Whether you are composing reports, memos, letters, e-mails, job procedures, job descriptions, or performance reviews, you need to be able to write clearly and correctly. Also keep in mind that much of your writing could have legal ramifications. If job descriptions aren’t precise regarding essential job functions, for example, or job performance documentation is not specific with dates and facts, you or your organization could face lawsuits.

Characteristics

Good business writing is clear, concise, accurate, complete, and coherent. It gets to the point right away, sticks to the facts, and says what you have to say in as few words as possible.

Its grammar, spelling, punctuation, and information are all correct and accurate. It includes all necessary information, answers any potential questions that readers may have, and makes recommendations where applicable.

It follows a logical progression from the opening sentence to the final paragraph, keeping your ideas on track and leading the reader to a conclusion consistent with your purpose for writing.

Effective business writing must also set the right tone, meaning it must always be professional. For example, it never blames, accuses, or insults. It is never defensive.

Mechanics

Keep sentences simple, expressing only one idea in each sentence. Divide very long sentences into two or more simpler, but still complete sentences. Use a combination of short and longer sentences to give your writing better flow and pace.

Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that describes what that paragraph is about. Make sure the sentences that follow support and expand upon the topic sentence. Keep paragraphs short—generally between two and five sentences. Use transitions between paragraphs to guide the reader from one topic to another.

Three-Point Format

Most written communications are composed of three basic parts—an opening, a body, and a closing. Even short communications such as e-mails should follow this format.

1. The opening introduces the purpose of the communication. It spells out the topic(s) that will be covered and lets the reader know from the first sentence what this letter, memo, report, or e-mail is about.

2. The body develops the main points you want to make, fills in the details, and gives your reasons and recommendations, etc.

3. The closing reminds the reader of your purpose for writing and briefly summarizes the main points you have made in the body. It leads
Millennials May Need Training on Business Communication

Like previous generations, Millennials enter the workforce with different assumptions from the generation before them, says Laura Brown, PhD, a communications and writing consultant. However, the “degree of differentiation is larger [now] than in previous generational shifts,” due in large part to technology and the Internet.

For example, while previous generations were accustomed to writing formal business letters, most Millennials are used to texting and e-mailing their friends. And some use the same informal tone when texting and e-mailing clients and colleagues, explains Brown, who is the author of How to Write Anything: Practical Guidance for Everything You’ll Ever Have to Write.

Training can help address workers’ assumptions and help avoid potential problems with customer service, productivity, and retention, she says. That is why Brown recommends that all new employees receive communications training during onboarding and then a few times per year after that, followed by ongoing efforts to create an awareness of active verbs to give your writing vitality and strength, for example, “I plan” rather than “It is planned,” or “We completed the project” rather than “The project was completed.”

Review

Read over all communications carefully before sending. Perform a spell check and grammar check on all documents written on the computer. But remember, these won’t pick up errors involving sound-alike words such as “to,” “too,” and “two,” or “there,” “their,” and “they’re,” so proofread as well.

Make certain all your facts and figures are accurate. Double check your sources.

Read communications for content, making sure they say exactly what you want to say. Think about tone and about how readers might perceive your words. In other words, read your message and ask if it would make the desired impression on you.

Prune your communications to ensure they are as short and concise as possible. Delete unnecessary words and superfluous information.