

Guide for Writing in Business

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About Business Writing

Business writing is purposeful in nature. Typically, the objective is to provide an analysis or make a recommendation that is grounded in evidence (e.g., case facts, collected data). Writing in business classes should be clear, concise, and organized with logical headings and section divisions.

About this guide

This guide contains the following sections:

- About Business Writing
- Common Assignments
- Evidence in Business
- Conventions of Writing in Business
- Formatting and Citation in Business
- Tips for Avoiding Common Errors

Common Assignments in Business Writing

Memo

Business memorandums are commonly referred to as “memos.” Memos are often internal correspondences between company members. They are short (typically one page) and succinct. Memos generally address one main issue. The writer acknowledges the main topic in the first few sentences, provides necessary facts (often in bulleted format), and then provides recommendations or courses of action related to the issue. For more detail on business memos please see the pages on [“Memos” on Purdue OWL’s website](#). A guide to writing business memos (including a sample memo) will also be provided in all business classes that require this writing assignment.

Case Analysis

A business case typically involves a situation in which a decision maker is facing a challenge or obstacle. A case analysis allows the writer to break the complex business issue down to the relevant facts and make decisions supported by evidence. The case provides quantitative and qualitative facts that must be analyzed. A written business case analysis begins with a brief of the case facts. The writer is required to identify and analyze several

courses of action that may be proposed in the case. To objectively analyze every option, the advantages and disadvantages of each potential course of action may need to be addressed. The last section of a case analysis is a recommendation, which is justified using the analysis conducted by the writer. This type of analysis and writing is common in business

The Disciplinary Writing Guides are designed to provide an introduction to the conventions, or rules, of writing in different subjects. These guides have been designed by Southwestern professors to help you understand what will be expected of you in your classes.

careers such as management consulting. In addition, case analysis is commonly used in Management of Business Administration (MBA) programs. For a more complete guide to business case writing, please see Cengage Learning's ["Online Study Center" page](#), ["Case Studies."](#)

White Papers

White papers are informational documents that provide more information about a particular topic. They are often used in sales or marketing professions to provide detail about a business service or product. White papers must provide sufficient background to make a compelling argument for the topic/product that is the focus of the white paper. White papers are typically organized as:

- a table of contents
- background information about the topic
- a main section containing details about the product/service
- a reference section

For a more complete guide please see Purdue OWL's [pages on white papers](#).

Business Plans

(Marketing Plans,
Strategic
Management,
Overall Business

In many business classes, students are expected to create a business plan. This may be an overall plan guiding the strategy and operations of a business, or it may be specific to a certain area, such as a strategic management or marketing plan. Business plans, whether overall or domain-specific, are comprehensive in nature. They begin with a situational analysis which includes both internal and external environment scans. Subsequent sections include analysis of the main issue (e.g., management challenge). This analysis likely includes primary and/or secondary data collection. The analysis section is followed by a recommendation section, plans for implementation, and any references, exhibits (including pro-forma financial statements), and appendices.

You can find links to templates for an overall business plan on Entrepreneur Magazine's webpage, ["Sample Business Plans."](#) You can also find templates on the page ["Create Your Business Plan,"](#) maintained by the U.S. Small Business Administration. For individual assignments, instructors will usually provide specific guidelines, but these templates can be a good place to start.

Evidence Use in Business Writing

In Business Cases

In business cases, writers are confined to the facts provided in the case only. Therefore, in-text citations and references are required only to reference the use of case information in calculations or analysis where such information is manipulated, and therefore is difficult to trace back to the source. For example, line item references may be provided for calculations that require the use of data from different tables in a case:

Table 1, Line 4	Total Revenue= \$100,000
Table 3, Line 2	Direct Labor= \$35,000
Exhibit 1-CEO Memo, Line 11	<u>Direct Material= \$15,000</u>
Gross Margin	\$50,000

In Memorandums, White Papers, and Business Plans

Issues addressed in memos, white papers, and business plans may require the use of primary data, secondary data, or both. For business purposes, primary data is data that is collected specifically to answer a research question. For example, a researcher wanting to learn more about human resource (HR) practices may conduct a survey with HR managers of local companies. Thus, the primary data is collected specifically to answer the research question. Secondary data is drawn from sources that are not collected expressly to answer the research/business question. For example, U.S. Census data may be used to determine a target market for a marketing plan, but this data was not generated by the Census Bureau for that purpose. Secondary data is often faster and less expensive to collect than primary data, but it also tends to be less tailored to the question. Specific guidance for source usage will be provided by your course instructor; if you have questions about the best type of data to use, ask!

A note on using quotations and paraphrase:

You are expected to paraphrase sources used as evidence. Direct quotations from a primary respondent (e.g., survey respondent) or secondary source (e.g., a quote from a periodical) should only be used when the exact quote is required in the manuscript, either to meet assignment requirements or to make the argumentation more compelling.

Below, you can find an example of a passage that has been revised to better incorporate supporting quotations.

Passage 1 – Includes unnecessary direct quote:

Fresh Green Grocery changed their product offering strategy to offer only organic produce. This resulted in higher prices for customers. According to Gardner (2014), “Due to higher prices, Fresh Green’s customers bought less produce. Thus, Fresh Green’s organic produce selection had a detrimental effect on its bottom line.” Customer feedback suggests customers would be willing to purchase more produce at Fresh Green Grocery if the value of eating organic products was explained to customers.

Passage 2 – Revised to remove unnecessary quotation and include a supportive direct quote:

Fresh Green Grocery changed their product offering strategy to offer only organic produce. The higher price of organic produce resulted in lower sales for Fresh Green, thereby lowering their bottom line profits (Gardner 2014). However, customers stated willingness to purchase the higher-priced organic products if the benefits were explained. Fresh Green customer Marie Parker said, “I would buy organic fruits and vegetables, if I understood why they were better.”

