

Clear and Effective Business Writing: A Few Easy Rules

Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division

Faculty

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Why Is This So Important?

It is important to write clearly and effectively because we have important things to say!

We Have Important Things To Say

- We want to project a professional image
- We want our words to be credible
 - Some people disregard our words if they are grammatically incorrect

We Have Important Things To Say

- We don't want our readers distracted by errors
- We want our readers to understand what we are writing

Testing Whether Writing Is Clear and Effective

- Does the reader focus on the text and not on the writer?
 - If what we say is important, it should capture the reader's attention
- Is it the writer or is it the reader who must do the hard work?
 - A hallmark of good writing is that it is easy to read

Testing Whether Writing Is Clear and Effective

- Does the reader have to make any decisions about what the writer means?
 - The meaning of any business document should be plain and obvious
- Does the reader have to slow down and re-read?
 - Avoid reading speed bumps!

Rule #1

Use Complete Sentences

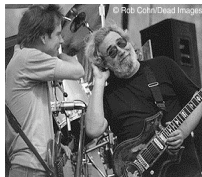
This is in response to your letter of November 15, 2008. Apologies for the delay in this response.

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Rule #2

Avoid Run-On Sentences

**The wheel is turning
and you can't slow down,
You can't let go and you can't hold on,
You can't go back and you can't stand still,
If the thunder don't get you,
then the lightning will.**



It is the policy of the Department of Public Health that employees must abide by all work rules and they may be subject to disciplinary action for any violations including they may be suspended or terminated from employment for serious or repeated infractions.

It is the policy of the Department of Public Health that employees must abide by all work rules. An employee may be subject to disciplinary action for work rule violations. He or she may be suspended or terminated from employment for serious or repeated infractions.

Rule #3

Use the Proper Case For Pronouns



I find that I drink, more and more,
to the memory of you and I.

Pronoun Cases

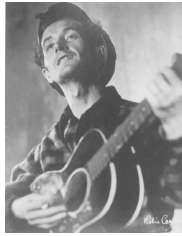
- **Subjective**
 - Use as the subject of a sentence or after a form of the verb, “to be”
 - I, you, he, she, it, they, who
- **Objective**
 - Use as the object of an action verb or as the object of a preposition
 - Me, you, him, her, it, them, whom

Pronoun Cases

- **Possessive**
 - Mine (my), yours (your), his (his), hers (her), its (its), theirs (their), whose (whose)



Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree.
Merry, merry king of the bush is he.



**This land is your land, this land is my land.
From California, to the New York island
From the redwood forest,
to the gulfstream waters
This land was made for you and me.**

The new employee wants to go to lunch with you and I.

The new employee wants to go to lunch with you and me.

Were you wondering who left the cookies on your desk? It was me.

Were you wondering who left the cookies on your desk? It was I.

Rule #4

Use a Pronoun Only If Its Antecedent is Clear

On March 15, 2009, I interviewed employee Susan Smith and her immediate supervisor, Sally Jones. When asked about allegations of rude and unprofessional behavior, she responded by saying that she cannot recall any such behavior but she did have a period of time when there were unusual stresses in her personal life.

On March 15, 2009, I interviewed employee Susan Smith, and her immediate supervisor, Sally Jones. When asked about allegations of rude and unprofessional behavior, Ms. Jones, the supervisor, responded by saying that she cannot recall any such behavior by Ms. Smith, but that Ms. Smith did have a period of time when there were unusual stresses in her personal life.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

Rule #5

Pronouns and Their Antecedents Must Agree

**But they didn't understand it
And I tried to make them see,
That one is only poor
Only if they choose to be.
Now I know we had no
money,
But I was rich as I could be,
In my coat of many colors
My momma made for me.**

**Each employee must turn in their cost
accounting report no later than the
fifth of every month.**

**Each employee must turn in his cost
accounting report no later than the
fifth of every month.**

**Each employee must turn in their cost
accounting report no later than the
fifth of every month.**

**Each employee must turn in his or her
cost accounting report no later than
the fifth of every month.**

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accounting report no later than the
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**Employees must turn in their cost
accounting reports no later than the
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**Each employee must turn in their cost
accounting report no later than the
fifth of every month.**

**You must turn in your cost accounting
report no later than the fifth of every
month.**

Rule #6

**Use Quotations Only for Direct,
Verbatim Quotes**

**Corollary:
Know How to Paraphrase Correctly**

In a recent memo, the governor told us that “the day after Thanksgiving will be a state holiday.”

In a recent memo, the governor said, “The day after Thanksgiving will be a state holiday.”

In a recent memo, the governor said that the day after Thanksgiving will be a state holiday.

