BUSINESS WRITING GUIDE

Business Writing Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing well gives you an edge in your career—in building relationships, advocating for yourself, promoting your ideas, and influencing others. Honing business writing skills is an ongoing pursuit, but you can make rapid progress by understanding readers' needs and writers' decisions.

What do business readers have in common? They share two needs that you'll find relatable:

- get through the material quickly **(efficiency)**
- feel confident in the knowledge they gain **(effectiveness)**

What do business writers have in common? They make decisions, one idea and word at a time, about how to best meet these needs. Consider these questions:

- Can a reader gain more knowledge from an assumption about the future or from researched and reasoned forecasting? **(a strategic issue)**
- Can a reader more quickly and confidently understand a memo that contains an unbroken series of paragraphs or one that has headings identifying key ideas? **(a macro issue)**
- Can a reader more quickly grasp "there are a few tricky issues faced by the ones who are in charge" or "the managers face three challenges"? **(a micro issue)**

In each case, the second choice better suits business readers' needs. Collectively, such distinctions shape business writing conventions: shared standards and practices that help ensure efficient, effective communication.

While these conventions are not arbitrary, some may be new to you, and all of them merit practice. The Lundquist College of Business writing skills rubric provides an overview of common business writing conventions and qualities (see Appendix). The following sections of this writing guide offer a closer look, with descriptions and recommendations to illustrate key ideas. Review the guide early and often as you navigate strategic, macro, and micro issues to produce clear, clean, compelling writing.

As you make progress, keep in mind: **business writers work hard so that business readers don't have to**.

2. STRATEGIC ISSUES

What are you writing about? Why? To whom? These are strategic issues: big-picture considerations that determine how you frame your core message and whether your writing achieves the desired result.

2.1 **Overall Impact**

Would you apply for a job with a sonnet instead of a resume? Probably not. Successful writing fits the situation, so put your rhetorical analysis skills to work.

2.1.1   ATTEND TO THE CONTEXT, TASK, AND PURPOSE

Before putting words on the page, evaluate your circumstances. For example, is the context formal or informal? What outcome do you want? What is the best vehicle—an email, a memo, a report? Will you need to gather research, consult with others, arrange feedback?

Carefully review all available instructions and guidelines. In the workplace, readers typically value attention to detail and expect writers to meet specifications. Imagine that a reader receives a document that doesn't have the required font size. Is that a minor issue? Or a red flag signaling other oversights and errors lurking within the pages? The reader may simply delete the document rather than risk wasting the time to find out.

2.1.2   FOCUS ON THE AUDIENCE

Business writing is typically action-oriented—convincing the audience to *do*. The more you can learn about your readers, the better. Their background knowledge, interests, and goals should inform every writing decision you make—from whether you need to define specific terms to which persuasion tactics you use to how you word your opening line.

Even if you don't have details about your specific readers, focusing on the audience's reading experience will help you craft your message. Draw on your knowledge of human attention, learning, decision-making, and behavior change to make an impact.

2.1.3   CREATE A BALANCED ARGUMENT

One model with insights for appealing to an audience is the rhetorical triangle. Three elements form the triangle:

- ethos—What can you include to help the audience trust you? **(credibility)**
- logos—How can you help the audience understand your claims? **(logic)**
- pathos—What will make the audience care? **(emotion)**

Including all three elements in your writing will help you make a balanced and compelling case.

2.2 Content Development

Of the three rhetorical triangle elements, logos is particularly relevant to strong content development. Business readers have high standards for airtight reasoning, so your critical thinking skills are vital.

2.2.1   ANALYZE INFORMATION

Business writers do more than collect and report information. They provide analysis that conveys new insights and conclusions. And they explicitly share their reasoning to guide readers from one point to the next.

Although you should be mindful of your readers' time, don't sell your argument short by omitting key points or assuming readers will make the same connections that you do. A thorough argument is rich with explanation, interpretation, and analysis.

