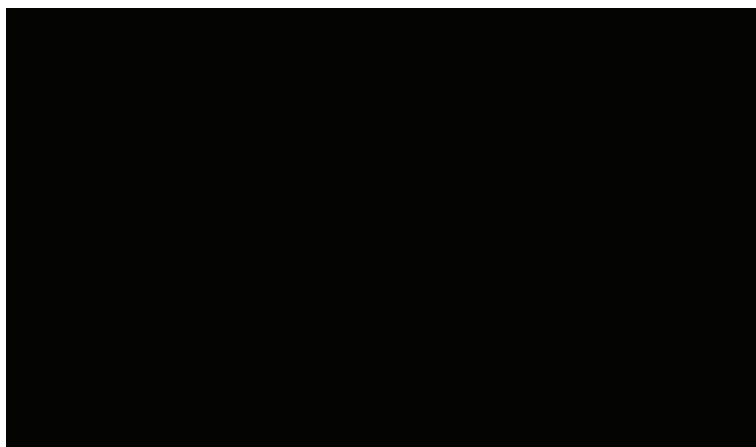




COUNTY OF
LOS ANGELES

ENGLISH USAGE

FOR BUSINESS WRITING



Los Angeles
County
Human Resources
YOUR CAREER STARTS HERE.



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome! The County of Los Angeles Department of Human Resources is pleased to offer this *Business Writing Guide* as part of a series of information guides developed by the Test Research Unit. We hope that you find it useful in enhancing your learning and career endeavors.

Writing is an important part of most business activities. Sometimes you write to document something for yourself (e.g., when you take notes at a meeting or make daily “to-do” lists). In these cases, you generally do not intend for others to read what you have written, and you do not *necessarily* need to follow any particular rules or structure.

Most times, however, you probably write to communicate something to another person who will read and need to understand what you have written. In these cases, you should write in such a way that the reader will be able to understand your message quickly and easily. Knowing and following the rules and guidelines of writing can help you accomplish this goal.

Purpose of this Guide

This guide describes *some* of the fundamental rules and guidelines of writing. Specifically, it covers elements of grammar, style, and mechanics that are important to writing *business* documents (e.g., memoranda, letters, emails, proposals, reports, notices). It addresses:

- Noun/Pronoun Agreement
- Subject/Verb Agreement
- Misplaced/Dangling Modifiers
- Style (including voice, parallelism, and conciseness)
- Word Usage
- Capitalization & Punctuation

Objectives

We have developed this guide to provide you with an understanding of

- *some* of the fundamental rules and guidelines of business writing;
- how these rules and guidelines help make business documents more understandable; and
- ways to check that business writing adheres to these rules and guidelines.

Who should use this Guide?

This guide may be useful to anyone interested in learning about fundamental rules and guidelines of business writing. You should already have a firm understanding of the basic parts of speech (e.g., noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb). We have provided a *brief* glossary at the end of this guide that you may use to refresh your knowledge about the parts of speech and related terminology.

Disclaimer

This guide provides a partial review of this subject matter. Further study of the subject and related concepts may be necessary to provide the understanding needed to achieve your learning and/or career goals. Although this guide presents useful and practical information, there is *no guarantee* that someone who reads it will be able to perform better on the job or on a County examination. By merely using this guide, you consent to understanding and agreeing with this disclaimer.

WHY THE RULES AND GUIDELINES ARE IMPORTANT

The following memorandum shows why the rules and guidelines of writing are important. What would you think if you received it?

November 1, 2009

To: All Staff

From: Approvals Committee Workgroup

Subject: Updates on New Approvals System

The new approvals system will be launched affective on November 22. The system is being developed proactively and to keep up with the increase in requests for approvals and changes to it and especially help the budget, administration's, operations and staffing divisions clients.

Of particular note is the new communication process within divisions in our organization. Prior to the implementation of the new system, communications specific to any and every approvals was emailed and changes to an approval was sent in written form. All communication centering on approvals as well as changes to it will henceforth be coming from the system as emails with the subject updates: approval request no to help in the identifying process and for the purposes of improving tracking.

Since being created, we have spend a lot of time in system testing and the development of a user guide. When published, users will be able to access them on demand from all workstation. The guide includes sample situations to think about. Additionally, focus group meetings will also be made available for everyone to provide feedback in the foreseeable future. We have been emailing everyone an agenda were contemplating for a focus group meeting on 113 in .pdf file format for your information.

Any questions about the system itself can be directed to the Help desk.

Most people who read this memorandum would probably have some difficulty understanding it. It is poorly-written, mainly because it does not follow the fundamental rules and guidelines of good business writing. There are many errors with noun/pronoun agreement, subject/verb agreement, misplaced/dangling modifiers, style, word usage, capitalization, and punctuation. Although this example may be somewhat exaggerated, it is nevertheless representative of common errors found in many business documents that prevent readers from quickly and easily understanding them.

The next sections of this guide describe some of the fundamental rules and guidelines for ensuring that your writing is not as confusing as this example! Each rule and guideline is illustrated with examples that use the following key:

- ✘ = Example is *incorrect*.
- ✔ = Example is *correct*.

NOUN/PRONOUN AGREEMENT

BASIC RULE: Pronouns must match the nouns they replace in person, number, gender, and case.

PERSON indicates whether the noun is the author (first person), the reader (second person), or someone/something else (third person).

First Person I will mail the documents.
{The pronoun "I" references the author of the statement}

Second Person You should receive them within three to four business days.
{The pronoun "You" references the reader of the statement}

Third Person They will arrive in a thick envelope.
{The pronoun "They" references something other than the author/reader}

NUMBER indicates whether the noun is about one person, place, or thing (singular), or multiple persons, places, or things (plural).

Singular I will mail the documents.
{The pronoun "I" references one person}

Plural I will mail the documents. They will arrive in a thick envelope.
{The pronoun "They" references multiple documents}

GENDER indicates whether the noun is masculine, feminine, or an object.

Masculine Forward your request to John. He will confirm that he received it.
{The pronoun "He" references the masculine noun "John"}

Feminine Forward your request to Marcia. She will confirm that she received it.
{The pronoun "She" references the feminine noun "Marcia"}

Object Forward your request to John. He will confirm that he received it.
{The pronoun "it" references the object "request"}

CASE indicates whether the noun is the subject/cause of the action (subjective), the object/receiver of the action (objective), or the owner of something referenced in the statement (possessive).

Subjective She assigns projects to workers after analyzing many factors.
{The pronoun "She" is the subject causing the action "assigns"}

Objective Given your unique project, Gary will probably assign it to me.
{ "It" is the object receiving the action of being assigned }

Possessive I hope that you will be satisfied with my recommendation.
{ "My" references the author's ownership of the recommendation }

The following table lists several pronouns according to their person, number, and case:

PRONOUNS	Subjective		Objective		Possessive	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
First Person	I	we	me	us	my	our
Second Person	you	you	you	you	your	your
Third Person	he, she, it	they	him, her, it	them	his, hers, its	their

NOUN/PRONOUN AGREEMENT

(continued)

Special Rules and Guidelines

Some words and word groupings have special rules that apply to them. It is important to understand the special rules along with the basic rule to ensure that nouns and pronouns agree. Additionally, there are special guidelines to follow to help you avoid common agreement errors. Some of these special rules and guidelines are described below.

