THE BUSINESS WRITER'S HANDBOOK

Gerald J. Alred

Charles T. Brusaw

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The Five-Way Access System

The five-way access system of *The Business Writer's Handbook* provides readers with multiple ways of retrieving information:

1. Alphabetically Organized Entries

The alphabetically organized entries with color tabs enable readers to find information quickly. Within the entries, terms shown as **links** refer to other entries that contain definitions of key concepts or further information on related topics.

2. Contents by Topic

The complete "Contents by Topic," on the inside front cover, groups the entries into categories and serves as a quick reference for finding all topics covered in the book. The "Contents by Topic" allows a writer focusing on a specific task or problem to locate helpful entries; it is also useful for instructors who want to correlate the *Handbook* with standard textbooks or their own course materials. The list of "Commonly Misused Words and Phrases" (see page 625) extends this topical key by listing all the usage entries in the book.

3. Checklist of the Writing Process

The "Checklist of the Writing Process" helps readers to reference all writing-process–related entries.

4. Comprehensive Index

The new user-friendly Index lists all the topics covered in the book—including subtopics and model documents—within the main entries in the alphabetical arrangement.

5. Model Documents and Figures by Topic

The list of "Model Documents and Figures by Topic" (see page 627) makes it easier to find the abundant real-world examples and sample documents throughout the text that provide models for effective business communication.

Contents by Topic

Use this list as a quick reference for finding entries by topic. To search this book in more detail, see the Index.

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The Business
Writer's Handbook

About the Authors

Gerald J. Alred is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, where he is a teaching-award recipient and an adviser to the Professional Writing Program. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and several standard bibliographies on business and technical communication, and he is a founding member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. He is a recipient of the prestigious Jay R. Gould Award for "profound scholarly and textbook contributions to the teaching of business and technical writing."

Charles T. Brusaw served as a faculty member at NCR Corporation's Management College, where he developed and taught courses in professional writing, editing, and presentation skills for the corporation worldwide. Previously, he worked in advertising, technical writing, public relations, and curriculum development. He has been a communications consultant, an invited speaker at academic conferences, and a teacher of business writing at Sinclair Community College.

Walter E. Oliu served as Chief of the Publishing Services Branch at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, where he managed the agency's printing, graphics, editing, and publishing programs as well as daily operations of the agency's public Web site. He has taught at Miami University of Ohio, Slippery Rock State University, Montgomery College, and George Mason University.

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Preface

Like previous editions, the eleventh edition of *The Business Writer's Handbook* is a comprehensive, easy-access guide to all aspects of business communication in the classroom and on the job. It places writing in a real-world context with quick reference to hundreds of business writing topics and scores of model documents and visuals. Anticipating the needs of today's professionals and job seekers, the eleventh edition has updated coverage of the job search based on the best expert advice available to help both students and new professionals secure positions in today's economy. This comprehensive *Handbook* is accompanied by LaunchPad Solo for *The Business Writer's Handbook,* offering extensive online resources (including digital document models and video tutorials) that can be packaged with the text at no additional cost.

Helpful Features

The ESL Tip boxes throughout the book, updated based on guidance from field experts, offer special advice for multilingual writers. In addition, the "Contents by Topic" on the inside front cover includes a list of entries—ESL Trouble Spots—that may be of particular interest to non-native speakers of English.

Digital Tip boxes throughout the book direct readers to specific, related resources in LaunchPad Solo. The Digital Tips in the book suggest ways to use technology to simplify complex tasks, such as writing and reviewing documents collaboratively or enhancing formal reports digitally. Expanded Digital Tips in LaunchPad Solo offer video tutorials for completing each task.

"Ethics Notes" throughout the text highlight the ethical concerns in today's business world and offer advice for dealing with these concerns. A thorough discussion of copyright and plagiarism clarifies what plagiarism is in the digital age and highlights the ethical aspects of using and documenting sources appropriately.

"Professionalism Notes" throughout the text cover professional behavior, guidelines for online and interpersonal communication for both the workplace and the classroom, and tips on preparing for important projects and presentations.

New to This Edition

Our focus in revising the *Handbook* for this edition has been on refining and updating existing entries and providing new coverage that is

especially relevant for securing a job in today's economy and for navigating the technologies needed to succeed on the job. We have made the following additions and improvements:

- **A new entry on social media** helps students effectively and carefully select, join, and use appropriate social-media platforms, depending on the organization they work for and its aims.

- **A new entry on infographics** describes the most effective use of these complex visuals and provides a step-by-step checklist for creating them.

- **A new entry on document management** describes processes and organizing principles for managing, tracking, and quickly retrieving digital documents within a document archive.

- **A thorough updating of the job-search and résumé entries** provides current advice on how to network using professional and social media and offers many tips on developing application materials that will spark the interest of prospective employers.

- **Updated coverage of copyrights, patents, and trademarks** prepares students to delineate the differences among them and to understand what is necessary when seeking to protect themselves or use the works of others.

- **Updated advice on documenting sources** provides current guidelines for following APA, *CMS*, and MLA styles.

- **New and updated Digital Tips** throughout the book advise students on relevant skills, including using technologies to schedule and conduct meetings, digitally enhancing formal reports, and using wikis and other collaborative software to circulate and revise documents. Online video tutorials expand on the tips in print, providing students with step-by-step instruction.

