



This is “Writing”, chapter 6 from the book [Communication for Business Success \(Canadian Edition\) \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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Chapter 6

Writing

Although I usually think I know what I'm going to be writing about, what I'm going to say, most of the time it doesn't happen that way at all. At some point I get misled down a garden path, I get surprised by an idea that I hadn't anticipated getting, which is a little bit like being in a laboratory.

- Lewis Thomas

Getting Started

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Match each statement in the left column with the most appropriate mode of communication in the right column, and note why.

| | |
|--|--|
| ___ 1. Need the sales figures for the last month available in three days | A. Text message or instant message (IM) |
| ___ 2. Inform department employees of face-to-face (F2F) meeting next month | B. E-mail |
| ___ 3. International client requests price quote | C. Fax |
| ___ 4. Assigned to investigate partnership with supplier to codevelop a new product | D. Report |
| ___ 5. Need to inform employee of a discrepancy in their expense report | E. Proposal |
| ___ 6. Need to facilitate meeting with two department managers from two distinct time zones. | F. Face-to-face (F2F) meeting, interpersonal interaction |
| ___ 7. Need to follow up with customer post sale | G. F2F meeting, group or team |
| ___ 8. Need to contact new prospective customer | H. Meeting (mediated), teleconference or videoconference |

There are no right or wrong answers to this matching exercise, but there are strengths and weaknesses associated with each mode. Does the information need to be received as soon as possible? Will the document require time and preparation? Will the result be comprehensive and require visual representation of data, trends, and their relationships(s)? Associate each statement with what you consider the most appropriate model of communication and note why. Discuss your responses with your classmates.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES (CONT.)

2. These sentences focus on some of the most common errors in English. Can you fill in the blanks correctly?

| | | | | |
|---|---|------------|--|-----------|
| 1. <i>accept</i> or <i>except</i> | The office will _____ applications until 5 p.m. on the 31st. | accept | Attendance is required for all employees _____ supervisors. | except |
| 2. <i>affect</i> or <i>effect</i> | To _____ the growth of plants, we can regulate the water supply. | affect | A lack of water has a predictable _____ on most plants. | effect |
| 3. <i>e.g.</i> or <i>i.e.</i> | Please order 2,000 imprinted giveaways (_____, pens or coffee mugs) | e.g. | Charge them to my account (_____, account #98765). | i.e. |
| 4. <i>its</i> or <i>it's</i> | The department surpassed _____ previous sales record this quarter. | its | _____ my opinion that we reached peak oil in 2008. | It's |
| 5. <i>lay</i> or <i>lie</i> | Please _____ the report on the desk. | lay | The doctor asked him to _____ down on the examination table. | lie |
| 6. <i>pressure</i> or <i>pressurize</i> | We need to _____ the liquid nitrogen tanks. | pressurize | It might be possible to _____ him to resign. | pressure |
| 7. <i>principle</i> or <i>principal</i> | It's the basic _____ of farming: no water, no food. | principle | The _____ reason for the trip is to | principal |

| | | | | |
|--|---|------------|---|---|
| | | | attend the sales meeting. | |
| 8. <i>regardless</i> or <i>irregardless</i> | _____ of what we do, gas prices are unlikely to go back down. | Regardless | _____ of your beliefs, please try to listen with an open mind. | Regardless (<i>irregardless</i> is not a standard word; see your dictionary) |
| 9. <i>than</i> or <i>then</i> | This year's losses were worse _____ last year's. | than | If we can cut our costs, _____ it might be possible to break even. | then |
| 10. <i>that</i> or <i>which</i> | _____ type of marketing data did you need? | Which | Karen misplaced the report, _____ caused a delay in making a decision. | which |
| | There are several kinds of data _____ could be useful. | that | | |
| 11 <i>there</i> , <i>their</i> , or <i>they're</i> | The report is _____, in the top file drawer. | there | _____ strategic advantage depends on a wide distribution network. | Their |
| | _____ planning to attend the sales meeting in Montreal. | They're | | |
| 12. <i>to</i> , <i>too</i> , or <i>two</i> | Customers need _____ drive slower if they want to save gas. | to | After sales meeting, you should visit customers in the Montreal area _____. | too |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|---|--------------|
| | In fact, the _____ of you should make some customer visits together. | two | | |
| 13. <i>uninterested</i> or <i>disinterested</i> | He would be the best person to make a decision, since he isn't biased and is relatively _____ in the outcome. | disinterested | The sales manager tried to speak dynamically, but the sales reps were simply _____ in what he had to say. | uninterested |
| 14. <i>who</i> , <i>whom</i> , <i>who's</i> , or <i>whose</i> | _____ truck is that? | Whose | _____ going to pay for the repairs? | Who's |
| | _____ will go to the interview? | Who | To _____ should we address the thank-you note? | whom |
| 15 <i>your</i> or <i>you're</i> | My office is bigger than _____ cubicle. | your | _____ going to learn how to avoid making these common mistakes in English. | You're |

If all the world is a stage then you, as a business writer, must be the script writer, correct? Actually, those who employ you, specify your job duties, manage the business, and designate which problems you are to solve are more like the script writers, directors, and producers. So what role does that leave you as a business writer? Actor. You may not be seen “on stage” by the suppliers you write, the departments you inform with your reports, or the customers you serve, but your writing represents you and your organization. As an actor must learn his or her lines, you too must learn the role of a business writer within the context of your business or organization. It may well be that you are allowed a degree of improvisation and creativity when you interpret your role, or it could be the case that many of the written documents you will produce follow a standard template, much like a script, that designates your lines before the writing process begins.

Knowing your place on stage and how it relates to your business is an important aspect of business writing best not ignored.

This chapter focuses on several strategies for success when it comes to the creative process of writing, and your awareness of these skills will prove invaluable as your responsibility increases and your ability to shape documents develops. Never lose sight of the fact that each document exists with a universe of relationships and interaction; it does not stand alone. Also remember that what you write today, particularly if you “publish” it on the Internet, will be there for years to come. Always consider how your words will represent you and your organization when you are not there to clarify, defend, or correct them. Your audience will have expectations of you, as will your employer, and as an effective business writer you know that one key to success is meeting these expectations.

Creative writing for exposition, narration, and self-expression is an important part of writing, but in the business context you have a role, job duties, and responsibilities both internal and external to your organization. Your mastery of clear and concise writing will directly affect the interpretation, and misinterpretation, of your message. Your goal remains to reduce misunderstandings through the effective and efficient use of words in business documents, and the well-known mandate to “Omit needless words” Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Macmillian. stands true. Up to this point you have been preparing to write, but now the moment has come for performance.

6.1 Organization

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how to develop and organize content in patterns that are appropriate for your document and audience.
2. Demonstrate your ability to order, outline, and emphasize main points in one or more written assignments.
3. Demonstrate how to compose logically organized paragraphs, sentences, and transitions in one or more written assignments.

The purpose of business writing is to communicate facts and ideas. In order to accomplish that purpose, each document has key components that need to be present in order for your reading audience to understand the message. These elements may seem simple to the point that you may question how any writer could neglect them. But if you take note of how often miscommunication and misunderstanding happen, particularly in written communications, you will realize that it happens all the time. Omission or neglect may be intentional, but it is often unintentional; the writer assumes (wrongly) that the reader will easily understand a concept, idea, or the meaning of the message. From background to language, culture to education, there are many variables that come into play and make effective communication a challenge. The degree to which you address these basic elements will increase the effectiveness of your documents. Each document must address the following:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- How
- (and sometimes) Why

If you have these elements in mind as you prepare your document, it will be easier to decide what to write and in what order. They will also be useful when you are reviewing your document before delivering it. If your draft omits any one of these elements or addresses it in an unclear fashion, you will know what you need to do to fix it.

Another way to approach organizing your document is with the classical proofs known as *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. **Ethos**¹, or your credibility, will come through with your choice of sources and authority on the subject(s). Your **logos**², or the logic of your thoughts represented across the document, will allow the reader to come to understand the relationships among who, what, where, when, and so forth. If your readers cannot follow your logic they will lose interest, fail to understand your message, and possibly not even read it at all. Finally, your **pathos**³, or passion and enthusiasm, will be reflected in your design and word choices. If your document fails to convey enthusiasm for the subject, how can you expect the reader to be interested? Every document, indeed every communication, represents aspects of these classical elements.

General Purpose and Thesis Statements

No matter what your business writing project involves, it needs to convey some central idea. To clarify the idea in your mind and make sure it comes through to your audience, write a thesis statement. A thesis statement, or central idea, should be short, specific, and to the point. Steven Beebe and Susan Beebe, S. [Steven], & Beebe, S. [Susan]. (1997). *Public speaking: An audience-centered approach* (3rd ed., pp. 121–122). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. recommend five guiding principles when considering your thesis statement. The thesis statement should

1. be a declarative statement;
2. be a complete sentence;
3. use specific language, not vague generalities;
4. be a single idea;
5. reflect consideration of the audience.

