked at...

(earlier)

I have a prior engagement / arrangement.

previous / previously **(formal)**

As we stated previously

begin / start **(informal)**

We will begin legal proceedings.

initiate **(formal)**

We will initiate legal proceedings.

best **(informal)**

I'll do my best to help.

utmost **(formal)**

I will do my utmost to help.

better (quality) **(informal)**

These goods are better quality.

This wine is better than the other.

superior **(formal)**

These goods are of superior quality.

This wine is superior to the other.

big (important) **(informal)**

He is a big customer.

major **(formal)**

He is a major customer.

big (large) **(informal)**

There have been big changes.

substantial / major **(formal)**

There have been substantial changes.

bigger (greater) **(informal)**

This is a bigger problem.

greater **(formal)**

This is a greater problem.

bother **(informal)**

Sorry to bother you...

trouble **(formal)**

Sorry to trouble you...

bring up **(informal)**

We need to bring up this point

raise **(formal)**

We need to raise this point.

but **(informal)**

We'd like to expand, but we need investment.

however **(formal)**

We'd like to expand; however, we need investment.

buy **(informal)**

I bought this scarf from your shop.

purchase **(formal)**

I purchased this scarf from your shop.

carry out **(informal)**

Mr Hughes carried out all his tasks in a professional manner.

perform / undertake **(formal)**

Mr Hughes performed / undertook all his tasks in a professional manner.

effect / implement **(formal)**

The changes have been effected.

The changes have been implemented.

carry on **(informal)**

We can't carry on like this!

continue **(formal)**

We cannot continue like this.

chance **(informal)**

Is there any chance of promotion?

opportunity **(formal)**

Is there any opportunity of promotion?

change **(informal)**

Can you change these figures?

amend **(formal)**

Can you amend these figures?

check **(informal)**

Could you check these figures?

verify **(formal)**

Please verify these figures.

choice **(informal)**

We have no other choice.

alternative **(formal)**

We have no other alternative.

choose **(informal)**

We have to choose the right person.

select **(formal)**

We have to select a suitable candidate.

clear **(informal)**

It is clear to us that we need to change our strategy.

apparent **(formal)**

It has become apparent that we need to amend our strategy.

come up with **(informal)**

They came up with a plan.

produce / devise **(formal)**

They produced a plan.

cut **(informal)**

The company has cut the working hours.

reduce **(formal)**

The factory has reduced the working hours.

There has been a reduction in working hours.

damaging **(informal)**

These policies will be damaging to our international image.

detrimental **(formal)**

These policies will be detrimental to our international image.

decide **(informal)**

They must decide on their priorities.

determine **(formal)**

They must determine their priorities.

difference **(informal)**

We have noticed a small difference in the figures.

discrepancy / anomaly **(formal)**

We have noticed a slight discrepancy in the figures.

doubts **(informal)**

I have big doubts about this.

misgivings **(formal)**

I have serious misgivings about this.

drawback **(informal)**

There's one small drawback...

disadvantage **(formal)**

There's one slight disadvantage...

ease (**informal**)

The new one-way system will ease the traffic problems.

alleviate (**formal**)

The new one-way system will alleviate the traffic problems.

earlier (**informal**)

In earlier letters, you...

previous (**formal**)

In previous correspondence, you...

end / stop (**informal**)

We will end the contract this year.

terminate (**formal**)

We will terminate the contract this year.

enough (**informal**)

We have enough time.

ample / adequate / sufficient (**formal**)

There is ample time.

We have adequate resources.

He has sufficient income.

example (**informal**)

This is another example of the problem.

instance (**formal**)

This is another instance of the problem.

expect (**informal**)

We expect steady growth next year.

We don't expect any problems.

anticipate / envisage (**formal**)

We anticipate steady growth next year.

We do not envisage any problems.

extra (see **more**)

fast (**informal**)

The fast pace of life demands efficient technology.

rapid (**formal**)

The rapid pace of life demands efficient technology.

faulty (**informal**)

The machine is faulty.

defective (**formal**)

The machine is defective.

find (**informal**)

You will find the switch behind the fan.

locate (**formal**)

The switch can be located behind the fan.

find out (**informal**)

We must find out the facts before taking any action.

establish / ascertain (**formal**)

We need to establish / ascertain the facts before taking any action.

finish (**informal**)

Can you finish this by Tuesday?

complete (**formal**)

Can you complete this by Tuesday?

first (**informal**)

We first thought it was a temporary problem.

originally / initially (**formal**)

We originally thought it was a temporary problem.

follow (**informal**)

Police are following inquiries.

pursue (**formal**)

Police are pursuing inquiries.

following / later **(informal)**

On following visits...

subsequent **(formal)**

On subsequent visits...

for the time being **(informal)**

I'm working here for the time being.

temporarily **(formal)**

I'm working here temporarily.

forget **(informal)**

I forgot to do the paperwork.

overlook **(formal)**

We overlooked the paperwork.

get **(informal)**

He got his degree.

obtain **(formal)**

He obtained his degree.

He got (bought) a race-horse. **(informal)**

He acquired a race-horse. **(formal)**

get close to **(informal)**

As you get close to London, you'll see the signs.

approach / near **(formal)**

As you approach / near London, you'll see the signs.

get bigger **(informal)**

The company is getting bigger.

They have made the warehouse bigger.

enlarge / expand **(formal)**

The company is expanding.

They have enlarged the warehouse.

get hold of **(informal)**

She tried to get hold of the lawyer.

contact **(formal)**

She tried to contact the lawyer.

get smaller **(informal)**

Their market share is getting smaller.

diminish / decrease **(formal)**

Their market share is diminishing.

give (a contract / an award) **(informal)**

They were given the contract.

award **(formal)**

They were awarded the contract.

