Chapter 1
Business Writing Style

This chapter is intended to provide tips for effective business writing that can be applied to all forms of business correspondence such as: memos, faxes, reports, and e-mails.

Use these 12 tips to develop an effective business writing style:

1. Keep your purpose, readers and content in mind

2. Keep your sentences short

3. Use positive language

4. Use linking words

5. Use simple, familiar words

6. Use passive voice for specific reasons

7. Use bullet points and numbered lists correctly

8. Use tables and charts effectively

9. Use impersonal style when expressing opinions

10. Avoid outdated expressions

11. Avoid repetition

12. Avoid turning verbs into nouns

1. Keep your purpose, readers and content in mind

Before you start writing your e-mail, memo or report, consider the following points and keep in mind the PRC (Purpose, Reader, Content) Triangle (see fig 1.1 below).

? Purpose

What is my purpose?

- To inform
- To persuade
- To complain
- To appreciate

- To request
- To suggest or recommend
- To explain

Readers

Who are my readers?

- Supervisors
- Trainees
- Managers
- Others

- Assistants
- Technicians
- Employees

Content

- What information do my readers want?
- Will my readers understand technical terms?
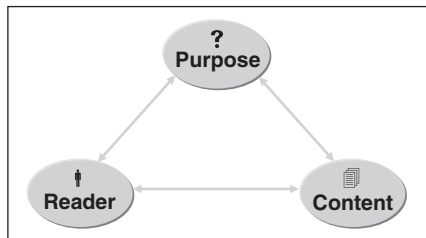- Would examples, details, or graphics help the readers to understand better?

Figure 1.1   PRC Triangle

Remember

You should keep in mind the PRC Triangle when writing a memo, an e-mail or a report. This shows that the purpose, reader and content of a report are all equally important but that each is influenced by the others (see figure 1.1).

2. Keep your sentences short

In business writing, the fewer words, the better.

The following examples illustrate how to remove unnecessary words that do not add meaning to a sentence.

Long	Short
One of the best things you can do for yourself to improve your writing is to learn how to cut words that are not necessary. 25 words	To improve your writing, cut out unnecessary words. 8 words
Make your employees sufficiently aware of the potentially adverse consequences involved regarding these chemicals. 14 words	Warn your employees about these chemicals. 6 words
In view of the fact that the motor failed twice during the time that we tested it, we are at this point in time looking for other options. 28 words	Since the motor failed twice during testing, we are now looking at other options. 14 words
To be sure of obtaining optimal results, it is essential that you give your employees the resources that are necessary for completion of the job. 25 words	To get the best results, give your employees the resources they need to complete the job. 16 words
Our intention is to implement the verification of the reliability of the system in the near future. 17 words	We want to verify the system's reliability soon. 8 words

Long	Short
Let me know as to whether or not we can start drilling in view of the fact that the problem has not been fixed at the present time. 28 words	Since the problem has not yet been fixed, let me know whether we can start drilling. 16 words
We hereby advise you, as per your request, that we will be forwarding a copy of the contract to you in due course. 23 words	A copy of the contract will be sent to you in a few days as requested. 16 words
I will be unable to attend your May 6 meeting. I would like to say the reason is that I will be attending the leadership course in Dubai on the same day. 32 words	I will be unable to attend the May 6 meeting as I will be attending the leadership course in Dubai. 20 words
In this e-mail we have attempted to answer all of your questions and we hope that if you have any additional questions whatsoever, please do not hesitate to contact us immediately. 31 words	If you have any additional questions, please call us. 9 words

Remember
- Try to limit yourself to one idea per sentence.
- Break down longer sentences into simpler, shorter sentences.

3. Use positive language

In business writing it is important to use positive language in order to get the results you want.

As you can see in the examples below, the column on the right turns the negative words into positive words to obtain a positive reader response.

