

BUS 100/310—Writing Style Guide

Active/Passive Voice	<p>In business writing, prefer the active voice. Also avoid unnecessary “dummy subjects” (e.g., “it” and “there”). Generally use passive voice only when using active voice would create a negative tone or when the performer of the action is not important.</p> <p>PASSIVE: The report was read by Joe.</p> <p>ACTIVE: Joe read the report.</p>
Dummy Subjects	<p>DUMMY SUBJECT – AMBIGUOUS “THERE”: There are several persuasive elements in this brochure.</p> <p>BETTER: This brochure contains several persuasive elements.</p> <p>DUMMY SUBJECT – AMBIGUOUS “IT”: It was important to give our employees all the information needed to make plans for the banquet.</p> <p>BETTER: Giving our employees all the information they need to make plans for the banquet was important.</p> <p>OR We must give our employees all the information they need to make plans for the banquet.</p>
Commas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><p>Serial Comma: Use a comma before the final conjunction when punctuating items in a series. In journalism and marketing communication, the serial comma is omitted unless it’s needed for clarity, but in business and technical writing, we use this comma so that we always know that we’ve been clear.</p><p>Ambiguous: In his speech the CEO credited his success to his parents, Brett Favre and Oprah. (Is he thanking two people or four?)</p><p>Clear: In his speech, the CEO credited his success to his parents, Brett Favre, and Oprah.</p><p>Comma Between Independent Clauses: When two independent clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), separate the clauses with a comma. Both clauses must be independent to use the comma.</p><p>Correct: I did the research for the report last week, and I plan to write the report this week.</p><p>Incorrect: I did the research for the report last week, and plan to write the report this week.</p><p>Comma After Introductory Dependent Clauses.</p><p>Correct: After we finished our meeting, I typed the minutes.</p><p>Incorrect: After we finished our meeting I typed the minutes.</p>
Semicolons	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><p>Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses closely related in thought.</p><p>Correct: Sue was late for the meeting; perhaps she overslept.</p><p>Incorrect: In order to make a decision quickly; Jill read the report’s executive summary.</p><p>Use a semicolon to separate independent clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs (e.g., however, therefore, consequently).</p><p>Example: We wanted to leave for Florida on Friday; however, the storm delayed our trip until Saturday.</p><p>Use a semicolon to separate elements in a series that are already punctuated with commas.</p><p>Example: We have offices in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Dallas, Texas; and Sacramento, California.</p>

Colons	<p>Make sure that an independent clause precedes a colon.</p> <p>INCORRECT: Three items we want to include in our final brochure are: the date of the event, a map for getting to the banquet, and information on child care provided at the banquet.</p> <p>CORRECT: We want to include three items in our final brochure: the date of the event, a map for getting to the banquet, and information on childcare provided at the banquet.</p>
Quotation Marks	<p>Always put quotation marks outside periods and commas.</p> <p>INCORRECT: After reading the article "Protect Your PC", I bought new antivirus software.</p> <p>CORRECT: After reading the article "Protect Your PC," I bought new antivirus software.</p> <p>INCORRECT: I bought new antivirus software after reading the article "Protect Your PC".</p> <p>CORRECT: I bought new antivirus software after reading the article "Protect Your PC."</p>
Hyphen, Em Dash, & En Dash	<p>Use hyphens and dashes correctly:</p> <p>Use a HYPHEN for compound words: This is a well-prepared argument. (Note: use one hyphen with no spaces before or after)</p> <p>Use an EM DASH to indicate emphasis: Three requirements—a degree, experience, and letters of recommendation—were listed in the job posting. (Note: use two hyphens with no spaces before, between, or after; Word will automatically covert two hyphens to an em dash. Or, use Ctrl+Alt+Num-)</p> <p>Use an EN DASH for ranges of times/dates: November 22–December 1. (Note: use Ctrl+Num- to insert an en dash)</p>
People who, not People that	<p>People are generally referred to as "who"; objects are generally referred to as "that."</p> <p>INCORRECT: We want to get the information to people that don't exercise regularly.</p> <p>CORRECT: We want to get the information to people who don't exercise regularly.</p>
Pronouns & Antecedents	<p>Pronouns must agree with their antecedents.</p> <p>INCORRECT: We want each employee to get the most from their experience at our fitness center.</p> <p>CORRECT: We want each employee to get the most from his or her experience at our fitness center.</p> <p>CORRECT: We want employees to get the most from their experience at our fitness center.</p>
Company Names	<p>Company names are considered singular; therefore, refer to a company as "it," not "their."</p> <p>CORRECT: Anderson and Associates wants all of its employees to attend this year's banquet.</p> <p>INCORRECT: Anderson and Associates wants all of their employees to attend this year's banquet.</p>
Web & Internet	<p>web site and web page (two words and lower case "w" except at the beginning of a sentence)</p> <p>Internet (capital "I")</p> <p>email (lower case "e" except at the beginning of a sentence)</p> <p>online and onsite (one word)</p>

Dates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Express dates as “November 22” or “22nd of November” but never “November 22nd.” Never use the suffix when the number follows the month. Spell out dates Example: May 21, 2011 NOT: 05/21/11
Time	Express time as follows: CORRECT: 2 p.m. or 3:30 p.m. INCORRECT: 2:00p.m. or 2p.m. or 3:30p.m.
“I think” “I feel” “I believe”	Generally, avoid saying “ <i>I feel</i> ,” “ <i>I believe</i> ,” or “ <i>I think</i> .” These expressions make you sound tentative and not confident in your ideas. TENTATIVE: I believe this Web page uses color effectively. ASSERTIVE: This Web page uses color effectively.
Unnecessary Prepositions	UNNECESSARY: We sent <u>out</u> our survey to 200 employees. CONCISE: We sent our survey to 200 employees.
Awkward Introductory Phrases	AWKWARD: On UWEC’s Web site, they have “Experience the Eau Claire Advantage.” BETTER: UWEC’s Web site includes a link entitled “Experience the Eau Claire Advantage.” BETTER: UWEC includes a link on its Web site entitled “Experience the Eau Claire Advantage.”
Wordy & Redundant Expressions	WORDY: Sue, the human resources representative, took the Sam’s record into consideration when making recommendations for the improvement of his performance. CONCISE: Sue, the human resources representative, considered Sam’s record when she recommended strategies for improving his performance. (NOTE: Watch for words that end in –ion or –ment). WORDY: Due to the fact that the holiday fell on a Sunday, the company closed on Monday. CONCISE: Because the holiday fell on a Sunday, the company closed on Monday. Phrases to avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>in regard to (use regarding)</i> <i>are looking to (use want)</i> <i>please feel free to/please do not hesitate to (use please)</i> <i>are able to (use can)</i> <i>as soon as possible/in the near future (give a specific timetable)</i>
Parallelism	Items in a series must be parallel (grammatically similar). Not Parallel: To prepare for the meeting, develop an agenda, send a meeting request to the team members, and a meeting room should be reserved. Parallel: To prepare for the meeting, develop an agenda, send a meeting request to the team members, and reserve a meeting room.

Consistent Voice	<p>Avoid switching from first or third person to second person.</p> <p>AVOID: Web designers should carefully consider the audience. You should especially consider the audience’s culture.</p> <p>BETTER: Web designers should carefully consider the audience. They should especially consider the audience’s culture.</p>
Letter & Memo Format	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Use the word “Attachment” when including something with a memo.2. Use the word “Enclosure” when including something with a letter.3. If your memo or letter has more than one page, the second page should contain a header with a) the receiver’s name, b) the date, and c) a page number. The first page does not contain a header or a page number.