The pronoun "who" references persons. The pronoun "that" references objects.

Example: Return the original documents to the clients that request them. ✗
Return the original documents to the clients who request them. ✓
{“Clients” references persons and requires the pronoun “who”}

Example: We are seeking a secretary that can type 40 words per minute. ✗
We are seeking a secretary who can type 40 words per minute. ✓
{“Secretary” references a person and requires the pronoun “who”}

When a pronoun references a singular noun AND a plural noun joined by “or” or “nor,” it must agree with the noun closest to it. This also applies when the nouns have different genders.

Example: Either the employees or the manager will send their comments by the deadline. ✗
Either the employees or the manager will send her comments by the deadline. ✓
{The singular noun “manager” is closest to the pronoun which must also be singular}

Note: This is an example where re-writing, if possible, would be better than following the rule to avoid awkwardness. For example: “Either the manager will send her comments by the deadline or her employees will send theirs.”

Checking for Noun/Pronoun Agreement



- ✓ Is the noun first, second, or third person?
- ✓ Is the noun singular or plural?
- ✓ Is the noun masculine, feminine, or an object?
- ✓ Is the noun subjective, objective, or possessive?
- ✓ Do any of the special rules apply?

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

BASIC RULE: Subjects and verbs must agree in person and number.

PERSON indicates whether the subject is the author (first person), the reader (second person), or someone/something else (third person).

First Person I will mail the documents to you.
{The author is the subject who is causing the action}

Second Person You should review them before returning them to me.
{The reader is the subject who is causing the action}

Third Person My assistant will review them by the fifteenth of this month.
{Someone/something other than the author or reader is causing the action}

NUMBER indicates whether the subject is about one person, place, or thing (singular), or multiple persons, places, or things (plural).

Singular Ms. Jones has earned the organization's highest achievement award.
{The subject is one person: Ms. Jones}

Plural The ergonomic keyboards have design features that will make our work easier.
{The subject is multiple things: keyboards}

Changing the Person and Number of Verbs

The following table describes the action verbs "read" and "watch" according to their person and number. Note that they are spelled the same way regardless of person or number in most instances. However, "s" or "es" is added to the end of the third person singular verb to make it agree with its subject in person and in number. This pattern applies to many, but not all, action verbs.

<u>ACTION VERBS</u>	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
<i>First Person</i>	I read.	I watch.	We read.	We watch.
<i>Second Person</i>	You read.	You watch.	You read.	You watch.
<i>Third Person</i>	He reads.	She watch <u>es</u> .	They read.	They watch.

Linking verbs that reflect states of being have special rules. Consider the following examples using the verbs "be" and "have":

<u>LINKING VERBS</u>	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
<i>First Person</i>	I am.	I have.	We are.	We have.
<i>Second Person</i>	You are.	You have.	You are.	You have.
<i>Third Person</i>	He is.	She has.	They are.	They have.

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

(continued)

Special Rules and Considerations

Some words and word groupings have special rules that apply to them. It is important to understand the special rules along with the basic rule to ensure that subjects and verbs agree. Additionally, there are special guidelines to follow to help you avoid common agreement errors. Some of these special rules and guidelines are described below.

Two or more subjects joined by "and" require a plural verb.

Example: The team leaders and my manager are attending the conference. ✓
{“Team leaders” and “manager” are the subjects. They require the plural verb “are”}

When two or more subjects are joined by “or” or “nor,” the verb must agree with the subject that is closest to it.

Example: Neither a timeline nor frequent revisions guarantee a successful outcome. ✓
{“Timeline” and “revisions” are the subjects. Because “revisions” is closest to the verb and it is plural, the verb must be plural}

Example: Neither frequent revisions nor a timeline guarantees a successful outcome. ✓
{“Timeline” and “revisions” are the subjects. Because “timeline” is closest to the verb and it is singular, the verb must be singular}

Collective nouns require a singular verb.

Example: The committee is hesitant about the change. ✓
{Though “committee” references multiple people, it is a singular noun that requires the singular verb “is”}

Some indefinite pronouns are singular (e.g., anything, everyone, either, no one, each, etc.) and others are plural (e.g., few, many, several, etc.).

Example: Everyone is excited about the project and many have stayed to complete it. ✓
{The singular pronoun “everyone” requires the singular verb “is” and the plural pronoun “many” requires the plural verb “have”}

Some indefinite pronouns can be singular OR plural depending on the context of the statement.

Example: Here is the document; some was edited by Jessica, but Frank edited most of it. ✓
{The pronoun “some” references *how much* of the singular noun “document.” Thus, it requires the singular verb “was”}

Example: Here are the documents; some have images that are best viewed in color. ✓
{The pronoun “some” references *how much* of the plural noun “documents.” Thus, it requires the plural verb “have”}

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

(continued)

The subject is not always a noun or pronoun. When a verb (usually ending in "ing") is used as a subject, it is called a gerund and it takes a singular verb.

Example: Walking is a good cardiovascular exercise. ✓
{The verb "walking" is the subject. It requires the singular verb "is"}

Example: Submitting your application in-person expedites its processing. ✓
{The verb "submitting" is the subject. It requires the singular verb "expedites"}

The subject and verb must agree even when words come between them.

Example: Each of these benefits suggests the program is a worthwhile investment. ✓
{The singular subject "each" requires the singular verb "suggests"}

Example: Our mission to provide effective and efficient services was formally adopted in May. ✓
{The singular subject "mission" requires the singular verb "was"}

In statements that begin with "there is" or "there are," the noun or pronoun that follows is the actual subject with which the verb must agree.

Example: There are many questions. ✓
{ "Questions" is the subject requiring the plural verb "are" }

There is a question. ✓
{ "Question" is the subject requiring the singular verb "is" }

Checking for Subject/Verb Agreement



- ✓ Find the subject by asking "who" or "what" the statement is about.
- ✓ Determine whether the subject is singular or plural.
- ✓ Find the verb by asking what the subject "is" or what the subject "is doing" in the statement.
- ✓ Determine whether the verb is singular or plural.
- ✓ If the subject and verb are both singular (or both plural), they agree. If one is singular and the other is plural, they do not agree.

MISPLACED/DANGLING MODIFIERS

Misplaced modifiers are phrases that modify (i.e., describe) part of a statement in an ambiguous manner because they could potentially apply to another part of the statement. The confusion that results could be avoided by re-arranging the statement so the modifier is in a different place.

Example: Here are some helpful suggestions for protecting your homes from the police chief. ✘

Because of the order of phrases in this statement, it seems that readers need to protect their homes from the police chief! Though perhaps possible, this is probably not the intended message. The phrase “from the police chief” is the misplaced modifier that should be moved in order to make the statement clearer.

Example: Here are some helpful suggestions from the police chief for protecting your home. ✔

The following table provides additional examples of statements with misplaced modifiers that have been corrected to make them clearer.

<i>Misplaced</i> ✘	<i>Properly Placed</i> ✔
Locate the enter key on the keyboard <u>made of red plastic</u> . {What is made of red plastic?}	Locate the enter key made of red plastic on the keyboard.
The building manager said that the office is <u>freshly painted with new carpet</u> and central air. {Carpet can be used to paint?}	The building manager said that the freshly-painted office has new carpet and central air.
She revised the form <u>sitting in court</u> . {Was the form sitting in court?}	Sitting in court, she revised the form.