Negative	Positive
We are **unable** to promote you to supervisor because you **do not have** the skills and experience required for this position.	We will be able to promote you to supervisor when you meet the experience required for this position.
We **will not** start repairing your test equipment until we receive a deposit.	We will begin repairing your test equipment once we receive a deposit.
This is the second time that you **do not bother** to follow and stick to the duty roster.	This is to remind you again that your attendance is required.
If you **fail** to provide the specifications by the May 1 deadline, the project will **fail**.	By providing the specifications by May 1, you can be assured that the project will be on time.
You **cannot** reconnect without logging on again.	Log on again to reconnect.
The corporation **will not** pay unless employees also contribute.	The corporation will pay only if employees contribute.

Negative	Positive
You **neglected** to send us your passport copy and therefore we **cannot** process your request.	We will be able to process your request as soon as we receive a copy of your passport.
It is **bad not** to review the spare parts availability before submitting a work request.	It is good to review the spare parts availability before submitting a work request.
I hope that you **will not** be **disappointed** with the quality of our report.	I am sure that you will be delighted with the quality of our report.
The parts your company sent us the last time were the wrong size. Do **not** do this again.	We hope the parts will arrive as ordered.
We **cannot** send your order from our store until June 1, 2004.	Your order will be sent to you on June 1, 2004.
You failed to include your company number, so we **cannot** process your application.	We will be glad to process your application as soon as we receive your company number.
This problem **would not have** happened if you had connected the wires properly in the first place.	This problem may be resolved by connecting the wires as shown in the handbook.

Remember

- Write with a positive attitude by paying attention to the words and expression you choose to get the results you want.
- Sentences should be positive unless there is a reason to stress the "not," "no" or "never."

4. Use linking words

Linking words help establish clear connections between ideas and ensure that sentences and paragraphs flow together smoothly, making them easier to read.

The following table summarizes the most common group of linking words used in business writing:

Function	Signals	Examples
Addition	And	• Your salary adjustment has been reviewed **and** approved by the operations committee.
	In addition	• **In addition** to cleaning the valve, the entire machine was inspected.
	Also	• The parts are cheap and they are **also** well made.
	Moreover	• The supplier will deliver the unit. **Moreover**, he will supervise its installation on site.
	Furthermore	• You are requested to submit the drawing for the Gas Project. **Furthermore**, inform us of the starting date.

Function	Signals	Examples
Cause and Effect	**Because (of)**	• The flight was delayed **because of** fog.
	Due to	• Internet users had a hard time accessing the web **due to** the international hacking competition yesterday.
	Therefore	• The pay rate is not clearly defined. **Therefore**, it is recommended that the contract should not be signed yet.
	As a result	• The morale and overall capabilities of our trainees have shown a remarkable improvement **as a result** of your efforts.
	Consequently	• The spare parts did not arrive on time. **Consequently**, I contacted the suppliers.
	Hence	• The number of trainees has been increased. **Hence**, we should monitor their attendance and performance.

Function	Signals	Examples
Contrast	But	• The software is expensive, **but** it meets our requirements.
	However	• The meeting scheduled for Monday was cancelled. **However**, we will meet sometime next week.
	Yet	• This is acceptable, **yet** it could be better.
	Although	• **Although** no complaints have been received, we think that the use of the internet must now be monitored.
Purpose	In order to	• We are writing to you **in order to** clarify certain confusing points.
	So that	• The new employees must be trained in a practical hands-on manner **so that** we can bring their performance up to acceptable levels.
	So	• Our office printer is running low on ink, **so** please refrain from printing unimportant documents for the time being.

Function	Signals	Examples
Concession	**Despite**	• **<u>Despite</u>** being issued a warning letter, your attendance record has not improved.
	In spite of	• **<u>In spite of</u>** previous memos, private car owners are still parking their cars in the administration building areas.
Alternatives	**Either . . . or . . .**	• We plan **<u>either</u>** to adjust your salary **<u>or</u>** to promote you to operations supervisor.
	Neither . . . nor . . .	• We have **<u>neither</u>** the spare parts **<u>nor</u>** the manpower to carry out this task.
	Or	• Do you need to receive your order in one day **<u>or</u>** in three days?

5. Use simple, familiar words

We write to express, not to use every word in the dictionary. Avoid using big words to convey your meaning clearly. For example, instead of "magnitude and configuration," say "size and shape."

