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**ABSTRACT**

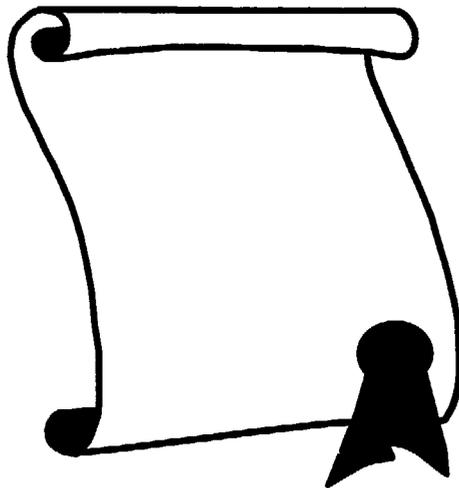
This workplace skills memo writing course is designed to enable students to write more accurate and concise memos and be better able to deal with difficult memo writing situations in the workplace. Introductory material includes course description, objectives, topics, methods, materials, evaluation, and teacher tips. The course consists of four sessions, each of which has these components: objectives, topics, methods, materials list, and information sheets and handouts. Topics covered in the sessions include the following: writing diagram, topic selection and specification, four steps of writing, standard memo format, and complete sentences. (YLB)

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# **Business Memo Writing**



## **Mercer County Community College**

**Division of Corporate and Community Programs**

**1200 Old Trenton Road**

**Trenton, NJ 08690**

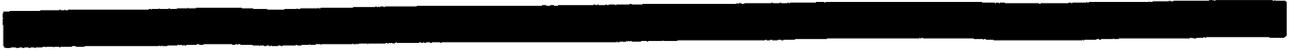
**Elaine S. Weinberg  
Director, Workplace Skills**

**Developed with funds from the United States Department of Education  
National Workplace Literacy Program**

**1995**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

**Mercer County Community College thanks Carol Lewandowski, Senior Education Specialist/Curriculum Developer for creating this manual. Through her valuable contributions employees in manufacturing and service industries learned concepts relevant to their existing jobs and strategies for learning other tasks if that opportunity should arise.**



**A factory or service center creates a classroom that is very different from the one we are used to seeing in colleges and adult schools, so it only follows that our approach to teaching in the factory should also differ.**

**Our goal is to teach employees skills that they need in order to be functional and successful in their work environment, and encourage them to apply those skills on the job and at home. For example, we motivate students to do the following:**

- **work more efficiently and more safely**
- **make fewer mistakes**
- **solve problems working interactively**
- **take greater responsibility for their jobs**
- **recognize the interconnectedness of the various jobs in their workplace**
- **be better communicators in the workplace**

**Company needs are revealed through a needs assessment. At that time, we also determine the basic skills needs of the employees. We are learner centered, as the individual employee's needs are considered alongside those of the company.**

**Once we have determined those needs, we develop curricula that incorporate basic skills, using the workplace literature (e.g. forms, applications, codes, abbreviations, charts and tables, handbooks, regulations, procedures, policies, memos, letters) of the company. Because each company is different, the needs and literature are also different; hence, we develop new materials for every company in which we teach. By utilizing these workplace items, we help students transfer and apply their skills directly to their jobs.**

**We rely on the classroom techniques of problem solving, cooperative learning, and group discussion. Our overall approach is concept based, with the emphasis on application, such as in role plays, dialogues, and group work. Despite the specific course titles, we incorporate the elements of math, English, and communication skills into all of our sessions.**

**In terms of students evaluation, after initial testing we give a pre-test and post-test in order to determine comprehension. Students receive feedback throughout the course from the instructor, as well as from fellow students as we sincerely believe in the powerful positive reinforcement of peer critiques and cooperative exchanges.**

**In essence, we believe that although we make the materials for the students with which to work, it is the students who truly make the class.**



In order to write clear and effective memos, employees must be aware of their writing style, their grammar, tone and organization. This course will enable students to write more accurate and concise memos and be better able to deal with difficult memo writing situations in the workplace.

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## **OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- recognize their audience
- name their topic/main idea before writing
- organize their writing time using the 4 steps
- use the standard memo format
- write complete sentences
- brainstorm
- use correct punctuation
- get their point across using clear and specific words  
recognize and avoid bad writing: redundancies, repetition, wrong usage, wordiness
- write memos that have a clear and strong intended action/effect
- write memos that are reader friendly (using bullets, lists, numbers, etc.)
- put the audience's needs for information first

## **TOPICS:**

- writing diagram
- topic selection and specification
- 4 steps of writing
- standard memo format
- complete sentences

**METHODS:**

- individual writing
- peer critique
- worksheets and review
- class discussion

**MATERIALS:**

- diagrams
- handouts and worksheets
- lists
- sample company memos
- student generated memos

**EVALUATION:**

- students evaluate their own work
- in peer critique, students evaluate each other's work
- instructor evaluates completion of memo



- **Students generate their own memos in class.**
- **Each class should have a writing time, a review time, an editing time, and a peer critique time.**
- **At the end of the class, students will have a portfolio of their own finished works.**
- **In terms of assigned topics – be sure to have a good idea of the types of situations your students actually write about and come up with a list of possible topics for them to use.**
- **Students bring in memos that they have written and use them for their own critiques and for peer evaluation.**
- **Students bring in memos that they have received and use them for critique.**
- **For the punctuation review, go over only those items with which the students are struggling. Do not approach this as a grammar class!**

## **OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this session, students will be able to do the following:

- consider and evaluate their potential audience
- use the 4-step plan for writing memo drafts
- use a correct and consistent memo format
- apply critical thinking skills to their writing in order to communicate more clearly and concisely
- write complete sentences
- use correct sentence punctuation

## **TOPICS:**

- audience identification
- 4-step plan for memo writing
- memo format
- critical thinking and writing skills
- complete sentences
- punctuation review

## **METHODS:**

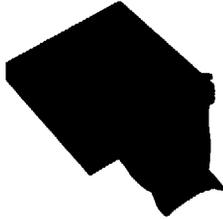
- class discussion
- partner work
- peer critique
- brainstorming

## **MATERIALS:**

- worksheets



In the space below, write a memo about something familiar to you, or about something that you really have to communicate. Don't worry about organization, spelling or grammar just yet – merely write your typical day's memo.