To ensure that your reader can understand your writing, make sure to place modifiers close to the word(s) they are modifying in the statement.

Dangling modifiers are phrases that modify part of a statement, but are missing some important word(s) to help clarify what they really mean. The confusion that results could be avoided by adding the missing words.

Example: Once executed, you must check the contract for full compliance. ✘

This statement says that “After you are executed, you must check the contract...” This is probably not the intended meaning of the statement. The phrase “once executed” is the dangling modifier that needs a few extra words to help it become clearer.

Example: Once the contract is executed, you must check it for full compliance. ✔

As shown in this example, most dangling modifiers are phrases at the beginning of a statement that do not have their own subject. Because they do not have their own subjects, they attach themselves to the subject of the statement that follows and modify it, rather than what they are really supposed to modify. The table on the next page provides additional examples of statements with dangling modifiers that have been corrected in order to make them clearer.

MISPLACED/DANGLING MODIFIERS

(continued)

Dangling ✘

Tattered and worn, Herbert has decided to request a new sofa for the lobby area.
{Herbert is tattered and worn?}

Left unattended for most of the morning, the secretary decided to pick up the briefcase.
{Was the secretary unattended?}

While sitting in the meeting, the alarm sounded and surprised everyone.
{The alarm sat at the meeting?}

Corrected ✔

The sofa was tattered and worn, so Herbert decided to request a new one for the lobby area.

Because the briefcase had been left unattended for most of the morning, the secretary decided to pick it up.

While everyone was sitting in the meeting, the alarm sounded and surprised them.

Correcting Misplaced or Dangling Modifiers



- ✔ Ensure that modifiers are placed as close as possible to the word(s) they are modifying.
- ✔ Add subjects to modifiers at the beginning of statements or completely re-write the statements.

WRITING STYLE

Style does not relate to particular rules of grammar or mechanics, but rather to ways to arrange words in statements so they are clear and strong in conveying your message. Voice, parallelism, and conciseness are components of style that affect business writing. This section will describe these components along with a few other general style guidelines for business documents.

Voice

“Voice” relates to the direction of the action in a statement. There are two voices: active and passive. In active voice, the action is directed *from the subject* to someone or something else. In other words, the subject performs the action. In passive voice, the action is directed *to the subject* by someone or something else. In other words, the subject receives the action. The following table illustrates these two structures.

ACTIVE:	Doer of Action (“Actor”)	→	Action	→	Receiver of Action
	The analyst		wrote		the report.
PASSIVE:	Receiver of Action	→	Action	→	Doer of Action (“Actor”)
	The report		was written		by the analyst.

Though it is grammatically correct, passive voice often makes readers work too hard to figure out “Who did what?” In fact, many writers take advantage of this characteristic of passive voice when they must convey negative information and want it to be perceived less harshly. For example:

<u>Passive</u> ❌	<u>Active</u> ✅
A review was conducted and your proposal was rejected.	The committee reviewed and rejected your proposal.
It is unfortunate that the letters were not issued on time.	Unfortunately, we did not issue the letters on time.
Errors were made, but they have been corrected.	We made some errors, but we have corrected them.

While there is prevalent use of passive voice in formal business documents, active voice is *generally* preferred to make statements clearer and more direct. However, using passive voice may be justified in some situations, such as when the “actor” is unknown, difficult to identify, or irrelevant to the overall message being conveyed (i.e., the receiver is more important than the “actor”).

Example: We will return the equipment to the supplier because it was damaged during shipping. {The specific person who did the damage is unknown or difficult to identify}

Example: Thankfully, hundreds of volunteers were recruited at the last minute to participate in the clean-up. {Who did the recruiting is irrelevant to the overall message}

Checking for Active versus Passive Voice



- ✓ Find the verb in the statement.
- ✓ Ask “Who?” or “What?” is performing the action.
- ✓ If the statement is constructed so the “actor” is the subject, it has active voice. If the “actor” is the object, it has passive voice.

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Parallelism

“Parallelism” is a balance of two or more similar words or phrases that creates a smooth rhythm and pattern in a statement. Statements that include non-parallel elements are awkward because they contradict the anticipated pattern, thus causing readers to stumble over your words as they attempt to understand them. Most issues with parallelism involve maintaining consistency when listing items, which must match each other in form to preserve the pattern.

Example: Typical activities include answering phones, greeting customers, and data entry. ✘

This statement has faulty parallelism because the last item in the list (i.e., “data entry”) is a noun, while the other items (i.e., “answering” and “greeting”) are verbs. The statement is made parallel by consistently listing each item in the same form (i.e., by repeating the “-ing” pattern):

Example: Typical activities include answering phones, greeting customers, and entering data. ✔

The following table provides additional examples of statements with non-parallel elements that have been made parallel in order to improve flow and understanding:

<i><u>Non-Parallel</u></i> ✘	<i><u>Parallel</u></i> ✔
The recruiter’s initial strategy is advertising online and then to conduct job fairs.	The recruiter’s initial strategy is <u>to advertise</u> online and then <u>to conduct</u> job fairs. {Each item is a verb in the same form}
The last survey indicated that employees 1) have high commitment to the organization and 2) showed lower rates of absenteeism.	The last survey indicated that employees 1) <u>had</u> high commitment to the organization and 2) <u>showed</u> lower rates of absenteeism. {Each item is in the past tense}
The report was written quickly, accurately, and in a thorough manner.	The report was written <u>quickly</u> , <u>accurately</u> , and <u>thoroughly</u> . {Each item is an adverb}

Checking for Parallel Structure

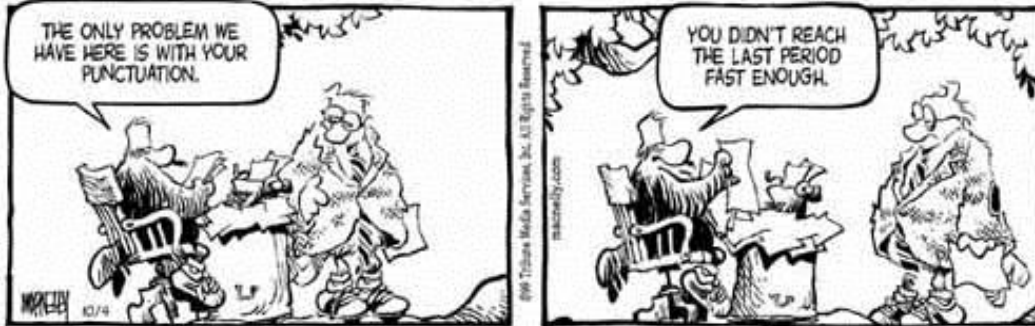


- ✔ Put each item in a vertical, bulleted list and see if they each begin with the same type of word (e.g., Is each a noun? A verb? Is each one present tense?)
- ✔ Compare the sounds of the items. Does each one have an “-ly” sound at the end? An “-ed” sound? Is there some other rhythm being repeated? If any item seems to break that pattern or repetition of sound, it is probably not parallel with the others.

