

Top 7 Mistakes of Business Writing

Business today is being conducted in a very informal way - in meetings and conferences we are using a natural, informal, more relaxed language, rather than stilted, formal language that was used several decades ago. So how come many people are still using business writing that is more suited to our great-grandfathers rather than 21st Century businessmen and women?

Here are my impressions of business writing today in the form of seven deadly sins.

1 We are modern but write with too many old-fashioned expressions

When will people realise that business language has changed? Expressions like "Please be informed," "Kindly be advised," "I would like to bring to your attention" and "I am writing to advise you" should have been relegated to the recycle bin way before the turn of this [new millennium!](#)

Unfortunately, today's writing is still full of centuries-old expressions like these, not to mention even worse ones like "Enclosed herewith please find our catalogue for your reference and perusal", "With reference to your above-mentioned order," "Further to the telecon today between your goodself and the undersigned."

This type of writing is BORING! People are using these standard, boring clichés that have been used for years simply because everyone else uses them, and has used them for centuries! Please! Put some thought, personalization and some feeling into your writing!

Instead of

We refer to your letter of 1st October 2009.

As spoken in our telecon today.

Please revert to me soonest possible.

Say

Thank you for your letter of 21 October 2009.

Thank you for calling me this morning.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Should you require any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned. Please give me a call on 80966987 if you have any questions.

2 KISS more

Remember the KISS principle - Keep it Short and Simple! Instead of "I should be very grateful" why not simply say "Please" (definitely not Kindly!) Please keep long words and long expressions, long sentences and long paragraphs at bay because they will impress no-one - they will only confuse!

Instead, use short words like buy, try, start and end instead of purchase, endeavour, commence and terminate. Remember to KISS in your business writing - use short words, simple expressions, short sentences and short paragraphs that are clear and concise!

Instead of	Say
purchase	buy
transmit	send
provide	give
sufficient	enough
terminate	end
endeavour	try
commence	start
in spite of the fact that	despite
in view of the fact that	as
in the event that	if

3 Active vs Passive

Our great-grandfathers used passive voice in writing because they didn't want to show who was responsible for anything. They preferred to use long sentences that beat about the bush but never revealed what was really happening and who was really responsible.

Today's the business you, should use active voice, which is more alive, more focused, more personalised and much more interesting and clear.

Instead of	Say
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Arrangements have been made for a repeat order to be despatched to you immediately. I have arranged for a repeat order to be sent to you today.


The cause of your complaint has been investigated ... I have looked into this matter ...

The seminar will be conducted by Shirley Taylor. Shirley Taylor will conduct the seminar.

Sales of the X101 have exceeded all expectations. X101 sales have gone [sky high](#).

4 Keep the colon clean


Why is it that many people have to put a line of colons in any list? It looks so cluttered and messy. Let's get rid of all the clutter in our business writing, and make it look neat, clean and well-organised.

Date : 29
November
2001
(Thursday) 

Time : 9.00am to
5.00 pm

Venue Sheraton
: Towers
Hotel

Date Thursday 29
November
2001

 Time 9.00 am to
5.00 pm

Venue Sheraton
Towers
Hotel

5 Attention Please!


Our great-grandfathers invented the attention line (and they were not lazy - they wrote it in full, "For the attention of ...") because they were merely directing the letter to the


desk of a real person, not writing personally to that person.

In those days, even with the attention line, letters still began "Dear Sirs" and the wording was formal and very passive, as if talking to the company as a whole, not to a real person.

Over the years the attention line has been very much misused and lazy writers have abbreviated it to "Attention" or even "Attn". Attention lines are today being incorporated (wrongly) in personal letters with personal salutations like "Dear David, Dear Mr Lee".


Let's put the attention line in the bin and relegate it firmly to the last century where it belongs. We rarely need it today. If you know the person to whom you are writing, and if you want to use a personal salutation, incorporate the addressee's name and title into the address section.

Attn : Lester Lim
ABV Distributors Pte Ltd (Books) 
32 Old Joo Jiat Road #05-02
Singapore 597654

 Mr Lester Lim
Product and Sales Manager
ABV Distributors Pte Ltd (Books)
32 Old Joo Jiat Road #05-02
Singapore 597654

6 Do you really need a line to sign your name on?

I thought it was only children who needed a line on which to write? Would managers really go into a fit if there was no line on which to sign their names? Would they really sit there and wonder where to put their signature? I really doubt it. Surely the space between "Yours sincerely" and the writer's name/title is indication enough that this is where the signature goes? Again, this is something that we simply don't need. Get rid of the line and let's get rid of even more clutter in our writing.

 Yours sincerely

David Low
General Manager

7 Thank you!

Why do so many people need to say "Thank you" at the end of a message? Thank you for what? For reading my letter? Please! Stop wasting time and ink. If you have been courteous throughout your communication (and let's face it, no matter what the circumstances, your writing should always be courteous) there should be no need to keep saying "Thank you" over and over again just because someone read your letter!

In today's fast-paced business world, there should be no room for yesterday's old-fashioned, long-winded jargon. Ditch the boring standard clichés that have been around for decades. Put some life into your business writing by using a natural, relaxed, friendly style. Put some zest into your presentation by getting rid of the clutter. Put some feeling, imagination and creativity into your writing by using a style that is more proactive, stimulating and interesting - writing that reflects your own personality. This is 2009, not 1909!

Thank you. (kidding ☺)