

Communication Essentials For Professionals



Soft Skills Unit



Professional Writing Skills

Outline

- Introduction
- Features of Business Documents:
 - Layout and Document Design
 - Organizing Information
 - Business Language
- Examples of Business Documents:
 - E-mail Writing
 - Report Writing
- Data Visualization



Introduction

Purposes of Business Writing

Most common purposes of business written communications:

In all directions

- Exchange business-related information
- Documentation and archiving

Usually top-down

- Deliver decisions/share news
- Call to action

Usually bottom-up

- Suggest ideas
- Explain or justify an action



Common Types of Business Documents

Business documents for “information exchange/conveyance” include:

- Emails and memoranda for internal communications
- Business letters for external communications
- Meeting agendas and meeting minutes
- Business reports and business proposals
- Legal and financial documents
- Promotional material



Features of Business Documents

Document Layout

Business documents must be easy to scan

- Business leaders are busy and cannot read everything
- Well written business documents can be easily scanned to find information quickly
- The document layout should be designed to serve this purpose



The Importance of White Space

Good writing often uses a device called parallelism, or parallel structure. Writers use parallelism instinctually because it appeals to our natural desire for symmetry. Parallelism matches nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, and phrases with phrases: "For *faster* action, *less* stomach upset, and *more* for your money, use XX." Readers expect parallelism, especially in sets of two or three items, and in bulleted and enumerated lists. Using parallel phrasing correctly is key to writing in the workplace. Positive voice uses affirmative words to make a point. For example, instead of saying, "We are out of green T-shirts," we would emphasize the positive and say, "Order any size of our orange and gray T-shirts." Avoid downbeat words or words than can convey a negative connotation and rephrase in a positive way. Instead of, "No coupons will be honored after April 30," say, "Coupons will be honored through April 30." Avoid jargon. Always, always, always choose the simpler, more recognizable word over the longer, more showy one. Instead of *rhinovirus* say *a cold*. Opt for *e-mail* over *electronic message*. In *utilize* versus *use*, *use* wins! (Also notice how the number of words your reader has to wade through goes down with simpler words.) Long paragraphs are appropriate for essays, but they have no place in professional documents. Big blocks of type scare readers away. The longest paragraph should be no more than six to eight lines. Always be aware of how a paragraph appears on a page (or a screen) and take pity on your audience—don't make your reader slog through dense prose. Although black is always the preferred color for body type, some color can add visual interest to print pages. Color can be used for document headings, in charts and graphs, or as ways to highlight information. Avoid using bright colors for type and understand that the way a color appears on the screen will likely differ from its reproduction on the printed page. Also remember that you will need a color printer for your color scheme to show! Adding graphical elements to your documents such as boldface, bullets, enumeration, italics, or underlining serve varied functions. Boldface calls attention to words and phrases. Bulleted points are used to list items and to attract the reader's eye. Bulleted points break up text, too. Enumeration (listing items 1., 2., 3., etc.) is used to indicate a series in order. Italics are used for emphasis, to indicate a word in a different language, for proper names, and for titles. Underlining can indicate a title or emphasis. A quick word on the use of CAPS. Beware that the reader will interpret type in all caps as a scream. The only time I use all caps is in a context in which I must conform to a text-only design. In that case, I use caps for headings. I never use all caps and boldface, however. It is not only redundant but also truly a signal for translating the words into a scream. Big blocks of type scare readers away. The longest paragraph should be no more than six to eight lines. Always be aware of how a paragraph appears on a page (or a screen) and take pity on your audience—don't make your reader slog through dense prose. Although black is always the preferred color for body type, some color can add visual interest to print pages. Color can be used for document headings, in charts and graphs, or as ways to highlight information. Avoid using bright colors for type and understand that the way a color appears on the screen will likely differ from its reproduction on the printed page. Also remember that you will need a color printer for your color scheme to show. The only time I use all caps is in a context in which I must conform to a text-only design. In that case, |

Parallelism

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Positive Voice

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Editing

No matter how good an editor you are already, you will become better if you follow these two practices:

1. Let time elapse between drafts.
2. Solicit the opinion of other people whose opinion you respect.

Color

Although black is always the preferred color for body type, some color can add visual interest to print pages. Color can be used for

Creating White Space

- **Shorter Paragraphs:**
 - A paragraph should not exceed 6-8 lines. Do not make your reader drag through dense prose.
- **Margins:**
 - Margins create white space to make a page look uncluttered. Leaving the right margin uneven rather than justified makes it easier to follow text.
- **Spacing:**
 - Use single spacing between lines, double spacing between paragraphs.

Indicating Information Hierarchy - Headings

- **Headers and Footers:**
 - Unify document and provide a location of page number, footnotes and adding logos.
- **Headings and Subheadings:**
 - Headings name categories of information and serve as markers that signal a new topic.
 - Subheadings are mini-headings, or subsections of a heading. They, too, break up long text and enhance visual appeal.