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Conciseness



[Shoe](#), October 1999 © Tribune Media Services

Business writing is most effective when it gets the point across *quickly*, that is, with as few words as possible to convey the message. Wordiness diminishes the clarity of your writing and makes understanding more complicated. Consider the following example which shows how a message can be lost when there are too many words:

Wordy: It is expected by management that great progress will be made by human resources in providing a solution to these problems in the near future. (25 words)

Concise: Management expects that human resources will soon solve these problems. (10 words)

Writing in active voice instead of passive voice is one way to make your statements more concise. Several examples are provided below to illustrate additional ways to improve the conciseness of your writing (the number of words in each example is noted in parentheses).

Choose words with the precise meaning intended (this includes avoiding unnecessary "not" phrases).

Wordy: The letter was sent by someone who did not provide his or her name. (14)

Concise: An anonymous person sent the letter. (6)

Wordy: You must schedule the deposition before tackling any other project or assignment. (12)

Concise: Scheduling the deposition is your priority. (6)

Eliminate redundancies (i.e., phrases that contain words with duplicate meaning).

Wordy: He discussed basic and fundamental principles of project management. (9)

Concise: He discussed basic project management principles. (6)

Wordy: She came up with a very unique alternative. (8)

Concise: She thought of a unique alternative. (6)

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Avoid using nouns when verbs can be used instead.

Wordy: The function of this department is the collection of accounts. (10)

Concise: This department collects accounts. (4)

Wordy: The current focus of the medical profession is disease prevention. (10)

Concise: The medical profession currently focuses on disease prevention. (8)

Simplify.

Wordy: The duties of a clerk are to check all incoming mail and to record it. (15)

Concise: Clerks check and record all incoming mail. (7)

Wordy: We have a tendency to make decisions to take action on requests immediately when customers make a personal appearance with us. (21)

Concise: We generally decide to act immediately on requests when customers meet with us in-person. (14)

Remove any unnecessary clauses that begin with "that," "who," and "which."

Wordy: We chose the system that is most efficient and cost-effective. (10)

Concise: We chose the most efficient and cost-effective system. (8)

Wordy: All applicants who are interested in the job must comply with the rule. (13)

Concise: All job applicants must comply with the rule. (8)

Wordy: The report which was released recently showcased our success. (9)

Concise: The recently-released report showcased our success. (6)

Avoid beginning statements with "It is/was" or "There are/were."

Wordy: It is imperative that we find a solution. (8)

Concise: We must find a solution. (5)

Wordy: There are two issues that should be addressed in the report. (11)

Concise: The report should address two issues. (6)

As these *guidelines* suggest, the fundamental consideration for making your statements concise is to eliminate words that add bulk, but not meaning. The tables on the next page provide examples of redundant, imprecise, and wordy expressions commonly used in business writing and more concise alternatives.

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Redundant ✘	Concise ✔
absolutely perfect	perfect
basic fundamental	basic
centered around	center
conclusive proof	proof
continue further	continue
each individual	each
end result	result
final outcome	result
future plans	plans
important essential	essential
increasingly more	increasingly
mutual cooperation	cooperation
past history	past
refer back	refer
sudden/serious crisis	crisis
sufficient enough	sufficient
together with	with
true fact	fact
unexpected surprise	surprise
very unique	unique

Imprecise ✘	Concise ✔
not accept	reject
not admit	deny
not allow	restrict
not confusing	clear
not different	similar
not have	lack
not include	omit
not many	few
not often	rarely
not the same	different

Wordy ✘	Concise ✔
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reason for • Being that • Due to the fact that • In light of the fact that • On the grounds that 	because, why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is crucial that • It is necessary that • There is a need for • It is important that 	must, should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As/in regards to • In reference to • With regard to/regarding • Concerning the matter of 	about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the event that • If it should happen that • Under circumstances in which 	if
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the present time 	currently, now
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite/due to the fact • Regardless of the fact that 	although
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is able to • Is in a position to 	can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is possible that • There is a chance that • It could happen that • The possibility exists for 	may, might, can, could
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to • In anticipation of • Subsequent to • At the same time as • Simultaneously with 	before, when, as, after
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the occasion of • In a situation in which • Under circumstances 	when
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On behalf of 	for

Checking for Conciseness



- ✓ Is active voice used?
- ✓ Are the words precise?
- ✓ Is there a simpler way to convey the message?
- ✓ Are there unnecessary words or redundancies?

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Other General Style Guidelines

The following are other general style guidelines for making your writing clear and understandable.

Avoid clipped words.

A clipped word is a shortened version of a longer word. It is appropriate to use clipped words in informal business writing (e.g., emails) or when you are certain that your reader will understand them. However, you should use full (i.e., non-abbreviated) words in formal business writing (e.g., reports, proposals, letters).

Clipped ✗	Full ✓
memo	memorandum
phone	telephone
asap	as soon as possible
cell	cellular

Avoid split infinitives.

Infinitives are verbs preceded by the word "to" (e.g., *to write, to address, to read*). Grammar rules dictate that an infinitive should be kept together (i.e., without any words in between). However, writing that explicitly follows this rule often ends up being awkward. Therefore, it has become *generally* acceptable to split an infinitive as long as the "to" and the verb remain fairly close together. Separating an infinitive with a long phrase (e.g., more than one or two words) can cause confusion.

Split Infinitive ✗	Intact Infinitive ✓
<u>to</u> clearly and concisely at all times <u>write</u>	<u>to write</u> clearly and concisely at all times
<u>to</u> as fairly and quickly as possible <u>address</u> concerns	<u>to address</u> concerns as fairly and quickly as possible

Do not end a statement with a preposition.

Although grammar rules dictate that prepositions should never be placed at the end of a statement, writing that explicitly follows this rule often ends up being awkward. In fact, it has become *generally* acceptable to ignore this rule in *informal* writing. However, formal business writing must still adhere to it. A good guideline for avoiding the awkwardness that can result is to re-write the statement altogether, if possible.

Example: Remember the name of the person you give the package to. ✗
Remember the name of the person to whom you give the package. ✓
Remember the name of the person who receives the package from you. ✓

Example: What are you requesting information about? ✗
About what are you requesting information? ✓
What is the information that you request? ✓

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Avoid using “you” inappropriately.

Many writers inappropriately rely on using “you” to describe general statements, which can result in confusion about their intended message. To ensure clarity, avoid using “you” unless you are directly referring to the reader.

Example: Most customers complain that you cannot upload attachments to the system. ✘
{Is “you” everyone in general or the specific person reading the statement?}

Most customers complain that the system restricts attachment uploads. ✔

Avoid using “they” inappropriately.

Many writers inappropriately use the pronoun “they” when unsure about the gender of a singular noun. This error in noun/pronoun agreement is usually related to writers wanting to avoid the awkwardness of using “he or she,” “he/she,” or “s/he” in their statements. These constructions are grammatically correct, but are *generally* perceived to have an unnecessarily distant style. While you should always adhere to the rules of noun/pronoun agreement, re-writing statements to avoid those constructions is a good idea, if possible.

Example: If the union decides to proceed, they will send us your form. ✘

If the union decides to proceed, it will send us your form. ✔

If the union decides to proceed, a union representative will send us your form. ✔

Example: The candidate’s application will show whether they meet the requirements. ✘

The candidate’s application will show whether he/she meets the requirements. ✔

The candidates’ applications will show whether they meet the requirements. ✔

Note: As illustrated in this example, making the noun plural is an easy way to change the statement so “they” can be correctly used.

