

Short Explanations of BUSX 301 Writing Rubric Standards

Answering the Questions

1. Answers all assignment-specific questions.

The focus of business writing is communicating information to a reader and meeting the reader's needs. If the writer does not deliver what the reader needs and expects, then the writer has failed in his or her primary task: communication. In business, the primary audience or reader is likely the writer's manager who gave the employee the assignment in the first place. The manager will ask an employee to write a report and expects certain information to be provided. If the manager wants three items, the writer should provide at least three. Over time, the employee will learn exactly what information the manager wants in a given type of writing assignment. If the writer is unsure, he or she should ask questions to ensure that all aspects of the report are covered. In some cases, lacking explicit directions from the reader, the writer must work to put themselves in the reader's position and anticipate questions. In a college class, some student business writers read the assignment title and remember a snippet of what the professor said in class about the assignment and then write an incomplete assignment. Submitting incomplete work will not help a student's grades or an employee's performance evaluations. Read the assignment carefully and then follow the directions for the entire assignment.

Thing to Remember:

- Listen to the assignment being given and take notes
- Read the assignment carefully
- Ask questions
- Brainstorm to discover likely questions
- Define unfamiliar terms
- Look for samples or models
- Follow assignment directions
- Gather the information
- Use the assignment as a checklist of items to be included
- Review the "checklist" with your draft to ensure you have provided all of the information

Examples:

1. Is your company in a strong financial position?

Example Answer: Company X is not in a strong financial position due to . . .

2. What was your rationale for selecting Company A as a competitor?

Example Answer: Our firm selected Company A as a competitor because . . .

Documenting the Sources

2. Provides sufficient, documented support for all relevant statements.

When you communicate in a business and an academic setting, you are participating in a very specific conversation. A conversation between close friends is easy because the friends (usually) trust each other and the friends share a common body of knowledge and information. Therefore, the communication is easy. In a business or an academic setting, the parties may not know each other, and the reader may not immediately trust the communicator. In order to build trust, the communicator must build credibility. The writer builds credibility and trust by providing credible sources and formally documenting those sources of information.

Things to remember:

- Cite all information that is not common knowledge (when in doubt, cite it)
- Most paragraphs have at least one citation (except for intro and conclusion)
- Yes, cite each piece of information, even if you think it repetitive
- Most information should be paraphrased, not directly quoted
- Use quotation marks when repeating another person's words verbatim (direct quotes are for significant words)
- Avoid Plagiarism by acknowledging the source of your work
- Use proper APA citation format (look it up)
- Question the quality of the source of information
 - Who is providing the information?
 - Is the author credible?

Examples:

Electronic Articles

In general, an electronic article is cited like a print article, but with the addition of a DOI. DOIs are usually located on the article or in the database where the article was found. If no homepage is available, use the database homepage.

Basic Entry:

Author, A. A. (2007). Title of article. *Title of Journal*, volume (issue), pages. Retrieved from journal homepage.

From the Cook Library Website.

Cook Library 6th Reference (2011) Cook Library website. Retrieved from

http://cooklibrary.towson.edu/helpguides/guides/APA_electronic.pdf

Sources for Further Information:

- Check *A Writer's Reference* section on Citation and citation style
- Check the Library Guides : <http://cooklibrary.towson.edu/styleGuides.cfm>
- See a cool citation website <http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/>

Targeting the Audience

3. Targets message to audience; acknowledges and meets audience needs (explicitly, if possible).

If a writer writes a memo in the wilderness, does anyone read it? If a writer does not consider the audience's needs, the communication will be less effective or it will fail to communicate. Each document has a particular context and needs to be crafted to present the information that the audience wants in a context that the audience will comprehend and act upon. The writer must take the time to analyze the audience and deliver the information in a way that meets the audience's needs and concerns.

Things to Remember:

- Writers write for readers. When the writer fails to meet the reader's needs, the document fails.
- Identify the primary audience (who is making the decisions or who asked for the information)
- Recognize that there is more than one audience
- Sometimes, the reader tells the writer what is needed. If so, listen and meet the requirements.
- If the audience does not explicitly state his or her needs, research and think about what the audience wants.
- Analyze the audience and predict its needs.
- Use a language, tone, and format that helps the reader understand.

Examples:

1. You have been instructed to write a memo addressing your CEO.

Example Audience Analysis: Your primary audience is the CEO who is an expert in your business; you do not need to define basic financial terms or "introduce" the company to this reader. Your secondary audience may be board members and/or your professor; again these people would be experts. Ask yourself what your audience (primary first, then secondary) wants to know and needs to do after reading your memo and only include that relevant information.