This statement is key to the success of your document. If your audience has to work to find out what exactly you are talking about, or what your stated purpose or goal is, they will be less likely to read, be influenced, or recall what you have written. By stating your point clearly in your introduction, and then referring back to it in the body of the document and at the end, you will help your readers to understand and remember your message.

Figure 6.1



Begin with a clear purpose statement.

1. Credibility.
2. Logic and reason.
3. Passion and enthusiasm.

Organizing Principles

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Once you know the basic elements of your message, you need to decide in what order to present them to your audience. A central organizing principle will help you determine a logical order for your information. One common organizing principle is chronology, or time: the writer tells what happened first, then what happened next, then what is happening now, and, finally, what is expected to happen in the future. Another common organizing principle is comparison: the writer describes one product, an argument on one side of an issue, or one possible course of action; and then compares it with another product, argument, or course of action.

As an example, let's imagine that you are a business writer within the transportation industry and you have been assigned to write a series of informative pieces about an international initiative called the "TransAmerican Transportation System Study." Just as the Canadian Pacific Railway once unified Canada from east to west, which was further reinforced by the TransCanada Highway System, the proposed TransAmerican Transportation System will facilitate integrating the markets of Mexico, the United States, and Canada from north to south. Rail transportation has long been an integral part of the transportation and distribution system for goods across the Americas, and its role will be important in this new system.

In deciding how to organize your report, you have several challenges and many possibilities of different organizing principles to use. Part of your introduction will involve an historical perspective, and a discussion of the events that led from the Canadian Pacific Railway to the TransAmerican Transportation System proposal. Other aspects will include comparing the old railroad and highway systems to the new ones, and the transformative effect this will have on business and industry. You will need to acknowledge the complex relationships and challenges that collaboration has overcome, and highlight the common benefits. You will be called on to write informative documents as part of a public relations initiative, persuasive essays to underscore the benefits for those who prefer the status quo, and even write speeches for celebrations and awards.

Table 6.1 "Organizing Principles" lists seventeen different organizing principles and how they might be applied to various pieces you would write about the TransAmerican Transportation System. The left column provides the name of the organizing principle. The centre column explains the process of organizing a document according to each principle, and the third column provides an example.

Table 6.1 Organizing Principles

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Time (Chronological) | Structuring your document by time shows a series of events or steps in a process, which typically has a beginning, middle, and end. “Once upon a time stories” follow a chronological pattern. | <p>Before the Canadian Pacific Railway, the events that led to its construction, and its impact on early Canada. Additional examples may include the national highway projects and the development of reliable air freight.</p> <p>Now we can consider the TransAmerica Transportation System and the similar and distinct events that led us to today.</p> |
| 2. Comparison | Structuring your document by comparison focuses on the similarities and/or differences between points or concepts. | <p>A comparison of pre- and post-Canadian Pacific Railway, showing how health and life expectancy improved with the increased access to goods and services.</p> <p>Another example could be drawn from air freight, noting that organ donation in one part of the country can now save a life in another state or on the opposite coast.</p> <p>In a similar way, the TransAmerica Transportation System will improve the lives of the citizens of Mexico, the United States, and Canada.</p> |

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| 3. Contrast | Structuring your document by using contrasting points highlights the differences between items and concepts. | <p>A contrast of pre- and post-Canadian Pacific Railway showing how much time it took to communicate via letter, or how long it took to move out West. Just in time delivery and the modern highway system and trucking may serve as an example for contrast.</p> <p>The TransAmerica Transportation System will reduce customs clearing time while increasing border security along the distribution network.</p> |
| 4. Cause and Effect | Structuring your document by cause and effect structuring establishes a relationship between two events or situations, making the connection clear. | With the availability of a new and faster way to travel, the movement of people and goods out West grew considerably from 1885 to 1914. Both the modern highway and air transportation systems may serve as examples, noting how people, goods, and services can be delivered in drastically reduced time frames. Citizens of all three countries involved have increasingly been involved in trade, and movement across common borders through the TransAmerica Transportation System will enable the movement of goods and services with great efficiency. |
| 5. Problem and Solution | Structuring your document by problem and solution means you state the problem and detail how it was solved. This approach is effective for persuasive speeches. | Manufacturers were producing better goods for less money at the start of the Industrial Revolution, but they lacked a fast and effective method of getting their goods to growing markets. The Canadian |

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|--|--|--|
| | | <p>Pacific Railway gave them speed, economy, and access to new markets. Highways and air routes have dramatically increased this trend. In a similar way, this new system is the next evolutionary step in the integration and growth of our common marketplaces.</p> |
| <p>6. Classification (Categorical)</p> | <p>Structuring your document by classification establishes categories.</p> | <p>At the time Canada considered the Canadian Pacific Railway, there were three main types of transportation: by water, by horse, and by foot.</p> <p>Now rail, road, and air transportation are the norm across business and industry.</p> |
| <p>7. Biographical</p> | <p>Structuring your document by biography means examining specific people as they relate to the central topic.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1793: Alexander MacKenzie reaches the Pacific Ocean and completes first east to west crossing of North America north of Mexico. • 1881: Canadian Pacific Railway founded. • 1886: First transcontinental train from Montreal arrives in Port Moody, B.C. on July 4; the journey takes 134 hours. |

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2012: Prime Minister Harper can fly from Montreal to Vancouver in 4.5 hours. • So why shouldn't the ratio of time from import to consumer be reduced? |
| 8. Space (Spatial) | Structuring your document by space involves the parts of something and how they fit to form the whole. | A train uses a heat source to heat water, create steam, and turn a turbine, which moves a lever, causing a wheel to move on a track. A package picked up from an office in Halifax in the morning is delivered to another in Edmonton in the afternoon. From a Pacific port in Northern Mexico to a market in Chicago or Winnipeg, this system unifies the movement of goods and services. |
| 9. Ascending and Descending | Structuring your document by ascending or descending order involves focusing on quantity and quality. One good story (quality) leads to the larger picture, or the reverse. | A day in the life of a traveller in 1800. Incremental developments in transportation to the present, expressed through statistics, graphs, maps, and charts. A day in the life of a traveller in 1960, 1980, or even 2000, with visual examples of changes and trends may also contribute to the document. A day in the life of a traveller in 2012 compared to the relatively slow movement of goods and services, constrained by an antiquated transportation network that negatively impacts efficiency. |

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| <p>10. Psychological</p> | <p>It is also called “Monroe’s Motivated Sequence.” Ayres, J., & Miller, J. (1994). <i>Effective public speaking</i> (4th ed., p. 274). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.</p> <p>Structuring your document on the psychological aspects of the audience involves focusing on their inherent needs and wants. See Maslow Maslow, A. (1970). <i>Motivation and personality</i> (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. and Schutz. Schutz, W. (1966). <i>The interpersonal underworld</i>. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books. The author calls <i>attention</i> to a <i>need</i>, then focuses on the satisfaction of the need, <i>visualization</i> of the solution, and ends with a proposed or historical <i>action</i>. Useful for a persuasive message.</p> | <p>When families in the year 1800 went out West, they rarely returned to see family and friends. The country as a whole was an extension of this distended family, separated by time and distance. The railroad, the highways, and air travel brought families and the country together. In the same way, common markets already exist across the three countries, but remain separated by time, distance, and an antiquated system scheduled for significant improvement.</p> |
| <p>11. Elimination</p> | <p>Structuring your document using the process of elimination involves outlining all the possibilities.</p> | <p>The government’s use of the Canadian Pacific Railway during the North-West Rebellion assisted in the destruction of the Aboriginal people’s way of life in 1885. After examining treaties, relocation and reservations, loss of the buffalo, disease, and war, the railroad can be</p> |

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| | | <p>accurately considered a catalyst for the end of an era.</p> <p>From the lessons of history we can learn to protect and preserve our distinct cultures, languages, and sovereign territories as we integrate a common transportation system for our mutual benefit and security.</p> |
| 12. Example | Structuring your document by example involves providing vivid, specific examples (as opposed to abstract representations of data) to support main points. | Just as it once took weeks, even months, for a simple letter to move from coast to coast, goods and services have had a long and arduous process from importation to market. For example, the popular Christmas toy X, imported to Mexico from China in September, may well not be on store shelves by December 25 under the old system. Now it can move from importation to market in under two weeks. |
| 13. Process and Procedure | Structuring your document by process and procedure is similar to the time (chronological) organizational pattern with the distinction of steps or phases that lead to a complete end goal. This is often referred to as the “how-to” organizational pattern. | From conception to design, manufacturing to packaging, to transportation and inspection, to sales and sales support, let’s examine how the new transportation system facilitates increased efficiency in delivery to market and product support. |
| 14. Point Pattern | Structuring your document in a series of points allows for the presentation of diverse assertions to be aligned in a cohesive argument with clear support. | The TransAmerica Transportation System offers several advantages: security, speed, efficiency, and cost reduction. |
| 15. Definition | Structuring your document with a guiding definition allows for a clear introduction of terms and concepts | The TransAmerica Transportation System can be defined by its purpose, its integrated |

| Organizing Principle | Explanation of Process | Example |
|--|---|--|
| | while reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation. | components, and its impact on the secure movement of goods and services across common borders. |
| 16. Testimonial | Structuring your document around a testimony, or first person account of an experience, can be an effective way to make an abstract concept clearer to an audience. | According to Ms. X, owner of InterCountry Trading Company, it previously took 12 weeks to import, clear, and deliver a product from Mexico to the United States, and an additional four weeks to take delivery in Canada. Now the process takes less than two weeks. |
| 17. Ceremonial (Events, Ceremonies, or Celebrations) | <p>Structuring your document by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thanking dignitaries and representatives 2. The importance of the event 3. The relationship of the event to the audience 4. Thanking the audience for participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration | Thanking the representatives, builders, and everyone involved with the construction of the TransAmerica Transportation System. The railroad will unite North America, and bring us closer in terms of trade, communication, and family. Thank you for participating in today's dedication. |

Outlines

Chances are you have learned the basic principles of outlining in English writing courses: an **outline**⁴ is a framework that organizes main ideas and subordinate ideas in a hierarchical series of roman numerals and alphabetical letters. The right column of [Table 6.2 "Outline 1"](#) presents a generic outline in a classical style. In the left column, the three main structural elements of an informative document are tied to the outline. Your task is to fill in the right column outline with the actual ideas and points you are making in your writing project. Feel free to adapt and tailor it to your needs, depending on the specifics of your report, letter, or other document.

