

**BYU MARRIOTT**  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS



**MCom 320**

Impactful Skills  
for Business Leaders

# MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION 320

Strategic Insights and Practical Skills for Modern Business Communication Leaders

This comprehensive resource covers the full spectrum of business communication: personal branding and employment communication, communicating with generative AI, navigating the writing process, developing information and data literacy skills, professionally formatting documents and presentation media, giving and receiving feedback, delivering difficult messages, communicating collaboratively, and delivering world-class business presentations. Focusing on practical application to real-world scenarios, the content prepares future business leaders to clearly, concisely, concretely, and confidently communicate with diverse audiences. This textbook is an indispensable guide for those seeking to master the art of business communication. For any questions or suggestions, please contact [BYUMCOM@byu.edu](mailto:BYUMCOM@byu.edu)

Communication

Management

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A New Vision

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Your Most Impactful Class

Brand

Write (with Gen Ai)

Analyze

Strategize

Research

Visualize

Organize

Draft for Impact

Design and Format

Revise

Collaborate

Present

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Email

Reports and Executive Summaries

Grammar

Syntax and Word Choice

Punctuation and Mechanics

Verb Tenses and Moods

# A NEW VISION



This book is a collaborative process that reflects our expression of Christlike leadership communication. It embodies the vision, mission, and values of the BYU Marriott School of Business and our unwavering commitment to faith in Christ, integrity in action, respect for all, and pursuit of excellence.

With a fresh perspective, this updated student-centered edition prioritizes students' learning journeys, empowering students to share with the world the light they gather. Transforming the world might sound ambitious, but we are confident that students can accomplish this goal by communicating through meaningful one-on-one interactions, changing lives one conversation at a time.

This book is dedicated to our Marriott School of Business students who light the world as they enter to learn and go forth to serve.

As you read this book and study each chapter, you will feel empowered to step out of your comfort zone and apply the principles you learn to navigate professional challenges and foster productive relationships. The world eagerly awaits your presence; your unique contributions matter.

**The Management Communication Group**  
Marriott School Of Business, Brigham Young University



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**Our students** who light the world as they enter to learn and go forth to serve.

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# YOUR MOST IMPACTFUL CLASS

Why Business Communication Matters

## STORY

### The Risk That Paid Off

“When people ask me, ‘What was the most impactful class you took during your MBA?’ they are often surprised by my answer,” wrote Alex Galbraith, now a brand manager at Hershey. “To improve my business writing skills, I made the difficult decision to enroll in an undergraduate business communications class. I was the lone MBA among undergraduates, seemingly learning grammar for the first time, and lacking the crutch of the MBA grading curve. But that decision created lasting impacts that extend well beyond the classroom as I now apply those principles each day.”

Alex’s story is not about grammar drills or academic humility. It’s about transformation. Business communication is not just a set of skills—it’s the foundation for leadership, career acceleration, and lifelong influence.

## MAIN IDEA

### The Currency of Success

Business communication is the currency of success. The ability to think clearly, write concisely, and speak persuasively is what transforms technical competence into leadership. This course is not a hoop. It’s a hinge—one that can open doors for the rest of your life.

## AGENDA

### What You’ll Learn in This Chapter

- Why communication matters more than ever in the AI economy
- What employers and leaders expect from strong communicators
- How this course can enhance your career, leadership, and relationships
- What it means to be a top hire, an effective leader, and a relationship builder

## REASONS

### Why Communication Is a Career Advantage

#### 1. Communication Is a Career Multiplier

Nina Legath, Head of Internal Global Communications at Adidas, explains that knowing information isn’t enough. Today’s business leaders must inspire, connect, and lead through communication. In a world where

automation accelerates, human expression becomes more valuable.

## 2. You'll Be More Employable

McKinsey's global study on the future of work in the AI economy identified communication and critical thinking as key cognitive capabilities for success. Likewise, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) ranks written and verbal communication among the top five skills employers seek.

Even in an AI-powered world, clear writing demonstrates clear thinking. Employers aren't just skimming résumés—they're assessing your communication skills through interviews, emails, reports, and team dynamics.

## 3. Communication Makes You a Leader

Zenger and Folkman, authors of *The Extraordinary Leader*, found that powerful communicators also score highly in other leadership competencies—even in unrelated areas like technical proficiency. Communication doesn't just complement leadership—it unlocks it.

Dr. Susan Madsen of Utah State University reminds us: leadership can be developed. If you want to lead, start by learning to communicate well.

## 4. Communication Builds Relationships That Matter

From pitching ideas to resolving conflict, from mentoring a peer to managing a team, your ability to connect with others will shape your success and well-being. Communication is not just professional—it's profoundly personal. The same skills that help you lead a project will help you strengthen a community, encourage a friend, or advocate for a cause.

As Noreena Hertz explains in *The Lonely Century*, meaningful human connection is becoming rare—and more valuable than ever.

### TASK

## What You'll Practice in This Course

- Analyze business problems and write clear, actionable recommendations
- Deliver oral presentations that inspire action and demonstrate credibility
- Collaborate professionally in teams using modern communication tools
- Use generative AI ethically and effectively to improve your work
- Develop a portfolio of communication artifacts that reflect your growth

Whether you're an undergraduate preparing for your first job or a graduate student like Alex Galbraith aiming to sharpen your edge, this class is your invitation to master the skill that amplifies all others.

# BRAND

Build Your Reputation

## STORY

### Personal Brand and Crisis Leadership

In March 2020, as COVID-19 brought global travel to a standstill, Marriott hotels faced an overnight collapse in bookings and growing uncertainty among thousands of employees. Investors were anxious. Workers were scared. The world was watching how corporate leaders would respond.

Marriott CEO Arne Sorenson released a video message that set a tone of resilience and transparency. Visibly fatigued from recent cancer treatment, he delivered sobering news with grace and transparency: massive revenue losses, halted hiring, executive pay cuts—including his own.

He didn't sugarcoat. He didn't spin. And in doing so, he modeled what a resilient, trusted leader looks like under pressure.



*"This is the most challenging crisis we have ever faced... But we will get through it together—and we will come out of it stronger."*

His personal brand was grounded in humanity, steadiness, and clear-eyed optimism.

## MAIN IDEA

### Your Brand Is the Story People Tell About You

You already have a personal brand. It's not your major or your resume—it's the impression you leave behind in class discussions, group projects, emails, job interviews, and social media posts. A strong brand opens doors. It builds trust, generates opportunities, and helps others remember you for the right reasons.

Deliberately building and enhancing your brand is worth the effort. In today's challenging job market, employers aren't just hiring skillsets—they're hiring reputations and potential. That means your online presence, your relationships, and your ability to articulate your values matter.

Perhaps most importantly, doing the work to determine and build your brand helps you become a valued leader at home and in your community, not just your workplace.

## AGENDA

# What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- Discover and define your personal brand.
- Align your online presence with that brand.
- Build a brand through relationships and service.
- Use your brand to stand out in the job search.
- Stay ready and keep growing.

## REASONS

# How to Build a Brand That Works for You

## 1. Discover Your Brand

What are your natural strengths? These could be technical skills like data analysis or writing, or soft skills like empathy and attention to detail. The [CliftonStrengths Assessment](#) can help identify your top talents, but informal feedback is just as valuable. Ask a few trusted friends or mentors: *What three words would you use to describe me?*

Then, get clear about your core values. Is service important to you? Creativity? Responsibility? Social psychologist [Amy Cuddy](#) notes that affirming your values boosts your self-esteem and lowers stress. When you act from your values, you tap into the power to influence others.

When you identify and live your core values—like Sorenson's steadiness and responsibility—you're not just preparing for a job; you are preparing to lead.

## 2. Align Your Online Presence

Your brand is more than your digital footprint—but your digital presence still matters. In fact, it might be your only chance to make a first impression. Employers and recruiters will likely Google you before an interview, and what they find should support your brand. Try this: open a private or incognito browser window and search your name. What do you see?

So in this competitive job market—especially for recent graduates—proactively manage your online presence. Employers are not only looking for reasons to eliminate candidates but also for positive indicators that support hiring decisions. A well-curated online profile can enhance your employability, and negative elements may eliminate you from consideration.

## 3. Build Relationships That Reinforce Your Brand

A brand grows through consistent action and by building relationships. Think of networking as giving, not asking. Attend events. Join clubs. Sit next to someone new. Ask questions. Find mentors. Help put away chairs. According to Harvard economist [Arthur C. Brooks](#), the act of helping others not only builds goodwill, it actually makes you happier.

As you take these steps to connect, remember that relationships are reciprocal. Your professors, coworkers, and community leaders are often eager to help. But before you seek guidance, clearly articulate your strengths, interests, and goals. When others see your potential, they're more likely to invest in it.

Trusted leaders like Sorensen didn't build their brand alone. He built credibility by investing in people, listening deeply, and staying visible—long before he became CEO. You are doing the same when you ask good questions, show up prepared, and treat every team member with respect. People remember those qualities.

## 4. Use Your Brand in the Job Hunt

Strong brands stand out. When you know who you are and what you bring to the table, you can more easily craft an elevator pitch, tailor your resume, and write a persuasive cover letter. Don't just list past tasks—highlight the sometimes obscure details that reflect your interests and values. Volunteering as a Little League coach or running problem-solving retreats shows, rather than tells, who you are.

Use platforms like [Handshake](#), a career platform focused on college students and recent graduates, to connect with employers seeking students and alumni. Also, build and maintain a profile on [LinkedIn](#), the world's largest professional network, to reach a broader, career-minded audience.

When Sorenson spoke during the crisis, his credibility made people listen. As a student, you can start building that credibility by properly framing your experiences—clearly, humbly, and confidently.

## 5. Stay Ready and Keep Growing

Your brand isn't static. As you gain experience, refine your skills, and expand your network, your brand should evolve too. One way to express that evolving story is through a short, memorable introduction—an elevator pitch. Practice this 30–45 second summary of who you are, what you're working on, and what you're aiming for until it sounds natural, not rehearsed.

Augment your practice by using [Big Interview](#) or [StandOut](#) to prepare for interviews where you should not only tell but also show who you are. And most importantly, keep showing up and contributing. Your brand becomes stronger every time you act in alignment with it.



### TASK

## Define and Live Your Brand Now

You are not a Fortune 500 CEO—yet. But you are someone with a brand. Like Sorenson, your defining moments will reveal what kind of leader you are becoming.

*“You are always communicating your brand—whether you mean to or not.”*

Your personal brand is your most valuable career asset. Define your values, polish your presence, build relationships through service, and tell your story with confidence. When the spotlight turns your way—whether in a job interview, a team conflict, or a chance to lead—your brand will enable you to succeed.



# WRITE (WITH GEN AI)

Use the Tool; Keep the Human

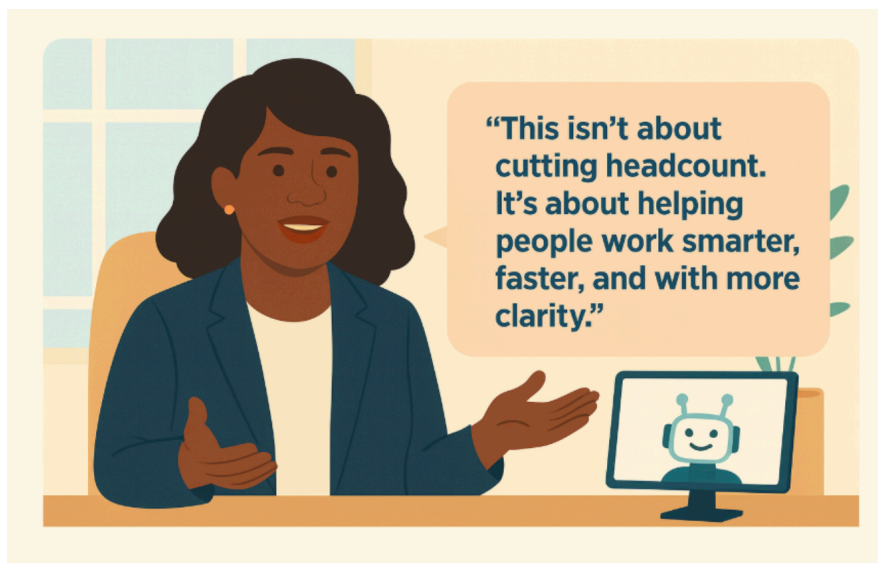
## STORY

### JP Morgan Chase's Real-World Advantage

In 2024, JPMorgan Chase gave over 200,000 employees access to a proprietary generative AI platform called IndexGPT. But the goal wasn't to replace employees—it was to empower them. Marketing and operations professionals began using the tool to organize client reports, simplify regulatory updates, and sharpen client-facing messaging.

As one executive shared in an interview, "This isn't about cutting headcount. It's about helping people work smarter, faster, and with more clarity."

The results? Increased productivity, faster internal reviews, and clearer communication with stakeholders. Professionals who adopted the tool early began standing out—not because AI replaced their skills, but because they used it to amplify their work.



## MAIN IDEA

# AI Can Enhance Your Writing—But it Can't Think for You

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Microsoft Copilot are changing the way people write. They can help brainstorm, rephrase, summarize, and revise. But they don't replace the need to understand the task and formulate a clear message.

This chapter helps you use AI as a business tool—one that boosts productivity without replacing your judgment.

*“Generative AI won't take your job—but someone who knows how to use it better than you will.”*

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- Use AI to enhance your business writing
- Write effective prompts using chain-of-thought reasoning
- Collaborate with AI on storytelling while avoiding generic traps
- Stay ethical and protect your voice and credibility

## REASONS

### Getting the Best from AI Without Losing Your Voice

#### 1. Use AI to Enhance Your Writing

Do the work to become absolutely clear on your message before you engage with AI. This ensures that you are driving the creative process. Once clear, use AI to assist with idea generation, structure, tone-checking, or revising.

#### What AI Can (and Can't) Do

##### AI can:

- ✓ Draft professional-sounding content
- ✓ Rephrase and simplify confusing sentences
- ✓ Suggest formats and structures
- ✓ Spark ideas when you're stuck

##### AI can't:

- ✗ Know your audience like you do
- ✗ Fact-check itself (it may hallucinate)
- ✗ Understand context beyond your input
- ✗ Reflect your unique experience or values

**Use AI for productivity. Rely on your brain for clarity, tone, and accuracy.**

- Drafting a complicated professional email or memo
- Condensing something verbose

- Adjusting your draft to a more appropriate tone

But if you let it do all the work, your writing will sound generic. Worse, you won't develop the communication skills real employers value most.

## 2. Master the Art of Prompting

Prompting is giving instructions to an AI model. But highly effective prompts are precise, specific, and well-structured.

**Example 1: Weak Prompt** "Write an email to reschedule a meeting with a client."

**Example 2: Strong Prompt**

"Act as a sales team lead writing to a client who missed a meeting. Write a friendly, professional email that reschedules the meeting and reaffirms our interest in working together. Keep it under 150 words."

Practice building prompts like a manager assigning a task. Clear instructions with adequate context and step-by-step directions yield better results. For complicated projects, use chain-of-thought prompting.

**Example 1: Brain-dump Prompt**

"Summarize this article, write an email about it, make it sound professional, fix the tone, and also suggest some catchy subject lines."






**Example 2: Chain-of-thought Prompt**

"We're going to prepare a summary for Global Reach, an important new client.

- Step 1: Summarize the article I'll upload into three bullet points for a business audience.
- Step 2: Based on that summary, write a short email that explains the key points to a supply chain client of ours, highlighting how our services can help them.
- Step 3: Suggest three possible subject lines for the email.

At this point, upload the article you referred to in your prompt.

### Prompt Elements

-  **Role** (who the writer is)
-  **Audience** (who the reader is)
-  **Purpose** (why you're writing)
-  **Tone** (friendly, formal, direct, etc.)
-  **Constraints** (length, format, etc.)



**[FOR MORE INFORMATION READ: OpenAI's Prompt](#)**

**[Engineering Guide](#)**



**[FOR MORE INFORMATION WATCH:](#)**

## Google's 9 Hour AI Prompt Engineering Cours...



### 3. Storytelling with Generative AI

AI's training on fiction makes it prone to produce dramatic, over-the-top intros—like “Imagine you're a sea captain navigating stormy waters...” Avoid the ‘Sea Captain’ Trap. You're writing business insights, not movie trailers.

**Better approach: Collaborate with AI. Don't let it lead.**

- “Give me real-world examples of companies solving this problem in the last two years.”
- “Here's a true story about our client. Help me frame it around opportunity cost.”
- “Suggest three ways to introduce a business case without sounding fictional.”

**Use AI to structure or expand your story—but supply the substance yourself.**

*“AI can help tell the story—but only you know what's worth telling.”*

### 4. Stay Ethical—and Be Wise

Generative AI isn't magic. It's trained on public data, which means

- ⚠ It can reflect existing biases.
- ⚠ It may not cite its sources.
- ⚠ It may confidently invent incorrect facts.

**Use your judgment.** If you use AI to help write something:

- ✓ Review and edit the output.
- ✓ Fact-check anything it claims.
- ✓ Do not copy/paste AI output without review or revision.
- ✓ Disclose AI (especially in academic and business settings)

Watch out for the following:



Made-up statistics



Uncited sources



Embedded bias

Also, don't upload private or confidential info into certain AI systems—your data may be stored or used for training.

Someday our use of AI will be assumed, but during this transition period, cite your use of AI transparently to boost your credibility and protect you from accusations of cheating.

Context	How to Cite Your AI Use
Email signature block	"I regularly use AI but I am fully responsible for all content."
Job interview	"Based on estimations from an AI model, the potential market size for this segment is approximately \$5 billion. I would of course validate this against industry reports in an actual project."
Question about your AI use	"I used AI to structure my thought process, but my recommendations are based on standard industry frameworks. If you'd like, I can walk through the report right now. Although I used AI as a tool, I'm fully versed in the arguments."
Citation in a business report	"ChatGPT 4.0 (OpenAI). (September, 2025). AI-generated market analysis on the luxury fashion industry. Retrieved from [URL if applicable]. Cross-referenced with [relevant URLs]"



**[For More Information READ: Mozilla Foundation "AI &](#)**

**[User Privacy"](#)**

*"Generative AI can speed up your writing—but it can't replace your judgment."*

## TASK

# Use AI Wisely

As you prepare a research-based business article or write professional messages, try this:

- Use AI to help you brainstorm or revise one of your writing assignments. Then reflect:
- What did the AI get right?
- What did you need to change?
- What did you gain from using AI? What did you lose?
- Did using AI make your thinking better, or just faster?

Just like JPMorgan's analysts, your edge isn't in replacing your writing with AI—it's in using it well to create clearer, more strategic business communication.

As you practice writing, think of AI as a tool in your toolbox. But the architect? That's still you.

# ANALYZE

Know Your Humans

## STORY

### Who's Your Audience?

Duolingo didn't start out as a viral sensation. It was just another language-learning app until it found its stride on TikTok by speaking the language of its users and meeting their needs expertly. By turning its green owl mascot, Duo, into a chaotic, funny, and deeply relatable character, Duolingo connected with millions of Gen Z users.

They didn't go viral by guessing—they got curious. They watched how their audience talked, laughed, and learned. Then they adjusted everything—tone, timing, visuals, even their mascot—to match.

*"What they [Duolingo] really do well is motivation," says Kirsty Gibson. "Ultimately learning a language is learning a language—it's not like you're reinventing the different words that people have to learn, but they're reimagining the way in which you're engaging people."*

- Learn your audience's preferences, quirks, concerns, and interests.
- Craft your message to address those, either explicitly or implicitly.
- Draw a clear connection between your request and a benefit to your audience.



## MAIN IDEA

## Good Communication Is Always About the Audience

You might be the one creating the message, but your audience is the one interpreting it. Success isn't about how hard you worked on it—it's about whether they understand it, care about it, and know what to do next.

Your ideas can be powerful, but only if they land with your audience. If you don't understand their knowledge, expectations, and reactions, your message might fall flat—or misfire entirely.



## AGENDA

## What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- Identify your primary and secondary audiences
- Understand what your audience knows, feels, and needs to do
- Craft messages that make saying yes easy

## REASONS

## How to Know & Reach Your Audience

### 1. Who's in the Room (or Inbox)?

Every message has at least one primary audience—the main person or group you're targeting. Most messages also have secondary audiences: colleagues who are copied on communication, e.g., stakeholders who hear the presentation later, or customers who view a summary slide.

Do some background research to determine the most effective audience for your message. Asking that nice guy in accounting to approve your budget may be most comfortable, but if only Karen can actually approve it, write to Karen.

**Before you write, speak, or design,  
ask :**



Who is the decision-maker?



Who has the authority to say yes?



Who else might see or hear this?

Digital and public communication is rarely private. If it's recorded, forwarded, or posted, others may encounter it. So plan for that wider reach.

The Duolingo team didn't just target language learners—they targeted language learners *on TikTok*. They knew the platform's users weren't looking for grammar tips—they were looking for laughs, trends, and relatable chaos. That meant rethinking everything about their tone and delivery.

## 2. What Does Your Audience Know / Feel / Do?



### KNOW

Don't assume your audience shares your context or vocabulary. If you use acronyms or jargon your audience doesn't understand, or omit crucial details, they may feel confused or annoyed and tune out. This phenomenon, **The Curse of Knowledge**—asserts that once we know something, we forget what it's like not to know it.

Imagine if Duolingo had launched with educational jargon instead of memes. "Interactive lexical scaffolding" wouldn't have gone viral. Duo threatening to eat your family if you skip your Spanish lesson? That did. They dropped the academic language and spoke like humans.

*"The more you know, the harder it is to write clearly." – Steven Pinker*



**FOR MORE INFORMATION WATCH:**

**Steven Pinker: The Sense of Style**



## TIP

- Try to remember what it felt like your first day on the job, or how it feels to receive a confusing request. You might find it easier to say no than to hunt down the required information.
- Only use technical language you're sure your audience shares.
- Examples, comparisons, and visuals are very powerful. AI can create tailored analogies for any audience.

Jargon Example



## TIP

**The False Consensus Effect**

We're deeply in our own heads and often believe that others think like we do. That assumption can create serious communication misfires.

- Am I taking for granted that they agree with me?
- Do I need to explain my reasoning more clearly?
- Would someone outside my team understand this?

## ACTIVITY

**Try Warren Buffett's trick:** When writing Berkshire Hathaway's annual report, he imagines he's explaining it to his sisters. That mental picture keeps his language accessible and sincere—even when the content is complex.



**READ Warren Buffett's Preface to the SEC Plain English Handbook**

**FEEL**

Is your audience skeptical, stressed, enthusiastic, distracted? Emotions influence how people receive your message. If you anticipate resistance, address concerns openly and with empathy. Attention and compassion can make you a powerful leader.

If you're delivering bad news, acknowledge the audience's frustration and seek to mitigate harm with compassion, offers of reasonable help, or links to resources. If you're making a request, show how it benefits them and the organization. If you know your audience has constrained resources, acknowledge that and show appreciation for their efforts despite challenges. Meet emotion with respect.

Duolingo brilliantly tapped into emotion—not by being earnest, but by being hilarious. Their brand became a release valve for the stress of language learning. They didn't just teach—they entertained. And the result? Millions kept coming back.

People want to feel positive and optimistic about the future. Instead of complaining about challenges, propose specific solutions. Paint a picture of a better future and show how your plan gets them there. Position yourself as a partner in progress, not a drain on resources. Applying this concept, known as framing, will help your audiences see how your communication benefits them.

**DO**

Some messages aim to motivate or convince. Others simply aim to inform, direct, or clarify. In both cases, your audience still needs to know what to do next. A meeting recap might ask participants to update a shared doc. A report might tell readers where to find more data. A policy update might remind staff to log into a training module. These aren't pitches or pleas—they're instructions that make action possible. Even the clearest information falls flat if the audience doesn't know what to do with it.

Duolingo's calls to action are audience-smart. Their TikToks don't beg people to download the app—they make people laugh so they go looking for it. When your audience feels understood,

**3. Make Saying Yes Easy**

How you craft your message can make saying yes hard or easy. Strategically provide everything your audience needs to decide in your favor. Sure, they can think through the benefits and risks of your proposal or do a quick web search to get the information they need, but why should they?

