



LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS

KnowledgeBrief Improving your Business English

English Business Scenario Workbook

If you have any questions or require further information please email:
functionalskills@knowledgebrief.com



Improving your Business English

English Business Scenario Workbook

This booklet is designed to give you support around your English writing skills in a variety of business scenarios. This will help you to not only work through your qualification more effectively, but also help you to come across professionally in your place of business.

If you would like further support on Business English reading, writing and communication skills, please contact our specialist Functional Skills team at: functionalskills@knowledgebrief.com.

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Section 1 | English for Business

Writing business documents is imperative for any working professional and requires skill and expertise. Your written communication reflects your professionalism and conveys an image of the company itself. The ability to understand the generally accepted formats and styles, whilst learning how to execute them successfully is crucial in any role. This section covers four key types of business documents that you may encounter during your professional life: business emails, business reports, business cases and meeting minutes.

“Communication works for those who work at it.”

– John Powell



Business emails

Business emails are a cornerstone of organisational communication and are used for several reasons such as providing an update, a recap on a meeting, or a simple exchange of information.

On the average day, professionals receive and send multiple emails. Therefore, by considering the key elements involved in writing effective emails, you can be confident in your responses and outcome. Understanding your audience and choosing the right words can save a significant amount of time and prevent misunderstandings or confusion from occurring.

Here are two questions you must consider as you begin to draft a professional email:

What is the purpose?

Before you write an email, the goal or purpose must be identified for it to be effective. It is important to narrow your focus to one main purpose: this allows the recipient to better understand and process the information.

Although emails are an efficient tool to communicate, it is important to assess whether they are the right channel to send your message as not all communication should occur over email.

Who is my audience?

It is important to acknowledge or anticipate your audience as this will determine several factors when constructing your email. Audiences have expectations and needs and by knowing this you are able to adapt your content, writing style, format and tone as appropriate, without losing sight of the core message.

The tone of your email also changes according to audience, so it is important to ensure the tone enhances the goal of your intended message. Tone can range from informal to direct but should always remain professional.

If you are writing an email to a colleague, a more informal approach may be appropriate, however, that style would not be appropriate when emailing clients where a more formal tone is expected. Taking into consideration the audience is key to effective emails.

Top tips for writing effective emails

- Clearly define your purpose and audience.
- Be concise and succinct, focusing on the main goal. Remember professionals receive and send several emails per day, so keep the body of the email concise.
- Ensure the message is clear and complete.
- Avoid repetition – maintain a logical structure and flow.
- Make sure the presentation is neat and easy on the eye.
- Showcase your professionalism and remain polite.
- Review the email for spelling and grammar errors before sending.
- Remember to follow up in good time!

Ask yourself

- Is an email necessary? Is it appropriate?
- What are you trying to achieve from the email?
- What do you want your recipients to do?

Ask yourself

- Who am I writing this for?
- Could the email be passed on to a wider audience?
- What would the readers expect from the email?
- What tone is necessary?

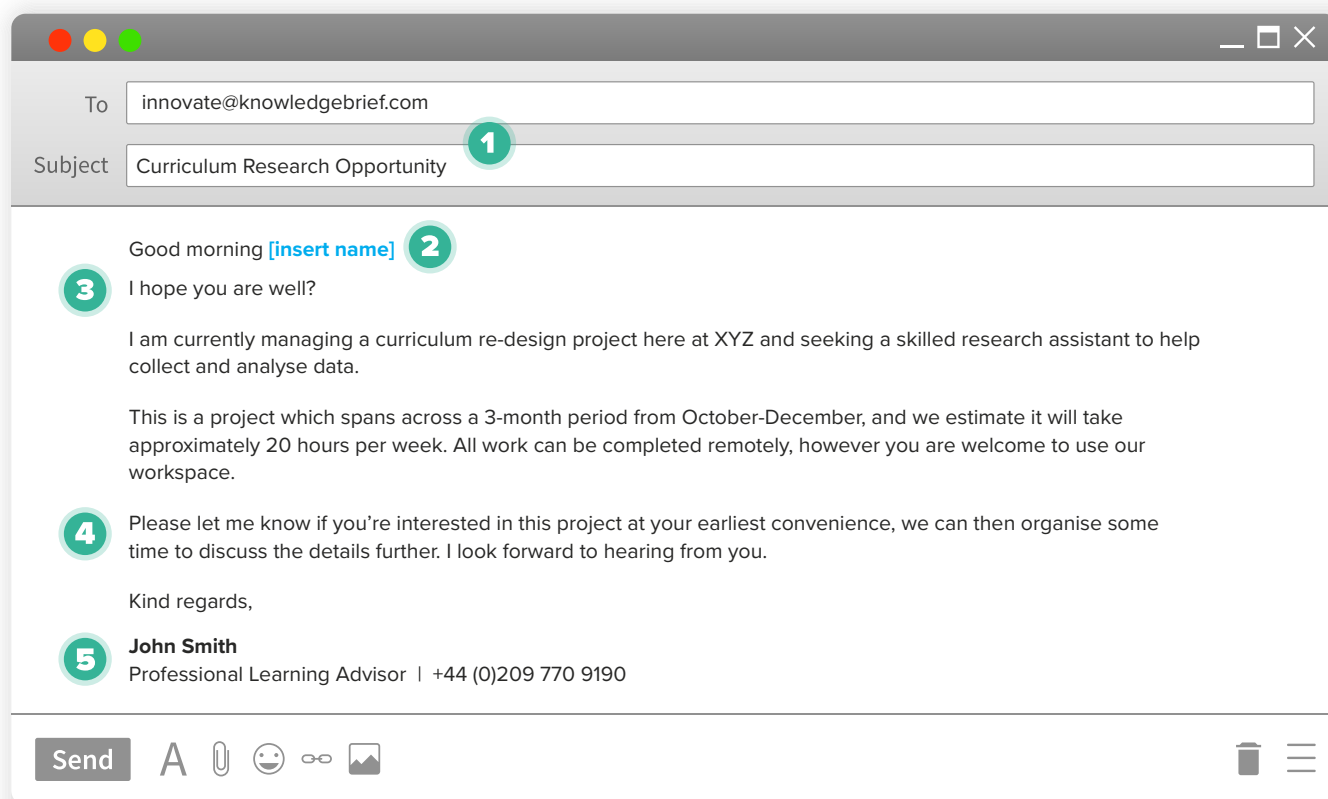
Reflection

Spend a few minutes considering the following questions:

- 1) How confident am I compiling business emails internally and externally?
- 2) How important is it for me to improve my skills in writing emails?
- 3) What impact does effective email writing skills have on my role?



