



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Principles of Business Writing

Being able to transition between academic and professional writing is a valuable skill to perfect as you advance in your educational career and prepare for life after school. Understanding and employing the following principles, however, can help give you an early advantage in your professional development.

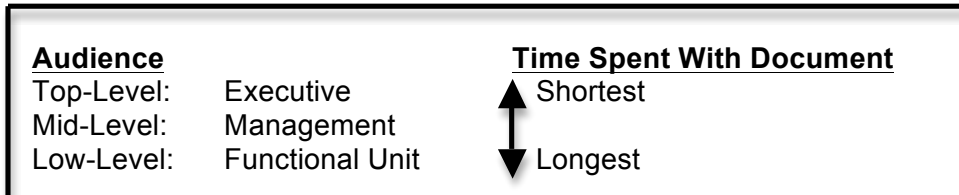
1. Know Your Audience

“In organizations today, writers think they are writing for readers. But business readers don’t read—they retrieve information. To reach their goal, writers must write for retrievers.”

- Lynn Gaertner-Johnston

Writing in a business environment requires the ability to tailor your document to a variety of different audiences. Your proposal may have to be approved at the executive level but carried out at the functional level.

Consider the following diagram when preparing your business document:



- Your writing should be detailed enough for it to be functional and effective, yet simple enough for all readers to understand.
- Write different sections for different readers. For example, summary sections tailored directly to executives and technical sections written for specific functional units.
- Format your document so that the reader’s eye falls on the most important information. Use bullets, bold, graphics and white space to organize information.

2. Be Concise

As the chart above demonstrates, the most influential decision-makers spend the least amount of time with your document. Your writing should take this into account. Avoid unnecessary embellishments and get straight to the point.

- Wordy Example:

The purpose of this document is to provide the reader with a detailed explanation of the primary business writing principles. In order to provide an introduction to this process for new business writers, we have prepared an overview, which describes the highlights of the business writing process in just three pages. This detailed document describes several tips and techniques that writers are able to follow in their path towards improving their business writing skills.

- Concise Example:

This document explains business writing principles in detail. A three-page overview has been prepared to introduce this process to new business writers. The included techniques can be utilized to further develop your writing skills.

3. Write to Inform, Persuade, or Promote

Most business documents are written to disseminate information, persuade an audience, or promote a product or service.

- Establish a Need. In persuasive documents, readers should perceive a need for your idea before being presented with facts and support for your idea.
- Stress Benefits before Features. Your audience, particularly at the executive level, seeks benefits rather than features. Readers are looking for direct benefits when reviewing and approving documents.
- Use Facts and Statistics. Readers tend to be naturally skeptical and will look for reliable information before providing their support for a specific idea. While it may sound obvious, relying on trustworthy supporting evidence can substantially help to persuade the audience.
- Provide a Call to Action. Establish a clear deadline and plan next steps. Readers are most likely to take action (such as approving your request, forwarding your questions, etc.) when there is a specific timeline and instructions for proceeding.

For further information on related concepts, please see the following handouts:

- Composing Professional Emails