- **LaunchPad Solo for *The Business Writer's Handbook*** provides engaging online resources and new ways to get the most out of your course. Featuring digital document models, video tutorials, and expanded Digital Tips, this customizable online course space allows you to assign and mix publisher-provided resources with yours. To package LaunchPad Solo for free, use ISBN 978-1-319-02413-0. Students who buy used books can purchase access to LaunchPad Solo for *The Business Writer's Handbook* at ***macmillanhighered.com/alredhandbooks11e***.

- **Now available in popular e-book formats.** Students can purchase *The Business Writer's Handbook* in popular e-book formats for computers, tablets, and e-readers. For details, log in to ***macmillanhighered.com/ebooks***.

How to Use This Book

The *Business Writer's Handbook* is made up of alphabetically organized entries with color tabs. Within each entry, underlined cross-references—for example, **proposals**—link readers to related entries that contain further information. Many entries present advice and guidelines in the form of convenient "Writer's Checklists."

The *Handbook*'s alphabetical organization enables readers to find specific topics quickly and easily; however, readers with general questions will discover several alternate ways to find information in the book.

• **Contents by Topic.** The complete "Contents by Topic" on the inside front cover groups the alphabetical entries into topic categories. This topical key can help a writer focusing on a specific task or problem browse all related entries; it can also help instructors correlate the *Handbook* with standard textbooks or their own course materials.

• **Commonly Misused Words and Phrases.** The list of "Commonly Misused Words and Phrases" on pages 625–26 extends the "Contents by Topic" by listing all of the usage entries, which appear in *italics* throughout the book.

• **Model Documents and Figures by Topic.** The topically organized list of model documents and figures on the inside back cover makes it easier to browse the book's most commonly referenced sample documents and visuals to find specific examples of business writing genres.

• **Checklist of the Writing Process.** The checklist on pages xxi–xxii helps readers reference key entries in a sequence useful for planning and carrying out a writing project.

• **Comprehensive Index.** The user-friendly Index lists all the topics covered in the book—including subtopics and model documents—within the main entries in the alphabetical arrangement.

Acknowledgments

For their invaluable comments and suggestions for this edition of *The Business Writer's Handbook*, we thank the following reviewers who responded to our questionnaires: Jeanne Allison, University of Missouri–St. Louis; Stevens Amidon, Indiana University–Purdue University, Fort Wayne; Joyce Anderson, Millersville University; Carol Davis, California State University, Monterey Bay; Greg Brecht, University of South Florida St. Petersburg; Christine Cranford, North Carolina State University; Sally Gearhart, Santa Rosa Junior College; Sonia Khatchadourian, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Tamara Kuzmenkov, Tacoma Community College; Melodee Lambert, Salt Lake Community College;

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We especially thank Richard C. Hay, Founder and CEO of Twenty Six Design, LLC, for consulting on technology-related issues and developing an entry on document management. In addition, we are very much indebted to the many reviewers and contributors not named here who helped us shape the first ten editions.

We wish to thank Bedford/St. Martin's for supporting this book, especially Denise Wydra, former President, and Karen Henry, Editorial Director, English and Music. We are grateful to Andrea Cava, Publishing Services Manager at Bedford/St. Martin's, and to Herb Nolan of Books By Design for their patience and expert guidance. We thank Amanda Legee for her organization and attention to detail. Finally, we wish to thank developmental editors Alyssa Demirjian and Kate Mayhew for their editorial direction on this always-challenging project.

We offer heartfelt thanks to Barbara Brusaw for her patience and time spent preparing the manuscript for the first five editions. We also gratefully acknowledge the ongoing contributions of many students and instructors at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Finally, special thanks go to Janice Alred for her many hours of help in coordination and for continuing to hold everything together.

G. J. A.
C. T. B.
W. E. O.

Five Steps to Successful Writing

Successful writing on the job is not the product of inspiration, nor is it merely the spoken word converted to print; it is the result of knowing how to structure information using both text and design to achieve an intended purpose for a clearly defined audience. The best way to ensure that your writing will succeed—whether it is a proposal, a résumé, a Web page, or any other document—is to approach writing using the following steps:

1. Preparation
2. Research
3. Organization
4. Writing
5. Revision

You will no doubt need to follow those steps consciously at first. The same is true the first time you use new software, interview a job candidate, or chair a committee meeting. With practice, the steps become nearly automatic. That is not to suggest that writing becomes easy. It does not. However, the easiest and most efficient way to write effectively is to do it systematically.

As you master the five steps, keep in mind that they are interrelated and often overlap. For example, your readers' needs and your purpose, which you determine in step 1, will affect decisions you make in subsequent steps. You may also need to retrace steps. When you conduct research, for example, you may realize that you need to revise your initial impression of the document's purpose and audience. Similarly, when you begin to organize in step 3, you may discover the need to return to research (step 2) to gather more information.

The time required for each step varies with different writing tasks. When writing an informal memo, for example, you might follow the first three steps (preparation, research, and organization) by simply listing the points in the order you want to cover them. In such situations, you gather and organize information mentally as you consider your purpose and audience. For a formal report, the first three steps require well-organized research, careful note-taking, and detailed outlining. For a routine e-mail message to a coworker, the first four steps merge as you type the information onto the screen. In short, the five steps expand, contract, and at times must be repeated to fit the complexity or context of the writing task.

Dividing the writing process into steps is especially useful when you are writing as a part of a team. In that case, you typically divide work among team members, keep track of a project, and save time by not duplicating efforts. When you collaborate, you can use e-mail to share text and other files, suggest improvements to each other's work, and generally keep everyone informed of your progress as you follow the steps in the writing process.

