

Preview

The entries in this section are intended to help you develop a style that is clear and effective—and that follows the conventions of standard English. For a number of related entries, see Tab 1, “The Writing Process”; Tab 11, “Grammar”; and the Appendix, “Usage.”

Some entries in this section—awkwardness, coherence, parallel structure, and sentence variety—will help you construct clear sentences and paragraphs. Other entries discuss such word-choice issues as abstract / concrete words, idioms, and jargon. Finally, this section covers the important subjects of biased language, business writing style, and the “you” viewpoint.

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→ abstract / concrete words

Abstract words refer to general ideas, qualities, conditions, acts, or relationships—intangible things that cannot be detected by the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), such as *learning*, *leadership*, and *technology*. Concrete words identify things that can be perceived by the five senses, such as *diploma*, *manager*, and *keyboard*.

Abstract words must frequently be further defined or described.

to develop its own customer database

- ▶ The marketing team needs freedom.

Abstract words are best used with concrete words to help make intangible concepts specific and vivid.

- ▶ Public *transportation* [abstract] in Chicago includes *buses* [concrete] and *commuter trains* [concrete].

See also word choice.

→ affectation

Affectation is the use of language that is more formal, technical, or showy than necessary to communicate information to the reader. Affectation is a widespread writing problem in the workplace because many people feel that affectation lends a degree of authority to their writing. In fact, affectation can alienate customers, clients, and colleagues because it forces readers to work harder to understand the writer’s meaning.

Affected writing typically contains inappropriate abstract, highly technical, or foreign words and is often liberally sprinkled with trendy buzzwords.

❖ **ETHICS NOTE** Jargon and euphemisms can become affectation, especially if their purpose is to hide relevant facts or give a false impression of competence. See ethics in writing (Tab 1). ❖

Writers easily slip into affectation through the use of long variants—words created by adding prefixes and suffixes to simpler words (*orientate* for *orient*; *utilization* for *use*). Unnecessarily formal words (such as *penultimate* for *next to last*), created words using *ese* (such as *managementese*), and outdated words (such as *aforesaid*) can produce affectation. Elegant variation—attempting to avoid repeating a word within a paragraph by substituting a pretentious synonym—is also a form of affectation. Either repeat the term or use a pronoun.

- The use of digital modules in our assembly process has increased ^{and} production. Modular digitization has also cut costs.

Another type of affectation is gobbledygook, which is wordy, roundabout writing with many legal and technical-sounding terms (such as *wherein* and *morphing*). See also lichés, conciseness, nominalizations, and word choice.

WEB LINK	Affected Writing Revised
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For an example of regulations that are revised to eliminate various forms of affectation, visit bedfordstmartins.com/bwc and explore the Web Links at the Student Site.

awkwardness

Any writing that strikes readers as awkward—that is, as forced or unnatural—impedes their understanding. The following checklist and the entries indicated will help you smooth out most awkward passages.

Writer's Checklist: Eliminating Awkwardness

- ✓ Strive for clarity and coherence during revision (Tab 1).
- ✓ Check for organization (Tab 1) to ensure your writing develops logically.
- ✓ Keep sentence construction (Tab 11) as direct and simple as possible.
- ✓ Use subordination appropriately and avoid needless repetition.
- ✓ Correct any logic errors within your sentences.
- ✓ Revise for conciseness and avoid expletives where possible.
- ✓ Use the active voice (Tab 11) unless you have a justifiable reason to use the passive voice.
- ✓ Eliminate jammed or misplaced modifiers (Tab 11) and, for particularly awkward constructions, apply the tactics described in garbled sentences.

biased language

Biased language refers to words and expressions that offend because they make inappropriate assumptions or stereotypes about gender, ethnicity, physical or mental disability, age, or sexual orientation. Even if used unintentionally, biased language can damage your credibility.

- **PROFESSIONALISM NOTE** The easiest way to avoid bias is simply not to mention differences among people unless the differences are relevant to the discussion. Keep current with accepted usage and, if you are unsure of the appropriateness of an expression or the tone of a passage, have several colleagues review the material and give you their assessments. ►

Sexist Language

Sexist language can be an outgrowth of sexism, the arbitrary stereotyping of men and women—it can breed and reinforce inequality. To avoid sexism in your writing, treat men and women equally and use nonsexist occupational descriptions.

INSTEAD OF	CONSIDER
chairman, chairwoman	chair, chairperson
foreman	supervisor, manager
man-hours	staff hours, worker hours
policeman, policewoman	police officer
salesman, saleswoman	salesperson

Use parallel terms to describe men and women.

INSTEAD OF	USE
ladies and men	ladies and gentlemen; women and men
man and wife	husband and wife
Ms. Jones and Bernard Weiss	Ms. Jones and Mr. Weiss; Mary Jones and Bernard Weiss

One common way of handling pronoun references (Tab 11) that could apply equally to a man or a woman is the use of the expression *his or her*. To avoid this awkward usage, try rewriting the sentence in the plural.

- All employees their reports
- Every employee should submit ~~his or her~~ expense report by
Monday.

NOT: Every employee should submit their expense report...

or →

294 business writing style

Another solution is to omit pronouns completely if they are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

- ▶ Every employee should submit ^{an} his or her expense report by Monday.

Other Types of Biased Language

Identifying people by racial, ethnic, or religious categories is simply not relevant in most workplace writing. Telling readers that an accountant is Native American or an attorney is Jewish almost never conveys useful information.

Also consider how you refer to people with disabilities. If you refer to “a disabled employee,” you imply that the part (*disabled*) is as significant as the whole (*employee*). Use “an employee with a disability” instead. Similarly, the preferred usage is “an individual who uses a wheelchair” rather than “a wheelchair-bound person,” an expression that inappropriately equates the wheelchair with the person. Likewise, references to a person’s age can be inappropriate, as in expressions like “middle-aged manager” or “young social-media coordinator.” See also *ethics in writing* (Tab 1).

business writing style

Business writing has evolved from a very formal and elaborate style to one that is more personal and direct. Business writing today varies from the conversational style you might use in a *text message* (Tab 2) to the formal, legalistic style found in contracts. In most e-mails, letters, and memos, a style between those two extremes generally is appropriate. (See *correspondence*, Tab 4.) Writing that is too formal can alienate your *audience* (Tab 1). But an inappropriate attempt to be casual and informal may strike readers as insincere and unprofessional, especially to clients or those you do not know well.

Dear :
▶ Hey Jane!
^ ^

Your proposal arrived today, and it looks good.
Just got your proposal. It's awesome!
^

The use of personal *pronouns* (Tab 11) is important in letters and memos. In fact, one way you can make your business writing natural

and persuasive is to use the “*you*” *viewpoint*, which often (but not always) uses the pronoun *you* to place the readers’ interest foremost.

❖ **ETHICS NOTE** Be careful when you use the pronoun *we* in a business letter that is written on company stationery because it commits your company to what you have written. In general, when a statement is your opinion, use *I*; when it is company policy, use *we*. Do not refer to yourself in the third person by using *one* or *the writer*. It is perfectly natural and appropriate to refer to yourself as *I* and to the reader as *you*. In a report, however, you may be writing to more than one reader and may not necessarily want to refer to collective readers as *you*. See also *ethics in writing* (Tab 1), *persuasion* (Tab 1), and *point of view* (Tab 1). ❖

The best writers strive to write in a style that is so clear that their message cannot be misunderstood. In fact, you cannot be persuasive without being clear. One way to achieve clarity, especially during *revision* (Tab 1), is to eliminate overuse of the passive *voice* (Tab 11), which plagues most poor business writing. Although the passive voice is sometimes necessary, often it makes your writing not only dull but also ambiguous, indirect, or overly impersonal.

You can also achieve clarity with *conciseness*. Proceed cautiously here, however, because business writing should not be an endless series of short, choppy sentences that are blunt or deliver too little information to be helpful to the reader. (See also *sentence variety* and *telegraphic style*.) Appropriate and effective *word choice* is also essential to clarity. Finally, the careful use of punctuation can promote clarity, as discussed in Tab 12, “Punctuation and Mechanics.” See also “Five Steps to Successful Writing” (page xxv).

buzzwords

Buzzwords are popular words or phrases that, because of an intense period of overuse, tend to lose their freshness and preciseness. They often become popular through their associations with technology, popular culture, or even sports. See also *jargon* and *word choice*.

- ▶ win/win, F2F meeting, 24/7, touch base, take-away [as a noun], same page, action items, impact [as a verb]

Obviously, the words in this list are appropriate when used in the right *context* (Tab 1).

- ▶ We must establish an *interface* between the computer and the satellite hardware.
[*Interface* is appropriately used as a noun.]

296 clichés

When writers needlessly shift from the normal function of a word, however, they often create a buzzword that is imprecise.

- We must ^{cooperate} interface with the Human Resources Department.

[Interface is inappropriately used as a verb; cooperate is more precise.]

We include such words in our vocabulary because they *seem* to give force and vitality to our language. Actually, buzzwords often sound like an affectation in business writing.

WEB LINK Buzzwords

For this and other resources on buzzwords, visit bedfordstmartins.com/bwc and explore the Web Links at the Student Site.

clichés

Clichés are expressions that have been used for so long that they are no longer fresh but come to mind easily because they are so familiar. Clichés are often wordy as well as vague and can be confusing, especially to speakers of English as a second language (Tab 11). A better, more direct word or phrase is given for each of the following clichés.

INSTEAD OF

all over the map
the game plan
last but not least

USE

scattered; unfocused
strategy; schedule
last; finally

Some writers use clichés in a misguided attempt to appear casual or spontaneous, just as other writers try to impress readers with buzzwords. Although clichés may come to mind easily while you are writing a draft, eliminate them during revision. See also affectation, conciseness, and international correspondence (Tab 4).

coherence

sentence to sentence

Writing is coherent when the relationships among ideas are clear to readers. The major components of coherent writing are a logical sequence of

related ideas and clear transitions between these ideas. See also organization (Tab 1).

Presenting ideas in a logical sequence is the most important requirement in achieving coherence. The key to achieving a logical sequence is the use of a good outline. (See outlining, Tab 1.) An outline forces you to establish a beginning, a middle, and an end. That structure contributes greatly to coherence by enabling you to experiment with sequences and lay out the most direct route to your purpose (Tab 1) without digressing.

Thoughtful transition is also essential; without it, your writing cannot achieve the smooth flow from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph that results in coherence.

Check your draft carefully for coherence during revision (Tab 1). If possible, have someone else review your draft for how well it expresses the relationships between ideas. See also unity.

compound words

A compound word is made from two or more words that function as a single concept. A compound may be hyphenated, written as one word, or written as separate words.

- high-energy, nevertheless, post office, low-level, online, blood pressure

If you are not certain whether a compound word should use a hyphen (Tab 12), check a dictionary.

Be careful to distinguish between compound words (*greenhouse*) and words that simply appear together but do not constitute compound words (*green house*). For plurals of compound words, generally add *-s* to the last letter (*bookcases* and *Web sites*). However, when the first word of the compound is more important to its meaning than the last, the first word takes the *s* (*editors in chief*). Possessives are formed by adding *'s* to the end of the compound word (the *editor in chief's* desk, the *pipeline's* diameter, the *post office's* hours). See also possessive case (Tab 11).

conciseness

Concise writing is free of unnecessary words, phrases, clauses, and sentences without sacrificing clarity or appropriate detail. Conciseness, however, is not a synonym for brevity; a long report may be concise, while its abstract (Tab 6) may be brief and concise. Conciseness is always desirable, but brevity may or may not be desirable in a given

passage, depending on the writer's purpose. Although concise sentences are not guaranteed to be effective, wordy sentences always sacrifice some of their readability and coherence.

Causes of Wordiness

Modifiers (Tab 11) that repeat an idea implicit or present in the word being modified contribute to wordiness by being redundant.

- ▶ *basic essentials* *completely finished*
- final outcome* *present status*

Coordinated synonyms that merely repeat each other contribute to wordiness.

- ▶ *each and every* *basic and fundamental*
- finally and for good* *first and foremost*

Excess qualification also contributes to wordiness.

- ▶ *perfectly clear* *completely accurate*

Expletives, relative pronouns, and relative adjectives, although they have legitimate purposes, often result in wordiness.

WORDY *There are* [expletive] many Web designers *who* [relative pronoun] are planning to attend the conference, at *which* [relative adjective] time we should meet.

CONCISE Because many Web designers plan to attend the conference, we should meet then.

Circumlocution (a long, indirect way of expressing things) is a leading cause of wordiness.

WORDY The payment to which a subcontractor is entitled should be made promptly so that in the event of a subsequent contractual dispute we, as general contractors, may not be held in default of our contract by virtue of nonpayment.

CONCISE Pay subcontractors promptly. Then, if a contractual dispute occurs, we cannot be held in default of our contract because of nonpayment.