Duolingo didn't expect people to be curious—they made curiosity effortless. Their short videos deliver punchlines, not pitches. The humor builds affinity, and that affinity makes it easy to say yes to opening the app, subscribing, or sticking with a streak.

If you make saying yes easy, audiences will want to engage—even without being asked directly. The table below provides a few examples for you to follow.

Say What to Do	Explain Why	Point to the Rewards
Approve this report here	...so we meet Tuesday's deadline	We'll top the leaderboard again
Upload your signed form by Friday	...so HR can process enrollment	You avoid coverage delays

Say What to Do	Explain Why	Point to the Rewards
Forward this to your team	...so they're ready for the meeting	The meeting runs smoother
Finish Module 2 before the deadline	...so you're certified in time	You skip the live refresher later
RSVP if attending Thursday	...so we reserve your spot	You get a printed guide

*“Never make your audience do work you could do for them.”*

## TASK

### Take Five Before You Communicate

- Who is my main audience?
- What do they already know?
- How might they feel?
- What do I want them to do?
- What would make it easy for them?

Every message is a chance to show your audience that you see them. Like Duolingo, your success lies in being relevant. That's what makes communication powerful—and human.

# STRATEGIZE

Know Your Purpose

## STORY

### Microsoft's Big Decision

In early 2019, Microsoft found itself falling behind in artificial intelligence. Its internal tools couldn't compete with emerging innovations from smaller players—especially a nonprofit lab called OpenAI. After testing OpenAI's models and benchmarking them against in-house efforts, Microsoft made a bold decision. Rather than build or buy, they partnered.

They carefully evaluated four paths: keep building, acquire another company, partner with OpenAI, or do nothing. Using a structured analysis based on speed to market, strategic fit with Azure, technical capability, and risk, Microsoft chose to invest a whopping \$1 billion in OpenAI in July 2019. Over the next four years, they deepened the partnership, ultimately investing over \$10 billion by 2023.

This structured, careful decision paid off: Microsoft leapfrogged competitors, integrated GPT models into Office products, and saw its market cap soar.



## MAIN IDEA

### Good Communication Is Always About the Audience

In business, your message can inform, persuade, or recommend. But if you choose the wrong strategy, even great ideas won't land. Knowing your purpose—and your audience's needs—is the key to being clear, credible, and effective.

## AGENDA

# What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- Inform others clearly, concisely, and objectively
- Persuade others using trust, emotion, and logic
- Recommend credible business solutions based on evidence and structure

## REASONS

# Match the Strategy to the Situation

## 1. Inform: Communicate Clearly, Concisely, and Objectively

When your audience needs to understand something—data, updates, policies—you're informing. Be neutral, factual, and specific. Avoid loaded language or framing that pushes an agenda.

- Use plain language and audience-focused explanations.
- Provide context ("To put that in perspective...").
- Simplify complex numbers with analogies. Ask AI to create a helpful analogy for your specific audience.

Stanford business professor and author Chip Heath, in his book *Making Numbers Count*, encourages communicators to "translate everything." When sharing numbers, look for ways to say, "That means..." or "Think of it this way..." so your audience stays grounded in meaning, not math.

### When You Deliver Bad News

Delivering bad news is one of the hardest tasks in professional communication. It's uncomfortable. Employees often fear hurting someone's feelings or sounding cold—and sometimes delay or sugarcoat the message so much that it causes more confusion or stress.

Here are some guidelines to help:

- **Be direct—but respectful.** Don't hide the bad news behind vague language. Use a clear subject line or opening sentence.
- **Use the right tone.** Avoid over-apologizing or sounding overly casual. Aim for empathy and professionalism.
- **Choose your medium wisely.** Sensitive or high-impact news should not be delivered over Slack or text. Often, a short meeting or phone call is best.

### Overly Vague

"Hey, just wanted to let you know we're making some changes, and your position is kind of being affected. Let's talk later."

### Clear and Empathetic



#### Buffer

Thanks for the great work you've done this semester.



#### Bad News

Unfortunately, due to restructuring, your internship will end two weeks earlier than planned.



#### Positive Close

I'd be happy to provide a recommendation or connect you to other opportunities.

**To a customer:** "We're reaching out to let you know that your delivery, originally scheduled for Friday, will now arrive Monday due to unexpected supply chain disruptions. We understand this delay may cause inconvenience, and we're working to ensure timely service going forward. Thank you for your patience."

**To a vendor:** “After a thorough review of our vendor partnerships, we’ve decided not to renew our contract at the end of this quarter. We appreciate your partnership and thank you for your work with us this year. Please feel free to reach out if you need transition assistance.”

Bad news handled well builds trust and relationships—even when it’s difficult.

Like Microsoft did when evaluating OpenAI’s performance, informing begins with clearly presenting data, context, and comparisons—without pushing an agenda. The goal is clarity, not influence.

Once the audience understands the information, your next goal may be to move them toward an agreement or action. That’s where persuasion begins.

## 2. Persuade: Use Emotion, Credibility, and Logic

**Just as Microsoft had to persuade internal stakeholders to pursue a bold new partnership, you’ll often need to win support for a single idea. To do that effectively, construct persuasive messages that rely on three tools: emotion, credibility, and logic.**

To persuade effectively, use:

- **Pathos (emotion):** Connect through stories, tone, and visual design. Harvard researcher [Jennifer S. Lerner](#) and her colleagues demonstrated that although we think we make rational decisions, most of us evaluate alternatives with our gut and emotions.
- **Ethos (credibility):** Although audiences generally decide based on pathos, the persuasion becomes stronger with ethos, which uses trustworthy information to persuade. Show your own expertise and cite trustworthy sources.
- **Logos (logic):** Provide clear reasoning and relevant evidence to support your argument, but beware [common logical fallacies](#).

Knowing the tools—emotion, credibility, and logic—isn’t enough. To persuade effectively, you need to use them **together**. Emotion grabs attention and motivates action. Credibility builds trust. Logic justifies the decision. On their own, each tool falls short—but combined, they reinforce one another. The most compelling messages don’t just appeal to the head or the heart—they do both, and they do it from a trustworthy source.

That balance matters because, in reality, **we don’t make decisions the way we think we do**.

We like to believe we’re logical creatures, carefully weighing facts and making reasoned choices. But research—and experience—tell a different story: our **guts often make the call before our brains catch up**. A persuasive message might include airtight reasoning, but if it doesn’t feel right—or come from someone we trust—it’s unlikely to land. The most effective communicators design their messages to resonate emotionally, hold up logically, and come from a credible place.

Use the examples below to see how persuasive messages work best when they **blend emotion, credibility, and logic**—not rely on just one. Notice how each element plays a different role in strengthening the message.

Scenario	Emotion (Pathos)	Credibility (Ethos)	Logic (Logos)	Why It Works
Convincing your team to adopt a new software tool	“We’ve all been frustrated by how long it takes to track project updates.”	“I’ve tested this tool for a month and reviewed peer feedback from other teams.”	“It cuts reporting time by 40% and integrates with our current systems.”	Opens with a relatable frustration, builds trust through experience, and ends with numbers that prove value.

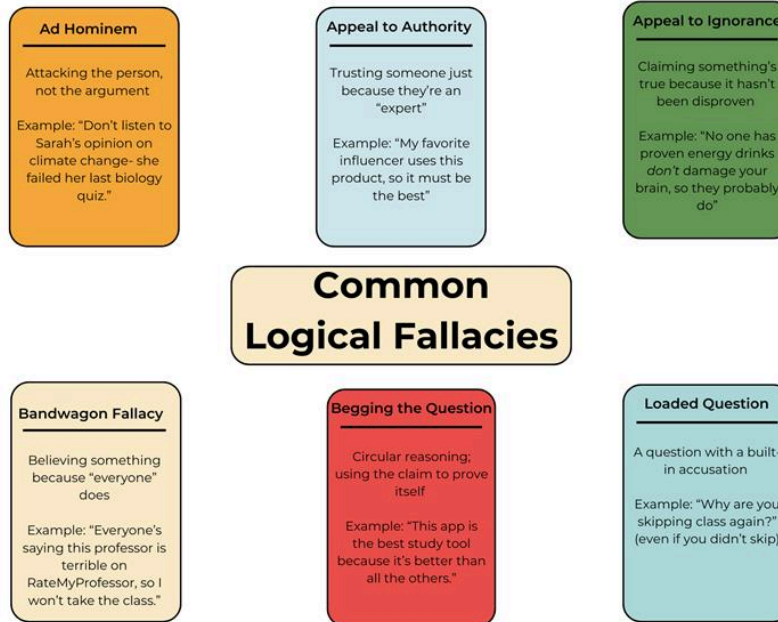
Scenario	Emotion (Pathos)	Credibility (Ethos)	Logic (Logos)	Why It Works
Asking for approval to attend a professional conference	"I've been looking for ways to reenergize after a tough quarter—I think this could be a real boost."	"It's hosted by the industry's top thought leaders and endorsed by our partners at Deloitte."	"Sessions directly align with our team's Q3 goals, and I can share takeaways in a lunch-and-learn."	Emotion shows personal motivation, credibility adds weight, and logic ties to team outcomes.
Encouraging a client to renew their contract	"We've built something great together—it's exciting to think about what's next."	"Our team delivered all milestones on time, and your customer satisfaction score is 98%."	"Renewal locks in your current rate before the upcoming pricing update."	Taps into positive emotion, backs it with facts, and offers a time-sensitive financial benefit.
Recommending a return-to-office plan	"Many team members have said they miss spontaneous hallway conversations and feeling more connected."	"The proposed plan follows both CDC guidance and best practices from Fortune 500 companies."	"A hybrid model balances flexibility with collaboration, and improves onboarding for new hires."	Leverages emotion and credibility, and wraps up with logic that balances people and productivity.

Blending emotion, credibility, and logic makes persuasion powerful—but power comes with responsibility. The same tools that build trust and inspire action can also be misused to manipulate or mislead. A story can stir emotion without offering facts. A confident tone can fake credibility. A flawed argument can sound logical if dressed up with jargon or data. That's why effective communicators don't just use these tools—they also watch for misuse, in their own messages and others'.

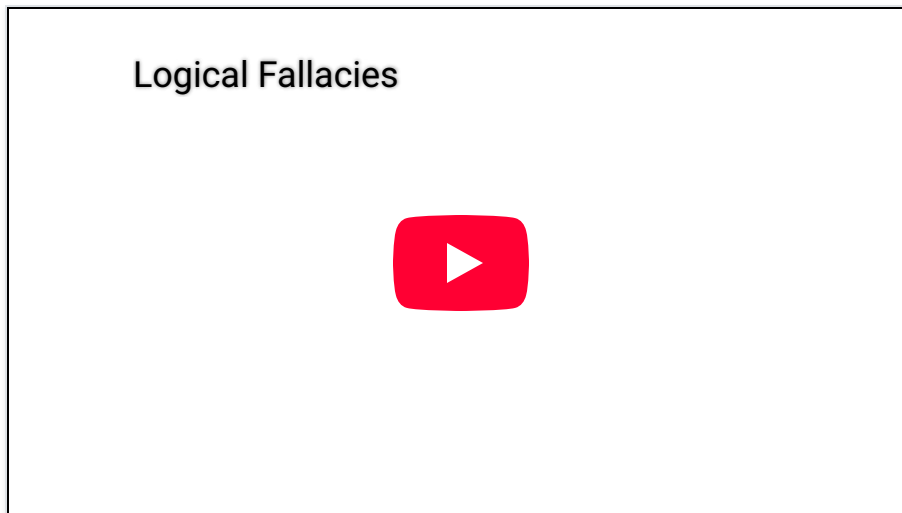
Watch for manipulation: Persuasion isn't about pressure—it's about alignment.

To be truly persuasive—and ethical—you must recognize the difference between influence and manipulation. That starts with learning how to spot common logical fallacies and credibility tricks that make bad ideas sound good.

Persuasion helps your audience see and agree with your ideas. But persuasive messages typically present **one proposed solution**. When multiple viable options exist—and a decision must be made—**recommendation** becomes the better strategy. Recommendation guides your audience through a structured comparison and leads them to the best choice through structured analysis.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION WATCH:**



### 3. Recommend: Offer Structured, Evidence-Based Solutions

Microsoft's high-level AI investment decision mirrored the same process you can use on a smaller scale. Whether choosing software or proposing a new strategy, the principles remain the same.

When you recommend a course of action, your job is to guide decision-making. Usually, you're responding to a request and offering a recommended solution based on structured analysis.

A strong objective recommendation accomplishes the following:

- Defines the problem
- Presents multiple options
- Uses stakeholder-focused weighted criteria to compare alternatives
- Supports a final choice with data
- Articulates an implementation plan
- Identifies and mitigates risk

When you're recommending a course of action—especially when there's more than one good option—**your message must show how you made the decision.** That's where a framework helps. One of the simplest and most effective tools is a **decision matrix**: a table that helps you compare options using weighted criteria.

This kind of structured comparison is common in business. It doesn't just help you choose—it helps your audience understand why your recommendation makes sense. You're not just saying "here's what I think"—you're showing your reasoning in a transparent, logical way.

## Sample Decision Matrix: Where Should We Hold the Conference?

Criteria	Weight	Grandview Hotel	Harbor place Suites	Canyon Conf. Center
Location	30%	4 (1.2)	5 (1.5)	3 (0.9)
Meeting space	30%	5 (1.5)	3 (0.9)	4 (1.2)
Cost	20%	3 (0.6)	4 (0.8)	5 (1.0)
Tech support	20%	4 (0.8)	5 (1.0)	3 (0.6)
<b>Total Score</b>		<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>

## Sample Decision Matrix: Which Project Management Tool Should We Use?

Criteria	Weight	Asana	Trello	Notion
Ease of use	30%	4 (1.2)	5 (1.5)	3 (0.9)
Integration	25%	5 (1.25)	4 (1.0)	3 (0.75)
Cost	20%	3 (0.6)	4 (0.8)	5 (1.0)
User feedback	25%	4 (1.0)	5 (1.25)	3 (0.75)
<b>Total Score</b>		<b>4.05</b>	<b>4.55</b>	<b>3.4</b>

Try This: Create a decision matrix with 3 options and 3–5 criteria. Score each option and multiply by weighted importance. The math won't decide for you—but it will clarify your thinking.

### 3. Recommend: Offer Structured, Evidence-Based Solutions

When multiple options exist, recommendation is often the best strategy. It's not just about what you think—it's about how you got there. Use a framework like a decision matrix to show your thinking.

## TASK

# Use the Right Tool for the Job

Microsoft didn't stumble into its partnership with OpenAI—it communicated its way there. Here's how the company used all three strategies from this chapter:

- **Inform:** Microsoft gathered internal data and ran performance benchmarks on OpenAI's tools compared to their own.
- **Persuade:** They built internal support by using emotion (urgency about falling behind), logic (performance data and market trends), and credibility (trusted internal advocates).
- **Recommend:** They presented a structured comparison of options—build, buy, partner, or do nothing—and backed their \$1B investment with clear criteria: speed to market, technical capability, strategic fit, and risk.

Their communication strategy didn't just lead to a decision—it led to a partnership that transformed the tech industry. Your messages may not move markets (yet), but the tools are the same.

Next time you prepare a message—email, presentation, proposal, or video—ask yourself:

- Am I informing? Be clear and neutral.
- Am I persuading? Blend emotion, logic, and credibility.
- Am I recommending? Offer structured analysis and evidence.

**Strategic communicators don't just write—they decide.** When you choose your approach with purpose, you sharpen your thinking, clarify your message, and lead others toward action that matters.

# RESEARCH

Find and Use Credible Sources

## STORY

### The Case of the Phantom Citations

In [2023](#), a lawyer representing a man injured by an airline submitted a 10-page legal brief citing several court decisions in support of his case. The citations looked professional, the arguments sounded logical, and the formatting was textbook perfect.

But there was a problem: none of the cited court cases existed. Every one of them had been made up—hallucinated—by ChatGPT. The lawyer had relied on AI to generate the content, never checking the facts. When the truth came out, the judge fined him, and his reputation took a hit. It wasn't just a legal failure—it was a credibility collapse.

The lesson? In business, just like in law, your credibility is your currency.

And your credibility depends on using accurate, verifiable information.

## MAIN IDEA

### Research Strengthens Your Message

Smart communicators don't just have opinions—they have evidence. Research isn't just about finding facts; it's about building trust, backing up your claims, and avoiding embarrassing (or costly) mistakes.

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- Search smarter—using surface and deep web tools
- Evaluate sources with the SIFT method
- Use AI tools wisely and responsibly
- Integrate, cite, and summarize evidence like a pro

## REASONS

### Build Research Skills That Strengthen Your Voice

#### 1. Where Should You Search?

There's more to research than Googling. Strong research pulls from both the **surface web** (free and accessible) and the **deep web** (subscription databases and behind-the-scenes sources). (FYI: the **dark web** is the illegal unsavory layer.)

**Primary research:** Conducted firsthand (e.g., surveys, interviews, performance reports)

**Secondary research:** Based on existing data (e.g., journal articles, government reports)

**Surface Web Tools:** Google, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, corporate blogs, online news, podcasts

**Deep Web Tools:** Library databases like ProQuest, Business Source Premier, IBISWorld, Statista, Mintel, JSTOR

**Use layered searching.** Start with a broad Google query like "employee retention trends site:hbr.org" to get familiar with the topic. Then move to ProQuest or IBISWorld to find data or whitepapers with deeper authority. If you are unfamiliar with these terms, your university business librarians are certainly happy to help you.

## TIP

Search government and nonprofit sites for free, credible data:  
BLS.gov, census.gov, data.gov, FRED.stlouisfed.org, Pew  
Research, World Bank.

## 2. Evaluate Sources with the SIFT Method

You've found sources—now how do you know if they're good? The Phantom Citation lawyer skipped this step. You won't.

Developed by University of Washington researcher Mike Caulfield, the SIFT method is a fast, modern way to vet information.

- **S** – Stop: Ask if this is a good source—current, credible, and relevant.
- **I** – Investigate the source: Who's behind it?
- **F** – Find better coverage: Can you verify this elsewhere?
- **T** – Trace claims: Go back to the original source.

## Stop

### Online Verification Skills – Video 1: Introduct...



## Investigate

**Online Verification Skills – Video 2: Investigat...**



**Find Better Coverage**

**Online Verification Skills – Video 3: Find the O...**



**Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media Back to the Original Context**

## Online Verification Skills – Video 4: Look for T...



**Example:** Before quoting a viral LinkedIn post, trace it to the original source, evaluate its credibility, and seek corroborating evidence—or don't use it.

SOURCE	What You Should Do
Blog post with no author	<b>Investigate</b> credibility
Viral infographic on X	<b>Trace</b> to the original
Stat in an HBR article	<b>Cross-check</b> and find context
Academic PDF behind paywall	<b>Trust</b> but summarize fairly
Academic PDF behind paywall	<b>Work</b> at midnight

You'll uncover research of various qualities or tiers. Use such information appropriately:

## SOURCE QUALITY GUIDE: HOW TO USE DIFFERENT RESEARCH TIERS

Tier	Source Type	Examples	How to Use
High	Peer-reviewed journals, government data, whitepapers	Harvard Business Review, BLS, Pew, Gartner	Quote or paraphrase directly
Medium	Trade magazines, company blogs, op-eds	SHRM, Fast Company, company whitepapers	Cross-check for accuracy
Low	Anonymous blogs, viral posts, AI output	Reddit, unsourced infographics, ChatGPT quotes	Avoid or verify before citing

### 3. Responsible AI Research

Used thoughtfully, AI tools can be a powerful part of your research workflow. You can ask them to summarize a dense report, suggest better search terms, or even locate new sources. But they're only as reliable as the data they were trained on—and they can make confident mistakes. Use AI to spark ideas, but always verify facts through credible sources.

The lawyer who submitted a brief created by ChatGPT sincerely wished he'd followed this practice.

#### AI VS. LIBRARIAN: WHO DOES WHAT BEST?

Task	Best Tool	Why
Brainstorm search terms or questions	AI	Fast and flexible with topic framing
Access peer-reviewed journal articles	Librarian	Has access to subscription-only sources
Summarize long reports	AI	Can break down dense text quickly (but needs review)
Find industry benchmarks or company filings	Librarian	Can guide you to credible, current sources
Check if a citation is real	Librarian	AI may hallucinate; human verification matters
Work at midnight	AI	Available 24/7, but never a substitute for critical thinking

**Before citing anything from an AI tool, ask and answer the following questions:**



**Can I find a human-published source that verifies this claim?**



**Did I use AI for drafting or discovery—not as a source of truth?**



**Am I clearly crediting how I used it?**

*“AI can generate content—but it can't generate*

credibility.”

## 4. Integrate, Summarize, and Cite Like a Pro

In business communication, integrating evidence is about credibility, not just citations. Strong communicators present evidence clearly, accurately, and ethically.

### Use signal phrases to build ethos.

"According to a 2024 McKinsey report on workplace retention..."  
 "Harvard Business Review's analysis of remote work trends shows..."

### Use paraphrasing to simplify expert language.

Original: "Organizations adopting hybrid models experienced an uptick in mid-level manager burnout, according to an internal IBM whitepaper."

Paraphrase: IBM found that hybrid teams saw more burnout among mid-level managers.

### Use summaries for long content.

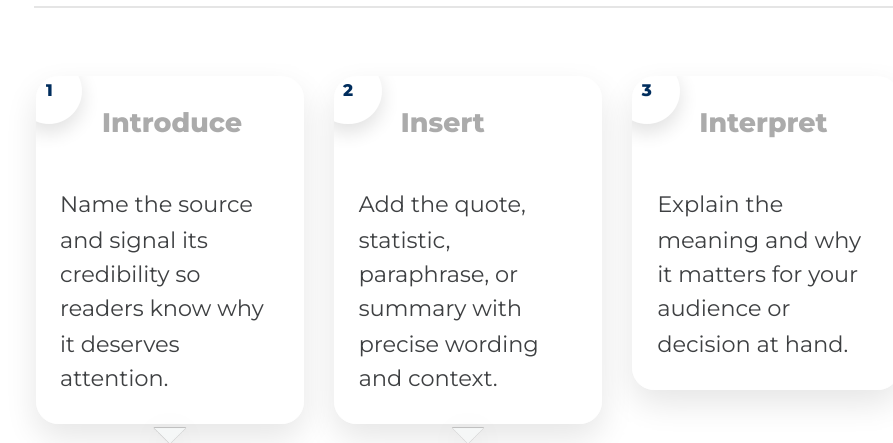
Summary: A Gartner survey found that over 60% of managers believe hybrid teams are less innovative.

Before you present any quote, statistic, or paraphrase, your audience needs to understand where it's coming from and why it matters. The best communicators follow a simple three-step method: Introduce, Insert, and Interpret.

## Example: Introduce, Insert, Interpret



# INTRODUCE • INSERT • INTERPRET



### Cite Ethically and Clearly.

Once you've selected strong sources and summarized them well, your next step is to clearly credit where your information came from—and do it in a way your audience can easily follow. The formality, type, and location of your citations depends on the message.

Format	How to Cite
White paper	Include formal endnotes or hyperlinks.
Slide deck	Embed source titles in small hyperlinked tags beneath visuals or stats.
Handout	Include a references page or list of clickable URLs.

**Avoid Plagiarism—Even Accidentally.** Rewording someone else's ideas without citation is plagiarism.

If you use AI tools in your research or writing process, include a citation such as: *"Drafted in collaboration with ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2024)"* or cite a specific output using a description and timestamp (e.g., *ChatGPT conversation, May 2025*).

For formal citations, use [Purdue OWL](#), and your library's citation guides to correctly follow APA, MLA, or CMS styles.

Use a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) to provide persistent links on the changing web.

Don't let great research go to waste—or worse, get you into trouble. Ethical citation is about clarity, not just compliance.

## TASK

### Research That Builds Trust

Before you share a stat, story, or claim in your next message, ask yourself:

- Who produced this information?
- Can I verify it with supplementary sources?

- Have I accurately cited or credited it?

Whether you're writing a white paper, pitch deck, or performance report, good research builds your credibility. But—as with the lazy attorney letting ChatGPT prepare his brief—poor research can destroy it.

## Articles

Gallo, Camine. "[Thomas Jefferson, Steve Jobs, and the Rule of 3.](#)" *Forbes*, July 2, 2012. Accessed August 2023

Gragg, Charles I. "Because Wisdom Can't Be Told." *Harvard Business Publishing*, July 1, 1951.