A typical structure of a business email



1 Subject line

The subject should set expectations of the email's content. A subject line should concisely convey the purpose of the message .

2 Greeting

Business emails should begin with a professional salutation.

Common greetings include:

- Dear
- Good morning/afternoon
- Hello

3 Openers

Acknowledge the reader before delving into your key message as this helps build a professional rapport.

4 Closing remarks

The last few lines of the email should complete your message, highlighting any specific action that needs to be taken coupled with a timeline.

Also, use an appropriate sign off:

- 1) Thanks
- 2) Best
- 3) All the best
- 4) Kind regards
- 5) Sincerely

5 Signature line

This should include your professional role and contact details for the reader.

Scenario: Business emails

Consider one of the following scenarios and construct your own email using the above guidance:

- 1) You need to give feedback to an employee who has not achieved an objective.
- 2) You need to reply to a challenging customer to let them know that their request cannot be fulfilled.

Then, submit your email via KBPro® as **External CPD**.

Please ensure you include a title for your submission.



Business reports

At the end of a project, it is generally required to provide a detailed account of the project: what it entailed, why it was undertaken, how it happened, and with what results. A report is a planned, organised and factual presentation prepared with the aim of getting the right message(s) across to your audience and managing their expectations.



Top Tip: Your reader must find your report useful, and the facts must be presented in such a way that they can be absorbed easily.

What is the typical format of a business/project report?

A written report is the most common format but depending on the audience/client it can also be delivered via a PowerPoint presentation or a facilitated workshop. The format can be established at the beginning of the project, when scoping the requirements.

Reports can be both formal and informal: formal reports are longer and used for complex projects, while informal reports are shorter, provide less details and can use an informal language.

What are the typical contents of a business/project report?

The template below details the main headings and contents of a generic business/project report:

Cover sheet: Gives a clear, informative title that sets out what the report is about, as well as the report author's name and a date of publication.

Executive summary: A short summary of the key points from the report, including research methods, findings, and any conclusions or recommendations. It must be:

- Self-contained and short; it's designed to give an overview of the full report
- Objective, precise and easy to read
- Concise, covering the key issues, details, main findings and conclusions

Table of contents (for longer reports): This should list the title of each section in the report and where it can be found. The purpose is to make it easy for the reader to navigate the document.

Background/Introduction: A summary of the brief you received for the report. This serves to clarify the context - why was the project launched, what had been tried before, and what are the key objectives.

Methodology: An explanation of how the project will be done (e.g. through surveys, interviews, desk research, mapping processes and so on) and its analysis methods.

Findings/Results: A more detailed account of what has been discovered, based on data collection and methodology used, along with the main findings of your research. These should be clearly linked to the project's purpose and aims.

Conclusions and recommendations: What you have learned from your research and recommendations for what to do next (if required). Conclusions should be linked to the objectives. Have the objectives been met? If not, what options can be considered to move forward? If recommending an option, include how much it will cost, how long it will take and what impact it will have.

References and appendices: At the end of your report, include a bibliography detailing the sources you have used. You can add any extra material (e.g. interview transcripts or raw data) to an appendix. Appendices always go at the back of the report and should be titled effectively and referred to in the report in the following format: (see Appendix 1).

Reflection

Spend a few minutes considering the following questions:

- 1) **Can you think of a project that you have led? Did you have to write a business report, what was its purpose?**
- 2) **What is the format and style you should use when writing a business report?**
- 3) **What are the main headings?**



Top Tip: Before you start writing, it is key that you know who you are delivering the report for and what is wanted from the report.

Some Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Plan before you write and keep an objective style
- Report progress against plan. Don't just comment on activity
- Give a balanced view of progress/status
- Provide all the necessary information
- Track and report actions agreed
- Assess problems fully and keep a clear structure

Don't

- Swamp with details, or focus on minutiae
- Lack continuity and links from one section to the other
- Simply list problems
- Recommend what can't be delivered



Business Report Scenario

Title: Report on Staff Turnover in Quest Diagnostics' National Customer Service (NCS) in 2018

Selection		Questions to consider
Executive Summary	The human resources manager requested this report to examine the high turnover rate of employees at Quest, leading provider of diagnostic services in the United States. The information was gathered by members over three months. In this report, recommendations are made to minimise the high turnover rate among the staff working at Quest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the key purpose of this section? – How would you improve it?
Background /Introduction	<p>Quest Diagnostics is an American company, providing blood tests and results to hospitals and patients across the country. It has grown significantly in recent years, acquiring more than a dozen labs between 2008 and 2012. Despite operating in a region with substantial unemployment, the annual staff turnover has been between 60 to 65% every year.</p> <p>The purpose of the project is to identify the reasons for high turnover and make recommendations to minimise it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why is this section important? – What does it include? – How detailed should it be?
Methodology	<p>Data was gathered from administration records, as well as interviews with staff over three months.</p> <p>Data was analysed to identify trends and patterns in turnover and uncover common complaints on working conditions and support provided to employees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the purpose of this section? – How would you improve this section?
Findings /Results	<p>The most significant issue found when interviewing staff was the lack of support to new employees: after four weeks of classroom training on medical terminology and Quest's technical system, each new employee is supposed to "nest" with an experienced colleague to get hands-on coaching. However, on average, data gathered from interviews reveals that "nesting" rarely happens.</p> <p>Another issue mentioned by the staff is the lack of communication between employees and upper management. They expressed their concerns about receiving inconsistent and late instructions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the focus of this section? – What would you add to strengthen this section?
Conclusions	<p>The main issues that were found were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Lack of support to new employees after receiving initial training. Lack of a structured coaching program, which results in a lack of knowledge, experience and therefore demotivation and disengagement of new employees. 2) Lack of communication between the staff and upper management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What does this section include, and what is its purpose?
Recommendations	<p>To address these two main issues, we recommend the following steps be taken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) A coaching and mentoring program to develop line managers to better support the new employees after their initial 4 weeks of training. This will be clearly structured, with regular performance reviews, and will last 90 days. This will ensure that "nesting" actually takes place and new employees are ready to work effectively after this period. 2) Each center should choose an employee ambassador to represent the interests of staff in management meetings. This ambassador can express concerns and relay outcomes to their teams to increase engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What does this section include, and what is its purpose? – Can you uncover any bias?

Scenario: Business report

Consider the scenario above and answer each question:

- 1) What does each section include, and what is its key purpose?
- 2) Would you improve any of the sections above? Why and how?
- 3) Can you uncover any bias throughout the report?

Then, submit your overview of the report and how it could be more effective via the KnowledgeBrief platform as **External CPD**.

Please ensure you include a title for your submission.



Business cases

A business case is a detailed recommendation for making a business change or enhancing business performance. It presents the potential benefits and risks, as well as the estimated resources and costs required to support a new proposal.



Top Tip: your proposal must highlight realistic projections of the return on investments (ROI) and business benefits, based on substantiating evidence. At the same time, do not ignore or hide the risks involved in the initiative.

Typically, organisations need to choose between several competing business ideas, and a business case enables senior managers to assess their potential value and make decisions about where to invest.

What is the format of a business case?

A formal written document is the most common format, but a business case may also be presented in a visual format, video or PowerPoint. Your organisation may have a standard format for business cases.

You may be required to make an oral presentation to stakeholders to convince them to invest in your proposal.



Top Tip: when pitching your case, consider how best to present it in order to optimise its impact. The case should be concise and well argued. Understand your audience and take time to anticipate the possible objections that might be raised.

Reflection

Spend a few minutes considering the following questions:

- 1) Can you think of a business case that you or a colleague in your organisation have produced?
- 2) In what format was it presented? Did you find it convincing?
- 3) What are the key components of a business case?

Top tips for writing effective meeting minutes

The structure below details the main headings and contents of a generic business case:

Introduction: Explains why the business case is needed and describes the background to the case.

Business objectives: Defines the business objectives, which should be Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Time-Bound (SMART). They are crucial to reviewing the success of the process once it is over.

Options considered and recommended solutions: Lists the options that have been considered, including their advantages and disadvantages. Each option should be linked to the objectives and measures of success established earlier, on which a recommendation is then made.

Business benefits: Lists the preferred options' achievability and impact on the business, for example why is a specific project area the one that will bring most benefit, most quickly. Consider a range of financial, operational benefits and soft benefits.

Costs/budget and proposed timescales: Estimates the project costs, budgets, and resources, as well as the proposed timescales.

Risks and assumptions: Lists assumptions and potential risks around costs and resource availability, which may delay or impinge the ability to implement and achieve some of the business case proposals. Analyses the probability and impact of each risk, and how they will be mitigated.

Conclusions and recommendations: Details next steps associated with getting the initiative up and running and reiterates the benefits of doing so.



Top Tip: once the case has been approved, make sure you develop a communications strategy to monitor and communicate the case's progress to interested stakeholders, ensuring it does not run over time.



Business Case Scenario

Title: Business Case for ABC Corporation's Intranet Global KnowledgeBase Initiative

Selection		Questions to consider
Introduction	<p>ABC Corporation, as a medium-sized manufacturer of specialised test equipment sold to electronic product manufacturers worldwide, has an annual revenue of \$520 million.</p> <p>In recent years ABC has come under increasing market pressure. In order to respond to management's call for rapid introduction of more successful new products, it has been recommended that management provide funds for upgrading and installing the Global KnowledgeBase (GKB) onto an intranet. This would provide direct and easier access for more engineers, regardless of location, as well as reduce numerous costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the key purpose of this section? – How would you improve it?
Business objectives	<p>The objective of this business case is to assess the business value of an investment in the acquisition and implementation of an intranet-based Global KnowledgeBase from Guidance Software during the next fiscal year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why is this section important? – Is the objective identified SMART?
Options considered and recommended solution	<p>The two options considered were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Contract for and install an intranet-based solution from Guidance Software called Global Engineer Designer 2) Continue using the status quo solution, which has been installed and has been in operation for the past four years. <p>The recommended option is to immediately install the intranet GKB.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the purpose of this section? – How would you improve this section?
Business benefits and costs/budget	<p>The intranet GKB has an Net Present Value (NPV) of over \$3 million, an ROI of 125 percent, and an overall payback period of 12.5 months — all much better than ABC's hurdle rates.</p> <p>Intangible advantages include enhancing ABC's reputation and competitive advantage via more, better, new products, thus increasing revenues and profits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the focus of this section? – What would you add to strengthen this section?
Proposed timeline	<p>Management is urged to make this GKB decision within the next 30 days.</p> <p>The new intranet GKB is to be installed the second quarter of ABC's next fiscal year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What does this section include, and what is its purpose?
Risks and assumptions	<p>The primary risk is considered to be GKB project failure or shortfall. It is judged to be a medium risk. Any systems project has an inherent risk factor due to the nature of its complexity and demands for change within an organisation.</p> <p>A secondary risk is security breaches. It is considered to be a low risk with the intranet GKB option. Although intranet solutions are generally considered more prone to such breaches than client servers, the architectural design of the Global Engineer Designer includes many state-of-the-art security features that reduce these risks significantly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What does this section include, and what is its purpose? – Can you uncover any bias?
Conclusions	<p>In conclusion, ABC can best improve its competitive advantage by introducing a more appealing new product which displays minimal risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How would you strengthen these conclusions?