Indicating Information Hierarchy - Lists

“When writing a report, consider what, why, how, who and where: why you are writing it, what the topic is about; what you already know about it; who else might know about it; where might you find information about it and how you make sure you are covering all the information.”

Vs.

‘When writing a report, consider why, what, who, where and how:

- Why are you writing it?
- What is the topic about?
- What do you already know about it?
- Who else might know about it?
- Where might there be information about it?
- How do you make sure you are covering all the information? ‘

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Directing the Reader's Eye - Typography

Cont'd

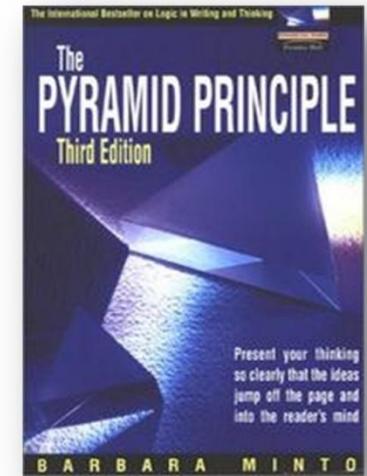
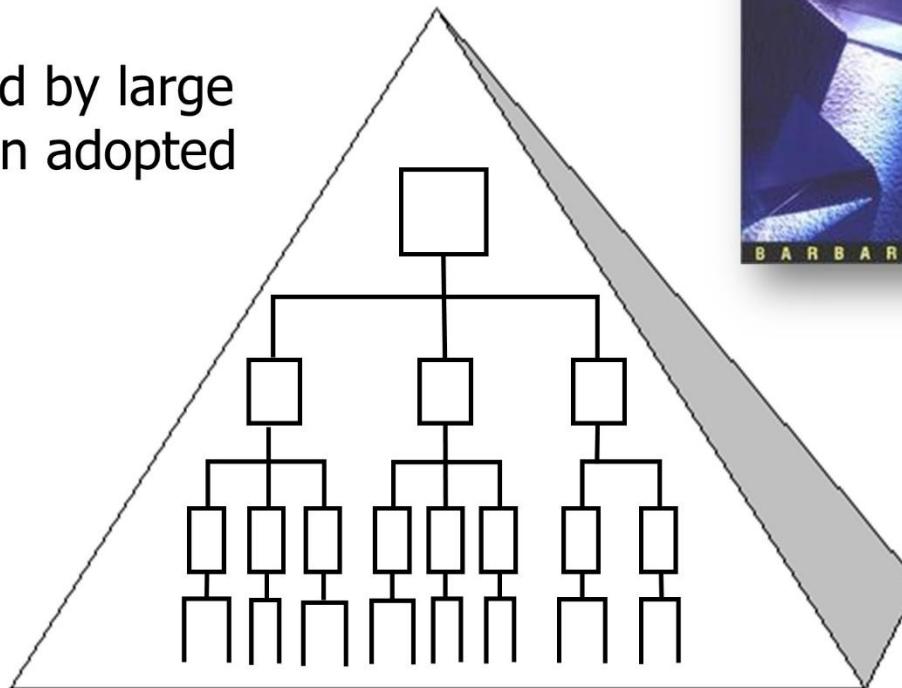
- **Boldface** is regularly used for headings and sparingly used to highlight words or phrases
- *Italics* are commonly used to indicate a quote, a word in slang or different language, for proper names, and to less extent in titles
- Underlining almost always indicates a title or used for emphasis
- **Colors** add emphasis and make a document more visually appealing. They are effective in graphs and presentations and less common in text communications
- **UPPERCASE** and **Special Fonts** are sometimes used for headings or for a blast of emphasis e.g. "We are NOT going to succumb to pressure."



Organizing Information in Business Documents

The Pyramid Principle

- The Pyramid Principle describes how a message (emails, presentations or reports) can be told effectively.
- It was introduced by Barbara Minto in 1987.
- It is now being used by large corporates and even adopted by the press.



The Pyramid Business Writing Style

Information Arrangement in business documents should be Deductive, not Inductive.

