

# Learning Commons

Academic Writing Center - Graduate Students



## Business Writing Tips

The business world requires proficiency in a variety of written genres – emails, reports, proposals, and beyond. This handout provides general tips that apply across genres.

### Using Charts & Graphs

- Create a scale that accurately represents information (i.e. baseline at zero); use scales consistently throughout the document
- Write a caption that quickly tells the reader the most important point
- Cross-reference between the chart/graph and the text (e.g. "See Figure 1")
- Avoid overly-complex charts/graphs – break into separate figures if one chart/graph has too much information

### Tone

- Be confident – avoid qualifiers like "probably"
- Be polite – avoid personalized pronouns to sound less accusatory toward individuals
- Use appropriate level of formality depending on your audience
- Use non-discriminatory language (e.g. avoid using default masculine pronouns/language)

### Concision & Clarity

- Avoid wordiness by eliminating redundancy (e.g. "My recommendation is..." instead of "My proposed recommendation is...")
- Cut unnecessary words (e.g. "Require employees to read the handbook" instead of "I propose the idea that we make all employees accustomed to the values, tenants, and intricacies of the most recent version of the employee handbook")
- Reduce wordiness by using verbs instead of nouns (e.g. "The test run failed" instead of "The test run was a failure")
- Use parallel structure, especially when writing lists (e.g. "Employees must: follow company policy, show up on time, and wear appropriate attire" instead of "Employees must: follow company policy, show up on time, and always be wearing appropriate attire")

### Readability

- Use spacing to make documents easier to read/scan – provide spaces between new points/ideas, break up large blocks of text, and add space between text and graphics
- Use easy-to-read fonts that clearly contrast with the background color
- Do not use a variety of fonts in a single document
- Create headings to help readers find points quickly – make headings stand out by using bold/italics/underline (but not all at once)
- Establish headings for different levels of information (i.e. broader to more detailed); be consistent – each level of heading should be in the same style

**Questions?**

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