Preparation

Writing, like most professional tasks, requires solid **preparation**.* In fact, adequate preparation is as important as **writing a draft**. In preparation for writing, your goal is to accomplish the following four major tasks:

- Establish your primary **purpose**.
- Assess your **audience** (or readers) and the **context**.
- Determine the **scope** of your coverage.
- Select the appropriate medium. See **selecting the medium**.

Establishing Your Purpose.   To establish your primary purpose, simply ask yourself what you want your readers to know, to believe, or to be able to do after they have finished reading what you have written. Be precise. Often a writer states a purpose so broadly that it is almost useless. A purpose such as "to report on possible locations for a new research facility" is too general. However, "to compare the relative advantages of Paris, Singapore, and San Francisco as possible locations for a new research facility so that top management can choose the best location" is a purpose statement that can guide you throughout the writing process. In addition to your primary purpose, consider possible secondary purposes for your document. For example, a secondary purpose of the research-facility report might be to make corporate executive readers aware of the staffing needs of the new facility so that they can ensure its smooth operation in whichever location is selected.

Assessing Your Audience and Context.   The next task is to assess your audience. Again, be precise and ask key questions. Who exactly is your reader? Do you have multiple readers? Who needs to see or to use the document? What are your readers' needs in relation to your subject? What are your readers' attitudes about the subject? (Are they skeptical? Supportive? Anxious? Bored?) What do your readers already know about the subject? Should you define basic terminology, or will such definitions merely bore, or even impede, your readers? Are you com-

*Throughout this book, words and phrases shown as links—underlined and set in an alternate typeface—refer to specific entries in the book.

municating with international readers and therefore dealing with issues inherent in **global communication**?

For the research-facility report, the readers are described as "top management." Who is included in that category? Will one of the people evaluating the report be the human resources manager? That person likely would be interested in the availability of qualified professionals as well as in the presence of training, housing, and even recreational facilities available to potential employees in each city. The purchasing manager would be concerned with available sources for needed materials. The marketing manager would give priority to a facility's proximity to the primary markets and transportation to important clients. The chief financial officer would want to know about land and building costs and about each city's tax structure. The chief executive officer would be interested in all this information and perhaps more. As in this example, many workplace documents have audiences composed of multiple readers. You can accommodate their needs through one of a number of approaches described in the entry **audience**.

Part of knowing the needs and interests of your readers is learning as much as you can about the context. Simply put, context is the environment or circumstances in which writers produce documents and within which readers interpret their meanings. Everything is written within a context, as illustrated in many entries and examples throughout this book. To determine the effect of context on the research-facility report, you might ask both specific and general questions about the situation and about your readers' backgrounds: Is this the company's first new facility, or has the company chosen locations for new facilities before? Have the readers visited all three cities? Have they already seen other reports on the three cities? What is the corporate culture in which your readers work, and what are its key values? What specific factors, such as competition, finance, and regulation, are recognized as important within the organization?

ESL TIP **for Considering Audiences**

In the United States, **conciseness**, **coherence**, and **clarity** characterize good writing. Make sure readers can follow your writing, and say only what is necessary to communicate your message. Of course, no writing style is inherently better than another, but to be a successful writer in any language, you must understand the cultural values that underlie the language in which you are writing. See also **awkwardness**, **global communication**, **plagiarism**, **plain language**, and **English as a second language**.

Throughout this book, we have included ESL Tip boxes like this one with information that may be particularly helpful to nonnative speakers of English. See the "Contents by Topic" on the inside front cover for listings of ESL Tips and ESL Trouble Spots, entries that may be of particular help to ESL writers.

Determining the Scope.   Determining your purpose and assessing your readers and context will help you decide what to include and what not to include in your writing. Those decisions establish the **scope** of your writing project. If you do not clearly define the scope, you will spend needless hours on research because you will not be sure what kind of information you need or even how much. Given the purpose and audience established for the report on facility locations, the scope would include such information as land and building costs, available labor force, cultural issues, transportation options, and proximity to suppliers. However, it probably would not include the early history of the cities being considered or their climate and geological features, unless those aspects were directly related to your particular business.

Selecting the Medium.   Finally, you need to determine the most appropriate medium for communicating your message. Professionals on the job face a wide array of options—from **e-mail**, **text messaging**, and videoconferencing to more traditional means like **letters**, **memos**, **reports**, and face-to-face **meetings**.

The most important considerations in selecting the appropriate medium are the audience and the purpose of the communication. For example, if you need to collaborate with someone to solve a problem or if you need to establish rapport with someone, written exchanges could be far less efficient than a phone call or a face-to-face meeting. However, if you need precise wording or you need to provide a record of a complex message, communicate in writing. If you need to make information that is frequently revised accessible to employees at a large company, the best choice might be to place the information on the company's intranet site. If reviewers need to make handwritten comments on a proposal, you may need to provide paper copies that can be faxed, or you may use collaborative software and insert comments electronically. The comparative advantages and primary characteristics of the most typical means of communication are discussed in **selecting the medium**.

Research

The only way to be sure that you can write about a complex subject is to thoroughly understand it. To do that, you must conduct adequate

research, whether that means conducting an extensive investigation for a major proposal — through interviewing, library and Internet research, careful **note-taking**, and **documenting sources** — or simply checking a reputable Web site and jotting down points before you send an e-mail message to a colleague.