Miller, G. A. 1956. "[The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information.](#)" *Psychological Review*, 63(2): 81–97.

Widenhouse, Kathy. "[Avoid the Deadly TLDR Label With These 3 Easy Writing Fixes.](#)" *Medium*, April 19, 2020. Accessed August 2023.

## Books

Duarte, Nancy. *Resonate: Present Visual Stories that Transform Audiences*. New York: John Wiley, 2010.

Garner, Bryan A. *HBR Guide to Better Business Writing*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2012 Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Heath, Chip and Dan Heath. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. New York: Random House, 2008.

Klein, Gary. *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998.

Lamb, Sandra E. *Writing Well for Business Success*. New York: St, Martin's, 2015.

Minto, Barbara. *The Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing and Thinking (3rd Edition)*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 2009.

## Websites

Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age. "[Transition Words.](#)" Accessed August 2023

Purdue Writing Lab. "[Types of Outlines and Samples.](#)" Accessed August 2023

The internet offers an abundance of free online mind-map tools such as these:

<https://www.canva.com/graphs/mind-maps/>

<https://venngage.com/features/mind-map-maker>

## Videos

Greyc Consultants. "[How to Make a Mind Map.](#)" YouTube, published May 6, 2009. Accessed August, 2023.



# VISUALIZE

Show What Matters

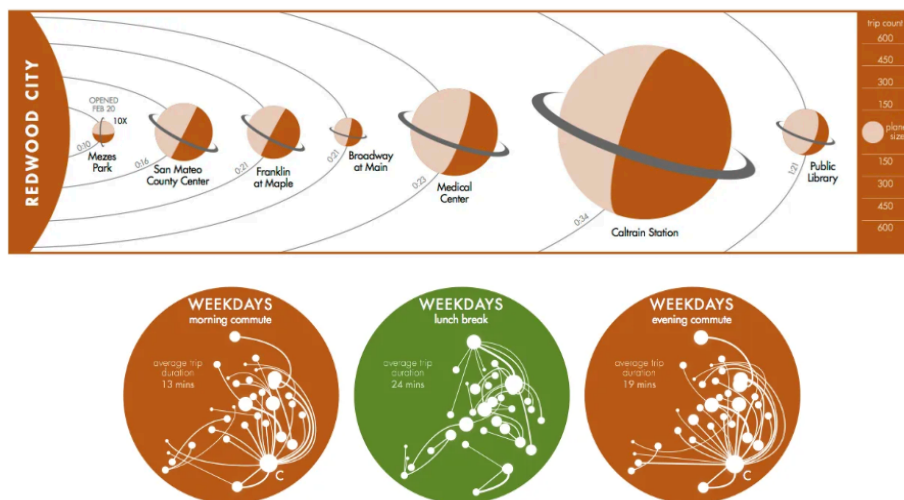
## STORY

### The Solar System That Explained a City

In 2014, the Bay Area Bike Share program had six months of user data—but no clear insight into how to improve their system. That changed when researcher and data designer **Bjorn Vermeersch** turned the data into a visual powerhouse.

Vermeersch created a solar system-style graphic where each bike station was a planet, its size representing trip volume and its orbit representing trip duration. The visualization revealed commuting patterns, system bottlenecks, and underused docks—all at a glance.

City planners used it to make data-backed decisions that improved service, station locations, and system efficiency.



Data doesn't speak for itself. Vermeersch made it make sense.

## MAIN IDEA

### Don't Just Show Data—Show What It Means

In business, you're surrounded by data. But your job isn't just to present numbers—it's to help people understand them.

Visuals that clarify data are increasingly powerful tools to persuade and inspire action, and clarity is more important than complexity.

Whether you're recommending a strategic change or reporting results, your credibility hinges on your ability to interpret and communicate data clearly. You'll be expected to translate spreadsheets into insight and guide decisions using visual storytelling.

## AGENDA

# What You'll Learn in This Chapter

In this chapter, you'll build the data literacy skills that help you inform and influence.

- Get to know data
- Get to know your data
- Interpret before you visualize
- Create visuals that make your message clear, not complicate it

## REASONS

# How to Visualize and Interpret Data

## Why Data Literacy Matters

Every click, swipe, sensor, and sale creates data. But only people with data literacy—the ability to interpret and communicate data—can turn it into insights that matter.

According to a Tableau/Forrester study, 87% of employees say data skills are critical for their jobs. But most also say they don't feel confident using data.

Your career advantage? Learn to turn numbers into meaning.

## From Solar Systems to Skill Sets

Vermeersch's visualization didn't just look good—it worked because he knew what kind of data he had, how to interpret it, and how to clearly communicate it. You'll need those same skills. Let's start by understanding the data you're working with.

## Get to Know Data

Before you visualize or interpret data, you need to understand what kind of data you're working with. Think of this stage like scouting a landscape before you draw a map. By taking time to understand your data's structure, source, and purpose, you'll make stronger, more ethical decisions about how to use it.

## Data Types

- **Quantitative data** is numerical (e.g., sales revenue, bounce rate, age).
- **Qualitative data** is descriptive and not numeric (e.g., customer reviews, interview transcripts, brand sentiment).
- **Structured data** fits neatly in rows and columns—think spreadsheets and databases.
- **Unstructured data** is messier—think video content, emails, or social media posts.
- **Semi-structured data** falls somewhere in between (e.g., JSON or XML files that have consistent markers but flexible content).

## Where to Find the Data

Depending on your goals, data might come from the following:

- **Government, nonprofit, or public sources:** [FRED](#), [BLS](#), [Census](#), [Pew Research](#)
- **Business and financial sites:** [Yahoo! Finance](#), [Statista](#)
- **Research platforms:** [Google Dataset Search](#), [IPUMS](#)

## Collection Methods

Understanding how data was gathered helps determine its trustworthiness and relevance. For instance, if you're writing about how calories affect body weight, you simply cannot make the same claims using data

you acquired from a self-report survey (since individuals tend to underreport their weight and intake) and those from a tightly controlled scientific study.

- **Surveys** collect self-reported data from large groups
- **Interviews** provide in-depth, qualitative insights
- **Experiments** test hypotheses under controlled conditions
- **Observational studies** track behavior without interference
- **Social listening** pulls patterns from social media and online interactions

You don't need to be a data scientist—but you do need to understand what your data can (and can't) say.

## Understand Your Data — Vet Before You Plot

- **Trace the source (first!):** Who collected it, when, and why? If you can't answer, keep digging or choose a different dataset.
- **Check fit:** Ask, “Does this dataset answer the specific question my article must address?” If it's tangential, pass.
- **Spot limits early:** Note sampling gaps, outdated figures, or proxy variables so you can disclose them upfront rather than scramble later.

## Interpret Before You Visualize — Decide on the Takeaway

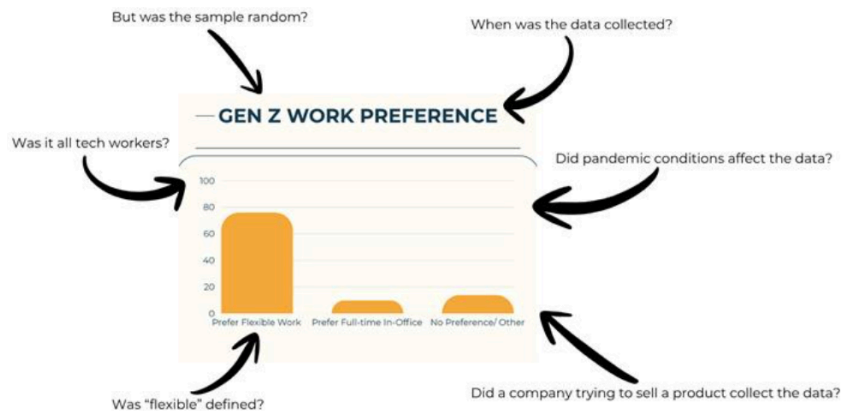
- **Write a one-sentence headline (talking title):** Do this before opening any charting tool. If you can't state the insight plainly, you're not ready to visualize.
- **Link to purpose:** Ask, “How will this visual move my argument forward?” If the answer is “It won't,” don't include it.
- **Flag caveats:** Plan a brief footnote or caption line that clarifies limitations—ethical transparency beats glossy perfection.

## Make Meaning with Interpretation

Knowing the data, however, is not enough. Raw data does not tell your audience what the data means. That's your job. Take the data you find and make it meaningful.

When interpreting data, ask questions that will help you understand the best way to use it (or indicate you shouldn't use it):

- Who **collected** it—and why?
- Is the sample **truly random** or was it biased by convenience, quota, or purpose?
- What does the **data imply** that my reader should do?
- Do **hidden assumptions** or **missing context** affect this interpretation?
- What does my reader **need to know** to trust and act?



TIP

Understanding limitations = communicating ethically.

## Show It Well: Data Visualization Best Practices

Now that you can ask the right questions, it's time to answer them visually. But not all charts clarify. In fact, poorly designed visuals confuse or even deceive.

**Good visuals do one job:** they make data easier to understand. Study the best practices for displaying data by observing what seems credible to you as you navigate information online, identifying the elements of excellent data viz, and completing short [courses](#).

Bjorn Vermeersch's satellite visualization of bike rentals in San Francisco wasn't just pretty; it accurately mapped size and range onto a familiar planetary diagram, helping stakeholders make informed decisions and improving the system for everybody.

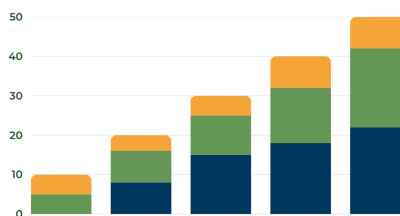
Here are some data visual design basics:

**Choose the right format.** Although hundreds of creative chart types exist, three basics do most of the heavy lifting. Use a bar chart for comparison, a line chart for change over time, and a donut chart for parts of a whole. (Avoid pie charts, which are not good at displaying comparative volume.)

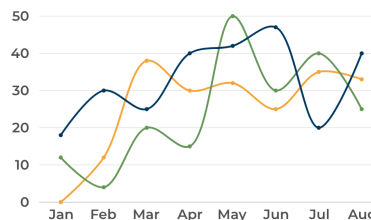
## DATA VISUALIZATION GUIDELINES

Guideline	Description
Choose the right format	Hundreds of creative chart types exist, but these three do most of the heavy lifting: Bar chart for comparison, line chart for change over time, donut chart for parts of a whole (avoid pie charts, which are not good at displaying comparative volume).

Comparison

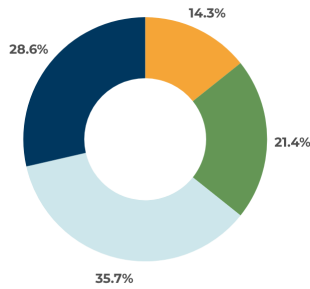


Change Over Time



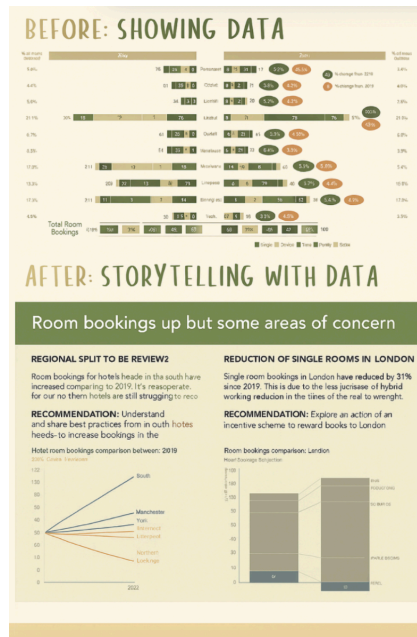
**Guideline**      **Description**

**Parts of a whole**



Don't overload visuals with unnecessary boxes, 3D effects, gridlines, shadows, or too much text. Focus on one key insight.

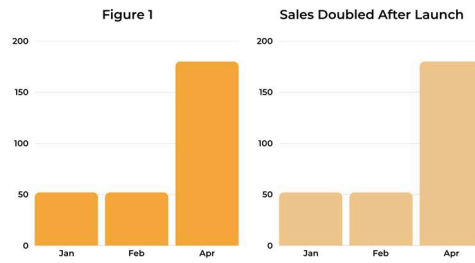
**Simplify**



**Label clearly**

Add "talking titles", or titles that tell the story: "Sales Doubled After Launch"—not just "Figure 2" or "Q4 Sales Figures."

**Guideline**      **Description**



Avoid distortion

Use consistent scales. Don't crop axes to exaggerate changes.

Cite your sources

Beneath or beside your visual. Always.

**Learn the Tools**

Learn the tools that create great visuals: **Excel, Tableau, Canva, Datawrapper, Google Charts, Power BI**, and **Piktochart** are standards. Ask which tools will be most helpful in your industry and proactively learn the basics with online tutorials.

*"If there's a conclusion you want your audience to reach, say it out loud. Don't assume they'll see what you see." —Cole Knaflic, data visualist*

**Introduce, Insert, and Interpret**

Even the best visual won't speak for itself. You must introduce it with text, position it well, and correctly interpret it. Don't drop a flashy visual in your text and walk away. Follow these steps:



**Introduce it.** "Figure 1, shows that customer satisfaction rose 20% after the support overhaul." Use a talking title, not a topic title. The title of the graphic should convey not only the "what" but also the "so what."



**Insert it.** Place it near the related text. Add a talking title: "Customer Satisfaction Improved 20%"

**Interpret it.** Explain what it means. Why does this matter? What should your reader do? Do not leave your audience to interpret what might be a

confusing graphic. Instead, guide the



audience

point.

through the graphic so it complements the main

In their book *Making Numbers Count*, authors Chip Heath and Karla Starr remind us that numbers don't make people care—meaning does. Business audiences don't automatically grasp data just because you present it clearly. To be persuasive, you must connect the numbers to something your audience already understands or values.

**Their key insight?** Anchor your numbers in the familiar. Translate abstract figures into concrete comparisons, relatable images, or memorable metaphors.

In presentations or reports, that means:

- Don't just drop in a chart—frame it with context your audience understands.
- Use simple, story-driven interpretations rather than jargon-heavy explanations.
- Make the visual a step in your narrative, not an interruption.

When you insert a chart, your job is not just to show it—it's to walk the audience through what it means and why it matters, just like you'd walk them through a story.

**You're not just visualizing data. You're making meaning visible.**

*"Good visuals clarify. Great visuals persuade. But only when you connect them to the story."*

## TASK

# VISUALS THAT ADD VALUE

Before you design your next data visualization, ask the following:

- What's the one insight my audience needs?
- Am I making that insight easy to see?
- Have I cited this data correctly so my audience can check my insights?

Like Vermeersch's solar system bike map, your job is to make data not just visible—but understandable. The best visuals don't show everything. They show what matters most.

"The best visuals don't show everything—they show what matters most."

# ORGANIZE

Outline to Understand and Be Understood

## STORY

### Elon Musk's Email That Cut Through the Noise

In April 2018, Elon Musk sent a company-wide email to Tesla employees as the company struggled to meet its Model 3 production goals. The message wasn't flashy. It didn't rely on bullet points or design. Instead, it followed a clear structure: each section was short, sequenced logically, and ended with a concrete recommendation. The subject? Productivity.

Musk's message cut through the chaos. Rather than a vague call to work harder, it provided clear expectations and a framework for making decisions. Teams responded. Waste was reduced. Communication sped up. Within weeks, Tesla began to recover its production targets.

The lesson? Structure doesn't just clarify your message. It drives action.

## MAIN IDEA

### Structure Earns You Credibility

Strong ideas only have power if they're easy to follow. In business, structure makes your message easier to remember, more persuasive, and more actionable. Without it, even accurate content can backfire.

Like Elon Musk, you may one day need to cut through noise and deliver a difficult or high-stakes message. This chapter helps you avoid confusion by showing how to structure your ideas before you speak or send.

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn

- Organize ideas using outlining methods that fit your project
- Use bottom-up outlining to clarify complexity
- Apply the SMART structure to professional messages

Like Elon Musk, you may one day need to cut through noise and deliver a difficult or high-stakes message. This chapter helps you avoid confusion by showing how to structure your ideas before you speak or send.

## REASONS

### From Idea Chaos to Message Clarity

#### 1. Starting with a Pile of Ideas? That's Normal.

Even skilled communicators start with messy notes, half-formed ideas, and scattered thoughts. The difference? They organize.

Outlining helps you think. It sharpens your message, reveals logical gaps, and gives you a roadmap.

Imagine if Musk had written a stream-of-consciousness email instead of outlining his points. The urgency would have been lost in the noise.

"You don't need more ideas—you need to organize the ones you already have."

## 2. Choose an Outlining Method That Fits

### Top-Down Outlining

Start with your main idea, then list supporting points.

Works well for standard formats or when your conclusion is clear.

**Example:** *An annual report or executive summary.*

### Mind-Mapping

Start with a core idea and branch outward.

Great for creative brainstorming or solving complex problems.

**Example:** *Developing an employee wellness initiative.*

### Bottom-Up Outlining

Most useful when you have a flood of information and need clarity.



### Brainstorm -

List all your points.



### Cluster -

Group related ideas.



### Sequence -

Order the clusters logically.

Let's revisit Musk's email. Here's how bottom-up outlining shaped it:

#### Brainstorm:

- Who is impacted
- Layoff timeline

#### Cluster:

- Immediate impacts (who, when, how)

#### Sequence:

- Confirm the decision

- Support resources
- Final pay info
- Follow-up steps
- Support (severance, HR contacts)
- Next steps (benefits access, final day)
- Explain the timeline
- Offer support
- Clarify next steps

### 3. Use the SMART Structure for Clarity and Flow

Once you've outlined your content, SMART helps you organize it into a flow your audience can follow:

Element	Purpose
S – Story	Hook attention with a narrative or example
M – Main Idea	State the core message clearly
A – Agenda	Preview the structure of your message
R – Reasons	Provide evidence and supporting points
T – Task	Close with a takeaway or next step

SMART works in presentations, memos, reports, and even some emails.

#### Let's rewrite Better.com's memo using SMART:

- **S:** "Today's message is difficult, but it's important."
- **M:** "We are announcing staff reductions that will affect 9% of our workforce."
- **A:** "We'll explain who is impacted, why this decision was made, and how we're supporting our people."
- **R:** Specifics on roles, timing, support resources, and next steps
- **T:** "If you are affected, please read the FAQ and contact HR. We're here to support you."

Compare that to the vague, reactive message they sent. Structure doesn't just convey information—it builds trust.

#### TIP

Many students assume "Story" must be a personal anecdote or character-driven tale. That's not the case—especially in business communication. More often, the "Story" is simply a

powerful opener: something that grabs attention, establishes relevance, and sets the tone.

**1. Quote:** Use a relevant quote that offers insight, authority, or surprise.

*“Design is the silent ambassador of your brand.” —Paul Rand*

**2. Metaphor:** Use a short metaphor or analogy to help your audience visualize an abstract idea.

*Formatting is to communication what plate presentation is to food. No matter how delicious the content, poor presentation can make people push it aside.*

**3. Image or Visual:** Use a side-by-side comparison, illustration, or screenshot that shows a problem or contrast.

*Two résumés: one is a gray block of text; the other has headings, bullet points, and breathing room. Same content—very different impact.*

**4. Stat or Study:** Open with a specific data point or research finding to establish urgency or credibility.

*“Readers take only 7 seconds to decide whether to keep reading your document—or move on.” (Nielsen Norman Group)*

## TASK

# Organize Before You Write

Don't jump into writing. Start with a structure. Use bottom-up outlining when you're buried in research or details. Use SMART when you need a polished message your audience can follow.

Elon Musk didn't inspire change through urgency alone. He outlined, sequenced, and structured his message to cut through chaos.

Your message may not be life-altering like a layoff notice. But every business message is a chance to build or break trust.

Plan it. Structure it. Then send it.

# DRAFT FOR IMPACT

The Pre-write Pay-off

## STORY

### When a Blog Post Undermines Trust: Tesla on Autopilot

In 2016, a driver died while using Tesla's Autopilot. Tesla responded with a **blog post**—not a press release—that opened with technical safety statistics and **buried news** of the fatality several paragraphs in.

The post was factually accurate, but it read as **cold and overly technical**. There was **no expression of sympathy**, and it lacked a clear structure. The backlash was swift. Critics said the message **downplayed the loss of life**, confused readers, and damaged public trust.

The problem wasn't the facts. It was the **way** they were written. Better drafting would have avoided the structure and tone misfires that undercut the message.

## MAIN IDEA

### Drafting Makes the Message Work

Drafting is when you translate your ideas into written form. It's not about perfection—it's about progress. The goal is to get your thoughts down clearly and coherently so they can later be refined. Strong drafting is the bridge between raw ideas and final impact.

First drafts don't need to be polished—they need to be purposeful.

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- How to overcome perfectionism and start writing
- How to draft unified, coherent, and well-developed paragraphs
- How to use tone that strengthens your message

## REASONS

### How to Draft Messages That Matter

#### Drafting Comes First

Before you refine sentences or analyze tone, you need to get the ideas on the page. Drafting is the process of moving from scattered thoughts to structured communication. It's where you begin shaping your ideas into organized paragraphs your reader can follow.

Don't aim for perfection yet—aim for clarity. Your first draft is where you build logic and structure. The revising stage will come later.

**Think of drafting as construction, not decoration.** You're putting up the framework. Polishing comes after.

## Try Freewriting

Try freewriting—writing quickly without stopping to edit. This technique helps accomplish these goals:

- Silence your inner critic
- Capture raw ideas before you forget them
- Increase fluency and reduce writer's block

You can always revise later. Right now, your job is to write.

### TIP

**Set a timer for 5–10 minutes and write nonstop.** Don't worry about grammar or structure—just get your ideas down.

## Overcome Perfectionism with Freewriting

Good drafting is about generating material—not polishing as you go. Many writers fall into the trap of editing too early, which slows thinking and kills creativity.

Before you draft polished paragraphs, consider warming up with a few minutes of freewriting. It helps you think clearly before you write purposefully.

## Build Paragraphs That Make Sense

Tesla's blog post wasn't just poorly toned—it was disorganized. It buried the lead, used inconsistent structure, and shifted focus without transitions.

A good paragraph should be unified (focused on one idea), coherent (logically sequenced), organized (follows a pattern), and developed (supported with examples or reasoning). Drafting strong paragraphs gives your writing structure that your audience can follow.

## WHAT GOOD PARAGRAPHS DO

Quality	How It Works	Why It Matters
Unified	Focuses on a single idea	Avoids topic drift
Coherent	Uses transitions and logical flow	Helps the reader follow
Organized	Follows a structure (e.g., cause-effect)	Improves clarity

Quality	How It Works	Why It Matters
Developed	Uses examples, evidence, or reasoning	Adds credibility
Short	2–5 sentences	Improves readability for skimmers

TIP

**Start with a topic sentence. Support it with detail. End with a transition.**

When drafting, apply structure intentionally:

- Open with a clear topic sentence
- Group related ideas logically
- Use signal words and transitions like *“for example,” “in contrast,”* or *“as a result”*
- Avoid cramming multiple unrelated ideas into one paragraph
- End with a transition or wrap-up that connects to what’s next

NO	YES
<p>Due to several ongoing organizational priorities and multiple team member concerns, it was decided by management that updates to the internal workflow system would proceed on a limited basis until the results of the pilot program could be further evaluated and budget allocations reviewed to ensure feasibility and operational alignment across cross-functional departments.</p>	<p>We’ve decided to pause full updates to the internal workflow system. This decision responds to staff concerns and competing priorities.</p> <p>Updates will continue on a monthly basis until the pilot results are reviewed and the budget is finalized, in about three months. Please assess feasibility while maintaining current team operations.</p>

**Use the Right Tone**

Even accurate writing can cause problems if the tone is off. Tesla’s post offered real data—but sounded defensive, impersonal, and distant. In business writing, tone affects how your audience feels about your message and about you.

