Social networking: What every business professional needs to know

FORMAL, INFORMAL, OR SOMEWHERE IN-BETWEEN?

MAKING YOUR POINT WITH VISUALS

There is, There Are... Do You Really Need Them?

SAMPLE CHAPTER

FOUR MAIN GUIDELINES WHEN PLANNING PERSUASIVE MESSAGES
LEARNING OBJECTIVES
LO1 Simplify writing by selecting familiar and short words.
LO2 Use technical words and acronyms with caution.
LO3 Write concretely and use active verbs.
LO4 Write with clarity and precision by selecting the right words and by using idioms correctly.
LO5 Use words that do not discriminate against others.
LO6 Write short, clear sentences by limiting sentence content and economizing on words.
LO7 Design sentences that give the right emphasis to content.
LO8 Employ unity and logical wording to make sentences clear.
LO9 Compose paragraphs that are short and unified, use topic sentences effectively, and communicate coherently.
LO10 Use a conversational style that eliminates rubber stamps.
LO11 Use the you-viewpoint to build goodwill.
LO12 Accent the positive through word choice and positioning to achieve goodwill and other desired effects.
Once you have analyzed your communication task, decided what kind of message you need to write, and planned your verbal and visual contents, you’re ready to get down to the challenge of writing—putting one word, sentence, and paragraph after another to communicate what you want to say.

While each document you write will need to respond to the unique features of the situation, keeping in mind certain guidelines can help you make good writing choices. This chapter offers advice on selecting appropriate words, writing clear sentences and paragraphs, and achieving the desired effect with your readers. The goal is documents that communicate clearly, completely, efficiently, and engagingly.
Return to your hypothetical role in Chapter 2 as manager of a struggling small business. You work very hard to make certain that all aspects of your business function effectively and efficiently. At the moment your attention is focused on the communicating done by your subordinates. Specifically, you are concerned about the communicating of Max Elliott, your assistant manager. You have before you an email report from Max. Following your instructions, he investigated your company’s use of available space. He has summarized his findings in this report. At first glance you are impressed with Max’s work. But after reading further, you are not sure just what his investigation has uncovered. Here is a typical paragraph:

In the interest of ensuring maximum utilization of the subterranean components of the building currently not apportioned to operations departments, it is recommended that an evaluation of requisites for storage space be initiated. Subject review should be initiated at the earliest practicable opportunity and should be conducted by administrative personnel not affiliated with operational departments.

Max’s problem is altogether too commonplace in business. His writing, though grammatically correct, does not communicate quickly and clearly. It also doesn’t show much consideration for his reader. This chapter shows you what you can do to avoid writing like this.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTATION

Clear, effective writing begins with adapting your message to your specific readers. As Chapter 1 explains, readers occupy particular organizational, professional, and personal contexts. They do not all have the same vocabulary, knowledge, or values. And you do not have the same relationship with all of them.

To communicate clearly and with the appropriate tone, you should learn everything possible about those with whom you wish to communicate and consider any prior correspondence with them. Then you should word and organize your message so that it is easy for them to understand it and respond favorably. Tailoring your message to your readers is not only strategically necessary; it is also a sign of consideration for their time and energy. Everyone benefits when your writing is reader focused.

SELECTING APPROPRIATE WORDS

Consider the following excerpts from two companies’ reports to shareholders:

Company A: Last year your company’s total sales were $117,400,000, which was slightly higher than the $109,800,000 total for the year before. After deducting for all expenses, we had $4,593,000 in profits, compared with $2,830,000 for 2010. Because of these increased profits, we were able to increase your annual dividend payments per share from the 50 cents paid over the last 10 years.

Company B: The corporation’s investments and advances in three unconsolidated subsidiaries (all in the development stage) and in 50 percent–owned companies was $42,200,000 on December 31, 2011, and the excess of the investments in certain companies over net asset value at dates of acquisition was $1,760,000. The corporation’s equity in the net assets as of December 31, 2011, and in the results of operations for the years ended December 31, 2010 and 2011, was $1,350,000 and $887,500, respectively. Dividend income was $750,000 and $388,000 for the years 2010 and 2011, respectively.

Which paragraph is better written? If you answered “it depends on the targeted readers,” you’re right. The wording in the first version would be appropriate for an audience without a background in finance, while that in the second is directed more toward finance professionals. Obviously, the lesson of the exercise is this: Choosing the best words for any document requires thinking about what you want to achieve and with whom.

Still, we can identify several stylistic principles that will apply to most of your documents. Whoever your readers, your selection of words is likely to be more effective if you keep the following suggestions in mind.

Choosing the best words for any document requires thinking about what you want to achieve and with whom.
Use Familiar Words

No matter who your readers are, a practice to avoid is using a complex word where an everyday word will do. Do you really need *ascertain* instead of *find out*? *Initiate* instead of *begin*? To convey your meaning as efficiently as possible, try to use the simplest words that will carry the meaning without insulting your readers’ intelligence or being too informal.


Here’s what the handbook says about using familiar words:

Surround complex ideas with short, common words. For example, use *end* instead of *terminate*, *explain* rather than *elucidate*, and *use* instead of *utilize*. When a shorter, simpler synonym exists, use it.

Use Slang and Popular Clichés with Caution

At any given time in any society, some slang words and clichés are in vogue. In the United States, for example, you might currently hear “voted off the island,” “Are you smarter than a 5th grader?,” or “Come on down!”—all of which come from U.S. television shows. But other expressions from U.S. television, such as “Where’s the beef?” and “That’s the $64,000 question,” have faded into the past. Business clichés come and go as well. One 2008 television commercial had employees playing business-cliché bingo, listening to a speech and checking off such phrases as “think outside the box” and “push the envelope” as the speaker said them. These once-popular expressions seem to be on their way out.

Slang and clichés may achieve a desired effect in a certain context, but they run the risk of sounding stale and out of date. They can also create problems in cross-cultural communication. Use such expressions sparingly and only in informal communication with people who will understand and appreciate them.

Prefer Short Words

According to studies of readability, short words generally communicate better than long words. Of course, part of the explanation is that short words tend to be familiar words. But there is another explanation: A heavy use of long words—even long words that are understood—leaves an impression of difficulty that hinders communication.

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**Managing Formality in Your Writing**

Though today’s workplaces are much less formal than they used to be, a degree of formality is still expected when you are

- communicating with someone you don’t know.
- communicating with someone at a higher level than you.
- using a conventionally formal medium, such as a letter, long report, or external proposal.
- writing a ceremonial message, such as a commendation or inspirational announcement.
- writing an extremely serious message, such as a crisis response or official reprimand.

In such situations, you can often achieve the desired level of formality by making substitutions like the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Wording</th>
<th>More Formal Substitute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looked into</td>
<td>Studied, investigated, analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggled</td>
<td>Rearranged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure</td>
<td>Ensure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great</td>
<td>Exceptional, award-winning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So (as a conjunction)</td>
<td>As a result, therefore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double check</td>
<td>Confirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check with</td>
<td>Consult with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Correct, accurate, appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t</td>
<td>Will not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, being more formal sometimes requires using more words or syllables. When your readers expect formality, the extra length is justified. Just keep your writing as clear and efficient as you can while meeting the formality requirements of the situation.
The suggestion that short words be chosen does not mean that all short words are easy and all long words are hard. Many exceptions exist. Not everyone knows such one-syllable words as gybe, verd, and id, whereas even children know such long words as hippopotamus, automobile, and bicycle. Generally, however, word length and word difficulty are related. Thus, you should rely mostly on short words and use long ones with caution.

The point is illustrated by the examples presented to support the use of familiar words. But the following illustrations give it additional support (the long words and their short replacements are in italics).

**Long Words**

During the **preceding year** the company operated at a financial deficit.

Prior to **accelerating productive operation**, the supervisor inspected the machinery.

The **unanimity** of current forecasts is not **incontrovertible evidence** of an impending business acceleration.

This **antiquated merchandising strategy** is **ineffectual** in **contemporary business operations**.

**Short Words**

Last year the company **lost money**.

Before speeding up **production**, the supervisor inspected the machinery.

Agreement of the forecasts is **not proof** that business will improve.

This **old sales strategy** **will not work** in today’s business.

LO 2 Use technical words and acronyms with caution.

**Use Technical Words and Acronyms with Caution**

Every field of business—accounting, information systems, finance, marketing, and management—has its technical language. This language can be so complex that in some cases specialized dictionaries have been compiled. Such dictionaries exist for technology, law, finance, and other business specialties. There are even dictionaries for subareas such as databases, e-commerce, and real estate.

As you work in your chosen field, you will learn its technical words and acronyms. In time you will use these terms freely in communicating with people in your field. Frequently, one such word will communicate a concept that would otherwise take dozens of words to describe. Moreover, specialized language can signal to other specialists that you are qualified to communicate on their level.

Problems can arise, however, when you use technical terms with people outside your field. If you forget that not everyone knows them, the result will be miscommunication. You can avoid such miscommunication by using technical words only when you’re sure your readers know them.