## Guidelines for Writing Memos

1. Be complete
2. Be concise
3. Be clear
4. Be correct
5. Be organized



1. Think



2. Write



3. Review



4. Correct





**What purpose?**

**What information to  
to get across?**

**What style? Tone?**

**What action to cause?**



**What topic?**

**Details?**

**What format?**

**How to cause it?**



**What knowledge?**

**What relationship?**

**What purpose?**

**What to do as a result?**

**COMPANY***Memorandum*

*(flush left)*

**TO:** Name, Title

**FROM:** (initial after your typed name, title)

**SUBJECT:** (be clear and specific)

**DATE:** date of writing

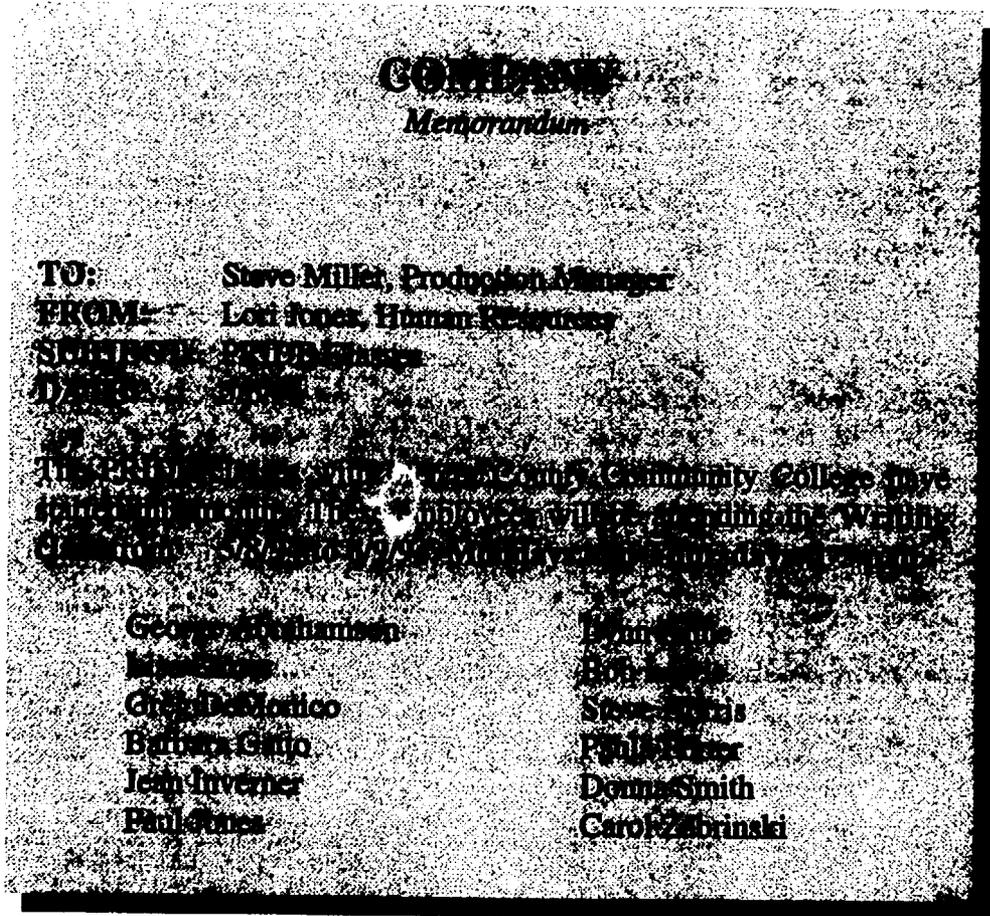
*(Do not indent here)*

This is a memo about how to format your memos. Do not indent the first sentence on the left. Instead, keep your paragraphs flush left.

Even if you start a new paragraph, keep it flush left -- avoid the temptation to indent!!

Remember to keep your memo **SHORT** -- no more than 3 paragraphs. The best memo is one that is a single paragraph with bullets, numbers, stars, or lists to make the information more accessible to the reader. If your memo runs on to 4, 5, 6 even 7 paragraphs, then something is wrong!! Reconsider your format and consider writing a report or proposal.

Here is a sample of a good memo. Why is it so good?



If you want your audience to understand your message, your ideas must be complete and clear!! This means that you must consider these thought patterns:

**1. Description:** answers the question what size, what color, what shape, what code, what time, how often, etc.

- Aim for clear description – don't write "in the afternoon," but give a precise time; don't write a "big meeting," but say how many people will attend.
- Avoid unnecessary metaphors and similes in this type of writing. Don't write that the new raise policy will be "like winning the lottery," or that the new VP will treat everyone "like royalty." Give concise details but not imagery.

**2. Narration:** tells a story

- Use narration sparingly and only when required to remind the audience of the facts and history of the situation. Remember, these are familiar readers so they should know most of the background.
- Use active voice, not passive voice.

**3. *Process Analysis:*** explains the steps for doing something, or tells how something works or is done

- Use chronological order and begin with step 1; end with the final step and don't leave your audience hanging with questions regarding unmentioned steps.
- Give information about what the consequences are of not following the steps. For example, after you give the steps for completing and returning the new insurance forms, you could note that if employees do not complete and submit the forms by a certain date, coverage may be affected.