## USE THE RIGHT TONE FOR BUSINESS

Tone	Poor Example	Why It Fails	Better Example	Why It Works
Confident	"I hope to demonstrate..."	Undermines credibility	"I will demonstrate..."	Clear and self-assured
Polite & Sincere	"Yeah, we can do it, I guess."	Casual and unsure	"Certainly! We're committed."	Professional and positive
Professional	"Hey there, what's up?"	Too informal	"Dear [Name], please see attached."	Polished and respectful
Inclusive	"For people like you who aren't tech-savvy..."	Condescending	"Our platform is built for all users."	Welcoming to everyone

**Tone is more than style—it's strategy.** Every word sends a signal about your values and professionalism.

### TASK

## Practice Drafting for Credibility

Before you finalize your next business message:

- Use free writing to overcome perfectionism and get started
- Draft short, well-structured paragraphs with clear topic sentences
- Make sure each paragraph supports one key idea
- Use transitions to create flow between paragraphs
- Adjust your tone to reflect the audience and purpose



# DESIGN AND FORMAT

Make Your Message Look as Good as It Sounds

## STORY

### The Solar System That Explained a City

According to a 2023 [Nielsen Norman Group UX study](#), users decide whether to stay on a page within 10 seconds—and formatting is a primary factor in that decision. Because readers first scan to decide whether they'll read, dense or disorganized documents simply don't get attention. Beautifully designed documents, however, reach not only their intended audience, but are often shared with others, too. That's power.



In business, how your message looks shapes how it's received. Great content deserves great formatting.

## MAIN IDEA

### Format Shapes First Impressions

Because readers judge whether a document is worth reading in seconds, good design helps your message get read, understood, and remembered.

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- Structure your message with titles, headings, and hierarchy
- Design for readability using font, color, and emphasis
- Use layout and spacing to guide attention and reduce clutter

## REASONS

# Design Tools That Serve the Message

## 1. Titles and Headings: Build a Scannable Information Hierarchy

Well-designed documents give readers structure at a glance. Titles and headings are your navigation system—they help the reader skim first, then decide where to dive deeper. When done right, they create an information hierarchy that reflects your message's priorities and structure.

- **Start with a strong title.** This is your headline—it should be specific, relevant, and a little punchy if appropriate.
- **Add a subtitle if helpful.** Subtitles can clarify context or preview your main argument.
- **Use headings to chunk content.** Each major section should have a clear heading that previews what's coming. Use subheadings to break complex sections into manageable pieces.

### Example of a Scannable Hierarchy:

**Title:** Fixing Customer Retention Problems

**Subtitle:** How We Lost Customers—and How We'll Win Them Back

**Heading 1:** Why Customers Leave

- Poor Onboarding
- Delayed Response Times
- Unmet Expectations

**Heading 2:** What We've Tried Already

- Customer Surveys
- Staff Training
- Improved Help Desk Tools

**Heading 3:** The New Three-Part Plan

- Improve Onboarding
- Proactive Support
- Feedback Loops

A nice by-product of writing titles and headings is that the process helps you understand your own message better. You will often make significant structural improvements after you clarify the sections of your message.

## Use Parallel Structure

Make sure your headings match grammatically and structurally. This reinforces the flow of your message.

### Not Parallel:

- Launching the New App
- Why Our Beta Failed
- Fix the Bugs

These headings don't follow the same grammatical pattern—one is a gerund phrase, one is a question, and one is an imperative verb. That lack of consistency disrupts flow and makes the structure harder to follow.

### Parallel:

- Launch the New App
- Analyze the Beta Failures
- Fix the Bugs

Now each heading starts with a verb in command form (imperative), creating a clear, scannable rhythm. To achieve grammatical parallelism, pick a structure and apply it consistently across headings at the same level.

## Choose Between Talking and Topic Headings

**Talking headings** are short statements or questions that preview your main idea. They cue your reader to receive your message.

**Example:** “Why Customer Retention Matters More Than Growth”

**Topic headings** are short labels. These work in formal documents or dashboards but are less engaging.

**Example:** “Customer Retention”

Choose one style and apply it consistently throughout the document. Talking headings usually make your content easier to understand and remember.

## Design for Readability Using Font, Color, and Emphasis

### CHOOSE FONTS THAT MATCH YOUR MESSAGE

Fonts act as the “voice” of your document. Use them intentionally. Here’s a snapshot of some basics:

Typeface	Voice
<i>Georgia (italic)</i>	Comfortable
<b>Helvetica (bold)</b>	Stable
Franklin Gothic	Objective
Century Gothic	Modern
Baskerville	Reliable

Use no more than two fonts in a document—usually one for headings and one for body text. Check your organization’s style guide or visit [FontPair](#) for well-matched combinations.

## Apply Contrast and Color with Purpose

### SIZE MATTERS

Usage	Font Size
<b>Title</b>	25–35 pt
<b>Subtitle</b>	Mid-size
Headings	14–16 pt
Subheadings	13–14 pt
Body Text	11–14 pt
<i>Captions/credits</i>	7–9 pt

## Color is Powerful

- Use at least one color, but no more than 2–3 colors per document
- Select colors from your org's palette or from [Coolors.co](#)
- Choose high-contrast colors for accessibility—check with the [Coolors Contrast Checker](#)
- Remember that grays are colors. Dark gray text can look more sophisticated than black

## Use Emphasis Wisely

- **Use bold to highlight key ideas**  
**Example: This is urgent, so please sign this contract today.**
- *Use italics to add emphasis*  
*Example: This strategy is not sustainable long term.*
- *Use color to show categories or highlight*  
*Example: red for an overdue items column header, green for completed tasks.*
- *Use 🍷 emoji strategically, depending on the formality of the document*  
*Example: Let's keep brainstorming possible taglines 🍷*

### TIP

Do not underline either for emphasis or headings.  
Underlined text indicates a hyperlink.

## Use Layout and Spacing to Guide Attention



## Provide breathing space

Set line spacing to 1.15

Leave blank lines between paragraphs (do not indent paragraphs)

Place headings immediately above the paragraphs they introduce, leaving a blank line above to indicate the start of a new section



## Align accurately

Choose left-aligned ("ragged right") text alignment for easiest reading. Avoid full justification—it creates distracting gaps (called "rivers").



## Keep it short

Aim for 52–70 (66 is the sweet spot!) characters per line (use columns if needed)

*“Great design doesn’t call attention to itself—it calls attention to your message.”*

### TASK

## Format Like a Pro

So try these formatting tips to break through the 10-second scan limit. Before you send that final draft:

- Add clear headings and subheadings
- Choose consistent fonts and sizes
- Use color, alignment, and emphasis strategically
- Leave visual breathing space



# REVISE

Sharpen Your Message

## STORY

### Revision Is the Chisel That Sets Your Message Free

Michelangelo didn't just create beauty—he revealed it. He once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” That's what revision does for your writing.

Your first draft is the block of marble—rough, bulky, full of potential but not quite there. Like Michelangelo, you need to see what's essential, then chip away the extra words, smooth the transitions, and shape the tone until the message shines through with clarity and purpose. In business communication, the masterpiece is a message that lands cleanly with your audience. Your chisel? Revision.

## MAIN IDEA

### Revision Clarifies and Earns Trust

Writing is thinking—but revision is where your thinking sharpens. By revising, you align your message with your audience's needs, fix what's unclear, and elevate your credibility. You don't just clean up your draft—you make it effective and trustworthy.

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- How to revise for clarity, concision, and concreteness
- How to spot tone misfires and fix them
- How to use peer feedback to strengthen your writing

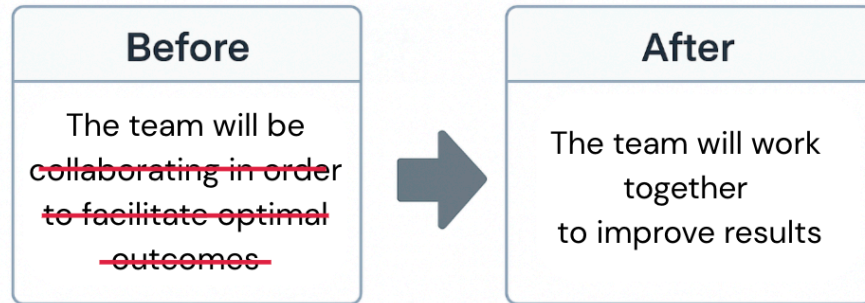
## REASONS

### Why You Should Revise

#### 1. Improve Clarity, Concision, and Concreteness

Your first draft gets the ideas down. Revision ensures those ideas make sense to others. Readers trust writing that is clear, concise, and concrete.

## Before and After: Sharpening Your Message



Principle	What to Look For	Fix Strategy
Clarity	Sentences that confuse or wander	Break long ideas into short sentences
Concision	Redundant phrases, extra words	Eliminate clutter and repetition
Concreteness	Vague or abstract terms	Replace with specific, vivid language

**Original:** Our team will be collaborating to facilitate optimal outcomes.

**Revised:** Our team will work together to improve results.

**Original:** There are many options available for resolving this issue.

**Revised:** You can call, email, or chat with support to resolve the issue.

**Original:** In regards to the upcoming quarterly meeting, please be advised that the agenda items are presently being finalized.

**Revised:** We're finalizing the agenda for next quarter's meeting and will share it by Friday.

### TIP

Remove unnecessary prepositions to make a message more concise.

**Original:** In light of the information that was provided during the course of the meeting, we have decided to move forward with the plan.

**Revised:** After the meeting we decided to proceed.

Revising is the difference between leaving your ideas buried in stone or shaping them into something sharp, clear, and persuasive.

## 2. Evaluate and Adjust Tone

Even well-organized messages can fail if the tone is wrong. A revision pass is the time to check whether your voice sounds appropriate, respectful, and professional. Your audience determines your tone, so do the work to understand them.

### Quick Tone Review Checklist

- Does your tone match the context (formal/informal)?
- Is your word choice respectful and constructive?
- Are you confident without sounding arrogant?

**Original:** "You clearly didn't read the manual."

**Revised:** "Let's review the manual together to find the issue."

**Tone Matters: Word Choice Builds—or Breaks—Trust.**

Harsh	Professional
<p>From:</p> <p>You clearly didn't read the manual.</p> <p>Best,</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>From:</p> <p>Let's review the manual together to find the issue.</p> <p>Best,</p> <p>_____</p>

## 3. Use Peer Feedback to Improve the Message

You can't revise well in isolation. A second set of eyes can catch what you miss—especially tone, assumptions, or unclear language.

**Ask a Peer to Help You Spot:**

- Sentences that feel confusing or too long
- Words that feel defensive, arrogant, or insincere
- Areas that need more clarity or specificity

Ask your reviewer to narrate their reactions as they read your work out loud, indicating what they liked, where they got confused, or where additional information would be useful. Take notes and make changes where needed.

### TASK

## Practice Strategic Revision

- Read it out loud to spot awkward phrasing or long sentences

- Highlight vague words and replace them with specifics
- Cut unnecessary words and repetitions
- Review your tone—is it confident, courteous, and respectful?
- Ask a peer for feedback

*“Choose your words carefully—especially the second time.”*

Remember Michelangelo. Your ideas are already there—you just have to carve away what's unnecessary. In moments of routine communication or high-stakes delivery, revision is how you free your message and shape it to resonate.

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# COLLABORATE

Lead Unified Teams

## STORY

### Mission-Ready Collaboration

In 2006, NASA awarded a contract to a relatively unproven company—SpaceX—to help deliver cargo to the International Space Station. The partnership was high stakes. Failure would not only cost billions but also derail national space objectives.

How did this risky collaboration succeed? NASA and SpaceX had radically different cultures, but they invested heavily in communication protocols, mutual respect, and iterative feedback. NASA brought process discipline; SpaceX brought speed and innovation. They succeeded together because they defined their roles, resolved friction quickly, and aligned around a shared mission.

*“This was a partnership built on rigorous review and respectful pushback—not blind agreement.” —Lori Garver, former Deputy Administrator, NASA*

## MAIN IDEA

### Effective Collaboration Drives Innovation and Engagement

Whether you lead a project or participate in one, your ability to collaborate directly affects your team's success and your credibility. An oft-cited [study](#) published by Salesforce found that 86% of employees and executives cite lack of collaboration or ineffective communication as the reason for workplace failures. Yet organizations that prioritize collaboration outperform their peers significantly in productivity.

The difference isn't luck—it's strategy. Clear roles, shared goals, and purposeful tools make collaboration not just smoother, but more impactful.

## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- How teams develop and why communication matters at each stage
- How to manage conflict and encourage inclusive dialogue
- How to lead and contribute to meetings that matter
- How to use digital collaboration tools with professionalism

That same principle applies to your work. Whether in student teams or corporate projects, your ability to collaborate begins with clarity—of purpose, process, and people.

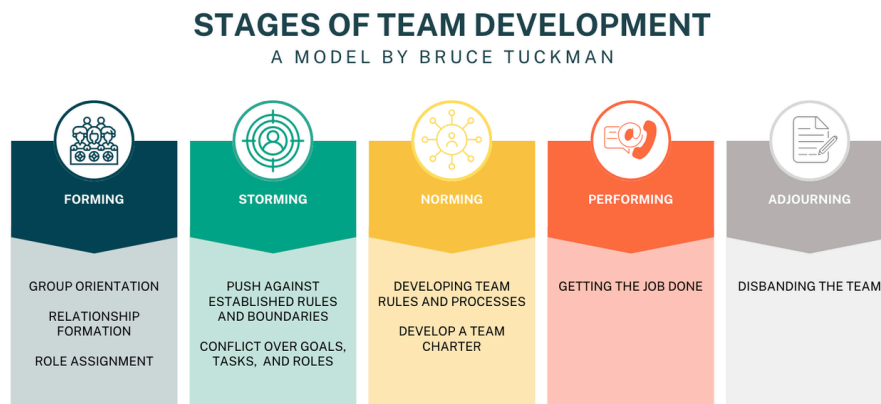
## REASONS

# Begin With Clarity—of Purpose, Process, and People

## 1. Understand How Teams Develop

Just like the NASA–SpaceX team did, work teams often experience the stages described by psychologist Bruce Tuckman:

- **Forming:** People get to know each other.
- **Storming:** Differences surface. Conflict may arise.
- **Norming:** Group roles, expectations, and trust begin to form.
- **Performing:** The team works smoothly and effectively.



Understanding these stages helps you normalize conflict, manage expectations, and work productively with others. A team charter outlining team roles, goals, and communication preferences can help align everyone from the start.

### TIP

At the beginning of a new project, create a collaborative doc recording your team's decisions about responsibilities, due dates, and communication norms. Treat it like your team's playbook.

The success of the NASA–SpaceX partnership didn't begin with the launch pad—it began with aligned expectations and clear communication. From the first proposal to final execution, both teams understood what they needed to deliver and how they'd collaborate across distinct organizational cultures.

## 2. Navigate Conflict with Empathy and Structure

Conflict isn't failure—it's a normal part of team life. The key is navigating it productively.

- Focus on facts, not personalities
- Reinforce shared goals

- Use active listening to clarify disagreements
- Avoid side conversations and triangulation
- Document decisions to avoid future confusion

NASA and SpaceX had to negotiate crucial differences—from timelines and testing protocols to media messaging. Without respectful conflict resolution, the partnership could have derailed under pressure.

*"The best teams don't agree on everything. They agree on how to work through it."*

### 3. Run Meetings That Matter

Poorly run meetings waste time and breed resentment. Good meetings create momentum.

#### Meeting Tips:

- Share an editable agenda in advance
- Appoint roles: timekeeper, facilitator, etc.
- Use an AI notetaker like [Fireflies.ai](#) to automatically produce transcripts, summaries, and action lists
- Stick to start/end times
- Use "parking lots" for off-topic items

#### Virtual Meeting Tips:

- Institute a cameras-on policy for at least part of every meeting
- Mute when not speaking
- Use chat to encourage quieter voices
- Share screens for visual clarity

#### TIP

If you're leading a quick team update, set the agenda: "We have three agenda items. Let's aim to finish in 25 minutes so we all get a break."

### 4. Use Collaboration Tools to Strengthen—not Stress—Your Team

Workplace tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, Trello, and Google Docs are only helpful when used well.

#### Tips:

- Set response-time expectations for different channels
- Avoid vague comments like *"Can someone do this?"*
- Tag only relevant people
- Use threads or folders to keep things organized

#### TIP

Tip: Use Slack channels like #logistics and #content-ideas to keep conversations organized. Pin important messages and documents.

## TASK

# Practice Collaborative Leadership Now

- Create a team charter at the start of your next group project
- Facilitate a snappy 15-minute team meeting
- Try a project management tool like Trello to track tasks

The NASA–SpaceX partnership worked because each team understood their role, respected the collaboration process, and aligned around a common goal. It's a model for how ambitious work gets done—not through luck or like-mindedness, but through discipline, respect, and communication.

Want to lead and succeed like that? Start by collaborating like that.

# PRESENT

Command the Stage

## STORY

### Amy Cuddy and the Science of Presence

When Amy Cuddy was a college student, a traumatic brain injury from a car accident left her doubting her ability to succeed. Doctors told her she wouldn't finish her degree. But she did—and more. She earned a doctorate, became a Harvard professor, and gave one of the most-watched TED Talks of all time. In it, she shared her research on how body language—not just words—can shape how we feel and how others see us.

Cuddy didn't become a powerful speaker through natural charisma. She practiced presence: standing tall, pausing deliberately, speaking with clarity, and focusing on her audience. Her story shows that presentation skills are learned—and they matter.

*“Don't fake it till you make it. Fake it till you become it.” —Amy Cuddy*

## MAIN IDEA

### Presence—Not Slides—Drives Success

Business presentations are not performances for entertainment. They are purposeful conversations designed to inform, persuade, or clarify in high-stakes environments. Strong delivery—not flashy slides—builds credibility. Your audience responds to your presence, preparation, and clarity more than your visuals.

According to Forbes, 70% of employed Americans who give presentations agree that presentation skills are critical to their success. Yet 20% say they'd rather pretend to be sick than give a presentation. Practicing your presence will prepare you for those moments when your manager turns and says, “Why don't you take 10 minutes and explain those numbers to us?”

## “ — ALUMNI ADVICE

“Making an effort to understand your audience demonstrates not only that you care but also that you have a solid work ethic. Through generic presentations, I’ve branded myself as just another competent professional. Through tailored presentations, I have branded myself as Dmitrii.”

Dimitrii Liu  
M&A advisor at Newsec Infra  
Stockholm, Sweden



### AGENDA

## What You’ll Learn in This Chapter

- How to prepare strategically for high-stakes presentations
- How to project presence through body, voice, and eye contact
- How to practice effectively with feedback and purpose
- How to design simple, consistent, visual slide decks
- How to troubleshoot common presentation challenges

### REASONS

## Develop and Deliver World-Class Business Presentations

### 1. Prepare Strategically: Plan Like a Pro

Cuddy’s TED Talk wasn’t spontaneous. It was strategic. She knew her message, shaped it around her audience’s needs, and supported it with clear evidence.

Good business presenters ask: *Who is my audience? What do they need to know, do, or feel? What’s my main message? What structure will guide them through the content?*

Your success doesn’t begin at the podium. It begins in the planning room.

### 2. Deliver with Presence: Use Body, Voice, and Focus

Cuddy’s research showed that people who adopt an open, powerful posture before speaking report feeling more confident. That confidence shows in voice, gestures, and eye contact.

In business, presence doesn’t mean theatricality. It means calm confidence.

- Stand tall. Plant your feet shoulder-width apart.
- Use gestures intentionally to reinforce structure.
- Vary your pitch, pace, and volume to emphasize key points.
- Pause to let ideas land. Silence is a powerful tool.
- Make direct eye contact to turn a boring monologue into a compelling conversation.

When Cuddy stepped onto that TED stage, she didn’t perform—she connected. The same is true in a business boardroom.

### 3. Practice with Purpose: Don't Memorize—Internalize

Cuddy didn't script her every word. Memorizing a presentation word-for-word makes presenters brittle. You may fall apart if you can't think of the next word. Cuddy practiced talking about ideas, not saying lines. Repetition helped her sound fluent and natural.

Take these steps to prepare:

- Rehearse out loud at least three times.
- Record yourself and look for distracting filler words or nervous tics.
- Practice in front of a colleague or mirror.
- Focus on transitions, pacing, and vocal energy.

**Confidence is earned, not inherited.**

### 4. Visual Aids: Support the Message—Don't Distract from It

YOU are the presentation. Slides are the support.

Cuddy used simple slides with clear visuals. Her presence—not her PowerPoint—carried the message.

**Follow these three slide design principles:**

- **Be Simple:** Each slide should focus on one idea in a short title or visual. Avoid bullet lists and paragraphs. Your audience should grasp the point of the slide in five seconds—and then turn their attention back to you. Use talking lead lines instead of topic headings, and use visual triggers to draw the audience's eye to important points on the slide.
- **Be Consistent:** Match fonts, colors, and layouts across all slides. Use the same design logic for titles, captions, and charts. Inconsistency distracts and undermines credibility.
- **Be Visual:** Replace text with images, charts, or icons wherever possible. Visuals should highlight, not overwhelm. For data-heavy slides, use animation or layering to walk the audience through each point.

Bad slides can ruin a good message. Distracting animations, mismatched fonts, and overloaded screens make it hard for your audience to follow. Design your slides like billboards: if someone glanced for five seconds, would they understand the point?

Cuddy's slides passed that test. Sparse, visual, clear. But even more important—she never relied on them. She spoke with confidence whether the clicker worked or not.

#### TIP

Test your slides in the actual space or platform where you'll present. Walk to the back of the room. Are they readable? If not, revise.

#### TIP

Want some good resources to help you design your slides? Check out [Nancy Duarte's Annotation Toolkit](#) and [Animated Charts](#). Both offer free downloads.

## 5. Troubleshoot Like a Pro: Stay Calm and Adapt

Technology fails. Time runs out. Tough questions arise. Presence prepares you to handle it all.

Cuddy teaches that presence is not pretending. It's showing up grounded and ready.

- If you blank, pause, breathe, glance at your slide or notes, and continue.
- If interrupted, thank the person and steer back to your point.
- If a group starts a distracting side chat, move toward them as you talk. They'll stop when you get close.
- If time is cut short, summarize the key takeaway and finish with a strong action statement.

Presence turns panic into poise.

### TASK

## Practice Professional Presence Now

- Record a one-minute explanation of a data chart. Focus on clarity and presence.
- Deliver a five-minute team update with no slides—just voice, body, and message.
- Practice pausing, eye contact, and vocal emphasis using a summary for practice.

**Key Reminder:** You don't need to be perfect. You need to be present.

# APPENDICES

[Email](#)

[Reports and Executive Summaries](#)

[Grammar](#)

# EMAIL

Strategies and Best Practices

## STORY

### Email Still Rules

In 2024, Forbes reported that despite Slack threads, Teams chats, and project management dashboards, workers overwhelmingly preferred email as their main mode of business communication. Even in hybrid and remote environments, employees chose email for its clarity, traceability, and professional tone.

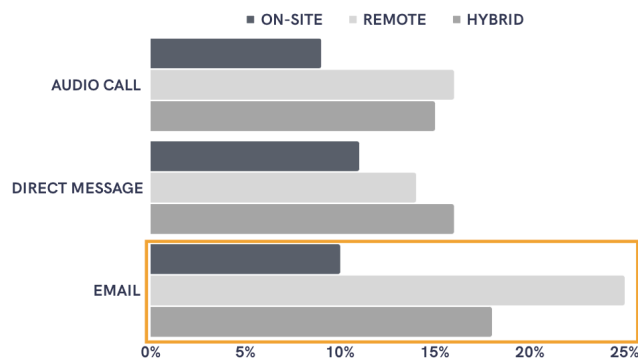
Andrew Brodsky, in his 2024 book *Ping: The Secrets of Successful Virtual Communication*, confirms this trend. While workers may prefer chat for speed, they still turn to email when they want to document decisions, maintain professionalism, or convey a more thoughtful message. Email, Brodsky writes, is the default for high-responsibility communication—and knowing how to write it well creates career advantage.

## MAIN IDEA

### Email Remains the Cornerstone of Professional Communication

Despite a growing number of workplace communication tools, email is still the most widely used and preferred method. Writing clear, professional emails is a vital skill for effective business communication and leadership.

"Email is still how business gets done. Learn to write it well."