Always try to use the simplest word possible.

Big word	Simple word
accrue	add, gain
acquire	get, buy
alleviate	reduce
allocate	assign
ameliorate	improve
anticipate	expect, await
apparent	clear
apprise	tell
articulate	explain
ascertain	find out
attain	reach, meet, achieve
attributable	due to
caveat	warning
cease	stop, end

Big word	Simple word
cogitate	think
cognizant of	aware of
commensurate	equal
concur	agree
confront	face
consolidate	combine, join
consummate	complete or finish
contemplate	consider
convene	meet
deem	consider
designate	appoint
detrimental	harmful
dispatch	send
disseminate	give, issue, pass, send
encounter	meet
enumerate	list
facilitate	make easier, help

Big word	Simple word
furnish	send, give
inception	start
incombustible	fireproof
initiate	start
interrogate	question
manifest	clear, obvious
mitigate	reduce
numerous	many
obviate	avoid
peruse	review
possess	own
preclude	prevent
promulgate	issue, publish
ratify	approve, confirm
recapitulate	sum up

Big word	Simple word
reimburse	pay back
reiterate	repeat
remunerate	pay
render	give, make
retain	keep
reveal	show
scrutinize	inspect
solicit	ask for, request
strategize	plan
streamline	update, simplify
transpire	take place, occur
utilize	use

As you write, remember that the goal of business writing is to communicate with your readers, not to impress them with your vocabulary.

Below are good examples of simple words to be used rather than difficult ones in order to convey your message clearly to your readers.

Unclear	Clear
He **discerned** that the **promulgated** policy would work.	He **knew** the **proposed** policy would work.
As **stipulated**, we **extrapolated** the budget figures for two years.	As **required**, we **estimated** the budget figures for two years.
Will you **utilize** instruction manuals during the **obligatory** training period?	Will you **use** instruction manuals during the **required** training period?
We **anticipate** that most of the options will be **fundamental** enough to meet our needs.	We **expect** that most of the options will be **basic** enough to meet our needs.
Remember to **incorporat**e all the other good writing principles you have learned in this course.	Remember to **include** all the other good writing principles you have learned in this course.

Remember

Avoid using difficult words when simple words will communicate your message.

6. Use the passive voice for specific reasons

The choice between using active or passive voice in business writing is a matter of style. Most books recommend using active voice. However, there is an exception to this rule.

Sometimes passive voice can be useful in an effort to sound more diplomatic and when you do not want to highlight the subject of the sentence.

When to use the passive voice?
The passive voice is to be preferred in the following cases:

1. Use the passive voice when you do not want to identify who performed the action.

Examples:

- Smoking is prohibited.
- A new safety policy was introduced after the accident.
- The new offices were decorated last week.
- The error has been corrected.
- The centrifugal pump was installed on May 12, 20xx.
- Procedures have been written to ensure safety.

2. Use the passive voice to describe a mistake to avoid blaming anyone in particular.

Examples:

- Profits are down by 2%.
- The incident rate in ABC Field is increasing dramatically this year compared to last year.
- Computer sales dropped by 10 % during the summer.
- The monthly report was submitted late.

3. Use the passive voice when you don't know who carried out the action.

Examples:

- Three computers were stolen from the training center.
- The training room was left unlocked.
- The briefcase was stolen at the airport terminal.
- The photocopier is broken.

7. Use bullet points and numbered lists correctly

Since people have little time to read, set out important points in a numbered or bulleted list. This makes it easier to scan so your readers get the meaning without reading every word.

When to use bulleted and numbered lists
Use numbered lists when working with instructions that are to be carried out in sequence. If the sequence of items is not essential, use bullets.

Example 1: Using bulleted lists

We are still having problems with the five new computers we have purchased from XYZ Computer Company. The problems we have been having include:

• Two notebook computers won't boot up.
• One monitor continues to make a high-pitched, whining sound.
• Two desktop computers became infected with viruses.

Example 2: Using bulleted lists

I raised your difficulty about arriving for work on time. I pointed out that:

• your managers had done their best to take account of your travel problems; and
• you had agreed with them that Dubai was the most convenient place for you to work.