Balance is important. When conciseness is overdone, writing can become choppy and ambiguous. (See also telegraphic style.) Too much conciseness can produce a style that is not only too brief but also too blunt, especially in correspondence (Tab 4).

Writer's Checklist: Achieving Conciseness

Wordiness is understandable when you are writing a draft (Tab 1), but it should not survive revision (Tab 1).

- Use subordination to achieve conciseness.

- ▶ *five-page*
The financial report was carefully documented, and it covered five pages.

- Avoid affectation by using simple words and phrases.

WORDY It is the policy of the company to provide Internet access to enable employees to conduct the online communication necessary to discharge their responsibilities; such should not be utilized for personal communications or nonbusiness activities.

CONCISE Employee Internet access should be used only for appropriate company business.

- Eliminate redundancy.

WORDY Post-installation testing, which is offered to all our customers at no further cost to them whatsoever, is available with each Line Scan System One purchased from this company.

CONCISE Free post-installation testing is offered with each Line Scan System One.

- Change the passive voice (Tab 11) to the active voice and the indicative mood (Tab 11) to the imperative mood whenever possible.

WORDY Bar codes normally are used when an order is intended to be displayed on a monitor, and inventory numbers normally are used when an order is to be placed with the manufacturer.

CONCISE Use bar codes to display the order on a monitor, and use inventory numbers to place the order with the manufacturer.

- Eliminate or replace wordy introductory phrases or pretentious words and phrases (*in the case of, it may be said that, it appears that, needless to say*).

REPLACE	WITH
in order to; with a view to	to
due to the fact that; for the reason that;	because
owing to the fact that; the reason for	by; with
by means of; by using; in connection with;	
through the use of	

300 connotation / denotation

Writer's Checklist: Achieving Conciseness (continued)

at this time; at this point in time; at present;
at the present

now; currently

- ✓ Do not overuse **intensifiers**, such as *very*, *more*, *most*, *best*, *quite*, *great*, *really*, and *especially*. Instead, provide specific and useful details.
- ✓ Use the “find and replace” command to locate and revise wordy expressions, including *to be* and unnecessary helping **verbs** (Tab 11) such as *will*.

connotation / denotation

The *denotations* of a word are its literal meanings, as defined in a dictionary. The *connotations* of a word are its meanings and associations beyond its literal definitions. For example, the denotations of *Hollywood* are “a district of Los Angeles” and “the U.S. movie industry as a whole”; its connotations for many are “glamour, opulence, and superficiality.”

Often words have particular connotations for **audiences** (Tab 1) within professional groups and organizations. Choose words with both the most accurate denotations and the most appropriate connotations for the **context** (Tab 1). See also **defining terms** (Tab 1) and **word choice**.

emphasis

Emphasis is the principle of stressing the most important ideas in your writing. You can achieve emphasis through one or more of the following techniques: position, climactic order, sentence length, sentence type, active **voice** (Tab 11), **repetition**, **intensifiers**, direct statements, long **dashes** (Tab 12), and typographical devices.

Achieving Emphasis

Position. Place the idea in a conspicuous position. The first and last words of a sentence, paragraph, or document stand out in readers' minds.

- ▶ Moon craters are important to understanding the earth's history because they reflect geological history.

The term *moon craters* is emphasized because it appears at the beginning of the sentence, and *geological history* is emphasized because it appears at the end of the sentence. See also **subordination**.

Climactic Order. List the ideas or facts within a sentence in sequence from least to most important, as in the following example. See also **lists** (Tab 7).

- ▶ The hostile takeover of the company will result in some employees being relocated to different cities, some being downgraded, and some being let go.

Sentence Length. Vary sentence length strategically. A short sentence that follows a long sentence or a series of long sentences stands out in the reader's mind, as in the short sentence (“We must cut costs”) that ends the following paragraph.

- ▶ We have already reviewed the problem the accounting department has experienced during the past year. We could continue to examine the causes of our problems and point an accusing finger at all the culprits beyond our control, but in the end it all leads to one simple conclusion. We must cut costs.

See **sentence construction** (Tab 11).

Sentence Type. Vary sentences by the strategic use of a compound sentence, a complex sentence, or a simple sentence.

- ▶ The report submitted by the committee was carefully illustrated, and it covered five pages of single-spaced copy.
[This compound sentence carries no special emphasis; it contains two coordinate independent clauses.]
- ▶ The committee's report, which was carefully illustrated, covered five pages of single-spaced copy.
[This complex sentence emphasizes the size of the report.]
- ▶ The carefully illustrated report submitted by the committee covered five pages of single-spaced copy.
[This simple sentence emphasizes that the report was carefully illustrated.]

See **sentence variety**.

Active Voice. Use the active voice to emphasize the performer of an action: Make the performer the subject of the verb.

- ▶ Our department designed the new system.
[This sentence emphasizes *our department*, which is the performer and the subject of the verb, *designed*.]

NOT: The new system was designed by our department
Sub → verb → obj

302 euphemisms

Repetition. Repeat key terms, as in the use of the word *remains* and the phrase *come and go* in the following sentence.

- ▶ Similarly, atoms *come and go* in a molecule, but the molecule *remains*; molecules *come and go* in a cell, but the cell *remains*; cells *come and go* in a body, but the body *remains*; persons *come and go* in an organization, but the organization *remains*.

—Kenneth Boulding, *Beyond Economics*

Intensifiers. Although you can use intensifiers (*most, much, very*) for emphasis, this technique is so easily abused that it should be used with caution.

- ▶ The final proposal is *much* more persuasive than the first one. [The intensifier *much* emphasizes the contrast.]

Direct Statements. Use direct statements, such as “most important,” “foremost,” or someone’s name in a direct address.

- ▶ Most important, keep in mind that everything you do affects the company’s bottom line.
- ▶ John, I believe we should rethink our plans.

Long Dashes. Use a dash to call attention to a particular word or statement.

- ▶ The job will be done—after we are under contract.

Typographical Devices. Use *italics*, **bold type**, underlining, color, and CAPITAL LETTERS—but use them sparingly because overuse can create visual clutter and cause readers to ignore truly important information. See also capitalization (Tab 12), italics (Tab 12), and layout and design (Tab 7).

euphemisms

A euphemism is an inoffensive substitute for a word or phrase that could be distasteful, offensive, or too blunt: *passed away* for *died*; *previously owned* or *preowned* for *used*; *lay off* or *downsize* for *fire* or *terminate* employees. Used judiciously, euphemisms can help you avoid embarrassing or offending someone.

- ❖ **ETHICS NOTE** Euphemisms can also hide the facts of a situation (*incident* or *event* for *accident*) or be a form of affectation if used carelessly.

