

20 tips for better business writing

 By [James Hurford](#)

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If you can't write well - if you can't get your point across in a clear, concise and organised way - you have no choice but to spray and pray. Write with bad grammar, bad spelling and bad punctuation and no one is going to take you seriously.

Every writer can get better, and no writer is perfect. No matter what level of writer you are, here are a few tips that can help you:

- **Use simple, clear, precise language** - never use a long word where a short one will do.
- **Edit yourself ruthlessly** - if you don't need a word, cut it.
- **Be concise** - remove everything but the essential. A short sentence is better than a long one, and a clear word is better than being fuzzy. Compact is powerful.
- **Write in plain English** - never use jargon, a foreign phrase or a scientific word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent. Using jargon is lazy, and it clouds the message you're trying to deliver. Using foreign language makes you look like a showoff.
- **Stay active** - never use a passive verb where you can use an active verb instead. Active verbs energise your writing. Instead of writing, "The meeting was led by Tom," write, "Tom led the meeting."
- **Curb your enthusiasm** - avoid overusing exclamation marks. Use professional sign-offs like "Best" or "Regards" instead of something over familiar like "Cheers" "Later" or "Ciao."
- **Limit your use of adverbs** - use a strong verb instead of a weak verb and an adverb. Instead of writing, "Sales grew quickly," try "Sales accelerated."
- **Be conversational** - don't write in stuffy business English. Write the way you talk. Even better, read it out loud. You'll find that if it doesn't sound right, it usually isn't right.
- **Choose pronouns wisely** - don't be afraid to use "me." Don't write, "Send the memo to Bob and myself," it sounds too formal and self important. Write, "Send the memo to me," or "to me and Bob."
- **Start and end strong** - the most important parts of your writing are the beginning and end. If you don't hook your reader at the start, they won't read the rest.
- **Get feedback** - get someone to read over your writing, preferably a good writer or editor. Someone who reads a lot and can give you good intelligent feedback. Then listen. Try to understand the criticism and accept it and use it to improve.
- **Revise** - it's where the good writing begins. Go over everything. Don't just check for grammar and spelling mistakes, check for unnecessary words and awkward structures and sentences. Aim for clarity, strength and freshness.
- **Experiment** - try new things. Copy and steal from other people - that's how you learn. Experiment with your style, tone and voice. Try new words. See what works and toss out what doesn't.
- **Write for the eye as well as the mind** - a good email or document should be easy to read and easy to refer to. It should look the part. Pay attention to format and appearance - because it's likely more people will read it.
- **Plan, then write** - think about what you're going to write before you sit down. Make notes and do an outline if necessary. Once the thinking's done, you'll find you'll crank out the text.
- **Take your time** - it's the difference between good writers and bad writers. Good writing has little to do with skill and more to do with perseverance. Bad writers quit. Good writers keep going.
- **Eliminate distractions** - don't multitask or have background noise. Writing is best done in quiet. Clear away all distractions so you can work without interruption.
- **Read good writing** - if you don't read good writing, you won't know how to do it.
- **Write everyday** - the more you write, the better you'll get. Start with emails. You have to write them anyway, and they're good place to practice.
- **Just get it down** - if you find you're staring at a blank screen and don't know what to write, don't even think about it. Start writing - you can always go back and make it better later.

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