

Writing Conventions in the Disciplines:

Writing in Business

Basic Purpose/Approach: Business writing is generally directed to causing its audience to make some decision and then take action on that decision. Little is left to the interpretation of the reader, because business writers hope to impress the reader with their own agendas and interpretations, rather than leave the reader potentially indecisive. Business writing is direct, concise, and written in an easily accessible structure.

Successful business writers tend to approach the writing process in three parts: 1) identifying a problem, 2) analyzing the problem and presenting possible solutions, 3) recommending the best solution (which will require some action of the audience). They value precision in identifying the problem, and their own writing is evaluated according to how well it resolves the problem – how effective the action prompted by the writing is.

Business writers do not always use thesis statements, because too often the factors that would properly qualify and explain the thesis' reasoning are many and complicated. Two pitfalls of beginning business writers are excessively generalized, concise statements (in an effort to include, but not mention, all the factors involved in the thesis) or excessively detailed, bloated theses. A thesis is also inappropriate for the business model because the assumption is that the writer must write in order to solve the problem, not that the writer begins with a solution.

Hierarchy and personal relationships are also factors in business writing which means that the business writer needs to give particularly careful thought to audience. Business writers face a greater variety of audiences than writers in other disciplines.

Nouns: Jargon is used in business writing when the writing is directed at a specialized audience with shared knowledge. Business writers prefer their jargon to be short and simple, so abbreviations are commonly used.

Pronouns: First and second-person pronouns are appropriate in business writing, because business writers are addressing audiences in an effort to get them to take action. As noted above, they often have personal relationships with these audiences. When writing to less personal audiences, for example to parties outside the company, business writers use a more formal mode that avoids use of the first and second person, yet does not usually fall into third-person constructions such as "One supposes that..." *Plain and unpretentious is an important aesthetic in business writing.*

Tense: Business writers use tenses just as we do in normal conversations, referring to the past in the past and the present in the present.

Active Voice: Business writers prefer active verbs, because they want their writing to convey energy and confidence. They slip into passive only when describing scientific findings or methods, for much the same reasons that natural science or social science writers would.

Mood: One pitfall of the business writer is overuse of the imperative mood. Because they wish to be concise, business writers often use the imperative, but it can sound pushy or condescending. This consideration is important whether writing to superiors or subordinates.

Modifiers: Subtle use of modifiers to enhance or emphasize their meanings but not exaggerate them is a necessary skill in business writing. Business writers must also consider possible lawsuits, so they favor careful qualification of claims even as they also strive for directness.

Diction: While the level of diction varies widely in business writing depending on audience and purpose, one constant is the importance of using positive terms. Rather than writing, “You need assistance because your credit rating is very low,” write: “We would like to help you improve your credit rating.”

Parallelism: Business writers like lists and bullet-points, so parallelism is a frequent trait of business writing. This technique is one way business writers make their material easier to read.

Tone: As noted above, business writers must adapt for a variety of audiences, so here, tone is incredibly important. Some constants include: a respect for audience, integrity, energy, positivity (to the extent that neutral language may even appear negative), and directness. Sentences are often shorter in business writing, and variations in font size and spacing also assist in making the writing accessible. Because of the brevity and directness, business writers must be sure that every word counts and is correct – even a minor grammar error can have a devastating effect when language is under this kind of pressure.