Opinionated or casual language list/number and symbol rules (FA16)

These frequently used opinionated or casual words may not be the most accurate for business writing.

Instead of:                        Use:
Is able to                   can/could
Go up                        increase
Go down                      decrease/reduce
Roughly                      approximately
About (in regards to #s)    approximately
Large/big/huge/enormous (in regards to # amounts) substantial/sizeable/significant
Bigger (in regards to #s)   higher
Smaller (in regards to #s)   less/lower
Set up                      established
Deal with                   handle/work with
Good                        successful/effective/efficient
Bad                         poor/unsuccessful/ineffective
Better                      various form of “improve” or “improvement”
Any contraction (don’t/can’t/won’t/etc.) write out the full word(s) (do not/cannot/will not/etc.)
Terrible                    poor
Vague words (everything/anything/everyone/etc.) more specific wording so your reference is clear
(i.e., everyone = the customers)

As a general rule, follow these guidelines when using symbols and/or numbers in business writing.

Symbols:                             Action:
*$, %, K (thousand), M (million), etc. Use whenever possible
*Etc. Should not be used in writing if you start the phrase with
“including,” “such as,” or “like”; these words introduce a list of
examples. “Etc.” is not one of those examples.

Numbers:                             Action:
*Numbers 10 and lower                Write it out (i.e., eight)
*Numbers 11 and higher               Use numeric form (i.e., 25)

Unless:
*The number starts a sentence           Write it out (i.e., Twenty-five students attended the course.)
*You use a number with a symbol          Use numeric form (i.e., I spent $25 on dinner. I left a 20% tip.)

**Used exclusively by the College of Business at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
For additional communication-related resources, see http://go.business.illinois.edu/CommunicationHelp