He was awarded damages.

give **(informal)**

He gave her an interview.

grant **(formal)**

He granted her an interview.

give (money) **(informal)**

He gives money to charity.

donate **(formal)**

He donates money to charity.

give out **(informal)**

We will give out money according to needs.

divide / allocate **(formal)**

Resources will be allocated on a needs basis.

give (instructions) **(informal)**

The company gave instructions.

issue (**formal**)

The company issued instructions.

go for (**informal**)

We're going for bigger market share.

aim towards (**formal**)

We're aiming towards greater market share.

go on (**informal**)

Please go on.

continue / proceed (**formal**)

Please continue.

Kindly proceed.

goal (see **aim**)

good (useful) (**informal**)

This arrangement is good for both of us.

good (useful) / beneficial (**formal**)

This arrangement is mutually beneficial.

happen (**informal**)

Should problems happen...

occur (**formal**)

Should problems occur...

happen again (**informal**)

We are sorry that the problem has happened again.

reoccur (**formal**)

We are sorry that the problem has reoccurred.

have (own) (**informal**)

Once we have the facts, we can take the right action.

possess (**formal**)

Once we possess the facts, we can take appropriate action.

help (**informal**)

If you would like any help...

We would be happy to help you.

assist / assistance (**formal**)

If you require any assistance...

We would be happy to assist you.

Can I help you

To be of service

May I be of service?

(make possible) **(informal)**

To help processing...

facilitate **(formal)**

To facilitate processing...

hint **(informal)**

He hinted there would be a pay rise.

imply / implication **(formal)**

He implied there would be a pay rise.

important / importance **(informal)**

Don't underestimate how important this account is.

The importance of this can't be underestimated.

significant / significance **(formal)**

Don't underestimate how significant this account is.

The significance of this cannot be underestimated.

improve **(informal)**

We need to improve quality.

ameliorate **(formal)**

We need to ameliorate quality.

keep (**informal**)

Please keep your receipt.

retain (**formal**)

Please retain your receipt.

keep to (obey) (**informal**)

Please keep to the regulations.

comply with (**formal**)

Please comply with the regulations.

late (**informal**)

He is never late.

unpunctual (**formal**)

He is never unpunctual.

later (see **following**)

leave out (**informal**)

He left out the paragraph.

omit (**formal**)

He omitted the paragraph.

let (see **allow**)

permit

limit (**informal**)

Overtime is limited to ten hours.

restrict (**formal**)

Overtime is restricted to ten hours.

look closely at (**informal**)

He looked closely at the report.

examine (**formal**)

He examined the report.

look into (**informal**)

We will look into this matter.

investigate (**formal**)

We will investigate this matter

lucky (**informal**)

He was lucky to get the promotion.

fortunate (**formal**)

He was fortunate to get the promotion.

make (**informal**)

The company makes enamel ware.

manufacture **(formal)**

The company manufactures enamel ware.

make longer **(informal)**

We have made working hours longer.

extend / prolong **(formal)**

The company extended its working hours.

They prolonged their holiday by two days.

(pass on)

Please pass on my best wishes to your father.

Please extend my best wishes to your father.

make more difficult **(informal)**

This has made it more difficult.

complicate **(formal)**

This has complicated matters.

make sure **(informal)**

Please make sure the doors are locked.

ensure **(formal)**

Please ensure the doors are locked.

many (**informal**)

There have been many problems.

numerous (**formal**)

There have been numerous problems.

more / extra (**informal**)

We need more people.

I have more questions.

There is extra material at the end of the book.

additional / further / supplementary (**formal**)

We require additional staff.

I have further questions.

There is supplementary material at the end of the book.

need (**informal**)

I need an answer today.

require (**formal**)

We would require an answer today.

You need to...

It is necessary to...

next to **(informal)**

Our office is next to the bank.

adjacent **(formal)**

Our office is adjacent to the bank.

often **(informal)**

The two roles are often confused.

frequently **(formal)**

The two roles are frequently confused.

own (see **have**)

pay back **(informal)**

We will pay you back for your expenses.

reimburse **(formal)**

We will reimburse you for your expenses.

pay into **(informal)**

I pay into the company pension.

contribute **(formal)**

I contribute to the company pension.

please **(informal)**

Please send back these documents.

kindly (**formal**)

Kindly return these documents.

promise (**informal**)

I promise you that this will not happen again.

assure (**formal**)

We would like to assure you that this problem will not reoccur.

receive a promise

We were promised that this would not happen again.

obtain assurances

We would like to obtain assurances that this will not reoccur.

put off (**informal**)

They were put off by the market conditions.

discourage (**formal**)

They were discouraged by the market conditions.

put right (**informal**)

We have now put this problem right.

correct / rectify (**formal**)

We have now corrected / rectified the problem.

put up with **(informal)**

We can't put up with this situation any longer.

tolerate **(formal)**

We are unable to tolerate this situation any longer.

quick **(informal)**

Thank you for your quick reply.

prompt **(formal)**

Thank you for your prompt reply.

reach **(informal)**

To reach our goals we must...

attain **(formal)**

To attain our goals we must...

repeat **(informal)**

To repeat the terms and conditions...

reiterate **(formal)**

To reiterate the terms and conditions...

as a result **(informal)**

As a result, the factory closed.

as a consequence / consequently **(formal)**

As a consequence, the factory closed.

Consequently, the factory closed.

right (correct / suitable) **(informal)**

You need permission from the right authorities.

appropriate **(formal)**

You need permission from the appropriate authorities.

say that **(informal)**

The terms and conditions say that...

state **(formal)**

The terms and conditions state...

secret **(informal)**

This report is secret.

confidential **(formal)**

This report is confidential.

see **(informal)**

I have seen a decline in productivity.

observe / witness **(formal)**

I have observed a decline in productivity.

We have witnessed a decline in productivity.

send **(informal)**

We sent the goods last week.

dispatch **(formal)**

We dispatched the goods last week.

send back **(informal)**

Please send back the contract.

return **(formal)**

Please return the contract.

serious / seriousness **(informal)**

We need to deal with something very serious.

gravity **(formal)**

We need to address an issue of the utmost gravity.

show **(informal)**

He showed initiative.

display / demonstrate **(formal)**

He displayed initiative.

He demonstrated initiative.

indicate (an emotion) **(formal)**

He indicated that he was not happy.

small (**informal**)

We have a small problem.

minor / slight (**formal**)

We have a minor problem.