Examples of misuse of technical writing are easy to find. To a worker in the Social Security Administration, the words **covered employment** commonly mean employment covered by social security. To some outsiders, however, they could mean working under a roof. **Annuity** has a clear meaning to someone in insurance. A **contract that guarantees an income for a specified period** would have more meaning to uninformed outsiders. Computer specialists know **C++** and Java to be popular programming languages, but these words may have different meanings for others.

Initials (including acronyms) should be used with caution, too. While some initials, such as IBM, are widely recognized, others, such as SEO (search engine optimization), are not. If you have any doubt that your reader is familiar with the initials, the best practice is to spell out the words the first time you use them and follow them with the initials. You may also need to go one step further and define what they mean.

Whatever your field of expertise, you will need to be careful not to use technical language when you write to people who do not understand it.

LO 3 Write concretely and use active verbs.

**Use Concrete Language**

Good business communication is marked by words that tend to form sharp and clear meanings in the mind. These are the concrete, specific words.

Concrete is the opposite of abstract. While abstract words are vague, concrete words stand for things the reader can see, feel, taste, or smell. Concrete words hold interest because they refer to the reader’s experience.
When considering using slang in cross-cultural messages, consider this lesson about how even a seemingly straightforward word can go wrong:

Some interesting problems can arise when attempts are made to reach what are thought to be single-minded markets supposedly speaking a common language. Spanish is probably the most vivid example of a language that, while it has many commonalities throughout its use in different places, also contains certain words that have marked variations in meaning. As a result, the message that’s meant to be conveyed isn’t necessarily the message that’s received.

To illustrate, according to Philip Cateora in his book *International Marketing*, the word *ball* translates in Spanish as *bola.* *Bola* means ball in several countries, a lie or fabrication in several others, while in yet another, it’s a vulgar obscenity. Tropicana brand orange juice, he writes, was advertised as *Jugo de China* in Puerto Rico, but when marketed to the Cuban population of Miami, Florida, it failed to make a dent in the market. To the Puerto Rican, *China* translated into orange, but none of the Cubans in Miami were interested in buying what they perceived to be Chinese juice.


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**Communication in brief**

*Lost in Translation*

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Sample concrete nouns are *chair, desk, computer, Lance Armstrong,* and the *Empire State Building.* Some abstract nouns are *administration, negotiation, wealth, inconsistency, loyalty, compatibility, conservation, discrimination, incompetence,* and *communication.* Note how difficult it is to visualize what the abstract words stand for.

Concreteness is related to being specific. Notice how much clearer the specific words are in the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A significant loss</td>
<td>A 53 percent loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leading company</td>
<td>First among 3,212 competitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The majority</td>
<td>62 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the near future</td>
<td>By noon Thursday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now let us see the difference concreteness makes in the clarity of longer passages. Here is an example of abstract wording:

*It is imperative that the firm practice extreme conservatism in operating expenditures during the coming biennium. The firm’s past operating performance has been ineffectual for the reason that a preponderance of administrative assignments have been delegated to personnel who were ill equipped to perform in these capacities. Recently instituted administrative changes stressing experience in operating economies have rectified this condition.*

Written for concreteness, this message might read as follows:

*We must reduce operating expenses at least $2 million during 2011–12. Our $1,350,000 deficit for 2009–10 was caused by the inexperience of our two chief administrators, Mr. Sartan and Mr. Ross. We have replaced them with Ms. Pharr and Mr. Kunz, who have had 13 and 17 years, respectively, of successful experience in operations management.*

As you can see, specific wording is not only easier to understand; it is also more informative.

**Prefer Active Verbs**

Of all parts of speech, verbs do the most to make your writing interesting and lively, for a good reason: they contain the action of the sentence.

But not all verbs add vigor to your writing. Overuse of the verb “to be” and passive voice can sap the energy from your sentences. To see the difference between writing that relies heavily on forms of “to be” and writing that uses active verbs, compare the following two passages (the forms of “to be” and their replacements are italicized):

*There are over 300 customers served by our help desk each day. The help desk personnel’s main tasks are to answer questions, solve problems, and educate the callers about the software. Without their...*
Technology in brief

Grammar and Style Checkers Help Writers with Word Selection

Today, word processors will help writers with grammar and style as well as with spelling. By default, Word checks spelling and grammar automatically, using red and green underlines to distinguish between them. But as you see in the grammar settings screen shots here, writers can specify whether or not they want help and even which rules are applied to their documents. And they can choose to correct as they go along or to correct on demand. Although grammar and style checkers are not as accurate as spelling checkers, they will identify words, phrases, and sentences that could be improved. In fact, they often provide a way to fix problems along with an explanation of correct usage.

In the example shown here, the checker found the use of passive voice and suggested a change to active voice. However, the writer must decide whether to accept the suggestion or ignore it. The writer needs to determine whether this passive voice was used intentionally for one of the reasons discussed in this chapter or whether it was used by accident and should be changed.

Expert work, our customer satisfaction ratings would be much lower than they are.

Our help desk personnel serve over 300 customers each day. They answer questions, solve problems, and educate the users about the software. Without their expert work, our customer satisfaction ratings would drop significantly.

As these examples show, using active verbs adds impact to your writing, and it usually saves words as well.
In addition to minimizing your use of “to be” verbs, you can make your verbs more active by using what grammarians refer to as active voice. As you may recall from your grammar teacher, a sentence with a verb that can take a direct object (the recipient of the action) can be written either in a direct (active) pattern or an indirect (passive) pattern. For example, the sentence “the auditor inspected the books” is in active voice. In passive voice, the sentence would read: “The books were inspected by the auditor.” Notice how more energetic the active-voice version is. For further support of the advantages of active over passive voice, compare the following sentences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The results were reported in our July 9 letter.</td>
<td>We reported the results in our July 9 letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This policy has been supported by our union.</td>
<td>Our union supported this policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The office will be inspected by Mr. Hall.</td>
<td>Mr. Hall will inspect the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware sales were increased 30 percent by the latest promotion.</td>
<td>The latest promotion increased hardware sales by 30 percent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The suggestion to prefer active voice does not mean passive voice is incorrect or you should never use it. Sometimes passive voice is preferable. For example, when the doer of the action is unimportant to the message, passive voice properly de-emphasizes the doer:

Advertising is often criticized for its effect on price.

Petroleum is refined in Texas.

Passive voice may enable you to avoid accusing your reader of an action:

The damage was caused by exposing the material to sunlight (instead of “You caused . . .”).

The desired color was not specified in your order [instead of “You did not specify . . .”].

Passive voice also may be preferable when the performer is unknown, as in this example:

During the past year, the equipment has been sabotaged seven times.

Yet another situation in which passive voice may be preferable is one in which the writer does not want to name the performer:

Two complaints have been made about you.

In general, though, your writing will be clearest and liveliest when you write sentences in the “who does what?” (subject, verb, object) order.

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Communication in brief

Everything You Wanted to Know about Active and Passive Voice

Writers are often confused by the terms active voice and passive voice. Here’s the lowdown:

Broadly speaking, there are two main categories of verbs in English: those that can take direct objects and those that can’t. To illustrate, the verb repair can take a direct object (that is, you can repair something), while the verb happen cannot (you can’t happen anything).

Sentences with verbs that can take direct objects are the ones that can be written in either active or passive voice. When you write in active voice, the sentence is in “who + does/did what + to what/whom” order, as in this for example:

An authorized technician repaired the new laser printer,

or even just

The new laser printer was repaired.

When you write the same idea in passive voice, the direct object moves to the start of the sentence and bumps the real subject to a phrase at the end of it (or out of it altogether). With this move, you now have

The new laser printer was repaired by an authorized technician.

Or even just

The new laser printer was repaired.

As you can see, inverting the word order this way makes the sentence less energetic, more roundabout, and sometimes less informative.

You can find instances of passive voice in your own writing by looking for two- and three-word verbs that consist of

• a form of the verb to be (for example, is, was, has been, will be) and
• a verb in past-tense form (for example, installed, reduced, chosen, sent).

When you find such verbs—was installed, has been reduced, will be chosen—see if your meaning would be clearer and sharper if you wrote in the active voice instead, with the doer of the action in the subject position.
PART 2 | Mastering Writing and Presentation Basics

Communication in brief

Be sure your verbs are action words, not camouflaged verbs like those in the middle and right columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Verb</th>
<th>Noun Form</th>
<th>Wording of Camouflaged Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acquire</td>
<td>acquisition</td>
<td>make an acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apply</td>
<td>application</td>
<td>make an application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assist</td>
<td>assistance</td>
<td>give assistance to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>discussion</td>
<td>have a discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider</td>
<td>consideration</td>
<td>give consideration to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>investigate</td>
<td>investigation</td>
<td>make an investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>judge</td>
<td>judgment</td>
<td>make a judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconcile</td>
<td>reconciliation</td>
<td>effect a reconciliation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Will the Real Verb Please Stand Up?

The following examples illustrate further:

**Weak Camouflaged Verb**
- An arrangement was made to meet for breakfast.
- Amortization of the account was effected by the staff.
- The new policy involved the standardization of the procedures.
- We must bring about a reconciliation of our differences.
- The establishment of a wellness center has been accomplished by the company.