Sources for Further Information:

See the Purdue On-Line Writing Lab for Audience Analysis Information:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/629/1/>

Providing an Introduction

4. Gives an introduction that could stand alone and gives a clear bottom line for the document.

One of the most repeated sayings about business writing is that no one wants to read it. Well, if a writer wants an audience to read his or her work, the writer must get to the point as soon as possible. A business document's opening paragraph must get to the point and address the reader's needs immediately. If the reader only reads the document's opening, he or she should get the overall point and reasoning of the document. A well-written opening should entice the reader to read the rest of the document. A basic introduction will answer the primary question, summarize the main ideas, and explain the purpose of the document.

Things to Remember:

- Answer the primary question or questions—the bottom line
- Summarize the main points of the document
- Put the document or the issue into context
- Explain the purpose of the document
- Provide basic information, not every detail

Examples:

A manager for BoBo Corp. asks an analyst for a report on the profit performance of company over the last three years.

A. Never Gets to the Point.

- a. BoBo Corp. is a company that sells BoBolicious treats. It's found Lemuel BoBo founded the company in 1954—three years after the Wisconsin cheese wars. Mr. BoBo founded the company using an inheritance he received from Benny "Cheddar" Wedge, his maternal grandfather. He would be happy with the company and how it has expanded to serve the tri-state area. It plans to start an internet sales division in two years. To determine whether the company performance is strong, we decided to review the revenue and net income figures for the last two years. I think you will be happy with what you see.

B. Gets to the point.

- a. BoBo Corp. profits have increase substantially in the last three years. The company net income increase 63 percent. Moving its manufacturing facilities to a low-wage region of the world has allowed the company to slash expenses and increase profits.

Sources for Further Information:

These books provide information on effective business writing.

Schultz, Heidi, *Business Scenarios: A Context-based Approach to Business Communication*, ISBN: 007-2984244

Writing That Works; How to Communicate Effectively In Business by Kenneth Roman and Joel Raphaelson (Aug 22, 2000) ISBN-13: 978-0060956431

Structuring the Paragraph

5. Structures each paragraph deductively with a topic sentence that gives a bottom line for the paragraph.

Much like how the opening of a business document provides the summary of the contents, each paragraph should include a topic sentence that provides the main idea of the paragraph. The reader who wants to quickly read the document will know where to look to find the main points. The main idea is usually an analysis or interpretation of the data; not simply the data itself. The writer is giving meaning to the data being presented. Answer the main questions and provide the facts to support the answer.

Things to Remember:

- Paragraphs usually have one main idea
- The topic sentence is not usually a statement of fact
- The topic sentence foreshadows the contents of the paragraph
- The topic sentence explains the meaning of the data, but doesn't include the data
- A paragraph should contain only information related to the topic sentence
- A paragraph should be supported with specific facts

Examples:

Think of a child telling you a story.

There was a pony. I ate ice cream. Mommy went to the store. I like Kelsey's dog Winner; she let me feed the dog. All of my friends were there, except for Pippi who was sick. And I got candy and cake. We played games. In school, we are learning our colors. I like lunch because you get French fries and coke to drink. No you don't drink French fries silly.

The above "paragraph" has lots of information. It appears that part of the information is about Kelsey's birthday party that the writer attended. And the second seemed to be about the writer's school experience.

A good paragraph could be crafted like this:

I had fun at Kelsey's birthday party because we had great things to eat and cool activities to play with. We had hot dogs and potato chip, and I got candy and cake. I rode a pony and played with Kelsey's dog. All of my friends were there, except for Pippi who was sick. We played games.

Sources for Further Information:

Hacker, Diana, A Writer's Reference, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, Sixth Edition, 2007.
ISBN: 0-312-45025-7

Purdue Online Writing Lab on paragraphing: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/>

Using Transitions

6. Transitions between sentences and paragraphs cohesively.

A strong writer uses transitions to put ideas in a logical order, which makes it easy for the reader to see relationships between ideas. The writer's job is to help the reader understand how the information being presented relates to the whole argument and how the facts relate to each other. Stringing together facts does little to help the reader's understanding of your argument. Some writing handbooks say transitions are like signposts or signals indicating which way the reader's mind should turn. We are looking for explicit transitions between paragraphs and sentences that contribute to the logical flow of the document.

