

# Business Writing Fundamentals

with Judy Steiner-Williams

## Exercise Guide - Answer Key

Directions: Use this answer key to compare my revisions with yours.  
I've left comments to explain my choices.

## Clear

1. **Original Version:** Jack told Jim that he could leave the meeting early.

The problem is that we don't know who gets to leave the meeting early—Jack or Jim?

**Revision:** Jack said to Jim, "You may leave the meeting early."

Jack told Jim that Jim could leave the meeting early.

In these two, Jim leaves early.

Jack said to Jim, "I am leaving the meeting early."

In this one Jack leaves early.

2. **Original Version:** Put the report on the corner desk in the conference room.

Are we supposed to put the report on the corner desk in the conference room or pick up the report from the corner desk and place it in the conference room?

**Revision:** Put the report that is on the corner desk in the conference room.

This revision indicates that the report is on the corner desk.

The report should be placed on the corner desk in the conference room.

This revision means that the report is to be placed on the corner desk.

3. **Original Version:** Younger workers made delicious appetizers at the banquet.

The younger workers were probably not served as the appetizers. This is an example where we can assume what the writer meant even though the writer did not write clearly what was meant.

**Revision:** The younger workers prepared delicious appetizers for the banquet attendees.

## Conversational

**2. Original Version:** Please be advised that I am sending your materials pursuant to your request under separate cover and also inquiring today in regards to your August 10 Order #249. Thank you for the acknowledgement that you received it. Kindly let me know if the order was complete upon receipt of it. With reference to the aforementioned order, it was shipped August 4.

“Please be advised,” “pursuant to your request,” and “in regards to” are not conversational phrases.

**Revision:** You will receive your requested materials in a separate package. Also, was Order #249 (shipped August 4) complete?

**3. Original Version:** In accordance with your wishes for your ordering preference and notwithstanding the fact that you are changing the ordering procedure we have on file for you, it should be noted that we are hereby advising you that your next order will be shipped by Red Line Motor Freight.

“In accordance with,” “notwithstanding the fact,” “should be noted that,” and “hereby advising” are not conversational words for most of us.

**Revision:** As you requested, your next order will be sent by Red Line Motor Freight.

## Considerate

**1. Original Version:** I am writing to answer your questions about the survey I conducted by telephone on Saturday, September 19. You wanted to know what I asked and who was included in the survey. I questioned a few customers in two groups—those who are new and those who are long-time customers. The purpose of the survey was to find out why the new customers became our customers and why the long-time customers remain customers. I also wanted to find out what they know about our competition and if the location of the customer made any difference in how long they've been our customer. Other relevant information that I thought would be important is if they like for our representatives to leave voicemail and if our hours are convenient.

The reader is faced with a long paragraph loaded with lots of information that is difficult to separate.

**Revision:** The following data was collected from the telephone survey of both new and long-time customers I conducted on Saturday, September 19:

- Reasons customers choose to do business with us
- How we rank against our competition
- If our hours and location are convenient
- The preferred method of contact

## 2. Original Version:

**TO:** All employees

**FROM:** Jami Hulen, Supervisor JH

**DATE:** (current date)

**SUBJECT:** Company Absenteeism

On August 8, the Human Resource Department mailed questionnaires (copy attached) to the supervisors of each of the ten departments. Nine of the supervisors have returned the questionnaires. The received responses are being tabulated and analyzed. After the committee thoroughly studies the results, it will then recommend how to help improve attendance. All employees will receive copies of this report at least one week before the September meeting so everyone will have an opportunity to think about the recommendations and have input at the meeting. Mary, Jon, and Alan will present the analyses at the annual employee meeting on (include date).

The writer was not considerate of the reader's time, first because the subject line does not clearly identify the memo's content. Second, two different ideas are included, but the writer has put both into one paragraph.

**Revision:**

**TO:** All employees

**FROM:** Jami Hulen, Supervisor JH

**DATE:** (current date)

**SUBJECT:** Progress on and Plans for Study of Company Absenteeism

Here is the most current information on the company absenteeism study.

### Questionnaire Process

On August 8, the Human Resource Department mailed questionnaires (copy attached) to the supervisors of each of the ten departments. Nine of the supervisors have returned the questionnaires.

The responses are being tabulated and analyzed.

### Future Plans

After the committee thoroughly studies the results, it will then recommend how to help improve attendance. All employees will receive copies of this report at least one week before the September meeting so everyone will have an opportunity to think about the recommendations and have input at the meeting.

Mary, Jon, and Alan will present the analyses at the annual employee meeting on (current date)

**3. Original Version:** The building was inspected last month by our VP, and it exceeded the minimum requirement we need for a new storage facility. Ryan said to make certain that everyone on the committee knows that our minimum requirement is 10,000 sq. ft. and that the Maxum Building is 12,000 sq. ft. Other items on the agenda for the next meeting are overtime pay, which needs to be reduced, and parking lot upgrades. Ryan mentioned that the building inspector will give a report on the Maxum Building's condition. The parking lot will get new security lights by the end of the quarter.