**Strong Clear Verb Form**
- We arranged to meet for breakfast.
- The staff amortized the account.
- The new policy standardized the procedures.
- We must reconcile our differences.
- The company has established a wellness center.

Avoid Overuse of Camouflaged Verbs

An awkward construction that should be avoided is the camouflaged verb. When a verb is camouflaged, the verb describing the action in a sentence takes the form of a noun. Then other words have to be added. For example, suppose you want to write a sentence in which eliminate is the action to be expressed. If you use the noun form of this verb, elimination, you must add more words—perhaps was effected—to have a sentence. Your sentence might then be “Elimination of the surplus was effected by the staff.” The sentence is indirect and passive. Using the verb eliminate yields this sharper sentence: “The staff eliminated the surplus.” Again, writing sentences in the “who does what?” order will give them the most clarity and impact. Involved, strained, and monotonous sentences often result from other structures.

**LO 4** Write with clarity and precision by selecting the right words and by using idioms correctly.

Select Words for Precise Meanings

Obviously, writing requires considerable knowledge of the language being used. But beyond basic familiarity with vocabulary, good writers possess a sensitivity to words’ shades of meaning. Words, like people, have personalities. Some are forceful and some timid; some are positive and some negative; some are formal and some informal. Your task as a writer attempting to achieve deliberate effects is to choose the words that will achieve those effects with your intended readers.

**be sensitive to connotation** Consider the differences among tycoon, industry giant, successful entrepreneur, and prominent business executive. All four labels indicate a person who has acquired wealth and power in business. But they differ in terms of their connotation, or the contexts and values they suggest. Tycoon calls to mind the robber barons of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with their diamond tie...
Some word choices are unwise, some are awkward, and some are just plain wrong.

**do not confuse similar words**  Knowledge of language also enables you to use words that carry the right denotation or primary meaning. For example, fewer and less mean the same to some people. But careful users select fewer to mean “a smaller number of items” and less to mean “reduced value, degree, or quantity.” The verbs affect and effect are often used as synonyms. But affect means “to influence” and effect means “to bring to pass.” You can read about more confusing word pairs on your chapter review cards.

**use correct idioms**  In your effort to be a precise writer, you should use idioms correctly. By idioms we mean word combinations that have become standard in a language. For example, “independent of” is good idiomatic usage; “independent from” is not. Similarly, you “agree to” a proposal, but you “agree with” a person. Here are some additional illustrations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faulty Idiom</th>
<th>Correct Idiom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>authority about</td>
<td>authority on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comply to</td>
<td>comply with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different than</td>
<td>different from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get a feel on</td>
<td>get a feel for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equally as bad</td>
<td>equally bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in accordance to</td>
<td>in accordance with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, some word choices are unwise, some are awkward, and some are just plain wrong. If you’re unsure which word you need or how a certain word will come across, consult a good dictionary.

**Avoid Discriminatory Wording**  Although discriminatory words are not directly related to writing clarity, our review of word selection would not be complete without some mention of them. By discriminatory words we mean words that do not treat all people equally and with respect. More specifically, they are words that refer negatively to groups of people, such as by gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, age, or disability. Such words run contrary to...
acceptable views of fair play and human decency. They do not promote good business ethics or good business and thus have no place in business communication.

The following review of the major forms of discriminatory words should help you achieve equitable and inclusive writing.

**use gender-neutral words** Take care not to use words that discriminate on the basis of gender. While sometimes sexist wording is directed against males, it is more likely to discriminate against women. Our language developed in a society in which it was customary for women to work in the home and for men to be the breadwinners and decision makers. But times have changed. The language you use in business needs to acknowledge the gender-diverse nature of most workplaces today.

This means avoiding words implying that only one gender can be in charge or perform certain jobs. Such job titles as man lawyer or lady lawyer excludes the female students. Historically, the word his has been considered generic—that is, it can refer to both sexes. But many modern-day businesspeople do not agree and are offended by this use of the masculine pronoun.

Perhaps the most troublesome words are the masculine pronouns (he, his, him) when they are used to refer to both sexes, as in this example: “The typical State University student eats his lunch at the student center.” Assuming that State is coeducational, the use of his excludes the female students. Historically, of course, the word his has been considered generic—that is, it can refer to both sexes. But many modern-day businesspeople do not agree and are offended by this use of the masculine pronoun.

You can avoid such problems in three ways (see Exhibit 4.1). First, you can reword the sentence to eliminate the offending word. Thus, the preceding example could be reworded as follows: "The typical State University student eats lunch at the student center.” Here are other examples:

**Sexist**

- If a customer pays promptly, he is placed on our preferred list.
- A supervisor who is not responsible for the damage if he is not negligent.

**Gender-Neutral**

- A customer who pays promptly is placed on our preferred list.
- A supervisor who is not negligent is not responsible for the damage.

A second way to avoid sexist use of the masculine pronoun is to make the reference plural. Fortunately, the English language has plural pronouns (their, them, they) that refer to both sexes. Making the references plural in the examples given above, we have these non sexist revisions:

- If customers pay promptly, they are placed on our preferred list.
- A customer who pays promptly is placed on our preferred list.

**Supervisors are not responsible for the damage if they are not negligent.**

A third way to avoid sexist use of he, his, or him is to substitute any of a number of neutral expressions. The most common are he or she, he/she, s/he, you, one, and person. Using neutral expressions in the problem sentences, we have these revisions:

- If a customer pays promptly, he or she is placed on our preferred list.
- When an unauthorized employee enters the security area, he/she is subject to dismissal.

**You are not responsible for the damage if you are not negligent.**

- You can avoid sexist use of he, his, and him by
  - Eliminating the personal pronoun altogether.
  - Using the plural personal pronouns (they, their, them).
  - Using a neutral expression, such as he or she or you.
CHAPTER 4

Using an Appropriate Style

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and the young. While those over 55 might be retired from their first jobs, many lead lives that are far from the sedentary roles in which they are sometimes depicted. They also are not necessarily feeble, forgetful, or forsaken. While some do not mind being called senior citizens, others do. Be careful with terms such as mature and elderly as well; perhaps retired, experienced, or veteran would be better received. Likewise, when tempted to refer to someone as young (young accountant, accomplished young woman), be sure that calling attention to the person’s age is defensible.

Avoid words that stereotype by race, nationality, or sexual orientation

Words that stereotype all members of a group by race, nationality, or sexual orientation are especially unfair, and frequently they reinforce stereotypical beliefs about this group. Members of any minority vary widely in all characteristics. Thus, it is unfair to suggest that Jews are miserly, that Italians are Mafia members, that Hispanics are lazy, that African Americans can do only menial jobs, that gays are perfectionists, and so on. Unfair references to minorities are sometimes subtle and not intended, as in this example: "We conducted the first marketing tests in the low-income areas of the city. Using a sample of 200 African-American families, we. . . ." These words unfairly suggest that only African Americans live in low-income areas.

Also unfair are words suggesting that a minority member has struggled to achieve something that is taken for granted in the majority group. Usually well intended, words of this kind can carry subtle discriminatory messages. For example, a reference to a Chinese human resources manager may suggest that it is unusual for a Chinese person to have skills in this area.

Eliminating unfair references to minority groups from your communication requires two basic steps. First, you must consciously treat all people equally, without regard to their minority status. Refer to minority membership only in those rare cases in which it is a vital part of the message to be communicated. Second, you must be sensitive to the effects of your words. Ask yourself how those words would affect you if you were a member of the minorities to which they refer. If you could be offended, find more neutral words.

Avoid words that stereotype by age

Your avoidance of discriminatory wording should be extended to include discriminating on the basis of age—against both the old and the young. While those over 55 might be retired from their first jobs, many lead lives that are far from the sedentary roles in which they are sometimes depicted. They also are not necessarily feeble, forgetful, or forsaken. While some do not mind being called senior citizens, others do. Be careful with terms such as mature and elderly as well; perhaps retired, experienced, or veteran would be better received. Likewise, when tempted to refer to someone as young (young accountant, accomplished young woman), be sure that calling attention to the person’s age is defensible.

Also be careful when using one of the popular generational labels in your writing. While it makes sense for the popular management literature to use such labels as Baby Boomer and Millennial as short-hand references to different generations, the same labels can seem discriminatory in business messages. Your co-worker Frank probably does not want to be referred to as the “Baby Boomer in the group,” and your manager Courtney probably will not appreciate your saying that she holds the opinions she does because she’s a “Generation X-er.” As we have suggested, use such labels only when relevant and appropriate.
avoid words that typecast those with disabilities People with disabilities are likely to be sensitive to discriminatory words. We often see or read about those with disabilities exceeding the performance of an average person, and common sense tells us not to stereotype these people. However, sometimes we do anyway. Just as with age, we need to avoid derogatory labels and apologetic or patronizing behavior. For example, instead of describing someone as deaf and dumb, use deaf. Avoid slang terms such as fits, spells, attacks; use seizures, epilepsy, or other objective terms. Adjectives such as crippled and retarded should be avoided. Work to develop a nonbiased attitude, and show it through carefully chosen words.