**4. *Division and Analysis:*** breaking something down into parts and describing the parts and how they work.

- Be sure to include all of the parts! If you are describing the tasks of the new work team, be sure to include all of the tasks, not just the administrative or judicial aspects.

**5. *Classification:*** breaking things down into categories.

- Be clear in making your categories and in naming them. Look for commonalities within the group to help you name the group. For example, if you are classifying errors you can do so by machine, by shift, or by area – each has a different purpose and result.



**6. Comparison and Contrast:** looking at how things are different and/or similar

- Be consistent in the elements you consider. A good format to remember is TOPIC/ASPECT:

T1/A1		T1/A1 & A2
T2/A1	or	T2/A1 & A2
T1/A2		
T2/A2		

**7. Definition:** explaining what something means or is

- Use when you have to explain a new policy or work issue. A dictionary definition is the drabest – instead, consider how the definition works at your company. For example, an opening in UTILITY could lead to a job posting, and in order to give a good idea of the job requirements you would have to define the job of a UTILITY person.



Even when you write the briefest memos, you must use **complete sentences**. A complete sentence is one that has the following:

1. a subject
  2. a verb
  3. a complete thought
-

**subject** = the person or thing that is doing the action in the sentence

**The president** has decided to overhaul the machinery.

**The new schedules** are on the bulletin board.

**We** will have another team meeting next week.

**It** takes 2 hours to fix that machine.

**Nobody** arrived on time for the meeting.

---

## COMMON MISTAKES

- assuming that the subject will carry over in the reader's mind:
  - ◇ The secretary took three days off last week. **Went to the beach.**  
(this is incomplete – use a pronoun to make it complete)
  - ◇ The secretary took three days off last week. **She went to the beach.**
- dropping the subject in a list of actions also causes fragments:
  - ◇ The employee came to work early. **Worked through lunch. Stayed 2 hours overtime. Did a really good job.** (*incorrect*)
  - ◇ The employee came to work early, worked through lunch, stayed 2 hours overtime, and in general did a really good job. (*correct*)
- starting a sentence with an infinitive (to work, to use, etc.) or an ING form:
  - ◇ **To come to work on time and stay through lunch.** (*incorrect*)
  - ◇ **She will come to work on time and stay through lunch.** (*correct*)
  - ◇ **Trying to pack more than 100 bottles in an hour.** (*incorrect*)
  - ◇ **He was trying to pack more than 100 bottles in an hour.** (*correct*)



**complete thought** = an idea that does not leave the reader hanging; an independent thought

**Because the machine broke constantly, we decided to buy a new one.**  
(This is a complex sentence with a dependent clause followed by an independent clause, so it is a *complete* idea)

**Because the machine broke constantly. (*incomplete*)**  
(This is a dependent clause and cannot stand alone as a sentence!)

**NOTE:** You can use dependent clauses *in* sentences, but not *as* sentences!!

---

Here is a list of words that make dependent clauses:

after	since	whereas
although	so that	whenever
as	than	whether
as if	that	which
because	though	whichever
before	unless	while
even if	until	who
even though	what	whom
ever since	whatever	whose
how	when	why
if	whenever	where
in order that		

**1. Simple Sentence:**

- contains a subject and verb
- expresses a complete thought
- considered a single independent clause

*Examples:*

- ◇ He came to work at 8:00.
- ◇ They brought the materials to the warehouse.
- ◇ Third shift starts at 11:00 p.m.

**2. Compound Sentence**

- contains two independent clauses joined by a **FANBOY**
- (for/and/nor/but/or/yet/so)
- expresses a complete thought

*Examples:*

- ◇ He came to work at 8:00, but he didn't start working until 8:30.
- ◇ They brought the materials to the warehouse so they could store them.
- ◇ The managers had a meeting and they decided to offer more overtime.

**3. Complex Sentence**

- contains a main clause (independent clause)
- contains a subordinate clause (identifiable by a word or an expression whose completion relies on the main clause: since, because, although, even though, before, after, while, during)
- expresses a complete thought

*Examples:*

- ◇ Even though he had no time, he volunteered to reorganize the shelves.
- ◇ Since they took on the account, they have received many inquiries.
- ◇ She packed the bottles after she took them off the machine.

Read these sentences and determine if they are complete. If they are complete, then write C on the line. If not, then write I and try to determine what is missing.

1. Although our gross figures are down. \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Reorganizing the work schedules to accommodate those with second and third jobs. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. The information has arrived via modem. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Before he came to this department. \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Please inform me of any production changes before our next meeting. \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. The maintenance department, the utility department, and the packing department. \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Helping with the boxes and teaching the new workers how to pack the boxes. \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. The office picnic, which is always held at Mercer County Park. \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. The new smoking policy has gone into effect. \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Which means no one can smoke in the cafeteria. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Period at the end
  2. Capital letter at the beginning
- 

***EZ comma rules:***

◆ **IC, IC. = comma splice**

◇ **He works overtime, he has a good attitude.**

◇ **The machine is down, we can't use it.**

➤ **To fix a comma splice, use one of the FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):**

◇ **He works overtime, and he has a good attitude.**

◇ **The machine is down, so we can't use it.**

➤ **Or make them 2 separate sentences with periods at the end of both:**

◇ **He works overtime. He has a good attitude.**

◇ **The machine is down. We can't use it.**

➤ **Or use a larger word of dependence and a semicolon:**

◇ **He works overtime; moreover, he has a good attitude.**

◇ **The machine is down; therefore, we can't use it.**

***EZ run on rules:***

- If you have a run on sentence, then it is like a comma splice but without the comma:

- ◇ He did the SPC for that machine he made a chart.