Things to Remember

- Use a transitional phrase such as "For example, "To contrast", "In addition" to show relationships between ideas
- Link a paragraph's topic sentence with the topic sentence of the previous paragraph
- Be consistent with terminology; for instance, if you say course requirements in one paragraph, don't use class requirements in the next to refer to the same requirements
- Consider the known/new contract

Examples:

To show the relationship between one paragraph and another, the writer ends the paragraph by summarizing the current paragraph and explaining what the next paragraph is about.

Paragraph A: shows that a company's stock price has increased over the past year.

Transition: Despite the company's soaring stock price, the company's balance sheet could be problematic.

Paragraph B: explains that on the company balance sheet, the company's liabilities have been growing at a faster rate than profits.

Notice that the writer is explaining that the company's condition is far more complex than the stock price indicates.

1. Paragraph A

Company A's net income increased more than its competitors over the last year. Company A's net income increased 7% revenue last year. Company A's revenue increased by 8% last year. While Company A leads the industry in profit growth, Company B leads with revenue growth at 12% last year. Company B net income increased by 2% last year.

Example Revision:

Company A's net income increased more than its competitors over the last year. Company A's net income increased 7% revenue last year, while Company B's net income increased by 2% last

year. **Bolstering** Company A's net income rise was its 8% revenue last year. **While** Company A leads the industry in profit growth, Company B leads with revenue growth at 12% last year. **However**, Company B's expenses are rising.

2. Paragraph B

AT&T's share in the wireless telecommunications market is declining. T-Mobile's market share has increased slightly. From 2008 to 2009, AT&T's market share went from 28.5% to 25%, losing 3.5% and leadership in the market (AT&T 2010). AT&T merged with Cingular in 2007, leading to a revenue growth of 88.61% in 2007 and 4.29% in 2008. Revenue declined .8% in 2009 (Cauley 2010). T-Mobile's market share has stayed consistent in the past 3 years. It recorded a market share of 11.1% in 2007, 12.1% in 2008 and 12.1% again in 2009. However, T-Mobile's revenue has slightly decreased by 1.62% from 2008 to 2009 (Bellevue 2009).

Example Revision 1:

AT&T's share in the wireless telecommunications market is declining, **and** T-Mobile's market share has increased slightly. From 2008 to 2009, AT&T's market share went from 28.5% to 25%, losing 3.5% and leadership in the market. (AT&T 2010) **Before losing some of its market share**, AT&T merged with Cingular in 2007, leading to revenue growth of 88.61% in 2007 and 4.29% in 2008. **Two years later**, AT&T revenue declined .8% in 2009 (Cauley 2010). **While AT&T's market share declined**, T-Mobile's market share has stayed consistent in the past 3 years. It recorded a market share of 11.1% in 2007, 12.1% in 2008, and 12.1% again in 2009. However, T-Mobile's revenue has slightly decreased by 1.62% from 2008 to 2009 (Bellevue 2009).

Example Revision 2:

AT&T's share in the wireless telecommunications market is declining, and T-Mobile's market share has increased slightly. From 2008 to 2009, AT&T's market share has declined by 3.5%, from 28.5% to 25% (AT&T 2010). Before losing some of its market share, AT&T merged with Cingular in 2007, leading to revenue growth of 88.61% in 2007 and 4.29% in 2008. **Two years after the merger**, AT&T's revenue declined .8% in 2009 (Cauley 2010). While AT&T's market share declined, T-Mobile's market share has stayed consistent in the past 3 years. It recorded a market share of 11.1% in 2007, 12.1% in 2008, and 12.1% again in 2009. However, T-Mobile's revenue has slightly decreased by 1.62% from 2008 to 2009 (Bellevue 2009).

Sources for Further Information:

See Purdue Online Writing Lab on Transitions: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/01/>

Hacker, Diana, A Writer's Reference, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, Sixth Edition, 2007.
ISBN: 0-312-45025-7

Using Plain English

7. Chooses words appropriately for audience; writes in “plain English” and avoids lofty diction.

To answer a reader’s questions, clear and efficient writing works better than technical, long-winded writing. Your job as the writer is to create a conversation with the reader, a conversation where you give the reader the information that answers their questions. Think about the exchange of information in a conversation; think of the words used in a conversation. In most cases, the exchange of information in conversation is brief, simple and to the point. Therefore, use words that are commonly known, words that your reader will understand.