However, your initial improvement was short-lived. Over the past two months your punctuality has dropped to a totally unacceptable level.

By using bulleted lists, you draw your reader's attention to important items.

Example 3: Using numbered lists

To: Amar Jones
From: Khaled Mohamed
Date: March 5. 20xx
Subject: Procedure for Handling Payroll Advances

There is a new procedure (to reflect updated policies) for obtaining payroll advances. Our employees will find it an improvement on the old confusing procedure. The new procedure is as follows:

1. Obtain form for Payroll Advance from your supervisor.
2. Complete the form by filling in all the blanks in the Employee Section form.
3. Get approval from your immediate supervisor.
4. Pick up your check from the cashier's office.

Example 4: Using numbered lists

To: All Employees Using XP 2000 Computers
From: Head of Information Technology
Date: March 5, 20xx
Subject: Computer Security Problem

Your cooperation is urgently needed to solve a serious computer security problem. To enable you to keep your files and those of the entire company secure, please follow these two actions:

1. Keep your password private and do not share it with anyone.
2. Log on to the computer manually.

Your adherence to the above is much appreciated.

By using numbers, you are directing your reader to carry out instructions in sequence.

Use parallel form to improve the clarity of your writing. To make your writing parallel, use the same grammatical form for all items in a list. In other words**,** match nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, and phrases with phrases.

Example: Parallel form in lists

Here are two versions of a passage. The first ignores the guidelines; the second follows them.

Weak List	Improved List
I left my job for several reasons: • Long hours • Poor pay • I found the work tedious • Equipment was dangerous	I left my job for several reasons: • Long hours • Poor pay • Tedious work • Dangerous equipment
The following preliminary work is required before work-over: 1. Remove pen-fold fence. 2. Removing crash barrier. 3. Clear cellar of sand. 4. Remove safety valve. 5. Master valves need to be checked for leakage.	The following preliminary work is required before work-over: 1. Remove pen-fold fence. 2. Remove crash barrier. 3. Clear cellar of sand. 4. Remove safety valve. 5. Check master valves for leakage.

Remember
- If the sequence matters, use a **numbered** list.
- If the order does not matter, use a **bulleted** list.
- Use parallel form to achieve balanced writing.

Tables, charts and other graphs are quick, effective ways for your reader to get information. People don't always read everything in a report, but they often look at the visuals.

In this section, we will concentrate on when to use tables and charts effectively to enhance your written presentation and to draw your readers' attention.

Tables

Use a table to present data and facts to improve clarity.

Example:

Department	Current Month	Year to Date
Drilling	$ 2,000	$ 5,000
Inspection	$ 1,200	$ 4,300
Operations	$ 3,300	$ 10,000
Safety	$ 1,200	$ 2,500
Technical	$ 3,000	$ 5,200
Total	**$ 10,700**	**$ 27,000**

Table 1.1   Overtime expenses for all departments

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Charts

The following charts are commonly used in technical reports:

• Line chart   • Pie chart   • Bar chart   • Flow chart

Line chart

Use a line chart to show trend data over extended time periods.
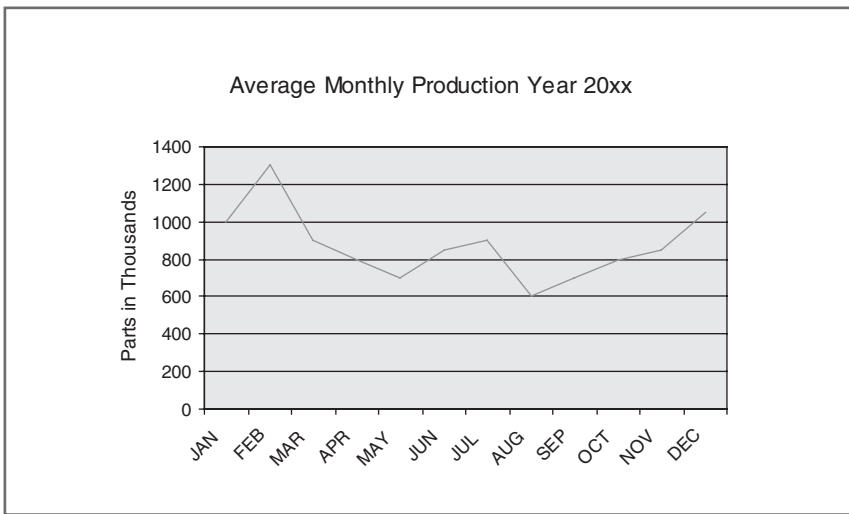
Example of line chart