Avoid nonstandard language.

Nonstandard language includes colloquialisms, clichés, idioms, slang, narrow analogies, or potentially offensive language. It should not be used in formal business writing.

Example: This will help employees keep their heads above water during the trial period. ✘
{“Heads above water” is a colloquialism}

This will help employees keep up with their work during the trial period. ✔

Example: Chairman is an elected position, but Secretary is not. ✘

{“Chairman” is potentially offensive. Language should be gender-neutral, as appropriate}

Chairperson is an elected position, but Secretary is not. ✔

Example: He really hit it out of the park with his presentation ✘

{“Hit it out of the park” is a sports analogy that all readers may not understand}

He did very well on his presentation. ✔

WRITING STYLE

(continued)

Avoid double negatives.

Double negatives occur when two negative words are used in the same statement. The two negatives “cancel” each other out to make a positive. Usually, double negatives can be avoided by choosing words more precisely.

Example: The delivery person left because she could not find no one in the office. ✘
{“Not” and “no one” are negatives that cancel each other out. This statement means that the delivery person found someone in the office, but left anyway}

The delivery person left because she could not find anyone in the office. ✔

Example: They determined that the request did not have no grounds to be denied. ✘
They determined that the request did not have any grounds to be denied. ✔
They determined that the request had no grounds to be denied. ✔

Note: Re-writing to avoid negatives altogether is a good idea, if possible. For example: “They determined that there were grounds to grant the appeal.”

Additionally, though some statements that include double negatives can still be grammatically correct, the inclusion of double negatives nevertheless interferes with clarity. “Not unlikely” and “not impossible” are double negatives frequently used on business documents.

Example: The project is not impossible, but it will take a large effort to properly execute it. ✔
{Not impossible = possible}

The project is possible, but it will take a large effort to properly execute it. ✔

Be consistent.

One of the best ways to get your message across is to be consistent in the words you use. If there are two or more words that can be used to describe the same thing, choose one and use it exclusively. Switching among or between words that have the same intended meaning can confuse your readers. They may think you are discussing a new concept. Using the same word repeatedly may seem monotonous, but it will help to ensure that your message is quickly and easily understood.

Example: Applicants should submit the employment application as soon as possible. The job bulletin will indicate how to file it properly. We encourage applicants to speak with the Exam Analyst if they have questions about applying for the job. ✘

Applicants should submit the employment application as soon as possible. The job bulletin will indicate how to submit it properly. We encourage applicants to speak with the Exam Analyst if they have questions about submitting it. ✔

WORD USAGE

Effective writing depends on effective word selection. Thus, good writers must understand the differences between words so they can select the correct ones. This section will describe some specific words that are commonly confused or misused in business writing.

a/an

- Use *a* before words that begin with consonants (e.g., “hard” sounds)¹
- Use *an* before words that begin with vowels (i.e., A, E, I, O, or U)¹

Example: Our messenger will deliver a box of brochures in about an hour. ✓

accept/except

- *Accept* means to receive or take in someone or something
- *Except* means to leave something out

Example: Patients may accept visitors every day except Sunday. ✓

advice/advise

- *Advice* is a noun that means guidance or suggestion
- *Advise* is a verb that means to give advice

Example: The case worker advised the participant to seek the advice of a counselor. ✓

affect/effect

- *Affect* means to influence someone or something
- *Effect* is the consequence, result, or impact of something

Example: Recent hiring significantly affected workloads and produced positive effects on customer satisfaction. ✓

A handy memory tool to help you choose correctly between “affect” and “effect” in *most* situations is the acronym **RAVEN**:



Remember that
Affect is a
Verb and
Effect is a
Noun.

among/between

- *Between* references two things
- *Among* references more than two things

Example: The second most populous city among all major U.S. cities has fluctuated between Chicago and Los Angeles for several years. ✓

¹ This rule is based on the first *sound* of a word rather than the actual first written letter. For example, the first letter (i.e., “h”) in the word “honor” is a consonant, but it is silent when the word is pronounced. The first *sound* of the word is a vowel sound (i.e., the “o”). Thus, “an” is correct (i.e., an honor) instead of “a” (i.e., a honor). “Hard” sounds require “a” and “soft” sounds require “an.”

Additionally, keep in mind that a given vowel can sound “hard” *or* “soft” in different words. For example, if the vowel “u” at the beginning of a word sounds like the word “you,” then “a” is correct (e.g., He had a unique idea). Otherwise, “an” is correct (e.g., The project received an unprecedented budget). If the vowel “o” at the beginning of a word sounds like the letter “w,” then “a” is correct (e.g., a one-sided document). Otherwise, “an” is correct (e.g., an only child).

WORD USAGE

(continued)

assure/ensure/insure

- *Assure* means to confidently encourage someone about something
- *Ensure* means to offer a guarantee; it references making something happen
- *Insure* means to prevent or protect against something unwanted or undesirable

Example: The IT Manager assured us that the back-up procedures will insure us against data loss and ensure that operations will continue after an emergency. ✓

at

- Do not use *at* after *where*; it is unnecessary.

Example: Susan works at the branch office; that is where my supervisor is at right now. ✗
Susan works at the branch office; that is where my supervisor is right now. ✓

beside/besides

- *Beside* means close to or next to
- *Besides* means in addition to

Example: Besides me, Paul and Ann also think a file cabinet should be beside each cubicle. ✓

compliment/complement

- *Compliment* relates to flattery or praise
- *Complement* means that two or more things support or work well together

Example: Chief Donald complimented the staff on their efforts to modify the program to complement the department's new strategic plan. ✓

choose/chose

- *Choose* is present tense or future tense
- *Chose* is past tense

Example: Regina already chose to go to tomorrow's session, but I will choose which session to attend after I speak with Bill. ✓

compare/contrast

- *Compare* means to note similarities
- *Contrast* means to note differences

Example: Many programs have comparable budgets; however, there is a tremendous contrast in staffing levels. ✓

continual/continuous

- *Continual* means intermittently repeated
- *Continuous* means uninterrupted or "all the time"

Example: The frustrated workers' continual pleas for different cubicles stem from the continuous noise of the nearby copy machine. ✓

WORD USAGE

(continued)

decide/determine

- *Decide* means to subjectively choose from among several options; there is no “right” or “wrong”
- *Determine* means to objectively evaluate something according to a standard; there is a “right” or “wrong”

Example: We determined that fulfilling the request would violate departmental policy and told Mr. Fox to call headquarters if he decides to appeal. ✓

e.g./i.e.

- The *e.g.* abbreviation means “for example.” It is used to list examples after a general statement. The list is usually considered incomplete.
- The *i.e.* abbreviation means “that is” or “in other words.” It is used to clarify something previously stated. When the clarification is a list of items, using *i.e.* indicates that the list is complete.