- Fix a run on any of the same ways that you fix a comma splice:

- ◇ He did the SPC for that machine and he made a chart.

- ◇ He did the SPC for that machine. Then he made a chart.

- ◇ First he did the SPC, and then he made a chart.

This memo is a nightmare of run ons, comma splices, and other format problems. Rewrite the memo and fix the problems.

## COMPANY

### *Memorandum*

TO: John  
FROM: Tim  
TOPIC: Insurance  
DATE: 8/6

The new insurance forms have arrived they are in Donna's office. Which is next to the receptionist area so you can pick up your new forms there. And fill them out.

Give them back to Donna when you are finished make sure you have signed the form at the bottom. On the line. If you have a spouse then he/she must sign it also the deadline for these to be returned in Aug. 4, 1994.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this session, students will be able to do the following:

- use active voice consistently
- write with clear modifiers
- avoid redundancies and wordiness when writing
- use confusing words (homonyms) correctly
- use lists, bullets, and numbers to elucidate their information
- avoid clichés when writing
- choose an appropriate tone based on their audience

## **TOPICS:**

- active vs. passive voice
- clear modifiers
- redundancies
- wordiness
- homonyms
- lists, bullets, numbers for clarity
- clichés
- tones

## **METHODS:**

- class discussion
- partner work
- peer critique

## **MATERIALS:**

- worksheets

**Avoid the passive voice and use the active voice when you write – not only does it save words, but it gets your idea across in a clearer style and with less possibility for confusion.**

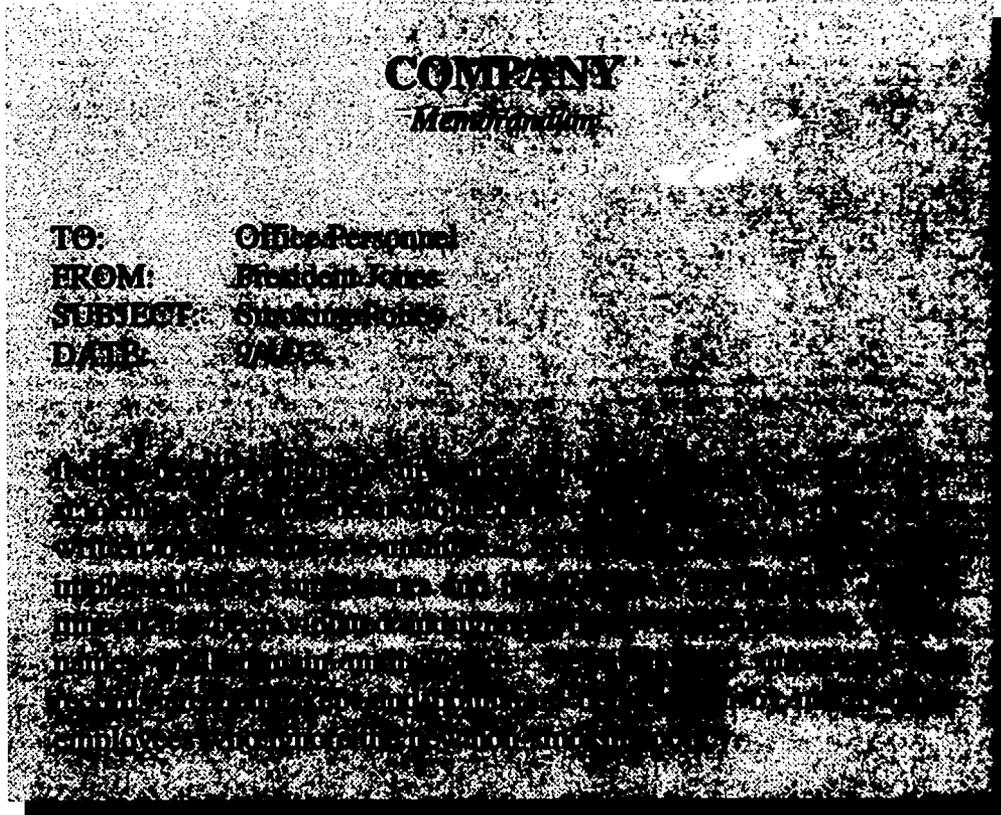
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**Look at the difference between these 2 voices – both sentences express the same idea, but which would *you* rather read?**

 **Passive:** The decision that new fire extinguishers be purchased was made by the safety committee at the meeting held by the managers after the new safety rules were discussed.

 **Active:** At the managers' meeting, the safety committee discussed the new safety rules and decided to buy new fire extinguishers.

Rewrite this memo – take it out of the passive and put it into the active voice.



**Don't misplace or dangle your modifiers – this can cause confusion, not to mention hilarity!!**

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*Example of a dangling modifier:*

**Broken and in need of repair, Steve tried to fix the machine again.  
(Poor Steve!!)**

**Correction:**

**Steve tried to fix the machine, which was broken and in need of repair.  
Broken and in need of repair, the machine gave Steve a hard time.**

---

*Example of a misplaced modifier:*

**The manager put the information with his secretary in the file.  
(Oh no!! Poor secretary!!)**

**Correction:**

**The manager put the information in the file and gave it to his secretary.  
(No doubt what happened!)**

**What's wrong with these modifiers? See how you can fix them.**

- 1. Working 10 hours a day and offering to stay late for clean up, the work was getting done by all of the hourly employees.**
  
- 2. The janitor put the trash with his helper in the dumpster.**
  
- 3. Having discussed the wage increases and vacation policy, coffee was poured for all of us managers.**
  
- 4. The bottles are burnt by the new employees around the rims.**

✂ re-do it again...

