**General Business Writing**

**FORMATTING: How does it look?**

Think about your writing’s overall appearance of spacing, font style and size, layout, etc. It should be consistent throughout your writing. To make a document easy to read you should have short sentences, clear topics with a focus or point. All paragraphs should start with a topic sentence and then elaborate or support it.

The document should be written in ‘Align Left’ only with page numbers. Make sure to follow instructions for font, margins, or specific formatting per assignment. For the purposes of this class, all writing assignments must be written in essay or paragraph form. All class assignments are to be written in paragraph form, no bullet points.

In general, if the document is single spaced then DO NOT indent the first line and leave one blank line between paragraphs. For double spaced documents you DO indent the first line but NO spaces between paragraphs.

**ORGANIZATION: Are the ideas and data logically organized?**

Transitions can be a great way to organize your writing. Make sure to help lead the reader with transitions such as, “initially, next, therefore, second, after that, finally” etc.

Writing assignments may vary but for most assignments that are very direct in nature you can lead with the answer and then support it. The reader will understand immediately what the recommendation or discovery is and then be led through your writing to understand more. In order to keep your writing as logical as possible only include details that are vital. Ask yourself, “why are you writing this piece?” and keep it to the need-to-know information. Readers will start skimming or lose interest otherwise. If you feel there are details that are important but would overwhelm the reader you can attach them in an appendix or separate document.

**STYLE: Do I understand my audience?**

Your style should reveal an understanding of the needs or perspective of the audience.

* CLEAR – Be clear about your goal or the message you are trying to communicate.
  + The audience wants to be on the same page with you and know what to expect.
  + Be direct and to the point so others do not have to make assumptions. Avoid vague statements.
* CONCISE – Stick to the point and avoid complicating the message.
  + You don’t need “fancy words” to strongly communicate your ideas.
  + Provide context when necessary, but don’t repeat yourself if it will cloud your point.
* CONCRETE - Use details that are necessary or specific to focus the audience.
  + Too many details can distract the audience.
  + You must be concrete so that the receiver is clear on what you’re telling them.
* CORRECT – To properly communicate via any style or to any audience you must be correct.
  + Did you check the names? Titles? Facts? Spelling? Grammar?
  + You must correctly identify your audience to know their level of familiarity on the subject.
* COHERENT - Coherent communication is logical. The audience must be able to follow along with the points you make and conclusion you’re leading them to.
  + If not done coherently you risk miscommunicating to the audience more often or easily.
* COMPLETE – If you have communicated completely then the audience understands the next steps or action necessary to take.
  + Your communication is complete if you’ve been as relevant as possible.
  + Simple errors can be avoided if you’re complete.
* COURTEOUS – Courteous communication is open, authentic, genuine, and pleasant.
* **Other C’s of Communication:** Strong communication can also be CREDIBLE and/or CREATIVE

Be careful with tenses. Use present, past, or future tenses - avoid perfect tense in direct format business writing (replace "I have had experience..." with "I worked...").

Use active instead of passive voice in direct format business writing ("Mr. Smith saved the dog" instead of "the dog was saved by Mr. Smith").

Write in the affirmative by using a positive statement (ex: Please sign on the 3rd page) maintains a friendlier tone and usually states things more directly than using negatives (e.g. Please do not sign on the first two pages).

Avoid the following common style mistakes:

* Using vague words
* Using slang or idioms and be more direct
* Using humor since it can be hard to interpret in writing
* Using overly “fancy” words or legalese
* Using complex words/phrases - keep sentences short and clear

**MECHANICS: Have I written properly?**

Always proofread your work for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. What if this sentence didn’t have a comma? EX: “Let’s eat, Bob!”

Your writing must not have run-on sentences. This is a sure way to lose your reader. If you’re not sure about the flow of your sentence, try reading it out loud. Often we’ll take a pause when speaking where a comma should go if it’s too long.

Let’s review commas. It’s best to use the Oxford comma rule. EX: “We went to the store for eggs, milk, and bread.” There should be a comma separating each of your list items. Also, use a comma when you are linking two COMPLETE sentences with an appropriate conjunction (and, or, but, yet). There are many more rules for commas but if you’re writing simply you won’t find the need for them as often. Please research comma and semicolon usage if necessary.

When writing with numbers please spell out one through ten but use numbers for 11 or higher. Remember never to start a sentence with numbers, you should spell the number out.

Avoid using British spelling for words, ex: favourite versus favorite.

Be mindful of commonly misused words: Affect, effect - Principal, principle - Their, there, they’re - To, two, too - Stationary, stationery - Capital, capitol - Posses, possess – modeling, modelling