## AGENDA

### What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- How to configure your professional email presence
- Why subject lines and structure matter

- How to write concise, scannable messages
- What etiquette rules still apply—and why they matter
- How to manage CC, BCC, attachments, and replies with professionalism
- Insights from Ping on when (and how) to use email effectively

## REASONS

# Why Good Email Writing Matters

## 1. Configure Your Email for Professionalism

Your display name and signature block are part of your brand. Brodsky reminds us that first impressions in virtual communication often happen before the message is read—through the sender's name, formatting, and tone.

### TIPS

- Use a clear name-based display (not initials or student IDs).
- Include a professional signature block with your name, title, organization, and LinkedIn.
- Use school-affiliated email while in college and brand-aligned personal email after graduation.

- Use a clear name-based display (not initials or student IDs).
- Include a professional signature block with your name, title, organization, and LinkedIn.
- Use school-affiliated email while in college and brand-aligned personal email after graduation.

## 2. Write Clear, Specific Subject Lines

Subject lines are headlines. They determine whether your message gets opened. Brodsky emphasizes that vague subject lines signal disorganization and lower urgency.

Vague	Better
"Hi"	"Strategy Meeting Confirmed for July 5 at 2 p.m."
"Important"	"Action Required: Q4 Budget Approvals Needed"

### TIP

If you're requesting action, say so in the subject line. If you're just informing, signal that too. People scan their inbox by intent.

### 3. Be Concise and Easy to Read

Avoid TL;DR (Too Long; Didn't Read). Use bullet points, bolded subheadings, and white space. According to Brodsky, long paragraphs decrease perceived urgency and make your audience more likely to delay responding.

#### Quick Wins:

- Put the main point in the first sentence.
- Break long messages into scannable chunks.
- **Bold** important deadlines or action items.

### 4. Use Professional Etiquette and Tone

Tone doesn't travel well digitally. Brodsky notes that email is often interpreted more negatively than intended. Always revise for clarity and warmth.

#### Do:

- Use greetings and sign-offs
- Match tone to audience and context
- Avoid sarcasm, ambiguous jokes, or excessive emojis

#### Don't:

- Use ALL CAPS (shouting)
- Skip names or closings on first contact

"With no tone of voice or facial expressions, words carry more emotional weight. Choose them carefully." — Ping

### 5. Be Timely and Set Expectations

Email isn't instant messaging. Brodsky advises communicating your response rhythm: *"I'll reply to this by tomorrow"* sets expectations and eases anxiety.

#### TIPS

- Respond within 24 hours
- Use out-of-office replies when away
- Don't train others to expect immediate responses unless that's your job

### 6. Manage Threads Thoughtfully

Email threads can become messy fast. Use subject lines that reflect updated context. Start a new thread when the topic shifts.

#### Use CC to:

- Inform stakeholders
- Maintain transparency
- Invite feedback from secondary recipients

#### Use BCC to:

- Protect privacy in mass emails
- Avoid reply-all clutter

## Avoid Reply-All unless:

- Everyone truly needs the update

### TIP

When in doubt, reply to just the sender. Fewer recipients = less cognitive load.

## 7. Handle Attachments Professionally

Brodsky notes that poorly managed attachments can derail productivity. Always reference them in the message body and provide context.

### Best Practices:

- Use PDFs for final documents
- Link to cloud storage for large files
- Mention the attachment in the body of the message
- Confirm the recipient before sending sensitive info

### TASK

## Write, Reflect, Improve

Take one of your recent or upcoming assignments and practice:

- Write an email version of your message.
- Ask AI to revise it for clarity and tone.
- Edit again, adding personalization and adjusting for your audience.

Then ask:

- What did the AI help with?
- What did you have to fix?
- How did you tailor the message to your professional context?

Remember: Good email is not about flair. It's about clarity, consideration, and getting things done—exactly what professionals notice.

### Further Reading:

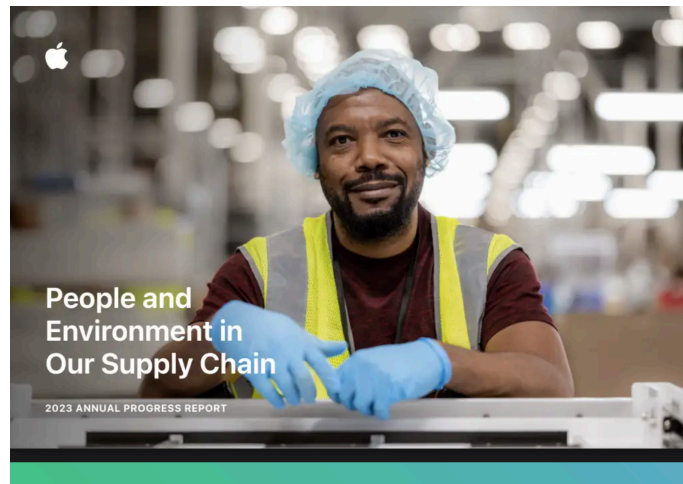
- Andrew Brodsky, *Ping: The Secrets of Successful Virtual Communication* (2024)
- Forbes Advisor, "[Digital Communication in the Workplace](#)" (2024)
- Zippia, "[Email Subject Line Statistics](#)" (2023)
- Mozilla Foundation, "[User Privacy and AI](#)"



[Example Report \(1\):](#)



[Example Report \(2\):](#)



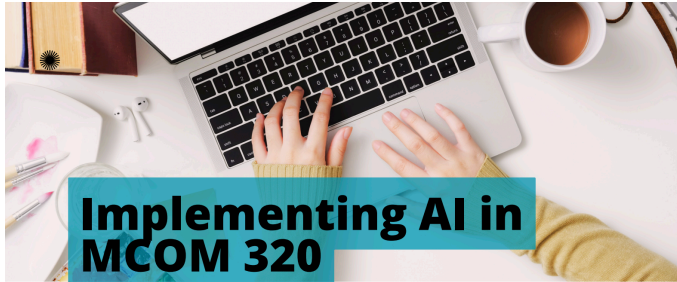
## Marketing

[Example Report \(1\):](#)



# Organizational Behavior/Human Resources

[Example Report \(1\):](#)



**Implementing AI in MCOM 320**

**ELISE WINGER**

Studies show that AI could affect nearly 15% of the workforce by 2030, displacing 400 million workers yet creating around 97 million new jobs.<sup>1</sup>

**AI IS PROJECTED TO CREATE**

[Example Report \(2\):](#)

McKinsey  
Digital


QuantumBlack, AI by McKinsey

## What every CEO should know about generative AI

Generative AI is evolving at record speed while CEOs are still learning the technology's business value and risks. Here, we offer some of the generative AI essentials.


This article is a collaborative effort by Michael Chui, Roger Roberts, Tanya Rodchenko, Alex Singla, Alex Sukharevsky, Laraina Yee, and Delphine Zurkiya, representing views from the McKinsey Technology Council and QuantumBlack, AI by McKinsey, which are both part of McKinsey Digital.

[Example Report \(3\):](#)



EMILY EREKSON | JUNE 22, 2023

**AI IN MCOM 320**  
**EMPOWERING STUDENTS IN AI-ASSISTED BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**



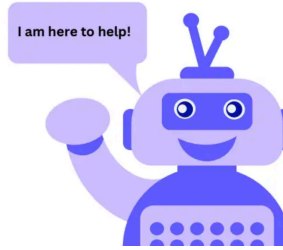
[Example Report \(4\):](#)

## AI FOR GRAMMAR EXAM PREP

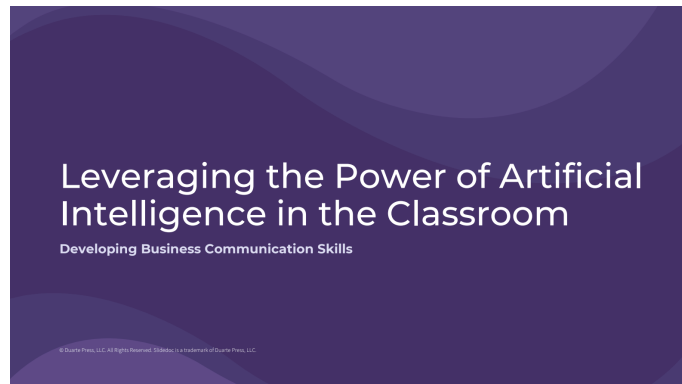
Students like me need hands-on, repetitive, and adaptive learning. Business writing concepts are no exception to that need. This term, I have found myself trying to find ways to immerse myself in the material. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of resources that effectively bring immersion to the material in an online setting.

The most effective AI-assisted business communication learning activity will be a dynamic tool for grammar exam preparation. I have created a skeleton website for this tool, which can be seen in my video presentation.

This tool will be adaptable to each student's



[Example Report \(5\):](#)



[Example Report \(6\):](#)

## IMPLEMENT AI IN CLASS

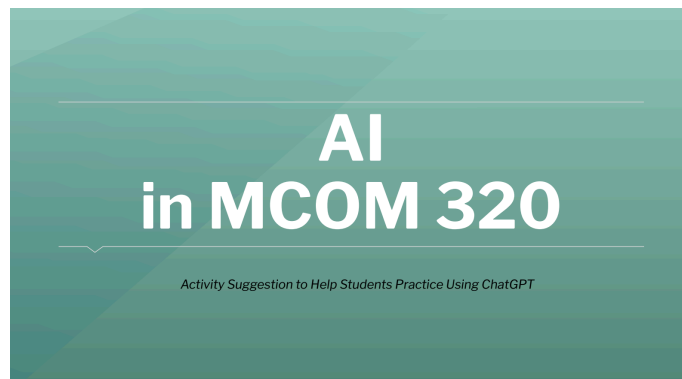
Nathan Carrizales

AI is taking the world by storm. Its effects are seen in nearly every setting. It has never been more important to implement AI in the classroom. In this article, I will explain one idea on how to implement AI to familiarize students with this trending topic.

There are a plethora of ways AI can be used.



[Example Report \(7\):](#)

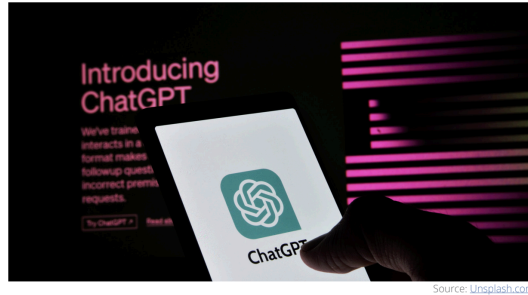


[Example Report \(8\):](#)

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19, June, 2023

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## ENHANCING MCOM 320:

An AI-powered Ideation Workshop

[Example Report \(9\):](#)

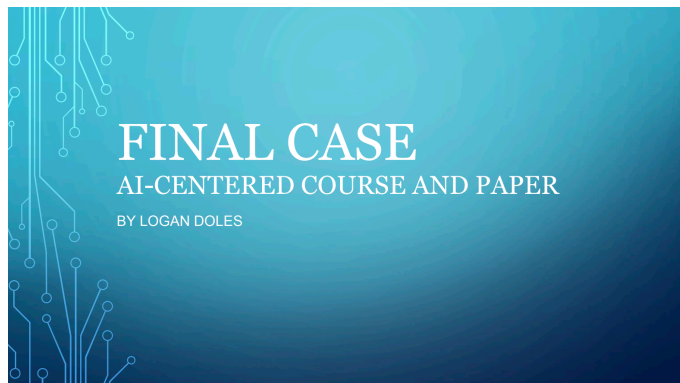


## Artificial Intelligence:

The Perfect Preparation for the Modern Interview

By: **Gunner Ellsworth**

[Example Report \(10\):](#)



[Example Report \(11\):](#)

CHAT WITH YOUR FAVORITE HISTORIC FIGURE

AN AI-DRIVEN ACTIVITY FOR INNOVATION

PRESENTED BY JOSH WILSON

## strategic management

[Example Report \(1\):](#)

**Deloitte.**



[Example Report \(2\):](#)

**INTECH**  
open science | open minds

International Journal of Engineering Business Management  
Special Issue on Innovations in Fashion Industry

OPEN ACCESS  
ARTICLE

## Demand Forecasting in the Fashion Industry: A Review

Regular Paper

Maria Elena Nenni<sup>1\*</sup>, Luca Giustiniano<sup>2</sup> and Luca Pirolo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Naples Federico II  
<sup>2</sup> University LIJSS Guido Carli

[Example Report \(3\):](#)



[Example Report \(4\):](#)

McKinsey  
& Company

McKinsey Global Institute

## A peek at the future health and wealth of our global economy

A new McKinsey report looks at four scenarios for inflation, interest rates, and growth over the next decade. Three of the economic outcomes portend stagnation and stagflation—but one offers hope.

tech

[Example Report \(1\):](#)



[SlideModel.com: Executive Summary](#)

[Vennqage Executive Summary Template](#)



# GRAMMAR

## The Path to Proofreading Proficiency

Good grammar is essential for students who actively engage in job searching. It serves as a key factor in creating polished and professional resumes, cover letters, and communication with potential employers, ultimately influencing their chances of securing employment opportunities. Take the words of Cathleen Smalls, an experienced editor and business owner.

"Grammar matters because without it you get cringeworthy errors," she explains.

"But my more serious answer is that using proper grammar in your communications sets you apart from the rest. Even if the person reading your correspondence doesn't actively think, 'Wow, nice use of grammar!' they certainly notice.

*If two people with similar qualifications submit a résumé and cover letter for an open job, and one has a flawless cover letter while the other one has some grammatical errors, I guarantee the error-free, grammatically correct one will get the first call."*

Avoid obstacles by polishing your grammar skills. You should certainly use a spell check, grammar check, and even AI, but those tools are not a substitute for knowing the rules. Knowing grammar rules may differentiate you as the go-to AI grammar training expert at your next internship or job.

If you were blessed with a natural gift for language or an amazing English teacher, grammar may come easily. If it does not come easily, you'll have to work harder. If English is not your native language, you may need additional help and tutoring. This chapter briefly explains 18 common grammar errors. We want to help you avoid these common pitfalls.

## SYNTAX AND WORD CHOICE

The following seven rules pertain to syntax and word choice. For a more in-depth study, [CLICK HERE](#).

### 1. Write complete sentences

Competent writers understand the difference between phrases and clauses and between independent and dependent clauses. A clause contains both a subject and its verb. A dependent clause cannot stand alone, but an independent clause can stand alone because it is a complete sentence. A phrase is a group of words that does not contain a subject. A phrase may contain nouns and verbs but not a **subject** and its associated verb.

Take a look at the example below.

Dependent clause: When she speaks without hesitation

Independent clause: She speaks without hesitation.

Phrase: Speaking without hesitation

### 2. Mind your modifiers

Adjectives and adverbs modify (describe) other words, phrases, and clauses. Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns while adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. You cannot use them interchangeably.

Additionally, always be aware of misplaced modifiers. They cause confusion because they are separated from the words, phrases, or clauses they describe or modify.

Take a look at the example below.

Incorrect: ProQuest published the article, which provides innovative research to the public.

Correct: ProQuest, which provides innovative research to the public, published the article.

### 3. Correctly use pronouns

Using the correct pronoun starts with identifying the point of view, case, number, and gender. Be aware that the case of the sentence strongly changes the type of pronoun you're using.

Take a look at the sentences provided below, and observe how, despite consistently employing a first-person point of view, the pronoun used is altered depending on the case.

**Subject:** Devon and **I** are going to the barbecue.

**Object:** Please come to the company barbecue with Devon and **me**.

**Possessive:** The car you saw in the parking lot is **mine**.

**Reflexive/Intense:** I plan to study for the exam **myself**.

### 4. Agree with antecedents

Pronouns must agree with their antecedent—the noun they are replacing. The pronoun must match the antecedent in number, singular or plural, and gender, male or female. Sometimes you might be confused if a noun is singular or plural. Take the word team. In business, a team is composed of a number of individuals. However, because the team is an entity distinct from its individual members, use a singular pronoun and verb when referring to the team as a whole.

For example:

Incorrect: The sales team achieved **their** target.

Correct: The sales team achieved **its** target.

### 5. Avoid ambiguous pronoun references

Pronouns must not only agree with their antecedents in gender and number but also refer to only one antecedent.

Take a look at the example below.

Ambiguous reference: John's manager said he wasn't allowed to go.

Clear Pronoun Reference: John's manager said John was not allowed to go.

### 6. Create parallel expressions

Parallelism means using the same word patterns—the same *syntax*—for similar parts of a sentence. When these similar elements aren't parallel, they sound awkward and out of place. Writers most often violate the parallelism principle in three situations: a list or series, vertical lists, and parallel connectives.

Take a look at this example below.

Items in a series.

Not parallel: Our exhibition booth will feature product giveaways, instructional videos, and we'll be especially pleased to raffle off a Hawaiian vacation.

Parallel: Our exhibition booth will feature product giveaways, instructional videos, and a Hawaiian vacation raffle.

### 7. Choose the right word

Have you ever been confused about whether to use affect or effect? If so, you are in good company. Many words are commonly confused. Take, for example, the words every day and everyday. Every day means daily. Everyday means commonplace.

Incorrect: For my new exercise regimen, I do yoga **everyday**.

Correct: For the company picnic, I wore my **everyday** jeans.

If you don't understand the difference between any of the pairs, review this alphabetized list of common word-use errors: [Easily Confused Words](#).

## PUNCTUATION AND MECHANICS

The following seven rules pertain to punctuation and mechanics. For a more in-depth study, [CLICK HERE](#).

### 8. Confidently place commas

Remember to place commas around nonessential (restrictive) words or phrases, e.g. "Helga Karlsson, who is from Denmark, has been hired as a financial advisor."

Use commas after introductory words, phrases, and clauses, e.g. "When selecting an organization to donate to, CEO Kent uses a personalized vetting model."

Also, use the Oxford comma to separate all items in a series—a list that contains three or more items.

### 9. Follow three rules for using semicolons

1. Punctuate independent clauses. For example, "Travis's expertise is local government; Dave's is finance."

2. Separate series that contain internal commas. For example, "Irwin visited Vienna, Austria; Paris, France; and Prague, Czech Republic."

3. Punctuate independent clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs. For example, "The Testing Center closes at 9 p.m.; however, you may take the online exam until midnight."

### 10. Use colons only after complete sentences

A colon introduces a list or series, example, quotation, or subtitle. It also separates time expressed in narrative writing.

Take a look at the example below.

The company's profits are trending in a positive direction: a 10% year-over-year increase for five years.

### 11. Differentiate Dashes from hyphens

Dashes (—) are not hyphens (-).

Hyphens express standalone fractions, join compound adjectives that appear before the noun, and connect prefixes to their root words. For more help with hyphens, check out this site: [How to Use a Hyphen](#).

Dashes are split into two main groups: em dash (—) and en dash (-). The em dash indicates a break in thought, emphasizes a point, or separates parenthetical information from the sentence; the en dash indicates a range or connection between items like numbers, dates, times, or locations.

### 12. Master apostrophes and quotation marks

Apostrophes indicate contractions (e.g., it's) and possession (e.g., the CEO's leadership).

Use quotation marks to indicate someone is speaking, to enclose a direct quote from a secondary source, or to indicate titles of short works.

Correctly place punctuation marks inside or outside quotation marks. For example, semicolons always appear outside quotation marks, while question marks appear outside the quotation marks when the quotation is not a question.

### 13. Capitalize correctly

For the most part, capitalization rules apply across languages: capitalize the first word of every sentence and capitalize proper nouns. Difficulty arises when writers are trying to determine whether a noun is proper or common. Take the example of educational degrees. The common rule is to capitalize the formal title of a degree but not the general reference.

Take a look at the example below.

Cary Lewis is earning a Master of Public Administration (MPA).

Camila Antivilo is working on a degree in business administration.

### 14. Know your numbers

The following basic rules are consistent with the *Chicago Manual of Style*, but you should consult your company's style guide to learn the differences. Generally, spell out single-digit numbers one through nine. Express large numbers—larger than one million—with a combination of decimals and verbal descriptors. For example, use 2.9 billion, instead of 2,943,000,000. Generally, use the cardinal—1, 2, 3—number to express dates in writing. Ordinal numbers—1st, 2nd, 3rd—are allowable only if the date precedes the month.

## VERB TENSES AND MOODS

The following four rules pertain to verb tenses and rules. For a more in-depth study, [CLICK HERE](#).

### 15. Make subjects and verbs agree

In a sentence, the subject is the actor and the verb is the action or state of being. Proficient English speakers often claim they instinctively know the correct verb form to use because it sounds right. However, intervening prepositional phrases can cause confusion. Intervening means the phrase comes between the subject and the verb. To avoid this common mistake, make sure the verb agrees with its subject.

Take a look at the example below.

Incorrect: The range of skill requirements **provide** for upward growth potential.

Correct: The range of skill requirements **provides** for upward growth potential.

The subject, range, is singular, so the verb should be singular.

### 16. Match indefinite pronouns and verbs

The *Syntax and Word Choice* section discusses indefinite pronouns in their function as pronoun antecedents. A similar issue arises when choosing whether to use a singular or plural verb with indefinite pronouns. For example, these indefinite pronouns always take a singular verb: anybody, anyone, everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, and nobody.

However, indefinite pronouns can also take a plural verb, e.g. both, few, several, or many. Here's a handy tip: If the quantity is countable, then the indefinite pronoun takes a plural verb; if the quantity is not countable, use the singular verb.

### 17. Use the right verb tense

Make sure that you reduce double auxiliary words. Writers occasionally reference an event that could have happened in the past but didn't, so they use the phrase *would have* followed by another verb. Consider this example:

I **would have** liked to have seen the movie.

However, that sentence uses double auxiliary verbs—*have liked* and *have seen*.

The second *have* is unnecessary. Changing it to the **infinitive**—the **base verb plus to**—more clearly and concisely conveys the same meaning:

I would have liked **to see** the movie.

## 18. Use the correct mood

Verbs can express a variety of moods, which indicate whether the writer is stating a fact, issuing a direct command, expressing a condition, implying uncertainty or doubt, or giving a subtle command. The most common English verb moods are indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and conditional. If you can differentiate the moods from each other, it will be easier for you to consider the level of formality, the power dynamics, and the desired tone of the communication and be aware of the social and cultural norms that may influence the choice of language in a given context.

## IN CONCLUSION

Awareness is the first step toward mastery. This section covered 18 syntax and word choice, punctuation and mechanics, and verb tenses and mood rules. If you struggle with any of these errors, keep studying, practicing, and getting feedback. Your writing and speaking will continue to improve until these fundamentals become second nature to you.

# SYNTAX AND WORD CHOICE

## 1. Write Complete Sentences

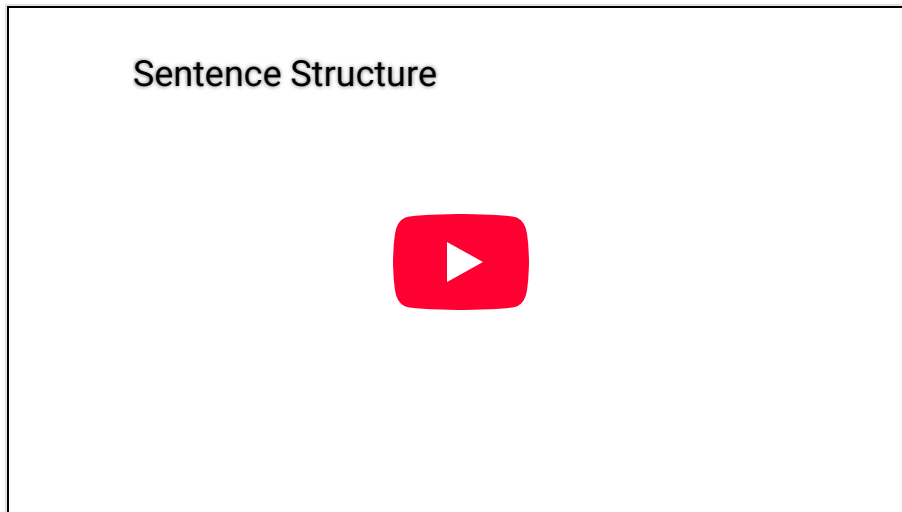
In informal conversation, we often speak in partial sentences, as in Holly's response below:

**Randall:** Holly, why were you late for today's meeting?

**Holly:** Because of traffic on I-215.

Although acceptable in colloquial speech, this reply in writing becomes a [sentence fragment](#). Eliminate sentence fragments from your formal business writing.