Sometimes we try so hard to get our point across that we get it across *twice*. For example, to **rewrite** means to **write again**, so if *I rewrite the memo again* I actually write it *two more times*, right?

Why are these expressions redundancies?

1. to closely scrutinize
2. to constantly persist
3. most favorite
4. incorrectly miscalculated
5. a joint cooperation
6. a wise insight
7. at 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon
8. a necessary requirement

---

**Remember this: less is more. The fewer words you can use, the stronger your message will be, and the easier for the reader to get your point.**

**Here are some traditional wordy expressions that we feel compelled to use when we write. In fewer and simpler words, what do they really mean?**

**At this point in time** \_\_\_\_\_

**Despite the fact that** \_\_\_\_\_

**In the event that** \_\_\_\_\_

**During the time that** \_\_\_\_\_

**In a hasty manner** \_\_\_\_\_

**We were not apprised of the fact that** \_\_\_\_\_

**We will proceed to examine** \_\_\_\_\_

**In a different manner of speaking** \_\_\_\_\_

**At this juncture of temporal events** \_\_\_\_\_

**Irregardless** \_\_\_\_\_

**We are clearly of the same opinion** \_\_\_\_\_

**Also avoid inflated language. Don't try to impress or intimidate – remember that you are trying to communicate. Fancy or verbose language can *obfuscate* that purpose!!**

**Which is easier to read?**

- **Illumination is required to be extinguished on these premises after nightfall.**
- **Lights out after dark.**

**Here are some extreme examples of inflated language. What do they mean?**

1. **Perform a fluttering action, perform a fluttering action, minuscule illuminating and swirling astronomical body.**
  
2. **Propel, propel, propel your craft, unobtrusively in the free flowing natural solution comprised of H<sub>2</sub>O.**
  
3. **The sample canines exhibited a 100% mortality rate.**
  
4. **Communication is the imparting of meaningful informational modes or concepts that impact on interpersonal inputs and interfacing.**

Be careful in your usage -- a lot of words sound exactly or somewhat alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings. These sets of similar words are called homonyms.

The best examples of homonyms are the words *to / two / too*. What is the difference between them?

Here is a list of the most commonly confused words. Pick the ones that you have the most trouble with, look them up in the dictionary, and see if you can see the difference between the uses.

affect / effect

its / it's

their / they're / there

advice / advise

device / devise

break / brake

personal / personnel

stationery / stationary

role / roll

week / weak

bored / board

for / four

loose / lose

moral / morale

right / write

instance / instants

past / passed

your / you're

we're / were / where

principal / principle

peace / piece

through / threw

weather / whether

hour / our

choose / chose

new / knew

Circle the correct word to complete these sentences.

1. The secretary ordered new **stationery / stationary** supplies and then had to store them in the closet with the **stationery / stationary** shelves.
2. My **principal / principle** idea is not to overhaul the system, but to upgrade some of the operational **principals / principles**.
3. Take my **advice / advise** and work a few hours overtime - it really is good **advice / advise**.
4. If you have a **personal / personnel** problem, then talk to one of our human resource people in the **personal / personnel** department.
5. The **breaks / brakes** on my car always **break / brake** after a cold winter.
6. The managers who **chose / choose** the meeting time will also have to **chose / choose** the meeting location.
7. The humidity had a bad **affect / effect** on the office equipment, and we hope the dry air doesn't **affect / effect** the machines.
8. The company will **device / devise** a new **device / devise** for keeping track of our employee's late days.

---

**Use bullets whenever you can to set off important information that can be read and processed quickly.**

**Here is the information about the PRIDE program:**

- 1. students sign up for their own courses**
- 2. instructors come on site**
- 3. there are no tests or grades**
- 4. attendance is recommended, but not mandatory**

**Use numbers when you are giving steps in instructions:**

**Make sure you do the following with your new insurance forms:**

- 1. Make the necessary changes in family or doctor information**
- 2. Sign the form at the bottom and on the back**
- 3. Return the form to HR by 4/5/93.**

**Use lists whenever you can to make the information clearer and accessible:**

**These students will receive CEUs on May 19, 1994:**

<b>Juan Alvarez</b>	<b>Peter Lewis</b>
<b>Victor Barrera</b>	<b>Christopher Torra</b>
<b>Sam Carron</b>	<b>Karen Vellara</b>

**Use abbreviations when you know that you reader will be familiar with them:**

**FYI: Overall the SPC rates fell, but when we spoke to QC they said they had the problem under control and would recalculate the SPC rates ASAP.**

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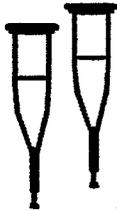
**Avoid big words that you feel might impress or intimidate your audience. Instead, use simple words with clear meanings:**

**We will utilize the new manual.      →      We will use the new manual.**

**The meeting will commence at noon.      →      The meeting will begin at noon.**

**Here is a list of some awful and awfully overused "big words." What smaller words can you think of that are more concise and user friendly?**

- 1. terminate \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. administer \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. facilitate \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. facsimile \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. aggrandize \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. elucidate \_\_\_\_\_



Avoid clichés and similes!! These may sound clever when we talk, but when we write they become **crutches** and eventually just get **hokier and hokier!!**

Here are some especially annoying and outdated clichés and images:

**pleased as punch**

**rich as a king**

**busy as a bee**

**pull a rabbit out of your hat**

**put your nose to the grindstone**

**do your homework**

**hold a pow wow**

**bite the bullet**

**come on board**

**bang for your buck**

**sick as a dog**

**the big chief**

**thank your lucky stars**

**out to lunch**

**big fish in a little pond**

**the early bird**

**smoking gun**

**a stuffed shirt**

**take the helm**

**ball in your court**

- A **formal tone** does not imply big words and jargon. Instead, it requires *professionalism and clarity*.
- An **informal tone**, on the other hand, can be offensive as it might be too familiar or unprofessional.

