

# Tips for Good Business Writing

**By June Campbell**

You can contribute significantly to your business' success by developing your writing skills.

If you're operating a business, eventually you will be required to write a business document. It could be a business letter, a business proposal, a business plan, a marketing strategy, copy for your web site, a white paper, a job description, an inter-office memo, a Board report, a press release, or...?

There is good news if writing is not your strong point. Writing is a skill that can be learned. With practice, almost anyone can learn to write an acceptable document.

Why is good writing important? First, some people will judge you by your writing. Why risk losing customers or investors because of a poorly written document?

Secondly, good business writing is easier to read and easier to comprehend than poor writing. Clarity is always a goal when writing business documents. Flowery prose is best left to those who write fine literature.

Many written documents show dramatic improvement when a few common writing errors are corrected. Try this test. Find a letter or document you have written, and go through it making the changes listed below. You could be surprised at the improvement when you follow these basic guidelines.

## **Use the Active Voice**

Write in the active voice instead of the passive voice. That is, rather than writing, "The computer that belongs to my brother," say, "My brother's computer." Rather than writing, "The merchandise that was delivered yesterday," say, "Yesterday's merchandise delivery."

Many people find that by making this one change, they can improve their writing substantially.

*Tip: Use MS Word's Spell and Grammar feature to help find the passive sentences. It's found in the Tool menu.*

## **Use Tenses Consistently**

Changing tenses through a document is a common mistake. Decide which tense you want to write in, then stick to it. **Tense** refers to the past, present, or future.

Past Tense: We did it this way.

Present Tense: We do it this way.

Future Tense: We will do it this way.

It is jarring to a reader to encounter tense changes such the ones in this paragraph:

*We started our business in 1995. We sold and serviced vacuum cleaners. My brother and I do everything ourselves.*

The sentence would be better if written like this:

*We started our business in 1995. We sold and serviced vacuum cleaners. My brother and I did everything ourselves.*

## **Use Consistent Spellings and Punctuation**

Certain words or terms can be written correctly in more than one way. For example, *ecommerce* and *e-commerce* are both correct. The key is to pick one spelling and use it consistently throughout the document.

Similarly, Jane Doe, MD and Jane Doe, M.D. are both correct. Again, you want to pick one usage and use it consistently.

If you're using numbers, decide whether to use the number signs or to spell out the word. It's a common practice to spell out numbers under ten and to use numerical signs for numbers over ten.

We have eight employees.

Or

"We have 28 employees.

## **Limit the use of Adverbs and Adjectives**

Business writing is improved when adverbs and adjectives are removed or used sparingly.

For example, "Our new facility is very, very spacious" is better written as, "Our new facility is spacious."

"Our spacious, new facility really meets our needs," is better written as, "Our spacious facility meets our needs."

And, most importantly of all:

## Strive for Clarity

Be clear about your message. Identify the main point you want to make for the entire document, then condense that point into one sentence. You might use that one sentence, or you might not. But you **MUST** decide what it is. If you have not formulated this one point in your own mind, your writing will not portray the most important thing you want to communicate.

For example, what is the one main message I want to communicate with this article? It is sentence #1.

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