2.2.2 SUPPORT CLAIMS WITH EVIDENCE

One way to view an argument is as a recipe with three main ingredients:
- claims—debatable statements
- evidence—facts, data, observations
- assumptions—theories or beliefs, often unstated, that link the evidence and claim

Even a single sentence can contain all three ingredients. Take this sentence, for example: "The weather forecast indicates rain, so you should bring an umbrella." What are the ingredients?
- "so you should bring an umbrella" **(claim)**
- "the weather forecast indicates rain" **(evidence)**
- unstated: you are going outside, don't want to get wet, have an umbrella available, don't prefer a hooded jacket, think the umbrella won't blow away, etc. **(assumptions)**

Will the person receiving this advice bring an umbrella? That depends. Does the person think the weather forecast is good evidence? Does the person share the same assumptions? Understanding the audience helps a writer determine what type of evidence to use and whether the assumptions warrant adjustment or additional explanation.

What evidence is common in business writing? While specific choices vary by context, start by identifying a mix of:
- numbers—statistics, measures, ratings, costs **(quantitative data)**
- descriptions—stories, examples, survey comments, research findings **(qualitative data)**
- firsthand accounts—experiences, interviews, original documents **(primary sources)**
- existing research—journal articles, analyses, commentaries **(secondary sources)**.

How much evidence is enough? Some writing tasks specify the number of sources, statistics, or examples to include. More often, though, you'll have to make a judgment call. In general, include more evidence if your readers are less likely to understand and agree with you or if you can't find evidence that precisely fits your claim. However, if the evidence you have is strong, resist the urge to supplement with weaker evidence, which can dilute rather than strengthen your case.

2.2.3 ELIMINATE UNSUPPORTED CLAIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Even if you win over your readers with ten well-supported claims, you can lose them with a single unsupported one. Delete overgeneralizations, exaggerations, logical fallacies, and any other debatable points that you can't (or don't have space to) back up. Consider these examples:
- "*If* we don't hire a new coach now, *then* we will lose even more games this season."
- "Residents *never* feel safe walking downtown."
- "Rent costs are *too high*."
- "Attendance rates rose *exponentially*."

These statements may pass without scrutiny in everyday conversation, but they can raise questions, create distractions, and damage credibility in a business context. An "if…then"

statement is a causal claim that would require significant evidence, especially because it relies on prediction. What about other factors? Could new recruits or updated equipment affect the number of wins? Similarly, absolutes such as "never" and "always" require proof that no exceptions exist. "Too high" is an opinion unless definitions and value explanations follow. "Exponentially" is a specific mathematical concept that merits accompanying data trends.

To avoid weakening your argument, evaluate every word, expand as necessary, and cut the rest.

3. MACRO ISSUES

After you work out the strategic *what*, *why*, and *who* writing issues, you can turn your attention to the macro *how* to help your readers navigate your ideas.

3.1 Organization

You likely have friends who organize their closets, playlists, or schedules differently than you do. No single method or pattern is "right." The same is true in business writing. But some methods are more familiar than others, and some patterns are easier to explain.

3.1.1 CREATE A COHESIVE STRUCTURE

Each part of a document should work together—as an integrated whole—to serve the audience, core message, and purpose. Whether you write a one-paragraph email or a 40-page report, your readers will minimally expect to find a three-part structure:

- an introduction that establishes the core message and purpose **(opening)**
- a body that unpacks the reasoning with evidence and explanations **(storyline)**
- an ending that reinforces the significance and recommends action **(closing)**

Some types of writing have specific structural conventions, much like how academic journal articles commonly include introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion sections. Look for guidelines and instructions that inform your decisions about structure.

3.1.2 DEVELOP A LOGICAL PROGRESSION OF IDEAS

Evaluate the relationships among your ideas—within every document, paragraph, and sentence—to determine what sequence of information is likely to increase readers' interest and understanding and decrease potential confusion and doubt. These are examples of common idea orders:

- general to specific
- high to low priority
- problem and solution
- cause and effect
- chronological
- sequential

In many cases, the progression of ideas is more nuanced. Outlining your key points before (or after) you draft may help you more clearly see the relationships and find an organic flow.

3.1.3   CONNECT IDEAS WITH TRANSITIONS

Even when you have a well-reasoned progression of ideas, writing can seem choppy without transitions. Using words and phrases such as *because*, *similarly*, *finally*, and *for example* is a simple way to improve flow and shape your readers' understanding. Consider these sentences, for example:

- They felt nervous about the pitch competition. *However*, they decided to get some sleep.
- They felt nervous about the pitch competition. *Therefore*, they decided to get some sleep.

A single word connects the ideas—and reveals whether sleep was a distraction or a strategy.

