Most Frequently Asked Questions for Business Writing

Q. What are some key steps to writing a business document?

A. Here are five steps to writing a business document:
1) Note the purpose of the document
2) Identify the readers' needs and how to meet them
3) Generate, organize, and outline your ideas
4) Write a first draft
5) Edit and make revisions

Q. What do I do first when writing a business document?

A. The first step in business writing is to identify the reason you are writing the document. Ask yourself what you want to accomplish by writing this or what results are you looking for after writing this. Oftentimes when you do this, you discover you may not even need to write. A phone call or face-to-face meeting may be better.

Q. What are some top writing mistakes to avoid?

A. Some of the top writing mistakes are simple errors that tend to be overlooked. When revising and editing, check for the following:

- ✓ Incomplete Sentences
- ✓ Run-on Sentences and Comma Splices
- ✓ Subject-Verb Agreement
- ✓ Pronoun Choice
- ✓ Commas
- ✓ Semicolons
- ✓ Colons
- ✓ Apostrophes

For additional details regarding top writing mistakes, click here.

Q. What is the difference between revising a document and editing it?

A. Revising a document and editing a document are similar but very distinct actions. Revising focuses more on the content of the writing while editing focuses on the minor touches to finish the piece. Revision is taking a second look at the ideas and thoughts of the piece to ensure the message is clear. Editing is usually used in the final steps after all revisions have been made, and the final polishing of diction, spelling, grammar, sentence structure and punctuation. Click here for a revision and editing checklist.

Q. What should I keep in mind about the reader when I'm writing a business document?

A. As you write a business document you should take into consideration who your reader(s) may be along with how they will interpret the message. You should always take into consideration how the reader will interpret the document and how he/she will benefits from reading it. Also, the tone used is very important as well.

Q. How can I effectively generate, organize, and outline my ideas?

A. There are many approaches to effectively generating and organizing your ideas, but regardless of the approach, it should be one that helps get the message across easily. Some common methods include drafting outlines, brainstorming ideas, and even dialoguing (talking it out with another person). After you have written down all of your ideas, start grouping them together to reveal the important topics and discard the irrelevant ones. Once that is completed, you can begin to organize the topics.

Q. What goes into an effective paragraph?

A. A paragraph should have four main components**: a topic sentence, unity, coherence,** and **development.** Your **topic sentence** is the main idea of the paragraph. Begin with a topic sentence, followed by supporting details. Make sure that there is **unity** – that the paragraph focuses only on one idea. The sentences should be **coherent**, meaning they are linked logically and relate to one another. Provide supporting details such as specific examples, evidence, facts, etc. to fully **develop** the paragraph.

Q. Why do I need to reread what I just wrote?

A. Oftentimes when you reread something you just wrote, you may discover that certain sentences are not providing the meaning that you had intended or the message is not clear and concise. It is best to take a break from writing after completing the first draft before revising and editing. It is also helpful to have someone else review your document because a new set of eyes can often spot errors that the writer can't see.

Q. Why is e-mail etiquette important?

A. It is important for all schools and departments to have high standards regarding e-mail etiquette for the following reasons:
- ✓ **Professionalism:** e-mails convey a professional image for you and the organization by using proper email language.
- ✓ **Efficiency:** e-mails that get to the point are much more effective than poorly worded emails.
- ✓ **Protection from liability:** employee awareness of e-mail risks will protect your department or school from costly law suits.

For a list of the Do's and Don'ts in e-mail writing, click here.

Q. What is important to know about e-mail privacy?

A. Remember that an e-mail is a permanent record of your message to someone. Be sure that you do not write something that you may regret later on. Also, all business e-mail correspondences belong to the organization, and in many cases, the e-mail administrator has the ability to monitor all e-mail messages for the purposes of protecting the organization. For a list of the Do's and Don'ts in e-mail writing, click here.

Q. What should be included in an e-mail signature and how do I set one up?

A. An e-mail signature allows the reader to easily access your contact information. It should be kept to approximately four lines to ensure that it doesn't take up too much space. If there is a disclaimer after the signature, do not add additional quotes or images. A signature consists of your name, title, department or school name, telephone number, and an e-mail address. Make it easy for your readers to have your contact information or allow to them to quickly recall who you are. To setup an e-mail signature in Outlook, click on Tools>Options>Mail Format>Signatures. . For a list of the Do's and Don'ts in e-mail writing, click here.