We are at a slight disadvantage.

so (see **as a result**)

thus / consequently (**formal**)

speak about (**informal**)

You spoke about the legal position.

mention / refer to (**formal**)

You mentioned the legal position.

start (see **begin**)

initiate

stay (**informal**)

He stayed behind to finish the letter.

remain (**formal**)

He remained behind to complete the letter.

stop (see **end**)

terminate

stop (yourself from) doing (**informal**)

Please stop smoking when the plane lands.

refrain from doing (**formal**)

Please refrain from smoking when the plane lands.

straight away (**informal**)

She told the manager straight away.

immediately (**formal**)

She told the manager immediately.

take up (time) (**informal**)

This takes up a lot of time.

consume (**formal**)

This is time-consuming.

take part (in) (**informal**)

Many companies are taking part.

participate (**formal**)

Many companies are participating.

tell **(informal)**

It tells us a lot about his intentions.

reveal **(formal)**

It reveals a great deal about his intentions.

tell **(informal)**

Please tell us when the goods will arrive.

advise **(formal)**

Please advise us of delivery dates.

tell / let us know **(informal)**

Please tell us if anything goes wrong.

notify / inform **(formal)**

Please notify / inform us of any problems.

thing **(informal)**

These things need to be discussed.

matter / issue **(formal)**

These matters / issues need to be discussed.

think about **(informal)**

We need to think about your idea.

consider (**formal**)

We need to consider your idea.

time (**informal**)

We spoke many times.

occasion (**formal**)

We spoke on many occasions.

try (**informal**)

We will try to deliver by March.

endeavor (**formal**)

We will endeavor to deliver by March.

turn something / someone into (**informal**)

We aim to turn leads into sales.

convert (**formal**)

We aim to convert leads into sales.

understand (**informal**)

As I'm sure you understand...

appreciate (**formal**)

As I'm sure you will appreciate...

unhappy (**informal**)

We are unhappy with the proposal.

dissatisfied (**formal**)

We are dissatisfied with the proposal.

unlucky (**informal**)

That was unlucky!

unfortunate (**formal**)

That was unfortunate.

usual (**informal**)

It is usual practice to screen our candidates.

customary (**formal**)

It is customary to screen our candidates.

want (**informal**)

I want some information.

would like / would appreciate (**formal**)

I would like / would appreciate some information.

want (**informal**)

I want to tell you that...

wish (**formal**)

We wish to inform you that...

do not want to **(informal)**

He doesn't want to get involved.

be reluctant to **(formal)**

He is reluctant to get involved.

work with **(informal)**

We are working with another department.

collaborate / co-operate with **(formal)**

We are collaborating with another department.

Keeping style consistent

Keep your writing consistent in style and don't go from informal to formal in the same text. Use a good dictionary to check whether words are formal or informal.

Consistent style - examples

All the following examples contain mixed style: they have elements of both a formal and informal style and as a result, they look strange.

1. Please check these accounts prior to faxing them out.
2. Consequently, a couple of wrong letters were dispatched.
3. Can you make sure that the warehouse facilitates this process?
4. Kindly look into this unfortunate matter and let me know what happens.
5. They informed us of a lot of things.
6. There are a lot of ways to tolerate this situation.
7. Please retain your tickets so that we can look at them.
8. We have observed a couple of things we are a bit unhappy with.
9. I look forward to your response. Thanks ever so much.
10. Please be informed that we can't help you any more.

These sentences could be written in the following formal and informal styles.

1. Formal: Kindly verify these accounts prior to faxing them out.
1. Informal: Please check these accounts before faxing them out.

2. Formal: Consequently, a couple of letters which contained errors were dispatched.

2. Informal: So we sent out a couple of wrong letters.

3. Formal: Please ensure that the warehouse facilitates this process.

3. Informal: Can you make sure that the warehouse makes this process possible?

4. Formal: Kindly investigate this unfortunate matter and inform me of the outcome.

4. Informal: Please look into this and let me know what happens.

5. Formal: They informed us of a number of issues / subjects / details / matters.

5. Informal: They told us a lot of things.

6. Formal: There are many ways to tolerate this situation.

6. Informal: There are a lot of ways to put up with this situation.

7. Formal: Please retain your tickets for examination.

7. Informal: Please keep your tickets so that we can look at them / for examination.

8. Formal: We have observed one or two situations / details that we are slightly dissatisfied with.

8. Informal: We have seen a couple of things that we are a bit unhappy with.

9. Formal: I look forward to your response. Thank you in advance...

9. Informal: Looking forward to hearing from you. Thanks in advance.

10. Formal: We regret to inform you that we can no longer assist you.

10. Informal: We are sorry to tell you that we can't help you any more.

Using a range of vocabulary

Good style also means using a range of words and phrases, so that you can avoid always using the same word. Here are some alternatives for common business words and phrases.

example, instance

another, an alternative, a choice, an option

plan, proposal, idea

suggestion, recommendation, advice

letter, correspondence

perhaps, maybe

likely, possible, probable

possible, viable, feasible

say, state, claim

review, reconsider, think again

weigh up, evaluate, consider

discount, offer, reduction

pleased, happy, satisfied, delighted

clear, obvious, apparent

carry out, manage, implement

unfortunate, regrettable

to know, to be aware of

extra, further, additional, more

type, kind, sort of

increase, expand, grow, widen

plan, intend to

show, reveal, demonstrate, prove

order, rule, regulation

find, source, locate

in progress, underway

seem, appear

enough, sufficient, adequate

difficult, tough, challenging, hard, complex

easy, uncomplicated, simple

task, job, assignment, project

under review, under consideration

shrink, get smaller, reduce

launch, introduce

disappointed, dismayed, upset

annoyed, angry, upset, irritated

disgusted, appalled, horrified

This is not an exhaustive list. Dictionaries such as the Longman Language Activator are good sources of synonyms.