How Diverse Is Too Diverse?

Can your employer tell you what to wear, outlaw decorated fingernails, or forbid the display of such body art as tattoos and piercings?

According to EmployeeIssues.com, a website about employee rights, the answer is yes—as long as the appearance policies are clearly stated in writing and are applied fairly to all employees.

Just as employers can require the use of uniforms, they can delineate what kinds of personal clothing will be acceptable on the job.

For example, they might define “business casual” in a way that explicitly excludes T-shirts, shorts, flip-flops, and the like. And as long as tattoos and body piercings aren’t required by your religion, they can be grounds for being disciplined or even fired—as long as the rules have been clearly stated.

Looking professional need not mean selling out your cultural or ethnic heritage, argues Kail Evans-Raoul, founder of an image consultancy for minorities. Everyone must “balance self-expression with workplace realities,” she asserts. Just as one doesn’t wear a uniform at home, one shouldn’t expect to bring one’s entire personal look to work.

To avoid conflicts over your on-the-job identity, your best bet is to try to choose an employer whose values align with your own. Then find and abide by that company’s appearance policy.


The first step toward avoiding discriminatory writing is to put yourself in the reader’s shoes.

Some Final Words about Words

There’s a lot to keep in mind when selecting the most appropriate words. Under time pressure, it can be tempting to take a shortcut and settle—as Mark Twain once put it—for the best word’s “second cousin.” But remember: Business and business relationships can be won or lost with one word choice. The effort to say what you mean as clearly, readably, and appropriately as you can is effort well spent.

WRITING CLEAR SENTENCES

When you sit down to write a given message, you have many bits of information at hand. How will you turn them into a clear, coherent message?
Your first task will probably be grouping and ordering the information—that is, planning the message’s overall organization or structure. But sooner or later, writing a successful message comes down to figuring out how to stitch your contents together in a series of sentences. How much information will you put into each sentence? And in what form and order will that information be?

The advice that follows will help you answer these questions and enhance your chances of communication success.

**LO 6** Write short, clear sentences by limiting sentence content and economizing on words.

## Limit Sentence Content

Business audiences tend to prefer simple, efficient sentences over long, complex ones. Having too much to do in too little time is a chronic problem in business. No one, whether executive or entry-level employee, wants to read writing that wastes time.

Favoring short sentences can save your readers time. It can also prevent miscommunication. Readability research tells us that the more words and the more relationships there are in a sentence, the greater is the possibility for misunderstanding. This finding suggests that the mind can hold only so much information at one time. Thus, to give it too much information in your sentences is to risk falling short of your communication

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**technology in brief**

**Readability Statistics Help Writers Evaluate Document Length and Difficulty**

Grammar and style checkers give writers the option of viewing readability statistics. These statistics report the number of words, characters, paragraphs, and sentences in a document along with averages of characters per word, words per sentence, and sentences per paragraph.

The report you see here was generated for a scholarly manuscript. It reports an average of 18.5 words per sentence, a bit high for a business document but probably at an acceptable level for a scholarly document’s readers. The Flesch-Kincaid score confirms that the reading grade level is 9.4, too high for business documents but appropriate for a scholarly audience. However, the Flesch Reading Ease score might give the writer cause to review the document for accessibility, even for its targeted audience. The 59.3 score is slightly below the 60–70 range that Microsoft recommends.

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When editing your message, it can help to print a copy and make corrections manually.
PART 2 | Mastering Writing and Presentation Basics

will need to gauge what sentence length is best for each situation.

Moreover, our preference for short sentences does not mean that you should use all short sentences. In fact, you should avoid overusing them. The overuse of short sentences results in a choppy, elementary-sounding effect. You should write easily digested sentences that nevertheless maintain a smooth flow of ideas.

Let’s consider an example. The following sentence from an employee handbook is much too long:

“When an employee has changed from one job to another job, the new corresponding coverages will be effective as of the date the change occurs, unless, however, if due to a physical disability or infirmity as a result of advanced age, an employee is changed from one job to another job and such change results in the employee’s new job rate coming within a lower hourly job-rate bracket in the table, in which case the employee may, at the discretion of the company, continue the amount of group term life insurance and the amount of accidental death and dismemberment insurance that the employee had prior to such change.”

So many words and relationships are in the sentence that they cause confusion. The result is vague communication at best—complete miscommunication at worst.

Now look at the message written in all short sentences. The meanings may be clear, but the choppy effect is distracting and irritating. Imagine reading a long document written in this style.

An employee may change jobs. The change may result in a lower pay bracket. The new coverage is effective when this happens. The job change must be because of physical disability. It can also be because of infirmity. Old age may be another cause. The company has some discretion in the matter. It can permit continuing the accidental death insurance. It can permit continuing the dismemberment insurance.

The following paragraph takes a course between these two extremes. Clearly, it is an improvement. Generally, it relies on short sentences, but it combines content items where appropriate.

The new insurance coverage becomes effective when because of disability, infirmity, or age an employee’s job change results in lower pay. But at its discretion, the company may permit the old insurance coverage to continue.

The upcoming advice in conciseness, management of emphasis, and sentence unity can help you decide how much content each sentence should carry.

DID YOU KNOW?

A study found that 95 percent of executives and managers make a to-do list for each day, but 99 percent of them do not complete the tasks on those lists. This is the busy environment in which they’ll be reading your messages.

Most people are aware that certain unwritten rules for professionalism govern people’s business interactions. Those with whom we do business expect us to show respect through our actions, words, and even appearance.

But what is considered appropriate will vary from situation to situation, industry to industry, and country to country. For example, in a small informal company, relatively casual clothing and relaxed behavior would be expected, and anyone behaving too formally would be considered stiff and rude. In a more formal setting, such as a bank or the executive offices of a large organization, what one should wear, say, or even laugh at would be more constrained.

Cross-cultural communication requires additional considerations. For example, according to a website researched by MBA students at the University of Texas–Dallas, it is considered rude in China for women to wear high heels or wear short-sleeved clothing while doing business, or for men to wear anything besides a conservative business suit. The Chinese are also offended by large hand movements, being pointed at while spoken to, and any actions involving touching the mouth.


Economize on Words

Related to limiting sentence content is economizing on words. Anything you write can be expressed in many ways, some shorter than others. In general, the shorter wordings save the reader time and are clearer and more interesting.

Sometimes business writers mistakenly strive for a droning, “blah-blah-blah” effect, believing that it makes them sound more official or businesslike. But readers are more impressed by clear, efficient language than by flabby prose. To avoid the latter, consider the following kinds of excess verbiage and edit them out of your own writing.

Take the Monotony Test

If your verbs are strong, your sentences vary in length, and you emphasize the right ideas, your writing will have an interesting and inviting rhythm.

So read your writing aloud. If you find your voice lapsing into a monotone, you probably need to apply one or more of the guidelines presented in this chapter.

cluttering phrases An often used uneconomical wording is the cluttering phrase. This is a phrase that can be replaced by shorter wording without loss of meaning. The little savings achieved in this way add up.

Here is an example of a cluttering phrase:

*In the event that payment is not made by January, operations will cease.*

The phrase *in the event that* is uneconomical. The little word *if* can substitute for it without loss of meaning:

*If payment is not made by January, operations will cease.*

Similarly, the phrase that begins the following sentence adds unnecessary length:

*In spite of the fact that they received help, they failed to exceed the quota.*

*Although* makes an economical substitute:

*Although they received help, they failed to exceed their quota.*
The Starbucks Study

Supporting the advice in this chapter is the Starbucks Study conducted by Fugere, Hardaway, and Warshawsky. These researchers selected two actual writing samples. One was written in what they called typical corporate speak—big words and long sentences. The other was written in the straight, clear way stressed in this text. The identities of the companies were hidden. The researchers asked a sample of customers at an Atlanta Starbucks coffee shop to select from a list of 30 common psychological traits (15 good and 15 bad) the ones they would associate with each writing sample. The Starbucks customers did not like the corporate-speak sample, selecting mostly words such as obnoxious, rude, stubborn, and unreliable. They liked the straight and clear writing sample, selecting words such as likeable, energetic, friendly, inspiring, and enthusiastic.


The following partial list (with suggested substitutions) of cluttering phrases should help you cut down on their use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluttering Phrase</th>
<th>Shorter Substitute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At the present time</td>
<td>Now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the time</td>
<td>While</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the purpose of</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the reason that</td>
<td>Because, since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the amount of</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the meantime</td>
<td>Meanwhile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the near future</td>
<td>Soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In very few cases</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In view of the fact that</td>
<td>Since, because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With regard to, with reference to</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

surplus words To write economically, eliminate words that add nothing to sentence meaning. As with cluttering phrases, we often use meaningless extra words as a matter of habit. Eliminating these surplus words sometimes requires recasting a sentence, but sometimes they can just be left out.

The following is an example of surplus wording from a business report:

I am writing to tell you that the records for the past years show a steady increase in special appropriations.