Example: We purchased many office supplies (e.g., staplers and file folders), but have now exhausted our supply budget (i.e., funds are no longer available). ✓

Example: During our busiest months (e.g., May), we approve most overtime requests. ✓
{This means that that May is one of the busiest months, not the only one}

Example: During our busiest month (i.e., May), we approve most overtime requests. ✓
{This means that May is the busiest month}

Punctuating *i.e.* and *e.g.*



- ✓ While the *e.g.* and *i.e.* abbreviations can be used either with or without parentheses, they should always be used with parentheses in formal business documents.
- ✓ Regardless of placement in a statement, the *e.g.* and *i.e.* abbreviations are always lowercase letters separated with periods that are always followed with a comma.

equal/equitable

- *Equal* means the same
- *Equitable* means fair

Example: Each plaintiff will have an equal opportunity to testify and will receive an equitable portion of any settlement. ✓

WORD USAGE

(continued)

farther/further

- *Farther* is used to compare length or distance
- *Further* means additional time or amount; it suggests “to a greater degree”

Example: We will further evaluate the logistics plan, particularly because it places restrooms farther away from employee workstations than what seems reasonable. ✓

fewer/less

- *Fewer* is used for things that can be counted
- *Less* is used for things that cannot be counted; it denotes degree, value, or percentage

Example: This change should result in clients having less of an issue with the kiosks even though fewer will be on hand. ✓

good/well

- *Good* is an adjective
- *Well* is an adverb; if it is used as an adjective, it means healthy or strong.

Example: She interviewed good. Her responses to our questions were good. ✗
She interviewed well. Her responses to our questions were good. ✓

Example: The meeting went good; we are well on our way to achieving the goal. ✗
The meeting was good; we are well on our way to achieving the goal. ✓

imply/infer

- *Imply* means to express something indirectly; to suggest
- *Infer* means to make an assumption about something

Example: The director’s message implied that our fiscal outlook is good. Staff inferred from it that pending training requests would subsequently be approved.

irregardless/regardless/irrespective

- *Irregardless* is not a word
- *Regardless* and *irrespective* mean “despite” or “without consideration”

Example: Irregardless of the obstacles, we will meet the challenge and succeed. ✗
Regardless of the obstacles, we will meet the challenge and succeed. ✓
Irrespective of the obstacles, we will meet the challenge and succeed. ✓

its/it’s

- *Its* is a pronoun that shows possession
- *It’s* is the contraction of “it is”

Example: After you verify its capacity, please reserve the room for the first Monday that it’s available. ✓

Choosing between *Its* and *It’s*



A useful strategy for choosing correctly between *its* and *it’s* is to remember that the apostrophe takes the place of the missing “i” in the “it is” contraction.

WORD USAGE

(continued)

lead/led

- *Lead* is a present tense noun that means to guide or direct. It can also reference a scientific metal.
- *Led* is a past tense noun that means to guide or direct.

Example: The scanner only reads markings made with a lead pencil. ✓

Example: Because they successfully led last year's project, Supervisor Clark will probably choose them to lead this year's project as well. ✓

may be/maybe

- *May be* is a verb that means "might be" or "could be"
- *Maybe* is an adverb that means perhaps or possibly

Example: The union representatives may be organizing for a re-election, but maybe not. ✓

me/myself

- The pronoun *me* is an object; it receives some action from someone or something else
- The pronoun *myself* is also an object; it only receives action from you (i.e., "I" will always be the subject)²

Example: I worked on the contract myself; please give any comments to me. ✓

number/amount

- *Number* is used for something that can be counted
- *Amount* is used for something that cannot be counted; it denotes degree, value, or percentage

Example: The large amount of effort to make this change is justified because the change will help reduce the number of delinquencies. ✓

of/have

- *Of* is a preposition that is often misused to mean "have." This mistake relates to how contractions that include the word "have" sound when pronounced (e.g., could've).

Example: The letter clearly indicated the due date. You could of overlooked it. ✗
The letter clearly indicated the due date. You could have overlooked it. ✓

principle/principal

- A *principle* is a fundamental rule, law, or concept; it is always a noun
- A *principal* is someone or something of highest importance or substance; it can be a noun or an adjective

Example: Though the manager successfully uses micro-management principles with most of her staff, our principal observation is that Betty needs more autonomy. ✓

² This applies to all pronouns that end in "self" (i.e., the subject must be the same person). For example, "I" must be the subject if "myself" is the object, "you" must be the subject if "yourself" is the object, "she" must be the subject if "herself" is the object, etc.

WORD USAGE

(continued)

than/then

- *Than* compares multiple items
- *Then* refers to time

Example: This year's review period is much shorter than it was last year. It was four weeks then, but we had to document more information. ✓

that/which

- Use *that* before information that is critical to the meaning of the statement (i.e., something that needs to be there or else the meaning would change)
- Use *which* before information that is not critical to the meaning of the statement (i.e., something that just provides additional information without really changing the meaning)

Example: The review office gives priority to cases that are submitted on time. ✓
{Only the cases submitted on time have priority}

Example: Your case file, which is on Bob's desk, will be submitted by deadline. ✓
{The information about the file being on Bob's desk could be removed without changing the meaning of the statement}

their/there/they're

- *Their* is a pronoun that shows possession of something by several persons or things
- *There* is a location
- *They're* is the contraction of "they are"

Example: They're present at the field office because their primary task is to report on operations there. ✓

to/too/two

- *To* means going toward; it relates to direction
- *Too* means in addition or to an excessive degree
- *Two* is the whole number that comes after "one" and before "three"

Example: Mr. Diaz is going to the meeting so he can meet the two new analysts, too. ✓
The proposal is too lengthy; we need to condense it. ✓

Punctuating Too and To



- ✓ When used to mean "in addition," *too* is always preceded by a comma and followed by another comma or other appropriate punctuation symbol (e.g., period, question mark, semi-colon, etc.).
- ✓ Because *to* is a preposition, it should never be the last word of a statement in formal business writing.

try and/try to

- *Try and* is an imprecise expression; replace it with *try to*

Example: After we discuss the project, try and meet the goals right away. ✗
After we discuss the project, try to meet the goals right away. ✓

WORD USAGE

(continued)

use/utilize

- *Use* means to manipulate something for its intended purpose
- *Utilize* means to manipulate something for an unintended purpose

Example: During earthquake training, we learned that office chairs can be utilized as protection against falling objects. A back-up generator would be used to provide power. ✓

Example: We utilized two books to level the wobbly table so the clerks could use it for assembling the packets. ✓

who/whom

- *Who* is always a subject that refers to the person doing the action of the statement
- *Whom* is always an object that refers to the person receiving the action of the statement

Example: The worker to whom you are assigned is the one who will issue payment. ✓

Choosing between *Who* and *Whom*

A useful strategy for choosing correctly between *who* and *whom* is to re-write the phrase that begins with *who* or *whom* as a complete thought and then substitute a pronoun for *who* or *whom*. If a subjective pronoun (i.e., I, you, she, he, and it) fits, then *who* is correct. If an objective pronoun (i.e., me, you, him, her, and it) fits, then *whom* is correct. Consider the following examples:



Original: Celeste, who/whom you all know, is the new project manager.

Re-written: You all know *her*.

{Because *her* is the object receiving the action, *whom* is correct}

Original: Refer to the directory to determine who/whom can assist you.

Re-written: *He* can assist you.

{Because *he* is the subject doing the action, *who* is correct}

your/you're

- *Your* means that you possess something
- *You're* is the contraction of "you are"

Example: Your performance suggests that you're ready for more challenging tasks. ✓

CAPITALIZATION & PUNCTUATION

Proper capitalization and punctuation are aspects of writing that are often neglected or not thoughtfully considered. However, even slight changes in punctuation and/or capitalization can change the meaning of a statement. This makes them important parts of conveying your message. This section will briefly describe *some* fundamental guidelines about punctuation and capitalization in business writing.