Avoiding style mistakes

As you're aiming to communicate an objective, avoid writing in a way that obscures your meaning, or distracts your reader from the message. In particular, avoid these "style mistakes":

Very

"Very", doesn't add anything to the meaning of a sentence. In the examples below, "very + adjective" has been replaced by one word that describes the idea more concisely.

very expensive - exorbitant

"The hotel charges were exorbitant."

very good - excellent

"The meal was excellent."

very bad - terrible, awful

"The service was terrible."

very interesting - fascinating

"He gave a fascinating lecture on Roman civilization."

very big - enormous/ huge

"They made an enormous / a huge effort to welcome us."

very small - minute/ tiny

"Minute traces of the banned substance were found."

"There was a tiny amount of ink left in the cartridge."

very old - ancient

"The ancient ruins are well worth seeing."

very pretty - beautiful

"The house enjoys beautiful views over the valley."

very cheap - a bargain/ heavily discounted

"You can pick up bargains in the market."

"Some of the items on sale are heavily discounted."

very painful - excruciating

"The procedure was excruciating."

very boring - tedious

"This type of work is tedious."

If you need a word that adds more, try "extremely". For example:

"This exercise is **extremely difficult**."

"This job is **extremely time-consuming**."

"He is **extremely sensitive** to criticism."

"We have to be **extremely price-conscious** at this time."

"It's an **extremely awkward** operation."

Flowery writing

In an effort to sound formal, some writers try to make their sentences longer, by using nouns rather than active verbs. This makes your writing heavy and should be avoided. For example, "have a discussion" could be replaced by the verb "discuss":

The sentence "They are having a discussion about the proposal" could be better written as: "They are discussing the proposal".

The first phrases in the following list are other examples of flowery writing. Replace with the suggested active verbs.

take a look = look

take a decision = decide

be in receipt of = receive

be of a concern to = concern

make preparation for = prepare

make an appearance = appear

make an analysis = analyze

make an examination = examine

give assurances that = assure

give your promise = promise

give consideration to = consider

Sometimes verb + noun structures form word partnerships that cannot be edited.

For example, "give an example", "take an interest in", "make an appointment" are all word phrases that cannot be shortened.

Cliches

Cliches make you appear a lazy writer: rather than thinking about what you want to write, you use someone else's expression. Because many other people have used this expression in their writing, the expression sounds tired.

Some examples of cliches, buzzwords and jargon that you should avoid are:

"A catalog of disasters"

"An innocent victim"

"At the end of the day"

"Avoid something like the plague"

"Less is more"

"Life goes on"

"Nearest and dearest"

"The four corners of the globe"

"To all intents and purposes"

"To move the goalposts"

"To think outside the box"

"When all is said and done"

"To drill down"

"To take something offline"

"Going forward"

Chapter 9: Tone

Tone can be defined as the "voice" that you use when you write. For example, if you're writing to ask for information, your tone will be polite and impersonal. If you're responding to a complaint, your tone should be polite and helpful. If you're writing to a close friend, your tone will be friendly, personal and warm.

Example of a rude email

Dear Mr Smith

We received your complaint regarding customer service.

I investigated the matter personally, but found no cause for complaint. Our representatives are polite and friendly.

If you want to take this matter further, you should write to the Regional Quality Manager, Ms Jane Stevenson.

We cannot help you any more.

John Brown

The overall tone of this email is arrogant. John Brown dismisses the concerns of Mr Smith (".. found no cause for complaint.") It seems as if he does not really care and his sentences are brief and direct ("We cannot help you anymore.") Instead of a polite suggestion, he writes "... you should write to" which appears rude, rather than helpful.

Improved version

Dear Mr Smith

Thank you for your email of (date) regarding your experiences with customer service.

We take all comments regarding our customer service department seriously, and I investigated the matter you raised. However, I could not find any instances of the type you describe. In fact, our representatives are trained to be polite, friendly and helpful.

I have referred the matter to our Quality Control Department, who will keep your comments on file. Please be assured that we will continue to monitor the performance of our customer service to ensure prompt and courteous handling of calls.

If you wish to contact someone regarding this matter, please write to the Regional Quality Manager, Ms Jane Stevenson. (Orchard House, 641 Staines Rd, Twickenham.)

Yours sincerely
John Brown

Avoiding rudeness

Here are some typical mistakes that can make your writing appear rude:

1. Making demands

Instead of writing "I want..." try "I would like..." or "I would be grateful for...":

"I would like some information on your admissions procedure."

"I would be grateful for some information on your admissions procedure."

2. Forgetting "please and "thank you"

Using the words "please" and "thank you" make you sound polite, which means that people will be more inclined to help you or to give you what you want.

Using "thank you" is also a useful way of starting a letter. For example, instead of starting "We received your order" which sounds abrupt, you could write "Thank you for your order" which sounds as if you appreciate their business.

3. Giving instructions

Only use instructions if you're writing a manual or a how-to article. Instead of issuing orders, try using "Please" or "You should".

For example, instead of "Send the information immediately" which appears rude, write "Please could you send the information as soon as possible" or "We would be grateful if you could send the information as soon as possible".

4. Not caring about the reader

Not thinking about the effect of what you write on your reader can make you sound unfriendly, distant or over-direct. Here are some common situations in which you should think carefully about the impact your writing might have.

You cannot help

Instead of "We cannot help you" write "We are sorry that we cannot help you further".

You have no information to give

"We have no information for you" could be rephrased "Unfortunately, we have no information regarding..."

Bad news

"Your order will be delayed" could be rewritten "Unfortunately, your order might be delayed".

Using modal verbs

One way to sound polite and diplomatic is to use modal verbs, which change the mood of a sentence.

1. Modal verbs are concise

Instead of writing "There is a slight possibility that I will go tomorrow" you can write "I **may** go tomorrow" or "I **might** go tomorrow".

2. Modal verbs make your writing less definite and more open to discussion
For example, "I want to meet you to discuss this" sounds like an order, where the reader has no choice in agreeing to a meeting.

But "I **would** like to meet you to discuss this" or "**Could** we meet to discuss this" invite the reader and are more likely to produce a favorable reaction.