Watch this video to review the three fundamental parts of a sentence:



The video identifies three sentence building blocks:

**Subjects**—the noun actors in the sentence; they either do, are, or have something

**Verbs**—express the noun's action, having, or being

**Complements**—words that add meaning to the sentence by completing or giving more information about—modifying—the subject or the verb.

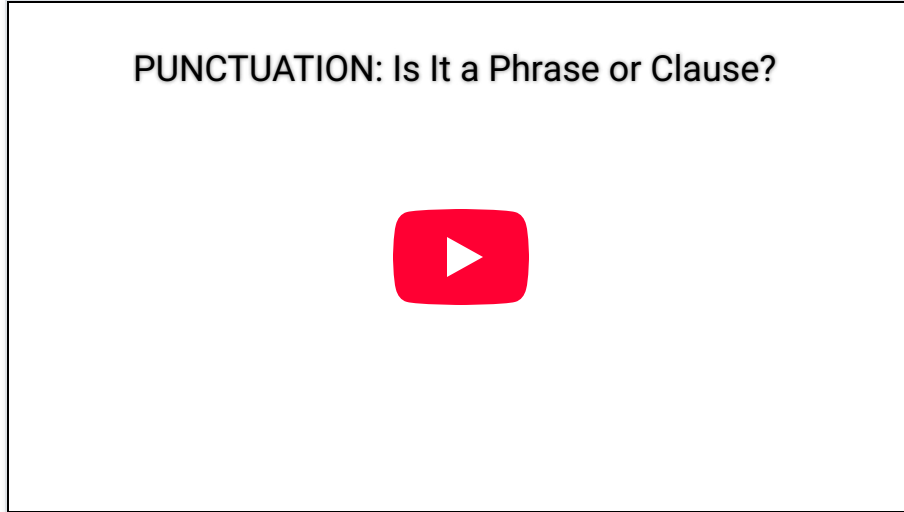
These elements collaborate to form meaningful sentence structure. Depending on the complexity of a sentence, it may contain multiple subjects, verbs, objects, and modifiers. A sentence may contain phrases and dependent clauses, but without an independent clause, no complete sentence exists. Click on the table below for examples of phrases, dependent clauses, and independent clauses.

Table 1 Phrases, dependent clauses, and independent clauses ([click here](#))

<b>A phrase (P) is a group of words that function as a single</b>	<b>A dependent clause (DC) contains a subject and a verb but does not express a</b>	<b>An independent clause (IC) contains a subject and a verb and expresses</b>
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<b>unit in a sentence. No subject-verb combination is present.</b>	<b>complete thought. When expressed alone or with a phrase(s), a dependent clause is a fragment.</b>	<b>When expressed alone a complete thought. Independent clauses are complete sentences.</b>
Walking to the store	While I was walking to the store	I walked to the store.
By her side	Because he stood by her side	Because he stood by her side, she felt more confident.
While studying for the exam	While she studies for the exam	While she studies for the exam, she should take the practice quizzes.
Without hesitation	When she speaks without hesitation	When she speaks without hesitation, the audience is fully engaged.

Competent writers understand the difference between phrases and clauses and between independent and dependent clauses. This video clarifies the differences:



When expressed alone or with a dependent clause(s) only, a phrase is a fragment.

A clause contains both a subject and its verb. A dependent clause cannot stand alone, but an independent clause can stand alone because it is a complete sentence. A phrase is a group of words that does not contain a subject.

## 2. Mind your Modifiers

### 2.1 Adjectives and adverbs modify (describe) other words, phrases, and clauses.

**Adjectives** modify nouns and pronouns. **Adverbs** modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

**Adjectives and adverbs do not function interchangeably.** Do not use an adverb where you need an adjective, and do not use an adjective where you need an adverb. Click on the table below for examples of adjectives and adverbs.

Table 2.1 Adjectives and adverbs (click here)

<b>Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns.</b>	Which one?	I like the <b>gray</b> house
	Which one?	The book <b>on the shelf</b> belongs to Lara.
	What kind?	Travis is a <b>serious</b> student.
	How many?	Francine gathered <b>three</b> tea sets.
<b>Adverbs modify verbs, adverbs, and adjectives.</b>	When?	Zelda arrived <b>yesterday</b> .
	When?	Frank finished the project <b>before the deadline</b> .

	How?	Taylor drives <b>carefully</b> .
	How?	<b>With style and grace</b> , Jeff accepted the feedback.
	Where?	Claire and Lily go <b>everywhere</b> together.
	Where?	Shelly ran <b>to the store</b> .
	To what extent?	This summer is <b>unseasonably</b> cool.
	To what extent?	The movie is entertaining <b>for all ages</b> .

## 2.2 Avoid misplaced modifiers.

Whether they are words, phrases, or clauses, modifiers must be correctly placed in a sentence. Misplaced modifiers cause reader confusion because they are separated from the words, phrases, or clauses they describe or modify. Click on the table below for examples of how to correct misplaced modifiers.

Table 2.2 Misplaced words, phrases, and clauses (click here)

Modifier Type	Incorrect Example	Explanation	Corrected Example
Misplaced word	Tony fixed his clogged bathroom drain <b>skillfully</b> .	<i>Skillfully</i> does not modify <i>bathroom drain</i> .	Tony <b>skillfully</b> fixed his clogged bathroom drain.
Misplaced word	For dessert, Lee <b>only</b> eats cakes.	<i>Only</i> does not modify <i>eats</i> .	For dessert, Lee eats <b>only</b> cakes.
Misplaced phrase	<b>Arriving home exhausted</b> , my toothbrush and bed were all I wanted.	The toothbrush and bed did not arrive home exhausted.	<b>Arriving home exhausted</b> , I wanted <b>only</b> my toothbrush and bed.
Misplaced phrase	I heard about the hurricane <b>at school</b> .	<i>"At school"</i> does not modify <i>hurricane</i> .	<b>At school</b> , I heard about the hurricane.
Misplaced clause	<b>I am a senior at BYU who is majoring in business</b> .	BYU is not majoring in business.	I am a BYU senior <b>who is majoring in business</b> .
Misplaced clause	Dmitri suffered from the flu for three weeks, <b>which nearly caused him to fail his finance class</b> .	Three weeks did not nearly cause him to fail his finance class.	Suffering from the flu for nearly three weeks nearly caused Dmitri to fail his finance class.
Misplaced clause	<b>Millennials saved thousands during the pandemic, which they used to purchase homes</b> .	The pandemic was not used to purchase homes.	During the pandemic, millennials saved thousands, <b>which helped that generation purchase homes</b> .
Misplaced clause	ProQuest published the article, <b>which provides innovative research to the public</b> .	The article does not provide innovative research to the public; ProQuest does.	ProQuest, <b>which provides innovative research to the public</b> , published the article.

## 2.3 Avoid dangling modifiers.

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that is neither clearly nor logically related to the word(s) it modifies. Unlike misplaced modifiers, dangling modifiers cannot be corrected by simply moving them to a different place in the sentence. Click on the table below for examples of how to correct dangling modifier errors.

Table 2.3 Dangling words and phrases (click here)

Modifier Type	Definition	Explanation	Corrected Version
Dangling word	<b>Decisively</b> , the cheating students were expelled.	The word has nothing in the sentence to modify.	The dean <b>decisively</b> expelled the cheating students.
Dangling phrase	<b>To be excused from class</b> , a positive COVID-19 test is required.	The phrase has nothing in the sentence to modify.	<b>To be excused from class</b> , students are required to present a positive COVID-19 test.

Dangling phrase	<b>After using the Chicago 17th citation format for several assignments</b> , this method felt logical and familiar.	Nothing in the sentence indicates who is using the Chicago 17th citation format.	After using the Chicago 17th citation format for several assignments, Lety found this method logical and familiar.
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## 2.4 Avoid squinting modifiers.

Squinting modifiers—words or phrases that could modify the words before or after them—create ambiguity and confusion. Click on the table below for examples of how to resolve squinting modifiers.

Table 2.4 Squinting modifiers (click here)

Type	Example	Reason It Squints	Corrected Version
Squinting word	Talking quickly annoys people.	Does talking <b>quickly annoy</b> people or does <b>talking quickly</b> annoy people?	Quickly talking annoys people.
Squinting phrase	I saw a bird in the tree with binoculars.	Who has the binoculars—you or the tree?	With my binoculars, I saw the bird in the tree.

## 2.5 Watch out for tricky exclusivatory modifiers. The words *only* and *just* are especially tricky modifiers.

They are tricky because they can function as adjectives or adverbs. This duality can cause great confusion. To avoid misinterpretation, think carefully about where to place *only* and *just*; they belong directly next to the word or words they modify. Click on the table below for examples of how to translate *only* and *just*.

Watch this video to review those pesky introductory phrases:

### MISPLACED MODIFIERS #2: Those pesky intr...




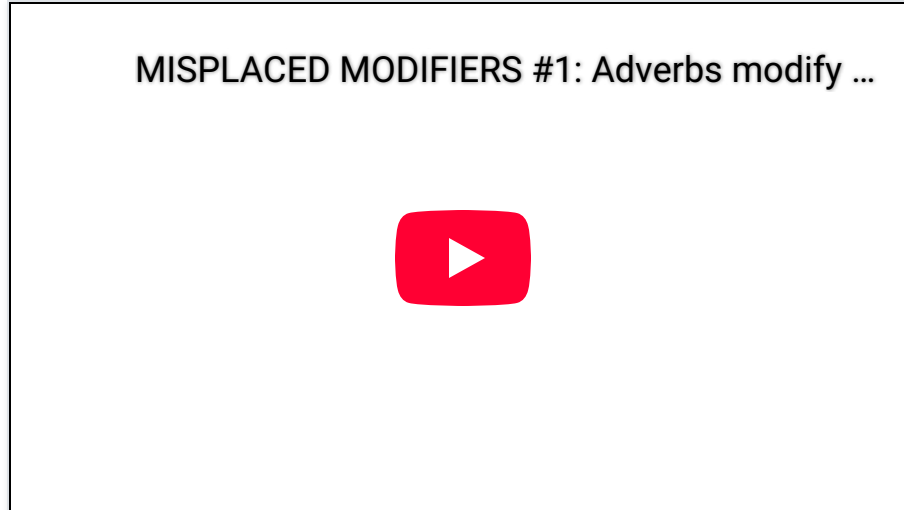
Table 2.5 Exclusionary modifiers

Example	Translation
She picked up the phone <i>only</i> when he was in the office.	She never picked up the phone unless he was in the office.
She <i>only</i> picked up the phone when he was in the office.	She didn't do anything else when he was in the office: she didn't say hello, dial a number, check her email, look out the window, and so on.
When he was in the office, her sole activity was to pick up the phone.	When he was in the office, the only activity she engaged in is picking up the phone.
Delina <i>just</i> went to the conference.	She left for the conference moments ago.
Delina went to <i>just</i> the conference.	She didn't go to the preconference workshop or the post-conference tour. Her sole participation was in the conference

itself.

None of the examples are incorrect, depending on the meaning the writer wants to convey. Therefore, carefully place *only* and *just* in a sentence. Errors typically occur when these words appear between the subject and the verb. Speakers get away with inserting *only* and *just* between the subject and the verb because vocal intonation clarifies meaning. In writing, however, place these words exactly where they belong: immediately before the word(s) you intend to modify.

For a general adverb-placement review, watch the following instructional video:



### 3. Correctly Use Pronouns

Pronouns stand in for nouns. To understand how pronouns are useful, consider the following two sentences:

#### LIFE WITHOUT PRONOUNS

*Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, Inc., says that Elon Musk will drive electric cars for the rest of Elon Musk's life.*

Reading that sentence is confusing. Pronouns clarify and make the sentence easier to understand.

#### LIFE WITH PRONOUNS

*Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, Inc., says that he will drive electric cars for the rest of his life.*

Some situations require repeating pronouns because the reader can't tell what the pronoun refers to. Rule #5 below (avoid ambiguous pronoun references) discusses these situations.

### 3.1 Learn how pronouns function.

Using the correct pronoun starts with identifying the point of view, case, number, and gender.

#### Point of view refers to whether the pronoun is in first, second, or third person.

First-person point of view indicates an "I/we/us" perspective. Second-person point of view indicates a "you" perspective. Third-person point of view indicates a "he/she/it/they/them" perspective.

#### Pronoun case refers to how the pronoun is being used in the sentence.

Subjects do the action in a sentence. Objects either receive the action in the sentence or come after a preposition. Possessives indicate ownership. If they are used before a noun, they become adjectives. Reflexives or Intensives reflect on the subject or emphasize or intensify nouns.

#### Pronouns can be singular or plural.

#### Some pronouns are assigned a gender.

Some pronouns indicate masculine or feminine gender; some are gender-neutral. Some pronouns are masculine. Others are feminine. Others are not assigned gender. Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Semitic, and Indo-Aryan languages assign gender to nouns, not just pronouns. English, however, assigns gender to only certain pronouns, like *she*, *her*, *herself*, *he*, *him*, and *himself*.

Table 3.1.1 provides a list of pronouns by point of view, number and gender, and case. Table 3.1.2 provides examples of each. Notice the gender-neutral *y'all*, which is inclusive. Click on the tables to view these examples.

Table 3.1.1 Pronoun point of view, number, gender, and case (click here)

Point of View	Number and Gender	Case			
		Subject	Object	Possessive	Reflexive and Intensive
First	Singular	I	Me	Mine	Myself
	Plural	We	Us	Ours	Ourselves
Second	Singular	You	You	Yours	Yourself
	Plural	You	You	Yours	Yourselves
Third	Masculine singular	He	Him	His	Himself
	Feminine singular	She	Her	Hers	Herself
	Neutral or inanimate singular	It	It	Its	Itself
	Gender-neutral singular	They	Them	Theirs	Themself
	Plural	They	Them	Theirs	Themselves

Table 3.1.2 Using pronouns in examples (click here)

Subject	Object	Possessive	Reflexive/Intensive
Devon and <b>I</b> are going to the barbecue.	Please come to the company barbecue with Devon and <b>me</b> .	The car you saw in the parking lot is <b>mine</b> .	I plan to study for the exam <b>myself</b> .
<b>We</b> plan to join the social impact club.	My team leader is going with <b>us</b> to the barbecue.	<b>Ours</b> is the office with the blue marquis.	We don't need an escort; we, <b>ourselves</b> can arrive safely.
You should take Stat 121 to prepare for data analytics.	After Jamie reads the book, she'll give it to <b>you</b> .	The responsibility for being ethical is <b>yours</b> .	<b>Y'all</b> must learn to manage <b>yourselves</b> . Take the final exam <b>yourself</b> .
Meet Juan and Juanita; <b>he</b> and <b>she</b> are this semester's TAs.	Linc and Sienna are my cousins; I'll make a place for <b>him</b> and <b>her</b> in my car.	Jack and Annie bought groceries; <b>his</b> cost more than <b>hers</b> .	He, <b>himself</b> prepared the entire meal, while she, <b>herself</b> decorated the dining room for the party.
I have a cat; <b>it</b> loves to sleep in the sun.	When you care for my cat, please feed <b>it</b> every three hours.	The cat will clean <b>its</b> paws after it finishes eating.	Bleach <b>itself</b> is enough to kill the virus.
My professor has a degree <b>they</b> earned at Boston University.	My professor earned <b>their</b> PhD in finance.	The laptop on the desk is <b>theirs</b> ; they forgot to take it with them when they left.	Alex introduced <b>themselves</b> to the group and expressed their excitement about joining the team.
Sean loves the mountains because <b>they</b> remind him of home.	When Sean goes to the mountains, he feels calmed by <b>them</b> .	Holly and Dan bought a new home on Fort Street; <b>theirs</b> has black siding.	Angela and Samantha will drive <b>themselves</b> to the airport.

TIP

**Compound Pronoun Tip**

If you get confused about which pronoun to use when it comes as part of a compound, use this helpful tip:

In your mind, omit "Devon and" from the pair:

“My team leader is going with **Devon and me/Devon and I** to the company barbecue.”

Removing "Devon and" simplifies the process so writers easily choose the correct pronoun.

My team leader is going with **me** to the company barbecue.

### 3.2 Correctly emphasize pronouns.

To **emphasize** a subject or object, add the corresponding pronoun in the correct case. The table below shows a few examples. If you can make your point without using the emphatic pronoun, be concise: leave it. Click on the table below to view examples of emphatic pronouns.

Table 3.2 Emphatic pronouns (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
Us managers will travel early to the conference.	<b>We</b> managers will travel early to the conference.
The conference will teach <b>we</b> managers to collaborate.	The conference will teach <b>us</b> managers to collaborate.

### 3.3 Correctly use relative pronouns.

When used to introduce relative adjective clauses, the relative pronouns—*that*, *which*, *who*, and *whoever*—introduce relative adjective clauses. Named because they **relate** the clause with the noun they modify, relative clauses answer these questions: Which one? What kind? How many? Click on the table below for examples of how to use relative adjective clauses.

Table 3.1.1 Use relative pronouns to start relative adjective clauses (click here)

Which one?	What kind?
The book <b>that is on the desk</b> belongs to Dr. Andersen.	The company produces cars <b>that are fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly</b> .
Harvey's test score is the straw <b>that broke the camel's back</b> .	The hotel offers rooms <b>that are spacious and comfortable</b> .
The team <b>that won the championship</b> celebrated their victory with a parade.	Deanne is an artist <b>who creates captivating, vibrant landscape paintings</b> .

How do you know whether to use *that*, *which*, or *who*? When referring to objects or groups—including families or teams—use *that* or *which*. Using *that* indicates a clause essential or restrictive to the meaning of the sentence. Using *which* indicates a clause nonessential or nonrestrictive to the meaning of the sentence. Notice that commas set off nonessential clauses (more to come in the punctuation section). When referring to people, use *who*. Click on the table below for examples of this rule.

Table 3.3.2 Relative pronouns indicate restriction (click here)

Essential—use <i>that</i> or <i>who</i>	Nonessential—use <i>which</i> or <i>who</i>
The family <b>that plays together</b> stays together.	Haagen Dazs strawberry ice cream, <b>which is Katrina's favorite</b> , is currently unavailable at Harmon's.
The librarian <b>who oversees all business disciplines</b> taught our information literacy workshop.	Olivia's professor, <b>who is also Taylor's mom</b> , holds office hours on Tuesday afternoons.
Travelers <b>who want reimbursement</b> should submit their receipts.	The soccer team, <b>which won the championship last year</b> , is now preparing for the upcoming tournament.

For more information on pronoun-related errors, visit [The Purdue OWL](#). The [Towson University](#) website also clearly explains pronouns.

## 4. Agree with Antecedents

### 4.1 Pronouns must agree with their antecedents.

Pronouns must agree with their antecedent—the noun they are replacing. The pronoun must agree with the antecedent in number (singular or plural) and in gender (male or female). Click on the table below to see examples.

Table 4.1 Singular and plural antecedents and their associated pronouns (click here)

Singular Antecedents	Associated Pronouns	Examples
Boy, man (masculine)	I, me, my, mine, he, him, his, you, your, yours	Vika's teammate Adnan wants to take his lunch break early today.
Girl, woman (feminine)	I, me, my, mine, she, her, hers, you, your, yours	Holly said I can use her computer if mine is not working.
Object, place, company, organization (gender neutral)	It, its	BYU is a desirable university because of its low price tag and its high moral standards.
Plural Antecedents	Associated Pronouns	Examples
Boys, men, girls, women	We, us, our, ours, you, your, yours, they, them, their, theirs	Vika's teammates Adnan and Furat want to take their lunch break early today.
Objects, places, companies, organizations	They, them, their, theirs	The Jazz are playing their first home game tonight at Vivint Arena.

### TIP

#### Singular Pronoun Tip

The following link clearly explains how to use singular pronouns with a singular company: [Business Writing Blog](#).

### 4.2 Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person, amount, or thing.

Indefinite pronouns refer to a non-specific person, place, thing, or idea. To correctly pair indefinite pronouns with their antecedents, you must know whether they are singular, plural, or either singular or plural.

Table 4.2.1 Indefinite pronouns that are always singular (click here)

Indefinite Pronoun Antecedent				Example
Anyone	Either	Everything	Nothing	<b>Nobody</b> wants to admit <b>he</b> is wrong.
Anybody	Every	Many a	Someone	Every water-damaged book must have <b>its</b> cover replaced.
Anything	Everyone	Neither	Somebody	<b>Each</b> mosaic has <b>its</b> unique pattern.
Each	Everybody	Nobody	Something	<b>Either</b> of the options has <b>its</b> advantages.

Table 4.2.2 Indefinite pronouns that are always plural antecedents (click here)

Pronoun	Both	Few	Several	Many
<b>Example</b>	<b>Both</b> parents love <b>their</b> children.	<b>Few</b> astronauts achieve <b>their</b> goals.	<b>Several</b> students failed <b>their</b> tests.	The storm separated <b>many</b> plants from <b>their</b> pots.

Table 4.2.3 Indefinite pronouns that are singular or plural antecedents (click here)

Pronoun	All	Most	Any	None	More	Some
<b>Example plural</b>	All the children are sleeping in <b>their</b> beds.	Most of the challenges will overcome <b>themselves</b> .	<b>Any</b> of the foods can be swapped for <b>their</b> substitutes.	<b>None</b> of the workers can find <b>their</b> overtime contracts.	<b>More</b> applicants submitted <b>their</b> resumes for the position.	<b>Some</b> students have already completed <b>their</b> projects.
<b>Example singular</b>	All the information is in <b>its</b> proper place.	Most of my work speaks for <b>itself</b> .	<b>Any</b> obstacle has <b>its</b> resulting reward.	<b>None</b> of the oil was stored in <b>its</b> original barrel.	<b>More</b> time is needed for the cake to reach <b>its</b> ideal consistency.	<b>Some</b> of the water spilled from <b>its</b> container.

### 4.3 Is a team—or another group of people like a family, city council, or board of directors—singular or plural?

In business, a team is composed of a number of individuals. However, because the team is an entity distinct from its individual members, use a singular pronoun and verb when referring to the team as a whole. Click on the table below for examples of how teams and families take singular pronouns.

Table 4.3 Teams and families take singular pronouns

Incorrect Example	Correct Example
The sales team achieved <b>their</b> target.	The sales team achieved <b>its</b> target.
The city council plans to hold <b>their</b> meetings on Tuesdays next year.	The city council plans to hold <b>its</b> meetings on Tuesdays next year.
The members of the team achieved <b>its</b> individual targets.	The members of the team achieved <b>their</b> individual targets.

### 4.4 Correctly use demonstrative pronouns.

Pointing to other nouns in the sentence, the demonstrative pronouns *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* indicate number and proximity. *This* and *that* are singular. *These* and *those* are plural. *This* and *these* refer to proximally close items. *That* and *those* refer to items that are far away. If the physical distance is ambiguous, consider the context. Assess physical proximity, emphasis, and intended meaning to choose the most suitable demonstrative pronoun. Click on the table below for examples of how to use demonstrative pronouns

Table 4.4 Correctly use demonstrative pronouns (click here)

Incorrect Example	Correct Example
<b>This</b> car in the Marriott Center parking lot across campus is illegally parked.	<b>That</b> car in the Marriott Center parking lot across campus is illegally parked.
<b>These</b> houses across the gully face west.	<b>Those</b> houses across the gully face west.
I applied for graduate school, studied abroad, and volunteered at a local homeless shelter. <b>This</b> lasted my entire summer.	I applied for graduate school, studied abroad, and volunteered at a local homeless shelter. <b>These</b> activities lasted my entire summer.
I'm donating <b>those</b> books on the shelf next to me. I plan to sell <b>these</b> on the shelf in Mary's room.	I'm donating <b>these</b> books on the shelf next to me. I plan to sell <b>those</b> on the shelf in Mary's room.
Let's try <b>this</b> restaurant across town.	Let's try <b>that</b> restaurant across town.

**TIP**

### Why We Use “All” or “Y’all” Instead of Adding “His or Her” With Indefinite Pronouns Like Each or Every

When using always-singular indefinite pronouns like each, every, or anyone, maintain agreement with the singular form. While a gender-neutral option, "his or her" can become cumbersome in longer sentences. To avoid this problem, consider rephrasing the sentence with a plural alternative. Consider the below examples, which ensure clarity while respecting gender neutrality.

