

Word Choice in Business

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

A well-worded document makes a positive impression on your reader, whereas poorly-chosen words can harm business relationships. Use the following principles to make a positive impression.

Be Concise

A few precise words are more powerful than a string of vague words (see *Economy in Writing* handout).

Avoid Unnecessary Phrases.

Bad Example	Suggestion
Acknowledging your . . .	(Avoid this phrase at the beginning of sentences.)
Answering your . . .	(Avoid this phrase at the beginning of sentences.)
Permit us to state . . .	(Avoid this phrase. Just state it.)
This letter is to inform you . . .	(Just give the information.)

Eliminate Redundant Words.

Bad Example	Suggestion
agreeable and satisfactory	(Use only one of the words.)
consensus of opinion	consensus
my personal opinion	my opinion
refer back to	refer to
thought and consideration	(Use only one of the words.)
true facts	facts
above-numbered policy	your policy; this policy
are of the opinion that	believe
costs the sum of	costs
for the purpose of learning	to learn
in spite of the fact that	although
in the city of	in

Replace Unclear Phrases.

Bad Example	Suggestion
a large number of	450; approximately 2000
as discussed above	(Be specific.)
in due course; in due time	(Give the specific time.)

Avoid Clichés

Bad Example	Suggestion
as a matter of fact	in fact,
as per your request	as you requested
at the present time	now
each and every one of us	each of us; everyone; all of us
feel free to	please
if and when	(Use just one of the words.)
in this day and age	today; currently
in the event that	if
take this opportunity	(Avoid this phrase.)
we are of the opinion that	we believe
with reference to	about

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Avoid Sounding Ostentatious

Never use large words or legal phrases just to impress your reader.

Bad Example	Suggestion
at which time	when
attached please find/ attached hereto	the attached brochure
the copy enclosed herewith	the enclosed copy
hold in abeyance	postpone
inasmuch	since
pending receipt of	until we receive
please be advised that	(Avoid this expression.)
pursuant to our agreement	as we agreed
subsequent to	after

Use Professional Language

Avoid slang and contractions, and always use language that is gender-inclusive.

Bad Example	Problem	Suggestion
I'd appreciate	Unprofessional	I would appreciate
Every doctor should know his patients personally.	Not gender-neutral	Doctors should know their patients personally. OR Every doctor should know his or her patients personally.

Use Caution with Jargon

Use jargon (terminology specific to a field) only when it is necessary and the reader will understand it.

BAD EXAMPLE	PROBLEM	SUGGESTION
bubble economy	Economic jargon	Avoid jargon unless you are certain the reader will know its meaning.
cold calling	Business jargon	
Graphical User Interface	Computer jargon	
multilateral action	Political jargon	

Be Sensitive to Your Reader

Avoid terms that might be construed as blaming your recipient.

Bad Example	Problem	Suggestion
insist and demand	Insensitive	(Avoid words that come across as demanding.)
You failed to enclose	Negative	Please enclose
You neglected to send	Negative	We did not receive

Write with Confidence

Show confidence through your words, but avoid anything that might be perceived as arrogant.

Bad Example	Problem	Suggestion
I hope and trust	Lack of confidence	(Avoid words that show doubt.)
I know I am just one of many similar applicants, but . . .	Lack of confidence	(Avoid statements that do not portray confidence in your unique abilities.)
As I am sure you can see, I am the best applicant for this position because . . .	Arrogant	I am well-qualified for this position because...