4. A framework that organizes main ideas and subordinate ideas in a hierarchical series.

Table 6.2 Outline 1

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Introduction | Main Idea |
| Body | I. Main idea: Point 1 Subpoint 1 A.1 specific information 1 A.2 specific information 2 |
| | II. Main idea: Point 2 Subpoint 1 B.1 specific information 1 B.2 specific information 2 |
| Body | III. Main idea: Point 3 Subpoint 1 C.1 specific information 1 C.2 specific information 2 |
| Conclusion | Summary: Main points 1-3 |

Table 6.3 "Outline 2" presents an alternate outline form that may be more suitable for brief documents like letters and e-mails. You can use this format as a model or modify it as needed.

Table 6.3 Outline 2

| | | |
|---|--------------|---|
| 1 | Introduction | General purpose, statement, or thesis statement |
| 2 | Body | Point 1: |
| | | Point 2: |
| | | Point 3: |
| 3 | Conclusion | Summarize main points |

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are how we package information in business communication, and the more efficient the package, the easier the meaning can be delivered.

You may wish to think of each paragraph as a small essay within a larger information platform, defined by a guiding thesis and an organizing principle. The standard five-paragraph essay format used on college term papers is mirrored in individual paragraphs. Often college essays have minimum or maximum word counts, but paragraphs hardly ever have established limits. Each paragraph focuses on one central idea. It can be as long or as short as it needs to be to get the message across, but remember your audience and avoid long, drawn-out paragraphs that may lose your reader's attention.

Just as a document generally has an introduction, body, and conclusion, so does a paragraph. Each paragraph has one idea, thought, or purpose that is stated in an introductory sentence. This is followed by one or more supporting sentences and concluded with a summary statement and transition or link to the next idea, or paragraph. Let's address each in turn:

5. Sentence that states the main thesis, purpose, or subject of the paragraph.
6. Sentences that support the topic sentence and relate clearly to the subject matter of the paragraph and overall document.
7. Sentence that brings the paragraph to a close.

- The **topic sentence**⁵ states the main thesis, purpose, or topic of the paragraph; it defines the subject matter to be addressed in that paragraph.
- **Body sentences**⁶ support the topic sentence and relate clearly to the subject matter of the paragraph and overall document. They may use an organizing principle similar to that of the document itself (chronology, contrast, spatial) or introduce a related organizing principle (point by point, process or procedure).
- The **conclusion sentence**⁷ brings the paragraph to a close; it may do this in any of several ways. It may reinforce the paragraph's main point, summarize the relationships among the body sentences, and/or serve as a transition to the next paragraph.

Effective Sentences

We have talked about the organization of documents and paragraphs, but what about the organization of sentences? You have probably learned in English courses that each sentence needs to have a subject and a verb; most sentences also have an object. There are four basic types of sentences: declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory. Here are some examples:

- **Declarative** – You are invited to join us for lunch.
- **Imperative** – Please join us for lunch.
- **Interrogative** – Would you like to join us for lunch?
- **Exclamatory** – I’m so glad you can join us!

Declarative sentences⁸ make a statement, whereas **interrogative sentences**⁹ ask a question. **Imperative sentences**¹⁰ convey a command, and **exclamatory sentences**¹¹ express a strong emotion. Interrogative and exclamatory sentences are easy to identify by their final punctuation, a question mark and an exclamation point, respectively. In business writing, declarative and imperative sentences are more frequently used.

There are also compound and complex sentences, which may use two or more of the four basic types in combination:

1. *Simple sentence.* Sales have increased.
2. *Compound sentence.* Sales have increased and profits continue to grow.
3. *Complex sentence.* Sales have increased and we have the sales staff to thank.
4. *Compound complex sentence.* Although the economy has been in recession, sales have increased, and we have sales staff to thank.

In our simple sentence, “sales” serves as the subject and “have increased” serves as the verb. The sentence can stand alone because it has the two basic parts that constitute a sentence. In our compound sentence we have two independent clauses that could stand alone; they are joined by the conjunction “and.” In our complex sentence, we have an independent clause, which can stand on its own, combined with a fragment (not a sentence) or dependent clause which, if it were not joined to the independent clause, would not make any sense. The fragment “and we have the sales staff to thank” on its own would have us asking “for what?” as the subject is absent. Complex compound sentences combine a mix of independent and dependent clauses, and at least one of the clauses must be dependent.

8. Sentence that makes a statement.
9. Sentence that asks a question.
10. Sentence that conveys a command.
11. Sentence that expresses a strong emotion.

The ability to write complete, correct sentences is like any other skill—it comes with practice. The more writing you do, as you make an effort to use correct grammar, the easier it will become. Reading audiences, particularly in a business context, will not waste their time on poor writing and will move on. Your challenge as an effective business writer is to know what you are going to write and then to make it come across, via words, symbols, and images, in a clear and concise manner.

Sentences should avoid being vague and focus on specific content. Each sentence should convey a complete thought; a vague sentence fails to meet this criteria. The reader is left wondering what the sentence was supposed to convey.

- Vague – We can facilitate solutions in pursuit of success by leveraging our core strengths.
- Specific – By using our knowledge, experience, and capabilities, we can achieve the production targets for the coming quarter.

Effective sentences also limit the range and scope of each complete thought, avoiding needless complexity. Sometimes writers mistakenly equate long, complex sentences with excellence and skill. Clear, concise, and often brief sentences serve to communicate ideas and concepts in effective and efficient ways that complex, hard-to-follow sentences do not.

- *Complex.* Air transportation features speed of delivery in ways few other forms of transportation can match, including tractor-trailer and rail, and is readily available to the individual consumer and the corporate client alike.
- *Clear.* Air transportation is accessible and faster than railroad or trucking.

Effective sentences are complete, containing a subject and a verb. Incomplete sentences—also known as sentence fragments—demonstrate a failure to pay attention to detail. They often invite misunderstanding, which is the opposite of our goal in business communication.

- Fragments – Although air transportation is fast. Costs more than trucking.
- Complete – Although air transportation is fast, it costs more than trucking.

Effective business writing avoids bureaucratic language and phrases that are the hallmark of decoration. Decoration is a reflection of ritual, and ritual has its role. If

you are the premier of a province, and want to make a resolution declaring today as HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, you are allowed to start the document with “Whereas” because of its ritual importance. Similarly, if you are writing a legal document, tradition calls for certain standard phrases such as “know all men by these presents.” However, in standard business writing, it is best to refrain from using bureaucratic phrases and ritualistic words that decorate and distract the reader from your clear, essential meaning. If the customer, client, or supplier does not understand the message the first time, each follow-up attempt to clarify the meaning through interaction is a cost. **Table 6.4 "Bureaucratic Phrases and Standard Alternatives"** presents a few examples of common bureaucratic phrases and standard English alternatives.

Table 6.4 Bureaucratic Phrases and Standard Alternatives

| Bureaucratic Phrase | Standard English Alternatives |
|---------------------------------|---|
| At the present time | Now, today |
| Concerning the matter of | Regarding, about |
| Despite the fact that | Although, while, even though |
| Due to the fact that | Because, since, as |
| Implement an investigation of | Find out, investigate |
| Inasmuch as | Because, since, as |
| It has been suggested | [name of person or organization] has suggested, said, or stated |
| It is believed that | [name of person or organization] believes, thinks, or says that |
| It is the opinion of the author | I believe, I think, in my opinion |
| Until such time as | Until, when |
| With the exception of | Except, apart from |

In oral communication, repetition can be an effective strategy to reinforce a message, but in written communication it adds needless length to a document and impairs clarity.

- Redundant – In this day and age air transportation by air carrier is the clear winner over alternative modes of conveyance for speed and meeting tight deadlines.
- Clear – Today air transportation is faster than other methods.