Inductive

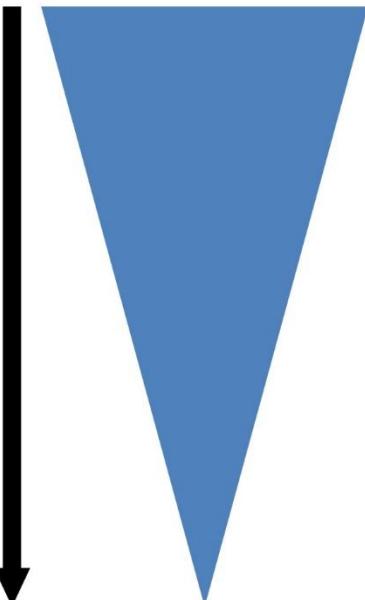
Scientific Communication

Data

Analysis

Findings

Conclusion/
Recommendation



Deductive

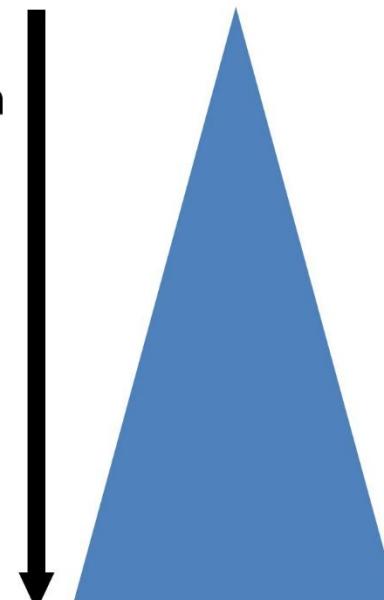
Business Communication

Conclusion/
Recommendation

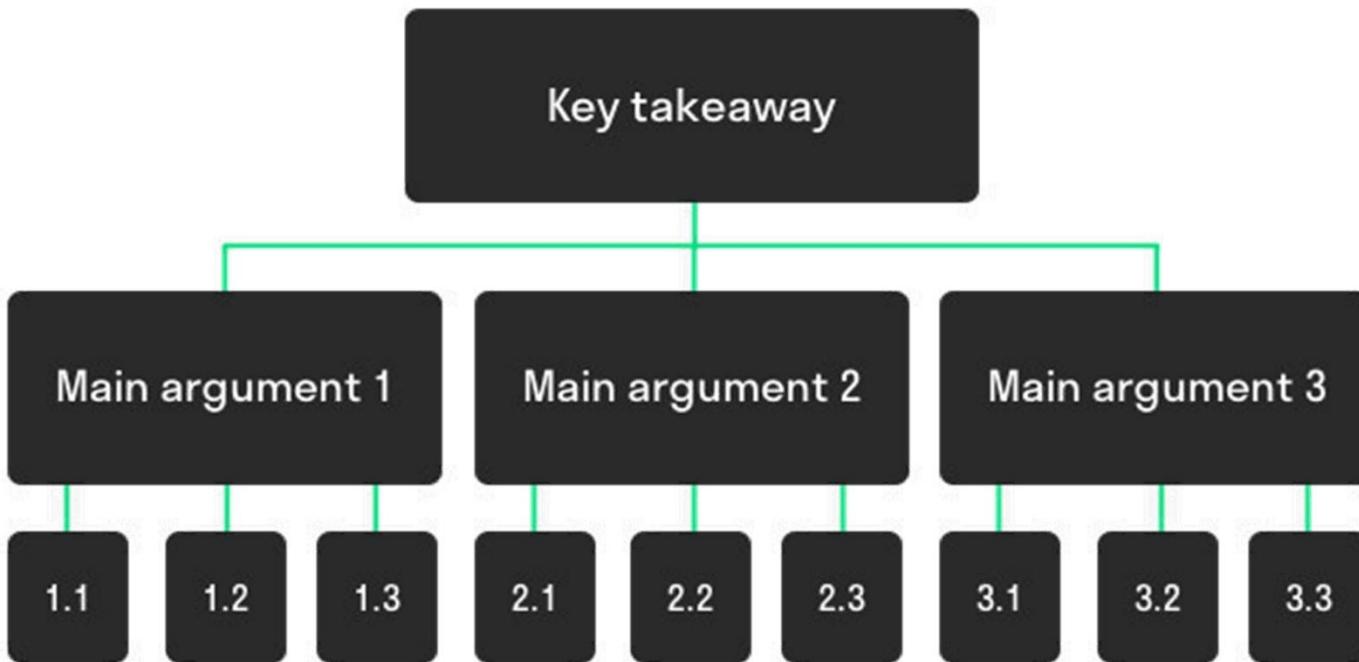
Findings

Analysis

Data



Key Principle





Business Language

Formal Business Language

Features of business language:

- Clear, Simple and brief
- Accurate, fact-based and complete
- Relevant and focused
- In short sentences
- Linguistically correct
- In active voice
- Void of symbols, unfamiliar abbreviations, acronyms and slang

Examples: Clarity and Simplicity

| Simple | Simple but Slightly Advanced |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Now | Currently |
| Start | Initiate |
| Show | Indicate |
| Finish | Finalize |
| Speed up, move along | Expedite |
| Use | Utilize |
| Place, put | Position |
| I am sorry | I Apologize |

Examples: Clarity and Simplicity

Cont'd

| Simple | Simple but Slightly Advanced |
|------------|------------------------------|
| Problem | Issue |
| Difficulty | Inconvenience |
| Give | Provide |
| Get | Receive |
| Help | Assist |
| Book | Reserve |
| Answer | Reply |
| Talk about | Discuss |

Examples: Accuracy and Precision

| Vague | Precise |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Very overspent | Overspent by 10,000 EGP |
| Slightly behind schedule | One day late |
| Many times | Ten times |
| Increased a great deal | A threefold increase |
| Recently / As of late | A week ago |

Examples: Brevity with Completeness

Instead of writing: Did you get my message? Can you come?

