

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

BY HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

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- I. Principles of good writing
 - A. Clear purpose
 - B. Recognizes the needs and attitudes of the audience
 - 1. How to determine audience needs and attitudes
 - 2. A practical example
 - C. Contains a “bottom line” message
 - D. Is delivered by the right person, at the right time, in the right format
 - 1. The right person
 - 2. The timing question
 - 3. Different formats for different purposes
 - a. Letter versus memo
 - b. E-mail
 - c. Combining written and personal presentations
- II. Start-up strategies
 - A. Questioning
 - B. Outlining
 - C. Brainstorming
 - D. Free writing
 - E. Scoping your project

Theoretically, you can outline your writing using much more fine-grained nesting of subtopics:

- I. First-level heading
 - A. Second-level heading
 - 1. Third-level heading
 - a. Fourth-level heading
 - (1) Fifth-level heading
 - (a) Sixth-level heading
 - i. Seventh-level heading

FIGURE 2 - 1

Brainstorm Outline Example

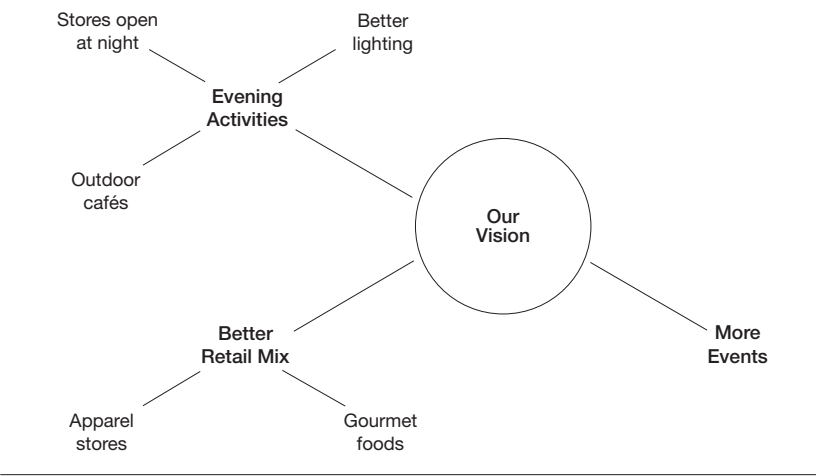


FIGURE 3 - 1

How People Reach the Downtown

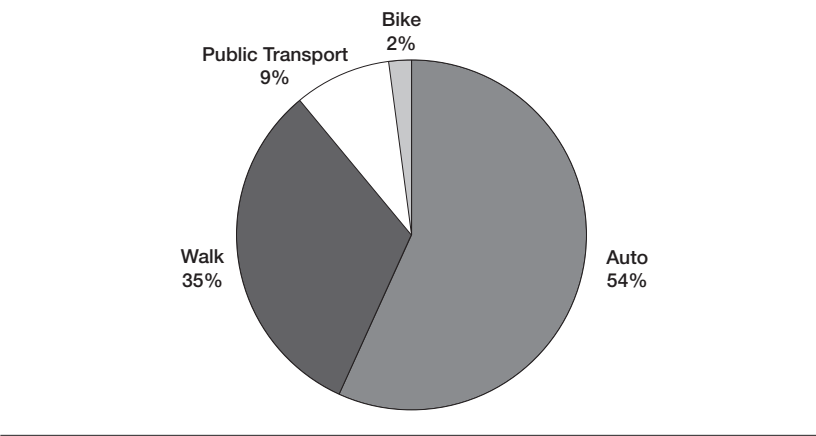


FIGURE 5 - 1

Sample Business Letter Format


Organizational letterhead	<p>Gizmo Products Company 320 Mountain Street Hilltop, Arizona 45678 Phone: (444) 555-6789 Fax: (444) 555-2456 E-mail: gizmoproducts@wildfire.net www.gizmoproducts.com</p> <hr/>
Date	June 30, 2003
Recipient's name and address	Mr. Richard Wilson 2 Irving Street Chicago Heights, Illinois 60411
Greeting	Dear Mr. Wilson:
Body	<p>Thank you for ordering our Model 5 Bass Ketcher. We regret that this item is temporarily out of stock because of extraordinary demand. However, Model 5 will be back in stock by the end of this month, at which time we will fill your order, using two-day express shipping at no additional charge.</p> <p>If this is satisfactory, no action is needed on your part. If you wish to cancel your order, please call us at (800) 555-BASS and Gizmo Products will give you a full refund. In either case, I have enclosed a reprint from <i>Bassaholic Monthly</i>, which describes the most effective ways to use the Model 5 Bass Ketcher. Good fishing!</p>
Closing	Respectfully,
Signature	
Name and title of sender	Lisa Goodrich Director of Customer Care
Additional information (typist's initials, enclosures, "cc" list, etc.)	ral Enclosure