The information in the Gardner (2014) quote can easily be paraphrased. It does not require a direct quotation. However, a direct quote demonstrating a customer’s viewpoint on organic products may strengthen the value proposition suggested in the last sentence.

Conventions of Business Writing

Business writers use **the paramedic method**. This style of writing has a few common characteristics.

- It is written in **active voice**.
- It has **limited use of prepositions**.
- It is written in **short, concise sentences**.

Below, you will find a sample paragraph, and then an example of the same paragraph re-written using paramedic method. For a more complete guide to the paramedic method, please see Purdue OWL's page, "[Paramedic Method: A Guide to Writing Concisely](#)."

Original Paragraph:

In this paper, I will discuss the distribution network for Tom's Engines which is made up of two channels. The case states that Tom's Engines is able to distribute its auto parts through two distribution channels. The first channel is through car dealerships. In this network, Tom's Engines ships finished products to a car dealership, and then the car dealership is able to take those products and sell them directly to end consumers. The second channel, which is described by the case, is the auto wholesaler network. In this channel, auto wholesalers serve as intermediaries who modify the product (auto parts) and then distribute it. As one can see, the auto wholesalers take up more of the work for Tom's Engines.

Paragraph Rewritten Using Paramedic Method:

Tom's Engines distributes its auto parts through two channels. First, Tom's Engines distributes parts through car dealerships. Tom's Engines ships finished products to the dealerships that then sell the products to end consumers. Tom's Engines also distributes auto parts through the auto wholesaler network. Auto wholesalers modify and distribute the products.

A Note on the Use of First Person ("I") in Business Writing:

It is not customary to use "I" in business writing unless you are providing an opinion or recommendation. Section one of this guide outlines common business writing assignments, all of which typically include a recommendation section. It is acceptable to use "I" when stating a recommendation because you are stating your own opinion (as supported by evidence and analysis) and do not want to overstate the position of the company.

"I" may also be used to describe a process that you as a writer have undertaken, such as data collection. For example, it would be appropriate to include the sentence "I collected data by surveying sixty Southwestern students."

Formatting and Citation in Business Writing

Business documents follow strict conventions when it comes to formatting text, tables, and figures. Unless your professor specifies otherwise, you should follow the formatting and citation guidelines.

Formatting Guidelines for Written Assignments

- Type all written assignments.
- Use Times New Roman or Arial 12 point font (or a font of equal size & readability).
- Single space all text. Double space between paragraphs.
- You may notice that in this document paragraphs are not indented; this is standard in business writing.
- Set margins to 1 inch.
- Number all pages on the bottom right.
- Staple your assignment in the upper left corner.
- Use headings that correspond to your content and logical outline.
- Use **Bold**, underlining and *italics* to highlight headings and key words consistently.
- Include footnotes **and** a complete bibliography in American Psychological Association (APA) format (more on this below).
- If you are writing a memo, bullets are acceptable.

Formatting Guidelines for Tables, Figures, and Appendices

- Tables and figures (including graphs) may be either included within the body of a paper or referenced within the body of the paper and then attached as exhibits or appendices at the end of the paper.
- Tables should be titled (e.g., Table 1), and all columns in a table should be labeled.
- Figures should include a title and a description; this should be typed below the figure if included in the body of the paper.
- Tables or figures that are referenced in the body of the paper and attached as an appendix/exhibit should include the title and description at top of the page. The title and description should be bolded and centered.
- For more detail on APA formatting of graphs, tables, and appendices please see the APA resources available in the [“Student Resources”](#) section of the Debby Ellis Writing Center website, or Purdue OWL’s [“APA Tables and Figures 1”](#) and [“APA Tables and Figures 2.”](#)

Citation Guidelines

Any time you include information or ideas that are not your own, you should note this for your readers with an in-text (parenthetical) citation that tells them where you found the information. The commonly used citation style in business is APA format. Turabian format may also be used in some business courses. You can find more information on these citation styles in the [“Student Resources”](#) section of the Debby Ellis Writing Center website.

Tips for Avoiding Common Errors

Analyze; don't repeat!

Did you simply summarize material from a case or reading, or did you logically construct an argument/position using this information? You should never summarize without a purpose.

Double-Check: After you finish your paper, ask yourself, "What would someone who's read the same sources I have learn from reading this?" The answer should be immediately clear.

Provide rationale.

Business students should be mindful of supporting recommendations with facts and evidence rather than using anecdotal support. Anecdotal support is based on the writer's personal accounts (e.g., a previous experience or observation by the writer) rather than information gathered through research or provided in a case. Because it cannot be verified, use of anecdotal support is discouraged.

Example: A student writes: "The company should sell its capital assets because this is fastest way to generate cash. My father's business raised \$15,000 in this manner." Unless the situation involving the student's father's business was included in case facts (for a case analysis) or collected through research (for a business plan), this is not suitable support for the recommendation to sell assets.

Write formally.

Business writing should be formal in tone.

- Avoid using contractions.
- Avoid using slang.
- Avoid over-familiar or unprofessional language.
- Ensure that your vocabulary is appropriate for your audience.

Read your manuscript aloud to see if you would feel comfortable sending this to your manager or work colleague. If not, rewrite!

Example of informal writing:

It's obvious that Ed's Energy Drink Inc. should target teens. Teens like to go to out and don't have any concerns about trying a new product. Also, the energy drink has a lot of sugar. Older consumers may be more worried about sugar content.

Example of formal writing:

The managers at Ed's Energy Drink Inc. are encouraged to target the teenage (ages 13-19) market. Teenagers typically have a social lifestyle and fewer inhibitions about trying a new product. In addition, the energy drink contains high sugar content, which may be a greater concern for an older demographic.