Write: Did you get my message regarding the meeting on the fourteenth? Can you come?

And..



Instead of replying: I am available.

Reply: I am available to speak at your meeting on the fourteenth.

Examples: Short Sentences

"A self-motivated, highly passionate and hardworking Software Developer seeking a position and an opportunity in the field of software development in a dynamic and challenging organization where I can utilize my skills and knowledge, unleash my capabilities and improve my coding skills in a competitive environment and develop further in tech sector in an efficient and fast way and work for the growth of the organization."

Vs.

"A self-motivated Software Developer pursuing a career in a challenging environment. Seeking an opportunity in a dynamic organization that would allow me to further develop my skills while contributing to the growth of the business."

Examples: Using Active Voice

Passive Voice: Rebates will be provided on all new purchases.

Active Voice: X Corp. will provide rebates on all new purchases.

Passive voice: The e-mail was sent.

Active voice: I sent the e-mail.

Passive voice: The brochure was revised for mistakes.

Active voice: The Marketing Manager revised the brochure for mistakes.



Examples: Which Communication is more effective?

Dear Sarah,

Do you remember last Saturday, as I was playing in the park with my friends and you joined us. I knew later that you were the one who wrote "Loser" on my hat, although you swore you were not who did it when I asked you that day!

And on last Sunday, as you visited me at our home and my elder sister had made a cake and you said "this is the most disgusting cake I have ever had"?

And then yesterday, as my cat touched you gently on your leg and you kicked him and threatened to send your dog "Monster" at him? Well, for all these reasons I hate you and do not want to have you as my friend anymore.

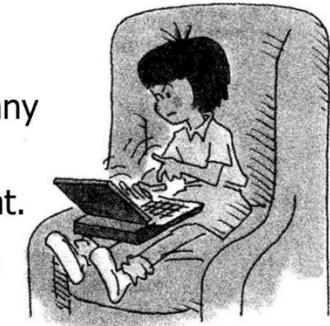


Lucy

Dear Sarah,

I do not want to be your friend any more. Here are my reasons:

1. You wrote "Loser" on my hat.
2. You insulted my elder sister.
3. You were violent to my cat.



Lucy

Activity

Which of the printed messages would you rather find on your desk?

"Mr. Sherif called. He said that he will not be able to make the appointment on Tuesday at 03:00 PM and would prefer any other time this week. Mr. Osama said that later in the week would also be acceptable to him perhaps even Wednesday or Thursday but not before 10:30 AM.

And Mr. Amr's secretary said, her boss will not return from London before late Wednesday evening. The conference room is reserved in the morning but it is still free on Thursday from 11:00 AM onwards. What do you think?"



Email Writing

E-mails At Work

Using To, CC and BCC

This screenshot shows the Microsoft Outlook ribbon interface with the 'Message' tab selected. The ribbon also includes 'Insert', 'Options', and 'Format Text' tabs. Below the ribbon are several toolbars: 'Clipboard' (Paste, Cut, Copy, Format Painter), 'Basic Text' (font, size, bold, italic, underline, etc.), 'Address Book' (Address Book, Check Names, Names), and 'Include' (Attach File, Attach Item, Business Card). A status bar at the bottom indicates 'This message has not been sent.'

To... **People required to take action.**

Cc... **Kept informed of the content, but no actions required from them.**

Bcc... **Receive the message without any of the other recipients knowing.**

Subject: **Must indicate the topic and be self-explanatory**

E-mails At Work

Cont'd

Replying to E-Mails



REPLY



REPLY TO ALL



FORWARD

E-mails At Work

Cont'd

E-Mails Body

- Put your main point first
- Never address more than one subject in an email
- Cut text into short paragraphs and use bullet points
- Mention all relevant information to avoid ping pong mailing



E-mails At Work

Cont'd

Remember the Golden Rules

- Be concise and don't ramble.
- Use correct spelling and grammar.
- Punctuation matters.
- Use maximum one exclamation marks!
- Use acronyms sparingly.
- Use Typographic carefully.
- Use a professional font.
- Don't write in All CAPITALS.