The beginning words make an obvious point and add nothing to the meaning of the sentence. Notice how dropping them makes the sentence stronger—and without loss of meaning:

The records for the past years show a steady increase in special appropriations.

Here is a second example:

His performance was good enough to enable him to qualify for the promotion.

The words to enable add nothing and can be dropped:

His performance was good enough to qualify him for the promotion.

The following sentences further illustrate the use of surplus words. In each case, the surplus words can be eliminated without changing the meaning.

Contains Surplus Words

There are four rules that should be observed.

The machines that were damaged by the fire were repaired.

By the examining of production records, they found the error.

The president is of the opinion that the tax was paid.

It is essential that the income be used to retire the debt.

Eliminates Surplus Words

Four rules should be observed.

The machines damaged by the fire were repaired.

By examining production records, they found the error.

The president believes the tax was paid.

The income must be used to retire the debt.

He criticized everyone he met.

He criticized everyone he came in contact with.
unnecessary repetition of words or ideas  

Repeating words obviously adds to sentence length. Such repetition sometimes serves a purpose, as when it is used for emphasis or special effect. But all too often it is without purpose, as this sentence illustrates:

**We have not received your payment covering invoices covering June and July purchases.**

It would be better to write the sentence like this:

**We have not received your payment covering invoices for June and July purchases.**

Another example is this one:

**He stated that he believes that we are responsible.**

The following sentence eliminates one of the *thats*:

**He stated that he believes we are responsible.**

Repetitions of ideas through the use of different words that mean the same thing (*free gift, true fact, past history*) also add to sentence length. Such redundancies are illogical and can rarely be defended.

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**Determine Emphasis in Sentence Design**

The sentences you write should give the right emphasis to the different pieces of content. Any written business communication contains a number of items of information, not all of which are equally important. Some are very important, such as a conclusion in a report or the objective in a message. Others are relatively unimportant. Your task as a writer is to form your sentences to communicate the importance of each item.

Sentence length affects emphasis. Short, simple sentences tend to carry more emphasis than long, involved ones. They stand out and call attention to their contents. Longer sentences tend to give less emphasis to their contents simply because they contain more material.

When a sentence contains two or more ideas, the ideas share emphasis. How they share it will depend on how you construct the sentence. If two ideas are presented equally (in independent clauses, for example), they get about equal emphasis. But if they are not presented equally (for example, in an independent and a dependent clause), the independent clause will get more emphasis than the other elements.

**To Use That or Not to Use That?**

How easy is it to read the following sentence without making a misstep?

**We found the reason for our poor performance was stiff competition from a local supplier.**

In such a sentence, adding the word *that* where it is implied would help:

**We found that the reason for our poor performance was stiff competition from a local supplier.**

In your quest for an economical sentence, do not eliminate *that* when it actually adds clarity.

**The Right EmPHAsis on the Right SyllAble**

Common usage determines which syllable in a word gets the accent. But in sentences and paragraphs, you decide what to emphasize. Consider the matter carefully, with your readers and your desired effect in mind.

To illustrate the varying emphasis you can give information, consider this example. You have two items of information to write. One is that the company lost money last year. The other is that its sales volume reached a record high. You could present the information in at least three ways. First, you could give both items equal emphasis by placing them in separate short sentences:

**The company lost money last year. The loss occurred in spite of record sales.**

Second, you could present the two items in the same sentence with emphasis on the lost money.

**Although the company enjoyed record sales last year, it lost money.**

Third, you could present the two items in one sentence with emphasis on the sales increase:

**Although the company lost money last year, it enjoyed record sales.**
Two Ways to Manage Emphasis

Coordinate: Put equally important information into equal structures (for example, both in main clauses).
Subordinate: Put less important information into phrases and dependent clauses that modify the main idea.

The following paragraphs illustrate the importance of thinking logically to determine emphasis. In the first, each item of information gets the emphasis of a short sentence and none stands out. However, the items are not equally important and do not deserve equal emphasis. Notice, also, the choppy effect that the succession of short sentences produces.

The main building was inspected on October 1. Mr. George Wills inspected the building. Mr. Wills is a vice president of the company. He found that the building has 6,500 square feet of floor space. He also found that it has 2,400 square feet of storage space. The new store must have a minimum of 6,000 square feet of floor space. It must have 2,000 square feet of storage space. Thus, the main building exceeds the space requirements for the new store. Therefore, Mr. Wills concluded that the main building is adequate for the company's needs.

In the next paragraph, some of the items are subordinated, but not logically. The really important information does not receive the emphasis it deserves. Logically, these two points should stand out: (1) the building is large enough and (2) storage space exceeds minimum requirements. But they do not stand out in this version:

Mr. George Wills, who inspected the main building on October 1, is a vice president of the company. His inspection, which supports the conclusion that the building is large enough for the proposed store, uncovered these facts. The building has 6,500 square feet of floor space and 2,400 square feet of storage space, which is more than the minimum requirement of 6,000 and 2,000 square feet, respectively, of floor and storage space.

The third paragraph shows good emphasis of the important points. The short beginning sentence emphasizes the conclusion. The supporting facts that the building exceeds the minimum floor and storage space requirements receive main-clause emphasis. The less important facts, such as the reference to George Wills, are treated subordinately. Also, the most important facts are placed at the points of emphasis—the beginning and ending.

Vice President George Wills inspected the main building on October 1 and concluded that it is large enough for the new store. The building’s 6,500 square feet of floor space exceed the minimum requirement by 500 square feet. The 2,400 square feet of storage space exceed the minimum requirement by 400 square feet.

The preceding illustrations show how sentence construction can determine emphasis. You can make items stand out, you can treat them equally, or you can deemphasize them. The choices are yours. But what you do must be the result of sound thinking about your purpose and your readers, not simply a matter of chance.

LO 8 Employ unity and logical wording to make sentences clear.

Give the Sentences Unity

Good sentences have unity. For a sentence to have unity, all of its parts must combine to form one clear thought. In other words, all the components of a sentence should have a logical reason for being together.
Stringy and See-Saw Sentences

If you try to load down a sentence with too much information, you can wind up with a stringy sentence like this:

While we welcome all applications, we are particularly interested in candidates who have at least three years’ experience, although we will consider those with less experience who have a degree in the field or who have earned a certificate from an industry-certified trainer, and we will also consider fluency in Italian a plus.

A see-saw sentence is one that goes back and forth between two points, like this:

A blog can add visibility to a business, although it can be labor intensive to maintain, but the time spent on the blog could be worthwhile if it generates a buzz among our potential customers.

In these cases, whittle the sentences down to digestible size, use helpful transitional phrases (in addition, on the other hand), and don’t switch directions too often.

Communication in brief

Stringy and See-Saw Sentences

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All the components of a sentence should have a good reason for being together.

Violations of unity in sentence construction are usually caused by two problems: (1) unrelated ideas and (2) excessive detail.

unrelated ideas Placing unrelated ideas in a sentence is the most obvious violation of unity. Putting two or more ideas in a sentence is not grammatically wrong, but the ideas must have a reason for being together. They must combine to complete the single goal of the sentence.

You can give unity to sentences that contain unrelated ideas in three basic ways: (1) You can put the ideas in separate sentences, (2) you can make one of the ideas subordinate to the other, or (3) you can add words that show how the ideas are related. The first two of these techniques are illustrated by the revisions of the following sentence:

Mr. Jordan is our sales manager, and he has a degree in law.

Perhaps the two ideas are related, but the words do not tell how. A better arrangement could be to put each in a separate sentence:

Mr. Jordan is our sales manager. He has a law degree.

Or the two ideas could be kept in one sentence by subordinating one to the other. In this way, the main clause provides the unity of the sentence.

Mr. Jordan, our sales manager, has a law degree.

Adding words to show the relationship of ideas is illustrated in the revision of the following example:

Our production increased in January, and our equipment is wearing out.

The sentence has two ideas that seem unrelated. One way of improving it is to make a separate sentence of each idea. A closer look reveals, however, that the two ideas really are related, but the words do not show how. The following revision brings out the relationship:

Even though our equipment is wearing out, our production increased in January.
Word Sentences Logically

At some point, you’ve probably had a teacher write “awkward” beside one or more of your sentences. Often, the cause of such a problem is illogical wording. The paragraphs that follow will help you avoid some of the most common types of illogical sentences. But keep in mind that many awkward sentences defy efforts to label them. The only guards against these kinds of sentences are your own good ear and careful editing.

**mixed constructions** Sometimes illogical sentences occur when writers mix two different kinds of sentences.

For example, can you describe what’s wrong with the following sentence about cutting costs?

> First we found less expensive material, and then a more economical means of production was developed.

If you said that the first half of the sentence used active voice but the second half switched to passive voice, you’re right. Shifts of this kind can make a sentence hard to follow. Notice how much easier it is to understand this version:

> First we found less expensive material, and then we developed a more economical means of production.

There’s a similar problem in the following sentence:

> The consumer should read the nutrition label, but you often don’t take the time to do so.

Did you notice that the point of view changed from third person (consumer) to second (you) in this sentence? The following revision would be much easier to follow:

> Consumers should read nutrition labels, but they often don’t take the time to do so.