Avoid them especially in international correspondence (Tab 4) and other forms of global communication (Tab 1) where their meanings could be not only confusing but also misleading. See also ethics in writing (Tab 1). ❖

expletives

An expletive is a word that fills the position of another word, phrase, or clause. *It* and *there* are common expletives.

- ▶ *It* is certain that he will be promoted.

In the example, the expletive *it* occupies the position of subject in place of the real subject, *that he will be promoted*. Expletives are sometimes necessary to avoid awkwardness, but they are commonly overused, and most sentences can be better stated without them.

- ▶ ^{Many} There were ^{were} many files lost when we converted to the new server.

In addition to its grammatical use, the word *expletive* means a profane exclamation or oath.

figures of speech

A figure of speech is an imaginative expression that often compares two things that are basically not alike but have at least one thing in common. For example, if a device is cone-shaped and has an opening at the narrow end, you might say that it looks like a volcano.

Figures of speech can clarify the unfamiliar by relating a new concept to one with which readers are familiar. In that respect, they help establish understanding between the specialist and the nonspecialist. (See also audience, Tab 1.) Figures of speech can help translate the abstract into the concrete; in the process of doing so, they can also make writing more colorful and graphic. (See also abstract / concrete words.) A figure of speech must make sense, however, to achieve the desired effect.

ILLOGICAL Without the fuel of tax incentives, our economic engine would operate less efficiently. [An engine would not operate at all without fuel.]

Figures of speech also must be consistent to be effective.

304 garbled sentences

- We must get our sales program *back on course*, and we are counting on you to ^{steer the effort.} carry the ball.
^

A figure of speech should not overshadow the point the writer is trying to make. In addition, it is better to use no figure of speech at all than to use a trite one. A surprise that comes “like a bolt out of the blue” seems stale and not much of a surprise. See also clichés and idioms.

garbled sentences

(The Palin)

A garbled sentence is one that is so tangled with structural and grammatical problems that it cannot be repaired. Garbled sentences often result from an attempt to squeeze too many ideas into one sentence.

- My job objectives are accomplished by my having a diversified background which enables me to operate effectively and efficiently, consisting of a degree in computer science, along with twelve years of experience, including three years in Staff Engineering-Packaging, sets a foundation for a strong background in areas of analyzing problems and assessing economical and reasonable solutions.

Do not try to revise such a sentence; rather, analyze the ideas it contains, list them in a logical sequence, and then construct one or more entirely new sentences. An analysis of the preceding example yields the following five ideas:

- My job requires that I analyze problems to find economical and workable solutions.
- My diversified background helps me accomplish my job.
- I have a computer-science degree.
- I have twelve years of job experience.
- Three of these years have been in Staff Engineering-Packaging.

Using those five ideas—together with parallel structure, sentence variety, subordination, and transition—the writer might have described the job as follows:

- My job requires that I analyze problems to find economical and workable solutions. Both my education and my experience help me achieve this goal. Specifically, I have a computer-science degree and twelve years of job experience, three of which have been in the Staff Engineering-Packaging Department.

See also awkwardness, mixed constructions (Tab 11), and sentence construction (Tab 11).

idioms

An idiom is a group of words that has a special meaning apart from its literal meaning. Someone “*runs for political office*” in the United States, for example, while a candidate “*stands for office*” in the United Kingdom. Because such expressions are specific to a culture, nonnative speakers must memorize them.

Idioms are often constructed with prepositions that follow adjectives (*similar to*), nouns (*need for*); and verbs (*approve of*). Some idioms can change meaning slightly with the preposition used, as in *agree to* (“consent”) and *agree with* (“in accord”). The following are typical idioms that give nonnative speakers trouble.

call off [cancel]	hand in [submit]
call on [visit a client]	hand out [distribute]
drop in on [visit unexpectedly]	look up [research a subject]
find out [discover information]	run into [meet by chance]
get through with [finish]	run out of [deplete supply]
give up [quit]	watch out for [be careful]

Idioms often provide helpful shortcuts. In fact, they can make writing more natural and lively. Avoid them, however, if your writing is to be translated into another language or read in other English-speaking countries. Because no language system can fully explain such usages, a reader must check dictionaries or usage guides to interpret the meaning of idioms. See also English as a second language (ESL) (Tab 11) and international correspondence (Tab 4).

WEB LINK Prepositional Idioms

For links to helpful lists of common pairings of prepositions with nouns, verbs, and adjectives, visit bedfordstmartins.com/bwc and explore the Web Links at the Student Site.

intensifiers

Intensifiers are adverbs (Tab 11) that emphasize degree, such as *very*, *quite*, *rather*, *such*, and *too*. (See also emphasis.) Although intensifiers serve a legitimate and necessary function, unnecessary intensifiers can weaken your writing. Eliminate those that do not make an obvious contribution or replace them with specific details.

- The team learned the very good news that it had been awarded \$10,000 a rather substantial monetary prize for its design.
^

Some words (such as *perfect*, *impossible*, and *final*) do not logically permit intensification because, by definition, they do not allow degrees of comparison. Although usage often ignores that logical restriction, avoid such comparisons in business writing. See also adjectives (Tab 11); conciseness; and the Appendix, “Usage.”

jargon

Jargon is a specialized slang that is unique to an occupational or a professional group. For example, human resource personnel use the term *headhunters* to describe specialists who recruit professional and executive personnel. Jargon is at first understood only by insiders; over time, it may become known more widely and become a buzzword. If all your readers are members of a particular occupational group, jargon may provide an efficient means of communicating. However, if you have any doubt that your entire audience (Tab 1) is part of such a group, avoid using jargon. See also affectation.

logic errors

Logic is the study of the principles of reasoning. In most writing, especially in writing intended to persuade an audience, logic is essential to demonstrating that your conclusions are valid. This entry describes typical errors in logic that can undermine the point you are trying to communicate and your credibility. See also persuasion (Tab 1).

❖ **ETHICS NOTE** Many errors in this entry occur unintentionally. However, when they are used intentionally to mislead readers, that practice is unethical. See also ethics in writing (Tab 1). ❖

Lack of Reason

When a statement is contrary to the reader’s common sense, that statement is not reasonable. If, for example, you stated, “New York City is a small town,” your reader would immediately question your statement. However, if you stated, “Although New York City’s population is more than eight million, it is composed of neighborhoods that function as small towns,” your reader could probably accept the statement as reasonable.

Sweeping Generalizations

Sweeping generalizations are statements that are too broad or all-inclusive to be supportable. They are general statements that disregard

exceptions: a flat statement such as “Management is never concerned about employees” ignores evidence that many managers are in fact concerned for their employees. Using such generalizations weakens your credibility.

Non Sequiturs

A non sequitur is a statement that does not logically follow a previous statement.

- ▶ I cleared off my desk, and the report is due today.

The missing link in these statements is that the writer cleared his or her desk to make space for materials to help finish the report that is due today. Avoid non sequiturs by making sure you explicitly state the logical connections of ideas and facts in your writing.

False Cause

A false cause (also called *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*) refers to the logical fallacy that because one event followed another event, the first somehow caused the second.

- ▶ I didn’t bring my umbrella today. No wonder it is now raining.
- ▶ Because we now have our board meetings at the Education Center, our management turnover rate has declined.

Such errors in reasoning can happen when the writer hastily concludes that two events are related without examining whether a causal connection between them, in fact, exists.

Biased or Suppressed Evidence

A conclusion reached as a result of biased or suppressed evidence—self-serving data, questionable sources, purposely omitted or incomplete facts—is both illogical and unethical. Suppose you are preparing a report on the acceptance of a new policy among employees. If you distribute questionnaires only to those who think the policy is effective, the resulting evidence will be biased. Intentionally ignoring relevant data that might not support your position not only produces inaccurate results but also is unethical.

Fact Versus Opinion

Distinguish between fact and opinion. Facts include verifiable data or statements, whereas opinions are personal conclusions that may or may not be based on facts. For example, it is verifiable that distilled water

boils at 100°C; that it tastes better or worse than tap water is an opinion. Distinguish the facts from your opinions in your writing so that your readers can draw their own conclusions.

Loaded Arguments

When you include an opinion in a statement and then reach conclusions that are based on that statement, you are loading the argument. Consider the following opening for a memo:

- ▶ I have several suggestions to improve the poorly written policy manual. First, we should change . . .

Unless everyone agrees that the manual is poorly written, readers may reject a writer's entire message because they disagree with this loaded premise. Conclusions reached with such loaded statements are weak and can produce negative reactions in readers who detect the loading.

WEB LINK	Understanding an Argument
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For this and other resources on argument, visit bedfordstmartins.com/bwc and explore the Web Links at the Student Site.

nominalizations

A nominalization is a noun form of a verb that is often combined with vague and general (or “weak”) verbs like *make*, *do*, *give*, *perform*, and *provide*. Avoid nominalizations when you can use specific verbs that communicate the same idea more directly and concisely.

- ▶ The staff should ^{evaluate} perform an evaluation of the new software.

If you use nominalizations solely to make your writing sound more formal, the result will be affectation. See also business writing style, conciseness, and verbs (Tab 11).

parallel structure

Parallel structure requires that sentence elements that are alike in function be alike in grammatical form as well. This structure achieves an

economy of words, clarifies meaning, expresses the equality of the ideas, and achieves emphasis. Parallel structure assists readers because it allows them to anticipate the meaning of a sentence element on the basis of its construction.

Parallel structure can be achieved with words, phrases, or clauses.

- ▶ Customer-service representatives must be *punctual, courteous, and conscientious*. [parallel words]
- ▶ Customer-service representatives must recognize the importance of *punctuality, of courtesy, and of conscientiousness*. [parallel phrases]
- ▶ If you want to excel as a customer-service representative, *you must arrive punctually, you must behave courteously, and you must respond conscientiously*. [parallel clauses]

Correlative conjunctions (*either . . . or, neither . . . nor, not only . . . but also*) should always join elements that use parallel structure. Both parts of the pairs should be followed immediately by the same grammatical form: two similar words, two similar phrases, or two similar clauses.

- ▶ Viruses carry either DNA or RNA, never both. [parallel words]
- ▶ Clearly, neither serological tests nor virus isolation studies alone would have been adequate. [parallel phrases]
- ▶ Either we must increase our production efficiency or we must decrease our production goals. [parallel clauses]

To make a parallel construction clear and effective, it is often best to repeat an article, a pronoun, a helping verb, a preposition, a subordinating conjunction, or the mark of an infinitive (*to*).

- ▶ The association has *a* mission statement and *a* code of ethics. [article]
- ▶ The software is popular *because* it is compatible across platforms and *because* it is easily customized. [subordinating conjunction]

Parallel structure is especially important in creating lists (Tab 7), outlines, tables of contents (Tab 6), and headings (Tab 7) because it lets readers know the relative value of each item in a table of contents and each heading in the body of a document. See also outlining (Tab 1).

Faulty Parallelism

Faulty parallelism results when joined elements are intended to serve equal grammatical functions but do not have equal grammatical form.

Faulty parallelism sometimes occurs because a writer tries to compare items that are not comparable.

310 plain language

NOT PARALLEL

careers

positions

The company offers special college training to help hourly employees move into professional careers like engineering management, software development, service technicians, and sales trainees. [Notice faulty comparison of occupations—*engineering management* and *software development*—to people—*service technicians* and *sales trainees*.]

To avoid faulty parallelism, make certain that each element in a series is similar in form and structure to all others in the same series.

PARALLEL

The company offers special college training to help hourly employees move into professional careers like *engineering management*, *software development*, *technical services*, and *sales*.

plain language

Plain language is writing that is logically organized and understandable on the first reading. Such writing avoids unnecessary jargon, affectation, and technical terminology. Even with the best of intentions, however, you cannot always avoid using specialized terms and concepts. Accordingly, assess your audience (Tab 1) carefully to ensure that your language connects with their level of knowledge. Replace jargon and complex legal wording with familiar words or terms when possible.

COMPLEX

The systems integration specialist must be able to visually perceive the entire directional response module.

PLAIN LANGUAGE

The operator must be able to see the entire control panel.

If you are a health-care provider, for example, use the appropriate plain-language equivalent for medical terminology with patients in conversations and written guidelines: *bleeding* instead of *hemorrhaging*; *heart attack* instead of *myocardial infarction*; *cast* instead of *splint*; *stitches* instead of *sutures*. If a plain-language alternative does not exist, define or explain a technical term on its first use and use visuals where necessary.

Writer's Checklist: Using Plain Language

- Identify your average reader's level of technical knowledge.
- Avoid unnecessary jargon and legal language.
- Avoid confusing terms and constructions.
 - Define necessary abbreviations (Tab 12) and acronyms.
 - Use the same words consistently for the same things.
 - Do not give an obscure meaning to a word.
- Use the active voice (Tab 11) for directness and for identifying the doer of an action.
- Use the second person (Tab 11) (*you / yours*) or imperative mood (Tab 11) to write directly to the reader.
- Write coherent sentences.
 - Aim for one message in each sentence.
 - Break up complex information into smaller, easier-to-understand units.
 - Use positive writing and the present tense (Tab 11) as much as possible.
- Select word placement carefully.
 - Keep subjects and objects (Tab 11) close to their verbs (Tab 11).
 - Put *only*, *always*, and other conditional words next to the words they modify.

WEB LINK

Plain-Language Resources

For background information about plain-language laws and practices, visit bedfordstmartins.com/bwc and explore the Web Links at the Student Site.

positive writing

Presenting positive information as though it were negative is confusing to readers.

NEGATIVE If the error does *not* involve data transmission, the backup function will *not* be used.

In this sentence, the reader must reverse two negatives to understand the exception that is being stated. The following sentence presents the exception in a positive and straightforward manner.

312 repetition

POSITIVE The backup function is used only when the error involves data transmission.

❖ **ETHICS NOTE** Negative facts or conclusions, however, should be stated negatively; stating a negative fact or conclusion positively is deceptive because it can mislead the reader.

DECEPTIVE In the first quarter of this year, employee exposure to airborne lead averaged within 10 percent of acceptable state health standards.

ACCURATE In the first quarter of this year, employee exposure to airborne lead averaged 10 percent below acceptable state health standards.

See also ethics in writing (Tab 1). ❖

Even if what you are saying is negative, do not state it more negatively than necessary.

NEGATIVE We are withholding your shipment because we have not received your payment.

POSITIVE We will forward your shipment as soon as we receive your payment.

See also correspondence (Tab 4), plain language, and “you” viewpoint.

repetition

The deliberate use of repetition to build a sustained effect or to emphasize a feeling or an idea can be a powerful device. See also emphasis.

- ▶ Similarly, atoms *come and go* in a molecule, but the molecule *remains*; molecules *come and go* in a cell, but the cell *remains*; cells *come and go* in a body, but the body *remains*; persons *come and go* in an organization, but the organization *remains*.

—Kenneth Boulding, *Beyond Economics*

Repeating keywords from a previous sentence or paragraph can also be used effectively to achieve transition.

- ▶ For many years, *oil* has been a major industrial energy source. However, *oil* supplies are limited, and other sources of energy must be developed.

Be consistent in the word or phrase you use to refer to something. In business writing, it is generally better to repeat a word or use a clear

pronoun reference (so readers know that you mean the same thing) than to use synonyms to avoid repetition. See also affectation.

SYNONYMS Several recent *analyses* support our conclusion. These *studies* cast doubt on the feasibility of long-range forecasting. The *reports*, however, are strictly theoretical.

CONSISTENT TERMS Several recent *studies* support our conclusion. These *studies* cast doubt on the feasibility of long-range forecasting. *They* are, however, strictly theoretical.

Purposeless repetition, however, makes a sentence awkward and hides its key ideas. See also conciseness.

- ▶ She said that the customer ~~said that he~~ was canceling the order.

sentence variety

Sentences can vary in length, structure, and complexity. As you revise, vary your sentences so that they do not become tiresomely alike. See also sentence construction (Tab 11).

Sentence Length

A series of sentences of the same length is monotonous, so varying sentence length makes writing less tedious to the reader. For example, avoid stringing together a number of short independent clauses. Either connect them with subordinating connectives, thereby making some dependent clauses, or make some clauses into separate sentences.

- STRING** The river is 63 miles long, and it averages 50 yards in width, and its depth averages 8 feet.
- IMPROVED** The river, which is 63 miles long and averages 50 yards in width, has an average depth of 8 feet.
- IMPROVED** The river is 63 miles long. It averages 50 yards in width and 8 feet in depth.

You can often effectively combine short sentences by converting verbs into adjectives.

- ▶ ^{failed}
The digital shift indicator ~~failed~~. It was pulled from the market.

314 sentence variety

Although too many short sentences make your writing sound choppy and immature, a short sentence can be effective following a long one.

- ▶ During the past two decades, many changes have occurred in American life—the extent, durability, and significance of which no one has yet measured. *No one can.*

In general, short sentences are good for emphatic, memorable statements. Long sentences are good for detailed explanations and support. Nothing is inherently wrong with a long sentence, or even with a complicated one, as long as its meaning is clear and direct. Sentence length becomes an element of style when varied for **emphasis** or contrast; a conspicuously short or long sentence can be used to good effect.

Word Order

When a series of sentences all begin in exactly the same way (usually with an article and a noun), the result is likely to be monotonous. You can make your sentences more interesting by occasionally starting with a modifying word, phrase, or clause.

- ▶ *To salvage the project*, she presented alternatives when existing policies failed to produce results. [modifying phrase]

However, overuse of this technique itself can be monotonous, so use it in moderation.

Inverted word order can be an effective way to achieve variety, but be careful not to create an awkward construction.

- AWKWARD** So good sales have never been.
EFFECTIVE Never have sales been so good.

For variety, you can alter normal sentence order by inserting a phrase or clause.

- ▶ Titanium fills the gap, *both in weight and in strength*, between aluminum and steel.

The technique of inserting a phrase or clause is good for achieving emphasis, providing detail, breaking monotony, and regulating pace.

Loose and Periodic Sentences

A loose sentence makes its main point at the beginning and then adds subordinate phrases and clauses that develop or modify the point. A loose sentence could end at one or more points before it actually ends, as the periods in brackets illustrate in the following example:

- ▶ It went up[.], a great ball of fire about a mile in diameter[.], an elemental force freed from its bonds[.] after being chained for billions of years.

A periodic sentence delays its main idea until the end by presenting modifiers or subordinate ideas first, thus holding the readers' interest until the end.

- ▶ During the last century, the attitude of Americans toward technology underwent a profound change.

Experiment with shifts from loose sentences to periodic sentences in your own writing, especially during **revision** (Tab 1). Avoid the monotony of a long series of loose sentences, particularly a series containing coordinate clauses joined by **conjunctions** (Tab 11). Using **subordination** not only provides emphasis but also makes your sentences more interesting.

subordination

Subordination is the use of sentence structure to show the appropriate relationship between ideas of unequal importance. Subordination allows you to emphasize your main idea by putting less-important ideas in subordinate **clauses** (Tab 11) or **phrases** (Tab 11).

- ▶ Envirex Systems now employs 500 people. It was founded just three years ago. [The two ideas are equally important.]
- ▶ Envirex Systems, *which now employs 500 people*, was founded just three years ago. [The number of employees is subordinated; the founding date is emphasized.]
- ▶ Envirex Systems, *which was founded just three years ago*, now employs 500 people. [The founding date is subordinated; the number of employees is emphasized.]