E-mails At Work – Email Etiquette

Cont'd

Remember the Golden Rules

- Introduce yourself briefly.
- Mention the attachment, and why you are sending it.
- Reply as soon as you can, but don't hit 'send' when you're emotional.
- Carefully use "Reply To All".
- Your Signature should not include pictures, quotes, or anything besides your contact info.
- Don't conduct personal business using your work e-mail.

Setting the Right Tone

Positive Voice

Emphasize the positive instead of the negative:

Instead of: We are out of green T-shirts

Write: Order any size of our orange and gray T-shirts

Instead of: No coupons will be honored after April 30

Write: Coupons will be honored until April 30

Setting the Right Tone

Cont'd

Avoiding Rudeness

1. Making demands

Instead of: I want/need some information on your admissions procedure

Write: I would like to have some information on your admissions procedure

or

I would be grateful if you could send me some information on your admissions procedure

Setting the Right Tone

Cont'd

Avoiding Rudeness

2. Forgetting "please" and "thank you"

Instead of: We received your order

Write: Thank you for your order

Instead of: Send the information immediately

Write: Please send the information as soon as possible

Setting the Right Tone

Cont'd

Avoiding Rudeness

3. Avoiding "you"

Instead of: You made a mistake

Write: There was a mistake

Instead of: You said...

Write: We understood...

Setting the Right Tone

Cont'd

Caring about the reader

1. You cannot help

Instead of: We cannot help you

Write: We are sorry that we cannot help you further

2. You have no information to give

Instead of: We have no information for you

Write: Regrettably, we have no information regarding...

3. Bad news

Instead of: Your order will be delayed

Write: Unfortunately, your order might be delayed



Report Writing

Report Writing Guidelines

1. Make sure you understand what the report is all about
2. In absence of an established format, develop a structure that works for your purpose
3. Use formal language
4. Support your claims with facts
5. Use illustrations and data visuals to simplify complex data
6. Edit and proofread

Report Structure

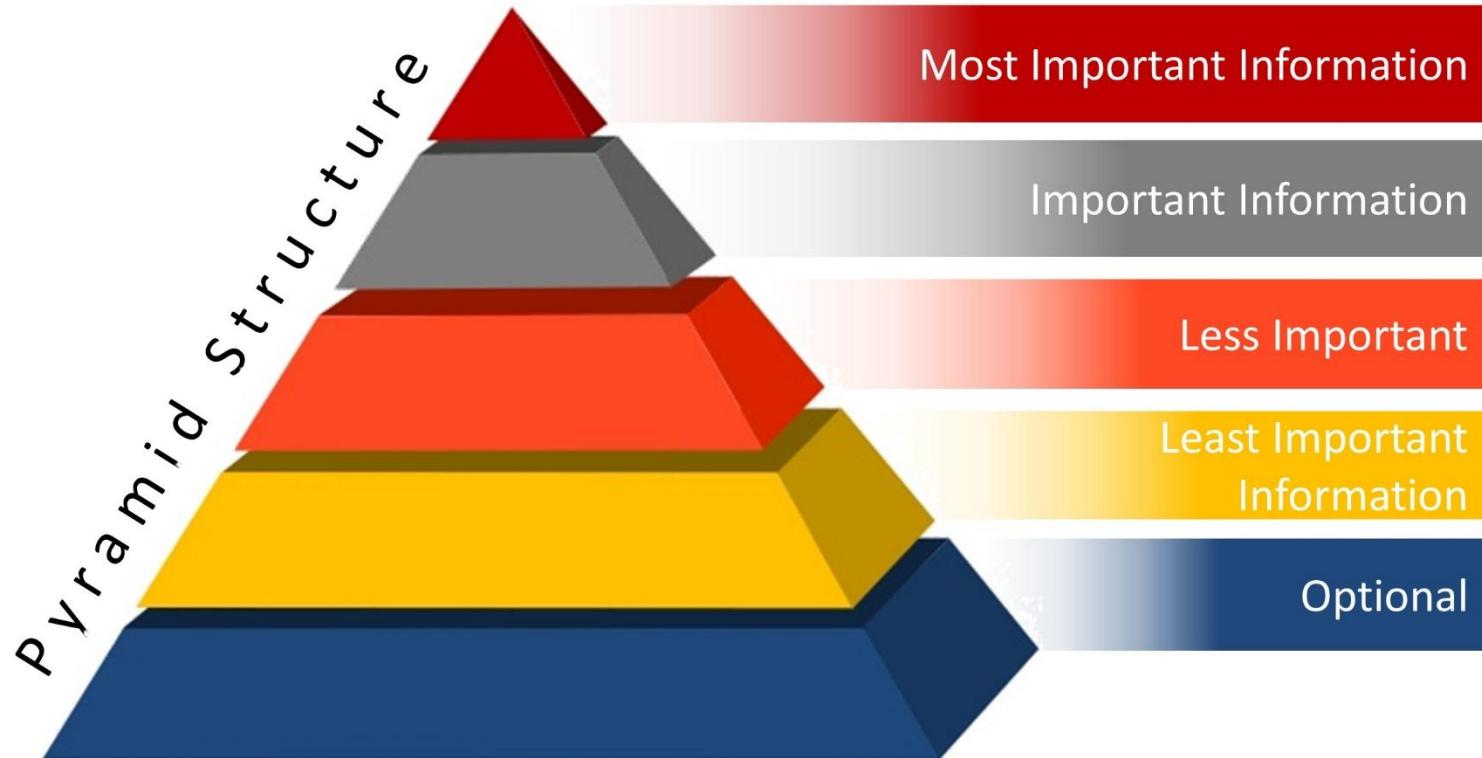
- Front Page
- Table of Contents
- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Body of Report (Information & Supporting Evidence)
- Recommendations