Scenario: Business case

Consider the scenario above and answer each question:

- 1) What does each section include, and what is its key purpose?
- 2) Would you improve any of the sections above? Why and how?
- 3) Can you uncover any bias throughout the business case?

Then, submit your thoughts about business cases via the KnowledgeBrief platform as **External CPD**.

Please ensure you include a title for your submission.



Meeting minutes

Every day, important meetings take place at work where decisions are made, and crucial issues are discussed. At the end of any meeting, it is good practice to obtain meeting minutes, which are a formal record of who attended, what was said and decided in the meeting.

Prior to a meeting it is also important to prepare an agenda, which is a list of items or topics that will be discussed coupled with a timeline, this is then distributed to those attending.



Top Tip: identify your meeting goals before preparing your meeting agenda. Also, make sure to build your minutes as the meeting progresses and write up minutes as soon as possible after the meeting is over.

What are meeting minutes?

Meeting minutes typically describe the events of the meeting and may include a list of attendees, a brief outline of the issues considered by the participants, and any agreed outcomes and decisions made. They are then generally typed up and circulated to all attendees.

Minutes provide key pointers for organising the next meeting's agenda and can help in making the decision on what key topics should be included in the agenda.



Top Tip: remember, minutes are not a detailed report, it is more about what was done at the meeting as oppose to what was said.

What are the typical contents of meeting minutes?

The format of the minutes can vary depending on the guidelines established by an organisation. However, the main headings and contents of generic meeting minutes include:

- Date and time of meeting
- Name of participants and absentees
- Agenda items
- Actions, and who is responsible for carrying them out, as well as any deadlines for completion
- The main points
- Decisions made about each agenda item
- Documents: images, attached files

Top tips for writing effective meeting minutes

- **Use simple, straightforward language.** You want to be as clear as possible
- **Avoid writing down all the intricate details of a discussion,** instead try to sum up any important issues
- **Avoid using pronouns such as 'I'** – minutes are an objective account of what was discussed and not a personal record
- **Contextualise the meeting minutes** to provide clarity to those who were unable to attend
- **Do not provide additional information,** which was gained since the meeting took place, only record what took place in the meeting
- **Clearly highlight the decisions made** and who was allocated responsibility for each action to be taken. Dates should also be included of when actions should be achieved
- **Distribute the meetings** to all participants and to others as appropriate
- **Monitor the progress** of subsequent action, where necessary

① Action Point

When you have your next meeting (small or large) about a project, prepare minutes with all the important details (who is responsible for what action, when, how and so on). Distribute the meetings to all meeting participants, then upload them on the platform as an **External CPD**.

Please ensure you include a title for your submission.



Meeting minutes example

Minutes of Merrydale Community Association meeting held on Thursday 28th February 2002, 7-9pm

Merrydale Community Association

Present at meeting

Mary Tyler (Chair), Jan Curtis (Treasurer), Andrew Brown (Secretary), Mavis Ashley, Tom Carter, Bill Forsyth, Ernie Grant, Doris Grant, Carol Parsons (Committee members) and 22 members of the Association.

Councillor Rob Price and Jeff Barnard from Housing Services were also at the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Jenny Saunders, Mrs Dale, Bob Hartford.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

These were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

3. Open Day

The local youth centre is holding an Open Day on Wednesday March 13th at the Community Centre 10am – 4pm. Mary Tyler and Jan Curtis said they would be attending.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Jan Curtis, reported that the Association has £456 in the bank and £32.87 in petty cash, making a total of £488.87.

5. Arrangements for the AGM

The Secretary, Andrew Brown, reported that the Community Centre has been booked for the 8th May. There will be a social and buffet after the Annual General Meeting (AGM) business is over. Doris Grant and Carol Parsons offered to organise the buffet.

ACTION: Carol to organise the buffet for the AGM.

6. Summer Fun Day

It was agreed to organise a summer outing to Thorpe Park during the school summer holidays. Jan Curtis will investigate the price of coaches, and the details will be discussed at the next meeting.

ACTION: Jan to investigate coach prices and report back to next meeting.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Thursday 28th March 2002, in the Community Centre.

End of sample minutes
Published October 2010

Source: <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/taking-minutes/>

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Section 2 | English grammar

Using good English grammar when writing always creates a positive impression on your colleagues and customers. Irrespective of your line of business, a well-composed text with accurate grammar helps the reader navigate through the text with ease and avoids any confusion or misunderstanding. This section provides practical guidance on how to use common punctuation (commas, apostrophes, colons and semi-colons) and avoid common grammar mistakes.

“Your grammar is a reflection of your image. Good or bad, you have made an impression. And like all impressions, you are in total control.”

– **Jeffrey Gitomer**, American author & business trainer



Punctuation

The correct use of punctuation in your writing helps the reader navigate through the text with ease.

Commas

In theory a comma indicates a pause between parts of a sentence, yet many professionals struggle with its use as commas can have several different uses. Some of the main types of usage are provided below:

Use commas after an introductory part of the sentence:

- ✓ After many years of working at the company, John felt it was time to move on.

Use commas to separate more than one adjective:

- ✓ The initiative is clear, concise and succinct.

Use a comma when attributing quotes:

- ✓ Peter Drucker said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast".
- ✓ "Culture eats strategy for breakfast", said Peter Drucker.

Use commas to separate dates and years, towns and counties, cities and countries:

- ✓ The event will take place on February 14, 2020.
- ✓ The office is based in London, England.

Use commas after an introductory adverb (i.e. moreover, however, therefore, furthermore). If the adverb appears in the middle of the sentence, put commas on either side:

- ✓ However, we will need the invoice for financial purposes.
- ✓ The meeting is tomorrow, however, I am unable to attend.

Use commas to separate items in a series. Do not use a comma to separate the last two items in the series:

- ✓ I like reading books, travelling and attending conferences.
- ✗ I like reading books, travelling, and attending conferences.

Use commas to join two sentences together with a joining word (so, and, but):

- ✓ The client is not available today, so we will need to schedule another meeting.

Use commas with an appositive – a word or word group that defines the noun or noun phrase preceding it:

- ✓ Julie, my manager, will be our featured speaker.



Apostrophes

The apostrophe has two main uses:

1) Contractions: They replace missing letters when we join words

Contractions are often called 'short forms' as they omit certain letters and an apostrophe is used to represent the missing letters. For example: I'm, you're, isn't, couldn't etc. We use contractions in everyday speech and they are associated with informal writing. They should be avoided in formal writing.

Do not

vs

don't

2) Ownership: It shows something belongs to someone

Apostrophes are used to show possession – that something belongs to someone or is connected to something.

The workman's hat. → The hat belonging to the workman.

It's the Chief Finance Officer's problem.

The boss's husband. Also written the boss' husband.

Where words end with an 's' care must be taken to place the apostrophe outside the word in question. For instance, if talking about a pen belonging to Mr. Hastings, many people would wrongly write Mr. Hasting's pen (his name is not Mr. Hasting). It would be Mr. Hastings' pen.

Common errors in using apostrophes

We do not use more than one contraction:

✓ She's not available

✗ She'sn't available

We do not use apostrophes to make a word plural:

✓ Several organisations attended the conference

✗ Several organisation's attended the conference

We don't use affirmative contractions at the end of clauses:

✓ I believe you are

✗ I believe you're

We do use negative contractions at the end of clauses:

✓ You've scheduled the meeting, haven't you?

✓ No, I haven't



In question forms, am not is contracted to aren't:

- ✔ I am leading the sales pitch, aren't I?
- ✘ I am leading the sales pitch, amn't I?

Colon and semicolon

The colon and semicolon often cause much confusion and are frequently used incorrectly. However, when used in the correct way, they provide clarity to the reader.

Use a colon to introduce an idea that follows from the one before the colon. It indicates to the reader that the two sentences are connected.

- ✔ There were two candidates who have been shortlisted: Mr. Millard and Mrs. Walsh.
- ✔ He asked for one thing: a promotion.

Use a colon to introduce items in a list. The sentence that precedes the colon must be a sentence that can stand alone.

- ✔ A business report usually includes the following components: an executive summary, a table of contents, a list of figures, tables and abbreviations, an introduction, a main body, a conclusion and recommendations.
- ✔ The university ranked first for three subjects: History, Linguistics and Philosophy.

Do not use a colon directly after a verb (i.e. are), prepositions (i.e. of) or phrases like 'such as', 'including' and 'for example' as this already highlights to the reader that the list will follow.

- ✘ There are several different types of punctuation such as: commas, colons, semicolons...etc.
- ✔ There are several different types of punctuation such as commas, colons, semicolons...etc.

Use a semicolon to join two closely related parts of a sentence that are not dependent on each other. They are typically used as follows:

- ✔ The results of the staff engagement survey were clear; there was a need to focus on staff morale and workplace culture.
- ✔ Businesses should focus on new and innovative ways to find customers; this is crucial for business growth.

Use semicolons to separate items in a list, particularly when the list contains commas:

- ✔ Some of the largest cities in Europe are: London, England; Istanbul, Turkey; Madrid, Spain; and Paris, France.
- ✔ The main points in favour for inclusivity in the workplace were that it would increase productivity of staff; increase employee engagement; improve creativity; and lead to better company reputation.



Subject-verb agreement

The subject and verb must agree in number.

- **Rule 1:** When two subjects are joined by 'and', the verb is plural.

For example: *My manager and your manager are joining the meeting.*

- **Rule 2:** When two singular nouns joined by 'and' refer to the same person or thing, the verb is singular.

For example: *The leader and coach of the team has been promoted.*

- **Rule 3:** Indefinite pronouns (everyone, each one, someone, somebody, no one, nobody, anyone, anybody etc.) are always singular.

For example: *Everyone in your team is open and honest.*

- **Rule 4:** When the percentage or a part of something is mentioned with plural meaning, the plural verb is used.

For example: *40 of every 100 staff were furloughed.*

- **Rule 5:** When the subjects joined by 'either...or' or 'neither...nor' are of different persons, the verb will agree in person and number with the noun nearest to it.

For example: *Neither you nor your manager knows how to identify the key issues.*

Neither my manager nor the clients agree with this decision.

Improving your Business English

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Section 3 | Proofreading and Language Techniques

Strengthening methods to your proofreading process and understanding language techniques will help you thrive in any work environment. Sophisticated wording, structure, and vocabulary frequently distinguish a successful and prestigious business from another. This section covers core tips and techniques in relation to proofreading, persuasion, skimming and scanning texts, paragraphing. It also covers frequently misused words when writing and introduces appropriate business vocabulary.

“Good writing is clear thinking made visible.”

– **William Wheeler**, journalist and author



Proofreading tips

Making spelling errors when writing an email, a business case or report can make a poor impression on your customers, colleagues and peers. That's why proofreading is essential for business communication: it ensures your writing is error free, accurate and professional.

Proofreading involves reviewing a document for grammar, language and formatting errors. It can seem like a simple task, and yet it requires a deep attention to detail and intense focus.

Top proofreading techniques

As the author of a document, it's harder to spot any errors in it. For this reason, you may want to ask a colleague or friend to proofread your work to get a fresh perspective and a truly objective review. But there are also some techniques that can help you improve your work and make sure is accurate.

- 1) **Step away from the document** (taking a 24-hour break), then focus on proofreading.
- 2) **Read aloud and slowly**, which allows your brain to fix errors and spot awkward sentences.
- 3) **Print a hard copy of your document**, which makes it easier to read and allows you to do it in different places.
- 4) **Align with company style standards**, from font choice to preferred spellings and formatting.
- 5) **Be concise, direct and remove excess words**, like repetitions, adjectives or adverbs that do not add value to the text.
- 6) **Explain or remove jargon and specialised terminology**. Spell out acronyms the first time you mention them.
- 7) **Check sentence structure and punctuation**, ensuring subjects and verbs agree.
- 8) **Use software**, for example Word's spelling and grammar tool can help catch detectable errors and can be useful as a first scan.
- 9) **Review flow and sequencing**, including numbering of pages and images, and general consistency and presentation.

How to avoid grammar mistakes

- 1) **Check homonyms**: Ensure your word choice is correct, which can be tricky with words that have similar spelling or pronunciation but different meanings. This is especially crucial if English is not your first language!
- 2) **Check apostrophes**: avoid contractions or letters missing in formal writing.
- 3) **Verify numbers, times and dates**: triple check numbers and dates; a misplaced number in a budget or deadline can cause stress and confusion.
- 4) **Verify names**: spelling a staff member's or client's name correctly is crucial to show your attention to detail.
- 5) **Test hyperlinks and phone numbers**: it can be very frustrating if a web address, link or number does not work. Double-check each to make sure the document is correctly directing the reader.

Ask yourself

- When is proofreading necessary?
- What are you trying to achieve when proofreading?
- What do you do to ensure your content is free of linguistic and formatting errors?

Apostrophe examples

- Do not → Don't
- Have not → Haven't
- I will → I'll
- We are → We're

① Action Point

The next time you send a business email or create a business document (meeting notes, business case etc.) use the techniques above to proofread your work. What strategy do you find most helpful and how can you share best practice across your team?



Persuasion techniques

Even the most well written, accurate and grammatically correct document will not have an impact if it's not persuasive and meaningful. Persuasive language is a powerful tool which is used for many reasons in business, for example to influence or convince others to take certain action, to help sell a product or service, or to have your voice and ideas heard.

Being persuasive involves more than simply getting someone to change their mind, it's about making sure your ideas are heard and valued: having a new product, platform or idea is great, but has no value if you cannot persuade people to buy into it.

① Action Point

Do you consider yourself to be persuasive? On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = poor; 5 = excellent), rate how persuasive you think you are in different business scenarios:

Business scenario	1-5
Dealing with challenging customer complaints	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing an email to sell a product or service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proposing a new idea at a team meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delivering a presentation on a business case	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establishing trust and a common ground with a client	<input type="checkbox"/>

Consider the ways in which you can enhance the competencies you scored low on in your future practices.

Write your reflections and submit an **External CPD** on the platform.



Here are some types of persuasive techniques and examples of how you can use them to improve your skills:

Technique	Example
Flattery: Compliment, encourage personal connections and establish a common ground	"A colleague introduced me to [brand] and had such high praise that I immediately signed up..." or "I am impressed with..."
Opinion: Use the first person and offer your personal viewpoint	" I think..." "In my view..."
Triples: Group information into sets of three. The use of series of three elements helps the audience remember the information and is often used in advertising and slogans	"Our service has revolutionised beauty, fashion, and lifestyle brands... " or " Reduce, reuse, recycle "
Emotive language: Use anecdotes and vocabulary that emotionally connects with the audience	"Thousands of animals are at the mercy of..."
Hyperbole: Extreme exaggeration	"It is out of this world... "
Statistics and figures: Use statistics and data: when uncertain, people tend to look to the actions and behaviours of others to make up their own mind	" 80% of managers say that..." "Each year over 30,000 people study with..."
Rhetorical questions: Use a question which implies its own answer to subtly influence your audience	"Who doesn't want to..."

📌 Action Point

Think of a time when you had to motivate your team: how could you have used these persuasion techniques to effectively lead change? Then, submit an **External CPD** on the platform.

Other editing techniques

Two useful editing principles that you should always consider when writing include:

- **Be clear, concise, and correct:** Wordy expressions may distract readers; be clear as well as concise, avoid excessive verbiage and cut unnecessary words and phrases. Stick to short words and phrases, but repeat and restate your messages.

I am writing this email because I want to thank you for your help.

vs

Thank you for your help,...

- **Write actively, not passively:** The active voice generally works better than the passive. It is more direct and concise, and enables to put your subject upfront. It also uses less words if you are restrained by a word count.

The report was reviewed on Tuesday

vs

We reviewed your report on Tuesday



Other language techniques

Other language techniques that you can consider when writing include:

- **Alliteration:** A repetition of words that share the same starting letter or sound. Use it to make your message more memorable.

*And our **task** today is to **take** the next steps in...*

- **Phrasal Verb:** A verb of more than one part that often alters the meaning. Replace these with formal verbs in professional writing.

Turn down / run into

vs

reject / decline

- **Simile:** A figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds (usually starts with 'like', or contains 'as... as').
- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which an expression is used to compare one thing to another by saying it is that thing. Comparing something to a different thing can help your audience to understand and visualise it.

📌 Action Point

Think of a time when you had to write an email or a report: how could you have improved your language, and ensure your document was clear, concise and correct? Provide an example of a professional email or report that you have written, comment on its purpose and the language used, and submit an **External CPD** on the platform.

