



Business writing needs to be informative. It should follow the right tone. It must be easy to follow. It has to be well formatted. It should be direct. It should be accurate, correct and polite.

Let's go over three easy style rules we can apply.

Better Writing: Careful with Prepositions, Passive Voice & Gender

Pay attention to gender

Gender can be tricky when you write emails because when you read names it doesn't always transpire whether the signer is a man or a woman. If you're not positive about people's sex (is this Mr or Ms Taylor Lewis?) check with someone who does know or use gender-neutral language.

They, them and *their* are now acceptable gender-neutral singular pronouns, as in these examples: “When a manager is dismissed **their** (instead of *his* or *her*) passwords should be disabled” or “If one student fails the exam ask **them** (rather than *him* or *her*) to retry the test next year.”

Use the active voice

Writing “The product was sold by Peter” is longer and less direct than “Peter sold the product”. Apply the active voice whenever possible. As a plus, your prose will sound more direct and energetic.

However, remember there are cases where the passive is needed. Sometimes we would rather not mention the subject of an action, as in “A mistake was made”. Other times we prefer to stress the object over the subject. “My house was damaged by a storm”, for example, shows that the house is more important to the writer than the storm.

Nevertheless, resort to the passive as sporadically as possible. You don’t want your prose to be boring, do you?

Avoid overusing for and of

Scan your text for prepositions and see whether they can be replaced by more economical constructions. Avoid writing “The material for the meeting” if “The meeting material” will do. Make ample use of the Saxon genitive and say “The company’s boss” instead of “The boss of the company”.

It also pays to sidestep other prepositions. “The office at the warehouse” would read better as “The warehouse office”. “The man from DHL” seems too long when compared to “The DHL man”. Economy is a plus, so shorter is generally better.

Andrew’s advice: Make your writing as direct as possible.

Gender: sex.
Tricky: confusing.
Transpire: become evident.
Gender-neutral: the same for any sex.
Sporadically: rarely.
Sidestep: avoid.
Saxon genitive: possessive case.



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