Capitalization

Capitalization provides a visual cue to readers that a particular word or group of words is important. The following table describes *some* fundamental guidelines about capitalization in business writing. There may be additional guidelines that are not described.

<u>Needs Capitalization</u> ³	<u>Example</u>
First person singular pronoun "I"	I will conduct next week's training sessions.
First word in any statement (e.g., a sentence or a question)	W riting is important. D o you agree?
People's names	G eorge C ole is our Director of Administration.
Titles	George Cole is our D irector of A dministration.
Days of the week, months, and holidays	Our office is open M onday through T hursday.
Proper names of places (e.g., cities, counties, states, and countries)	The most populous county in the U nited S tates is the C ounty of L os A ngeles.
Proper names of historical periods/events and formally organized groups	The S upreme C ourt has ruled on many cases that affect our operations.
Proper names of races, ethnicities, nationalities, and languages	We have recently added S panish and V ietnamese translation services for our customers.
Names of businesses, trademarks, and brand names	Our office uses M icrosoft W ord.
Specific entities as opposed to non-specific entities (as determined by context)	Though there are 30 d epartments in our organization, that single D eartment has supplied six of the last seven Chief Executives.

Punctuation

Punctuation also provides visual cues to help readers understand statements. The following table lists the major types of punctuation marks and their general use in business writing. There may be additional uses that are not described.

<u>Punctuation</u>	<u>Usage</u>	<u>Example</u>
Period .	Ends a complete statement	The report is due tomorrow.
Question Mark ?	Ends a question or statement of doubt	How many residents are in your household?
Exclamation Point !	After interjections and complete statements to show extreme excitement or surprise	Wow! That's so interesting!

³ Usually only the first letter of each word is capitalized. Prepositions (e.g., "of") and articles (e.g. "the") are typically not capitalized (e.g., Fourth of July not Fourth Of July), unless they are at the beginning of a statement.

CAPITALIZATION & PUNCTUATION

(continued)

<u>Punctuation</u>	<u>Usage</u>	<u>Example</u>
Comma ,	To separate items in a series	We offer workbooks, seminars, and online courses.
	To separate a string of adjectives	The report is a clear, concise, well-planned document.
	To separate two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction	I was going to the meeting, but I changed my mind.
	After long introductory phrases	In order to correct the program before its launch, the supervisor had to check all passwords.
	Before quotations ⁴	She said, "The content was timely."
	Between day of the month and year in dates	February 4, 2006
	Between city and state	Los Angeles, CA
	Before surname, degree, or title in names	Larry Jimenez, Sr.
	After conjunctive adverbs	She took several classes; therefore, she no longer refers to the operation guide.
Semicolon ;	To separate two closely-related main clauses	He was thorough; we all understood his presentation.
	To separate clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb	She took several classes; however, she still referred to the manual often.
	To separate a series of equal elements which themselves include commas	We met practitioners from Dallas, TX; Memphis, TN; and Philadelphia, PA.
Colon :	After headings in formal letters, memorandums, or other documents	Dear Sir:
	To separate hour and minute in time	8:00 a.m.
	Before a list preceded by a complete statement	Employees can choose from among four special committees: charitable giving, birthdays, recreation, and clubs.
	After a formal statement to mean "note what follows"	Every employee has a major responsibility: to provide outstanding customer service.
Apostrophe '	To indicate possessives	The managers' meeting is this morning.
	In contractions	The files weren't there.
	In numerals	The '09 budget is published online.
Parenthesis ()	Around examples of information that illustrate or support the main text	The conference is in Hollywood (Florida, not California) this year.
	Around abbreviations	County of Los Angeles (CoLA)
Quotations " "	Around information quoted directly from some other source	Her feedback was that the content was "timely."
	Around words referred to as words or letters referred to as letters	Change every "client" to "customer" in the report.

⁴ A comma is not needed when the quotation flows within the context of the statement, as illustrated below.
 Comma Needed: She said, "The content was timely and informative."
 Comma Not Needed: Her feedback was that the content was "timely and informative."

CAPITALIZATION & PUNCTUATION

(continued)

Other important guidelines for punctuating business documents are provided below:

Avoid contractions in formal business documents.

Example: We weren't able to acquire additional software licenses. ✘
We were unable to acquire additional software licenses. ✔

Possessive pronouns do not require apostrophes to show possession.

Example: Since your directory has not arrived, ask Terry if you can borrow her's. ✘
Since your directory has not arrived, ask Terry if you can borrow hers. ✔

Be careful about the placement of the apostrophe and "s" to form possessive words.

Example: The manager's presentation is tomorrow. ✔
{ "Manager" is singular, so an "s" and an apostrophe are needed to form the possessive }

The managers' presentation is tomorrow. ✔
{ "Managers" is plural, so only an apostrophe is needed to form the possessive }

Note: These examples apply to many, but not all, words. For example, to form the possessive of the plural word "children," you would add an apostrophe and an "s" at the end (i.e., "children's"). Similarly, to form the possessive of singular words that end in "s" like "boss," you would add an apostrophe and an "s" at the end (i.e., "boss's").

Remember the last comma when listing items in a series.

Though some style guides (e.g., Associated Press) state that a comma should not be placed before the conjunction in a series of items (i.e., before the last item), typical business practices require that the comma be included in order to prevent misunderstandings.

Example: The cases will be distributed evenly among Maria, Bill, Olga and Leon. ✘
{ Without the comma, it is unclear whether the cases will be split four or three ways }

The cases will be distributed evenly among Maria, Bill, Olga, and Leon. ✔
{ The last comma clearly indicates that the cases will be split four ways }

CONCLUSION

This guide provided information about *some* of the fundamental rules and guidelines of business writing. As shown in the following revision to the poorly-written memorandum provided at the beginning of this guide, applying knowledge of noun/pronoun agreement, subject/verb agreement, misplaced/dangling modifiers, style, word usage, capitalization, and punctuation can help ensure that people who read your documents have a clear understanding of your message.

November 1, 2009

To: All Staff

From: Approvals Committee Workgroup

Subject: Updates on New Approvals System

After many months of development and testing, the new approvals system will launch on November 22. It will address current and projected increases in the number of approval requests received from clients. The system will benefit four divisions in particular: budget, administration, operations, and staffing.

One notable advantage of the system is an improved internal communication process. Currently, we email communications about new requests and mail communications about revised requests. However, once implemented, the new system will directly email communications about all requests. The subject of the system emails will be "Updates: Approval Request No. ____" to help you better identify and track communications.

We will provide a user guide (accessible from any workstation at any time) that includes example scenarios for using the system. Additionally, we will conduct focus group meetings to obtain your feedback about the system. We have emailed you a tentative agenda in .pdf file format for the January 13, 2010 focus group meeting.

If you have any questions about the system, please contact the Help Desk.

For practice applying the information described in this guide, please visit the Test Preparation System (TPS). This website includes several written expression practice tests and other resources to assist those preparing for a County of Los Angeles written employment test. TPS is available on the Department of Human Resources website (<http://hr.lacounty.gov>) by clicking on "Job Information" and then on "Employment Test Preparation."