Look at these 2 sentences and decide which is extremely formal and which is extremely informal.

1. Please be so kind as to reply immediately to our departmental concern.
2. If you don't answer my question, I'll come and raise the roof!

Your best bet is to aim for somewhere in the middle, keeping the professional tone but getting rid of the stuffy and inflated language:

3. Get back to me ASAP with a reply.

-  **Read this memo and figure out what the topic is, the details, and the action: then rewrite the memo, getting rid of the jargon, glaring informalities, wordiness, and other verbal atrocities!**

---

## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** All Employees  
**FROM:** Payroll  
**TOPIC:** Payroll  
**DATE:** August 4, 1993

This memo is to inform you that we are no longer using the same banking institution as we were previously utilizing. In other words, at this point in time we are making a change in our banking alliance.

The former institution, **Hamilton Trust**, has increased its checking user fees and instead of accepting that new fee policy we have decided to make a move to another banking institution. As a result of this most recent banking change, we will issue checks from our new account at **Packard Trust Co.** This new change will take effect with the checks that will be newly issued on August 20, 1993. The checks for this current week will still be drawn from our old account, and you can cash those as you normally would, under regular circumstances, at your convenience and in your regular manner at your preferred institutions of choice.

In the future, and only for a short period of time until which time your own banks recognize the change in our own company checking account, checks cashed at banks other than the previously aforementioned financial institution will require a form of identification (an ID such as a driver's license or social security card or work ID will be sufficient).

We are confident that this change is a change for the better. If you have any concerns or should you experience any problems whatsoever with this new account on your payroll check, please contact us as soon as is reasonably possible and we will get on the horn and get in touch with your financial institution and shake them up so they will cash your check without hassles.

**OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this session, students will be able to do the following:

- use punctuation to enhance their messages
- edit for spelling and punctuation

**TOPICS:**

- punctuation review
- editing review

**METHODS:**

- class discussion
- partner work
- peer critique

**MATERIALS:**

- worksheets



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### **Apostrophes for Contraction**

**1. Use an apostrophe to replace the removed letter(s):**

We are = we're  
can not = can't  
we have eaten = we've eaten

**Note:** *He's* could mean **he is** or **he has**, and you need to know the context to determine the tense.

He's tired = he is tired  
He's eaten = he has eaten

**Write the contractions for these words.**

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. Did not    | 7. Could not   |
| 2. Will not   | 8. I would     |
| 3. Should not | 9. They have   |
| 4. It is      | 10. We are     |
| 5. She has    | 11. You are    |
| 6. She is     | 12. They would |

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### Apostrophes for possession

#### 1. Use an apostrophe and an S to show possession:

- ◇ Carol's book
- ◇ Lorna's pencil
- ◇ the student's notebook

#### 2. If the name/noun ends in an S, you have two options:

- 1) add only the apostrophe:
- 2) add the apostrophe and the S

- ◇ Luis' book or Luis's book
- ◇ Jesus' mother or Jesus's mother
- ◇ the boss' office or the boss's office

#### 3. If the noun is plural and you are showing plural possession, add the S to make the countable noun plural then add just the apostrophe

- \* the teacher's book = one teacher and his/her book
- \* the teachers' lounge = many teachers use the lounge

#### 4. If the spelling changes on the plural, make the change, then add the apostrophe after the S to show possession:

- \* the company's policy = one company
- \* the companies' policy = more than one company

**5. If the plural is irregular, use apostrophe S to show possession:**

- \* the women's room
- \* the children's baby-sitter

**6. If the plural and singular noun are the same, add apostrophe S:**

- \* the sheep's barn

**7. If you are using the possessive for an indefinite pronoun, use 'S.**

- \* anyone's            everyone's            someone's
- \* no one's            somebody's

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**REMEMBER:**

*Possessive pronouns* that replace the noun **do not** take an apostrophe:

yours	<i>not</i> your's
theirs	<i>not</i> their's
ours	<i>not</i> our's
hers	<i>not</i> her's

**BE CAREFUL!**

It is = it's (contraction)

its = possession (no apostrophe for the pronoun possessive)

*Example:* **It's** unfortunate that the company lost 10% of **its** profits.



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1. Use a comma in a compound sentence between the 2 independent clauses and before the **FANBOYS** unless it obstructs the flow.

**IC, for IC.**  
**IC, but IC.**

*Examples:*

- ◇ He asked for a promotion, **but** he got a demotion.
- ◇ She had to go to the warehouse, **so** she left early.
- ◇ The shipment was late, **for** it was incorrectly addressed.
- ◇ QC checked the bottles, **yet** a few went out damaged.

2. Use commas around **removable information**.

*Examples:*

- ◇ The house, **made of wood and cement**, was demolished in 1988.
- ◇ The company, **a turbine manufacturer**, has three locations.
- ◇ Steve, **who has worked for the company for 10 years**, has taken his GED.

3. Use commas to separate items in a list. The items can be things (nouns) or action phrases.

*Examples:*

- ◇ He brought nails, screws, tacks, and a hammer.
- ◇ They take the order, call the customer, check the order, and ship the merchandise.

**NOTE:** The final comma in the series before the "and" is optional, but it depends on the context. If the reader could be confused without the comma, then put it in.

*Examples:*

- ◇ He drinks tea, beer and milk.
- ◇ The afternoon garbage man will drive the truck, make the stops, eat and pick up the garbage.
- ◇ This being my last will and testament, I am leaving my estate to be divided
- ◇ among my sons: Bill, George and Steve.