Methods of Research.   Researchers frequently distinguish between primary and secondary research, depending on the types of sources consulted and the method of gathering information. *Primary research* refers to the gathering of raw data compiled from interviews, direct observation, surveys, experiments, **questionnaires**, and audio and video recordings, for example. In fact, direct observation and hands-on experience are the only ways to obtain certain kinds of information, such as the behavior of people and animals, certain natural phenomena, mechanical processes, and the operation of systems and equipment. *Secondary research* refers to gathering information that has been analyzed, assessed, evaluated, compiled, or otherwise organized into accessible form. Such forms or sources include books, articles, reports, Web documents, e-mail discussions, and brochures. Use the methods most appropriate to your needs, recognizing that some projects may require several types of research and that collaborative projects may require those research tasks to be distributed among team members.

Sources of Information.   As you conduct research, keep in mind all the sources of information that are available to you:

- Your own knowledge and that of your colleagues
- The knowledge of people outside your workplace, gathered through **interviewing for information**
- Internet sources, including Web sites, directories, archives, and discussion groups
- Library resources, including databases and indexes of articles as well as books and reference works
- Printed and electronic sources in the workplace, such as brochures, memos, e-mail, and Web documents

The amount of research you will need to do depends on the scope of your project.

Organization

Without organization, the material gathered during your research will be incoherent to your readers. To organize information effectively, you need to determine the best way to structure your ideas; that is, you must choose a primary **method of development**.

Methods of Development.   To choose the development method best suited to your document, consider your subject, your readers' needs, and your purpose. An appropriate method will help focus your information and make it easy for readers to follow your presentation.

For example, if you were writing instructions for assembling office equipment, you might naturally present the steps of the process in the order readers should perform them: the **sequential method of development**. If you were writing about the history of an organization, your account might naturally go from the beginning to the present: the **chronological method of development**. If your subject naturally lends itself to a certain method of development, use it—do not attempt to impose another method on it.

Often you will need to combine methods of development. For example, a persuasive brochure for a charitable organization might combine a specific-to-general method of development with a **cause-and-effect method of development**. That is, you could begin with persuasive case histories of individual people in need and then move to general information about the positive effects of donations on recipients.

Outlining.   Once you have chosen a method of development, you are ready to prepare an outline. **Outlining** breaks large or complex subjects into manageable parts. It also enables you to emphasize key points by placing them in the positions of greatest importance. By structuring your thinking at an early stage, a well-developed outline ensures that your document will be complete and logically organized, allowing you to focus exclusively on writing when you begin the rough draft. An outline can be especially helpful for maintaining a collaborative writing team's focus throughout a large project. However, even a short letter or memo needs the logic and structure that an outline provides, whether the outline exists in your mind, on-screen, or on paper.

At this point, consider **layout and design** elements that will be helpful to your readers and appropriate to your subject and purpose. For example, if **visuals** such as photographs or tables will be useful, this is a good time to think about where they may be deployed and what kinds of visual elements will be effective, especially if they need to be prepared by someone else while you write and revise the draft. The outline can also suggest where **headings**, **lists**, and other special design features may be useful.

Writing

When you have established your purpose, your readers' needs, and your scope, and you have completed your research and your outline, you will be well prepared to write a first draft. Expand your outline into **paragraphs**, without worrying about **grammar**, **usage**, or **punctuation**. Writing and revising are different activities; refinements come with **revision**.

Write the rough draft, concentrating entirely on converting your outline into sentences and paragraphs. You might try writing as though you were explaining your subject to a reader sitting across from you. Do not worry about a good opening. Just start. Do not be concerned in the rough draft about exact **word choice** unless it comes quickly and easily—concentrate instead on ideas.

Even with good preparation, writing the draft remains a chore for many writers. The most effective way to get started and keep going is to use your outline as a map for your first draft. Do not wait for inspiration—you need to treat writing a draft as you would any on-the-job task. The entry **writing a draft** describes tactics used by experienced writers—discover which ones are best suited to you and your task.

Consider writing the **introduction** last because then you will know more precisely what is in the body of the draft. Your opening should announce the subject and give readers essential background information, such as the document's primary purpose. For longer documents, an introduction should serve as a frame into which readers can fit the detailed information that follows.

Finally, you will need to write a **conclusion** that ties the main ideas together and emphatically makes a final, significant point. The final point may be to recommend a course of action, make a prediction or a judgment, or merely summarize your main points—the way you conclude depends on the purpose of your writing and your readers' needs.

Revision

The clearer a finished piece of writing seems to the reader, the more effort the writer has likely put into its **revision**. If you have followed the steps of the writing process to this point, you will have a rough draft that needs to be revised. Revising, however, requires a different frame of mind than does writing the draft. During revision, be eager to find and correct faults and be honest. Be hard on yourself for the benefit of your readers. Read and evaluate the draft as if you were a reader seeing it for the first time.

Check your draft for accuracy, completeness, and effectiveness in achieving your purpose and meeting your readers' needs and expectations. Trim extraneous information: Your writing should give readers exactly what they need, but it should not burden them with unnecessary information or sidetrack them into loosely related subjects.

Do not try to revise for everything at once. Read your rough draft several times, each time looking for and correcting a different set of problems or errors. Concentrate first on larger issues, such as **unity** and **coherence**; save mechanical corrections, like **spelling** and punctuation, for later **proofreading**.