Sometimes we start writing one kind of sentence and then change it before we get to the end, illogically fusing parts of two different sentences together. Here’s an example:

**Because our salespeople are inexperienced caused us to miss our quota.**

Rewriting the sentence in one of the following ways (by either changing the subject or changing the predicate) would eliminate the awkwardness:

**Because our salespeople are inexperienced, we missed our quota.**

**Our inexperienced salespeople caused us to miss our quota.**
Communication in brief

Don’t Make Me Laugh

Misplaced modifiers can have unintentionally humorous effects, as these examples show:

The patient was referred to a psychologist with several emotional problems.

Two cars were reported stolen by the Farmingdale police yesterday.

Please take time to look over the brochure that is enclosed with your family.

To keep the joke from being on you, put the modifier next to what it modifies.


These sentences further illustrate the point:

**Mixed Construction**

Some activities that the company participates in are affordable housing, conservation of parks, and litter control.

Job rotation is when you train people by moving them from job to job.

Knowing that she objected to the price was the reason we permitted her to return the goods.

My education was completed in 2008, and then I began work as a manager for Home Depot.

The cost of these desks is cheaper.

**Improved**

Some causes the company supports are affordable housing, conservation of parks, and litter control.

Job rotation is a training method in which people are moved from job to job.

Because we knew she objected to the price, we permitted her to return the goods.

I completed my education in 2008 and then began work as a manager for Home Depot.

The cost of these desks is lower. (Or These desks are cheaper.)

You can rectify the problem in one of two ways:

As far as time management goes [or is concerned], he is a master of multitasking.

As for time management, he is a master of multitasking.

**dangling/misplaced modifiers** Putting modifiers in the wrong place or giving them nothing to modify in the sentence is another common way that sentence logic can go awry.

Consider this sentence:

Believing the price would drop, the purchasers were instructed not to buy now.

The sentence seems grammatically correct . . . but it doesn’t make sense. It looks as though the purchasers believed the price would drop—but if they did, why did someone else have to tell them not to buy? The problem is that the people whom the opening phrase is supposed to modify have been left out, making the opening phrase a dangling modifier.

You can correct his problem by putting the right agents after the opening phrase:

Believing the price would drop, we instructed our purchasers not to buy now.

What makes this sentence hard to follow?

We have compiled a list of likely prospects using the information we gathered at the trade show.

Surely the “prospects” aren’t really the ones using the information. The sentence would be clearer if the final phrase were more logically placed, as in

Using the information we gathered at the trade show, we have compiled a list of prospects in the Chicago area.
faulty parallelism Readers expect the same kinds of elements in a sentence to be worded in the same way. Faulty parallelism violates this logical expectation.

How might you make the similar items in this sentence more parallel in wording?

They show their community spirit through yearly donations to the United Way, giving free materials to Habitat for Humanity, and their employees volunteer at local schools.

Here’s one way:

They show their community spirit by donating yearly to the United Way, giving free materials to Habitat for Humanity, and volunteering at local schools.

Other rules of grammar besides those mentioned here can help you avoid illogical constructions and write clear sentences. You can review these rules by studying the online material about correctness and completing the diagnostic exercise there to test your understanding of them.

WRITING CLEAR PARAGRAPHS

Skillful paragraphing is also important to clear communication. Paragraphs show where topics begin and end, thus helping the reader mentally organize the information. Strategic paragraphing also helps certain ideas stand out.

Designing paragraphs requires the ability to organize and explain information. It also involves anticipating your readers’ likely reactions and structuring your content for the desired effect. The following advice will help you use paragraphing to your best advantage.

LO 9 Compose paragraphs that are short and unified, use topic sentences effectively, and communicate coherently.

Give the Paragraphs Unity

Like sentences, paragraphs should have unity. When applied to paragraph structure, unity means that a paragraph sticks to a single topic or idea, with everything in the paragraph developing this topic or idea. When you have finished a paragraph, you should be able to say, “Everything in this paragraph belongs together because every part concerns every other part.”

A violation of unity is illustrated in the following paragraph from an application letter. As the goal of the paragraph is to summarize the applicant’s coursework, all the sentences should pertain to coursework. By shifting to personal qualities, the third sentence (in italics) violates paragraph unity. Taking this sentence out would correct the problem.

At the university I studied all the basic accounting courses as well as specialized courses in taxation, international accounting, and computer security. I also took coursework in the behavioral areas, with emphasis on human relations. Realizing the value of human relations in business, I also actively participated in organizations, such as Sigma Nu (social fraternity), Alpha Kappa Psi (professional fraternity), Intramural Soccer, and A Cappella. I selected electives to round out my general business education, choosing courses in investments, advanced business report writing, financial policy, and management information systems. The enclosed résumé provides a complete list of my business-related coursework.

Keep Paragraphs Short

As a general rule, you should keep your paragraphs short. This suggestion overlaps the suggestion about unity, because unified paragraphs tend to be short.

As noted earlier, paragraphs help the reader follow the writer’s organization plan. Writing marked by short paragraphs identifies more of the details of that plan. In addition, such writing is inviting to the eye. People simply prefer to read writing with frequent paragraph breaks.

Give every paragraph a clear focus.
How long a paragraph should be depends on its contents—on what must be included to achieve unity. Readability research has suggested an average length of eight lines for longer papers such as reports. Shorter paragraphs are appropriate for messages.

**Wise Words on Simplicity**

> It is far more difficult to be simple than to be complicated.  
> —John Ruskin

> Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.  
> —Albert Einstein

> The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.  
> —Thomas Jefferson

Keep in mind that these are general suggestions. Some good paragraphs may be quite long—well over the average. Some paragraphs can be very short—as short as one line. One-line paragraphs are an especially appropriate means of emphasizing major points in business messages. A one-line paragraph may be all that is needed for a goodwill closing comment or an attention-grabbing opening.

A good rule to follow is to question the unity of all long paragraphs—say, those longer than 10 lines. If after looking over such a paragraph you conclude that it has unity, leave it as is. But you will sometimes find more than one topic. When you do, make each topic into a separate paragraph.

**Make Good Use of Topic Sentences**

One good way of organizing paragraphs is to use topic sentences. The topic sentence expresses the main idea of a paragraph, and the remaining sentences build around and support it. In a sense, the topic sentence serves as a headline for the paragraph, and all the other sentences supply the story. True, not every paragraph must have a topic sentence. Some paragraphs, for example, introduce ideas, relate succeeding items, or present an assortment of facts that lead to no conclusion. The central thought of such paragraphs is difficult to put into a single sentence. Even so, you should use topic sentences whenever you can. Using topic sentences forces you to find the central idea of each paragraph and helps you check for paragraph unity.

Where the topic sentence should be in the paragraph depends on the subject matter, the reader’s expectations, and the writer’s plan, but you basically have three choices: the beginning, end, or middle. The following sections illustrate these possibilities.

**topic sentence first**  The most common paragraph arrangement begins with the topic sentence and continues with the supporting material. In fact, the arrangement is so appropriate for business information that one company’s writing manual suggests that it be used for virtually all paragraphs.

To illustrate the writing of a paragraph in which the topic sentence comes first, take a paragraph reporting on economists’ replies to a survey question asking their view of business activity for the coming year. The facts to be presented are these: 13 percent of the economists expected an increase; 28 percent expected little or no change; 59 percent expected a downturn; 87 percent of those who expected a downturn thought it would come in the first quarter. The obvious conclusion—and the subject for the topic sentence—is that the majority expected a decline in the first quarter. Following this reasoning, we would develop a paragraph like this:

> A majority of the economists consulted think that business activity will drop during the first quarter of next year. Of the 185 economists interviewed, 13 percent looked for continued increases in business activity, and 26 percent anticipated little or no change from the present high level. The remaining 59 percent looked for a recession. Of this group, nearly all (87 percent) believed that the downturn would occur during the first quarter of the year.

**topic sentence last**  The second most common paragraph arrangement places the topic sentence at the end, usually as a conclusion. Paragraphs of this kind present the supporting details first and then lead readers to the conclusion, as in this example:

> The significant role of inventories in the economic picture should not be overlooked. At present, inventories represent 3.8 months’ supply. Their dollar value is the highest in history. If considered in relation to increased sales, however, they are not excessive. In fact, they are well within the range generally believed to be safe. Thus, inventories are not likely to cause a downward swing in the economy.

**topic sentence within the paragraph**  A third arrangement places the topic sentence somewhere within the paragraph. This arrangement is rarely used, but sometimes it is appropriate, as in this example:

> Numerous materials have been used in manufacturing this part. And many have shown quite satisfactory results. **Material 329, however, is superior to them all.** When built with material 329, the part is almost twice as strong as when built with the next best material. It is also three ounces lighter. Most important, it is cheaper than any of the other products.

**What Is This Paragraph Doing?**

Each paragraph needs to make a clear point. But it also needs to contribute to your overall communication strategy.

So ask yourself not only what each paragraph is saying but also what it is doing. Adding further support to a point? Explaining why something happened? Moving on to the reader’s next question? Switching from what you can’t do to what you can? Have a clear purpose for each paragraph, and you’ll be likely to have a clear point as well.
Leave Out Unnecessary Detail
You should include in your paragraphs only the information needed to achieve your purpose.

You can best judge what to include by putting yourself in your reader’s place. What additional information might be helpful or persuasive? What information does he or she need? How will it be used? If you follow this procedure, you will probably leave out much that you originally intended to use.

The following paragraph from a message to an employee presents excessive information.

In reviewing the personnel records in our company database, I found that several items in your file were incomplete. The section titled “work history” has blanks for three items of information. The first is for dates employed. The second is for company name. And the third is for the type of work performed. On your record only company name was entered, leaving two items blank. Years employed or your duties were not indicated. This information is important. It is reviewed by your supervisors every time you are considered for promotion or for a pay increase. Therefore, it must be completed. I request that you log in to the company portal and update your personnel record at your earliest convenience.

The message says much more than the reader needs to know. The goal is to have the reader update the personnel record, and everything else is of questionable value. This revised message is better:

A recent review of the personnel records showed that yours is incomplete. Please log in to the company portal at your earliest convenience to update your record.

Make Paragraphs Coherent
Like well-made sentences, well-made paragraphs move the reader logically and smoothly from point to point. They clearly indicate how the different bits of information are related to each other in terms of logic and the writer’s apparent purpose. This quality of enabling readers to proceed easily through your message without side trips and backward shifts, is called coherence.

The best way to give your message coherence is to arrange its information in a logical order—an order appropriate for the strategy of the case. So important are such decisions to message writing that we devote whole chapters to different patterns of organization. But logical organization is not enough. Various techniques are needed to tie the information together. These techniques are known as transitional devices. Here we will discuss three major ones: repetition of key words, use of pronouns, and the use of transitional words (Exhibit 4.2).

repetition of key words By repeating key words from one sentence to the next, you can smoothly connect successive ideas. The following sentences illustrate this transitional device (key words in italics). The sentences come from a message refusing a request to present a lecture series for an advertising clinic.

Because your advertising clinic is so well planned, I am confident that it can provide a really valuable service to practitioners in the community. To be truly valuable, I think you will agree, the program must be given the time a thorough preparation requires. As my time for the coming week is heavily committed, may I recommend that you invite Seth Greenley to conduct the ad-writing session?

avoid vague this When using the word this to refer back to a preceding idea, use it with a noun—for example, “this plan,” “this improvement”—to make the reference clear.

use of pronouns Because pronouns refer to words previously used, they make good transitions between ideas. The demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those) can be especially helpful. The following sentences (with the demonstrative pronouns in italics) illustrate this technique.

Ever since the introduction of our Model V nine years ago, consumers have suggested only one possible improvement—voice controls. During all this time, making this improvement has been the objective of Atkins research personnel. Now we proudly report that these efforts have been successful.

demonstrative pronouns

transitional words When you talk in everyday conversation, you connect many of your thoughts with transitional words. But when you write, you may not use them enough. So be alert for places where providing such words will help move your readers through your paragraphs.

Among the commonly used transitional words are in addition, besides, in spite of, in contrast, however, likewise, thus, therefore, for example, and also. (You can find a more extensive list on page xx and on the Words and Style page of the BC Resources online.) These words bridge thoughts by indicating the nature of the connection between what has been said and what will be said next.

Notice how the transitional expressions (in italics) in the following paragraph signal the relations among the parts and move the reader steadily forward through the ideas:

Three reasons justify moving from the Crowton site. First, the building rock in the Crowton area is questionable. The failure of recent
geologic explorations in the area appears to confirm suspicions that the Crowton deposits are nearly exhausted. **Second,** the distances from the Crowton site to major markets make transportation costs unusually high. Obviously, any savings in transportation costs will add to company profits. **Third,** the obsolescence of much of the equipment at the Crowton plant makes this an ideal time for relocation. The old equipment at the Crowton plant could be scrapped.

The transition words **first,** **second,** and **third** bring out the paragraph’s pattern of organization and make it easy for the reader to follow along.

Keep in mind that transitional devices can also be used between paragraphs—to tie thoughts together, to keep the focus of the message sharp, and to move the reader smoothly from point to point. Strive for coherence on both the paragraph and the document level.

**WRITING FOR A POSITIVE EFFECT**

As Chapter 1 made clear, every business message has a human-relations dimension. Using an appropriate style involves managing your tone as well as your contents. You need to strive both for clarity and for positive emotional effects in order to achieve your communication purpose.

Getting positive effects with your messages is largely a matter of skillful writing and of understanding how people respond to words. Keeping certain attitudes and techniques in mind can help. The following sections review these attitudes and techniques.

**LO 10** Use a conversational style that eliminates rubber stamps.

**Use a Conversational Style**

One technique that helps build goodwill is to write in conversational language. Such language is warm and natural. Because it is the language we use most, it is also easily understood.

**Communication in brief**

**The Business Benefits of Positivity**

University of Michigan professor Kim Cameron, a pioneer in the new field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), researches the connections between positive attributes and organizational success. He has identified four leadership strategies “that tend to produce life-giving, flourishing outcomes”:

1. **Positive climate.** Leaders who foster “compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness” help create more productive organizations.
2. **Positive relationships.** When leaders reward “positive energizers”—employees who “leave others feeling inspired, motivated, and full of vitality”—they boost performance.
3. **Positive communication.** Affirmative language pays. “In a study of high-, average-, and low-performing teams, the single most important factor in predicting organizational performance was the ratio of positive statements . . . to negative statements.”
4. **Positive meaning.** Those leaders who reinforce the meaningfulness of employees’ work elicit more positive outcomes.


Writing conversationally is not as easy as you might think. When faced with a writing task, you can be tempted to change character and write in stiff and stilted words. The result is a cold and unnatural style—one that doesn’t produce the goodwill effect you want your messages to have. The following examples illustrate this problem and how to correct it.

**Stiff and Dull**

Enclosed herewith is the brochure about which you make inquiry.

This will acknowledge receipt of your May 10th order for four dozen Docker slacks. Please be advised that they will be shipped in accordance with your instructions by UPS on May 16.

Submitted herewith is your notification of our compliance with subject standards.

**Conversational**

Enclosed is the brochure you asked about.

Four dozen Docker slacks should reach your store by the 18th. As you instructed, they were shipped today by UPS.

Submitted herewith is notification of our compliance with the standards.
Cut Out “Rubber Stamps”

Rubber stamps (also called clichés) are expressions used by habit every time a certain type of situation occurs. They are used without thought and are not adapted to the specific situation. As the term indicates, they are used much as you would use a rubber stamp. Because they are used routinely, rubber stamps communicate the effect of routine treatment, which is not likely to impress readers favorably. Such treatment tells readers that the writer has no special concern for them—that the present case is being handled in the same way as others. In contrast, words specially selected for the case show the writer’s concern for and interest in the readers. Clearly, specially selected wording is the better choice for producing a goodwill effect.

Some examples of rubber stamps you have no doubt heard before are listed below. These phrases, while perhaps once appropriate, have become stale with overuse:

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to ask.
This will acknowledge receipt of . . .

This is to inform you that . . .
Thank you for your time.
It has come to my attention . . . (which is negative as well as stale)
You do not need to know all the rubber stamps to stop using them. You need only to write in the language of good conversation and treat your readers like the individuals they are.

LO 11 Use the you-viewpoint to build goodwill.

Use the You-Viewpoint

Writing from the you-viewpoint (also called you-attitude) is another technique for building goodwill in written messages.
In a broad sense, you-viewpoint writing emphasizes the reader’s interests and concerns. It emphasizes you and your and de-emphasizes we and our. But it is more than a matter of just using second-person pronouns. You and your can appear prominently in sentences that emphasize the we-viewpoint, as in this example: “If you do not pay by the 15th, you must pay a penalty.” Likewise, we and mine can appear in sentences that emphasize the you-viewpoint, as in this example: “We will do whatever we can to protect your investment.” The point is that the you-viewpoint is an attitude of mind that places the reader at the center of things.

The following examples illustrate the value of using the you-viewpoint. Imagine the contrasting effects that the difference in wording would create.

**We-Viewpoint**

We are pleased to have your new account.

Our policy prohibits us from permitting outside groups to use our equipment except on a cash-rental basis.

We have been quite tolerant of your past-due account and must now demand payment.

We have received your report of May 1.

Please submit your January report so that we may complete our records.

We require that you sign the sales slip before we will charge to your account.

Some critics of the you-viewpoint point out that it can be insincere and manipulative. It is better, they say, just to “tell it likes it is.”

Without question, the you-viewpoint can be used to the point of being insincere, and it can be used to pursue unethical goals. Our advice is to use the you-viewpoint when it is friendly and sincere and when your goals are ethical. In such cases, using the you-viewpoint is “telling it like it is.” If you have your readers’ feelings genuinely in mind, writing from the you-viewpoint should come naturally.

**You-Viewpoint**

Your new charge account is now open for your convenience.

Our policy of cutting operating costs by renting our equipment helps us make efficient use of your tax dollars.

If you are to continue to enjoy the benefits of credit buying, you must clear your account now.

Thank you for your report of May 1.

So that your file may be completed, please send us your January report. For your protection, you are charged only after you have signed the sales slip.

Some critics of the you-viewpoint point out that it can be insincere and manipulative. It is better, they say, just to “tell it likes it is.”

Without question, the you-viewpoint can be used to the point of being insincere, and it can be used to pursue unethical goals. Our advice is to use the you-viewpoint when it is friendly and sincere and when your goals are ethical. In such cases, using the you-viewpoint is “telling it like it is.” If you have your readers’ feelings genuinely in mind, writing from the you-viewpoint should come naturally.

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**LO 12** Accent the positive through word choice and positioning to achieve goodwill and other desired effects.

**Accent the Positive**

In most situations, it is better to use positive than negative wording in your business messages.

This is not to say that negative words have no place in business writing. Such words are powerful, and you will sometimes want to use them. But positive words tend to put the reader in a cooperative frame of mind, and they emphasize the pleasant aspects of the goal. They also create the goodwill that helps build relationships.

Consider the case of a company executive who had to deny a local civic group’s request to use the company’s meeting facilities. To soften the refusal, the executive could let the group use a conference room, which might be somewhat small for its purpose. The executive came up with this totally negative response:

*We regret to inform you that we cannot permit you to use our auditorium for your meeting, as the Sun City Investment Club asked for it first. We can, however, let you use our conference room, but it seats only 60.*

The negative words are italicized. First, the positively intended message “We regret to inform you” is an unmistakable sign of coming bad news. “Cannot permit” contains an unnecessarily harsh meaning. And notice how the good-news part of the message is handicapped by the limiting word *only*.

Had the executive searched for more positive ways of covering the same situation, he or she might have written:

*Although the Sun City Investment Club has reserved the auditorium for Saturday, we can offer you our conference room, which seats 60.*

Not a single negative word appears in this version. Both approaches achieve the primary objective of denying a request, but their effects on the reader would differ sharply. There is no question about which approach does the better job of building goodwill.
In the 1950s, psychologist Eric Berne developed a model of relationships that he called “Transactional Analysis.” It has proven to be so useful that it is still popular today.

At the core of this model is the idea that in all our transactions with others (and even within ourselves), people occupy one of three positions: parent, child, or adult.

- **A parent** is patronizing, spoiling, nurturing, blaming, criticizing, and/or punishing.
- **A child** is uninhibited, freely emotional, obedient, whining, irresponsible, and/or selfish.
- **An adult** is reasonable, responsible, considerate, and flexible.

Significantly, the “self” that one projects invites others to occupy the complementary position. Thus, acting “parental” leads others to act “childish” and vice versa, while acting “adult” invites others to be adults.

In both internal and external business messages, strive for “adult–adult” interactions. Your courtesy and professionalism will be likely to elicit the same from your readers.

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**Communication in brief**

**Parent, Child, or Adult?**

In general, you should be wary of strongly negative words. These words convey unhappy and unpleasant thoughts, and such thoughts usually detract from your goal. They include such words as mistake, problem, error, damage, loss, and failure, as well as words that deny—words such as no, do not, refuse, and stop. Try also to avoid wording that blames the reader or focuses on what you cannot do. The following examples illustrate (negative wording is in italics):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You failed to give us the fabric specifications of the chair you ordered.</td>
<td>To complete your order, please check your choice of fabric on the enclosed card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking is not permitted anywhere except in the lobby.</td>
<td>Smoking is permitted in the lobby only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We cannot deliver until Friday.</td>
<td>We can deliver the goods on Friday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regret to inform you that we must deny your request for credit.</td>
<td>For the time being, we can serve you on a cash basis only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should have known that the camera lens cannot be cleaned with tissue, for it is clearly explained in the instructions.</td>
<td>The instructions explain why the camera lens should be cleaned only with a nonscratch cloth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effort to accentuate the positive can involve more than word choice; it can also involve skillful management of emphasis. As we advised earlier in this chapter, use sentence structure to your advantage. If you have positive information, putting it in the main clause of the sentence—or even in a short sentence all by itself—will emphasize it. If you have negative information, you might be able to de-emphasize it by putting it in a phrase or dependent clause, as in the following sentence:

**While your plan is not feasible at this time, we encourage you to submit it again next year when we should have more resources for implementing it.**

Another way to manage emphasis is to consider carefully where to put the positive and negative news.

The beginnings and endings of a writing unit usually carry more emphasis than the center parts. This rule of emphasis applies whether the unit is the message, a paragraph of the message, or a sentence within the paragraph (see Exhibit 4.3). Some authorities think that the reader’s fresh mental energy explains beginning emphasis. Some say that the last parts stand out because they are the most recent in the reader’s mind. Whatever the explanation, research has suggested that this emphasis technique works.

If we were to use this technique in the example just provided, we might write a paragraph like this:

**In light of the current budget crunch, we approved those suggestions that would save money while not costing much to implement. While your plan is not feasible at this time, we hope you will submit it again next year when we should have more resources for implementing it.**
As with use of the you-viewpoint, emphasis on the positive, when overdone, can lead to fake and manipulative messages. The technique is especially questionable when it causes the reader to overlook an important negative point in the message—the discontinuation of a service, for example, or information about an unsafe product.

Do not let your effort to please the reader lead you to be dishonest or insincere. That would be not only morally wrong; it would also be a bad way to do business. On the other hand, you should not be naïve about the nature of reality, either. What we represent in our communication—whether data, events, people, or situations—does not come to us possessing one and only one meaning. Most phenomena can be rightly perceived in multiple ways. In your quest to achieve your communication purpose and build goodwill, think before you let negative feelings make their way into your messages. You will often be able to depict the glass as half full rather than as half empty, and you will probably find that your own perspective has improved in the process.

When ethical and appropriate, view the glass as half full, not as half empty.
The following questions will test your take-away knowledge from this chapter. How many can you answer?

**LO1** What are two ways to simplify your writing through word choice?

**LO2** Why should you use technical words and acronyms with caution?

**LO3** What do we mean by “concrete language” and “active verbs”?

**LO4** What three guidelines should you especially keep in mind when choosing the right word?

**LO5** What are four kinds of discriminatory writing to avoid?

**LO6** What are two ways to keep your sentences short?

**LO7** What are two ways to use sentence structure to emphasize the most important information?

**LO8** Avoiding which problems will help give your sentences unity and clear logic?

**LO9** What are five good pieces of advice for writing clear, smooth paragraphs?

**LO10** How does avoiding “rubber stamps” help you achieve a conversational style?

**LO11** What is the “you-viewpoint” and why should you use it?

**LO12** What are two ways to focus on the positive in your writing?
Did your answers include the following important points?

LO1
• Use familiar words; use short words.

LO2
• By their very nature, most technical words and acronyms require relatively specialized knowledge in order to be understood.

LO3
• Concrete words are specific; they stand for things the reader can visualize, feel, taste, or smell.
• Active verbs contain action, unlike “is,” “have been,” and other forms of the verb “to be.” Two ways to make verbs active are to use active voice and to avoid camouflaged verbs.

LO4
• Be sensitive to connotation; do not confuse similar words; use correct idiom.

LO5
• Sexist words
• Words that stereotype by race, nationality, or sexual orientation.
• Words that stereotype by age.
• Words that typecast those with disabilities.

LO6
• Limit the content; use economical wording.

LO7
• Put the more important points in the shorter sentences.
• State the important points as main clauses.

LO8
• Including unrelated ideas; including excessive detail; mixing two types of sentences; writing incomplete constructions; usingmodifiers illogically; putting like elements in nonparallel form.

LO9
• Giving paragraphs unity.
• Keeping paragraphs short.
• Making good use of topic sentences.
• Leaving out unnecessary detail.
• Using coherence devices (such as repetition of key words and transitional words).

LO10
• A conversational style treats your reader as an individual. “Rubber stamps” (clichés) convey the impression that the specific personality and interests of the reader are not relevant or important.

LO11
• The “you-viewpoint” is an attitude of mind that places the reader in the center of things. Using the you-viewpoint shows the reader that you have his/her needs and interests in mind.

LO12
• Use positive wording; emphasize positive points by putting them in positions of emphasis.

Practical Application
How many wording problems can you spot in the following message thanking a new customer for his business?

Dear Mr. Taylor,
You are welcomed as a new customer and thanked for your business. It will be seen that we have a lot of wonderful, cheap products which have gained us notoriety in our industry. Plus, our CRM is second to none. And our customer-service girls will answer your questions ASAP, 24-7.

We are anxious to serve you further and look forward to a harmonious and mutually profitable collaborative experience.

Word Use Review
Select the correct word for each sentence below.

1. Using the you-viewpoint will help you have a positive (affect, effect) on your reader.
2. When you (chose, choose) your words, be sure to keep your reader’s interests and background knowledge in mind.
3. A paragraph is easier to understand when (its, it’s) topic sentence is clear and well placed.

ANSWERS

1. effect
2. choose
3. its