More complex transitions reveal even more reasoning and are particularly useful at the beginning of sections and paragraphs. One common strategy is to write a single sentence that contains a key word or phrase from both the previous and new paragraphs. For example, in the opening sentence of this subsection, "progression of ideas" (the main topic of subsection 3.1.2) and "transitions" (the main topic of subsection 3.1.3) illustrate this strategy.

3.2 **Design**

Your hard work producing rich ideas and a cohesive structure happens behind the scenes. For your readers, the first impression of your writing is the document's appearance. Does it look inviting or overwhelming? Polished or chaotic? This first impression of visual appeal can affect their views about your credibility as well as their interest in reading.

After observing the visual appeal, most business readers skim the document. A document designed for "high skim value" allows readers to gain general understanding quickly. Design features also assist readers when they thoroughly read, and later review, the material.

3.2.1   FORMAT STRATEGICALLY

Some formatting expectations vary. In your specific writing context, look for any requirements or templates that address line spacing, font, margin size, color use, and other minor style issues.

You also may find guidance about whether you can or should use charts, tables, and other visuals within the document. Visuals help engage readers, emphasize key points, and clarify complex ideas. If you use visuals, make sure:

- the image quality is high
- the value merits the amount of space it takes on the page
- the relationship to the adjacent text is clear
- the placement fits neatly with the other formatting features
- any text is a readable font size.

Although expectations vary, business writing typically employs these tools for creating visual appeal and skim value: white space, short block paragraphs, and bulleted or numbered lists.

White Space

Imagine reading a document *filled* with words, top to bottom, left to right, no open space anywhere. It would look like a word-search puzzle—which could be fun if you're in the mood for games, but not if you're trying to quickly learn new material.

Empty space decreases visual fatigue and provides structural cues. Margin space, left-justified text, larger indents to distinguish subsets, and blank lines between paragraphs are classic examples of white space.

Short Block Paragraphs

Business writing uses "block" paragraphs, named for their squared-off appearance. Do not indent the first line of a paragraph. Instead, include a blank line between paragraphs to signal the shift between key ideas.

Keeping paragraphs brief is also a signature of business writing. Each paragraph focuses on just one main idea and typically contains:

- maximum six lines of text in shorter pieces, such as a one-page memo
- maximum ten lines of text in longer proposals and reports.

Bulleted/Numbered Lists

Bulleted and numbered lists aren't required in business writing, but they are common because they increase visual appeal and skim value. They allow a writer to draw attention to specific information, break up dense content, and illustrate relationships among ideas. Here are five tips for using lists effectively:

1. Precede a list with a lead sentence that logically and grammatically introduces the content that follows. Typically, this sentence ends with a colon.
2. Word each point to be logically and grammatically parallel. Similar phrasing helps readers easily see the connections. For example, each point can contain:
   a. a single word
   b. comparable statistics
   c. a noun phrase
   d. a verb phrase
   e. a complete sentence.
3. Include at least two items in the list. Typically, lists include seven points or fewer to accommodate readers' attention spans.
4. Use simple wording and limit the length of each point, preferably to two lines of text maximum.
5. Typically, use plain round bullets or numbers (rather than dashes, arrows, or Roman numerals, for example) to maintain a clean visual appearance in the list.

Consider following the list with commentary, interpretation, analysis, or other wrap-up before you begin a new idea so readers can better digest the detail you provided.

3.2.2 WRITE DESCRIPTIVE HEADINGS

Headings are powerful visual and informational cues, offering your readers the document's outline at a glance. Short documents tend to have simpler outlines, so a one-page memo may have as few as two headings. Longer documents include more headings because readers need

additional guidance from sections *and* subsections, much like those that appear in many textbooks. Headings that represent the main sections are "level 1 headings." Headings within a main section are "level 2 headings," headings within those subsections are "level 3 headings," and so on—reflecting the hierarchy of ideas just as an outline does.

Making headings "descriptive" means using wording that distinctly identifies the content within the section or subsection. Descriptive headings increase skim value because they help readers quickly develop interest and understanding. These are more effective than generic labels, such as "Section 1" or "Background," which don't offer readers much information about what to expect.

If you start with a clear outline, you may be able to write headings before you draft. If you do, revisit them as you write to ensure they precisely fit the content. Another option is to write the content first and then determine what headings will help readers navigate it smoothly.