This message does not begin with the purpose, has more than one idea, jumps back and forth between ideas, and does not organize the information into logical categories.

**Revision:**

### VP Ryan's Agenda Items for Next Month's Meeting

- **Maxum Building Update:** The Maxum Building, which is being considered for a new storage location, is 12,000 sq. ft., 2,000 sq. ft. more than our minimum requirement. The building inspector will report on his findings about the building's condition.
- **Overtime Pay:** It will be reduced.
- **Parking Lot:** New security lights that will be installed by the end of the quarter.

## Correct

**1. Original Version:** All along the production line employees have expressed a need for more frequent breaks.

The reader doesn't know what the sentence means without the correct punctuation. If the comma is inserted after All along, the message is different from the comma being inserted after line.

**Revision:** All along, the production line employees have expressed a need for more frequent breaks. (Meaning they have always wanted the breaks.)

All along the production line, employees have expressed a need for more frequent breaks. (Meaning the production line employees are the ones that want the breaks.)

**2. Original Version:** Here are a list off the attendees; Susanna Arreaza, Doris Belmont, Pam Burin, Steve Corey, James Medinna, Kev Peary, Melanie White, and Lou Waters. The list is is complete. If you want too request more information about the class. Please call 1.800.555.520.

This example has problems with subject-verb agreement, look-alike words, punctuation, proofreading, homonyms, and sentence structure.

**Revision:** Here is a list of the attendees: Susanna Arreaza, Doris Belmont, Pam Burin, Steve Corey, James Medinna, Kev Peary, Melanie White, and Lou Waters. The list is complete. If you want to request more information about the class, please call 1.800.555.5206.

**3. Original Version:** Everyone brought their lunch to the meeting. The consensus was that its not going to rain so the meeting can be held in the park Sam said that he will make sure everybody know where to park.

This example contains a run-on sentence and confuses the homonyms "its" and "it's."

**Revision:** Everyone brought his/her lunch for the meeting. The consensus was that it's not going to rain, so the meeting can be held in the park. Sam said that he will make sure everybody knows where to park.

## Courteous

**1. Original Version:** You can't use that door even if it is closer to the parking lot because company policy says that door is to be used only by guests. I can't grant you an exception. You certainly should know by now which door is the employee door!

This example contains negative words ("can't" and "company policy") and uses a preachy tone.

**Revision:** Door A is reserved for guests only. Door B is always available for all employees.

**2. Original Version:** If you had followed the instructions that came with the product, you wouldn't be requesting another one to replace the broken one you returned. Even though you didn't follow the directions, we are going to send you a replacement.

This example uses a preachy tone and lingers on the negative, but it also places blame on the customer.

**Revision:** You will receive your replacement, along with an updated instruction manual, by Friday. Page 13 diagrams the steps to using your product to ensure that it provides years of dependable service.

**3. Original Version:** We are going to accept your request to participate in your donation efforts. We think that helping the homeless in our community is something that shouldn't be ignored. Because we don't have enough in our budget for the rest of the year, we can't give what you have requested. We hope that this \$10,000 will give us the publicity that we are a Silver Donor as listed on your information sheet.

Again, the writer is using a negative tone. Phrases like "shouldn't be," "we don't," and "we can't" aren't necessary.

**Revision:** Here is our \$10,000 Silver Donor donation to help your organization's worthwhile efforts to help the homeless in our community.

## Concise

**2. Original Version:** We've noticed some of you struggling to read the information on the billing ticket. We've experimented with different positions and have found that ideally, it would be best to put the billing ticket just below the screen and above the keyboard.

This example contains extra (and obvious) information.

**Revision:** The best location for easily reading the billing ticket is between the screen and keyboard.

**3. Original Version:** We are writing to inform you that the purpose of this letter is to indicate that if we are unable to mutually benefit from our seller/buyer relationship, with satisfactory payment, then we have no alternative other than to sever the relationship. In other words, unless the account is handled in 45 days, we will have to change your terms to a permanent COD basis. Due to the fact that your account is past due for the amount of \$1,500, the privilege of buying on credit will in the future no longer be available because we can longer provide that service until your unpaid balance is paid.

**107 words**

The example contains a lot of words that don't add any meaning. "We are writing to inform you"? Well, of course.

**Revision:** Please pay your \$1,500 account balance by (date) to keep your credit account open. After that date, your account will be permanent COD.

**23 words**

## Complete

**1. Original Version:** You are invited to be one of the first guests at our new store. An open house will be held from 4:00-6:00 p.m. on Friday (include exact date). Hors d'oeuvres will be served and tours will be available for you to view the new facilities.

Where is the new store located?

**Revision:** You are invited to be one of the first guests at our new store, located on the northwest corner of Grimes and Smith, 9001 N. Grimes. An open house will be held from 4:00-6:00 p.m. on Friday (include exact date). Hors d'oeuvres will be served and tours will be available for you to view the new facilities.

**2. Original Version:** You will need to contact the team leader who has just been assigned to the recruiting team. The leader will tell you when and where the next meeting is and the agenda. Let the team leader know that you have been notified of this change.