Things to Remember:

- Use the active voice
- Common, everyday words are easier for the reader to understand
- Avoid jargon, idioms, clichés, euphemisms, slang, emoticons, and non-standard abbreviations
- Introduce abbreviations and acronyms before using them
- Define any words that may be unusual or unfamiliar to your audience
- Using plain English does not mean “dumbing-down” or having an informal conversation

Examples:

Don’t use elevated diction because it usually isn’t necessary in business writing.

1. Eschew obfuscation.

Revision in plain English: Avoid confusion.

2. Unfettered expansion will afford inevitable engorgement of the product within the marketplace.

Revision in plain English: Unchecked sales will lead to market saturation.

3. I cannot sufficiently extol the eminence of embracing an attitude of rectitude.

Revision in plain English: I think integrity is important.

Sources for Further Information:

- Check out the U.S. government’s own website on plain English: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>
- Read what professor Joseph Kimble has to say about plain English: <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/kimble/>
- Here is a link to the SEC’s own handbook on plain English; the forward is written by Warren Buffet: <http://www.sec.gov/pdf/handbook.pdf>

Formatting

8. Formats lists, headings, and text consistently for a readable document.

Formatting is more than simply an aesthetic choice. Headings allow readers to scan documents for information pertinent to their needs (rather than reading the entire piece from beginning to end). Uniformity in formatting allows readers to accomplish their goals quickly and makes the document appear cleaner and more professional.

Things to Remember:

- Uniformity includes textual features such as font, capitalization, size, indentation, italics, etc.
- Uniformity includes grammatical features such as parallel structure

For example:

- Uniformity in Textual Features
 - Lacking Uniformity
 - Heading One
 - HEADING TWO
 - Heading 3
 - Uniform
 - Heading One
 - Heading Two
 - Heading Three
- Parallel Grammatical Structure
 - Non-parallel structure
 - Pick up groceries
 - Garbage needs to be taken out
 - Laundry
 - Parallel structure
 - Pick up groceries
 - Take out garbage
 - Fold laundry

Sources for Further Information:

Using Headings to Aid Readability

9. Writes headings that can stand alone as "headlines," and gives the bottom line for the text that follows.

Business writing is meant to be scanned—not read from beginning to end. Headings allow readers to do this, but only if those headings possess certain traits. Headings that are ambiguous, lack a bottom line, or are too short, (or missing entirely) make the document more difficult to navigate for the reader.

Things to Remember:

- Headings should read like headlines
- Headings should provide a “bottom line” for the section they precede
- Headings should enable a reader to gather the conclusions made in a document

Examples:

- Sample Section:

Researchers at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico have developed in the 18 months program Stealthy Insect Sensor Project a method for training the common honeybee to sniff out the explosives using bee's exceptional olfactory sense.

The new techniques would help in the fight against the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), a critical factor for security of civilians and military troops worldwide. The trained bees stick out their proboscis, use to feed on nectar, when they feel explosives in anything from cars and roadside bombs to belts used by suicide bombers, a behavior displayed by these insects when they find nectar.

The bees were taught to associate the smell of vapors from TNT, C4 plastic explosives, TATP explosives and propellants with a sugar water reward. "When bees detect the presence of explosives, they simply stick their proboscis out," said Tim Haarmann, one of the researchers. "You don't have to be an expert in animal behavior to understand it, as there is no ambiguity."¹

- Short/Ambiguous Heading: Bees and Bombs
- Long Heading: Los Alamos National Laboratory Researchers Use Sugar Water to Train Bees to Detect All Kinds of Explosives and Alert Military with Their Proboscis
- Misleading Heading (misses main point): Researchers in New Mexico Train Bees
- Strong Heading: Researchers Train Bees to Detect Explosive Devices

Sources for Further Information:

Schultz, Heidi, Business Scenarios: A Context-based Approach to Business Communication, ISBN: 007-2984244

¹ Text taken from: <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Bomb-Detecting-Bees-41313.shtml>

Providing Effective Visuals

10. Provides readable, usable graphs, charts, and tables that are referenced specifically in the text and convey information effectively.

Graphs, charts, and tables are used to provide the reader with an effective way to understand relationships among large amounts of numerical data. What can be written in a long paragraph full of data, can be visually shown in a clear graph, chart or table. However, a poorly created visual can be just as easily misunderstood as a long paragraph full of numerical data. A visual should be able to stand alone in your document and clearly convey the information it contains. Size, color and type of visual are also important choices to consider, depending on the information to be conveyed. The necessary components of a well placed and effective visual are an introduction, a “bottom line” heading, the visual, a citation, and an analysis, preferably in that order.