When a writer states that something is a “true fact,” a group achieved a “consensus of opinion,” or that the “final outcome” was declared, the word choices reflect an unnecessary redundancy. A fact, consensus, or outcome need not be qualified with words that state similar concepts. If it is fact, it is true. A consensus, by definition, is formed in a group from diverse opinions. An outcome is the final result, so adding the word “final” repeats the fact unnecessarily.

In business writing we seek clear and concise writing that speaks for itself with little or no misinterpretation. The more complex a sentence becomes, the easier it is to lose track of its meaning. When we consider that it may be read by someone for whom English is a second language, the complex sentence becomes even more problematic. If we consider its translation, we add another layer of complexity that can lead to miscommunication. Finally, effective sentences follow the KISS formula for success: Keep It Simple—Simplify!

Transitions

If you were going to build a house, you would need a strong foundation. Could you put the beams to hold your roof in place without anything to keep them in place? Of course not; they would fall down right away. In the same way, the columns or beams are like the main ideas of your document. They need to have connections to each other so that they become interdependent and stay where you want them so that your house, or your writing, doesn't come crashing down.

Transitions¹² involve words or visual devices that help the audience follow the author's ideas, connect the main points to each other, and see the relationships you've created in the information you are presenting. They are often described as bridges between ideas, thoughts or concepts, providing some sense of where you've been and where you are going with your document. Transitions guide the audience in the progression from one significant idea, concept, or point to the next. They can also show the relationships between the main point and the support you are using to illustrate your point, provide examples for it, or refer to outside sources. [Table 6.5 "Types of Transitions in Writing"](#) is a summary of fourteen different types of transitions. Consider them as you contemplate how to bring together your information and make notes on your outline.

12. Bridges between ideas, thoughts or concepts; words, phrases, or visual devices that help the audience follow the speaker's ideas, connect the main points to each other, and see the relationships in a speech.

Table 6.5 Types of Transitions in Writing

| Type | Definition | Examples |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| 1. Internal Previews | An internal preview is a brief statement referring to a point you are going to make. It can forecast or foreshadow a main point in your document. | If we look ahead to, next we'll examine, now we can focus our attention on, first we'll look at, then we'll examine |
| 2. Signposts | A signpost alerts the audience you are moving from one topic to the next. Sign posts or signal words draw attention to themselves and focus the audience's attention. | Stop and consider, we can now address, turning from/to, another, this reminds me of, I would like to emphasize |
| 3. Internal Summaries | An internal summary briefly covers information or alludes to information introduced previously. It can remind an audience of a previous point and reinforce information covered in your document. | As I have said, as we have seen, as mentioned earlier, in any event, in conclusion, in other words, in short, on the whole, therefore, to summarize, as a result, as has been noted previously |
| 4. Sequence | A sequence transition outlines a hierarchical order or series of steps in your document. It can illustrate order or steps in a logical process. | First...second...third, furthermore, next, last, still, also, and then, besides, finally |
| 5. Time | A time transition focuses on the chronological aspects of your order. Particularly useful in an article utilizing a story, this transition can illustrate for the audience progression of time. | Before, earlier, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, then, until, afterward |
| 6. Addition | An addition or additive transition contributes to a previous point. This transition can build on a previous point and extend the discussion. | Additionally, not to mention, in addition to, furthermore, either, neither, besides, on, in fact, as a matter of fact, actually, not only, but also, as well as |
| 7. Similarity | A transition by similarity draws a parallel between two ideas, concepts or examples. It can indicate a common area between points for the audience. | In the same way, by the same token, equally, similarly, just as we have seen, in the same vein |

| Type | Definition | Examples |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| 8. Comparison | A transition by comparison draws a distinction between two ideas, concepts or examples. It can indicate a common or divergent area between points for the audience. | Like, in relation to, bigger than, the fastest, larger than, than any other, is bigger than, both, either...or, likewise |
| 9. Contrast | A transition by contrast draws a distinction of difference, opposition, or irregularity between two ideas, concepts or examples. This transition can indicate a key distinction between points for the audience. | But, neither...nor, however, on the other hand, although, despite, even though, in contrast, in spite of, on the contrary, conversely, unlike, while instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, regardless, still, though, yet, although |
| 10. Cause and Effect, Result | A transition by cause and effect or result illustrates a relationship between two ideas, concepts or examples and may focus on the outcome or result. It can illustrate a relationship between points for the audience. | As a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, accordingly, so, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end, for this reason, as a result, because, therefore, consequently, as a consequence, and the outcome was |
| 11. Examples | A transition by example illustrates a connection between a point and an example or examples. You may find visual aids work well with this type of transition. | In fact, as we can see, after all, even, for example, for instance, of course, specifically, such as, in the following example, to illustrate my point |
| 12. Place | A place transition refers to a location, often in a spatially organized essay, of one point of emphasis to another. Again, visual aids work well when discussing physical location with the reading audience. | Opposite to, there, to the left, to the right, above, adjacent to, elsewhere, far, farther on, below, beyond, closer to, here, near, nearby, next to |
| 13. Clarification | A clarification transition restates or further develops a main idea or point. It can also serve as a signal to a key point. | To clarify, that is, I mean, in other words, to put it another way that is to say, to rephrase it, in order to explain, this means |

| Type | Definition | Examples |
|-------------------|--|---|
| 14. Concession | A concession transition indicates knowledge of contrary information. It can address a perception the audience may hold and allow for clarification. | We can see that while, although it is true that, granted that, while it may appear that, naturally, of course, I can see that, I admit that while |

KEY TAKEAWAY

Organization is the key to clear writing. Organize your document using key elements, an organizing principle, and an outline. Organize your paragraphs and sentences so that your audience can understand them, and use transitions to move from one point to the next.

EXERCISES

1. What functions does organization serve in a document? Can they be positive or negative? Explain and discuss with a classmate.
2. Create an outline from a sample article or document. Do you notice an organizational pattern? Explain and discuss with a classmate.
3. Which of the following sentences are good examples of correct and clear business English? For sentences needing improvement, describe what is wrong and write a sentence that corrects the problem. Discuss your answers with your classmates.
 - a. Marlys has been chosen to receive a promotion next month.
 - b. Because her work is exemplary.
 - c. At such time as it becomes feasible, it is the intention of our department to facilitate a lunch meeting to congratulate Marlys.
 - d. As a result of budget allocation analysis and examination of our financial condition, it is indicated that salary compensation for Marlys can be increased to a limited degree.
 - e. When will Marlys's promotion be official?
 - f. I am so envious!
 - g. Among those receiving promotions, Marlys, Bob, Germaine, Terry, and Akiko.
 - h. The president asked all those receiving promotions come to the meeting.
 - i. Please attend a meeting for all employees who will be promoted next month.
 - j. Marlys intends to use her new position to mentor employees joining the firm, which will encourage commitment and good work habits.
4. Find an example of a poor sentence or a spelling or grammar error that was published online or in print and share your finding with the class.

6.2 Writing Style

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Demonstrate your ability to prepare and present information using a writing style that will increase understanding, retention, and motivation to act.

You are invited to a business dinner at an expensive restaurant that has been the top-rated dining establishment in your town for decades. You are aware of the restaurant's dress code, which forbids casual attire such as jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers. What will you wear? If you want to fit in with the other guests and make a favourable impression on your hosts, you will choose a good quality suit or dress (and appropriately dressy shoes and accessories). You will avoid calling undue attention to yourself with clothing that is overly formal—an evening gown or a tuxedo, for example—or that would distract from the business purpose of the occasion by being overly revealing or provocative. You may feel that your freedom to express yourself by dressing as you please is being restricted, or you may appreciate the opportunity to look your best. Either way, adhering to these style conventions will serve you well in a business context.

The same is true in business writing. Unlike some other kinds of writing such as poetry or fiction, business writing is not an opportunity for self-expression. Instead it calls for a fairly conservative and unadorned style. **Writing style**¹³, also known as voice or tone, is the manner in which a writer addresses the reader. It involves qualities of writing such as vocabulary and figures of speech, phrasing, rhythm, sentence structure, and paragraph length. Developing an appropriate business writing style will reflect well on you and increase your success in any career.

Figure 6.2



Your writing style reflects on you when you are not there to represent yourself. Make sure your style is professional.

Formal versus Informal

There was a time when many business documents were written in third person to give them the impression of objectivity. This formal style was often passive and wordy. Today it has given way to active, clear, concise writing, sometimes known as

13. Also known as voice or tone; the manner in which a writer addresses the reader.

“Plain English.” Bailey, E. P. (2008). *Plain English at work: A guide to business writing and speaking*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. As business and industry increasingly trade across borders and languages, writing techniques that obscure meaning or impede understanding can cause serious problems. Efficient writing styles have become the norm. Still, you will experience in your own writing efforts this “old school versus new school” writing debate over abbreviations, contractions, and the use of informal language in what was once considered a formal business context. Consider the following comparison of informal versus formal and bureaucratic styles.

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Bureaucratic: Attached is the latest delivery data represented in topographical forms pursuant to the directive ABC123 of the air transportation guide supplied by Transport Canada in September of 2008.

- Formal – Please note the attached delivery data for July 2009.
- Informal – Here’s the delivery data for last month.