Average Monthly Production Year 20xx

Figure 1.2   Line chart

Use a pie chart to show percentage or distribution of a whole.

Example of pie chart
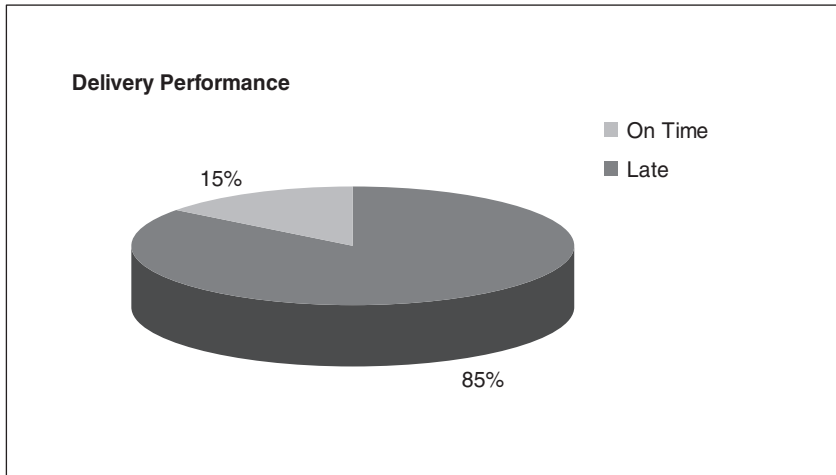
Figure 1.3   Pie chart

Bar chart

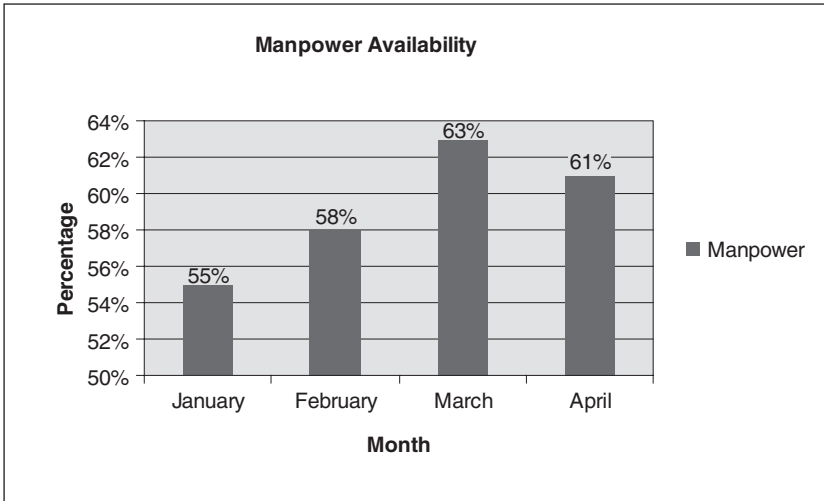Use a bar chart to compare items with one another.

Example of bar chart
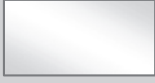

**Manpower Availability**

Figure 1.4   Bar chart

Flow chart

Use a flow chart to show a series of steps from beginning to end (e.g. procedure or process).