Effective subordination can be used to achieve **conciseness**, **emphasis**, and **sentence variety**.

DEPENDENT CLAUSE	The regional manager's report, <i>which covered five pages</i> , was carefully illustrated.
PHRASE	The regional manager's report, <i>covering five pages</i> , was carefully illustrated.
SINGLE MODIFIER	The regional manager's <i>five-page</i> report was carefully illustrated.

316 telegraphic style

Subordinating conjunctions (*because, if, while, when, although*) achieve subordination effectively.

- ▶ An increase in local sales is unlikely *because* the local population has declined.

You may use a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet*) to concede that an opposite or balancing fact is true; however, a subordinating conjunction can often make the point more smoothly.

- ▶ *Although* their bank has a lower interest rate on loans, ours provides a wider range of essential services.

The relationship between a conditional statement and a statement of consequences is clearer if the condition is expressed as a subordinate clause.

- ▶ *Because* the bill was incorrect, the customer was angry.

Relative pronouns (*who, whom, which, that*) can be used effectively in subordinate clauses to combine related ideas within a sentence. See pronouns (Tab 11).

- ▶ OnlinePro, *which* protects computers from malicious programs, makes your system “invisible” to hackers.

Avoid subordinate constructions that overlap and depend on the preceding construction. Overlapping can make the relationship between a relative pronoun and its antecedent less clear.

OVERLAPPING Shock, *which* often accompanies severe injuries and infections, is a failure of the circulation, *which* is marked by a fall in blood pressure *that* initially affects the skin (*which* explains pallor) and later the vital organs such as the kidneys and brain.

CLEAR Shock often accompanies severe injuries and infections. Marked by a fall in blood pressure, it is a failure of the circulation, initially to the skin (thus producing pallor) and later to the vital organs like the kidneys and the brain.

telegraphic style

Telegraphic style condenses writing by omitting articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and transitions. Although conciseness is important, especially in instructions, writers sometimes try to achieve conciseness by omit-

ting necessary words and thus producing misunderstandings. Compare the following two passages and notice how much easier the revised version reads (the added words are italicized).

TELEGRAPHIC Per 5/21 e-mail, 12 instruction booklets/questionnaires enclosed. Report can be complete when above materials received. July filling, so let's set date. Pls advise.

CLEAR *As promised in my May 21 e-mail, enclosed are 12 copies of the instruction booklet and the questionnaire. We can complete the report when we receive the questionnaires. Our July calendar is filling quickly, so please call me to set a meeting date as soon as possible.*

Telegraphic style can also produce ambiguity, as the following example demonstrates.

AMBIGUOUS The director wants report written by New York office. [Does the director want a report that the New York office *wrote in the past*, or does the director want the New York office *to write a report in the future*?]

CLEAR The director wants the report *that was* written by the New York office.

CLEAR The director wants the report *to be* written by the New York office.

- ▶ **PROFESSIONALISM NOTE** Although you may save yourself work by writing telegraphically, your readers will have to work that much harder to decipher your meaning. Professional courtesy requires that you help your reader (Tab 1). Even in text messaging (Tab 2), you need to make sure your reader will understand your message. ▶

tone

Tone is the attitude a writer expresses toward the subject and his or her readers. In workplace writing, tone may range widely—depending on the purpose, situation, context, audience, and even the medium of a communication. For example, in an e-mail message to be read only by an associate who is also a friend, your tone might be casual.

- ▶ Your proposal to Smith and Kline is super. We'll just need to hammer out the schedule. If we get the contract, I owe you lunch!

318 transition

In a message to your manager or superior, however, your tone might be more formal and respectful.

- ▶ I think your proposal to Smith and Kline is excellent. I have marked a couple of places where I'm concerned that we are committing ourselves to a schedule that we might not be able to keep. If I can help in any other way, please let me know.

In a message that serves as a report to numerous readers, the tone would be professional, without the more-personal style that you would use with an individual reader.

- ▶ The Smith and Kline proposal appears complete and thorough, based on our department's evaluation. Several small revisions, however, would ensure that the company is not committing itself to an unrealistic schedule. These revisions are marked on the copy of the report attached to this message.

The word choice, the introduction, and even the title contribute to the overall tone of your document. For instance, a title such as "Ecological Consequences of Diminishing Water Resources in California" clearly sets a different tone from "What Happens When We've Drained California Dry?" The first title would be appropriate for a report; the second title would be more appropriate for a popular article. See also business writing style, correspondence (Tab 4), and titles (Tab 5).

transition

Transition is the means of achieving a smooth flow of ideas from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and subject to subject. Transition is a two-way indicator of what has been said and what will be said; it provides readers with guideposts for linking ideas and clarifying the relationship between them.

Transition can be obvious.

- ▶ *Having considered the benefits of a new facility, we move next to the question of adequate staffing.*

Transition can be subtle.

- ▶ *Even if this facility can be built at a reasonable cost, there still remains the problem of adequate staffing.*

Either way, you now have your readers' attention fastened on the problem of adequate staffing, which is exactly what you set out to do.

Methods of Transition

Transition can be achieved in many ways: (1) using transitional words and phrases, (2) repeating keywords or key ideas, (3) using pronouns (Tab 11) with clear antecedents, (4) using enumeration (1, 2, 3, or first, second, third), (5) summarizing a previous paragraph, (6) asking a question, and (7) using a transitional paragraph.

Certain words and phrases are inherently transitional. Consider the following terms and their functions:

FUNCTION	TERMS
Result	<i>therefore, as a result, consequently, thus, hence</i>
Example	<i>for example, for instance, specifically, as an illustration</i>
Comparison	<i>similarly, likewise, in comparison</i>
Contrast	<i>but, yet, still, however, nevertheless, on the other hand</i>
Addition	<i>moreover, furthermore, also, too, besides, in addition</i>
Time	<i>now, later, meanwhile, since then, after that, before that time</i>
Sequence	<i>first, second, third, initially, then, next, finally</i>

Within a paragraph, such transitional expressions clarify and smooth the movement from idea to idea. Conversely, the lack of transitional devices can make for disjointed reading. See also telegraphic style.

Transition Between Sentences

You can achieve effective transition between sentences by repeating keywords or key ideas from preceding sentences and by using pronouns that refer to antecedents in previous sentences. Consider the following short paragraph, which uses both of those means.