FIGURE 7 - 1

Triangle Visual Aid

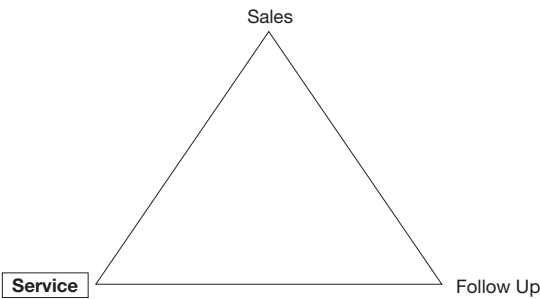


TABLE 7 - 1

The Pros and Cons of Different Media

Medium	Pros	Cons
Overheads	Flexible Easy to create Can allow light in the room for continued eye contact Good for both formal and informal situations	Can be awkward putting up and switching between overheads
Slides	Easy to create Good for formal presentations	Take time to produce Require a darkened room and allow for minimal eye contact
PC-Based Slides	Easy to create, to update, and to transport	Do not always project clearly Technology can break down, necessitating a backup set of overhead slides
Flip Charts	Encourage interaction Flexible Easy to create	Not effective for large groups Difficult to transport
Handouts	Can contain supplemental background information Useful for informal, short presentations Provide a place for note-taking and a take-away for later reference	Can become the audience's focal point, distracting them from listening to you (Avoid handing out reading material during the presentation. It detracts from your presentation.)

FIGURE 9 - 1

Catchball Figure

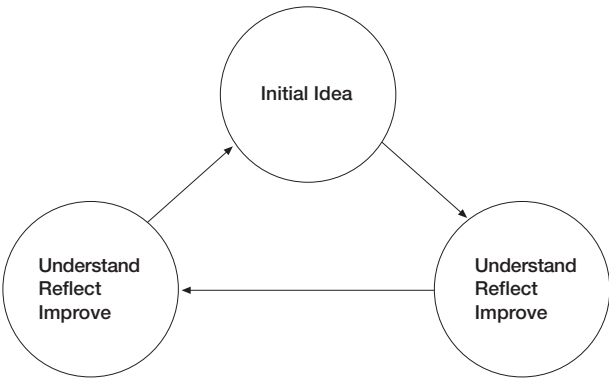


FIGURE A - 1

Preliminary Planning Worksheet

Use this worksheet to help you plan the content of your presentation.

Topic:
Requested by:

Objectives

If your presentation is a success, what will be the immediate results?

Main Messages

What must the audience understand and remember from your presentation?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Supporting Facts

What facts support your main message?

- Message 1
- Message 2
- Message 3
- Message 4
- Message 5

Source: HMM Making a Presentation.

FIGURE A - 2

Presentation Outline Worksheet

Once you have planned what you want to say, use this worksheet to help you organize your content most effectively, identify any visual aids or support materials that will enhance your presentation, and estimate the time you will need. You may have to revise your content if it appears to exceed your time limitations.

Your Content	Visuals/Support Materials	Time
Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State your purpose.• Preview your main points.• Make your audience want to listen.		
Body <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get across the main points of your presentation.		
Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summarize your content.• Challenge the audience to take action.		

Source: HMM Making a Presentation.

FIGURE A - 3

“Be Your Own Editor” Checklist

The questions below reflect easy-to-overlook aspects of editing. Before releasing a document, verify for yourself that you have considered each item.

Content

- Purpose: ☐ Stated clearly? ☐ Specific requests for action or information?
- Information: ☐ Accurate and complete? ☐ Right amount of detail?

Sequence

- Bottom Line: ☐ At the top? ☐ Strategically placed?
- Organization: ☐ Ideas flow logically?

Design

- Format: ☐ Enough headlines, sidelines, and lists? ☐ Deadlines and action items highlighted?
- ☐ White space to frame ideas?
- Presentation: ☐ Would a chart, table, or graph be more effective for certain information?

Structure

- Paragraphs: ☐ Begin with a topic sentence? ☐ Transitions within and between?
- ☐ Focused on one topic? ☐ Limited to 5 to 6 lines?
- Sentences: ☐ Varied in structure and length? ☐ Streamlined to 15 to 20 words?