Using "would", "could" and "might"

These modals make what you sound less definite and are particularly useful for keeping the negotiation open.

"Is it possible to meet next week?" becomes "**Would** it be possible to meet next week?"

"We want to discuss the arrangements." becomes "We **would like** to discuss the arrangements."

"The price is too high for us." becomes "The price **would be** too high for us" (= ... but we would consider a lower price!)

"We are not happy with these conditions of service." becomes "We **would not be** happy with these conditions of service." (= ... but if you changed them, maybe we would be happy.)

"We cannot accept these terms." (= No deal!) becomes "We **could not** accept these terms." (= But we could accept others.)

"There is likely to be a problem." becomes "There **might be** a problem." (= On the other hand, there might not be a problem, but I just wanted to warn you to avoid any future disappointment.)

"I want to do this." (=I don't really care what you think.) becomes "It **might be** a good idea to..." (= I have a good idea that I want to pursue.)

Other ways of sounding polite

Here are some other ways to sound polite when you write.

1. Past forms

Use past tenses to sound less definite. For example:

"We **were hoping** for..." (rather than "We **are** hoping for...")

"I **was expecting**..." (rather than "I **am** expecting...")

"I **was wondering** if..." (rather than "I **am** wondering if...")

"We **wanted** to know..." (rather than "We **want** to know...")

2. Qualifiers

Use qualifiers such as "rather", "a little", "somewhat" or "a slight" to minimize problems and make what you write sound less worrying. For example:

"There will be a delay" becomes "There **might** be **a slight** delay."

"We have a problem" becomes "We have **a little** problem."

"It is difficult for us to help you" becomes "It is **rather** difficult for us to help you."

"The contract is complicated" becomes "The contract is **somewhat** complicated."

3. Introduce bad news

Use an introductory word or phrase to warn the reader that bad news follows and to reduce "reader shock". For example:

"We have lost the contract" becomes "**Unfortunately**, we have lost the

contract."

"We cannot keep you on over the summer" becomes "**Regrettably**, we cannot keep you on over the summer."

"Your application has been unsuccessful" become "**We regret to inform you that** your application has been unsuccessful."

"We are unable to locate your luggage" becomes "**We are sorry to inform you that** we are unable to locate your luggage."

4. Apologize

Making an apology is even more effective in defusing a difficult situation if you then say what you are doing to address the problem.

"**We would like to apologize for** this misunderstanding. We have taken steps to ensure that..."

"**Please accept our apologies for** this oversight. We have now corrected the information and..."

Don't forget to apologize even if it isn't your fault!

"**We are sorry to hear** that you have been experiencing problems with our laptops."

"**We are sorry to inform you** that we are no longer making deliveries in your area."

5. Appear neutral or unemotional

You can use 'not very' + positive adjective to make what you say sound more positive. This allows you to play down problems and appear more objective.

"That was a stupid thing to do" becomes "That was **not a very smart** thing to do."

"Your customer service representatives are rude" becomes "Your customer service representatives are **not very polite.**"

You can also use words with a positive focus to minimize a negative impact. For example:

"issue" or "matter" (instead of "problem")

"an oversight" (rather than "to forget")

"inconvenience" / "inconvenient" (rather than "difficulty" or "difficult")

"misunderstanding" (rather than "argument")

"sensitive" (to describe an issue that you would rather not discuss)

"unfortunate" or "disappointing" (rather than "bad")

Example sentences

"The figures are bad" becomes "The figures are **disappointing.**"

"We have had an argument with our suppliers" becomes "We have had a **misunderstanding** with our suppliers."

"Next Monday is impossible" becomes "Next Monday would be rather **inconvenient.**"

"We need to discuss this problem" becomes "We need to discuss this **matter.**"

"This is a difficult issue" becomes "This is a **sensitive** issue."

6. Avoid "you"

Change the focus of the sentence to make it more neutral and less accusing in tone.

Instead of writing "you", write "it", "there" or "we".

"You made a mistake" becomes "**There seems to be** a mistake."

"You said..." becomes "**We understood...**"

The right voice

Who you write to is important in deciding how you will write. Some people (bosses and customers, for example) have a high status. This means that you should pay particular attention to how the writing appears, to make sure that it sounds polite and professional. Of course, you should always be polite and helpful, but you can generally be more direct with colleagues and peers.

The reason why you are writing is also important. If you're writing to ask people to do something, using polite language is extremely important. If you are informing someone of a delivery date, you can be more direct.

Read the following two emails, written by the same woman.

This first email is written in an informal and friendly way.

Email 1

...I am a MEd student from Oz, working on a major assignment for my CALL subject. I am seeking permission to evaluate your site and reproduce some pages in my assignment for illustrative purposes.

Can you help?

Regards,

Email 2 (after being advised to write directly to another person)

This email, requesting special permission for something, changes in tone, becoming more formal and distant.

... I am a MEd student from **the University of Southern Queensland, in Australia, who is in the process of completing** a major assignment for a CALL subject that I am taking. **I have chosen your well-designed and informative site to evaluate and I am writing to request permission to reproduce some pages** as examples in my assignment, **so that I may**

illustrate some key points. For example, when I discuss the layout/design of your page, **I would like to** include the index page to illustrate my point.

Do I have permission to do this? Please let me know ASAP. **I would greatly appreciate your assistance in this matter.**

Kind regards,

Some tips for writing politely

In summary, here are five tips to make sure your writing achieves the right tone with your reader.

1. Instead of giving advice, make a suggestion.

"We should clarify this matter" becomes "**Perhaps we could** clarify this matter."

2. Instead of saying what needs to happen, or what you want to happen, make a request.

"We need to arrange a meeting" becomes "**We would appreciate it if we could** arrange a meeting."

"We would like a meeting" becomes "**Would it be possible** to arrange a meeting?"

3. Instead of announcing your decision, make a request or a suggestion.

"As from next Monday, I will work flexi-time" becomes "I would like to work flexi-time from next Monday, **if possible.**" (request)

Or "**It might be possible** for me to work flexi-time from next Monday." (suggestion)

4. Instead of giving orders, make a request.

"I would like you to return this form" becomes "**Could you** return this form?"