Useful Phrases

- **Phrases to illustrate a point:** For instance, for example, specifically, in particular, namely, such as, like
- **Phrases to introduce an example:** For example, thus, as an example, in the instance of, in other words, to illustrate
- **Phrases to make suggestions:** To this end, keeping this in mind, for this purpose, therefore
- **Phrases to transition:** Also, furthermore, additionally, besides that, equally as important, similarly, likewise, as a result, otherwise, however
- **Phrases to discuss or evaluate an argument:** On the other hand, nevertheless, despite, in spite of, yet, conversely, instead, by the same token
- **Phrases for conclusions and summarising:** With this in mind, as a result of, because of this, for this reason, so, due to, since, finally, in short, in conclusion



Skimming and Scanning Texts

Skimming and scanning are reading techniques used to move quickly through a text. They both involve processing visual information (text) to determine what information is important, and what is not. However, they have slightly different purposes:

Skimming a text is reading rapidly in order to get a general overview of the text, understanding the general idea. **Scanning** is reading rapidly in order to draw out key information and specific facts.

Reading strategies: skimming and scanning

As a professional, it is easy to delve into the fine details of texts, which is needed in some cases. However, it's important to learn the skill of skimming and scanning as some texts do not require you to read with the same amount of attention as other, more complex ones. These techniques can save you a significant amount of time.

Skim reading – This is useful when you want to quickly gain an overall understanding of the subject matter. This strategy involves glancing over the text quickly. For example, it is useful to read the first and last paragraph to get a more concrete understanding. Skimming allows you gauge the main ideas without looking at the text in too much detail.

When to use it: when previewing or reviewing texts, to quickly determine main ideas and important sections from a large quantity of written material.

Scanning text – Scan a text if you are searching for a specific piece of information. This strategy involves rapidly moving across the text to identify key words, dates, names, figures quickly.

When to use it: when you have a question in mind and read the text to find the answer, ignoring unrelated information.



Top Tip: Adapt your reading pace according to the text and the purpose of your reading. How fast you should go is dependent upon your subject knowledge, how challenging the text is, and how thoroughly you need to understand it.

How can you skim and scan texts?

Skim reading

- Establish your purpose for skimming
- Look for relevant key words in the contents pages
- Start at the beginning of the reading and glide your eyes over the text very quickly. Try to detect the main idea in the introductory paragraph
- Read the first sentence in each paragraph. This generally describes what will follow in the paragraph
- Do not read complete sentences if you feel it will not yield useful information. Skip to the next sentence
- Pay attention to headings, graphics and writing techniques

Scan reading

- Establish your purpose for skimming
- Pay attention to how the text is arranged in order to locate words more quickly. Look out for tables, diagrams and images
- Look out for key words and phrases (names, numbers, dates...etc.)
- Glance over the text in a zigzag pattern to absorb as much information as possible (use your finger to guide you, if necessary)
- When you locate an important word or information, slow down to read that specific section more thoroughly

Ask yourself

- When is skimming and scanning necessary in your role?
- What are you trying to achieve from reading a specific text?
- What do you think are the benefits of skimming and scanning?

Remember

Scanning and skimming are not alternatives for thorough reading and should only be used as a strategy to locate material quickly.



Skim and scan text example

Businesses put an awful lot of effort into meeting the diverse needs of their stakeholders — customers, investors, employees, and society at large. But they're not paying enough attention to one ingredient that is crucial to productive relationships with those stakeholders: trust.

Volkswagen is still struggling with the aftermath of the 2015 revelation that it cheated on emissions tests. United Airlines has yet to fully recover from two self-inflicted wounds: getting security to drag a doctor off a plane after he resisted giving up his seat in 2017, and the death of a puppy on a plane in 2018 after a flight attendant insisted its owner put it in an overhead bin. In the spring of 2019 Boeing had to be forced by a presidential order to ground its 737 Max jets in the United States, even though crashes had killed everyone on board two planes in five months and some 42 other countries had forbidden the jets to fly. Later the news broke that Boeing had known there was a problem with the jet's safety features as early as 2017 but failed to disclose it. Now, customers, pilots and crew, and regulators all over the world are wondering why they should trust Boeing. Whose interests was it serving?

Betrayals of trust have major financial consequences. In 2018 the Economist studied eight of the largest recent business scandals, comparing the companies involved with their peer groups, and found that they had forfeited significant amounts of value. The median firm was worth 30% less than it would have been valued had it not experienced a scandal. That same year another study, by IBM Security and Ponemon Institute, put the average cost of a data breach at \$3.86 million, a 6.4% increase over the year before, and calculated that on average each stolen record cost a company \$148.

Creating trust, in contrast, lifts performance. In a 1999 study of Holiday Inns, 6,500 employees rated their trust in their managers on a scale of 1 to 5. The researchers found that a one-eighth point improvement in scores could be expected to increase an inn's annual profits by 2.5% of revenues, or \$250,000 more per hotel. No other aspect of managers' behavior had such a large impact on profits.¹

① Action Point

Skim and scan the text above and answer the following questions:

- 1) Where might this text be from and what is the purpose of the text?
- 2) What did Volkswagen do that resulted in a loss of trust?
- 3) How much is the average cost of data breach?
- 4) What is the conclusion of the piece?



Top Tip:

- 1) Read the questions first
- 2) Skim read the text for context and purpose
- 3) Scan the text for key information
- 4) Highlight any names, places, numbers or dates
- 5) Re-read the questions and then find the answers in the text

¹ Sucha, S. and Gupta, S. (2019) Harvard Business Review



Paragraphing

Paragraphing is the practice of dividing a text into paragraphs with the aim of marking a new point and ensuring the argument clearly progresses from one point to the next. Paragraphs, whether denoted by a new line and an indentation or a line break, provide a structure for writing of any length and enable the reader to identify the stages of your argument. As McLaren (2001) puts it, "A neat series of paragraphs acts like stepping stones that can be followed pleasurably across the river."