Flow chart symbols

Name	Symbol	Meaning
Oval		Start or end of the task
Rectangular		Steps
Diamond		Decisions
Flow line	→	Used to connect symbols and indicate the flow of logic

✎ Example of flow chart

Figure 1.5 shows the major steps in the procedure for issuing a high voltage electrical certificate using flow chart symbols.
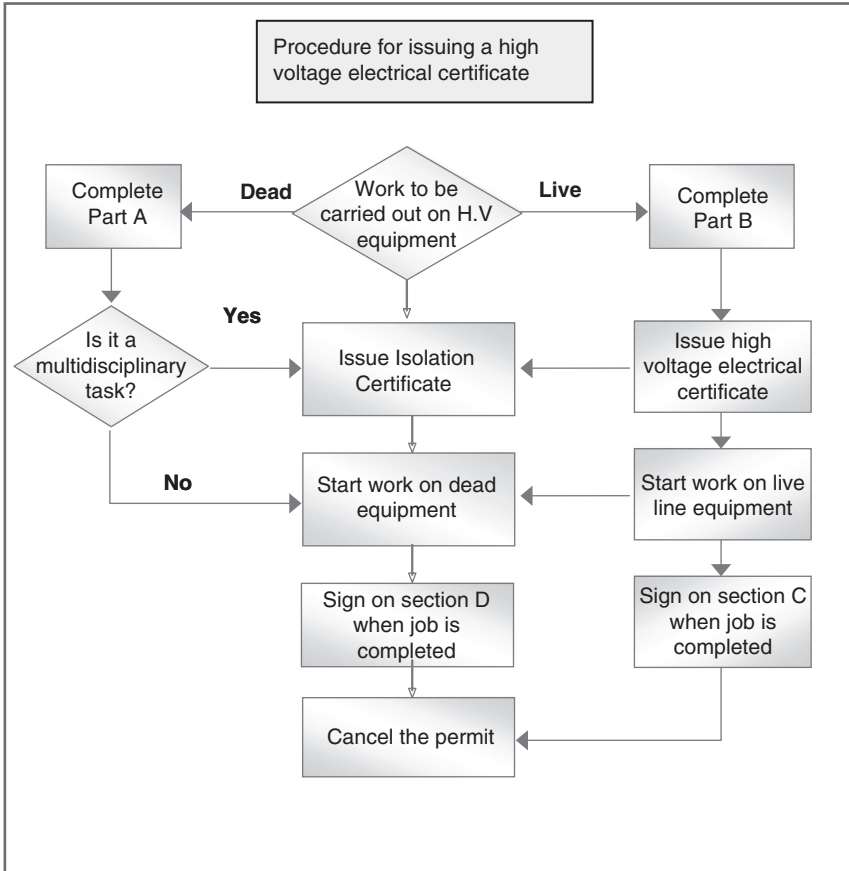

Figure 1.5   Flow chart

9. Use impersonal style when expressing opinions

Expressions like "I think" or "I feel" are rarely used in business reports because they are too personal. Managers are not looking for your personal opinion and feeling; they are looking for professional opinions.

Personal Style	Impersonal Style
I believe a bonus for our employees should be based on employees' performance.	The bonus for our employees should be based on employees' performance.
I expect that the use of computers will make it easier to compile our monthly production report.	The use of computers will make it easier to compile our monthly production report.
I feel certain that the new plan is better than the old method.	The new plan is better than the old method for the following reasons:
I think that by taking this course, it will help improve my writing skills. I know that I will learn how to use skills that are good to know in any job.	This course should improve my writing skills, teaching me skills that are good to know in any job.
I would like to recommend that everyone wear safety boots in the Power Station.	It is recommended that everyone wear safety boots in the Power Station.

10. Avoid outdated expressions

Here are some classic examples of outdated expressions to be avoided in business writing. Use modern language instead which is shorter and clearer.

Instead of this . . .	Try this . . .
Please send your comments not later than (date).	Please send your comments by (date).
Please find attached herewith . . .	Attached is . . .
Enclosed please find . . .	Enclosed is . . . or I have enclosed . . .
Please feel free to contact the undersigned on . . .	Please call me on . . .
As per your request . . .	As requested . . .
In accordance with your request . . .	As you requested . . .
We are hereby acknowledging receipt of your order . . .	We received your order . . .
Please be good enough to advise me . . .	Please let me know . . .
I would be glad if you could advise me when . . .	Please let me know when . . . .
Pursuant to your e-mail . . .	According to your e-mail . . .
I am writing this e-mail to convey my warmest congratulations on your promotion to . . .	Congratulations on your promotion to . . .

