



BUSINESS WRITING COURSE

INSTRUCTOR: REBECCA HELMS



AGREEMENTS

- Please be punctual
- Please be present when you are here—refrain from checking your phone during our meeting
- Please ask as many questions as needed—there are **NO** stupid questions
- Sign-in for each session

- M. Ed FROM COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY WITH A CONCENTRATION IN ENGLISH
- TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH FOR 4 YEARS
- TAUGHT ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE FOR 2 YEARS
- TAUGHT BUSINESS WRITING FOR CORPORATIONS AND MILITARY OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS

What's In it For Me?

- Better Report Writing (Like the WAR or Trip Reports)
- Effective Employee Reviews
- More concise, professional emails

WHY AM I HERE?

HARD TRUTHS:

- PEOPLE WILL JUDGE YOU BY THE WAY YOU SPEAK AND WRITE—ALWAYS BE PROFESSIONAL
- THERE IS NO SHORT CUT—YOU WILL HAVE TO THINK CRITICALLY AND APPLY WHAT YOU KNOW AND LEARN
- THE BEST WAY TO WRITE BETTER IS TO READ MORE !
(GARBAGE IN/GARBAGE OUT—THINK TEXT FROM A TEEN VS. TIME MAGAZINE)
- SPELL CHECK CANNOT AND WILL NOT SAVE YOU

AGENDA—SESSION 1

- SIGN IN SHEET REMINDER—GET THOSE CPE'S
- MEETING AGREEMENTS
- ACTIVE LEARNING REVIEW—WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS
- THE VERB REVIEWS—LET'S CONJUGATE
- SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT
- PRONOUN
- PUNCTUATION
- ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE VOICE
- PROOF-READING PRACTICE

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

- If the subject of the sentence is plural, the VERB must be singular (and vice versa).
- It especially gets confusing in long sentences where the subject and verb are separated by other words.

Example: Attila the Hun and his army kill and pillage for a living.

Note: Replace all the subjects with a pronoun and use the right verb (in your mind) to check yourself.

Example: They kill and pillage for a living.

Example: Attila the Hun runs a tight ship as a leader.

Example: He runs a tight ship as a leader

APOSTROPHES AND POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

- Theirs
- Yours
- Its (It's is)
- His (his)

QUICK CHECK

- Many people expect the new president to fix our economy.
- The Jones family wants their sprinklers upgraded by next Spring.
- The management meeting and the quarterly breakfast were combined to save money; it's probably better that way.
- Any projects left over at the end of the day will be completed tomorrow.
- I expected more of Johnathan, even though he isn't a straight "A" student.
- The group won the lottery because they bought a ticket together; the winnings were theirs.

DON'T BE A PSYCHO—USE CORRECT PUNCTUATION

Let's eat grandma!



Let's eat, grandma!

**Punctuation
Saves Lives.**

We invited the strippers, JFK, and Stalin.

- The comma between JFK and Stalin is the Oxford comma.
- Proponents say it helps eliminate ambiguity.
- For instance, without the Oxford comma above, would that mean JFK and Stalin were the strippers?
 - We invited the strippers, JFK and Stalin.

Practice

- Many children love to play video games, especially ones that include learning.
- My mother visited us last year; it was a great trip for us both.
- Here are this week's safety highlights:
 1. Two employees failed their drug tests; only one had a prescription.
 2. A meeting was held by the nurse to review:
 - Tips for traveling healthy
 - Deadlines for submitting vaccinations
 - This year's flu clinic hours for employees

ACTIVE VOICE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

- **Active Voice** means writing so the subject of the sentence is in “action”—he, she, or it is the one **performing the action**.
- Use this to keep the meaning clear, to give a directive, to assign blame or praise, or to be brief
- **Example:** The company’s management increased production to meet the demands of customers.
- **Passive Voice** means writing so that the subject of the sentence is “passive—he, she, or it is receiving the action
- Use this to avoid direct blame, to deliver bad news, or when the person or thing doing the action is not important
- **Example:** Production was increased by management to meet the demands of customers.

Practice

- Janice wrote the email.
- Can your company fill the order by the deadline?
- Your department's poor performance caused the company's profits to diminish.
- The bikes were ridden 20 miles by Jonathan and his friends.