Things to Remember:

- Choose the type of visual (line graph, pie chart, or table) depending on the information you are trying to convey. Line graphs can be used to show trends over time; pie charts can be used to compare parts to the whole; tables can be used to sort and compare information.
- Introduce your visual using a simple sentence that tells the reader when they should refer to your visual.
- Provide a “bottom line” heading for your visual that tells the reader what they should expect to see in your visual.
- Choose a place in your paper to place the visual that makes sense. Ask yourself when you want your reader to look at your visual: Before reading this? After reading that?
- Cite the sources of data in your visual using proper APA citation.
- Analyze the data; do not summarize the information. Tell the reader why the data is important.

Examples:

1. According to Lexus Nexus, CNK generated \$100.75 million in net income, compared to \$95 million for RGC. Currently, RGC has a quick ratio of 0.9144. CNK compares favorably well to RGC with a quick ratio of 1.3872. On a 6 month and year analysis of RGC and CNK, CNK’s stocks have outperformed the stocks of RGC (1 year 12.65, 6 month 15.33, and intra day 12.50 for RGC; and 1 year 10.04, 6 month 16.93, and intra day 14.61 for CNK). The P/E ratio for RGC is 36.62, while the P/E ratio for CNK is 12.48. The EPS for RGC is 0.36, while the EPS for CNK is 1.21. CNK outperforms RGC when comparing net income, quick ratios, and stock prices. CNK’s lower P/E ratio and higher EPS also help signify that CNK is in a financially better position when compared to RGC.

Example Revision:

Cinemark Entertainment (CNK) is in a financially better position than Regal Entertainment (RGC). The Table 1 below demonstrates this finding.

Table 1
Comparative Financial Analysis between CNK and RGC

| | RGC | CNK |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Stock Price (1 year, 6 month, intra day) | 12.65, 15.33, 12.50 | 10.04, 16.93, 14.61 |
| Net Income | \$95 million | \$100.75 million |
| Quick Ratio | 0.91444 | 1.3872 |
| P/E Ratio | 36.62 | 12.48 |
| EPS | 0.36 | 1.21 |

*Note: All financial information was obtained from Lexis Nexus Academic.

CNK outperforms RGC when comparing net income, quick ratios, and stock prices. CNK’s lower P/E ratio and higher EPS also help signify that CNK is in a financially better position when compared to RGC.

Might the stock price be better shown in a chart like this?

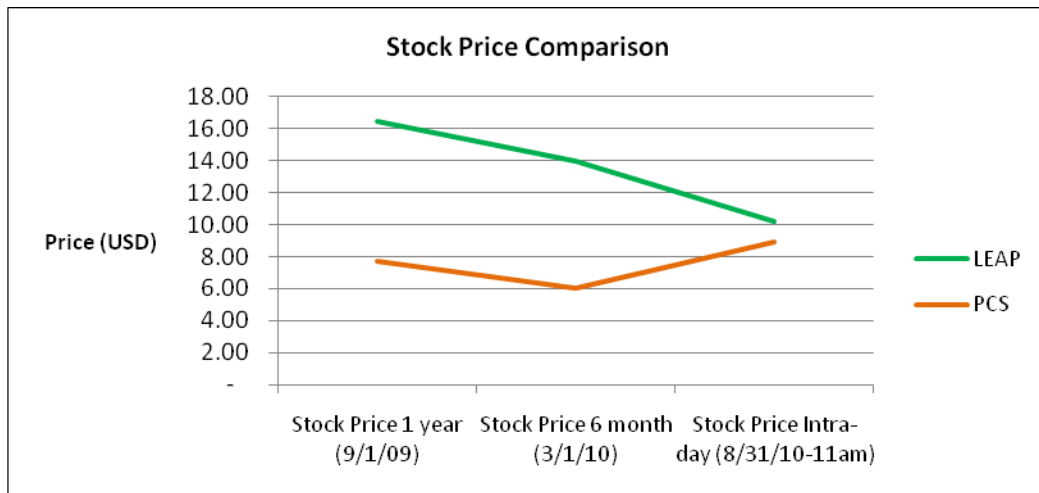


Figure 1
Stock Price Comparison

Note: Stock Price Comparison by Yahoo, August 31, 2010.

Sources for Further Information: