Writing That Works

Dr. Teeanna Rizkallah
Lecturer, Business Communication
Writing That Works:
Agenda

- **Common grammar errors**
  - Possessives
  - Comma splices
  - Dangling participles
  - Impersonal “you”
  - Singular vs. plural pronouns

- **Misused words**

- **Style**
  - Parallelism
  - Conciseness
  - Directness

Sponsored by the Division of Administration & Finance
Writing That Works:
Misused Words

- There, their, and they’re
  - There = location
  - Their = belonging to them
  - They’re = they are

- Two, to, and too
  - Two = 2
  - To = possession or movement
  - Too = also

- Then and than
  - Then = time
  - Than = comparison
Misused Words

- Assure, ensure, and insure
  - Assure = to make confident
  - Ensure = to make certain
  - Insure = to issue an insurance policy

- It’s and its
  - It’s = it is
  - Its = possession

- You’re and your
  - You’re = you are
  - Your = possession
Writing That Works:

Misused Words

- **Affect and effect**
  - *Affect* = To make an impression, influence, or effect on something (verb)
  - *Effect* = A result or consequence (noun)

- **Accept and except**
  - *Accept* = to receive
  - *Except* = to leave out, exception

- **Advice and advise**
  - *Advice* = information
  - *Advise* = to provide information
Writing That Works:
Misused Words

- Lay and lie
  - Lay = When the object is being laid down
  - Lie = When the object lays itself down

- Fewer and less
  - Fewer = things that can be counted
  - Less = uncountable things or abstract concepts
Writing That Works:
Misused Words

- Among and between
  - Among = three or more
  - Between = comparison between two

- Amount and number
  - Amount = quantities in bulk
  - Number = things that can be counted
Misused Words: Exercises

WRITING THAT WORKS
Writing That Works:
Common Grammar Errors

- **Possessives**
  - Apostrophe use
  - Plurals with apostrophes
  - Confusion with subject/verb agreement
  - Exceptions to the rule (whose, its)

- **Comma splices**
  - Use of a comma to connect two complete sentences
  - Corrective actions:
    - Period
    - Semi-colon
    - Conjunction (and, also, because, etc.)
Writing That Works:
Common Grammar Errors

- **Dangling participles**
  - When the verb (ending with “ing”) doesn’t agree with the subject
  - Often a result of passive voice
    - Example: 
      *While walking down the street, the cat caught my attention.* – Who is walking?!?

- **The impersonal “you”**
  - Using “you” instead of “people”
    - Example: 
      *You must work hard to make a living.*
        - INCORRECT
      *People must work hard to make a living.*
        - CORRECT
Writing That Works:
Common Grammar Errors

- Singular versus plural pronouns
  - When using indefinite pronouns, the antecedent to the verb must be singular. The easy fix is to make the pronoun definite and/or plural.

  » Example:
  - Everyone wants to have their own computer.
    - INCORRECT!
  - Everyone wants to have his or her own computer.
    - CORRECT BUT STRANGE!
  - All employees would like to have their own computers.
    - CORRECT AND BETTER!
Common Grammar Errors: Exercises

WRITING THAT WORKS
Writing That Works:

Style

Parallelism

Disrupts reader’s expectations when a series starts with one kind of unit and suddenly shifts to another.

- Within a sentence (commas)
- Within a set of bulleted items
Parallelism Examples
(Note: the following examples are all INCORRECT!)

1. He was a miser, bachelor, and egotistical. (noun, noun, adjective)
2. He was healthy, wealthy, and an athlete (adj., adj., noun)
3. Lincoln was a man of the people, for the people, and loved by the people. (prepositional phrase, prepositional phrase, participle phrase)
Writing That Works:

Style

Conciseness

A message should make its point using the fewest words possible. You should:

- Remove opening fillers
- Eliminate redundancies
- Reduce compound prepositions
- Purge empty words
Conciseness: Remove Opening Fillers

Openers like *there is/are* and *it is* fill in sentences but add no meaning.

- There are three things I want you to do. (wordy)
- I want you to do three things. (concise)

- It is important to start meetings on time. (wordy)
- Starting meetings on time is important. (concise)
Conciseness: Eliminate Redundancies

Say it only once. Repeating yourself wastes your time and weakens the point you want to emphasize.

Watch for--
- Redundant words
- Redundancies using conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositions
Writing That Works:

Style

Conciseness: Eliminate Redundancies
(Examples)

- Advance warning
- Dollar amount
- End result
- Perfectly clear
- Great majority
- New changes
- Past history
- Serious interest
- Personal opinion
- True facts

- Alter or change
- Consensus of opinion
- Each and every
- Few in number
- Free and clear
- Necessary and important
- Visible to the eye
- Last and final
Conciseness: Reduce Compound Prepositions

Replace phrases with a single word when possible.

- At this point in time — now
- At such time — when
- Due to the fact — because
- For the amount of — for
- In regards to — regarding
- The manner in which — how
Writing That Works:

Style

Directness

Avoid noun phrases and trite business sayings. They tend to muddy meaning.

- Noun phrases: changing verbs into nouns (we make a recommendation of instead of we recommend)
- Trite business phrases: “business-ese”
Writing That Works:

Style

Directness: Noun Phrases

- Conduct a discussion of—discuss
- Engage in the preparation of—prepare
- In regards to—regarding
- Perform an analysis of—analyze
- Take action on—act
Writing That Works: 

Style

Directness: Trite Business Phrases

- As per your request—as you requested
- Every effort will be made—we will try
- In receipt of—have received
- Please do not hesitate—please
- Under separate cover—separately
- With reference to—about
Style: Exercises

WRITING THAT WORKS