Tone/Style

- Words: ☐ Simple, specific, and straightforward? ☐ Terminology familiar to readers?
- ☐ Free of affectation and stuffy outdated language? ☐ Headlines designed for impact?
- ☐ Acronyms explained?
- Style: ☐ Personable, upbeat, and direct? ☐ Active voice?
- ☐ Appropriate for the audience? ☐ Positive approach?

Proofread

- ☐ Grammar, spelling, and punctuation accurate? ☐ Should someone else review this?
- ☐ Typographical errors corrected? ☐ If this is a repeat mailing, is new data highlighted?

Other *Enter your own editorial “trouble spots” to double-check and prevent.*

Source: HMM Writing for Business.

FIGURE A - 4

Design for Visual Impact

Use this guide as a quick reminder of how to design your document for easy reading.

You Can Use . . .	To . . .
Headlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduce most paragraphs• focus your reader on your major ideas
Sidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• add extra emphasis• aid in persuasion
Text fonts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• assure readability• unify style
Short paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• avoid overwhelming your reader• attract speed readers
Two columns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• convey two kinds of information simultaneously• encourage faster reading
Bulletped lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• replace lists within sentences
Numbered lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• indicate sequence• list steps in a procedure• provide easy reference to the list• quantify items
White space and indentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• frame your ideas• improve readability
Graphs, charts, and tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• present numbers, dollar amounts, and technical data
Color (use judiciously)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• highlight information (limit to two colors)• add aesthetic appeal
<u>underlining</u> bold typeface different fonts ALL CAPITALS <i>italics</i> different type sizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• emphasize deadlines and action items
Source: HMM Writing for Business.	