Content of Body

- Decide what information to include.
- Find the information to include.
- Choose how to best present it.



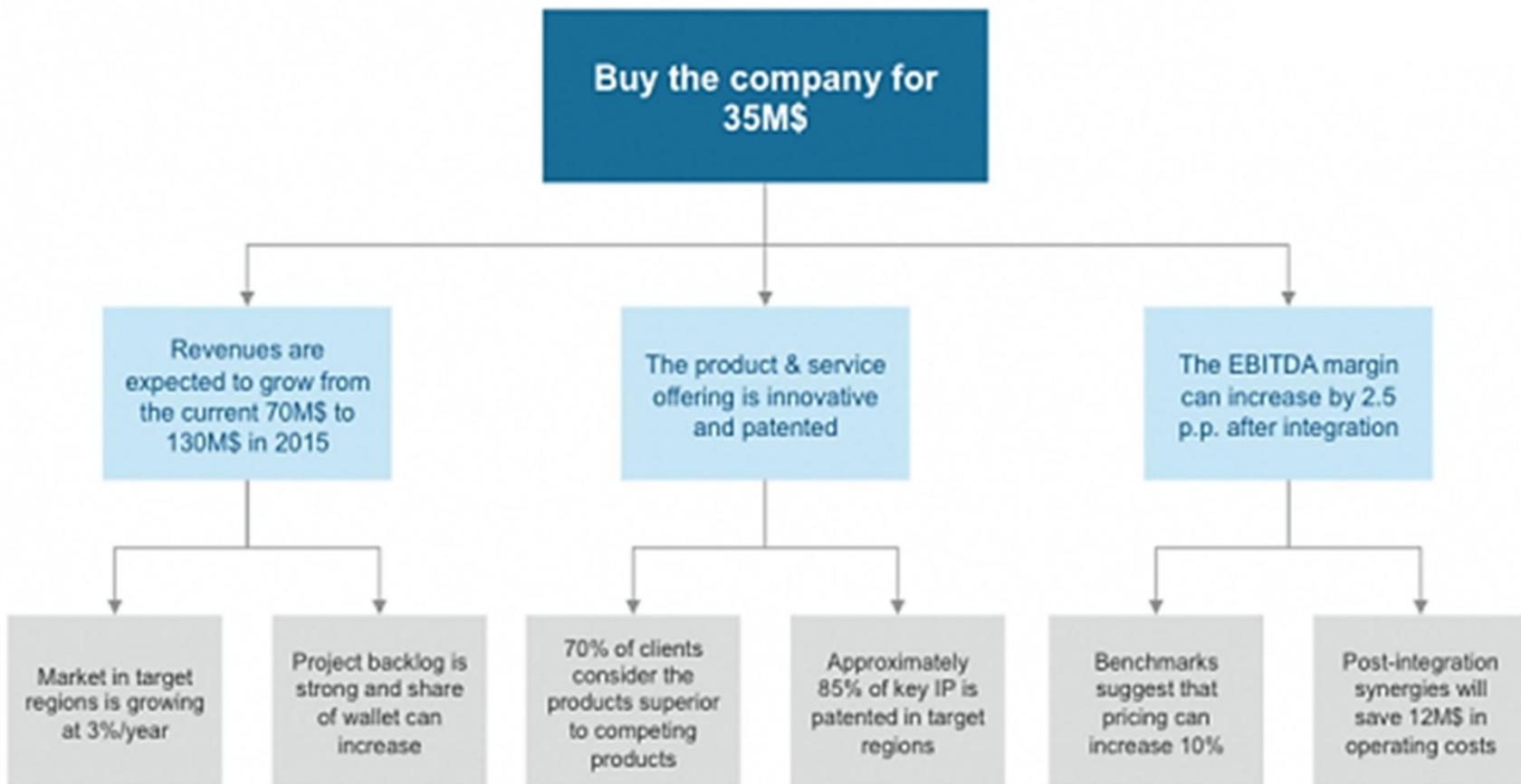
Structure of Body



Example: North Pole Report

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Introduction | 2 |
| I. A unique and unspoiled nature | 3 |
| The midnight sun turns night into day | 4 |
| The perpetual ice helps people keep a cool head | 6 |
| Wild life gives the landscape more colour | 7 |
| II. Highly interesting possibilities for leisure time activities | 9 |
| Ice-floe jumping trains rigid muscles | 11 |
| Dog-sleigh races offer thrill | 12 |
| Fishing through the ice provides relaxation | 14 |
| Ice sculpting releases creativity | 16 |
| III. No chance to spend too much money | 17 |
| Igloos instead of hotels | 18 |
| Self-made fish instead of expensive restaurants | 19 |
| Jogging instead of shopping | 19 |