5. Instead of focusing on your own needs, involve your reader.

"We need to resolve this issue" becomes "**Could you help** us to resolve this issue?"

Chapter 10: Punctuation

Correct punctuation allows you to write with clarity and precision, so helping your reader to understand you. Classic native speaker mistakes include not capitalizing "I", using commas instead of semi-colons or full stops, and using an apostrophe to write a plural.

Capital letters

Common mistakes

"He speaks french and english."

"On monday, 22 december."

"i'll see you tomorrow..."

Use capital letters

1. At the beginning of the sentence

"Can you tell me the time, please?"

Note: you should also use a capital letter in the first sentence after a salutation in an email:

Hi John

Thank you for your email...

2. Names, places, countries, nationalities and languages

"Sarah Frank lives in Oxford, England."

"Sarah is British and she speaks English, French and German."

3. Titles, including VIP' s and religious titles

"Sarah Frank", "Account Manager."

"His Majesty", "Sultan of Brunei", "Lord Woolf", "The Holy Spirit"

When there is no name with the title, capital letters are generally not used:

"King Frederik", but "the king".

"President Ford", but "the president".

4. Personal pronoun I

"I hate Monday mornings!"

5. Nicknames or names derived from people

"Essex Man", "Thatcherism"

6. Names of companies, institutions, government organizations and religions

"**Hewlett Packard**", "**The British Museum**", "**The Foreign Office**",
"Christianity", "Islam".

7. Abbreviated names

"**CNN**", "**BBC**", "the **UN**".

8. Names of books, television and radio programs, newspapers and magazines

"**To Kill a Mockingbird**". (Omit capital letters for prepositions or articles in book titles.)

"**The Simpsons**", "**The News at Ten**", "**The Times**".

9. Names of products and brands

"**Coca-Cola**", "**Ferrari**".

10. Days of the week and months of the year

"**Monday**, **June 2nd**."

11. Important holidays

"**Christmas**", "**Passover**", "**Ramadan**".

12. Historical periods or events

"the **Russian Revolution**", "the **First World War**", "the **Ice Age**".

13. Geographical location

Rivers, mountains, lakes

"**The Thames**", "**Ben Nevis**", "**Lake Geneva**".

14. Countries, continents or political / geographical regions

"**Asia**", "**England**", "**North Africa**", "the **Middle East**".

15. House names, streets and roads

"**Bay View**", "**62 Elm Road**".

16. Laws

"**The Official Secrets Act**".

Comma

Common mistakes

"I am writing to tell you, - in all confidence, - that..."

"I like fruit, (but he doesn't.)"

"As you know it often rains in England in summer although this is when it is supposed to be sunny."

"It often rains, in England, in summer."

"Based on the document you have sent the instructions we will send to our brokers are..."

"He made several errors of judgment, these are described in detail below."

When to use commas

1. To separate items in a list

"I bought some shoes, a new coat, a pair of trousers and some socks."

In British English there isn't normally a comma before *and*. In American English, a *serial comma* (or a comma before *and*) can be used.

"His house is light, spacious, and modern."

However, there's a comma before the last item in a list if this item has an *and* in it.

"He likes old cartoons, such as Top Cat, Scooby Doo, and Tom and Jerry."

The list can be turned around to avoid using this comma:

"He likes old cartoons, such as Tom and Jerry, Top Cat and Scooby Doo."

2. To separate clauses which are related in meaning

"Are you ready to go out now, or should I wait?"

You can also use a comma in long sentences, when clauses are linked by words such as *and*, *but* and *so*.

"There are many reasons for the slowdown in internet advertising, but the main one is lack of confidence."

Not everyone uses commas in these situations and where the clauses are short, commas are not used:

"I like it so I'll buy it."

See the following for information on clauses:

What makes a clause?

A clause is a mini-sentence, which contains a noun, a verb and the object of the verb. For example, in the sentence "the cat chased the mouse, then he caught it," there are two clauses: "the cat chased the mouse" and "then he caught it". These two clauses are separated by a comma to allow a pause or breathing space.

However, when two clauses are not as close in meaning and content, you should use either a linking word (such as "and" or "but") or a semicolon (;).

Incorrect sentence

"He made several errors of judgment, these are described in detail below."

Correct sentences:

"He made several errors of judgment; these are described in detail below."

"He made several errors of judgment and these are described in detail below."

Incorrect sentence

"If you do not want to receive any more mailings, you do not need to do anything, this is a one time mailing."

Correct sentences:

"If you do not want to receive any more mailings, you do not need to do anything; this is a one time mailing."

"If you do not want to receive any more mailings, you do not need to do anything, as this is a one time mailing."

You do not need commas between short parts of a sentence.

Instead of "It often rains, in England, in summer" you could write "It often rains in England in summer." However, you do need commas to avoid misunderstanding, This is the case when the verb could relate to more than one noun.

Example 1

The sentence "Based on the document you have sent the instructions we will send to our brokers are..." is confusing.

The sentence should be written "Based on the document you have sent, the instructions we will send are..."

Example 2

"In the text below the names have been changed."

This sentence is confusing because you read "in the text below the names" (i.e. the text is below the names). When you then read "have been changed", you know that this verb cannot relate to "the text". To avoid this confusion and to allow the reader to understand on the first reading, use a comma to separate the two nouns "text" and "names":

"In the text below, the names have been changed."

3. After introductory phrases

"Unfortunately, we are unable to help."

4. Before and after a word or phrase that interrupts the main clause

"I would, if I were you, concentrate on getting a job."

"She is, however, the best person for the job."

5. Before and after non-defining relative clauses

Example 1

"The children, who were in class, saw the accident through the window."

= All the children were in class.

Compare with a defining clause (which restricts the noun).

"The children who were in class saw the accident through the window."
= Only the children who were in class saw the accident - those children who were not in class didn't see the accident.

Example 2

"The companies, which are listed, made an overall loss of 0.25%."
= All the companies are listed, so they all made a loss.

