

Chapter 4

Business Style: Sentences and Paragraphs

Key points :

- 1.** Recognize basic types of sentences and the building blocks of sentences.
- 2.** Improve sentence variety by matching sentence style and length to purpose.
- 3.** Phrase basic types of questions.
- 4.** Improve sentence clarity.
- 5.** Emphasize important facts and ideas; minimize less important ones.
- 6.** Use parallelism to write with consistency and impact.
- 7.** Distinguish between active and passive voice.
- 8.** Eliminate sentence errors that impair clarity and unity : sentence fragments, run-ons, misplaced and dangling modifiers, mixed constructions.
- 9.** Develop logical, coherent, and focused paragraphs.
- 10.** Apply strategies for proofreading different types of messages.

1. Recognize basic types of sentences and the building blocks of sentences.

- Identify the independent and dependent clauses in your sentence.
- Make sure each sentence is grammatically complete.

Depending on your message, use one of these types of sentences:

Simple	1 independent clause	Use for opening sentence. Ideal to emphasize message or being straightforward
Compound	2 independent clauses	Join by coordination conjunctions. Use to stress the equivalence in value of 2 ideas. Use only for related sentences.
Complex	1 dependent and 1 independent clause	Use to show the relative importance of ideas and encompassing details.
Compound-Complex	1 dependent and 2 independent clauses	Use to show the relative importance of ideas and encompassing details.

2. Improve sentence variety by matching sentence style and length to purpose.

- Alternate between short and long sentences to vary the rhythm.
- Keep your readers' attention and improve their comprehension of your text.
- Turn a clause in a prepositional phrase; it acts as an adjective of the main clause and streamlines the sentence.
- Turn a clause in an appositive using commas to set it off from what it renames.

3. Phrase basic types of questions.

Closed questions:

- Use when seeking verification or fast-checking.
- Formulate your questions knowing that the answer is often yes or no.

Open questions:

- Use when trying to obtain more detailed information than a few words.

Hypothetical questions:

- They ask the reader to suggest different circumstances than they actually are.
- Ideal for brainstorming and contingency planning.

4. Improve sentence clarity.

Avoid broad references:

- Check for pronoun references, especially with *this*, *that* and *it*.
- Repeat the noun if necessary.

Avoid embedding dependent clauses:

- Put them at the beginning or the end of a sentence.
- Having them in the middle makes sentences choppy and hard to read.

Limit multiple negatives:

- They are mostly used for rhetorical effect or as euphemism.
- Most of the time results in confusion.

5. Emphasize important facts and ideas; minimize less important ones.

Emphasis through mechanical device:

- You can use underlining, **boldface**, *italic*, **change font size**, ALL CAPS or **colours** to emphasize certain words.
- Be careful! Use them with moderation. These devices do not usually belong in a business environment.
- Use dashes instead of commas or parentheses to emphasize facts that demand special attention.

Emphasis through style:

- Put important ideas first or last; use the primacy or recency effect to achieve maximum impact.
- Use short, simple sentence to highlight key ideas.
- Label ideas with markers to indicate important ideas.
- Present important ideas in list (bulleted) form. Use a vertical listing rather than a horizontal one.
- Use precise and specific words to identify the main point; cut down on the description.
- Repeat the key words/ideas for a rhetorical effect. It is mostly used for persuasion.

De-emphasize:

- Use the opposite rules to de-emphasize unimportant facts or bad news that need to be announced.

6. Use parallelism to write with consistency and impact.

Parallelism is:

- Delivering similar content in a similar way, matching nouns, verb tenses and phrases throughout a sentence.

Use it to ease the reading and make your sentences more compelling.

7. Distinguish between active and passive voice.

Active voice:

The ACTOR poses an ACTION on the RECEIVER

- To state good news in a clear and direct way.
- To emphasize the actor.

Passive voice:

The RECEIVER is subjected to an ACTION from the ACTOR

- To conceal the actor when the information is unimportant, unknown or harmful.
- To de-emphasize negative news.
- To reduce intrusive first-person pronouns. But first, make it clear that the *I* is responsible for the action.
- To maintain consistency with previous sentences using the passive voice.

8. Eliminate sentence errors that impair clarity and unity: sentence fragments, run-ons, misplaced and dangling modifiers, mixed constructions.

Here are some mistakes you should watch out for:

- Sentence fragments

They are incomplete portions of sentences that are punctuated as such. To identify them, work backwards, going from last sentence to first. Then correct it by coordinating them to the main sentence.

- Run-on sentences

They are sentences that are composed of too many independent clauses without an adequate connecting element. Add a comma, conjunction or period to separate the 2 entities.

- Comma splice

It is a similar problem to a run-on sentence in which 2 independent clauses are linked by only a comma. Use a conjunction or a period to separate them.

- Misplaced modifier

In order to avoid confusion on which word it relates to, place the modifier as close as possible to the word it describes.

- Dangling modifiers

Happens when the modifier doesn't clearly relate to another word in the sentence. To address this, avoid starting a sentence with a verbal phrase or make 2 distinct clauses.

- Elliptical construction

It is when a word is omitted because it is inferred by the context. Use the exact same words when writing about the same idea.

- Faulty predication and mixed constructions

They happen when you have mismatched elements that don't fit together.

- Mixed construction is leaving an incompatible grammatical structure as is, rendering the meaning unclear or illogical. Some of the most common are:

- o *Is when or is where* combination

To fix this, drop the where or when and add a classifying word or substitute another verb.

- *Reason...is* combination

Replace with *the reason is that...*

- *The fact that*

Change the sentence opening or write *the fact is that...*

9. Develop logical, coherent, and focused paragraphs.

Paragraph length:

- Use single sentence as an opener or closer. Also use to emphasize important facts.
- Use short paragraphs when writing messages.
- Use long paragraphs when writing reports or when you need to explain complex material.

Topic sentence:

- The topic sentence announces the paragraph's purpose. Use it to help readers keep focus.
- Use it for paragraphs that describe, classify or illustrate.

Paragraph coherence:

- Use transitional words to:
 - o Add a point
 - o Illustrate
 - o Show cause and effect
 - o Show contrast and reversal
 - o Show similarity
 - o Summarize or conclude
 - o Concede a point Show a time sequence.

10. Apply strategies for proofreading different types of messages.

Proofreading ensures that your text be recognized as a professional text. Make sure you follow these steps when going over your text:

- Make sure your names, facts and figures are accurate
- Use the appropriate format
- Use of correct grammar
- Spell-check. Make sure your spell-checking software uses the correct English (U.K., US, Australia)
- Check the punctuation, especially the commas