FIGURE C - 1

12-Month Sales Models A, B, C

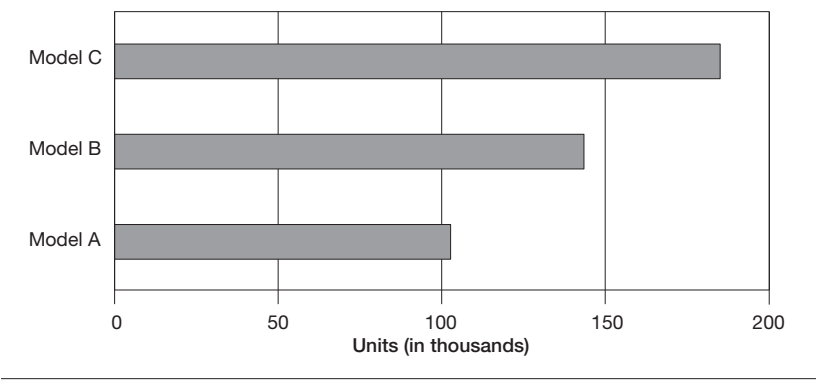


FIGURE C - 2

12-Month Sales Models A, B, C

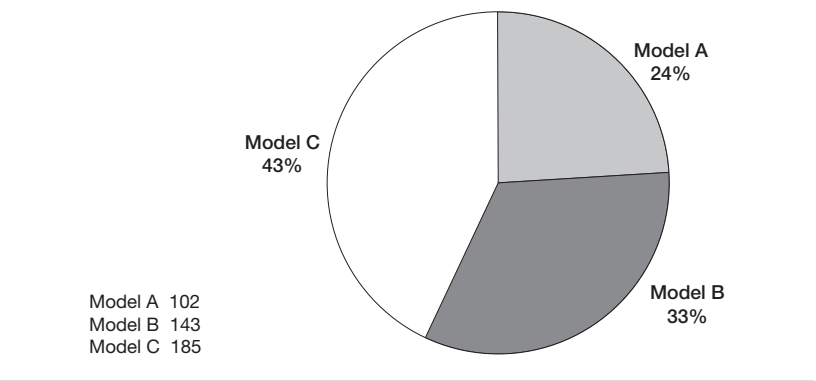


FIGURE C - 3

**Average Monthly Stock Price
XYZ Corporation**

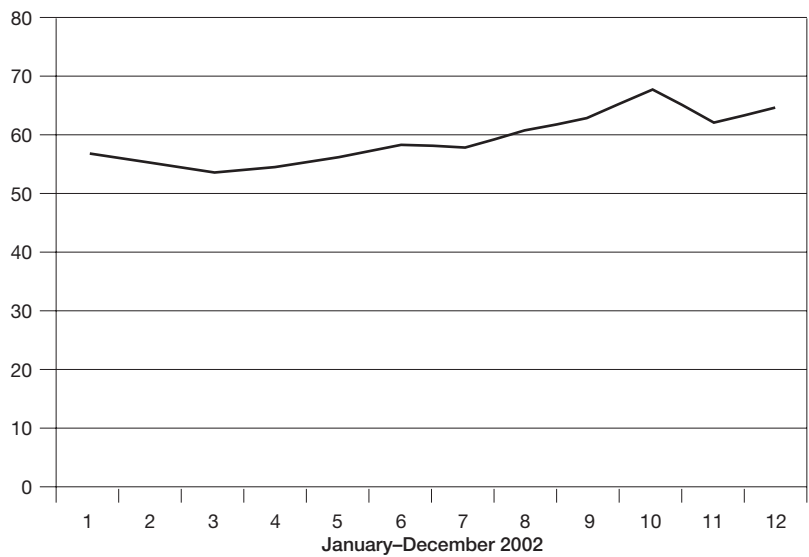


FIGURE C - 4

Percentage Returns

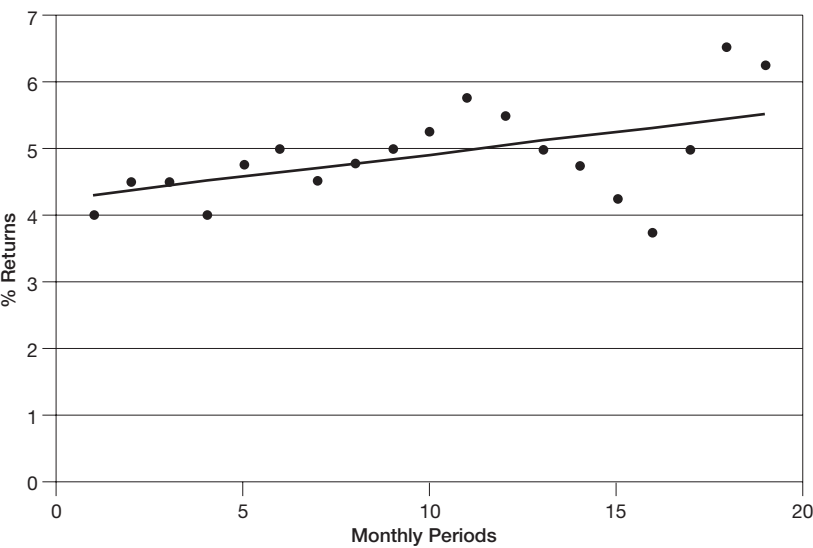
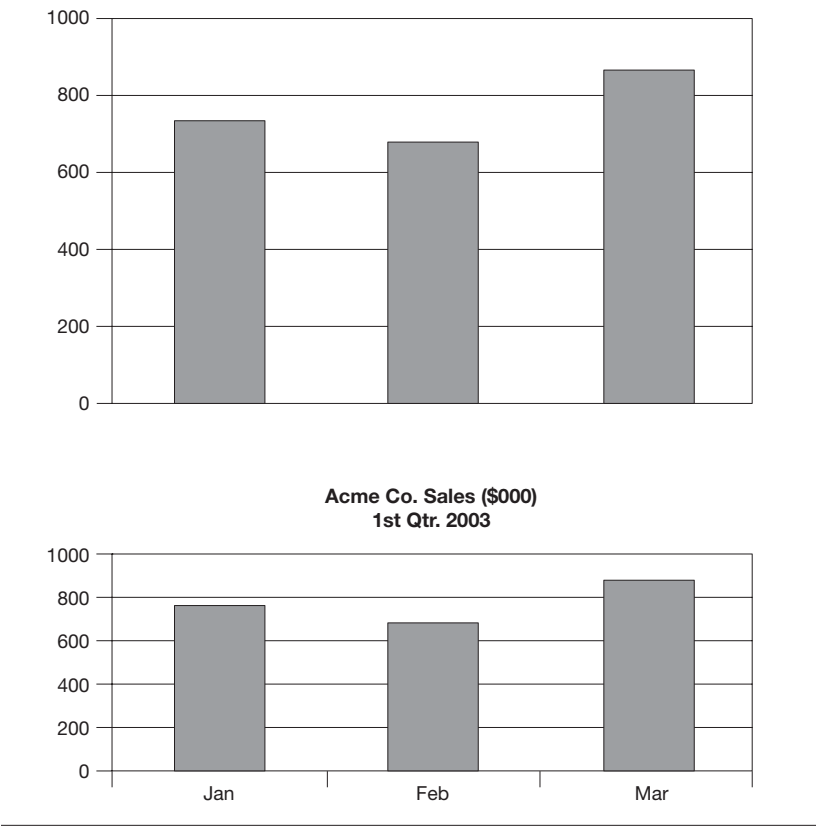


FIGURE C - 5

Unlabeled Versus Labeled Graph



Glossary

ACTIVE LISTENING giving one's respectful and undivided attention to both the words of a speaker and the emotions behind the spoken words, which are generally signaled through body language and vocal delivery.