Some contexts and audiences require specific heading styles, so refer to any available instructions or templates for guidance. In most situations, apply the following conventions for effective headings:

- Each heading level has distinct formatting (font size, bold, italic, color, extra spacing).
- Each heading should fit all content between it and the next same-level heading. If any content doesn't relate, restructure the content or reword the heading.
- Each heading should be specific *and* concise, typically less than half a line.
- Headings must appear in sets of two or more.
- Headings in the same set use the same style and similar phrasing:
  - identical font features
  - consistent capitalization
  - parallel grammar (all are noun phrases, all start with question words, etc.)

For examples of these conventions, review the headings in this writing guide. Throughout the guide, four heading levels distinguish relationships among ideas. Shorter sections, such as the introduction, have only one heading level. More complex sections, such as the macro section, use all four. These headings illustrate the hierarchy of ideas, from general to specific:

> Level 1—Macro Issues
> Level 2—Design
> Level 3—Format Strategically
> Level 4—White Space

The font size decreases with each level, and the color shifts between green and black font. You may also notice that the level 3 headings in this guide, such as "Format Strategically" and "Write Descriptive Headings," use a verb-phrase structure and provide the most description so that these key writing actions stand out.

The headings in this writing guide also use a numbering system (such as "3.2.2"). Because the numbers add visual clutter, they are not the most common practice in business writing. In this case, however, they aim to facilitate easier referencing in classroom settings—another example of context, audience, and purpose driving writing decisions.

3.2.3 ADD SIGNPOSTS

Because macro issues focus on guiding the reader, "signposts" play an important role. Much as signposts on a road help drivers follow a route, signposts in writing help readers follow a line of reasoning. In business writing, they are particularly prevalent because direct, simple cues make reading less time-intensive and more confidence-inspiring. The headings and transitions you include are signposts. Additional signposts can fold in anywhere you want to give readers an extra nudge, such as in these examples:

- "We have a *two-phase* plan to accomplish our goals. The *first phase*…. The *second*…."
- "The *most distinctive* product feature is…. *Additionally*…."
- "*How will* this training program benefit company culture? *Employee engagement will*…."

Openings and closings particularly benefit from signposts. Introductions typically include a preview of the content, following the same order and structure as the body. Final paragraphs often don't provide a full summary, but they do call attention to the most important takeaways and direct recommendations. Content sections function in this way as well, with a warm-up or preview of content at the beginning and a wrap-up at the end. This need for signposting is the main reason most business writing includes at least one sentence between headings—giving the readers a map before guiding them down a narrower road.

4. MICRO ISSUES

As the name suggests, micro issues focus on smaller-scale writing decisions—another aspect of *how* you convey your message and influence your audience.

4.1 Sentence-Level Language

Word choice, phrasing, punctuation—these tiny marks on a page can make or break your argument. Collectively, they can add clarity, energy, and polish that move your readers to say, "Yes!" But any one of them can also be an instant deal breaker.

No pressure, right? Fortunately, business writing follows specific sentence-level writing conventions that are learnable and get easier with practice.

4.1.1 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH TONE

Do you respond more positively when someone "encourages" or "commands" you to do something? Do you have more confidence in someone who "hopes to" or "will" make a change? Different words convey different tones—and hence impact emotion (pathos) and credibility (ethos), even when they have similar meanings (logos).

Use your analysis of audience, context, and purpose to guide your tone. Some circumstances warrant particular politeness: "Thank you for considering this request." And others warrant a stern approach: "This behavior violates company policy." Whatever the circumstances, you'll build stronger relationships if you steer clear of:

- jargon
- slang
- clichés
- vague expressions

- overly complex vocabulary
- overly informal words or spelling
- discriminatory words or stereotypes
- accusatory language.

In any context, keep in mind that your words affect your readers' emotional experience, their perception of you, and their openness to your ideas.

4.1.2 USE CONCISE PHRASING

Another key language strategy is to convey an idea as simply as possible. Using straightforward words, phrases, and sentence structures creates "cognitive ease" for readers, saving them time and effort. Examine these two sentences:

1. "We are choosing to look into and analyze this company because it is publicly traded and there is a lot of history and information that has been made available about it."
2. "We chose to analyze this company because of its public status and rich history."