Finally, for important documents, consider having others review your writing and make suggestions for improvement. For collaborative writing, of course, team members must review each other's work on segments of the document as well as the final master draft. Use the "Checklist of the Writing Process" on pages xxi–xxii to guide you not only as you revise but also throughout the writing process. See also **ethics in writing**.

◖ PROFESSIONALISM NOTE   **Style Guides and Standards**   Organizations and professional associations often follow such guides as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, and *United States Government Printing Office Style Manual* to ensure consistency in their publications on issues of usage, format, and documentation. Because advice in such guides often varies from one guide to another, some organizations set their own standards for documents. Where such standards or specific style guides are recommended or required by regulations or policies, you should follow those style guidelines. For a selected list of style guides and standards, see *macmillanhigher.com /alredhandbooks11e* and select *Links for Handbook Entries*. ◗

Checklist of the Writing Process

This checklist arranges key entries of *The Business Writer's Handbook* according to the sequence presented in "Five Steps to Successful Writing," which begins on page xiii. This checklist is useful both for following the steps and for diagnosing writing problems.

✔ Construct effective **paragraphs**   379

✔ Use **quotations** and **paraphrasing**   460, 384

✔ Write an **introduction**   292

✔ Write a **conclusion**   105

✔ Choose a **title**   543

Revision   **500**

✔ Check for **unity** and **coherence**   551, 81

conciseness   103

pace   379

transition   547

✔ Check for **sentence variety**   519

emphasis   180

parallel structure   382

subordination   532

✔ Check for **clarity**   79

agreement   24

ambiguity   32

awkwardness   50

case   72

modifiers   347

pronoun reference   422

sentence faults   516

✔ Review mechanics and **punctuation**   450

abbreviations   2

capitalization   69

contractions   112

dates   129

italics   298

numbers   365

proofreading   427

spelling   529

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A

a / an

A and *an* are indefinite **articles** because the **noun** designated by the article is not a specific person, place, or thing but is one of a group.

▶ The insurance agent sold *a* policy.
[This is not a specific policy but an unnamed policy.]

Use *a* before words or abbreviations beginning with a consonant or consonant sound, including *y* or *w*.

▶ *A* cost estimate is available for your review.

▶ It was *a* historic event for the organization.
[*Historic* begins with the consonant *h*.]

▶ We were awarded *a* DMV contract.

▶ The year's activities are summarized in *a* one-page report.
[*One* begins with the consonant sound "wuh."]

Use *an* before words or abbreviations beginning with a vowel or a consonant with a vowel sound.

▶ He seems *an* unlikely candidate for the job.

▶ The applicant arrived *an* hour early.
[*Hour* begins with a silent *h*.]

▶ She received *an* SBA loan.
[*SBA* begins with a vowel sound "ess."]

Do not use unnecessary indefinite articles in a sentence.

▶ The meeting begins in *a* half *an* hour.
[Choose one article and eliminate the other.]

See also **adjectives**.

1

a lot

A lot is often incorrectly written as one word (*alot*). The phrase *a lot* is informal and often too vague for business writing. Use *many* or *numerous* for estimates or give a specific number or amount.

▶ We received ~~a lot of~~ e-mails supporting the new policy.
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abbreviations

DIRECTORY

Abbreviations are shortened versions of words or combinations of the first letters of words (*Corp./Corporation, URL/Uniform Resource Locator*). If used appropriately, abbreviations can be convenient for both the reader and the writer. Like symbols, they can be important space savers in business writing.

Abbreviations that are formed by combining the initial letter of each word in a multiword term are called *initialisms.* Initialisms are pronounced as separate letters (*SEC/Securities and Exchange Commission*). Abbreviations that combine the first letter or letters of several words—and can be pronounced—are called *acronyms* (*PIN/personal identification number, LAN/local area network*).

Using Abbreviations

The most important consideration in the use of abbreviations is whether they will be understood by your **audience**. The same abbreviation, for example, can have two different meanings (NEA stands for both National Education Association and the National Endowment for the Arts). Like **jargon**, shortened forms are easily understood within a group of specialists; outside the group, however, shortened forms might be incomprehensible. In fact, abbreviations can be easily overused, either as an **affectation** or in a misguided attempt to make writing con-

cise, even with **instant messaging** where abbreviations are often appropriate. Remember that **memos**, **e-mail**, or **reports** addressed to specific people may be read by others, so consider those secondary audiences as well. A good rule to follow: "When in doubt, spell it out."

WRITER'S CHECKLIST **Using Abbreviations**

✔ Except for commonly used abbreviations (*U.S.*, *a.m.*), spell out a term to be abbreviated the first time it is used, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. Thereafter, the abbreviation may be used alone.

✔ In long documents, repeat the full term in parentheses after the abbreviation at regular intervals to remind readers of the abbreviation's meaning, as in "Submit the CAR (Capital Appropriations Request) by October 15." For digital texts, consider linking abbreviations to a glossary or providing the definition in a pop-up that appears when the cursor hovers over an abbreviation.

✔ Do not add an additional period at the end of a sentence that ends with an abbreviation. ("The official name of the company is DataBase, Inc.")

✔ For abbreviations specific to your profession or discipline, use a style guide recommended by your professional organization or company.

✔ Write acronyms in capital letters without periods. The only exceptions are acronyms that have become accepted as common nouns, which are written in lowercase letters, such as *scuba* (*s*elf-*c*ontained *u*nderwater *b*reathing *a*pparatus).