But:

"The companies which are listed made an overall loss of 0.25%."
= Only the companies which are listed made a loss of 0.25%. Those companies that are not listed didn't make a loss of 0.25%

6. To separate numbers into millions, thousands and hundreds

1,350,602

7. After greetings and endings in letters and emails

Dear Mr Smith,
Yours sincerely,

However, it's now more common to leave out commas after greetings and endings:

Dear Mr Smith
Yours sincerely

8. To divide sentences which contain quoted speech

John said, "I'm not going."
"I'm not going," he said.

9. Commas are not used before brackets or dashes or after question marks.

"We will supply you with more stock of our top-selling model (Byren 206)."

"Tomorrow - January 23rd - is a public holiday."

"Can you supply within a month?" they asked.

Full stop / Period

(Full stop is the term used in British English, while period is the term used in American English.)

1. Use a full stop at the end of the sentence

He closed the door quietly behind him.

2. Full stops are also used in American English after initials or abbreviations

"Mr. C. Smith." (In British English, full stops are not used in names: "Mr C Smith.")

3. Full stops are used as a decimal point

"3.6%", "\$7.70"

4. A full stop is not used

- After a quotation which ends in a full stop (.), question mark (?) or exclamation mark (!)

He quoted "To be or not to be."

I don't understand it when you say "What do you mean?"

All he could say was "Wow!"

- After an abbreviation that has a full stop after it.

"They left at 4 p.m."

Colon (:)

Colons are used:

1. To introduce a list

"We ordered the following items from you: 3 toner cartridges, 6 boxes of letter-sized envelopes and 10 boxes of white writing paper."

2. To introduce explanations

"The notice was clear: it had been written in bright red paint."

Semi-colons or dashes can also be used here:

"The notice was clear; it had been written in bright red paint."

"The notice was clear - it had been written in bright red paint."

3. To introduce quotations

As Margaret Thatcher famously said: "This lady is not for turning."

Note:

To introduce direct speech, commas are used.

He said, "I don't know who did it."

4. To write the time

"The 18:36 train calls at all stations to London Paddington."

5. Between the title and subtitle of a book

"Shakespeare: The Complete Works"

Semi-colon (;)

Semi-colons show a pause which is longer than a comma, but not as long as a full stop.

"He made several errors of judgment; these are described in detail below."

Semi-colons are also used in the following situations:

1. To separate long items in a list

"The training course includes several components: correspondence, including letters and emails; style and vocabulary choice; punctuation; layout and planning."

2. To give balance to sentences, or to link parallel sentences

"Some industries did well in 2011; others did badly."

"Some did well; some did badly."

3. To introduce an explanation

(Colons can also be used - see above)

"The notice was clear; it had been written in bright red paint."

Apostrophe

Typical mistakes:

"We looked at his photo's."

"Who's pen is this?"

"It's their's."

"Its raining outside."

"It's profits have soared."

When to use an apostrophe

1. With an s to show possession

"The company's profits."

The 's comes after singular nouns (even those ending with s) and after plural nouns which are irregular (those which do not end in s).

"The company's staff", "James's desk", "the men's room", "the children's shoes".

But the apostrophe follows the s when the noun is plural and regular.

Compare:

"The girl's school" (school of one girl) and "the girls' school" (school of many girls.)

"The boss's union" (union of one boss) and "the bosses' union" (union of the bosses.)

"The people's choice" (the choice of the people) but "the peoples' choice" (the choice of many peoples.)

With nouns which end in y in the singular, but end in *ies* in the plural (like company) the apostrophe follows the s when it is plural.

"The company's profits" (profits of one company) and "the companies' profits" (profits of more than one company.)

With hyphenated nouns, the 's comes at the end of the word.

"My step-mother's cat."

2. To show that something has been shortened

"I don't like smoking." (= do not)
"He can't help you." (= cannot)
"It's a nice day." (= it is)
"She's been there before." (= has been)
"There's no-one here." (= there is)
"There's been an accident." (= there has

A common mistake is to use *it's* instead of *its*. For example, "It's profits have soared."

It's = it is. Do not use *it's* to show possession.

The correct version is "Its profits have soared."

3. To show some plurals

"Laser PC's", "CD ROM's".

The apostrophe is sometimes used for plural words in expressions: "The do's and don't's"

Remember:

You cannot use the 's to make a plural of nouns that end in a vowel. For example, "one memo", "two memos" is correct

4. In time references

"In two weeks' time", "next year's plan", "three years' experience".

5. In shortened dates

"From '03 to '06 he worked in the Sales Department."

6. With names of shops, you can add 's

For example, "The butcher's", "the baker's", "the chemist's". (Note, you can only use this with shops that only sell one type of thing. You can't write "the supermarket's".)

7. Apostrophes are not used for possessive pronouns

For example, "Whose is this pen?" is correct. ("Who's" = who is. "Whose" shows possession.)

"That pen is hers." (Not "That pen is her's.")

"That pen is ours."

"That pen is yours."

"That pen is theirs."

"Its" also exists as a possessive pronoun, but it is quite rare.

"Its profits have soared." (Relating to a company). The common mistake with "its" in this context is to add an apostrophe, which would make it "it is". (See Number 2 above.)

Hyphen (-)

Hyphens are used:

1. In two-part words

Two-part words are separated by hyphens. For example, fractions ("two-fifths"), adjectives made up of two or more words ("black-economy rate", "the Liverpool-Arsenal match") and website addresses, such as "english-at-home" (english hyphen at hyphen home).

2. To separate compound nouns and words formed with prefixes that start and finish with the same letter

"double-edged", "co-operate". (The exception is with words formed with over- and under- such as "overrate", "underrated".)

3. To avoid ambiguity

"A little-known criminal" (Not many people know the criminal.)

"A little known-criminal" (Many people know about the criminal, who is small in size.)

4. To show page or chapter references

"The information is on pp. 30-35."

"Please see Chapters 2-3 for further information."

5. To show inclusive dates

"She's away from April 6-15."

"From 2002-05 he worked as a Product Manager for Mandira Ltd."