4. Use a comma between a subordinate clause and a main clause.  
**SC , MC.**

*Examples:*

- ◇ Even though it was 110 degrees, he was wearing a sweater.
- ◇ Since they lost the key to the room, they had to break down the door.

**NOTE:** If you put the MC first, you don't need a comma.  
**MC , SC**

*Example:*

- ◇ They had to break down the door since they lost their key.  
(MC) (SC)

**5. Use a comma to set of a direct quote.**

*Examples:*

- ◇ He said, "The meeting will be at noon."
- ◇ They asked, "Where is the meeting being held?"

**NOTE:** In reported speech, omit the comma.

*Examples:*

- ◇ He said the meeting would be at noon.
- ◇ They asked where the meeting was being held.

**6. Use commas between adjectives of equal importance.**

*Examples:*

- ◇ She is a wise, witty woman.
- ◇ The big, expensive, obnoxious American car was parked illegally.

**NOTE:** use a comma between adjectives when you would say "and"

*Examples:*

- ◇ The big AND expensive car is parked illegally.

**But:** The expensive American car (you wouldn't say expensive AND American car)



•                   •  
;                   ,                   ;                   ,

**DO NOT** use a comma between two independent clauses (IC , IC.). This error is known as a **comma splice**, because you are *splicing* together two ideas that could stand independently.

- ◇ He was late, he came to work at 9:00.
- ◇ They never replaced the part, the machine was down all week.

### **HOW TO FIX A COMMA SPLICE?**

1. Use a period to separate the 2 clauses, making 2 separate sentences.

**IC . IC .**

2. Use a comma and a **TRANSITION WORD** to separate the 2 clauses.

**IC , so IC.  
IC , for IC.  
IC , but IC.**

**IC , and IC.  
IC , yet IC.  
IC , nor IC.**

3. Use a semicolon to separate the 2 clauses.

**IC ; IC.**

4. Use a semicolon and a transition word (followed by a comma) to separate the 2 clauses.

**IC ; however, IC.  
IC ; nevertheless, IC.  
IC ; regardless, IC.**

**IC; moreover, IC.  
IC; in addition, IC.  
IC; consequently, IC.**

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Semicolons are the most underrated piece of punctuation! Give them a chance and let them work for you!

### **LONG ITEMS or CLARIFICATIONS IN A LIST:**

1. Use semicolons between long or wordy items in a list, and commas between the adjectives and phrases.

#### **Confusing list with commas:**

There were several reasons why she hated going to the warehouse alone: the dark, damp space scared her, the extreme quiet rankled her nerves, made her skin crawl, and left her tense, and her fear of being locked in, a fear that stemmed from her childhood, froze her in her tracks.

#### **Clearer list with semicolons and commas:**

There were several reasons why she hated going to the warehouse alone: the dark, damp space scared her; the extreme quiet rankled her nerves, made her skin crawl, and left her tense; and her fear of being locked in, a fear that stemmed from her childhood, froze her in her tracks.

2. Use commas between items and clarifications, then semicolons between the separate items in a list.

*Example:*

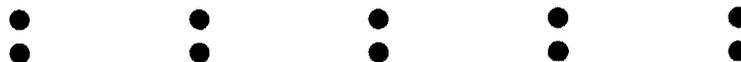
Many people attended the meeting: Paul Smith, President, Ken Lewis, Vice President, Stan Heim, Marketing Representative, and Paula Stenhouse, the secretary.

*How many people attended that meeting?*

Many people attended the meeting: Paul Smith, President; Ken Lewis, Vice President; Stan Heim, Marketing Representative; and Paula Stenhouse, the secretary.

*How many people attended that meeting?*

**Note:** If you are giving titles and names, be consistent - if you start with the title, then keep starting with the title followed by the name. It doesn't matter which style you choose, just *be consistent!*



1. Use colons to introduce a list. **MAKE SURE** that you have a **complete sentence before the colon**.

*Example:*

Many different classes are being offered in our PRIDE program: English, Math, and Writing.

**But not** The classes are: English, Math, and Writing.

*Example:*

The new shift times are as follows: A (8-3 p.m.), B (3-11 p.m.).

**But not** The new shift times are: A (8-3 p.m.), B (3-11 p.m.).

**Biggest COLON error:** using *including* and then a colon.

**Wrong:** We have many classes, including: Math, English, and ESL. (Since the colon is like saying "including," what you are saying is including including – a clear redundancy!!)

**Right:** We have many classes: Math, English, and ESL.

2. Use a colon to come to a **conclusion or generalization**.

*Example:*

He had no other choice: he had to change shifts. The wheels were broken, the radiator was smoking, and the fenders were falling off: her car was a piece of junk.

**Put any and all punctuation into these sentences ( : ; , ? . ).**

- 1. During the meeting the manager was shrewd clever and controlled but the order went to the companies competition**
  
- 2. In spite of the Equal Opportunities Act women still find it difficult to move up in the company let alone become president**
  
- 3. We thought we would have to work over the Labor Day weekend therefore we were delighted when we finished the order two days before schedule**
  
- 4. When does the managers meeting take place**
  
- 5. The employees handbook is updated occasionally when there are policy changes when there are holiday changes and at the end of every year**

**6. The Christmas bonuses were distributed on December 21 but Bill and Mary two workers in the warehouse complained that they hadn't gotten theirs yet they had a Merry Christmas**

**7. My new office contains a lot of new furniture a top of the line IBM compatible computer a laser printer a modern streamlined wooden credenza and an eye sensitive environment sensitive halogen lamp**

**8. The guard at the security house is thorough and reliable he always asks for identification and often requires strangers to show a second form of ID a drivers license a social security card or a recent photo ID**

**OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this session, students will be able to do the following:

- avoid stilted business writing language
- use specific details and information
- make correct and clear comparisons
- present bad news in a positive way

**TOPICS:**

- stilted business language
- logical comparisons
- specific details
- bad news in a good way

**METHODS:**

- class discussion
- partner work
- peer critique

**MATERIALS:**

- worksheets

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**Rewrite these run on sentences and use any of these solutions:**

- **FANBOY plus comma**
- **period to separate**
- **semicolon**
- **semicolon and transition word**

***Example:*** The collator is broken again this is the third time this month we will have to get a service contract for next year.