✔ Generally, use periods for lowercase initialisms (*a.k.a.*, *p.m.*) but not for uppercase ones (*GDP*, *IRA*). Exceptions include geographic names (*U.S.*, *U.K.*, *E.U.*) and the traditional expression of academic degrees (*B.A.*, *M.S.E.E.*, *Ph.D.*).

✔ Form the plural of an acronym or initialism by adding a lowercase *s*. Do not use an **apostrophe** (*CARs*, *DVDs*).

✔ Do not follow an abbreviation with a word that repeats the final term in the abbreviation (*ATM location* not *ATM machine location*).

✔ Avoid creating your own abbreviations; they will confuse readers.

Forming Abbreviations

Names of Organizations. A company may include in its name a term such as *Brothers, Incorporated, Corporation, Company,* or *Limited Liability Company.* If the term is abbreviated in the official company name that appears on letterhead stationery or on its Web site, use the abbreviated form: *Bros., Inc., Corp., Co., or LLC.* If the term is not

abbreviated in the official name, spell it out in writing, except with addresses, footnotes, **bibliographies**, and **lists** where abbreviations may be used. Likewise, use an **ampersand** (&) only if it appears in the official company name. For names of divisions within organizations, terms such as *Department* and *Division* should be abbreviated only when space is limited (*Dept.* and *Div.*).

Measurements.   Except for abbreviations that may be confused with words (*in.* for *inch* and *gal.* for *gallon*), abbreviations of measurement do not require periods (*yd* for *yard* and *qt* for *quart*). Abbreviations of units of measure are identical in the singular and plural: *1 cm* and *15 cm* (not *15 cms*). Some abbreviations can be used in combination with other symbols (*°F* for *degrees Fahrenheit* and *ft²* for *square feet*).

For a listing of abbreviations for the basic units used in the International System of Units (SI), see *http://physics.nist.gov/cuu/Units/units .html*. For additional definitions and background, search the National Institute of Standards and Technology Web site at *www.nist.gov* and generally online for *units of information*. For information on abbreviating dates and time, see **numbers**.

Personal Names and Titles.   Personal names generally should not be abbreviated: *Thomas* (not *Thos.*) and *William* (not *Wm.*). An academic, civil, religious, or military title should be spelled out and in lowercase when it does not precede a name. ("The *captain* checked the orders.") When they precede names, some titles are customarily abbreviated (*Dr. Smith*, *Mr. Mills*, *Ms. Katz*). See also **Ms. / Miss / Mrs.**

An abbreviation of a title may follow the name; however, be certain that it does not duplicate a title before the name (*Angeline Martinez, Ph.D.* or *Dr. Angeline Martinez*). When addressing **correspondence** and including names in other documents, you normally should spell out titles (*The Honorable Mary J. Holt*; *Professor Charles Matlin*). Traditionally, periods are used with academic degrees, although some style guides suggest omitting these (*M.A./MA*, *M.B.A./MBA*, *Ph.D./PhD*).

Common Scholarly Abbreviations and Terms.   The following is a partial list of abbreviations commonly used in reference books and for documenting sources in research papers and reports. Other than in such documents, generally avoid such abbreviations.

anon.	anonymous
bibliog.	bibliography, bibliographer, bibliographic
ca., c.	*circa*, "about" (used with approximate dates: *ca. 1756*)
cf.	*confer*, "compare"
chap.	chapter
diss.	dissertation
ed., eds.	edited by, editor(s), edition(s)

e.g.	*exempli gratia*, "for example" (see **e.g. / i.e.**)
esp.	especially
et al.	*et alii*, "and others"
etc.	*et cetera*, "and so forth" (see **etc.**)
f., ff.	and the following page(s) or line(s)
GPO	Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
i.e.	*id est*, "that is"
MS, MSS	manuscript, manuscripts
n., nn.	note, notes (used immediately after page number: *56n., 56n.3, 56nn.3–5*)
N.B., n.b.	*nota bene*, "take notice, mark well"
n.d.	no date (of publication)
n.p.	no place (of publication); no publisher; no page
p., pp.	page, pages
proc.	proceedings
pub.	published by, publisher, publication
rev.	revised by, revised, revision; review, reviewed by (Spell out "review" where "rev." might be ambiguous.)
rpt.	reprinted by, reprint
sec., secs.	section, sections
sic	so, thus; inserted after a misspelled or misused word in quotations ([*sic*]). For details and examples, see **brackets**.
supp., suppl.	supplement
trans.	translated by, translator, translation
UP	University Press (used in MLA style, as in *Oxford UP*)
viz.	*videlicet*, "namely"
vol., vols.	volume, volumes
vs., v.	*versus*, "against" (*v.* preferred in titles of legal cases)

Postal Abbreviations. For a list of the official state and place-name abbreviations used by the United States Postal Service, go to *www.usps .com*.

above

Avoid using *above* to refer to a preceding passage or **visual** because its reference is vague and often an **affectation**. The same is true of *aforesaid* and *aforementioned*. (See also **former / latter**.) To refer to something previously mentioned, repeat the **noun** or **pronoun**, or construct your **paragraph** so that your reference is obvious.

> Please complete and submit ~~the above~~ *your travel voucher* by March 1.

absolutely

Absolutely means "definitely," "entirely," "completely," or "unquestionably." Avoid it as a redundant **intensifier** to mean "very" or "much."