| Ending | |

Example: Business Report



Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own.

- Plagiarism is unethical and is considered a crime
- Information taken from other sources **must** be attributed to them
- In some cases, a permission is needed before the information is used
- Paraphrasing is not enough to make an idea your own
- Plagiarism checking tools are available online for free



Using Generative AI in Professional Writing

Generative AI in Writing

Potential uses:

- Brainstorming
- Generating outlines
- Summarizing longer texts
- Refining
- Translation

Generative AI in Writing

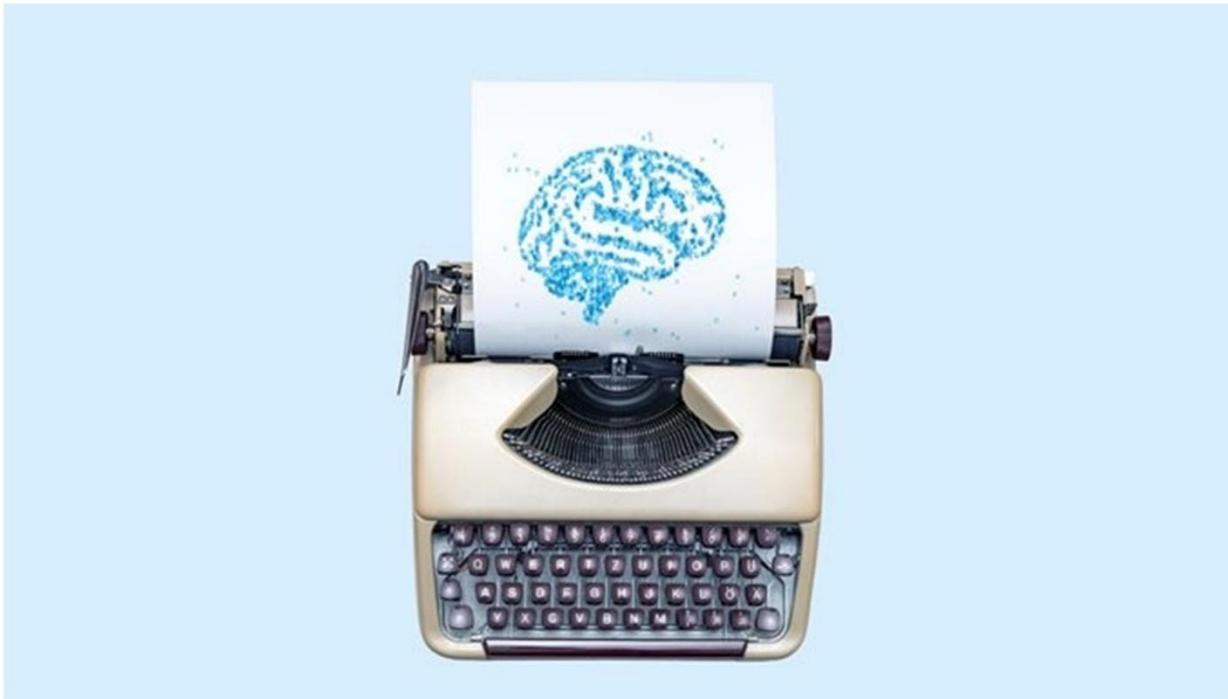
Potential pitfalls:

- Information may be false
- Responses may contain biases
- The tools consume personal or private information



What is Prompt Engineering?

Prompt engineering is the practice of designing inputs for AI tools that will produce optimal outputs.