While it is generally agreed that bureaucratic forms can obscure meaning, there is a debate on the use of formal versus informal styles in business communication. Formal styles often require more detail, adhere to rules of etiquette, and avoid shortcuts like contractions and folksy expressions. Informal styles reflect everyday speech patterns and may include contractions and colloquial expressions. Many managers prefer not to see contractions in a formal business context. Others will point out that a comma preceding the last item in a series (known as the “serial comma” or “Oxford comma”) is the standard, not the exception. Some will make a general recommendation that you should always “keep it professional.” Here lies the heart of the debate: what is professional writing in a business context? If you answered “it depends,” you are correct.

Keep in mind that audiences have expectations and your job is to meet them. Some business audiences prefer a fairly formal tone. If you include contractions or use a style that is too casual, you may lose their interest and attention; you may also give them a negative impression of your level of expertise. If, however, you are writing for an audience that expects informal language, you may lose their interest and attention by writing too formally; your writing may also come across as arrogant or pompous. It is not that one style is better than the other, but simply that styles of writing vary across a range of options. Business writing may need to meet legal standards and include references, as we see in the bureaucratic example above, but that is generally not the norm for communications within an organization. The skilled business writer will know his or her audience and will adapt the message to

best facilitate communication. Choosing the right style can make a significant impact on how your writing is received.

You may hear reference to a conversational tone in writing as one option in business communication. A **conversational tone**¹⁴, as the name implies, resembles oral communication in style, tone, and word choice. It can be appropriate for some audiences, and may serve you well in specific contexts, but it can easily come across as less than professional.

If you use expressions that imply a relationship or a special awareness of information such as “you know,” or “as we discussed,” without explaining the necessary background, your writing may be seen as overly familiar, intimate, or even secretive. Trust is the foundation for all communication interactions and a careless word or phrase can impair trust.

If you want to use humour, think carefully about how your audience will interpret it. Humour is a fragile form of communication that requires an awareness of irony, of juxtaposition, or a shared sense of attitudes, beliefs, and values. Different people find humour in different situations, and what is funny to one person may be dull, or even hurtful, to someone else.

Although there are business situations such as an interview or a performance self-evaluation where you need to state your accomplishments, in general business writing it is best to avoid self-referential comments that allude to your previous successes. These can come across as selfish or arrogant. Instead, be generous in giving credit where credit is due. Take every opportunity to thank your colleagues for their efforts and to acknowledge those who contributed good ideas.

Jargon is a vocabulary that has been developed by people in a particular group, discipline, or industry, and it can be a useful shorthand as long as the audience knows its meaning. For example, when writing for bank customers, you could refer to “ATM transactions” and feel confident that your readers would know what you meant. It would be unnecessary and inappropriate to write “Automated Teller Machine transactions.” Similarly, if you were working in a hospital, you would probably use many medical terms in your interactions with other medical professionals. However, if you were a hospital employee writing to a patient, using medical jargon would be inappropriate, as it would not contribute to the patient’s understanding.

14. Writing style that resembles oral communication.

Finally, in a business context, remember that conversational style is not an excuse to use poor grammar, disrespectful or offensive slang, or profanity. Communication serves as the bridge between minds and your written words will represent you in your absence. One strategy when trying to use a conversation tone is to ask yourself, “Would I say it in this way to their face?” A follow-up question to consider is, “Would I say it in this way in front of everyone?” Your professional use of language is one the hallmark skills in business, and the degree to which you master its use will reflect itself in your success. Take care, take time, and make sure what you write communicates a professional tone that positively represents you and your organization.

Figure 6.3



Sewing, like many other fields of expertise, has its own jargon.

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Introductions: Direct and Indirect

Sometimes the first sentence is the hardest to write. When you know the two main opening strategies it may not make it any easier, but it will give a plan and form a framework. Business documents often incorporate one of two opening strategies regardless of their organizational pattern. The direct pattern states the main purpose directly, at the beginning, and leaves little room for misinterpretation. The indirect pattern, where you introduce your main idea after the opening paragraph, can be useful if you need a strong opening to get the attention of what you perceive may be an uninterested audience. Normally, if you expect a positive response from the reader you will choose a direct opening, being clear from the first sentence about your purpose and goal. If you do not expect a positive reception, or have to deliver bad news, you may want to be less direct. Each style has its purpose and use; the skilled business writer will learn to be direct and be able to present bad news with a positive opening paragraph.

Adding Emphasis

There are times when you will want to add emphasis to a word, phrase, or statistic so that it stands out from the surrounding text. The use of visual aids in your writing can be an excellent option, and can reinforce the written discussion. For example, if you write that sales are up 4 percent over this time last year, the number alone may not get the attention it deserves. If, however, near the text section you feature a bar graph demonstrating the sales growth figures, the representation of the information in textual and graphical way may reinforce its importance.

As you look across the top of your word processing program you may notice **bold**, *italics*, underline, highlights, your choice of colours, and a host of interesting fonts. Although it can be entertaining to experiment with these visual effects, do not use them just for the sake of decoration. Consistency and branding are important features of your firm's public image, so you will want the visual aspects of your writing to support that image. Still, when you need to highlight an important fact or emphasize a key question in a report, your readers will appreciate your use of visual effects to draw their attention. Consider the following examples:

- Bullets can be effective when used with discretion.

Take care when using the following:

1. Numbers
2. With subheadings
3. In serial lists
4. As they can get
5. A bit overwhelming to the point where
6. The reader loses his or her interest

Emphasis can be influenced by your choice of font. Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman and Garamond, have decorative ends that make the font easy to read. Sans serif fonts, like Arial, lack these visual cues and often serve better as headers.

You can also vary the emphasis according to where you place information within a sentence:

- *Maximum emphasis.* Sales have increased across Canada because of the latest promotional efforts in our largest and most successful market.
- *Medium emphasis.* Because of the latest promotional efforts in our largest and most successful market, sales have increased across Canada.
- *Minimum emphasis.* Canada, which has experienced a sales increase, is our largest and most successful market.

The information at end of the sentence is what people often recall, and is therefore normally considered the location of maximum emphasis. The second best position for recall is the beginning of the sentence, while the middle of the sentence is the area with the least recall. If you want to highlight a point, place it at the beginning or end of the sentence, and if you want to deemphasize a point, the middle is your

best option. McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Active versus Passive Voice

You want your writing to be engaging. Which sentence would you rather read?

- A – All sales orders are processed daily by Mackenzie.
- B – Mackenzie processes all sales orders daily.

Most readers prefer sentence B, but why? You'll recall that all sentences have a subject and a verb, but you may not have paid much attention to their functions. Let's look at how the subject and verb function in these two sentences. In sentence A, the subject is "Mackenzie," and the subject is the doer of the action expressed by the verb (processes). In sentence B, the subject is "sales orders," and the subject is the receiver of the action expressed by the verb (are processed). Sentence A is written in **active voice**¹⁵—a sentence structure in which the subject carries out the action. Sentence B is written in **passive voice**¹⁶—a sentence structure in which the subject receives the action.

Active sentences tend to be shorter, more precise, and easier to understand. This is especially true because passive sentences can be written in ways that do not tell the reader who the doer of the action is. For example, "All sales orders are processed daily" is a complete and correct sentence in passive voice.

Active voice is the clear choice for a variety of contexts, but not all. When you want to deemphasize the doer of the action, you may write, "Ten late arrivals were recorded this month" and not even mention who was late. The passive form doesn't place blame or credit, so it can be more diplomatic in some contexts. Passive voice allows the writer to avoid personal references or personal pronouns (he, she, they) to create a more objective tone. There are also situations where the doer of the action is unknown, as in "graffiti was painted on the side of our building last night."

Overall, business communication resources tend to recommend active voice as the preferred style. Still, the styles themselves are not the problem or challenge, but it is how we use them that matters. A skilled business writer will see both styles as options within a range of choices and learn to distinguish when each style is most appropriate to facilitate communication.

15. Sentence structure in which the subject carries out the action.

16. Sentence structure in which the subject receives the action.

Commonly Confused Words

The sentences in [Table 6.6 "Common Errors in English"](#) focus on some of the most common errors in English. You may recall this exercise from the introduction of this chapter. How did you do? Visit the “Additional Resources” section at the end of the chapter for some resources on English grammar and usage.