▶ We are ~~absolutely~~ certain we can meet the deadline.

abstract / concrete words

Abstract words refer to general ideas, qualities, conditions, acts, or relationships—intangible things that cannot be detected by the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), such as *learning*, *leadership*, and *technology*. *Concrete words* identify things that can be perceived by the five senses, such as *diploma*, *manager*, and *keyboard*.

Abstract words must often be further defined or described.

▶ The marketing team needs freedom *to develop its own customer database*.

Abstract words are best used with concrete words to help make intangible concepts specific and vivid.

▶ Public transportation [abstract] in Chicago includes *buses* [concrete] and *commuter trains* [concrete].

The use of abstract and concrete words depends on your **purpose** and the **context** in which you are using those words. See also **word choice**.

abstracts

An abstract summarizes and highlights the major points of a **formal report**, journal article, dissertation, or other long work. Its primary purpose is to enable readers to decide whether to read the work in full. For a discussion of how summaries differ from abstracts, see **executive summaries**.

Although abstracts, typically 200 to 250 words long, are published with the longer works they condense, they can also be published separately in periodical indexes, by abstracting services, and in introductory sections of online journals (see **research**). For this reason, an abstract should be readable apart from the original document and contain appropriate key search terms for researchers using online databases.

Types of Abstracts

Depending on the kind of information they contain, abstracts are often classified as descriptive or informative (see Figure A–1). A *descriptive abstract* summarizes the **purpose**, **scope**, and methods used to arrive at the reported findings. It is a slightly expanded **table of contents** in sentence and paragraph form. A descriptive abstract need not be longer than several sentences. An *informative abstract* is an expanded version of the descriptive abstract. In addition to information about the purpose,

ABSTRACT

Purpose

This report investigates the long-term effects of long-distance running on the bones, joints, and general health of runners aged 50 to 72. The Sports Medicine Institute of Columbia Hospital sponsored this investigation, first to decide whether to add a geriatric unit to the Institute, and second to determine whether physicians should recommend long-distance running for their older patients.

Descriptive section

Methods and scope

   The investigation is based on recent studies conducted at Stanford University and the University of Florida. The Stanford study tested and compared male and female long-distance runners aged 50 to 72 with a control group of runners and nonrunners. The groups were matched by sex, race, education, and occupation. The Florida study used only male runners who had run at least 20 miles a week for five years and compared them with a group of runners and nonrunners. Both studies based findings on medical histories and on physical and X-ray examinations.

Findings

   Both studies conclude that long-distance running is not associated with increased degenerative joint disease. Control groups were more prone to spur formation, sclerosis, and joint-space narrowing and showed more joint degeneration than runners. Female long-distance runners exhibited somewhat more sclerosis in knee joints and the lumbar spine area than matched control subjects. Both studies support the role of exercise in retarding bone loss with aging. The investigation concludes that the health risk factors are fewer for long-distance runners than for those less active aged 50 to 72.

Conclusions

   The investigation recommends that the Sports Medicine Institute of Columbia Hospital consider the development of a geriatric unit a priority and that it inform physicians that an exercise program that includes long-distance running can be beneficial to their aging patients' health.
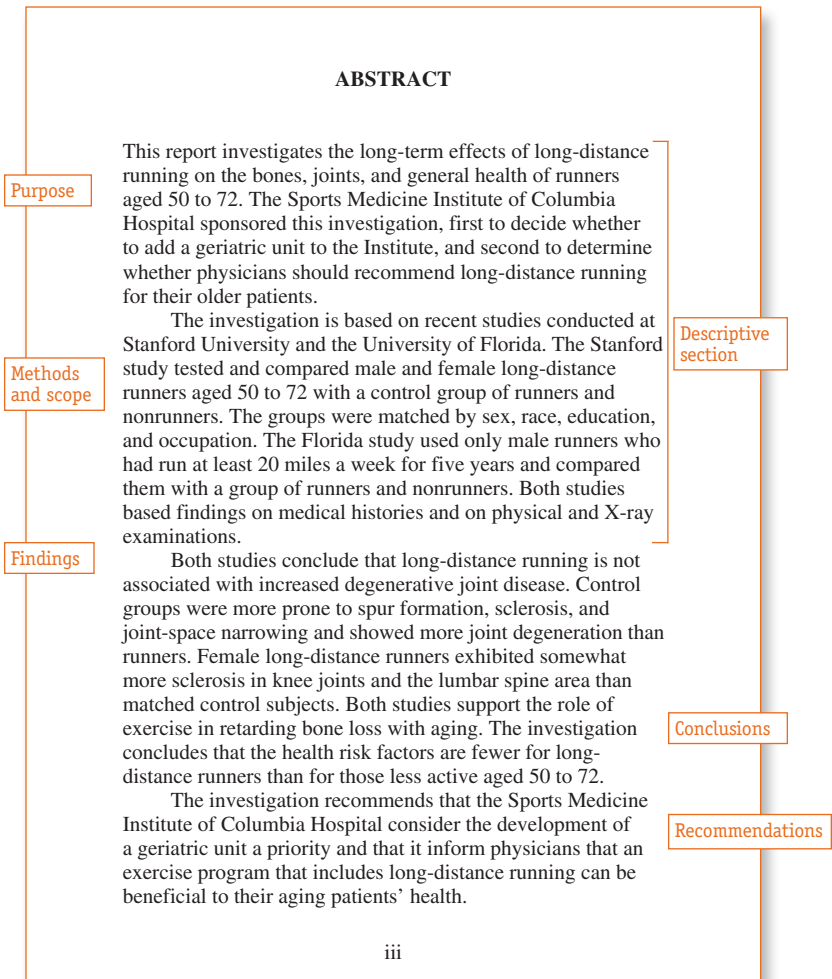
Recommendations

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FIGURE A–1. Informative Abstract (from a Report)

scope, and research methods used, the informative abstract summarizes any results, **conclusions**, and recommendations. The informative abstract retains the **tone** and essential scope of the original work, while omitting its details. The first two paragraphs of the abstract shown in Figure A–1 alone would be descriptive; with the addition of the paragraphs that detail the findings and conclusions of the report, the abstract becomes informative.