Instructions to Create Effective Prompts

- Keep it specific
- Provide context and background
- State the result format
- Split complex tasks into simpler subtasks
- Act as if...
- Use “do” and “don’t”

Example for Effective Prompts

"Act as an employee writing to my manager who is located at the company's headquarters abroad. Compose a professional email requesting a 30-minute online meeting via Microsoft Teams to discuss the ITI project deadline. Begin with a formal and polite greeting, and include a suitable subject line such as 'Meeting Request: ITI Project Deadline Discussion.' Suggest meeting next Sunday at any time from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the manager's time zone (GMT+1). Mention that you will send a meeting invitation upon confirmation. Please consider that the manager is from a low-context culture and that my relationship with the manager is completely formal. Make the email very professional and direct. The email should be clear and specifically request the manager's confirmation of the meeting time. Finally, don't use bullets or exclamation marks in the email. The result should be a polished email suitable for communication with a manager, and it should be between 150 to 200 words."

Responsible Use of Generative AI

- Check the policy of your company
- Professional and creative integrity (transparency)
- Sensitive information disclosure
- Third-party fact-checking



Final Word

“ You are ultimately responsible as a human user for the content or product that you create using Generative AI ”



Data Visualization

Effective Data Visualization

- Consider nature of audience
- Reduce complexity and facilitate understanding of data
- Show hierarchy and relations of data
- Illustrate outcomes and conclusions of data



To Plot Or Not To Plot Data!

One or two data points



No Visual

Intake 45 students:
1150

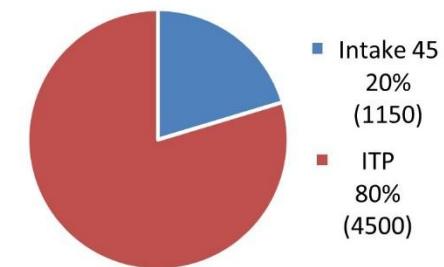
"The number of
intake 45 students
is 1150"

Comparisons
without
Variables



No Plot

- Intake 45 students:
1150
- ITP Program students:
4500

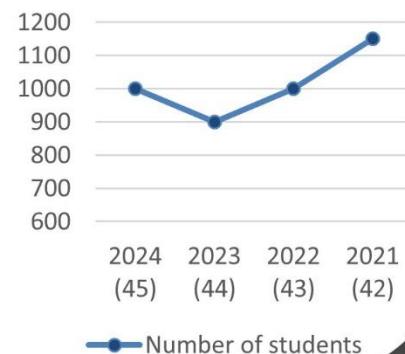


One or
more
Variables



Data
Plotting

- 2024 (Intake 45):
1150
- 2023 (Intake 44):
1000
- 2022 (Intake 43)
900
- 2021 (Intake 42)
1000



Activity

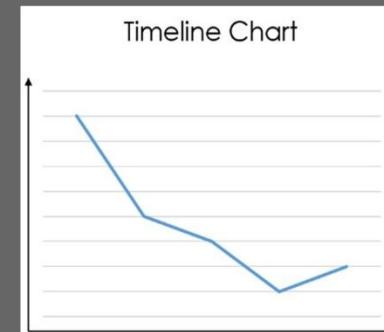
1

| ITI Branch | Number of Students |
|------------|--------------------|
| Cairo | 400 |
| Alexandria | 200 |
| Mansoura | 150 |
| Assiut | 50 |
| Isamalia | 100 |

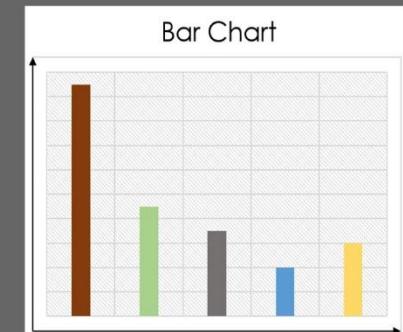
2

| Exam score range | Number of students scored within the specified range |
|------------------|--|
| 50-59 | 1 |
| 60-69 | 4 |
| 70-79 | 8 |
| 80-89 | 12 |
| 90-100 | 5 |

A

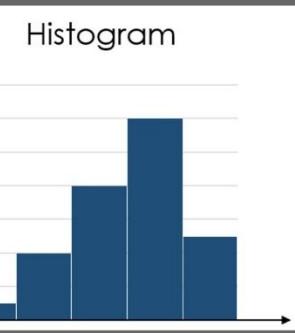
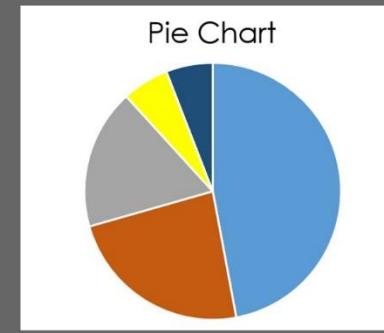


B



| Course (December 2020) | Average mark per class |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| PCT | 95 |
| OB | 45 |
| PM | 35 |
| HR | 20 |
| CF | 30 |

| Year | Annual Sales |
|------|--------------|
| 2015 | 800 |
| 2016 | 400 |
| 2017 | 300 |
| 2018 | 100 |
| 2019 | 200 |



3

4

C

D

Thank You