

Types of Writing Word Choice in Business

Written communication is a fundamental part of business. A well-worded document can make a positive impression on your reader, whereas a poorly chosen word can negatively affect business relationships and transactions. The following examples and general guidelines demonstrate important principles about word choice in business writing.

GUIDELINES

BE CONCISE

Wordiness buries meaning; a few precise words are often more powerful than a long string of vague words. To keep your writing concise, eliminate unnecessary words, phrases, and sentences. (See the *Economy in Writing* handout.)

◀ Avoid unnecessary phrases.

BAD EXAMPLE	SUGGESTION
Acknowledging your . . .	(Avoid this at the beginning of sentences.)
Answering your . . .	(Avoid this at the beginning of sentences.)
Permit us to state . . .	(Avoid this phrase. Just state it.)
This letter is to inform you . . .	(Just give the information.)

◀ Eliminate redundant words.

BAD EXAMPLE	SUGGESTION
agreeable and satisfactory	(Use only one of the words.)
consensus of opinion	consensus
my personal opinion	my opinion
refer back to . . .	refer to . . .
thought and consideration	(Use just one of the words.)
true facts	facts

◀ If you can express an idea with fewer words, do so.

BAD EXAMPLE	SUGGESTION
above-numbered policy	your policy; this policy
are of the opinion that . . .	believe . . .
costs the sum of . . .	costs . . .
for the purpose of learning	to learn
in spite of the fact that . . .	although . . .
in the city of . . .	in . . .

◀ Replace unclear phrases with words that more precisely portray your meaning.

BAD EXAMPLE	SUGGESTION
a large number of . . .	450 . . .
as discussed above	(Be specific.)
in due course; in due time	(Give the specific time.)

AVOID CLICHÉS

Avoid clichés (overused words and phrases).

BAD EXAMPLE	SUGGESTION
as a matter of fact	in fact,
as per your request	as you requested
at the present time	now
each and every one of us	each of us; everyone; all of us
feel free to . . .	please . . .
if and when	(Use just one of the words.)
in this day and age	today; currently
in the event that . . .	if . . .
take this opportunity	(Avoid this phrase.)
we are of the opinion that . . .	we believe . . .
with reference to . . .	about . . .

Types of Writing Word Choice in Business

AVOID APPEARING OSTENTATIOUS

Never use large words just to impress your reader. Short, common words are often more powerful than complex words, and writers who misuse lengthy words may be perceived as unintelligent or insincere.

BAD EXAMPLE	SUGGESTION
at which time . . .	when . . .
attached please find . . . ; attached hereto	the attached brochure
the copy enclosed herewith . . .	the enclosed copy . . .
hold in abeyance	postpone
inasmuch . . .	since . . .
pending receipt of . . .	until we receive . . .
please be advised that . . .	(Avoid this expression.)
pursuant to our agreement	as we agreed
subsequent to . . .	after . . .

USE PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

Avoid slang, and always use language that is gender-inclusive.

BAD EXAMPLE	PROBLEM	SUGGESTION
Anywheres	Unprofessional	(There is no such word.)
I'd appreciate . . .	Unprofessional	I would appreciate . . . (Use contractions only when a more casual tone is appropriate.)
You're invited to . . .	Unprofessional	You are invited to . . . (Avoid contractions unless a casual tone is appropriate.)
Every doctor should know his patients personally.	Not gender-neutral	Doctors should know their patients personally. OR Every doctor should know his or her patients personally.

USE CAUTION WITH JARGON

Use jargon (terminology specific to a field) only when it is necessary and when the reader will understand it.

BAD EXAMPLE	PROBLEM	SUGGESTION
Boolean search	Computer jargon	Avoid jargon unless you are certain the reader will know its meaning.
bubble economy	Economic jargon	
cold calling	Business jargon	
Graphical User Interface	Computer jargon	
multilateral action	Political jargon	

BE SENSITIVE TO YOUR READER

Avoid terms that might be considered offensive. When expressing negative news, be sensitive to how your reader will receive it, and adjust your words accordingly.

BAD EXAMPLE	PROBLEM	SUGGESTION
insist and demand	Insensitive	(Avoid using strong words that come across as demanding or insensitive.)
You failed to enclose . . .	Negative	Please enclose . . .
You neglected to send . . .	Negative	We did not receive . . .

WRITE WITH CONFIDENCE

Show confidence through your words, but avoid anything that might be perceived as arrogant.

BAD EXAMPLE	PROBLEM	SUGGESTION
I hope and trust	Lack of confidence	(Avoid words that show doubt.)
I know I am just one of many similar applicants, but . . .	Lack of confidence	(Avoid statements that do not portray confidence in your unique abilities.)
As I am sure you can see, I am the best applicant for this position because . . .	Arrogant	I am well-qualified for this position because...