

The Five C's of Effective Business Writing



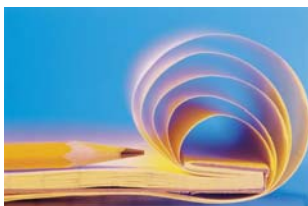
General Principles

- ⇒ **Clarity:** Clarify purpose and understand audience
- ⇒ **Coherence:** Use logical structure and accessible formats
- ⇒ **Correctness:** Ensure your writing is free of errors
- ⇒ **Conciseness:** Keep all communication concise and to the point
- ⇒ **Confidence:** Demonstrate a confident tone



Clarifying your Purpose and Understanding Your Audience

- Who are the primary and secondary readers?
- How do these readers like to be informed?
- What is your purpose or objective in writing to this person or group (to inform, to persuade, or to instruct)?
- What is important to this reader?
- What feelings may influence his or her response to this document?
- What do you expect the reader to do in response to this memo or report?
- How much does he or she know about your subject or about you?



Creating Coherent Documents

You should ask yourself if your writing is logical and accessible; is it “reader friendly”?

Opening: Start fast. In the first paragraph, establish context and purpose and foreshadow content. Make sure the subject line in a memo or e-mail clearly states the purpose (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1 - Sample Memo

Date: August 11, 2006
To: All marketing team members
From: Ana Zhang
Subject: Summary of last meeting

As agreed, I am sending you a summary of our last meeting for your review. We discussed meeting efficiency and ways to organize tasks.

Meeting Efficiency

We decided that we can make our meetings more efficient by distributing an agenda ahead of time and designating a leader for every team meeting.

Organization of Tasks

We also discussed ways to organize our tasks more effectively and decided to create a team action plan and divide up tasks according to project phases.

Contact me at zhang@sw.com with changes.

Body: Use a logical structure and conventional organizational device, such as one of the following:

- Deductive
- Inductive
- Chronological
- Cause/effect
- Comparison/contrast
- Problem/Solution

Format: Use formatting to make the document easy to read:

- Break up long paragraphs into short ones
- Use headings to separate sections
- Create a logical hierarchy for headings and use a consistent font for each level
- Use bulleted lists whenever you can

Five-C's of Effective Business Writing - Continued



Ensuring your Communication is Correct

Information

- Is your information accurate?
- Have you presented it correctly?
- Have you double-checked all numbers?

Usage

- Have you followed conventional business grammar and spelling rules? Check the list of the top 20 most distracting errors to make sure you have not made any of them.
- Have you used all words correctly?
- Have you run spell check but not relied solely on it to catch all errors?
- Have you printed the document and proofread it carefully?

3. Always keep your audience in mind: what do they need to know vs. what may be nice for them to know.
4. Avoid prepositional idioms (e.g., due to the fact that, for the purpose of, in order to, etc.) and eliminate all excess words (the fewer words used, the better).
5. Avoid repetition and redundancy.



Demonstrating a Confident Tone

1. Establish a positive ethos: think credibility, suggesting who you are, that you know what you are talking about, and that you and your organization can be trusted.
2. Be careful not to use too many modifiers, empty words, or weasel words (e.g., almost, like, virtually, things, etc.).
3. Stay away from expressions, such as “in my opinion,” “I think,” and “I believe.”
4. Use strong verbs and avoid passive voice.
5. Trust yourself and your knowledge about the subject, but be careful not to sound as if your way is the only way.

Using the Five Rules for Making Writing Concise



1. Test the importance of what you have written by asking, “Can anyone say ‘so what’ to that?”
2. Use action verbs (e.g., capture, alter, maintain, etc.) and avoid passive voice.

This Five-C Overview is brought to you by



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