The form, length, style, and positioning of paragraphs will vary depending on what you are writing, however, as a guideline, paragraphs should usually be no less than 2 or 3 sentences long. Every paragraph should contain a single developed idea and should signal a new point or stage in your writing. If a paragraph is coherent, each sentence flows smoothly into the next without obvious shifts or jumps. A basic paragraph should consist of three key parts:

- An opening sentence to introduce the idea and make the purpose of the paragraph clear.
- A detailed explanation of the topic, which should connect clearly to the opening sentence. The idea can be developed by giving examples, commenting on evidence, examining opposing ideas or redefining the concept.
- A summary to sum up the key ideas, comment on their implication or make a link to the next paragraph.

Paragraphs should be unified by using connectives, word and phrases like: moreover, nonetheless, another key point to consider is, in addition, in conclusion etc.

Example

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) defines the continuing commitment of businesses to behave ethically and improve the quality of life of the workforce as well as the local community and society at large (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

Research suggests that businesses that invest in sustainable and ethical approaches will demonstrate that they are responsible, thus encouraging customer buy-in, improving the business reputation and consumer sales (Watson, 2018). This is because customers tend to support ethical green businesses. Firms with a strong CSR culture also tend to be more attractive to jobseekers (Cooke, 2011). For example, by implementing CSR in Nigeria, Coca-Cola improved its corporate image and profits while aligning its strategy with cultural objectives and the country's neoliberal educational reform model (Love, 2000).

Overall, evidence suggests that investing in CSR can improve a firm's brand image and performance.



Commonly confused words

Commonly Confused Words	Difference in meaning	Example
accept vs except	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Accept is to receive something that is offered– Except is to exclude (not include)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Sarah accepted the job promotion– I can work every day except Fridays
among vs between	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Among is used when referring to items that are part of a group– Between is used when naming individual items	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– China's economy is among the world's top ten– What is the difference between private and public companies?
affect vs effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Affect (verb) is to have an influence on someone or something– Effect (noun) is the result or the outcome of a particular influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Employee engagement significantly affects businesses– The effect of economic growth on business is often positive
complement vs compliment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Complement is to contribute to in a way that improves its quality– Compliment is to express praise or admiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The new products complement the existing range– The finance director complimented the staff for all their efforts in preparation for the audit
proceed vs precede	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Proceed is to begin a course of action– Precede is to come before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The manager decided to proceed with the hiring decision– John preceded Mary as the compliance director
principle vs principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Principle is a general belief of how something works– Principal is the first in order of importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Businesses are guided by a set of core principles– The principal goal is to increase your leadership knowledge
imply vs infer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Imply is to express something indirectly; without explicitly stating it– Infer is to conclude through reasoning; to make an informed guess	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– He implied that he thought the project was not great– From the data we can infer that the sales are growing faster than last year
farther vs further	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Farther is used when referring to physical distance– Further means in addition to something	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 'How much farther?'– We will further evaluate the performance of the model
use vs utilise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Use is to deploy something for a purpose– Utilise is to make practical use of something	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The department have used up all their allocated funding for the financial year– I haven't really utilised my bachelor's degree since I left university
criterion vs criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Criteria is the plural form of criterion; a basis of comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– There are four criteria in this task– You have met each and every criterion within the task
mutual vs reciprocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Mutual is when an opinion, feeling or action is held by more than one person– Reciprocal is when a feeling or action is returned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 'I agree with the company's proposed plans.' 'yes, so do I. the feeling is mutual'– 'I gave Sam really great feedback; I was hoping for some reciprocal comment'
comprise vs compose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Comprise is to have things or people as parts or members; 'to consist of'– Compose means to make up or form something	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The report comprises of eight sections– Income statements are composed of the following two elements: income and expense
elicit vs illicit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Elicit is to draw out information or a response– Illicit refers to something that is not morally or legally accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The aim of the survey was to elicit information about inclusivity in the workplace– The use of cash to avoid paying taxes is a mechanism for illicit funds



Professional business vocabulary

Expanding business vocabulary is crucial, as a business professional.

As a business professional, it is important you articulate your words and use appropriate vocabulary in your practice, whether that be meetings, reports or presentations. This will help ensure that your ideas are understood.

Reflection

Spend a few minutes considering the following questions:

- 1) **How confident are you in using business vocabulary?**
- 2) **How important is it for you to expand your business vocabulary for professional contexts?**

Nouns (general)

action	continuity	function	progress	structure
allocation	element	growth	projection	submit
agenda	expansion	merger	restructure	transition
brand	framework	output	strategy	update

Verbs

accept	consider	establish	report
allocate	delegate	improve	respond
approve	deliver	promote	suggest
confirm	develop	recruit	supply

Adjectives

accountable	collaborative	focused	timely
accurate	constructive	innovative	thorough
articulate	detailed	prompt	structured
cooperative	extensive	robust	systematic

Synonyms

allocate/assign	continuity/stability	dominant/prevaling	extensive/vast
articulate/coherent	cost/expense	element/component	focused/centered
calculate/determine	detailed/comprehensive	employ/appoint	promote/encourage
collaborative/collective	develop/create	expansion/growth	robust/vigorous



- Top Tips:**
- **Read often:** consistent exposure to new words is crucial to increase your mental dictionary
 - **Keep a dictionary at hand.** When you come across a new word look it up in the dictionary to find its meaning
 - **Build a personal dictionary,** when you come across a new word add it to the list alongside its meaning
 - **Write often,** incorporate new words to develop practical vocabulary
 - **Engage in dialogue** to be comfortable in using learned vocabulary in conversations



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