Both sentences are grammatically correct, use basic vocabulary, and convey the same meaning. But the second is significantly shorter and simpler:

1. wordy version—31 words, 4 clauses
2. concise version—14 words, 1 clause

To make a wordy sentence more concise, begin with a "when in doubt, cut it out" mindset, deleting any repetitions or unnecessary information. You can also learn common culprits of wordy writing, such as the examples under the language categories below. Systematically search for these culprits—and replace or delete them—to increase cognitive ease.

Complex Words and Phrases
Replace longer words and phrases with simpler options.

Wordy	Concise
utilize	use
encounter	meet
commence	start
few and far between	rare
in order to	to
in the event that	if
at the present time	now
due to the fact that	because
arrive at an agreement on	agree
make a decision about	decide
take into consideration	consider
the agenda for the meeting	the meeting agenda
in the process of negotiation	during negotiation
for the purpose of increasing sales	to increase sales

Expletives
Delete empty "it" and "there" phrases and begin the sentence with the subject.

Wordy	Concise
It's important to understand the budget.	Understanding the budget is important.
We didn't realize it would be helpful to	We didn't realize arguing would be helpful.
There are six participants who completed the survey.	Six participants completed the survey.
There wasn't enough time to meet.	We didn't have enough time to meet.

Passive Voice
Replace passive verbs with active verbs by making the "do-er" of the action the subject.

Wordy	Concise
The project was completed early.	We completed the project early.
The grant request will be submitted by noon.	The director will submit the grant request by noon.
They expected their hypothesis would be supported by the data.	They expected the data would support their hypothesis.
They were given the award.	They received the award.

4.1.3   AVOID GRAMMAR ERRORS

Writers tend to reduce grammar errors naturally as they reduce wordiness. More straightforward writing simply leaves less room for error. Still, some errors are difficult to spot. Below are some common errors in business writing, along with incorrect and correct example sentences. If you spot a common error type in your own writing, seek additional instruction and examples to aid your long-term writing progress.

Error Type	Incorrect Sentence	Correct Sentence
Run-on	The site visit was useful, I have several new ideas for improving customer service.	The site visit was useful. I have several new ideas for improving customer service.
Fragment	We arrived late to the meeting. Because storms delayed our	We arrived late to the meeting because storms delayed our
Missing comma	Midway through the presentation the speaker asked for a volunteer.	Midway through the presentation, the speaker asked for a volunteer.
Surplus comma	The concern we felt before the deadline, faded immediately.	The concern we felt before the deadline faded immediately.
Wrong word choice	Market fluctuations effected consumer confidence.	Market fluctuations affected consumer confidence.
Subject-verb agreement	The team of experts were working on the project all night.	The team of experts was working on the project all night.
Unparallel structure	We learned about time management, effective communication, and how to delegate tasks.	We learned about time management, effective communication, and task delegation.

Dangling modifier	After receiving feedback, my performance improved.	After I received feedback, my performance improved.

Grammar is not always as straightforward as *incorrect* and *correct*. These are examples of grammar choices specific to business writing:

- **Semi-colons** (;) make sentences longer and more complex. Do not use them.
- **Coordinating conjunctions** (particularly *and, but, so*) can begin a sentence, except in particularly formal contexts.
- **Contractions** (such as *can't, don't, isn't, they're*) are typically acceptable because they help create a direct, personable tone.
- **First-person pronouns** (*I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours*) are acceptable when necessary to identify authorship, relay personal experience, or avoid passive voice.
- **Second-person pronouns** (*you, your, yours*) are common, but use them only when you mean "you, the reader."
- **Third-person singular pronouns** (*it, its*) are typical in references to an organization.

4.2 Citations

If your writing draws on research from outside sources, include citations so that readers can evaluate the quality of your information and find the original material for their own work. Business writing doesn't have its own discipline-specific citation style, although APA and MLA are fairly common. Any style you use has three essential elements: in-text citations, full references, and consistent formatting.

4.2.1 DOCUMENT SOURCES WITH IN-TEXT CITATIONS

Anytime you quote, paraphrase, or summarize information from an outside source, include an in-text citation. Even if you already mention the source in your sentence, an in-text citation is necessary. Specific formatting varies by style, but these citation options are common:

- Numbered—Add superscript numbers (for example, [1][2][3]) to indicate each source in order of appearance in the text **(footnote/endnote citations)**.
- Named—Add, in parentheses, the first piece of information that appears in the full reference (often, but not always, the author's last name) and any other information that the style requires (such as publication year or page number) **(parenthetical citations)**.