The type of abstract you should write depends on your **audience** and the organization or publication for which you are writing. Informative abstracts work best for wide audiences that need to know conclusions and recommendations; descriptive abstracts work best for compilations, such as proceedings and progress reports, that do not contain conclusions or recommendations.

Writing Strategies

Write the abstract *after* finishing the report or document. Otherwise, the abstract may not accurately reflect the longer work. Begin with a topic sentence that announces the subject and scope of your original document. Then, using the major and minor headings of your outline or table of contents to distinguish primary ideas from secondary ones, decide what material is relevant to your abstract. (See **outlining**.) Write with **clarity** and **conciseness**, eliminating unnecessary words and ideas. Do not, however, become so terse that you omit articles (*a*, *an*, *the*) and important transitional words and phrases (*however*, *therefore*, *but*, *next*). Write complete sentences, but avoid stringing together a group of short sentences end to end; instead, combine ideas by using **subordination** and **parallel structure**. Spell out all but the most common **abbreviations**. In a report, an abstract follows the title page and is numbered page iii.

accept / except

Accept is a **verb** meaning "consent to," "agree to take," or "admit willingly." ("I *accept* the responsibility.") *Except* is normally used as a **preposition** meaning "other than" or "excluding." ("We agreed on everything *except* the schedule.")

acceptance / refusal letters (for employment)

When you decide to accept a job offer, you can notify your new employer by telephone or in a meeting—but to make your decision official, you should send an acceptance in writing. What you include in your message and whether you send a **letter** or an **e-mail** depends on your previous

conversations with your new employer. See also **correspondence**. Figure A–2 shows an example of a job acceptance letter written by a graduating student. (See his **résumé** in Figure R–8 on page 487.)

In the first paragraph of Figure A–2, the writer identifies the job he is accepting and the salary he has been offered—doing so can avoid any misunderstandings about the job or the salary. In the second paragraph, the writer details his plans for relocating and reporting for work. Even if the writer discussed these arrangements during earlier conversations, he needs to confirm them, officially, in this written message. The writer concludes with a brief but enthusiastic statement that he looks forward to working for the new employer.

When you decide to reject a job offer, send a written job refusal to make that decision official, even if you have already notified the employer during a meeting or on the phone. Writing to an employer is an important goodwill gesture.

In Figure A–3, an example of a job refusal, the applicant mentions something positive about his contact with the employer and refers to the specific job offered. He indicates his serious consideration of the offer, provides a logical reason for the refusal, and concludes on a pleasant note. (See his résumé in Figure R–9 on pages 488–89.) For general advice on handling refusals and negative messages, see **refusal letters**.
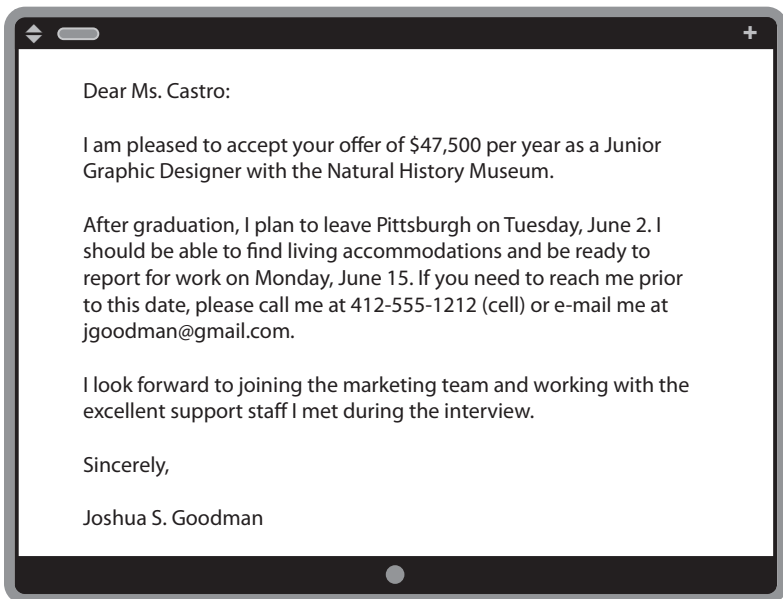
Dear Ms. Castro:

I am pleased to accept your offer of $47,500 per year as a Junior Graphic Designer with the Natural History Museum.

After graduation, I plan to leave Pittsburgh on Tuesday, June 2. I should be able to find living accommodations and be ready to report for work on Monday, June 15. If you need to reach me prior to this date, please call me at 412-555-1212 (cell) or e-mail me at jgoodman@gmail.com.

I look forward to joining the marketing team and working with the excellent support staff I met during the interview.

Sincerely,

Joshua S. Goodman

FIGURE A–2. Acceptance Letter (for Employment)