Table 6.6 Common Errors in English

| | | | | |
|---|---|------------|--|--|
| 1. <i>accept</i> or <i>except</i> | The office will _____ applications until 5 p.m. on the 31st. | accept | Attendance is required for all employees _____ supervisors. | except |
| 2. <i>affect</i> or <i>effect</i> | To _____ the growth of plants, we can regulate the water supply. | affect | A lack of water has a predictable _____ on most plants. | effect |
| 3. <i>e.g.</i> or <i>i.e.</i> | Please order 2,000 imprinted giveaways (_____, pens or coffee mugs) | e.g. | Charge them to my account (_____, account #98765). | i.e. |
| 4. <i>its</i> or <i>it's</i> | The department surpassed _____ previous sales record this quarter. | its | _____ my opinion that we reached peak oil in 2008. | It's |
| 5. <i>lay</i> or <i>lie</i> | Please _____ the report on the desk. | lay | The doctor asked him to _____ down on the examination table. | lie |
| 6. <i>pressure</i> or <i>pressurize</i> | We need to _____ the liquid nitrogen tanks. | pressurize | It might be possible to _____ him to resign. | pressure |
| 7. <i>principle</i> or <i>principal</i> | It's the basic _____ of farming: no water, no food. | principle | The _____ reason for the trip is to attend the sales meeting. | principal |
| 8. <i>regardless</i> or <i>irregardless</i> | _____ of what we do, gas prices are unlikely to go back down. | Regardless | _____ of your beliefs, please try to listen with an open mind. | Regardless (<i>Irregardless</i> is not a standard word; see |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|---|------------------|
| | | | | your dictionary) |
| 9. <i>than</i> or <i>then</i> | This year's losses were worse _____ last year's. | than | If we can cut our costs, _____ it might be possible to break even. | then |
| 10. <i>that</i> or <i>which</i> | _____ type of marketing data did you need? | Which | Karen misplaced the report, _____ caused a delay in making a decision. | which |
| | There are several kinds of data _____ could be useful. | that | | |
| 11. <i>there</i> , <i>their</i> , or <i>they're</i> | The report is _____, in the top file drawer. | there | _____ strategic advantage depends on a wide distribution network. | Their |
| | _____ planning to attend the sales meeting in Montreal. | They're | | |
| 12. <i>to</i> , <i>too</i> , or <i>two</i> | Customers need _____ drive slower if they want to save gas. | to | After sales meeting, you should visit customers in the Montreal area _____. | too |
| | In fact, the _____ of you should make some customer visits together. | two | | |
| 13. <i>uninterested</i> or <i>disinterested</i> | He would be the best person to make a decision, since he isn't biased and is relatively _____ in the outcome. | disinterested | The sales manager tried to speak dynamically, but the sales reps were simply _____ in what he had to say. | uninterested |
| 14. <i>who</i> , <i>whom</i> , <i>who's</i> , or <i>whose</i> | _____ truck is that? | Whose | _____ going to pay for the repairs? | Who's |
| | _____ will go to the interview? | Who | To _____ should we address the thank-you note? | whom |
| 15 <i>your</i> or <i>you're</i> | My office is bigger than _____ cubicle. | your | _____ going to learn how to avoid | You're |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | making these common mistakes in English. | |
|--|--|--|--|--|

Making Errors at the Speed of Light

In business and industry there is increasing pressure to produce under deadlines that in some respects have been artificially accelerated by the immediacy inherent in technological communication devices. If you receive an e-mail or text message while you are in the middle of studying a complex problem, you may be tempted to “get it out of the way” by typing out a quick reply, but in your haste you may fail to qualify, include important information, or even check to make sure you have hit “Reply” and not “Reply to All” or even “Delete.” Take care to pause and review your text message, e-mail, or document before you consider it complete. Here is a quick electronic communication do/don’t list to keep in mind before you click “send.”

Do remember the following:

- Everything you access via an employer’s system is subject to inspection.
- Everything you write or record reflects you and your business or organization, even if it is stored in a Google or Yahoo! account.
- Respect personal space by not forwarding every e-mail you think is funny.
- Use a concise but relevant and informative phrase for the subject line.
- E-mail the receiver before sending large attachments, as they may exceed the limit of the receiver’s in-box.
- Attach your intended attachments.

KEY TAKEAWAY

An appropriate business writing style can be formal or informal, depending on the context, but it should always reflect favourably on the writer and the organization.

EXERCISES

1. Select at least three examples of writing from different kinds of sources, such as a government Web site, a textbook, a popular magazine, and a novel. According to the style characteristics discussed in this section, how would you characterize the style of each? Select a paragraph to rewrite in a different style—for example, if the style is formal, make it informal; if the selection is written in active voice, make it passive. Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. What are some qualities of a good business writing style? What makes certain styles more appropriate for business than others? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.
3. Find an example of formal writing and write an informal version. Please share with your classmates.
4. Find an example of informal writing and write a formal version. Please share with your classmates.
5. You are assigned to a work team that has to come up with a formal declaration and an informal explanation for the declaration. The declaration could be a memo indicating that your business will be observing a holiday (each team should have a different holiday).
6. How would you characterize your writing style? Do you need to make modifications to make your style suitable for business writing? Write a one- to two-page essay on this subject.

6.3 Making an Argument

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Demonstrate how to form a clear argument with appropriate support to persuade your audience.
2. Recognize and understand inherent weaknesses in fallacies.

According to the famous satirist Jonathan Swift, “Argument is the worst sort of conversation.” You may be inclined to agree. When people argue, they are engaged in conflict and it’s usually not pretty. It sometimes appears that way because people resort to fallacious arguments or false statements, or they simply do not treat each other with respect. They get defensive, try to prove their own points, and fail to listen to each other.

But this should not be what happens in written argument. Instead, when you make an argument in your writing, you will want to present your position with logical points, supporting each point with appropriate sources. You will want to give your audience every reason to perceive you as ethical and trustworthy. Your audience will expect you to treat them with respect, and to present your argument in a way that does not make them defensive. Contribute to your credibility by building sound arguments and using strategic arguments with skill and planning.

In this section we will briefly discuss the classic form of an argument, a more modern interpretation, and finally seven basic arguments you may choose to use. Imagine that these are tools in your toolbox and that you want to know how each is effectively used. Know that the people who try to persuade you—from telemarketers to politicians—usually have these tools at hand.

Let’s start with a classical rhetorical strategy. It asks the rhetorician, speaker, or author to frame arguments in the following steps:

Table 6.7 Classical Rhetorical Strategy

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 1. Exordium | Prepares the audience to consider your argument |
| 2. Narration | Provides the audience with the necessary background or context for your argument |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 3. Proposition | Introduces your claim being argued in the document |
| 4. Confirmation | Offers the audience evidence to support your argument |
| 5. Refutation | Introduces to the audience and then discounts or refutes the counterarguments or objections |
| 6. Peroration | Your conclusion of your argument |

This is a standard pattern in rhetoric and you will probably see it in both speech and English courses. The pattern is useful to guide you in preparing your document and can serve as a valuable checklist to ensure you are prepared. While this formal pattern has distinct advantages, you may not see it used exactly as indicated here on a daily basis. What may be more familiar to you is Stephen Toulmin's rhetorical strategy, which focuses on three main elements (see [Table 6.8 "Toulmin's Three-Part Rhetorical Strategy"](#)). Toulmin, S. (1958). *The uses of argument*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Table 6.8 Toulmin's Three-Part Rhetorical Strategy

| Element | Description | Example |
|------------|--|---|
| 1. Claim | Your statement of belief or truth | It is important to spay or neuter your pet. |
| 2. Data | Your supporting reasons for the claim | Millions of unwanted pets are euthanized every year. |
| 3. Warrant | You create the connection between the claim and the supporting reasons | Pets that are spayed or neutered do not reproduce, preventing the production of unwanted animals. |

Toulmin's rhetorical strategy is useful in that it makes the claim explicit, clearly illustrates the relationship between the claim and the data, and allows the reader to follow the writer's reasoning. You may have a good idea or point, but your audience will want to know how you arrived at that claim or viewpoint. The warrant addresses the inherent and often unsaid question, "Why is this data so important to your topic?" In so doing, it helps you to illustrate relationships between information for your audience.

Effective Argumentation Strategies: GASCAP/T

Here is a useful way of organizing and remembering seven key argumentative strategies:

1. Argument by Generalization
2. Argument by Analogy
3. Argument by Sign
4. Argument by Consequence
5. Argument by Authority
6. Argument by Principle
7. Argument by Testimony

Richard Fulkerson notes that a single strategy is sufficient to make an argument some of the time, but it is often better to combine several strategies to make an effective argument. Fulkerson, R. (1996). *The Toulmin model of argument and the teaching of composition*. In E. Barbara, P. Resch, & D. Tenney (Eds.), *Argument revisited: argument redefined: negotiating meaning the composition classroom* (pp. 45–72). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. He organized the argumentative strategies in this way to compare the differences, highlight the similarities, and allow for their discussion. This model, often called by its acronym GASCAP, is a useful strategy to summarize six key arguments and is easy to remember. Here we have adapted it, adding one argument that is often used in today’s speeches and presentations, the argument by testimony. [Table 6.9 "GASCAP/T Strategies"](#) presents each argument, provides a definition of the strategy and an example, and examines ways to evaluate each approach.

