

BUSINESS WRITING | CHECKLIST**AUDIENCE**

Communication level	Is this upward, downward, or horizontal communication?	
Culture	Are there cultural issues?	
Managerial style	Should your communication style be directive or supportive for this message?	
Tone	Consider the tone from your perspective as well as from the audience perspective.	
Who else?	Who else might read this communication? Should that influence how you will write it? Is this going to a group of people or to one person?	
Feedback	Are you expecting feedback or a response? You might need to clarify the expectations.	
Voice	Is your voice active or passive?	
Scannable	Will your audience read this thoroughly or scan it?	

MECHANICS

Spelling	Check all spelling. Do not rely only on spell check – ask someone!	
Grammar	Is your grammatical structure appropriate for the audience and the message?	
Alignment	Alignment for business writing should be left justified.	
Margins	Consider margins according to the format from which it will be read.	
Emphasis	Emphasize important points but do not overly rely on bold or italicized text.	
Length	Vary the length of the sentences and paragraphs.	
Lines and borders	Consider using horizontal lines to break up content. Consider borders as well.	
Wording	Should you use simple or formal words?	
Jargon	Be careful with uses of jargon and acronyms.	
Font	Consider font size, type, and color.	
Blank spaces	Leave blank spaces between paragraphs in emails for easier readability.	
Underlining	Avoid underlining words, paragraphs, or phrases. They will be interpreted as a hyperlink.	
Hyperlinks	Use hyperlinks if appropriate but do not overuse. It can disrupt the flow of information.	

ORGANIZATION

Reading format	How will this message be read? (web-based, in print, email, mobile device...)	
Sentences	<p>Make sure your paragraphs are no longer than 8 sentences long for print: No longer than 5 for a screen-read document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure to carefully consider the length of your paragraphs. Remember that business document paragraphs can actually be one or two sentences long. In general, <i>fewer</i> than 8 sentences (print) per paragraph will be best. • Carefully consider paragraph length when writing different sections of your document. For instance, introductory and closing paragraphs should nearly always be shorter than the main body of the letter. 	
Alternate to text	Will bullets, graphs, tables, or other graphics be appropriate and useful?	
Headings	Be sure to incorporate headings or subheadings if appropriate.	
Length	Is your message succinct and to the point?	
First paragraph	Is your first paragraph brief? Does it introduce the upcoming topic?	
Topics	Do you have more than one topic per paragraph?	
White space	Did you include enough white space?	
Communication	Should you use inductive or deductive content delivery?	
Readability	Does your document conform to overall readability standards?	
Paragraphs	One-line paragraphs are acceptable in business writing but be sure you do not use them too much and be sure the sentence structure conveys the message.	

PROOFREADING | REVISING | REFINING

Bias	Check for bias.	
Unity	Are the paragraphs unified? Use connecting words when possible but do not overdo.	
Revise	Revise until you cannot see any way to improve.	
Bulky text	Check for bulky text – separate into topical paragraphs!	
Profanity	Check for profanity.	
Redundancy	Check for redundancy.	
Clichés	Check for clichés.	
Condescending	Check for condescending or demeaning expressions.	
Revisions	Be prepared to revise several times.	

ADVICE	<p style="text-align: center;">Ask for advice Feedback Suggestions</p> <p>NOTE: Be conscious of who should read your document when you ask to have someone proof read your document. <i>Ask yourself:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is this document confidential? Should my ‘best proofreader’ be reading it?• If it is confidential? Can you trust the person to keep quiet?• Are you violating anyone’s privacy by showing this document to someone?• Are you looking for grammatical proofreading? Smoothness of expression? Content proofreading? Bias? Know what you are asking your proofreader to do and clarify it to that person. You may want to identify more than one proofreader depending upon his/her strengths and other qualifications.• Is this person going to expect compensation in some way?• Is the person qualified to understand the tone, content, intention and other purposes of the message? If not, they may pick up on things that are fine, or they miss other things that should be taken into consideration.• Are you placing a burden on someone if you expect them to maintain confidentiality when reading it?• <i>Be careful about asking subordinates to read your documents!</i>
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Writing business communications is a challenging task.

As you can see, there are many issues to consider.

No one becomes a great business writer overnight. It takes work!

Trouble getting started? See the webpage on *Why You Must Write the First Draft First* by Jody Calkins.



This document is available to you for download in 2 formats.

The *.doc* option will allow you to save and edit, adding notes or other criteria specific to you, or for use it as a checklist.

The *.pdf* version may also be saved to your computer for future use but cannot be edited.

Dr. Jean E. Collins | Managerial Communications | Writing Business Communications - Checklist