

3



COMPOSING BUSINESS MESSAGES

Writing is somewhat like creating an oil painting. First, you need a purpose, a reason for completing the painting. Second, you need a plan for achieving the purpose. Third, you need paints and brushes. Fourth, you need the artistic talent and skill to make the painting an impressive reality.

When writing, you also have a purpose, a plan, and tools, but not all writing is alike. Consider the writing style used in five general writing domains—casual, creative, academic, business, and technical. How you write a casual note to a friend differs from how you would write a creative story; and how you write an academic paper for your professor differs from how you would write a business analysis or technical procedure. The writing principles included in this chapter pertain primarily to business and technical situations.



Figure 3.1 Composing a business message is somewhat like painting a picture—it requires a purpose, plan, tools, and skill.

Chapter 3 is broken into two main sections. The first section includes instruction about five attributes of well-written documents, as well as five attributes of well-written paragraphs. The second section explains the OABC writing pattern and provides instruction on six different types of messages you will encounter in your profession. After studying both sections of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Explain the five C attributes of effective documents.
- Describe five CLOUD attributes of well-written paragraphs.
- Describe the OABC message pattern and demonstrate how to write six different types of messages.

DOCUMENT AND PARAGRAPH ATTRIBUTES

As you compose, strive to make your writing clear, complete, correct, considerate, and convincing. Also, as you compose each paragraph in professional documents, consider the aspects of cohesion, length, order, unity, and development. Given these ten aspects of writing good documents and paragraphs, you can see that composing effective documents can be a somewhat complex process. However, guidelines are explained in the following sections to help you through the process.

FIVE C'S OF EFFECTIVE DOCUMENTS

The five C principles apply regardless of the type of message or document you are composing. A long report and a short text message both need to be clear, appropriately complete, correct, considerate, and convincing. Further, the scope, length, formality, and subject matter might vary, but the five C's still apply.

CLEAR. Make your message clear. After reading your message, the audience should understand what you have written and what they should know or do after reading your message. Various tactics can enhance the clarity of messages, including the following six.

1. **Chunk the content.** Break the text it into small bite-size chunks. Large masses of text are overwhelming and difficult to process. Small chunks are much easier.
2. **Write coherently.** Arrange the text as a logical chain of thoughts, ideas, or steps, from the first sentence to the last. Thought A must lead to thought B, thought B to thought C, and so forth. The opposite of coherence is incoherence—an illogical thought arrangement that doesn't flow logically or rationally.
3. **Use appropriate words.** Choose words that the audience will understand and words that have an appropriate level of precision. First, use words that are readily understood by society in general. Be especially careful with word choice when writing to people for whom English is not their native language. Prefer simpler, more common words and expressions, such as “analyze,” rather than “conduct an investigation.” Also, as

from the conference. I would really appreciate it. Please give me a call when you get this message so I can answer any questions you might have. Thanks. Bye.

Agendas provide multiple benefits. Using an agenda helps you write more well-organized messages, and more well-organized messages are easier for your audience to read. Further, when you request a response, your audience will often organize their response in a similar well-organized manner.

BODY. The body of a message presents the content identified in the outlining process and announced in the agenda. For instance, if the agenda forecasts three body elements, the body provides content about those three elements, as in the OABC example in Figure 3.5. If the agenda forecasts information about two release dates for new software upgrades, the body would contain two segments explaining the products to be released on the two dates mentioned in the agenda.

To: Jackson Millard

From: Nora Stewart, Director of IT Services

Date: October 3, 20XX

Re: POS SYSTEM INSTALLATION

We are scheduled to install your new POS terminal system at your site on the weekend of August 24. Here are three important items for you to address in preparation for this installation.

First, we need complete access to your system from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Sunday August 25. Even though the installation will likely take only three or four hours, please plan to have a knowledgeable employee at your store during that complete 12-hour period.

Second, please close all files, log out, and power down your system when your office closes on the evening of August 25. Your system should be ready for business as usual on Monday morning at 8 a.m.

Third, we will provide training for your store employees from 7-8 a.m. on Monday, August 26. Please have all employees present for that one-hour period.

I will contact you again on Thursday, August 22, to confirm that everything is ready for the installation.

If you have any questions, please let me know as soon as possible.

Nora

Opening

Agenda

Three main body elements

Closing

Figure 3.5 OABC messages are well structured and easy to follow.

impressed that you have taken time to express these kind words. Never underestimate the power of relationship-building messages. Make a habit of reaching out in this manner throughout your life.

James,

Thank you for taking time to review my slideshow last week. I gave my presentation on Friday, and several people commented on how much the slides helped to get my message across. I always appreciate your wisdom and experience that you are so willing to share.

Adriana

Figure 3.6 Thank-you notes are thoughtful expressions that strengthen relationships.

Occasionally you might need to write a letter of apology for inappropriate behavior or a mistake. If an apology is needed, state the apology sincerely, make restitution the best can, and indicate what action you are taking, or will take, to make sure the problem doesn't happen again.

Lety, I'm very sorry for missing our 10 a.m. team meeting this morning. For some reason, I failed to read your email about the meeting and scheduled another appointment at that time. I will try to be more diligent in checking all my messages in the future. Tracy shared with me her meeting notes and reviewed the meeting highlights with me this afternoon.

GOOD-NEWS MESSAGES. Good-news messages are written for many situations, such as announcing promotions, expressing congratulations for achievements, and making job offers. Good-news messages are easy to write because you are providing information the reader will be happy to receive. When writing these messages, put the main idea at the beginning.

1. **Opening.** Begin with the good news.
2. **Agenda.** As needed, insert any of the agenda types as appropriate.
3. **Body.** Provide additional relevant details related to the good news.
4. **Closing.** Conclude with a cordial comment, a reference back to the good news, or other appropriate statement.

Here are two short samples of good-news messages. Another good-news message is shown in Figure 3.7.

logic as necessary, such as, “If A happens, do B, else (or otherwise) do C.” Wherever possible, front-load the sentences, putting the most important information at the beginning of each sentence. Number items for easy reference. Use headings and other font variations so readers can skim your writing and find the information they are seeking.

Include visuals appropriately so people can both see and read instructions. Use callouts to point to specific parts of the image. For example, take a screen shot and then create a callout arrow to point to a specific icon. As appropriate, create videos to demonstrate the process in action (see Chapter 11).

After writing the instructions, perform the task yourself, and then perform usability testing—ask four or five other people read your instructions and perform the task—to make sure the instructions are clear and accurate.

To illustrate, assume that you work for the mortgage department of a credit union. People have asked you how much your credit union will lend them. You decide to write a set of instructions people can follow by themselves to determine that amount (see Figure 3.9). Your instructions can then be posted on the credit union’s website.

How to Calculate Your Maximum Monthly House Payment

What is needed

Before performing this calculation, you will need a calculator or spreadsheet, your monthly net income, and the total amount of all your monthly payments for other debts, such as car payments, credit card payments, student loans, and so forth.

1. Using your calculator, enter your *annual income*.
2. Divide your annual income by 12. This yields your *monthly income*.
3. Multiply your monthly income by .45. This is the *maximum debt amount* the financial institution will allow you to carry.
4. Add all other monthly debt payments you must make (e.g., car payment + credit card payment + student loans + other).
5. Subtract your “other monthly debt” payments from the “maximum debt amount.” The result is the “maximum monthly house payment.”

Specific steps

The following calculation demonstrates this process:

	A	B	C	D	E
1		\$50,000	Annual income		
2	50000 / 12	\$ 4,167	Monthly income		
3	4167 * .45	\$ 1,875	Maximum debt amount		
4		\$ 715	Other monthly debt		
5	1875 - 715	\$ 1,160	Maximum monthly house payment		

Visual

Figure 3.9 Written instructions must be easy to understand and easy to follow.

EASY PERSUASION MESSAGES. With easy-persuasion messages, you request the reader to do something after reading your message, but your request requires only minor convinc-