Original: **Each** student should submit **his or her** assignment by midnight on the due date.

Alternative: **All** students should submit **their** assignments by midnight on the due date.

Also concerning is the plural masculine reference "you guys," which traditionally refers to mixed-gender groups. Because the phrase carries non-inclusive gendered references, consider using a centuries-old phrase from the American South: "y'all" is a popular choice for addressing groups without relying on gendered terms. If you're comfortable with it, "y'all" can be a great replacement for "you guys" in both tone and function.

Original: **You guys** should submit your assignments by midnight on the due date.

Alternative: **Y'all** should submit your assignments by midnight on the due date.

## 5. Avoid Ambiguous Pronoun References

Pronouns must not only agree with their antecedents in gender and number but also refer to only one antecedent. For more information, watch the following video that contains advice on keeping your pronoun references straight.

Take note—**antecedents must be nouns or pronouns**. Verb phrases, adjectives, and adverbs are not allowed to be antecedents.

The following video explains pronoun references:

## COMPLEMENTS #3: Make Pronouns Clear



Click on the table below for examples of how to use clear pronoun references.

Table 5 Use clear pronouns references (click here)

Ambiguous Reference	Clear Pronoun Reference	Explanation
John's manager said <b>he</b> wasn't allowed to go.	John's manager said John was not allowed to go.	Clarify so the reader knows who is not allowed to go.
My team leader is afraid of the new audit director; <b>she</b> constantly avoids <b>her</b> .	Heidi, my team leader, is afraid of the new audit director. In fact, Heidi constantly avoids her.	Clarify so the reader knows who is avoiding whom.
Dyson and Laney rarely debug their code. <b>This</b> could create future system-wide problems.	Dyson and Laney rarely debug their code. This negligence could create future system-wide problems.	Clarify so the reader knows that <i>this</i> refers to negligence. The verb <i>debug</i> may not be an antecedent for a pronoun. Note that adding the noun after <i>this</i> transforms <i>this</i> into a possessive adjective.

## 6. Create Parallel Expressions

Parallelism means using the same word patterns—the same *syntax*—for similar parts of a sentence. When these similar elements aren't parallel, they sound awkward and out of place.

Writers most often violate the parallelism principle in three situations:

1. When stating items in a **list or series**
2. When expressing **vertical lists**
3. When connecting items with **parallel connectors**

Click on the table below for examples of how to create parallel expressions.

Table 6 Create parallel expressions (click here)

Situation	Not Parallel	Parallel
<b>Items in a series.</b> A series consists of three or more items or actions. Each item in the series must have the same structure and start with the same part of speech.	Our exhibition booth will feature product giveaways, instructional videos, and we'll be especially pleased to raffle a Hawaiian vacation.	Our exhibition booth will feature product giveaways, instructional videos, and a Hawaiian-vacation raffle.

<p><b>Vertical list.</b> Whether bulleted or enumerated, all items in a bulleted list must start with the same part of speech and be the same functional part (e.g., a question or a statement)</p>	<p>Projects will be evaluated on the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the client satisfied?</li> <li>• Are the consultants fully engaged?</li> <li>• Existence of a follow-on project.</li> </ul>	<p>Projects will be evaluated on the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the client satisfied?</li> <li>• Are the consultants fully engaged?</li> <li>• Did the project generate follow-on work?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parallel connectors.</b> To be parallel, the same part of speech must follow each of the connecting pairs—<b>neither/nor, either/or, not only/but also, both/and,</b> and <b>rather/or.</b></p>	<p>The movie was neither interesting nor did we like the graphics.</p>	<p>The movie was neither interesting nor visually appealing.</p>
	<p>Walmart is going to either lay off workers or it will cut hours.</p>	<p>Walmart is going to either lay off workers or cut their hours.</p>
	<p>The new consultant is not only a genius but also loves to cook.</p>	<p>The new consultant is not only a genius but also a gourmet cook.</p>
	<p>Google is both innovative and it turns a profit every quarter.</p>	<p>Google is both innovative and profitable.</p>
	<p>Would you rather take two weeks off or would you move to a different team?</p>	<p>Would you rather take two weeks off or move to a different team?</p>

Learn more about parallelism in the video below:

## COMPLEMENTS #1: Parallel Connective Pairs



To solidify your understanding of how to use parallel connectives, watch this video:

## COMPLEMENTS #2: Parallel Items in a Series



### TIP

To learn more about parallel connectives, click the link below.

[The OWL on Parallel Structure](#)

## 7. Choose the Right Word

Have you ever been confused about whether to use *affect* or *effect*? If so, you are in good company. Many words are commonly confused. Take, for example, the words *every day* and *everyday*. *Every day* means daily. *Everyday* means commonplace.

**INCORRECT:** *For my new exercise regimen, I do yoga **everyday**.*

**CORRECT:** *For the company picnic, I wore my **everyday** jeans.*

Table 7 List of words commonly misused in business writing (click here)

Do you know the difference?			
ensure/insure	sale/sell	adverse/averse	appraise/apprise
its/it's	compliment/complement	accept/except	can/may
further/farther	number/amount	aid/aide	choose/chose
principle/principal	affect/effect	lead/led	cite/site/sight
counselor/councilor	advice/advise	allot/a lot	everyday/every day
then/than	whether/if	fewer/less	many/much

If you don't understand the difference between any of the pairs in this table, review this alphabetized list of common word-use errors: [Easily Confused Words](#).

# IN CONCLUSION

Awareness is the first step toward mastery. This section covered seven types of sentence structure and word-choice errors. If you struggle with any of these errors, keep studying, practicing, and getting feedback. Your writing and speaking will continue to improve until these seven fundamentals become second nature to you.

Consider putting your writing through an AI grammar checker. Do you notice whether it finds your grammar errors?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### [MCOM Grammar Videos](#)

Fogarty, Mignon. "[What Is a Subordinate Clause?](#)" *Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips*, February 29, 2016.

Mills, Bonnie. "[Pronouns and Antecedents.](#)" *Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips*, November 30, 2018.

For further information on the importance of grammar in business writing, review the following articles:

Wiens, Kyle. "[I Won't Hire People Who Use Poor Grammar. Here's Why.](#)" *HBR Blog Network*, July 20, 2012.

*Kyle Wiens takes a stand on sloppy grammar and will not hire people who do not pass a grammar test. He believes that grammar is relevant for all companies because it establishes credibility.*

Hoover, Brad. "[Good Grammar Should Be Everyone's Business.](#)" *HBR Blog Network*, March 4, 2013.

*In response to Wien's article, Brad Hoover, CEO of Grammarly, reviewed 100 LinkedIn profiles of native English speakers with similar job experience for correct use of grammar. He found that those with fewer grammar errors achieved higher positions, and moved up the corporate ladder more quickly.*

Shellenbarger, Sue. "[This Embarrasses You and I: Grammar Gaffes Invade the Office in an Age of Informal Email, Texting, and Twitter.](#)" *The Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 2012.

*Shellenbarger discusses business professionals' grammar inequity. Because grammar rules are often unclear, they can be sources of office debate and argument (for example, using the Oxford comma, or ending a sentence with a preposition).*

For more in-depth information, review the following books:

[HBR Guide to Better Business Writing](#) by Bryan Garner

[It Was the Best of Sentences, It Was the Worst of Sentences](#) by June Casagrande

[Words Fail Me](#) by Patricia O'Conner

[Eats, Shoots, and Leaves](#) by Lynne Truss

[The Only Grammar Book You'll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment](#) by Susan Thurman

### [MCOM Grammar Videos](#)

Fogarty, Mignon. "[What Is a Subordinate Clause?](#)" *Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips*, February 29, 2016.

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Shellenbarger, Sue. "[This Embarrasses You and I: Grammar Gaffes Invade the Office in an Age of Informal Email, Texting, and Twitter](#)." *The Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 2012.

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# PUNCTUATION AND MECHANICS

## 8. Confidently Place Commas

Originating from Greek and Latin texts, commas have evolved to become indispensable tools of clarity and precision. In modern writing, commas serve as signposts, creating rhythm and flow, highlighting pauses, separating ideas, and ensuring coherence.

Table 8.1 Use commas around nonessential (restrictive) words or phrases (click here)

Without Commas	Explanation	With Commas	Explanation
The painting by Picasso is worth millions.	This reference is restricted to a painting done by Picasso.	The painting, by Picasso, is worth millions.	This reference adds extra information about the painting but is not necessary for identification.
My son Wayne majored in economics.	The sentence indicates that you have more than one son. <i>Wayne</i> is necessary to identify which son you are referring to.	My son, Wayne, majored in economics.	If you have only one son, then his name is not necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence.
The street lined with trees marks the border between counties.	The phrase <i>lined with trees</i> identifies which street marks the border.	The street, lined with trees, is my favorite walking route.	Although descriptive, <i>lined with trees</i> is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.
All students who completed their assignments earned full credit.	The relative clause <i>who completed their assignments</i> identifies the students who received full credit.	Helga Karlsson, who married my cousin, teaches Introduction to Swedish.	In this sentence, the clause set off with commas, <i>who married my cousin</i> , is not necessary to complete the meaning of the sentence: Helga Karlsson teaches Swedish.
The book <b>*that is alone on the shelf</b> belongs to Samuel.	The relative clause <i>that is alone on the shelf</i> is essential to identify Samuel's book.	The Poisonwood Bible, <b>*which is Lisa's favorite novel</b> , was written by Barbara Kingsolver.	The clause set off with commas, <i>which is Lisa's favorite novel</i> , is not necessary to complete the meaning of the sentence: The Poisonwood Bible was written by Barbara Kingsolver.

\*The relative pronoun *that* is used with **restrictive/essential clauses**: information without which the reader might misunderstand the meaning of the sentence. The relative pronoun *which* is used with **nonrestrictive/nonessential clauses**: information not essential to the meaning of the sentence. The relative pronoun *who* may or may not have commas depending on the context, so the writer uses punctuation to indicate restriction.

The following video further clarifies the difference:

## That vs. Which



In summary, never use commas around a *that* clause. Always use commas around a *which* clause. Depending on its meaning, a *who* clause can go either way.

## 8.2 Use commas after introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

Commas prevent the intro act from stealing the show from the main act. Table 8.2 below highlights introductory words, phrases, and dependent clauses. Note that if the dependent clause comes after the independent clause, you should not use a comma.

Table 8.2 Use commas to set off introductory words, phrases, and clauses (click here)

<b>Introductory word</b>	Yes, we can help you with your fundraiser.
<b>Introductory phrase</b>	Walking on the shore, Hannah accidentally stepped on a jellyfish.
<b>Introductory dependent clause</b>	When Martha introduced the president, everyone applauded.
<b>Dependent clause after the independent clause</b>	Everyone applauded when Martha introduced the president.

## 8.3 Use commas to punctuate independent clauses joined by FANBOYS conjunctions.

Separate independent clauses that are joined by coordinating conjunctions—FANBOYS. The FANBOYS are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*.

Table 8.3.1 Use commas to separate independent clauses joined by FANBOYS conjunctions (click here)

<b>For</b> (connotes reason, cause, or explanation)	Freddie chose to go to the pizza parlor, for today is his birthday.
<b>And</b> (indicates addition or plural)	Jaxon offered to bring his guitar, and Jasmine offered to sing.
<b>Nor</b> (less common in modern English)	Selassie did not eat breakfast, nor did he have time for lunch.
<b>But</b> (indicates contrast or contradiction)	I wanted to go to the movies, but I did not have enough time.
<b>Or</b> (presents a choice between options)	I can go to the movies, or I can stay home and relax.
<b>Yet</b> (presents contrasting or unexpected information)	Louise finished her exam on time, yet she remained nervous.
<b>So</b> (denotes cause and effect, result, or conclusion)	Venitia did not sleep last night, so she is exhausted today.

If a sentence starts with a short independent clause—fewer than five words—the comma is optional: *I will stay but she will go.*

## FANBOYS: Coordinating Conjunctions



Table 8.3.2 Do not use commas between compounds (click here)

Compound Subject		Compound Verb		Compound Object	
Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct
Davide, and Gabi played volleyball in the Olympics.	Davide and Gabi played volleyball in the Olympics.	We flew nonstop to Singapore, and visited our Asian subsidiary.	We flew nonstop to Singapore and visited our Asian subsidiary.	Kavya invited division directors, and managers to attend the Delhi conference.	Kavya invited division directors and managers to attend the Delhi conference.

### 8.4 Use commas between items in a series—a list that contains three or more items. Use the Oxford comma before the last item in a series.

Use commas to separate all the items, including the last one.

In her speech, the sales VP thanked her team members, Shanna Parry and Miranda Parkinson.

In her speech, the sales VP thanked her team members, Shanna Parry, and Miranda Parkinson.

The first example does not clarify whether Shanna and Miranda are on the team. Using the Oxford comma to clarify meaning.

Many style guides (including Associated Press (AP), the most common journalistic style guide) do not require the Oxford comma. Chances are your school newspaper intentionally omits the Oxford comma. This textbook, however, follows [Patricia O'Connor's](#) advice: “[The Oxford comma] doesn't hurt and it creates clarity, so leave it in.”

Table 8.4 Use the Oxford comma before the last item in a series (click here)

<b>Words in a series</b>	Floyd enjoys reading, writing, and painting.
<b>Phrases in a series</b>	While on our study abroad, we visited international companies, toured historic sites, and learned about local culture.
<b>Clauses in a series</b>	Don ran 15 miles, Sally walked 10 miles, and Kalen swam 1 mile.

## 8.5 Use commas to separate adjacent coordinate adjectives.

Place a comma between coordinate adjectives—two adjacent adjectives that equally modify a noun:

Table 8.5 Use commas to separate adjacent coordinate adjectives (click here)

Incorrect Example	Correct Example
Jimena went for a long grueling bike ride.	Jimena went for a long, grueling bike ride.
Patrick purchased a blue, sports car.	Patrick purchased a blue sports car.
Watch out for the mushy discolored mangos.	Watch out for the mushy, discolored mangos.
Enrique is an efficient, administrative assistant.	Enrique is an efficient administrative assistant.

To test whether you need a comma, insert the word *and* between the adjectives. If it makes sense, insert a comma between them.

## 8.6 Where to avoid commas

The previous rules showed you where to correctly place commas. This rule shows you places where you should never (well almost never) place commas.

With few exceptions, avoid commas in the following situations:

- Between a subject and its verb
- Between compound subjects, verbs, and objects (including correlative conjunctions)
- Between [transitive](#) verbs and their objects

Rule	Incorrect Example	Correct Example
<b>Between a subject and its verb</b>	The classes Joy enjoys the most, are already full.	The classes Joy enjoys the most are already full.
<b>Between compound subjects</b>	Angel, and Rahel secured high-paying internships.	Angel and Rahel secured high-paying internships.
<b>Between compound objects</b>	The landscaping crew stored not only the backhoe loaders, but also the excavator in the storage facility.	The landscaping crew stored not only the backhoe loaders but also the excavator in the storage facility.
<b>Between compound verbs</b>	Financial advisors manage investments, and mitigate risk.	Financial advisors manage investments and mitigate risk.
<b>Between transitive verbs and their objects</b>	As the lead analyst, Lucy will review, the data.	As the lead analyst, Lucy will review the data.

For more information on comma-related errors, visit [Purdue's OWL](#).

## 9. Follow Three Rules for Using Semicolons

Semicolons have three specific uses: **punctuating independent clauses** not joined by FANBOYS conjunctions, **separating series** that contain internal commas, and **punctuating independent clauses** joined by conjunctive adverbs—words like *therefore*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *moreover*, and *notwithstanding*.

Table 9.1 Correctly use semicolons (click here)

<b>Punctuate independent clauses not joined by FANBOYS</b>	Herta's customer service ratings are her highest yet; she worked tirelessly this quarter to exceed her clients' expectations. Travis's expertise is local government; Dave's is finance.
<b>Separate series that contain internal commas</b>	Irwin visited Vienna, Austria; Paris, France; and Prague, Czech Republic. Jonathon ordered power cords, docking stations, and external hard drives; but wireless chargers, keyboards, and video cards arrived.
<b>Punctuate independent clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs</b>	The Testing Center closes at 9 p.m.; however, you may take the online exam until midnight.

We received approval for the new position; i.e., we can hire either one full-time employee or two part-time employees.

Table 9.2 Do not use semicolons when words interrupt flow (click here)

Incorrect Example	Correct Example
Laying off your top performers; however, does not boost morale.	Laying off your top performers, however, does not boost morale.
Bruce enjoys different music genres; e.g., jazz, rock, and pop.	Bruce enjoys different music genres, e.g., jazz, rock, and pop.
Cash flow refers to the inflow and outflow of funds that determine the availability of liquid assets for operational needs; *i.e., the movement of money in and out of a business.	Cash flow refers to the inflow and outflow of funds that determine the availability of liquid assets for operational needs, i.e., the movement of money in and out of a business.

\*To be clear and concise, if you use *i.e.*, which means *in other words*, consider eliminating everything to the left of the *i.e.* If you have to say *in other words*, you did not clearly, concisely express yourself in the first place.

Need a little more practice? Check out Grammar Girl's tips on [semicolons](#).

## 10. \*\*Use Colons Only After Complete Sentences

A colon introduces a list or series, example, quotation, or subtitle. It also separates time expressed in narrative writing.

Table 10 Correctly use colons (click here)

<b>Introduce a series</b>	Please bring the following items: a pen, a notepad, and a laptop.
<b>Introduce a vertical list</b>	The information literacy conference will focus on the following competencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing research skills</li> <li>• Understanding emerging trends</li> <li>• Spotting mis- and disinformation</li> </ul>
<b>Introduce an explanation</b>	The company's profits are trending in a positive direction: a 10% year-over-year increase for five years.
<b>Introduce a quotation</b>	Warren Buffett said the following about learning to speak: "My advice to you is to take a class in public speaking: it will change your life."
<b>**Introduce a subtitle</b>	<i>Making Numbers Count: The Art and Science of Communicating Numbers</i>
<b>**Indicate time</b>	Please arrive at the train station no later than 8:45 a.m.

\*\*In these two cases, the colon does not need to be preceded by an independent clause (a complete sentence).

For more information, read Grammar Girl's advice on [colons](#).

## 11. Differentiate Dashes from Hyphens

Dashes (—) are not hyphens (-).

Table 11.1 The hyphen (-) has three mechanical functions (click here)

	Correct Example	Explanation
Join compound adjectives that appear <b>before</b> the noun.	We bought <b>first-class</b> tickets for our flight to Rome.	Hyphenate words that combine to form one idea that modifies the noun.
Also hyphenate flat adverb-adjective combinations that appear before the noun.	Zena is a <b>well-informed</b> advocate.	
Do not hyphenate -ly adverb-adjective combinations that appear before the noun.	The Rome flight crew's service was <b>world class</b> .	Do not hyphenate when the words appear after the noun.

The <b>floating hyphen</b> works when the second words of two compound adjectives are identical.	Zena's advocate is <b>well informed</b> . Please prepare a 10- to 15- <b>page</b> report on our quarterly performance. Only <b>one-third</b> of the applicants passed the screening test. Only <b>33%</b> of the applicants passed the screening test.	Use a floating hyphen when the second word in each pair is identical. The hyphen connects the numerator and denominator. In business writing, consider using decimals or percentages instead.
Express <b>standalone fractions</b> .	Shari is an excellent <b>self-regulator</b> ; she knows when to take a break. Your insurance policy does not cover <b>pre-existing</b> conditions.	Always hyphenate the prefixes <i>ex-</i> , <i>self-</i> , <i>all-</i> , <i>non-</i> , and <i>semi-</i> . Hyphenate words whose prefixes and root share the same letter.
Connect <b>prefixes</b> to their root words.		

For more help with hyphens, check out this site: [How to Use a Hyphen](#).

Table 11.2 Correctly use em and en dash (click here)

Definitions	Incorrect Example	Correct Example
The <b>em dash (—)</b> , named because it is typically the width of the typed letter <i>m</i> , indicates a break in thought, emphasizes a point, or separates parenthetical information from the sentence.	The experience team—which always hosts the company retreat, starts planning a year in advance. Do not use a dash on one side and a comma on the other side of the emphasized element.	The experience team—which always hosts the company retreat—starts planning a year in advance. Notice no space appears on either side of the em dash.
The <b>en dash (–)</b> , named because it is typically the width of the typed letter <i>n</i> , indicates a range or connection between items like numbers, dates, times, or locations.	The conference will be held from Monday - Friday. Please read pages 10 - 12 of your information packet for more information. Do not use a hyphen where you need a dash.	The conference will be held from Monday – Friday. Please read pages 10 – 12 of your information packet for more information. Notice that a space appears on either side of the en dash.

## 12. Master Apostrophes and Quotation Marks

### 12.1 Apostrophes indicate contractions and possession.

Table 12.1.1 Apostrophes indicate contractions – missing letters (click here)

Original Expression	Contraction
It is   It has	It's Do not confuse <i>it's</i> with <i>its</i> , a possessive pronoun that does not use an apostrophe. You would not say, The dog lost it is collar.
Let us	Let's
Can not   Do not   Will not	Can't   Don't   Won't
You all	Y'all

Table 12.1.2 Apostrophes indicate possession (click here)

Situation	Rule	Example
Singular nouns that do not end in s	Add an apostrophe and an s.	Stockholders were pleased with the <b>auditor's</b> report. The <b>CEO's</b> leadership is well-known throughout the company.
Singular nouns that end in s	Add an apostrophe and an s.	The <b>dress's</b> hem needs mending. <b>Chris's</b> laptop died last night.

Plural nouns that do not end in s	Add an apostrophe and an s.	The <b>children's</b> theater was wildly successful this year. The <b>people's</b> efforts in completing the community project did not go unnoticed. The <b>***Gonzalezes'</b> cabin is luxurious.
Plural nouns that end in s	Add an apostrophe.	The <b>teachers'</b> lounge is always crowded on Mondays. The <b>interns'</b> responsibilities include working weekends.
Joint ownership	Add an apostrophe on only the second owner.	<b>Alex and Mary's</b> apartment is huge for the Bay Area.
Individual ownership	Add an apostrophe on both owners. Make the object plural.	<b>Silvia's and Laron's passports</b> are valid until 2030.

\*\*\*What do you do with names that end in -s, -es, -z, or -x? To keep things simple, this book adheres to the *Chicago Manual of Style's* differentiation between references to one person versus a group.

For more on how to make names plural and possessive, read the Grammar Girl's posts [How to Make Family Names Plural](#) and [Apostrophe Catastrophes](#).

## 12.2 Use quotation marks to indicate someone is speaking, to enclose a direct quote from a secondary source, or to indicate titles of short works.

Table 12.2 Correctly use quotation marks (click here)

<b>Indicate someone is speaking</b>	Insisting that the estimate was close enough, Pratima emphasized, "The client won't care." Use a comma before a full-sentence quotation.
<b>Enclose a direct quote from a secondary source (learn to cite your sources in the SCRUTINIZE chapter)</b>	On her <a href="#">Unlocking Us podcast</a> , Brené Brown describes the messy middle as "the point of no return." Do not add a comma before the quote if it finishes the sentence. In their latest <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> article entitled "Artificial Intelligence in Business Communication: a Snapshot," authors Jeffrey Naidoo and Ronald Dulek discuss the usefulness of AI as a communication tool.
<b>Indicate titles of short works like journal articles</b>	Notice that the name of the journal appears in italics while the article name appears in quotation marks.

## 12.3 Correctly place punctuation marks inside or outside quotation marks.

Table 12.3 Correctly place punctuation marks relative to quotation marks (click here)

Punctuation Mark	Inside or Outside Quotation Marks	Example
Periods	Always inside	Professor Stillman said, "I will mentor your entire team."
Commas	Always inside	"If we launch our product third quarter," remarked Seth, "I plan to take an extended fourth-quarter vacation."
Semicolons	Always outside	Gleibner wrote "Uncertainty and Resilience in Strategic Management: A Profile of a Robust Company"; Roumpi wrote "Rethinking the Strategic Management of Human Resources."
Colons	Always outside	Listen to what my professor said: "Your test is timed, but you may use your text."