- ◇ **The collator is broken again, and this is the third time this month, so we will have to get a service contract for next year.**
- ◇ **The collator is broken again. This is the third time this month. We will have to get a service contract for next year.**
- ◇ **The collator is broken again for the third time this month; we will have to get a service contract for next year.**
- ◇ **The collator is broken again for the third time this month; therefore, we will have to get a service contract for next year.**



1. **The company has implemented a new non-smoking policy employees will have to leave the building if they want to smoke.**
  
2. **As you are aware, postal rates will be increasing as of February 1995 we will have to re-calculate the estimate for your projected services**
  
3. **Company wide inventory will occur on February 5 and 6 from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. each department is expected to participate.**
  
4. **Mr. Lewiston and Ms. Pilster from BMW are visiting the offices on Friday casual day will be on Friday as usual.**
  
5. **Piece number 542A has been relocated to shelf A piece number 543C has been relocated to shelf C piece number 544 D has been relocated to shelf D this is to facilitate the picking process.**



**Learn to recognize and stay away from overused trite business writing expressions. Here is a list of lethal expressions. In what other way can you say the same idea?**

<b>along these lines</b>	<b>as per your request</b>
<b>as per our conversation</b>	<b>as per our agreement</b>
<b>at the present time</b>	<b>enclosed herewith</b>
<b>for the purpose of</b>	<b>for the amount of</b>
<b>pending receipt of</b>	<b>in view of the fact that</b>
<b>pursuant to our talk</b>	<b>please be advised</b>
<b>please be warned</b>	<b>please be reminded</b>
<b>regarding the topic of</b>	<b>following the idea of</b>

**thank you for your interest and attention in this matter**  
**thank you for your infinite patience**

**Be sure to use specific names, numbers, dates, times, quantities, places, titles, and so on – otherwise your writing is vague and it becomes difficult for the reader to "connect" to your message.**

**Vague:** The woman was fired recently.  
**Specific:** Ms. Kline was fired on December 1, 1994.

**Vague:** They sat in the cafeteria reading magazines.  
**Specific:** The departmental managers sat in the cafeteria reading Sports Illustrated.

**Vague:** Profits have fallen a bit.  
**Specific:** Profits have fallen 2% in this quarter.

**Vague:** The BMS portfolios have been moved to a new location.  
**Specific:** The BMS 1995 promotional portfolios have been moved to section D, shelf 3, area 2.



Don't get lazy and trail off in your idea!! If you are comparing two things, make sure that they are **similar** things.

What's wrong with this example?

- The taxes in NJ are higher than Pennsylvania.

The *taxes* in one state are being compared to *another state*. What you want to do is compare the *taxes* in one state to the *taxes in another state*. A clear way to say this is the following:

- The taxes in NJ are higher than those in Pennsylvania.
- The taxes in NJ are higher than Pennsylvania's.
- The taxes in NJ are higher than in Pennsylvania.



**Fix these bad comparisons.**

- 1. The employees at HOD are friendlier than XYZ.**
- 2. The tires on Lorna's 4-wheel drive are bigger than my car.**
- 3. The costs for the brochure mailing are lower than the letters.**
- 4. The number of Hispanics working here has increased and we have more than Asians.**
- 5. Those old green file cabinets in my department are older than marketing.**



**Another error or confusion that occurs with comparisons is when the object is confused with the subject. Look at this example and think of what it could mean:**

- **I like my job more than my husband.**

**To make it absolutely clear, be sure to finish out the sentence:**

- **I like my job more than I like my husband.**
- **I like my job more than my husband does.**

**Fix these confusions.**

- 1. I eat pizza more than my dog.**
- 2. The department uses more perforated paper than the computer.**
- 3. Women like children more than men.**
- 4. This computerized scale weighs more than the analog scale.**

Note the differences between the following thumbs up and thumbs down sentences.



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You failed to notice

Let me point out that

You neglected to mention

We may consider also

You overlooked the fact that

One additional idea is

You missed the point

From another perspective

If you persist in

If you choose to

I see no alternative but

Our clear plan of action is

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What do you notice about the **negative** statements?

What do you notice about the more **positive** ones?

**Take these extremely negative expressions and put them into more palpable language.**



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**You have made a serious mistake**

**Your company has erred**

**The only way to solve this**

**Your ineffectual tactics**

**Your clear lack of a long term vision**

**Your lack of updated information**



Sometimes we have to deny a client's request, or inform a client that they have not fulfilled a prior obligation. Have you ever struggled with the right way to say something not very good?

Perhaps you have asked yourself these questions:

- How can I deny but still remain essentially positive?
- How can I convey the NO answer without falling back on baffling expressions or sugar coating the language?
- How can I say NO in a nice way without misleading the client?

**Remember:** even criticism or a NO can be delivered positively.



Take a moment to **praise**, then to state the error/problem/situation. This at least prefaces the bad with the good. Be sure to include **specific details** as to why something has not worked, or why something cannot be done. Then close with an **upbeat** statement for the future – as if to say that this is behind us and we can move on to continue our professional relationship.

One of your employees has eagerly been awaiting a transfer to another account – an account that carries a lot of prestige and corporate power. This is the memo that he received regarding his transfer.

