TOP 10 MISTAKES TO AVOID IN BUSINESS WRITING

These issues were listed by firms/organizations that recruit students here at Illinois. Make it a priority to improve your writing in these areas. Don’t just take my word for it; take theirs.

10. Lack of paragraphs/headers/subheaders/bullet points. Business writing should be clear and concise; if you have a lot to cover, break up your information so the reader can quickly see the different topics and jump to one if needed.

9. Dates with “st/nd/rd/th” included. Simply write the date: August 26, 2015. Just because you say the “th” doesn’t mean you write it. You only write it if you say, “In August, I am free on the 26th.”

8. Passive voice and vague “they” or “it” usage. Make it easy for everyone: clearly state who/what is doing or should do the action whenever possible. This is particularly important if you are describing operations or recommendations on procedures.

7. Improper or lack of citation. You HAVE to give credit where credit is due. Use citation appropriately and consistently. Word-for-word quotes need quotation marks and citation. Don’t be a plagiarizer.

6. LONG sentences. Typical rule of thumb here: count how many subject/verb phrases you have in your sentence. If you have more than 3 or 4, consider either cutting some text or creating two or more sentences.

5. Agreement errors: it/they/he/she. This one can make you stand out positively from the rest of the crowd if you use agreement properly. “It” refers to a singular noun: a business plan. “It” also describes a group/unit as a whole, and not the individual partners/members. Therefore, use “it” to refer to one entity. Use “they” to refer to numerous items or individuals.

4. Capitalization problems. Consistency is key here. Also, overuse can be overboard, so capitalize only proper names and important titles.

3. Punctuation. SUPER IMPORTANT. Even if you think you know your mechanics really well, review our chart online: http://go.business.illinois.edu/CommunicationHelp.

2. Too Much Information (TMI) or wordiness. Avoid the overshare of trivial or insignificant information. If someone wants to know all of the details, he or she will ask you for it.

1. Spelling errors, especially with company titles and people’s names. Want to make a client think you just don’t care enough? Nothing stands out more than misspelled words. Don’t rely on spellcheck. Proofread and pay attention to important details. How would you feel if someone misspelled your name in writing?

This guide was designed by the College of Business at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

For additional communication-related assistance, visit http://go.business.illinois.edu/CommunicationHelp