ANTITHESIS a rhetorical device that places a sentence or one of its parts in opposition to another in order to capture the listener's attention or to evoke a strong response.

AUDITORY LEARNERS individuals whose primary learning style is more responsive to words and other sounds than to other stimuli.

BRAINSTORM OUTLINING a writing start-up strategy that uses free association to generate the ideas that will go into one's writing. In this strategy, the author jots down ideas as they come into his or her head. Those thoughts then become the bases for generating other ideas. All are then organized into an outline.

CATCHBALL a cross-functional method for accomplishing two things: idea enrichment/improvement, and buy-in among participants.

DESIGN ELEMENTS headings, subheadings, short blocks of text, graphics, and white space used to make a piece of written text less formidable, more comprehensible, and easier to skim.

EMPATHY the ability to identify with or vicariously experience the thoughts or feelings of others.

FREE WRITING METHOD a writing start-up strategy that relies on the author's freely roaming imagination. In this method, the author jots down anything that comes into his or her head. Once ideas stop flowing, the author highlights important ideas and organizes them into logical categories.

KINESTHETIC LEARNER an individual whose primary learning style is engaged by physical activities: handling a prototype, working at a laboratory bench, and so forth.

OUTLINING METHOD a writing start-up strategy that develops and organizes key points and subpoints into a nested structure that uses letters and roman and arabic numerals to indicate levels of information. Roman numbers identify the highest-level headings, with capital letter headings (A, B, C, etc.) nested under them. More details may be nested under those capital letter headings in the form of arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.).

PARALLEL STRUCTURE a rhetorical device that uses sentence elements that are alike in both function and construction—for example, “We will work hard. We will work smart. We will not tire or fail.”

QUESTIONING METHOD a writing start-up strategy that anticipates questions readers might have about the topic. By turning those questions into affirmative statements, the writer creates a list of points to be covered.

RHETORICAL QUESTION a question asked for the sole purpose of producing an effect on the audience. The speaker does not expect the question to be answered—least of all by the audience.

SCOPING a writing practice in which the author determines the breadth of the subject and how deeply it will be covered.

STYLE the choice of words, sentences, and paragraph format in a piece of writing that produces the desired reaction and result.

SUBJECT LINE in a memo or an e-mail, the part of the opening format through which the writer describes the general contents and aims to capture the reader’s attention.

TRADITIONAL OUTLINING See *Outlining method*.

TRIAD a rhetorical device that uses a list of three items.

VISUAL LEARNER a person whose primary learning style responds best to pictures, graphs, and other visual stimuli.

For Further Reading

Dumaine, Deborah, and the Better Communications® Team. *Instant-Answer Guide to Business Writing*. Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, 2003. If you do lots of writing, this definitive reference work should be on your shelf. Organized alphabetically, it contains expert advice and examples on all points of grammar, punctuation, writing style, the use of presentation graphs, and much more.

Dumaine, Deborah, and the Better Communications® Team. *Write to the Top: Writing for Corporate Success*, New York: Random House, 2004 (revised edition). A time-saving, step-by-step approach to writing business documents that drive action.

Ekman, Paul. *Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1992. Ekman, one of the world's experts on this subject, reveals how to spot clues that what you're hearing is not the truth.

Fielden, John S. "What Do You Mean You Don't Like My Style?" *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1982. The appropriate style of a written message varies with the purpose of the message and the relationship between the writer and the reader. This article explains how to determine the best style for many typical business situations. Though first published in 1982, the article remains timely and the best source on the subject. Reprints are available through Harvard Business Online at <www.hbsp.harvard.edu>.

Munter, Mary. *Guide to Managerial Communication*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003. An excellent guide to effective business writing and speaking. The book contains a very good section on the use of visual aids.

Strunk, William Jr., E. B. White, and Roger Angell. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000. This timeless little book, whose origins go back to the 1930s, has been the English language's most effective advocate for clear, concise, and more effective writing. Buy it. Read it. Follow its advice.