- ▶ Representative of many American university towns is Middletown. *This midwestern town, formerly a sleepy farming community, is today the home of a large and vibrant academic community. Attracting students from all over the Midwest, this university town has grown very rapidly in the last ten years.*

Enumeration is another device for achieving transition.

- ▶ The recommendation rests on *two conditions*. *First*, the department staff must be expanded to handle the increased workload. *Second*, sufficient time must be provided for training the new staff.

Transition Between Paragraphs

The means discussed so far for achieving transition between sentences can also be effective for achieving transition between paragraphs. For paragraphs, however, longer transitional elements are often required. One technique is to use an opening sentence that summarizes the preceding paragraph and then moves on to a new paragraph.

- ▶ One property of material considered for manufacturing processes is hardness. Hardness is the internal resistance of the material to the forcing apart or closing together of its molecules. Another property is ductility, the characteristic of material that permits it to be drawn into a wire. Material also may possess malleability, the property that makes it capable of being rolled or hammered into thin sheets of various shapes. Purchasing managers must consider these properties before selecting manufacturing materials for use in production.

The requirements of hardness, ductility, and malleability account for the high cost of such materials. . . .

Another technique is to ask a question at the end of one paragraph and answer it at the beginning of the next.

- ▶ New technology has always been feared because it has at times displaced some jobs. However, it invariably created many more jobs than it eliminated. Almost always, the jobs eliminated by technological advances have been unskilled jobs, and workers who have been displaced have been forced to increase their skills, which resulted in better and higher-paying jobs for them. *In view of this history, should we now uncritically embrace new technology?*

Certainly technology has given us unparalleled access to information and created many new roles for employees. . . .

A purely transitional paragraph may be inserted to aid readability.

- ▶ The problem of poor management was a key factor that caused the weak performance of the company.

Two other setbacks to the company's fortunes also marked the company's decline: the loss of many skilled workers through the early retirement program and the intensification of the rate of employee turnover.

The early retirement program resulted in engineering staff . . .

If you provide logical organization (Tab 1) and have prepared an outline, your transitional needs will easily be satisfied and your writing will have unity and coherence. During revision, look for places where transition is missing and add it. Look for places where it is weak and strengthen it.

unity

Unity is singleness of purpose (Tab 1) and focus; a unified paragraph (Tab 1) or document has a central idea and does not digress into unrelated topics.

The logical sequence provided through outlining (Tab 1) is essential to achieving unity. An outline enables you to lay out the most direct route from introduction to conclusion, and it enables you to build each paragraph around a topic sentence that expresses a single idea. Effective transition helps build unity as well as coherence, because transitional terms clarify the relationship of each part to what precedes it.

vague words

A vague word is one that is imprecise in the context in which it is used. Some words are vague because they encompass such a broad range of meanings that there is no focus for their definition. Words such as *real, nice, important, good, bad, contact, thing, and fine* are often called “omnibus words” because they can have so many meanings and interpretations. In speech, our vocal inflections help make the meanings of such words clear. Because you cannot rely on vocal inflections when you are writing, avoid using vague words. Be concrete and specific. See also abstract / concrete words and word choice.

VAGUE	It was a <i>good</i> meeting. [Why was it good?]
SPECIFIC	The meeting resolved three questions: pay scales, fringe benefits, and workloads.

word choice

Mark Twain once said, “The difference between the right word and almost the right word is the difference between ‘lightning’ and ‘lightning bug.’” The most important goal in choosing the right word in business writing is the preciseness implied by Twain’s comment. Vague words and abstract words defeat preciseness because they do not convey the writer’s meaning directly and clearly.

VAGUE	It was a <i>productive</i> meeting.
PRECISE	The meeting resulted in the approval of the health-care benefits package.

322 “you” viewpoint

In the first sentence, *productive* sounds specific but conveys little information; the revised sentence says specifically what made the meeting “productive.” Although abstract words may at times be appropriate to your topic, using them unnecessarily will make your writing difficult to understand. See also abstract / concrete words.

Being aware of the connotations and denotations of words will help you anticipate the reactions of your audience (Tab 1) to the words you choose. Understanding antonyms (*fresh / stale*) and synonyms (*notorious / infamous*) will increase your ability to choose the proper word. For help with some common usage decisions, see the Appendix, “Usage.” See also connotation / denotation.

Although many entries throughout this book will help you improve your word choices and avoid impreciseness, the following entries should be particularly helpful:

<u>affectation</u> 291	<u>euphemisms</u> 302
<u>biased language</u> 293	<u>idioms</u> 305
<u>buzzwords</u> 295	<u>jargon</u> 306
<u>clichés</u> 296	<u>logic errors</u> 306
<u>conciseness</u> 297	<u>vague words</u> 321

A key to choosing the correct and precise word is to keep current in your reading and to be aware of new words in your profession and in the language. In your quest for the right word, a dictionary that is reputable and up to date is essential. See also English as a second language (ESL) (Tab 11).

WEB LINK	Wise Word Choices
For a variety of online resources about word choice, visit bedfordstmartins.com/bwc and explore the Web Links at the Student Site.	

“you” viewpoint

The “you” viewpoint places the reader’s interest and perspective foremost. It is based on the principle that most readers are naturally more concerned about their own needs than they are about those of a writer or a writer’s organization. See audience (Tab 1).

The “you” viewpoint often, but not always, means using the words *you* and *your* rather than *we*, *our*, *I*, and *mine*. Consider the following sentence that focuses on the needs of the writer and organization (*we*) rather than on those of the reader.

- *We must receive* your signed invoice before *we can process* your payment.

Even though the sentence uses *your* twice, the words in italics suggest that the point of view (Tab 1) centers on the writer’s need to receive the invoice in order to process the payment. Consider the following revision, written with the “you” viewpoint.

- *So you can receive* your payment promptly, please send your signed invoice.

Because the benefit to the reader is stressed, the writer is more likely to motivate the reader to act. See also persuasion (Tab 1).

In some instances, as suggested earlier, you may need to avoid using the pronouns *you* and *your* to achieve a positive tone and maintain goodwill. Notice how the first of the following examples (with *your*) seems to accuse the reader. But the second (without *your*) uses positive writing to emphasize a goal that reader and writer share—meeting a client’s needs.

ACCUSATORY	<i>Your</i> budget makes no allowance for setup costs.
POSITIVE	The budget should include an allowance for setup costs to meet all the concerns of our client.

As this example illustrates, the “you” viewpoint means more than using the pronouns *you* and *your* or adopting a particular writing style. By genuinely considering the readers’ interests as you write, you can achieve your purpose (Tab 1) not only in correspondence (Tab 4) but also in many other documents and presentations (Tab 8).