Question Marks	Inside or outside—inside if the question is part of the quote; outside if the question is not part of the quote	Did Harry say, "I'm retiring before Christmas?" Magaly asked, "Harry, do you plan to retire before Christmas?"
Dashes	Typically outside when used to set off additional information or an interruption.	Jorge said, "Our weather is unpredictable"—he knows it could change at any moment.

### 13. Capitalize Correctly

For the most part, capitalization rules apply across languages: capitalize the first word of every sentence and capitalize proper nouns. The difficulty arises when determining whether a noun is proper or common.

#### 13.1 Capitalize specific proper nouns, but do not capitalize common nouns.

Explore the difference in Table 13.1 below.

Table 13.1 Capitalize specific proper nouns (click here)

<b>Capitalized Nouns</b> I am enrolled in MCom 320. I love Mom's crazy jokes. I need a Kleenex. (Kleenex is a trademark.) Introduce him to President Bannerjee. Lola is studying the US Constitution.	<b>Not Capitalized</b> I am taking a business writing class. My mom is late—is your mom coming? Please get me a tissue. Introduce him to the president of the company. Lola is studying constitutional law.
<b>Capitalized Proper Adjectives</b> I am taking a French class. Could we install a Coke machine in the lobby?	<b>Not Capitalized</b> I love french fries. Could we install a soda machine in the lobby?

#### 13.2 Capitalize the first word of each item in a vertical list.

Make lists parallel, as emphasized in "Syntax and Word Choice." Note how each of these bullet items begins not only with an upper-case letter but also with a verb:

- Reduce days in receivables
- Hire a new IT manager
- Slash unnecessary expenses

#### 13.3 Correctly capitalize titles and degrees

Table 13.3 Correctly capitalize book titles, job titles, and degrees (click here)

Item	Rule	Example
Creative Works	<p><b>For titles of books, movies, and other creative works,</b> capitalize the following, regardless of word length:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First and last words</li> <li>• Verbs</li> <li>• Adverbs</li> <li>• Adjectives</li> <li>• Nouns</li> <li>• Pronouns</li> </ul>	<p><i>The Call of the Wild</i></p> <p><i>How I Met Your Mother</i></p> <p><i>Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis</i></p>
Job Title	<p>For all other words—mainly articles and prepositions—capitalize only those <b>more</b> than four letters long.</p> <p>When it precedes the person's name, capitalize a job title, but don't capitalize for the general reference to a job title.</p>	<p>The president of this company is Jackie Jones.</p>

		Carol introduced the new head of our company, President Jackie Jones.
		owner Sally Ford
Occupations	Titles are not the same as occupations. Do not capitalize occupations before full names.	coach Rafiki Danube director Steven Spielberg
Educational Degrees	For formal degrees, capitalize the formal title but not the general reference.	Cary Lewis is earning a Master of Public Administration (MPA). Camila Antivilo is working on a degree in business administration.

### 13.4 Capitalize the first word of direct quotations whose first word begins the sentence. Similarly, capitalize the first word of an internal question and a midsentence independent clause.

Table 13.4 Capitalizing quotations and internal questions (click here)

Rule	Example
Capitalize the first word of a complete-sentence quotation.	Warren Buffett says, "If you can't communicate and talk to other people, you're giving up your potential."
Do not capitalize the first word of a quotation that finishes the logical flow of the sentence.	Warren Buffett says that communicating and talking is essential to reaching your potential.
Capitalize the first word of an internal question.	Loren could not help but wonder, What will the future hold for our division?
Capitalize the first word of a midsentence independent clause.	One of Warren Buffett's cardinal rules is, No. 1. Never lose money.

### 13.5 Capitalize compass points that refer to a specific place or region, not when they refer to a general area or direction.

Table 13.5 Capitalize specific compass points or regions (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
Lake Tahoe is about four hours East of San Francisco.	Lake Tahoe is about four hours east of San Francisco.
Jamie Parsons was raised in the middle east.	Jamie Parsons was raised in the Middle East.
Landon lives in New York's upper west side.	Landon lives in New York's Upper West Side.
We are heading North for our Alaskan vacation.	We are heading north for our Alaskan vacation.
The restaurant is in the heart of east London.	The restaurant is in the heart of East London.
From the top of the hill, you can see the beautiful landscapes to the West.	From the top of the hill, you can see the beautiful landscapes to the west.

## 14. Know your numbers

The following basic rules are consistent with the *Chicago Manual of Style*, but you should consult your company's style guide to learn the differences.

### 14.1 Generally, spell out single-digit numbers one through nine.

Use numerals for double-digit numbers 10 and higher, percentages, measurements, statistics, and page and chapter numbers. In sentences that contain numbers over and under 10, maintain consistency by using numerals.

Table 14.1 Correctly express numbers (click here)

Rule	Example
Spell single-digit numbers one through nine.	Nancy teaches three classes per week.
Use numerals for double-digit numbers 10 and higher.	Jared realized he could eat 13 mandarin oranges and still consumer fewer calories than are in a single glazed donut. Thirteen clients expect visits this week.
Do not start a sentence with a numeral, even if the number is 10 or higher.	This week, 13 clients expect visits.
Use numerals and percentage signs to express percentages, even if the number is under 10.	Our division's revenue increased 5% this quarter.
Use numerals to express measurements.	The study patients received 5 mg of the experimental drug.
Use numerals to express statistics.	The results of the second test were statistically significant: $t(12) = 4.11, p < .05$ .
Use numerals in sentences that contain numbers under and over 10.	Francine ordered 15 computers but only 5 arrived on time.
Capitalize chapter names and use numerals for chapter numbers.	I carefully read Chapter 5 but still don't understand the material.
Do not capitalize "page" and use numerals to express page numbers in text.	The projections are on page 6 of the prospectus.

## 14.2 Express large numbers—larger than one million—with a combination of decimals and verbal descriptors.

Table 14.2 Express numbers larger than one million with a combination of decimals & verbal descriptions (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
As of July 2022, Facebook had more than 2,934,000,000 monthly active users. The company's earnings were more than \$4,200,000 last year.	As of July 2022, Facebook had more than 2.9 billion monthly active users. The company's earnings were more than \$4.2 million last year.

## 14.3 Express dates.

Generally, use the cardinal—1, 2, 3—number to express dates in writing. Ordinal numbers—1st, 2nd, 3rd—are allowable only if the date precedes the month. Although cardinal and ordinal forms are interchangeable in conversation, follow this rule in writing.

Table 14.3 Correctly express dates (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
The store opened on Saturday, July 22nd, 2023.	The store opened on Saturday, the 22nd of July 2023. The store opened on Saturday, July 22, 2023.
Will you meet me on the 12 July?	The store opened on Saturday, 22 July 2023. Will you meet me on the 12th of July?

## 14.4 Express currency and time.

Use the currency sign with no decimals for whole numbers—\$20. For fractions of dollars or other currency, use the decimal expression—\$20.56. Use the correct symbol for the currency you are expressing (not all monetary units are dollars).

Use whole numbers to express time—5 PM—but use the colon to express fractions of hours—5:30 PM. To maintain parallelism in sentences that contain multiple time expressions, use the colon even if only one item contains a fraction of an hour. Both uppercase and lowercase notations—AM or a.m. and PM or p.m.—are acceptable expressions for morning and afternoon/evening. However, avoid using *o'clock* in business writing.

Table 14.4 Correctly express currency and time (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
The movie ticket costs \$9.95, but I had only \$5.	The movie ticket costs \$9.95, but I had only \$5.00.
The stock price rose \$5 dollars per share last week.	The stock price rose \$5 per share last week.
The meeting will start at 11 and end at 12:30 PM.	The meeting will start at 11:00 AM and end at 12:30 PM. The meeting will start at 11:00 a.m. and end at 12:30 p.m.

## 14.5 Express fractions.

Express standalone fractions—numbers greater than zero but less than one—as hyphenated words. In business writing, replace fractions with percentages or decimals whenever possible.

Table 14.5 shows examples of how to express fractions and decimals, but you should follow your company's style guide.

Table 14.5 Express fractions as hyphenated words, percentages, or decimals (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
Only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the students passed the exam.	Only one-fourth of the students passed the exam.
After traveling west for five and one-quarter miles, travel three and one-half miles north on the frontage road.	After traveling west for 5.25 miles, travel 3.5 miles north on the frontage road.

For more information on numbers, read the Business Writing blog post, [Rules for Numbers](#).

## IN CONCLUSION

Punctuation and mechanics can be puzzling for business writers. Use AI checkers but remember they will not catch all your mistakes and they will falsely indicate mistakes. The best rule of thumb is to familiarize yourself with the rules and keep trusted resources bookmarked in your favorite browser.

# VERB TENSES AND MOODS

*This section focuses on verbs, which enliven your writing, propel action, and capture emotion and moods, which indicate the way the action or condition is presented.*

Animate your writing by choosing concrete, vivid verbs that convey action, intensity, or a specific quality. Go beyond basic or generic verbs to add depth, nuance, and clarity to a sentence. Capture your reader's attention and enhance the overall richness of your writing—even your business writing. Make the language come alive and engage your reader's senses.

## Follow the Goldilocks principle of verbs: Use vigorous language but don't go overboard:

<b>Not enough (bland/vague)</b>	Someone gave a presentation.
<b>Too much (wordy/confusing)</b>	Someone delivered a meticulously curated presentation replete with data points that showcased the unprecedented and unequivocal surge in customer satisfaction indices.
<b>Just right (vigorous)</b>	Our customer service manager, Juan, delivered an engaging, data-driven presentation on this quarter's skyrocketing customer service ratings.

The verbs section discusses subject-verb agreement, indefinite pronouns and verb agreement, and verb tenses. The mood section discusses indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and conditional moods.

## 15. make subjects and verbs agree

In a sentence, the subject is the actor and the verb is the action or state of being. Proficient English speakers often claim they instinctively know the correct verb form to use because it sounds right. However, three situations can cause confusion:

- Intervening prepositional phrases (by far the biggest offender)
- Intervening relative clauses
- Intervening phrases other than prepositional phrases

### 15.1 Identify intervening prepositional phrases.

**Intervening means the phrase comes between the subject and the verb.**

Which of the following sentences sounds correct?

**Sentence 1:** *Only one of Alex's friends **studies** accounting at BYU Marriott School.*

**Sentence 2:** *Only one of Alex's friends **study** accounting at BYU Marriott School.*

They both sound okay. In fact, Sentence 2 may sound better because the intervening prepositional phrase of *Alex's friends* contains the plural noun *friends*.

If the sentence confuses you, revise it, moving the intervening phrase to the start of the sentence, creating an introductory phrase:

**REVISED SENTENCE 1:** *Of Alex's friends, only one **studies** accounting at BYU Marriott School.*

## TIP

If you need help understanding sentence parts, consider using a free sentence diagramming tool like [Let's Diagram](#).

Table 15.1 Subject-verb agreement with intervening prepositional phrases (click here)

Incorrect	Correct	Explanation
The range of skill requirements <b>provide</b> for upward growth potential.	The range of skill requirements <b>provides</b> for upward growth potential.	The subject, <i>range</i> , is singular, so the verb should be singular.
The group of students <b>are going</b> on a field trip.	The group of students <b>is going</b> on a field trip.	The subject, <i>group</i> , is singular, so the verb should be singular.
A box of chocolates <b>were left</b> on the table.	A box of chocolates <b>was left</b> on the table.	The subject, <i>box</i> , is singular, so the verb should be singular.

## 15.2 Identify intervening relative clauses.

As you learned in the *Syntax and Word Choice* lesson, relative clauses are adjectives, so they must go right next to the noun they modify. Remember that a clause has a subject and a verb that agrees with the subject. If the relative clause modifies a singular noun, then the verb of the relative clause must be singular. If the relative clause modifies a plural noun, then the verb of the relative clause must be plural.

Table 15.2 Subject-verb agreement with relative clauses

Incorrect	Correct	Explanation
One of the realtors who <b>works</b> in Fernando's brokerage is Matias.	Matias is one of the <b>realtors</b> who <b>work</b> in Fernando's brokerage.	The relative adjective clause modifies <i>realtors</i> , a plural noun, so the relative clause must use a plural verb.
One of the students who <b>is</b> studying for the exam is working on her dissertation.	One of the <b>students</b> who <b>are</b> studying for the exam is working on her dissertation.	The relative adjective clause modifies <i>students</i> , a plural noun, so the relative clause must use a plural verb.
One of the houses that <b>was</b> damaged in the storm is being repaired by a humanitarian group.	One of the <b>houses</b> that <b>were</b> damaged in the storm is being repaired by a humanitarian group.	The relative adjective clause modifies <i>houses</i> , a plural noun, so the relative clause must use a plural verb.

## 15.3 Identify other intervening elements.

Intervening phrases like *as well as*, *along with*, and *together with* do not create compound or plural subjects, so they take singular, not plural, verbs. These phrases are connectors that add extra information, but they do not create a plural subject. The word *and* creates a compound plural subject.

Table 15.3 Subject-verb agreement with intervening phrases

Incorrect	Correct	Explanation
The coach, in addition to her players, are flying to the overseas tournament.	The coach, in addition to her players, is flying to the tournament.	The subject, <i>coach</i> , is singular, so the verb must be singular. The phrase <b>in addition to</b> does not create a plural subject.
Maria, together with her friends, are planning a surprise party.	Maria, together with her friends, is planning a surprise party.	The subject, <i>Maria</i> , is singular, so the verb must be singular. The phrase <b>together with</b> does not create a plural subject.

The priceless book, as well as other valuable documents, were lost in the fire.	The priceless book, as well as other valuable documents, was lost in the fire.	The subject, <i>book</i> , is singular, so the verb must be singular. The phrase <b>as well as</b> does not create a plural subject.
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## TIP

### Equal Emphasis Tip

Phrases like *as well as* place unequal emphasis on two expressions—the expression preceding *as well as* carries stronger emphasis than the expression following it. So if you want to emphasize both expressions, join them with the strong coordinating conjunction *and*.

- The coach and her players are flying to the overseas tournament.
- Maria and her friends are planning a surprise party.
- The priceless book and other valuable documents were lost in the fire.

## 16. Match indefinite pronouns and verbs

The [Syntax and Word Choice](#) section discusses indefinite pronouns in their function as pronoun antecedents. A similar issue arises when choosing whether to use a singular or plural verb with indefinite pronouns.

Table 16.1 Indefinite pronouns that always take a singular verb (click here)

Anyone	*Either	Everything	Nothing
Anybody	Every	Many a	Someone
Anything	Everyone	*Neither	Somebody
Each	Everybody	Nobody	Something

**\*IF EITHER APPEARS WITH OR, AND IF NEITHER APPEARS WITH NOR, MAKE THE VERB AGREE WITH THE NOUN CLOSER TO THE VERB.**

Table 16.2 below shows a few examples. When both nouns are singular or plural, the agreement is simple. However, if one noun is singular and one is plural, place the plural noun second and make the verb plural. Although grammatically correct, the sentence sounds awkward if the singular noun comes second.

Table 16.2 With indefinite pronoun pairs, make the verb agree with the closer noun (click here)

Incorrect	Correct
Neither the competitors nor the timekeeper who crossed the finish line first.	<b>know</b> Neither the timekeeper nor the competitors who crossed the finish line first.
Either the designers or the project manager <b>update</b> the change log.	Either the manager or the designers <b>update</b> the change log.
Either the entrepreneur or her CFO <b>are</b> exaggerating.	Either the entrepreneur or her CFO <b>is</b> exaggerating.

Not only the invoices but also the bill of shipping <b>is</b> inaccurate.	Not only the bill of shipping but also the invoices <b>are</b> inaccurate.
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Table 16.3 Indefinite pronouns always take a plural verb (click here)

**Both** | **Both** of the assignments **are** due next Monday.

**Few** | Only a **few** interns **seem** interested in a full-time position.

**Several** | **Several** engineers **are** presenting at next month's conference.

**Many** | **Many** HR managers **agree** that the new policy is more flexible.

Table 16.4 Indefinite pronouns that take singular or plural verbs (click here)

All	Most	Any	None	More	Some
All the divisions <i>are</i> presenting their reports tomorrow.					The verb is plural because <i>divisions</i> are countable.
	Most of the work <i>is</i> finished.				The verb is singular because <i>work</i> is not countable.
		Any of the club presidents <i>are</i> welcome to attend.			The verb is plural because <i>presidents</i> are countable.
			None of the coupons <i>were</i> redeemed.		The verb is plural because <i>coupons</i> are countable.
	More of the credit <i>belongs</i> to Sally.				The verb is singular because <i>credit</i> is not countable.
		Some of the files <i>are</i> on Lou's desk.			The verb is plural because <i>files</i> are countable.

Here's a handy tip: If the quantity is countable, then the indefinite pronoun takes a plural verb; if the quantity is not countable, use the singular verb.

## 17. Use the right verb tense

Verb tenses indicate the **time** of an action or event—present, past, or future. When did the action happen? When will it happen? Is it still happening? Did it happen before something else also happened? Using the correct verb tense clarifies the timeframe of the action.

### 17.1 Understand verb tenses.

Verb tense refers to the form of the verb that indicates the time of an action or event. It conveys whether the action is in the present, past, or future. The main verb tenses are present, past, and future. Present, past, and future all have conjugations that indicate specific temporal information that accurately expresses the timing of actions or events.

Table 17.1 Verb tenses (click here)

#### TIP

For tips on mastering verb tenses [the Purdue OWL website](#) can help.

### 17.2 Reduce double auxiliary verbs.

Writers occasionally reference an event that could have happened in the past but didn't, so they use the phrase *would have* followed by another verb. Consider this example:

"I **would have** liked to have seen the movie."

The sentence uses double auxiliary verbs—*have liked* and *have seen*.

Changing the second **have** (have seen) to the infinitive—the base verb plus *to*—more clearly and concisely conveys the same meaning:

I would have liked **to see** the movie.

Applying this rule simplifies construction.

Table 17.2 Reduce double auxiliary verbs (click here)

Sentence	Reduced Sentence
I would have loved to have gone to the concert.	I <b>would have loved to go</b> to the concert.
Claire would have chosen to have played soccer.	Claire <b>would have chosen</b> to play soccer.
Frank and his roommates would have liked to have seen the movie.	Frank and his roommates <b>would have liked to see</b> the movie.
Jacob would have preferred to have stayed at home.	Jacob <b>would have preferred</b> to stay at home.
The case team would have chosen to have studied harder.	The case team <b>would have chosen</b> to study harder.

### 17.3 Use the present tense to express a permanent truth or condition.

Suppose someone says to you, "What did you say your name *was*?"

Though the person might have been introduced to you last week, your name is likely the same today as it was last week, so the question should be phrased as follows: "What did you say your name *is*?" or "What is your name?"

Table 17.3 Use present tense to express a permanent truth or condition (click here)

Incorrect Example	Corrected Example
What <b>was</b> your name?	What <b>is</b> your name?
She said her name <b>was</b> Maria.	She said her name <b>is</b> Maria.
The book <b>said</b> that cats are independent.	The book <b>says</b> that cats are independent.
What he told me yesterday <b>was</b> that he <b>was</b> happy to present at our upcoming conference.	What he told me yesterday <b>is</b> that he <b>is</b> happy to present at our upcoming conference.
Dr. Ferry <b>was</b> my favorite professor of all time.	Dr. Ferry <b>is</b> my favorite professor of all time.
Reactions to the merger <b>appeared</b> on page 14A of last Tuesday's <i>Wall Street Journal</i> .	Reactions to the merger <b>appear</b> on page 14A of last Tuesday's <i>Wall Street Journal</i> .

### 18. Use the correct mood

A sentence's verb can express a variety of moods, which indicate whether the writer is stating a fact, issuing a direct command, expressing a condition, implying uncertainty or doubt, or giving a subtle command. The most common English verb moods are indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and conditional.

#### 18.1 The English language uses four moods.

Table 18.1.1 below illustrates the four moods in the English language: indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and conditional.

Table 18.1.1 English language moods (click here)

Mood	Definition	Example
<b>Indicative</b>	States facts, makes statements, asks questions, expresses certainty or reality	She sings beautifully.
<b>Imperative</b>	Gives commands, makes requests, offers instructions	Close the door.
<b>Subjunctive</b>	Expresses hypothetical or unreal situations, wishes, recommendations, doubts, or possibilities	I suggest that she retake the GMAT.

<b>Conditional</b>	Expresses actions or situations dependent on a condition or hypothetical circumstance.	I would buy a car if I could earn a little more money.
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Even if they know the definitions, writers can easily confuse the conditional and subjunctive moods.

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## Conditional Mood

The conditional mood is typically used to express hypothetical or conditional situations that depend on a certain condition being met. It expresses possibilities, preferences, or outcomes based on a specific condition or specific events.

## Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive mood expresses wishes, doubts, recommendations, or unreal or hypothetical situations that may not be based on a specific condition. Use subjunctive when you discuss something that may not be true or certain.

Table 18.1.2 Conditional vs. subjunctive mood (click here)

Conditional Mood	Subjunctive Mood	Differences
Candace would like to read more books, but she does not currently have time.	If Candace had more time, she would read more books.	Conditional expresses a hypothetical condition. Subjunctive expresses a doubt or uncertainty
If Taylen wins the lottery, she could buy a new house.	If Taylen were to win the lottery, she would buy a house.	Conditional expresses a possible, hypothetical condition. Subjunctive expresses the doubtfulness of the situation.
If Adeline would study harder, she could pass the exam.	Dr. Friendly suggested that Adeline study harder to pass the exam.	Conditional implies a possible condition and its outcome. Subjunctive issues a subtle command with the word <i>that</i> .

## 18.2 Sometimes use plural past tense to form the subjunctive.

In some cases, the subjunctive mood uses the plural past tense of the verb instead of the normal conjugation used in the indicative mood. Why?

The subjunctive mood sometimes uses the plural, past-tense form, like *were*, instead of the singular, past-tense form *was*, even when the writer is referencing herself or other singular subjects. This construction might seem odd, but it's an English language convention.

The reason for using the plural, past-tense form is historical. English used to have a clearer distinction between different moods, including the subjunctive. The plural, past-tense form was used in subjunctive constructions; over time, this convention stuck.

Today, using the plural past tense in the subjunctive doesn't necessarily mean more than one subject is involved. It's just a way to signal that we're discussing something hypothetical, unreal, or uncertain. It helps writers express ideas like wishes, possibilities, recommendations, or desires that may not be true or certain.

In simple terms, using the plural, past-tense form in the subjunctive is a grammar rule that shows events that might not actually exist or happen, expressing certain thoughts and possibilities.

Table 18.2 Constructing the subjunctive mood (click here)

Incorrect Example	Correct Example	Explanation
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If I <b>was</b> president, I would make changes.	If I <b>were</b> president, I would make changes.	This expresses a hypothetical or unreal condition.
Dr. Packer prescribed that Shari <b>takes</b> medication.	Dr. Packer prescribed that Shari <b>take</b> medication.	This sentence expresses a recommendation or requirement.
Alexis suggests that Taylor <b>studies</b> harder.	Alexis suggests that Taylor <b>study</b> harder.	This sentence offers advice or a recommendation.
If I <b>was</b> to speak multiple languages, I could be an interpreter.	If I <b>were</b> to speak multiple languages, I could be an interpreter.	This expresses a desire or an unrealizable wish.

### 18.3 Use the polite conditional.

Writers sometimes use the polite conditional when they could use the indicative or imperative instead.

When choosing between the polite conditional and the imperative, consider the level of formality, the power dynamics, and the desired tone of the communication, and be aware of the social and cultural norms that may influence the choice of language in a given context.

Table 18.3 Using the polite conditional (click here)

Polite Conditional	Ask	Use Indicative or Imperative
I <i>would</i> be delighted to prepare the broccoli.	Under what conditions would you be delighted?	I <i>am</i> delighted to prepare the broccoli.
We <i>would</i> like to welcome you to the 2023 Broccoli Fest.	Under what conditions would you like to welcome me?	<i>Welcome</i> to the 2022 Broccoli Fest!

#### TIP

FOR TIPS ON USING THE SUBJUNCTIVE [CLICK HERE](#).

#### IN CONCLUSION

Awareness is the first step toward mastery. This section covered four types of verb tenses and moods. If you struggle with any of these, keep studying, practicing, and getting feedback. Your writing and speaking will continue to improve until these seven fundamentals become second nature to you.