Table 6.9 GASCAP/T Strategies

| | Argument by | Claim | Example | Evaluation |
|---|----------------|---|---|--|
| G | Generalization | Whatever is true of a good example or sample will be true of everything like it or the population it came from. | If you can vote, drive, and die for your country, you should also be allowed to buy alcohol. | STAR System: For it to be reliable, we need a (S) sufficient number of (T) typical, (A) accurate, and (R) reliable examples. |
| A | Analogy | Two situations, things or ideas are alike in | Alcohol is a drug. So is tobacco. They alter perceptions, have an impact on physiological and psychological | Watch for adverbs that end in “ly,” as they qualify, or lessen the relationship between the examples. Words like “probably,” |

| | Argument by | Claim | Example | Evaluation |
|---|-------------|---|---|---|
| | | observable ways and will tend to be alike in many other ways | systems, and are federally regulated substances. | “maybe,” “could,” “may,” or “usually” all weaken the relationship. |
| S | Sign | Statistics, facts, or cases indicate meaning, much like a stop sign means “stop.” | Motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol occur at significant rates among adults of all ages in Canada. | Evaluate the relationship between the sign and look for correlation, where the presenter says what the facts “mean.” Does the sign say that? Does it say more? What is not said? Is it relevant? |
| C | Cause | If two conditions always appear together, they are causally related. | In the United States, the insurance industry has been significantly involved in state and national legislation requiring proof of insurance, changes in graduated driver’s licences, and the national change in the drinking age from age 18 to age 21. | Watch out for “after the fact, therefore because of the fact” (<i>post hoc, ergo propter hoc</i>) thinking. There might not be a clear connection, and it might not be the whole picture. Mothers Against Drunk Driving might have also been involved with each example of legislation. |
| A | Authority | What a credible source indicates is probably true. | According to Transport Canada, older drivers are increasingly involved in motor vehicle accidents. | Is the source legitimate and is their information trustworthy? Institutes, boards, and people often have agendas and distinct points of view. |
| P | Principle | An accepted or proper truth | Any proposed change in the drinking age should be put to a vote. It’s not about alcohol, it’s about our freedom of speech in a democratic society. | Is the principle being invoked generally accepted? Is the claim, data or warrant actually related to the principle stated? Are there common exceptions to the principle? What are the practical consequences of following the principle in this case? |

| | Argument by | Claim | Example | Evaluation |
|---|-------------|---------------------|---|---|
| T | Testimony | Personal experience | I've lost friends from age 18 to 67 to alcohol. It impacts all ages, and its effects are cumulative. Let me tell you about two friends in particular. | Is the testimony authentic? Is it relevant? Is it representative of other's experiences? Use the STAR system to help evaluate the use of testimony. |

Evidence

Now that we've clearly outlined several argument strategies, how do you support your position with evidence or warrants? If your premise or the background from which you start is valid, and your claim is clear and clearly related, the audience will naturally turn their attention to "prove it." This is where the relevance of evidence becomes particularly important. Here are three guidelines to consider in order to ensure your evidence passes the "so what?" test of relevance in relation to your claim. Make sure your evidence has the following traits:

1. *Supportive*. Examples are clearly representative, statistics are accurate, testimony is authoritative, and information is reliable.
2. *Relevant*. Examples clearly relate to the claim or topic, and you are not comparing "apples to oranges."
3. *Effective*. Examples are clearly the best available to support the claim, quality is preferred to quantity, there are only a few well-chosen statistics, facts, or data.

Appealing to Emotions

While we've highlighted several points to consider when selecting information to support your claim, know that Aristotle strongly preferred an argument based in logic over emotion. Can the same be said for your audience, and to what degree is emotion and your appeal to it in your audience a part of modern life?

Emotions¹⁷ are a psychological and physical reaction, such as fear or anger, to stimuli that we experience as a feeling. Our feelings or emotions directly impact our own point of view and readiness to communicate, but also influence how, why, and when we say things. Emotions influence not only what you say or how you say it, but also what you hear or how you hear it. At times, emotions can be challenging to control. Emotions will move your audience, and possibly even move you, to change or act in certain ways.

17. A psychological and physical reaction, such as fear or anger, to stimuli that we experience as a feeling.

Aristotle thought the best and most preferable way to persuade an audience was through the use of logic, free of emotion. He also recognized that people are often motivated, even manipulated, by the exploitation of their emotions. In a business context, we still engage in this debate, demanding to know the facts separate from personal opinions or agendas, but see the use of emotional appeal to sell products.

Marketing experts are famous for creating a need or associating an emotion with a brand or label in order to sell it. You will speak the language of your audience in your document, and may choose to appeal to emotion, but you need to consider how the strategy works, as it may be considered a tool that has two edges.

If we think of the appeal to emotion as a knife, we can see it has two edges. One edge can cut your audience, and the other can cut you. If you advance an appeal to emotion in your document on spaying and neutering pets, and discuss the millions of unwanted pets that are killed each year, you may elicit an emotional response. If you use this approach repeatedly, your audience may grow weary of this approach, and it will lose its effectiveness. If you change your topic to the use of animals in research, the same strategy may apply, but repeated attempts to elicit an emotional response may backfire (i.e., in essence “cutting” you) and produce a negative response called “emotional resistance.”

Emotional resistance¹⁸ involves getting tired, often to the point of rejection, of hearing messages that attempt to elicit an emotional response. Emotional appeals can wear out the audience’s capacity to receive the message. As Aristotle outlined, ethos (credibility), logos (logic), and pathos (passion, enthusiasm, and emotional response) constitute the building blocks of any document. It’s up to you to create a balanced document, where you may appeal to emotion, but choose to use it judiciously.

On a related point, the use of an emotional appeal may also impair your ability to write persuasively or effectively. For example, if you choose to present an article about suicide to persuade people against committing it and you start showing a photo of your brother or sister that you lost to suicide, your emotional response may cloud your judgement and get in the way of your thinking. Never use a personal story, or even a story of someone you do not know, if the inclusion of that story causes you to lose control. While it’s important to discuss relevant topics, you need to assess your relationship to the message. Your documents should not be an exercise in therapy. Otherwise, you will sacrifice ethos and credibility, even your effectiveness, if you “lose it” because you are really not ready to discuss the issue.

18. Occurs when the audience gets tired, often to the point of rejection, of hearing messages that attempt to elicit an emotional response.

Recognizing Fallacies

“**Fallacy**¹⁹” is another way of saying false logic. Fallacies or rhetorical tricks deceive your audience with their style, drama, or pattern, but add little to your document in terms of substance. They are best avoided because they can actually detract from your effectiveness. There are several techniques or “tricks” that allow the writer to rely on style without offering substantive argument, to obscure the central message, or twist the facts to their own gain. **Table 6.10 "Fallacies"** examines the eight classical fallacies. Learn to recognize them so they can’t be used against you, and learn to avoid using them with your audience.

Table 6.10 Fallacies

| Fallacy | Definition | Example |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Red Herring | Any diversion intended to distract attention from the main issue, particularly by relating the issue to a common fear. | Why should I pay the speeding ticket when police should be dealing with the serious problems in our city like gangs and murderers? |
| 2. Straw Man | A weak argument set up to easily refute and distract attention from stronger arguments. | I don’t support animal rights because animal rights activists believe that animals are superior to human beings. I think we should put people before animals. |
| 3. Begging the Question | Claiming the truth of the very matter in question, as if it were already an obvious conclusion. | Useless courses like Business Communication should be dropped from the college’s curriculum. |
| 4. Circular Argument | The proposition is used to prove itself. Assumes the very thing it aims to prove. Related to begging the question. | Once a liar, always a liar. |
| 5. Ad Populum | Appeals to a common belief of some people, often prejudicial, and states everyone holds this belief. Also called the bandwagon fallacy, as people “jump on the bandwagon” of a perceived popular view. | More young people are playing World of Warcraft everyday as violence all around us is increasing. Violent video games cause violent behaviour. |
| 6. Ad Hominem or “Argument | Argument against the man instead of his message. Stating that someone’s argument is wrong solely because of | Our mayor is a drunk who’s cheated on his wife. How can we trust him on the issues of safety and family? |

19. False logic.

| Fallacy | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| against the Man” | something about the person rather than about the argument itself. | |
| 7. Non Sequitur or “It Does Not Follow” | The conclusion does not follow from the premises. They are not related. | Since the “Occupy” movement of 2011, we’ve seen an increase in the number of UFO sightings. |
| 8. Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc or “After This, Therefore because of This” | It is also called a coincidental correlation. | She got sick after dining out last night, so the food must have made her sick. |

Ethical Considerations in Persuasion

In his book *Ethics in Human Communication*, Richard Johannesen offers eleven points to consider when communicating. Although they are related to public speaking, they are also useful in business writing. You may note that many of his cautions are clearly related to the fallacies we’ve discussed. His main points reiterate many of the points across this chapter and should be kept in mind as you prepare, and present, your persuasive message. Johannesen, R. (1996). *Ethics in human communication* (4th ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Do not

- use false, fabricated, misrepresented, distorted, or irrelevant evidence to support arguments or claims;
- intentionally use unsupported, misleading, or illogical reasoning;
- represent yourself as informed or an “expert” on a subject when you are not;
- use irrelevant appeals to divert attention from the issue at hand;
- ask your audience to link your idea or proposal to emotion-laden values, motives, or goals to which it is actually not related;
- deceive your audience by concealing your real purpose, your self-interest, the group you represent, or your position as an advocate of a viewpoint;
- distort, hide, or misrepresent the number, scope, intensity, or undesirable features of consequences or effects;
- use emotional appeals that lack a supporting basis of evidence or reasoning;

- oversimplify complex, gradation-laden situations into simplistic, two-valued, either-or, polar views or choices;
- pretend certainty where tentativeness and degrees of probability would be more accurate;
- advocate something that you yourself do not believe in.

