

BUSINESS WRITING

GENERAL INFORMATION

Purposes: to inform, maintain goodwill, persuade, and request as well as to present the writer in a positive light.

Accomplish this by doing the following:

- Address the person(s) to whom you are writing with proper business etiquette.
- Be clear, concise, correct, and courteous.
- Meet the reader's needs first.
- Know your audience (internal, external; primary, secondary, initial).
- Don't use "I", don't use "you" (use reader's name).
- Single space within paragraphs and short lists.
- Double space between paragraphs, within top matter, after headings, and within long lists.
- Triple space above a heading (if room) and after top matter.
- Use words that are generally short, familiar, non-technical, and concrete. Be yourself.
- Be careful of gender-biased language.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Informative memos and letters should use a direct approach:

Introduction

- Contains the main points.
- Has a positive tone (nothing worse than neutrals).
- Includes the five Ws (who, what, where, when, why) for reader orientation.

Body

- Contains the details.
- Emphasizes reader benefits.
- Plays down negatives.

Conclusion

- Ends the memo or letter on a positive tone.
- States the specific issue(s) the letter focuses on.

E-mails are "chummier" and get to the point more quickly:

- Utilize short subject lines.
- Sign your name.

Persuasive messages use a direct approach if the reader is inclined to accept and an indirect approach if s/he is inclined to reject:

- Appeal to common ground.
- Educate reader as to what you want specifically (make your request clear!).
- Try to show advantages outweighing disadvantages.
- Imply respect toward reader.

JOB SEARCH CORRESPONDENCE:

Résumés:

- Be consistent in format and style.
- Write sentences in fragments that omit the pronoun "I."
- Use strong action verbs and use parallel structure at every level of the résumé.
- List activities and/or jobs in reverse chronological order.
- Be sure your résumé can pass the "three-second" test (any information can be found within three seconds).
- Use white space to make information easy to spot and to create a well-balanced look.
- Use unjustified (ragged) right margins.
- Use the "hanging-indentation" format when in doubt.
- Use matching good-quality paper/envelope but use only white, or very light-colored, paper.

Cover (or application) letters:

Dos and don'ts:

- Don't exceed one page in length.
- Remember the purpose is to get an interview, not to tell your life story.
- Don't repeat what is in the résumé (elaborate and explain strong points, negatives, special concerns and positive motivation for changing fields).

Introduction

- States right away what job you are applying for and how you learned of it.
- Mentions your degree if you have one and it is required for the position.
- Offers three selling points that you will discuss in your letter.

Body

- Shows how your qualifications can help the company with its needs.
- Brings up points you wish to discuss in an interview.
- Shows personal qualities, hobbies, and interests which might translate into qualifications for the job.
- Mentions small bits of information about the company (to show you have knowledge of your prospective employer).

Conclusion

- Mentions the résumé.
- Explicitly requests an interview.
- States where and when you're available for interview.
- Lists all phone numbers.

FORMAL BUSINESS WRITING:

Proposals:

- Write with a high, but not stuffy, level of formality.
- Be objective.
- Use specific headings in parallel form, and make them professional and clear.
- Test the completeness and validity of your proposal with a series of questions:
 - Is there a real need or problem that needs to be solved?
 - Can you fill the need or solve the problem?
 - How, exactly, are you going to solve the need or problem?
 - What are the benefits--primary, secondary and less obvious?
 - Who will be involved in your project?
 - How long will it take?
 - How much will it cost (dollars, equipment, facilities, time)?
 - Who else will contribute?

Formal reports

- Use "we" instead of "I".
- Generally only name experts.
- Try to maintain a neutral tone.
- Minimize passive voice

Parts of a report:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| ▪ Letter/memo of transmittal | ▪ Introduction/background | ▪ Visuals, if needed |
| ▪ Title page | ▪ Scope/limitations | ▪ Appendices |
| ▪ Table of contents | ▪ Purpose | |
| ▪ Summary | ▪ Conclusion | |