Who is the new team leader? How should he be contacted? When is the information needed?



**Revision:** You will need to contact Jim Bain, the new team leader for the recruiting team. Jim will notify everyone when and where the next meeting is and provide the agenda. Let Jim know at company@our company.org by 5:00 p.m. Friday that you have been notified of this change.

**3. Original Version:** If you want to take advantage of the opportunity to earn the preferred customer status and reap all the benefits, be certain you have purchased the required amount, have submitted the required forms on line, and have activated your new card if you have received it.

This example raises a lot of questions. What are the benefits of this status? What is the required purchase amount? Where can I find the required forms? What is I haven't received my new card?

**Revision:** You will have the preferred customer status and be able to have advance notice of all sales and save 20% on your total purchase, as soon as you have

- purchased a total of \$500
- completed the forms at preferredcustomer@beststore.com
- activated your new card, which should arrive by (date)

## Concrete

**1. Original Version:** As we discussed, I needed to work to the best of my abilities, and I think I improved. I called on more customers and made more sales. I was on time almost always for my appointments and remembered to bring extra forms.

This example contains vague words that don't project confidence, such as "I think" and "almost."

**Revision:** Based on the performance improvements you recommended, I achieved the following:

- Called on 14 customers this month (8 last month)
- Sales increased to \$7,234 from \$5,670
- Met clients at scheduled time except for Mr. Axsom. (10 minutes late because of traffic backup and I let him know I would be late)
- Had a complete supply of all forms customers requested.

**2. Original Version:** I asked several employees how they felt about the new plan, and many of them said they were opposed to some of the provisions. I learned which provisions they were opposed to through a survey. Therefore, it shouldn't be approved.

This isn't a very convincing argument. Exactly how many employees are opposed to the new plan?

**Revision:** Results of the survey showed that eighty percent of our employees are opposed to Provisions A, G, and P. I recommend that we postpone approving the new plan.

**3. Original Version:** As you requested, here is some input about how our company is doing. I like some of the things our company is doing, but other things are having a negative impact on employee morale. Some of us think that an employee suggestion box would be beneficial, and most of my department wants to help with the upcoming company picnic to bond outside of the office environment.

Again, this examples uses words that are vague about the quality and quantity of the feedback, e.g. "some input," "some other things," and "some of us think."

**Revision:** Here is your requested feedback on company work environment:

- Positives: Company picnic for employee bonding
- More overtime opportunities to increase pay
- Opportunities: Increase company-sponsored events
- Provide an employee suggestion box
- Offer chance to help with department functions

## Credible

**1. Original Version:** You will probably be turning in your resignation because you said if you didn't get the promotion, you would quit. I just heard that Janie got the promotion and will start in the new position before too long.

This is a message the writer might want to think hard about sending. Remember to always question the source of your information before passing it along. Or, better yet, wait for the official announcement.

**Revision:** VP Andersen just announced that beginning January 1, (year), Janie Abitt will be the new office manager for our company.

**2. Original Version:** Most of our clients think that we should add more company services. One of the services mentioned is a delivery service. I know someone I can contact who provides that service and have already contacted him.

Ask the right questions—which or how many clients? What services? Whom do you know (a brother-in-law who is out of work?), and why did you contact them without authorization?

**Revision:** Based on a client survey, seventy percent of our customers would use a delivery service. Lynn Smelter, owner of Smelter's Delivery Service, which has been in business for over 20 years, has agreed to give us detailed information by the end of the month.

**3. Original Version:** Mary said that she knows a better method for some of our company's processes that someone told her about. She said that they worked great for one of our competitors.

Ask the right questions. Which Mary--only one in the company? Which company processes? Someone that worked great? Which competitors?

**Revision:** Mary Herman in Accounting recently attended a How to Improve Accounting seminar, sponsored by Ernst & Young. Wright the Wrong software can reduce the amount of payroll correction time by 25%. Company R, our leading competitor, has used it successfully for six months.

# Coherent

1. **Original Version:** A new process for correcting pay check errors will begin Monday. Reminder: Have you signed up for the company bowling league yet? The landscaping on the north side will begin next month.

This example contains three different ideas with nothing to connect.

## Revision:

Reminders:

1. A new process for correcting paycheck errors will begin Monday.
2. The company bowling league signup ends Wednesday.
3. The landscaping on the north side will begin next month.

3. **Original Version:** At the next company-wide sponsored meeting, refreshments will be catered by Rit's Catering Service. How many employees will represent your department? Next week we have a group of high school students coming to tour our facilities, and we need a couple volunteers to act as guides for the students. Friday is the last date to give input on our company's proposed dress policy or to suggest what refreshments we should have for our meeting.

This example contains five unconnected ideas.

## Revision:

Please email your input on the following items by Friday (give exact date) to [jswills@company.org](mailto:jswills@company.org):

1. How many employees from your department will attend the company-wide meeting on (date?)
2. What is your preference of refreshments from Rit's Catering for the meeting?
3. Are you available to act as a volunteer guide for a group of 50 high school students on (give date)?
4. What is your input on the proposed dress policy?