Aristotle said the mark of a good person, well spoken, was a clear command of the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. He discussed the idea of perceiving the various points of view related to a topic and their thoughtful consideration. While it's important to be able to perceive the complexity of a case, you are not asked to be a lawyer and defend a client.

In your message to persuade, consider honesty and integrity as you assemble your arguments. Your audience will appreciate your thoughtful consideration of more than one view and your understanding of the complexity of the issue, thus building your ethos, or credibility, as you present your document. Be careful not to stretch the facts, or assemble them only to prove your point; instead, prove the argument on its own merits. Deception, coercion, intentional bias, manipulation and bribery should have no place in your message to persuade.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The art of argument in writing involves presenting supportive, relevant, effective evidence for each point and doing it in a respectful and ethical manner.

EXERCISES

1. Select a piece of persuasive writing such as a newspaper op-ed essay, a magazine article, or a blog post. Examine the argument, the main points, and how the writer supports them. Which strategies from the foregoing section does the writer use? Does the writer use any fallacies or violate any ethical principles? Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. Find one slogan or logo that you perceive as persuasive and share it with your classmates.
3. Find an example of a piece of writing that appears to want to be persuasive, but doesn't get the job done. Write a brief review and share it with classmates.
4. In what ways might the choice of how to organize a document involve ethics? Explain your response and discuss it with your class.

6.4 Paraphrase and Summary versus Plagiarism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the difference between paraphrasing or summarizing and plagiarism.
2. Demonstrate how to give proper credit to sources that are quoted verbatim, and sources whose ideas are paraphrased or summarized.
3. Demonstrate your ability to paraphrase in one or more written assignments.

Even if you are writing on a subject you know well, you will usually get additional information from other sources. How you represent others' ideas, concepts, and words is critical to your credibility and the effectiveness of your document. Let's say you are reading a section of a document and find a point that relates well to your current writing assignment. How do you represent what you have read in your work? You have several choices.

One choice is simply to reproduce the quote **verbatim**²⁰, or word for word, making sure that you have copied all words and punctuation accurately. In this case, you will put quotation marks around the quoted passage (or, if it is more than about fifty words long, inset it with wider margins than the body of your document) and give credit to the source. The format you use for your source citation will vary according to the discipline or industry of your audience; common formats include APA (American Psychological Association), MLA (Modern Language Association), and CMS (Chicago Manual of Style).

Another common strategy in business writing is to **paraphrase**²¹, or rewrite the information in your own words. You will relate the main point, but need to take care not to copy the original. You will give credit where credit is due, but your citation will be more informal, such as "A *Globe and Mail* article dated July 8, 2012, described some of the disagreements among G-8 nations about climate change." Here are several steps that can help you paraphrase a passage while respecting its original author:

20. Word for word.

21. To rewrite information in your own words.

1. Read the passage out loud, paying attention to the complete thought rather than the individual words.
2. Explain the concept in your own words to a friend or colleague, out loud, face-to-face.

3. Write the concept in your own words, and add one or more illustrative examples of the concept that are meaningful to you.
4. Reread the original passage and see how your version compares with it in terms of grammar, word choice, example, and conveyance of meaning.
5. If your writing parrots the original passage or merely substitutes synonyms for words in the original, return to step one and start over, remembering that your goal is to express the central concepts, not to “translate” one word into another.
6. When you are satisfied that your expression of the concept can stand on its own merit, include it in your document and cite the original author as the source of the idea.

Summarizing information is another common way of integrating information into your original work that requires care and attention to detail. To **summarize**²² is to reduce a concept, idea, or data set to its most basic point or element. You may have a literature survey to summarize related information in the field under consideration, or a section on background to serve a similar purpose. Suppose you are reporting on a business situation and it occurs to you that one of Shakespeare’s plays has a plot that resembles your situation. You may wish to summarize the Shakespeare play in a few sentences before drawing parallels between it and your current situation. This may help readers to remember and understand your report. Regardless of how or where you incorporate a summary within your document, give attention to its original context and retain its essential meaning free of distortion in the new context of your writing.

Because summarizing is an act of reductionism, some of the original richness in detail that surrounds the original will be necessarily lost. Think of a photograph you have taken in the past that featured several people you know. Using a software program that allows you to modify and manipulate the image, draw a box around only one face. Delete the rest of the contents of the photo so only the information in the box remains. Part of the photo is intact, and one person has become the focal point for the image, but the context has been lost. In the same way, if you focus on one statistic, one quote, or one idea and fail to capture its background you will take the information out of context. Context is one of the eight components of communication, and without it, the process breaks down. While you cannot retain all the definition and detail of the original context in a brief summary, effort to represent the essential point within its context is essential or you risk distortion of the original meaning.

22. To reduce a concept, idea, or data set to its most basic point or element.

Unlike quoting or paraphrasing, summarizing is something you can—and will—also do to the material you have written. You may start your document with a summary of the background that gives the document purpose. Formal business reports often

begin with an executive summary, and scientific articles usually begin with an abstract; both of these serve as a brief preview of the information in the full document. You may write a brief internal summary after each main discussion point in a lengthy document; this will serve to remind your reader of the discussion to date and to establish the context for the upcoming point. Finally, a summary is a very common, and often effective, way to conclude a document. Ending your writing with a summary helps your reader to remember your main points.

Plagiarism is neither paraphrasing nor summarizing information from other works. **Plagiarism**²³ is representing another's work as your own. Professional standards, which are upheld in all fields from architecture to banking to zoology, all involve the elements of authenticity and credibility. Credit is given where credit is due, authorities in the field are appropriately cited or referenced, and original writing is expected to be exactly that. **Patch writing**²⁴, or the verbatim cut-and-paste insertion of fragments, snippets, or small sections of other publications into your own writing without crediting the sources, is plagiarism. Wholesale copying of other works is also plagiarism. Both destroy your professional credibility, and fail to uphold common professional standards.

Colleges and universities have policies against plagiarism, and within business and industry, the negative impact on credibility and careers often exceeds any academic punishment. There is no shame in quoting someone else's work while giving credit, nor in paraphrasing a point correctly or summarizing the research results of a study you did not perform; but there are significant consequences to representing other's ideas as your own.

Aside from the fear of punishment, a skilled business writer should recognize that intellectual theft is wrong. You may be tempted to borrow a sentence; however, know your document will be represented in many ways across time, and more than one career has been destroyed by plagiarism discovered years after the fact. The accomplished business writer should take as a compliment the correct citation and reference of their work. The novice business writer should learn by example but refrain from cut and paste strategies to complete a document.

In a world where most modern documents are accessible in some form online, the ability to cross-reference information with a couple of key strokes makes plagiarism a self-defeating solution when better alternatives exist. Quote and give credit, link to related documents with permission, paraphrase and summarize with citation, but do not plagiarize.

23. Representing another's work as your own.

24. Verbatim cut-and-paste insertion of fragments of other publications into one's own writing without crediting the sources.

KEY TAKEAWAY

There is nothing wrong with quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing with credit to your original source, but presenting someone else's work as if it were your own is plagiarism.

EXERCISES

1. Select a piece of writing such as an essay from a Web site, a book chapter, or a newspaper or magazine article. Write a paraphrase of a portion of it. Write a brief summary of the entire piece. Note the difference between the two techniques. Giving credit to the original piece, discuss your paraphrase and summary with your classmates.
2. Find an example of an advertisement you perceive as particularly effective and write a one-sentence summary. Share the advertisement and your one-sentence summary with the class.
3. Find an example of an advertisement you perceive as particularly ineffective and write a one-sentence summary. Share the advertisement and your one-sentence review with the class.
4. Find a case where plagiarism or misrepresentation had consequences in the business world. Share your findings and discuss with classmates.

6.5 Additional Resources

Read an informative article about outlines and get a sample outline template.

<http://www.essaywritinghelp.com/outline.htm>

This Writing Tutorials site from John Jay College of Criminal Justice offers a menu of tools for composing a thesis statement, an outline, well-constructed paragraphs, and more. <http://resources.jjay.cuny.edu/erc/writing/index.php>.

This RefDesk.com page offers a compendium of different resources for English grammar and usage. <http://www.refdesk.com/factgram.html>

Read an article on avoiding bureaucratic language by marketing strategist David Meerman Scott. <http://www.econtentmag.com/Articles/ArticleReader.aspx?ArticleID=14538&ContextSubtypeID=12>

Garbl's Wordy Phrases presents a list of bureaucratic phrases to avoid and their standard English alternatives. <http://home.comcast.net/~garbl/stylemanual/phrases.htm>

This University of North Carolina site provides a handout on writing arguments. <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>

Read about logic in argumentative writing on Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL). <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/659/01>

The University of Guelph provides a robust guide for how to avoid plagiarism. <http://www.academicintegrity.uoguelph.ca/plagiarism.cfm>