I interviewed employee Ronald Johnson on March 16, 2009. He said that I was only informed of the policy on sick leave call-ins after I returned to work.

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Interlude

**Words and Phrases
That Are Often Misused**

And/Or

An employee participating in the Christmas Open House should bring a covered dish and/or a beverage.

And/Or

An employee participating in the Christmas Open House should bring a covered dish and a beverage.

An employee participating in the Christmas Open House should bring a covered dish or a beverage.

An employee participating in the Christmas Open House should bring a covered dish or a beverage or both.

Anticipate

We anticipate that the Legislature will raise the per diem allowance next year.

We expect that the Legislature will raise the per diem allowance next year.

Divided Into

The team was divided into six employees.

The team was composed of six employees.

Effect

The patient was adversely effected.

The patient was adversely affected.

Hopefully

Hopefully, we will be finished with the current project on Thursday.

We hope we will be finished with the current project on Thursday.

Including but Not Limited To

- This is a redundant phrase**

Irregardless

Irregardless of how members of the public behave toward them, employees must maintain a professional demeanor at all times.

Irregardless

Regardless of how members of the public behave toward them, employees must maintain a professional demeanor at all times.

Irrespective of how members of the public behave toward them, employees must maintain a professional demeanor at all times.

Less

The clinic has less staff members on the evening shift than it has on the day shift.

The clinic has fewer staff members on the evening shift than it has on the day shift.

Proactive

- **This is a weak, insipid word**
- **There are many good substitutes, depending on the context**
 - **Active, rigorous, alert, responsive**

Regarding

Thank you for writing with your question regarding the wellness program.

Thank you for writing with your question about the wellness program.

Type

She is the type person who always sees the good in anyone she meets.

She is the kind of person who always sees the good in anyone she meets.

Unique

Joe is a very unique person.

Joe is a very unusual person.

Joe is a unique person.

Rule #7

Use Definite, Specific,
Concrete Language



As concerns this question, our inspired Founder instructs us that the fealty due from the Ultimate in connection with and subjection to the intermediate and the inferential, these being of necessity subordinate to the Auto-Isothermal, and limited

subliminally by this contact, which is in all cases sporadic and incandescent, those that ascend to the Abode of the Blest are assimilated in thought and action by the objective influence of the truth which sets us free, otherwise they could not.



Yesterday December 7th, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. . . .

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces.

I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves.

This memorandum is concerning the matter of the, "consistently exceeds standards," evaluation given to employee James Doe. During the course of the past year Mr. Doe has been an excellent employee who really deserves a consistently exceeds standards evaluation.

He has been helpful and he exhibits a good attitude to his supervisor and to his co workers while in the process of performing his duties. Due to the fact that he is always willing to go the extra mile he is receiving a consistently exceeds standards evaluation.

This memorandum is to explain why James Doe received a, "consistently exceeds standards," score on his annual evaluation this year. During the past year, Mr. Doe has volunteered to remain at work late on at least six separate occasions when grant writing projects were at or near their deadlines.

Nearly every day we have seen him encouraging his co-workers by bringing them candy, by cheerfully offering to make them coffee when they are stressed, or by writing short post-it notes and leaving them on their computer screens.

He was the division's chairperson of the combined charities campaign, and helped organize three teams for participation in the Scale Back Alabama promotion. When he is not busy with his own job tasks, he will be found at his supervisor's door, asking if he can help out with anyone else's work.

In September of last year, he volunteered to revise our division's policies and procedures manual, correcting those policies where our actual practice had evolved and diverged from those outlined in the manual.

Rule #8

Use the Active Voice

Your application is being reviewed by our staff.

Our staff is reviewing your application.

The patient was fed by the home health assistant.

The home health assistant fed the resident.

My car was damaged by the repair shop.

The repair shop damaged my car.

Rule #9

Put Statements in a Positive Form

Use the Word, "Not," Sparingly

Employees must not submit cost accounting reports after the fifth of each month.

Employees must submit cost accounting reports by the fifth of each month.

Do not fail to use proper infection control techniques when providing care to patients.

Use proper infection control techniques when providing care to patients.

On September 15, 2008, the employee did not make a late entry notation for medications she documented were administered to the patient three days earlier.

On September 15, 2008, without noting that she was making a late entry, the employee documented that she administered medications to the patient on September 12, 2008.



I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

**I have a dream that my four
little children will one day
live in a nation where they
will not be judged by the
color of their skin but by
the content of their
character.**

I have a dream today!

A Last Word

**Always Proofread Your Work,
Then Ask Someone Else to
Proofread Your Work**