The main purpose of these in-text citations is to show readers where to look in the list of full references for more source details.

4.2.2 INCLUDE A REFERENCE LIST

Just as an in-text citation leads readers to the full reference, the full reference leads them to the original source material.

What is a "full" reference? Beyond providing just a title or web address for the source, a full reference includes the author, title, publication date, and other identifying information. The

specific components and formatting depend on the citation style and source material. These steps can help you find the right formula for your citation:

1. Refer to an official style manual or credible online style guide.
2. Look up your source type (book, journal article, website, industry report, interview, etc).
3. Apply the instructions to your source material.

Here are examples of full references for the same source, first in MLA style and then in APA. Although the formatting details differ, both versions provide information that allows readers to locate a copy of the book:

Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die.* Random House, 2007.

Heath, C, & Heath, D. (2007). *Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. Random House.

After you create full references for all of your sources, include them at the end of the document in a reference or works cited page, arranged in:

- numerical order, if you are using endnotes
- alphabetical order, if you are using parenthetical citations.

4.2.3 ENSURE CONSISTENT FORMATTING

Whatever style you use, completeness and consistency will help signal to your readers that your research is thoughtful and trustworthy. Review your document carefully to ensure that you are not missing any in-text citations. Then proofread your full reference list for these common errors:

- mixed citation styles (such as some in APA and others in MLA)
- references out of the intended numerical or alphabetical order
- missing components (such as not including the author or date)
- differences in information order, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization

Online citation generators can help save time, but they sometimes create citations with all capital letters, repeated information, extra spacing, or other oddities. Ultimately, your own judgment and attention to detail are your best tools.

5. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The previous sections address writing qualities and strategies you can use in your own writing. But you likely won't be writing entirely on your own. Business writing commonly involves teammates and technology—and knowing how to work effectively with both will give you a further advantage.

5.1 Collaborative Writing

In business settings, collaborative writing is common because it works. By strategically drawing on their unique perspectives, skill sets, and expertise, writers who collaborate can produce more

brainstorming, identify more nuanced solutions, generate more critical feedback, and ultimately produce a stronger final product.

These advantages aren't automatic. Consider this scenario: Co-writers facing a complex project attempt a simple divide-and-conquer strategy—assigning sections, writing independently, and collecting the pieces. Regardless of their individual writing skills, their final product likely contains logical disconnects, incomplete evidence, choppy structures, jarring style shifts, and distracting errors.

True collaboration requires teamwork. A strong team agreement, psychological safety, and frequent communication will help you reap the rewards and avoid the pitfalls of writing with other people. As you work together, develop a strategic team writing process with steps such as these:

1. **Prepare individually**—If each team member begins with task understanding and initial ideas, the team benefits from divergent thinking and more easily avoids groupthink.

2. **Schedule focused team meetings**—Productive teams don't meet for the sake of meeting. Decide what activities merit team meetings and create agendas with timing and outcomes.

3. **Complete the rhetorical analysis**—Working together to dissect the task, audience, and purpose helps team members stay on the same page.

4. **Set specific objectives**—Staying on the same page also involves having shared expectations. What are the team's priorities for the teamwork experience and the written product?

5. **Identify team assets**—Each writer brings different interests, experiences, and skills. How can each person best contribute?

6. **Create a project timeline**—Breaking the task into steps and identifying deadlines for each can facilitate momentum and reduce stress and misunderstandings.

7. **Assign roles**—Making individual tasks explicit at each stage reduces redundancies and oversights. Assigning partners can also improve accountability and information flow.

8. **Shape the core message and outline**—Completing this big-picture step together improves the likelihood that individual writers will produce cohesive work.

9. **Establish a documentation system**—A writing team should have shared notes and files, as well as common strategies for tracking document comments and revisions.

10. **Hold peer reviews**—Incorporating feedback early in the writing process allows team members to stay familiar with all contributions, spot diverging assumptions, and provide support.

11. **Develop a style guide**—Business writing conventions create some style consistency. But teams typically need to develop their own guidelines for issues such as tone, headings, and citations.

12. **Evaluate the completed project**—After writing, revising, and proofreading, a team can still benefit from collectively reviewing the work and seeking outside feedback before submitting.

Keep in mind that writing is an iterative, rather than linear, process. For the best results, loop back through steps to evaluate your progress and refine your approach.