Instead of this . . .	Try this . . .
Thanking you in advance . . .	I appreciate your . . .
Please give your attention to the contents of enclosed brochures.	Please see the enclosed brochures.
I would be very happy if it would be possible to send me . . .	Please send me . . .
It may be of some concern to you to learn that your pump is ready for testing.	Your pump is ready for testing.
Your attention is directed to the contents of enclosed brochures.	Please see the enclosed brochures.
Thanking you in advance for cooperation in this matter.	Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.
Pursuant to your request, two contracts are attached hereto.	As you requested, two contracts are attached.
Should you require any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.	Please call me if you have any questions.
Please furnish details.	Please send me details.

Instead of this . . .	Try this . . .
I regret to inform . . .	I am sorry . . .
Permit me to say	(never use)
Let me take this opportunity	(never use)
As of this date in time	Now
In light of the fact that…	Because or Since
In view of the fact that	Because or Since
In the event that	If
Per diem	Daily

Remember

Try to write in similar fashion to the way you speak in a business meeting. The clarity of your writing will improve and you won't sound boring.

11. Avoid repetition

Repetition means saying the same thing twice. The following examples indicate that it is a good idea to edit your writing to look for repetition and redundant words.

Repetition	Without Repetition
I think **the reason why** Lucas has been promoted to operations manager is **because** of his performance.	Lucas has been promoted to operations manager **because** of his performance.
We do not have the manpower to **carry out the major overhaul of the gas turbine** or the spare parts to **carry out the major overhaul of the gas turbine**.	We have neither the manpower nor the spare parts to **carry out the major overhaul of the gas turbine**.
I ask **the question whether** trainees can attend the gas turbine course.	I ask **whether** trainees can attend the gas turbine course.
Each **individual operator** will receive a bonus for completing the task on time.	Each **operator** will receive a bonus for completing the task on time.
Our Human Resources department is **planning in advance** a meeting to review the effectiveness of the new appraisal system.	Our Human Resources department is **planning** a meeting to review the effectiveness of the new appraisal system.
The August 8 meeting has been **postponed to a later date**.	The August 8 meeting has been **postponed**.

12. Avoid turning verbs into nouns

Using the noun form of the verb takes more words than using a strong verb. For example, instead of saying "make a decision" it is more effective to say "decide."

Noun Form	Verb Form
give instructions to	instruct
make a classification	classify
carry out an investigation of	investigate
perform an assessment	assess
make an observation	observe
conduct a review of	review
make adjustments	adjust

In the following examples, notice how much more straightforward and easy to understand the sentences are when presented with a strong verb form.

Examples

Instead of	Use this
The police **conducted an investigation** into the matter.	The police **investigated** the matter.
Our **intention** is to **perform an audit** of the records of the program.	We **intend** to **audit** the program.
My boss **has an expectation** that I will attend the Power and Gas Exhibition.	My boss **expects** me to attend the Power and Gas Exhibition.
Authorization was given by the Planning manager to purchase new computers.	The Planning manager **authorized** the purchase of new computers.
We hope you're willing to **undertake serious reconsideration** of your position.	We hope you will **reconsider** your position.
The function of this handout is the **improvement** of wordy writing.	This handout **improves** wordy writing.
The committee **made the decision** to reward all employees in the Production section.	The committee **decided** to reward all employees in the Production section.
The **implementation of** the plan was successful.	The plan was **implemented** successfully.
Take into consideration the cost of maintaining the data.	**Consider** the cost of maintaining the data.

Remember   Rely on the **verb** to do the work.

Summary

These tips provide the basics of good business writing and will always keep your written communications sharp and effective.

To produce effective documents, please use these tips every time you write.

1. Keep your purpose, readers and content in mind

2. Keep your sentences short

3. Use positive language

4. Use linking words

5. Use simple, familiar words

6. Use the passive voice for specific reasons

7. Use bullet points and numbered lists correctly

8. Use tables and charts effectively

9. Use impersonal style when expressing opinions

10. Avoid outdated expressions

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12. Avoid turning verbs into nouns