Additional Resources

Reading this guide is a good step toward understanding how to write well. To help you gain a deeper understanding of the larger body of knowledge about good writing (e.g., how to organize statements into paragraphs and tailor your message to the audience), you may consider seeking additional information. Other resources (e.g., books, college courses, workshops, seminars, Internet resources) are available to help expand your understanding.

Feedback

In order to assist us in enhancing this document, we would greatly appreciate your feedback. Please email any suggestions to testprep@hr.lacounty.gov. In the subject line of your email, please write "English Usage Guide." Thank you in advance for your response.

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GLOSSARY

Adjective

A word that modifies or describes a noun or pronoun. An adjective usually precedes the noun or the pronoun it modifies, as illustrated in the following statement:

- Regional supervisors prepare quarterly reports. {"Regional" modifies the noun "supervisors" and "quarterly" modifies the noun "reports"}

Adverb

A word that modifies verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. An adverb describes "how," "when," "where," and "how much." The following statements include adverbs:

- We regularly distribute project updates. {"Regularly" modifies the verb "distribute"}
- The recently posted flyers announce the new location. {"Recently" modifies the adjective "posted" which modifies the noun "flyers"}
- We somewhat regularly distribute project updates. {"Somewhat" modifies the adverb "regularly" which modifies the verb "distribute"}

A *conjunctive adverb* is a special type of adverb that joins complete ideas to show comparison, contrast, cause-effect, sequence, or other relationships.

Examples:

accordingly, also, consequently, finally, furthermore, hence, however, incidentally, indeed, instead, likewise, meanwhile, nevertheless, next, nonetheless, otherwise, still, then, therefore, thus

The following statements include conjunctive adverbs:

- The orientation has been cancelled; therefore, we will be able to attend the meeting. {"Therefore" joins the two statements and shows a cause-effect relationship}
- We submitted the requisitions after the deadline; nevertheless, we still received the supplies. {"Nevertheless" joins the two statements and shows a contrast relationship}

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Conjunction

A word that links words, phrases, and clauses in a statement. The following are two types of conjunctions:

- *Coordinating Conjunctions* – link individual words and independent clauses to indicate that the connected words and clauses have equal importance.

Examples:

and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet

The following statements include coordinating conjunctions:

- Joey and Bill will represent our unit at the seminar. {"And" links the words "Joey" and "Bill" as equals}
- The contract was signed last week, but it will not become effective until next year. {"But" links the independent clauses that are equally important}

- *Subordinating Conjunctions* – introduce dependent clauses and indicate that the independent clauses they are linked to are more important.

Examples:

after, although, as, because, before, how, if, once, since, than, that, though, until, when, where, whether, while

The following statements include subordinating conjunctions:

- After we receive your application, we will evaluate your qualifications for the position. {"After" shows the relationship between receiving the application and evaluating the qualifications}
- The attendees will not receive the materials until they check-in at the front desk. {"Until" shows the relationship between receiving the materials and checking-in}

Interjection

A word that is added to a statement to convey emotion. They are not used typically in formal written communications, though they may be used in direct quotations. The following statement includes an interjection:

- The employee exclaimed, "Wow, thank you," when we surprised him with the attendance award. {"Wow" conveys the employee's emotion}

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Noun

A word that names a person, place, or thing. There are many different types of nouns, some of which are described below:

- *Common Nouns* – name a person, place, or thing in a *general* sense.

Examples:

president, city, department

- *Proper Nouns* – name a specific person, place, or thing. They are always capitalized.

Examples:

George Washington, Los Angeles, Transportation Department

- *Collective Nouns* – name a group of persons, places, or things. The group is considered to be a single unit.

Examples:

team, workgroup, jury

Part of Speech

The traditional term that describes the category into which each word in the English language can be classified. There are eight major parts of speech: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, and interjection. A word's part of speech depends on its context within a given statement (i.e., how it relates to other words in the statement). Thus, the same word can be classified as different parts of speech in different statements. For example, the word "interview" could be a noun in one statement (e.g., The interview is tomorrow), and a verb in another statement (e.g., We will interview him).

Phrase

A group of words that focus on an idea, but which do not have a subject, a verb, or both. The following statement includes a phrase:

- The photocopier, pulling paper from multiple bins, is processing the job slowly." {" Pulling paper from multiple bins" is a phrase; it does not have a subject}
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Preposition

A word that links nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words in a sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the *object of the preposition*. The whole phrase, in turn, acts as an adjective or an adverb to locate something in time and space, or tell when, where, or under what conditions something happened.

Examples:

about, after, against, among, around, at, before, between, despite, during, except, for, from, in, into, like, of, on, onto, over, past, since, through, to, under, until, up, upon, with, within, without

The following statement includes a prepositional phrase:

- The presenter's biography was read aloud during the conference. {In the prepositional phrase "during the conference," "during" is the preposition and "conference" is the object. The entire phrase tells when the biography was read}

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Pronoun

A word that replaces a noun. When you write multiple statements about a given person, place, or thing, pronouns help to make the statements less repetitive or awkward. The following statements illustrate the usefulness of this part of speech:

- After he received the notice, Mr. Hu called to discuss his options. {With pronouns}
- After Mr. Hu received the notice, Mr. Hu called to discuss Mr. Hu's options. {Without pronouns}

There are many different types of pronouns, some of which are described below:

- *Personal Pronouns* – replace nouns that name persons.

Examples:

I, you, he, we

- *Demonstrative Pronouns* – identify nouns by answering "Which one?"

Examples:

this, that, these, those

"This" and "these" reference nouns that are nearby in space or time, and "that" and "those" reference nouns farther away in space and time. The following statements include demonstrative pronouns:

- This will be the committee's first opportunity to meet. {"This" perhaps replaces "tomorrow's meeting," which is nearby in time}
- That will be the committee's first opportunity to meet. {"That" perhaps replaces "next year's meeting," which is farther away in time}

- *Indefinite Pronouns* – refer to an identifiable, but not specified person, place, or thing. They convey "How much?" or "How many?"

Examples:

all, any, anyone, anything, each, everyone, everything, few, many, none, several

- *Interrogative Pronouns* – used to ask questions.

Examples:

who, whom, which, what

Generally, "who" and "whom" refer to people, and "which" and "what" refer to things. The following statements include interrogative pronouns:

- Whom should we ask to present the award?
- Which computer can the temporary employee use today?

- *Reflexive Pronouns* – refer back to the subject of the sentence or clause.

Examples:

myself, yourself, himself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves

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Sentence

A group of words that expresses a complete thought. All sentences must have a subject and a verb. A verb shows action or state of being. The subject answers "Who?" or "What?" about the verb. For example, consider the following sentences:

- Her secretary typed the letter.
 - Verb → What is the action? *Typed*
 - Subject → Who or what performed this action? *Her secretary*
 - The paperwork is due tomorrow.
 - Verb → What is the state of being? *Is*
 - Subject → Who or what is in this state of being? *The paperwork*
-

Verb

A word that expresses action or state of being. The two types of verbs can be described as the following:

- *Action Verbs* – express something that a person, force of nature, or thing can physically do.

Examples:

answer, consider, open

- *Linking Verbs* – connect the subject of a verb to additional information about the subject. These types of verbs relate to a state of being.

Examples:

be, become, seem, and sometimes appear, feel, grow