5.2 **Generative AI**

As artificial intelligence (AI) technologies rapidly evolve, so too do the implications for business writers. The wide release of ChatGPT and other text-generating systems prompted a range of responses in workplaces, from *yay* to *yikes* and everything in between. Companies continue to grapple with concerns about ethics, security, authenticity, accuracy, bias, and other issues while also trying to equip their employees, improve efficiency, and gain a competitive advantage.

Given the inherent complexities, whether and how you use generative AI in your writing process is bound to change across contexts and over time. For some audiences and tasks, you may be prohibited from using these technologies. For others, you may be required to use them. More often, you'll use your own judgment.

If your goal is to strengthen your business writing skills, produce innovative content, or develop your own competitive advantage, resist giving too much power to a chatbot. You're smarter than it is—and can strive to stay that way.

If appropriate in your particular situation, a chatbot can provide guidance or feedback that facilitates your long-term writing progress. Consider copying a sentence, paragraph, or other portion of your writing and directing the system to evaluate it. Here are sample prompts for each writing category:

- **Strategic issues**—Is this paragraph persuasive? Does this information provide a problem or a solution? Analyze the logic of this paragraph. Does this content have emotional appeal?
- **Macro issues**—Create parallel headings for content about these four ideas. Does this paragraph have a clear topic sentence? What additional signposts might help the reader?
- **Micro issues**—Make this less wordy. Does this paragraph use passive voice? Which verbs are in past tense? Find missing commas.

Are the chatbot replies trustworthy? Not always. Much like grammar-check suggestions, they can overlook problems in some areas while flagging false positives in others. But they do provide opportunities for you to look at your material with fresh eyes and evaluate options.

Whatever writing tools evolve, the value of efficient and effective communication is timeless. Critical thinking skills, rhetorical analysis practices, and business writing know-how will help you make sound communication decisions—and meet your readers' needs—in a changing world.

6. APPENDIX

Lundquist College of Business Writing Skills Rubric

	Accomplished	Effective	Emerging	Ineffective
Strategic Issues – Overall Impact and Content Development				
The writing achieves its purpose with the intended audience and connects to the assigned task/ question/problem.	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose and aligns precisely with the assigned task(s).	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and aligns closely with the	Demonstrates awareness of context, purpose, and assigned tasks(s), with some attention to audience values, needs, and assumptions.	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and assigned tasks(s).
The writing analyzes, supports, and connects key points.	Provides thorough and thoughtful analysis, supported by strong evidence and convincing logic.	Provides key points that are mostly well developed, supported with evidence, and logically cohesive.	Includes key points that are mostly clear but require audience to infer meaning and accept unclarified assumptions.	Includes key points that are unclear or insufficiently explained and supported.
Macro Issues – Organization and Design				
The writing exhibits a clear overall structure and logical progression of ideas.	Demonstrates careful attention to structure and cohesion, including a compelling opening, storyline, closing, and connections.	Provides a clear pattern of organization, with an opening, storyline, and closing and moderately compelling	Follows basic expectations for organization but requires further attention to idea order and storyline development.	Demonstrates limited attention to conventions for creating a cohesive structure and connecting key points.
The writing provides high skim value and visual appeal.	Creates excellent skim value and visual appeal through strategic formatting, carefully worded and coherent headings, and skillful use of signposts.	Creates good skim value and visual appeal through attention to adequate formatting, descriptive headings, and signposts that flag important points	Creates fair skim value and visual appeal by including basic formatting, headings, and signposts to help the audience glean the main objective and argument.	Creates low skim value due to missing or inadequate design features and signposts.
Micro Issues – Sentence-Level Language and Citations				
The writing demonstrates a professional tone and high sentence-level clarity.	Uses compelling language that precisely aligns with context, audience, and purpose, with concise phrasing and no errors.	Uses concise language and appropriate tone, with few errors.	Uses language that is generally clear and appropriate for a professional audience but contains some wordiness or distracting errors.	Uses language that is not suitable for a professional audience or that impedes meaning because of wordy sentences, awkward phrasing, or grammar errors.
The writing accurately documents sources, if applicable.	Includes clear, consistent, well-organized in-text citations and full references, with no errors.	Includes both in-text citations and full references, with few errors.	Follows basic expectations for in-text citations and references, although with some errors or inconsistencies.	Omits references or includes references that are disorganized, incomplete, or inaccurate.