



UNIT-2

The C's of Writing

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss how to make writing clear, complete, concise, and correct.

Unit 2

The C's of Writing

Writing Clearly

All writing should be clear, concise, complete, and correct. Good writers use plain language to express clear meaning. They write in a simple style that uses everyday words, which is different than writing academically or for leisure reading. They do not use showy words and ambiguous expressions in an effort to dazzle or confuse readers. They write to express ideas, not to impress others.

What do you think this manager meant in the following message?

“Personnel assigned vehicular space in the adjacent areas are hereby advised that utilization will be suspended temporarily Friday morning.”

You would probably have to read that sentence several times before you understand that you are being advised not to park in the lot next door on Friday morning.

Clear messages contain words that are familiar and meaningful to the reader. Whenever possible, use short, common, simple words to say what you mean.

Familiar Words

Look at the following list. Can you decide which words your audience would be more familiar with?

Ascertain	Find out
Conceptualize	See/visualize
Encompass	Include
Hypothesize	Guess
Monitor	Check
Operational	Working
Option	Choice
Perpetuate	Continue
Perplexing	Troubling

Reciprocate	Return
Stipulate	Require
Terminate	End
Utilize	Use

Precise Words

When you consider what you need to say and how to say it, don't give up a precise word if it says exactly what you mean. For example, "The report was on time," is not as precise as, "The detailed, twelve-page report was submitted on time."

Likewise, "There is a change in our budget," is less clear than, "There is a 10% reduction in our budget."

Another example: "The president of the company said we should contribute..." vs. "The president of the company [urged, pleaded, demanded] that we contribute."

Concrete Nouns

Concrete nouns help readers visualize the meaning of words. Concrete nouns name objects that are more easily imagined, such as desk, car, or an earring. On the other hand, **abstract nouns** name concepts that are difficult to visualize, such as automation, justice, integrity, and environment.

In business writing, you should help your reader see what you mean by using concrete language whenever possible.

Jargon

Every workplace has some words and some terms that are particular to that industry or that business.

Test Your Knowledge

What are some examples of jargon in your workplace?

Why do we want to avoid using jargon in our writing?

When is it appropriate?

We avoid jargon so that people outside our industry or organization will not be confused. It would only be appropriate to include jargon when we are writing to someone who we know for sure will not only understand but expect us to use that jargon.

Writing Concisely

Writing concisely means saying exactly what you mean in the fewest words possible and include all the details that are needed. How do we do this?

Use the active voice when possible.

- Ñ **Passive voice:** The groceries had been carried away by the manager.
- Ñ **Active voice:** The manager carried away the groceries.

Notice how much shorter the second sentence is, even though it contains the same information? It’s also easier to read and understand.

Watch out for adverbs.

Adverbs can add unnecessary bulk to your sentences. In his treatise *On Writing*, Stephen King says, “The road to hell is paved with adverbs.”

Example:

- Ñ The dog moved much more quickly than the cat.
- Ñ The dog moved quicker than the cat.

Don't be redundant.

Have you ever seen a sentence like, "I watched the colorful sun set in the west," or, "I took off the purple colored shirt"? Now, if the sun were setting in the east, that would be something to comment on, but we all know that the sun sets in the west. Likewise, you can safely assume that your readers know that purple is a colour.

Similarly, watch out for words that mean the same: "We drained and emptied the tank," could be replaced by, "We emptied the tank."

Replace clichés and metaphors.

When we speak with friends, our language can become full of words that don't belong in business writing. Try to avoid relying on clichés and metaphors to get your meaning across. Replace those phrases with words you really mean, and that other people will understand more easily.

Clichés are words and phrases that have been so overused that they lose their impact, even though they may be true. They include phrases like, "dumb as a sack of hammers," "work like a dog," or "right as rain."

Metaphors are figures of speech that try and help us understand one thing through the story of another. For example, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare compared the world to a stage and all the people as merely players. Metaphors can get quite complex as they use analogy, rhetoric and parable.

While the application of a well phrased metaphor can be quite powerful in writing, they usually do not belong in business writing. If you feel the temptation coming over you to write with strongly metaphoric speech, keep in mind that when you edit you'll need to be cutting all that work out as you aim for writing that is clear and concise.

Make your writing complete.

Complete writing means that you have included all of the important elements in your writing. The easiest way to think about this is to make sure that your writing includes the 5 W's (who, what, why, when and where) and How.

You can accomplish complete writing by approaching each assignment like an investigative reporter to make sure you remember all of the required elements.

Test Your knowledge

Instead of...	Write...
By means of	
Due to the fact that	

For the purpose of	
For the simple reason that	
In order to	
In spite of the fact that	
In this world today	
It is important that	
It is necessary that	
On the occasion of	
Prior to	
In anticipation of	
Until such time of	
With regard to	
In the neighborhood of	
Had an effect on	

Writing Correctly

Test Your Knowledge

What sources have you used to ensure that your work is correct?

There are two aspects of correct writing that we will discuss here: style and facts.

Style

Style refers to the method behind the writing that you do. If you are writing a document that must conform to particular style specifications (such as Chicago or the American Psychological Association, or a style guide created by your organization), you must make sure that it meets those guidelines. You will also ensure that your document is free of spelling and grammar errors.

Rules associated with style include whether there is a hyphen in some words (like e-mail), how you treat commas, and so on.

Test Your Knowledge

How can we ensure that our document is stylistically correct?

Facts

An important component of correctness is factual precision. Did the budget actually come in at \$5,600 or was it the actual total on the financial statements, which show \$5671? Was the temperature actually 67 degrees? Were the test results really positive?

There are a few ways to ensure that your document is factually correct. When writing, make sure you **list the source** whenever you include a fact. These sources can be for your own reference and not part of the final document, but they will help you when editing. These references will also help you answer any questions that readers may have later on.

If at all possible, make sure you go to the **original source**. If you find a newspaper article that quotes a particular study, for example, go back and find that study. In some cases, you may want to find multiple sources to confirm a particular fact. It depends on your audience and what kind of document you are writing.

It can also be a good idea to include **excerpts** from your source. For example, rather than try to explain a graph, it might be easier to include the graph itself. Make sure that you have the appropriate permissions and that the source is quoted if you choose to do this.

Food for thought: *Caveat lector* is Latin for “reader, beware” (or take heed).

Test Your Knowledge

What kinds of sources might we use to check for factual correctness?

If you are going to use the Internet as a reference source, remember these points.

- Ñ Make sure you are using reputable websites, with verifiable, reputable sources.
- Ñ If you are in doubt of the accuracy of the site, find another way of checking the fact.
- Ñ If at all possible, go back to the original source and use it as a reference.
- Ñ Always keep notes of the name of the site, the URL, and the date you visited it. You may even want to save a copy of the webpage to your local computer.

Test Your Knowledge

Choosing Your Sources

Brochure with Time Management Tips

University Paper on Dinosaurs

Newspaper Article on the Emergence of Internet Fraud

Internal Company E-Mail on Budget Items

Company Memo Recommending a Product

Training Presentation on Goal Setting

Further Reading:

- Guffey, Mary Ellen. *Essentials of Business Communication*. South-Western College Pub, 2006.
- Kessler, Lauren. *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2003.