PROOF READING—IT MATTERS

- Read aloud to yourself slowly, pausing on every few words (you can whisper)—you will HEAR what is written vs. what you intended to say
- Read the sentence backwards—your eyes will pick up on what's not there
- HAVE SOMEONE ELSE READ IT—set aside your pride!
- Set your font to 40 or 50 so you can see what's actually in the words—not what was intended
- Use spell check—but remember it will only pick up on misspellings—not misuse of a word
- Remember—people will judge you on the quality of what you send them:
 - Simple emails that sound like texts (no punctuation, capital letters, subject/verb, complete sentences, etc.)
 - Having to proof/rewrite your reports vs. your co-worker's—who do you think will get promoted?

Quick Reference Guide

Business Writing

Top Ten Tips

1. Clearly **state your purpose** within the first two sentences
2. **Organize your writing** so the ideas go in a logical sequence; they should flow easily from paragraph to paragraph
3. Keep sentences short—**7 to 25 words each**. Vary the length of sentences in a paragraph
4. Keep writing **simple and clear**
Instead of: “It has come to our attention” or “Enclosed you will find”
Try: “We’ve discovered” and “I’ve enclosed”
5. Use **active voice** so writing is more direct (see reverse side)
6. Give **specific deadlines** when requesting information
7. Ask **questions that require a specific response**, avoid ones that require a “yes/no” answer
8. Make your **writing visually interesting**—use bullet statements, lists, bold or underlined fonts, and short paragraphs to help the reader easily scan for critical information
9. Remove **unnecessary words** like *that* or *which* when possible
10. **Proof read carefully before sending**—this may be the only impression you provide

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS EMAIL

PUNCTUATION



BUSINESS WRITING PRESENTATION

PRESENTER: REBECCA HELMS



SESSION 2

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER—WHEN IT MATTERS...

- REVIEW FROM SESSION 1
- HOW TO BE CONCISE
- EMAIL STYLE AND ETIQUETTE
- REPORT WRITING STYLE
- EMPLOYEE REVIEWS AND AWARDS

REVIEW

- Yesterday, after all the employees had gone home, the company leadership met to discuss policy changes.
- Each manager gave supervisors a list of items to be discussed.
- James' group handed out action items once everyone arrived.
- A lot of the employees, including the executives, need the training because people were not setting good examples in their departments.
- Human Resources handed out the meeting's agenda and the CEO explained the purpose and introduced the trainers. (Reduced wording too.)
- The CEO and leadership wanted to ensure that their company was effectively communicating.

WRITE CONCISELY

- Use Active Voice
- Put the action first
- Reduce/eliminate wordy verbs and adverbs
- (likely, quickly, simultaneously, heavily, single-handedly, -ly)
- Avoid expletive constructions (using the verb “to be” ... “It is, there is, there are, etc.”)
- Avoid vague, all-purpose nouns, be specific in your descriptions
- Use simple language—avoid flowery descriptions (therefore, due to the fact, according to, etc.)

- 5 W's—Don't forget to organize
- Topic Sentence—what is the most important thing about this report
- Supporting Sentences—explanations as needed; keep it brief
- Summarize—offer a solution, explain how it was successful, does it need to be repeated, does the project need to end...

PRACTICE

Break into pairs to write an email to your boss about this week's task accomplishments **IN AN EMAIL** (but on your paper).

- The following rules apply:
- Keep it concise but thorough
- List 3 things you accomplished
- Why were they important? what did it help or improve?
- You are courtesy copying your co-worker who helped you
- Use active voice

Example behaviors at Meets Expectations:

- Breaks down problems into fundamental parts. Identifies root causes and addresses problems in a way that lead to innovative solutions
- Recognizes typical as well as complex and unusual issues and action needed to advance the decision making process. Recommends possible solutions. Follows-up to ensure resolution
- Creates new ideas and processes despite initial ambiguity of the situation, modifies approach to achieve results

PRACTICE

- Write 3 lines for your next review based off of what you have accomplished so far this year, or expect to accomplish this year.
- Remember:
- What did you do?
- Specific details of what it entailed?
- How did it make it better?

Business Writing Rubric	
1	Are the sentences in active voice?
2	Do the first two sentences describe the most important ideas? Did you use 5W's?
3	Is the overall tone professional and polite?
4	Did you proofread for grammar and punctuation? Did you use spell-check?
5	Did you offer a solution or degree of improvement as needed?

PARTING REMARKS

- Use your Rubric and Quick Reference Guide
 - Have another person read your work
- **Read something every day that is challenging to you (top CEOs read 1-2 books a week; outside of work)**
 - Use a writing guide...

References

Gerwitz, Adina Rische. *How to say it. Business writing that works.* (2007)

Thurman, Susan. *The only grammar book you'll ever need.* (2003)

Thurman, Susan. *The only grammar & style workbook you'll ever need.* (2012)