Dash (-), brackets ()

1. Dashes are used in the middle of a sentence, instead of commas or brackets

"The president of the company - top right in the photograph - has just renegotiated the energy deal."

(Note that there are two dashes, where there would be two commas or two brackets.)

2. To explain something further, or to emphasize a point

"The MD is away this week - he's in Rome."

"Please let me know as soon as possible - I'm on holiday next week."

3. To add extra information quickly to the end of a sentence

"We spoke about various matters - including the new pricing structure."

Note: don't use too many dashes in one text. Instead, use shorter sentences, commas or brackets. .

Brackets

1. Brackets give additional or explanatory information

"Our new brochures (the ones designed by the UK office) are available for use."

"Please be aware that December 26 (Boxing Day) is a public holiday."

2. Brackets are not used after commas

"Our brochures (the ones designed by Steven) are available." (Correct use.)

"Our brochures, (the ones designed by Steven) are available." (Incorrect use.)

Quotation marks

When to use quotation marks

1. To introduce direct speech

You can use either single (' ') or double (" ") quotation marks. As long as you're consistent in your choice, it doesn't matter which style you use.

(British English normally uses single marks; American English normally uses double quotations.)

'I'm cold,' she said.

"I'm cold," she said.

2. To introduce a text up to approximately 100 words

For longer quotations (more than 100 words), use a colon, then leave a line between the colon and the start of the quotation. The quotation is then normally indented.

The report mentions the following possibilities for action:

In the first place, a flotation cannot be ruled out. Should there be sufficient justification for this, the Board will consult the investment agencies concerned. Secondly, several areas can be identified where considerable savings can be made. For example, certain non-core assets may be sold off to free a considerable amount of capital. In addition, some departments could be streamlined, most notably the advertising and marketing departments. Thirdly, human resources are now working with the Trades Unions to encourage early retirement where appropriate.

These measures may be discussed at a later stage, should the proposed merger talks fail.

3. To draw attention to something

She said that she felt "ill". (American)

She said that she felt 'ill' . (British)

Where to put quotation marks

The closing quotation marks come after any punctuation that belongs to the quotation. Any punctuation that doesn't belong to the quotation comes after the final quotation mark.

He said I was "interesting"!

He said, "What an interesting person!"

Punctuation that divides quoted speech goes inside the quotation marks.

"I'm not going," he said, "and you can't make me."

John said, "I'm not going, and you can't make me."

Quotations inside quotations

A quotation inside another quotation is shown by double quotation marks in British English and single quotation marks in American English.

' Do you remember her "special friend"?' he asked. (British)

"Do you remember her 'special friend'?" he asked. (American)

When you do not use quotation marks

- When you paraphrase something, rather than quoting it word for word.

- When you use a different typeface, such as italics, to quote something.

For example, He said *I am living in France*, when *I live in France* would be more appropriate.

Other punctuation

Question marks (?)

1. These are used at the end of questions

Could you let us know your views on this?
"What do you want?" he asked.

2. Question marks are not used in indirect questions

She asked us if we knew the answer.

Exclamation mark(!)

These are used to show strong emotions, surprise or to emphasize something.

"Cool!"
"I hate Mondays!"

From the point of view of style, too many exclamation marks look as if you cannot express yourself precisely. Try to avoid using them, if possible.

Dot dot dot (...)

1. These show that some information has been omitted

"The report indicates various solutions... we are most interested in the one concerning flotation."

2. They can also be used to invite the reader to use his or her imagination

By deliberately leaving out the end of a sentence, they are especially used in advertising.

"Remember the happiest day of your life... ."

(If the 'dot dot dot' happens at the end of the sentence, add a fourth final stop.)

Slash /

1. / (forward slash) is most commonly used in website addresses

"http://www.english-at-home.com"

2. The slash can also be used to show *or*

"Dear Sir / Madam"

3. It is also used in dates

"The 2008/09 school year."

Ditto marks (" ")

1. These are used to avoid repeating the same word in lists.

For this recipe you need:

3 1b raspberries

" " strawberries

Underline or underscore(_)

1. These are often used in email addresses

"name_surname@emailaddress.com"

Underlining can be useful to highlight something in your writing, but this should be used sparingly. Other ways of highlighting text are by changing the font in some way (for example to bold or italic or a combination such as bold and italic) or by using bullet points or numbering.

The at sign (@)

1. The @ sign is used most frequently in email addresses

2. It can also be used to mean *about* or *approximately*

"It costs @\$10."

Bullet points

Bullet points are particularly useful for lists.

- Item 1
- Item 2
- Item 3.

If your items are complete sentences, they should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop

If the list has short points, the full stop comes at the end of the last item on the list.

We need

- a photocopier
- a fax machine
- a printer.

If the list is part of a continuous sentence, put semi-colons after each point and start each point with a lowercase letter

The following categories of people may apply for funding:

- sole-trader companies;
- partnerships of fewer than three partners; and
- freelancers.

Asterisk *

1. These are used to show a footnote

"According to recent statistics*, over 98% of people have access to the internet."

(At the bottom of the page is * and the reference)

2. To show letters have been omitted, specially in swear words

"Sh*t," he said.

Punctuation - sentence length

The following sentence is too long:

We anticipate that profits will rise in the next quarter, as a result of streamlining our operations and disposing of our non-essential assets, this means that we will be able to strengthen our R&D division by allocating extra budget in terms of personnel and resources

It would be better to write it in two sentences:

We anticipate that profits will rise in the next quarter, as a result of streamlining our operations and disposing of our non-essential assets. This means that we will be able to strengthen our R&D division by allocating extra budget in terms of personnel and resources.

Tips for avoiding over-long sentences

1. Only have a maximum of two ideas per sentence (or 15-20 words maximum).
2. If you need to add a large amount of detail, put it in its own sentence.
3. Try not to put too much information before your main idea.
4. Don't put too much information into brackets. If necessary, start a new sentence with this information.
5. Read it out aloud. If you run out of breath or have to stop in the middle, then the sentence is probably too long.

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