

## SJSU — Spring 2022

### ENGL 100WB: Writing Workshop for Business Students

#### Welcome!

This syllabus will serve the following course:

**ENGL 100WB-07 (24828)**      MW      3:00 – 4:15      BBC 122

\*This course will be asynchronous until Mon., Feb. 14.\*

Instructor:                      Scott Alkire, M.A.  
 Email:                              s\_alkire@hotmail.com  
 Office hours:                      By arrangement

#### **Course Description**

Most business people believe that success in business is fundamentally based on human relationships, and that successful relationships are started and maintained through positive, honest, and authentic communication. The course looks at how influential 20<sup>th</sup> century writers have addressed this challenge. Students will put into practice selected principles from the books in establishing relationships with their classmates, guest speakers, outside professionals, and the instructor. Prerequisites: Eng. 1B (with a grade of C or better), completion of core GE courses, and upper division standing.

#### **Required Materials**

- Puzo, Mario. *The Godfather*. A good paper edition is ISBN 0-451-20576-6
- Carnegie, Dale. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. A good paper edition is ISBN 978-0-671-02703-2.
- Ward, G. K. *Mark My Words* (out of print; copies on reserve).

#### **Quizzes**

Short quizzes will be given regularly, based on our class readings. The quizzes will constitute 33% of your overall grade.

#### **Class partner/peer reviewer**

Each student will have a class partner/peer reviewer with whom they will share class work for feedback. Another purpose of this collaborative work is for students to gain practice in building relationships. Building successful relationships is essential no matter what your focus in business is.

#### **Late Work/Makeups**

In most cases, no late work or makeups will be accepted. If it is accepted, the maximum grade that can be earned is C.

#### **Plagiarism**

Work must have a similarity rate of less than 10%, based on turnitin.com calculations. Assignments with over 10% similarity to other sources will be considered plagiarized.

The tables on the next two pages show all assignments for the course.

**LLD 100WB Assignments, Spring 2022**  
**(updated Jan. 24, 2022)**

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>SLOs</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>% of grade</b>	<b>Min Words</b>	<b>Max Words</b>
Autobio-graphical essay	a c d e f h i j	a b c d e h i g	/ 20	2%	N/A	N/A
LinkedIn profile	a c d e f h i j	a b c d e h i g	/ 20	2%	N/A	N/A
Action email	a c h i j	b c g h i	/ 100	10%	200	300
Cover letter	a c d h i j	a b c d e h i l	/ 30	3%	250	300
Resume	a c d h i j	a b c d e h i l	/ 30	3%	250	400
Thank you letter	a c d h i j	a b c d e g h i l	/ 30	3%	100	200
Rhetorical Analysis— includes citations and references	a c d e f g h i	a b c d e g h i	/ 150	15%	1500	2000
Discipline Investigation— includes citations and references	b c d e f h i j	a b c d f g j	/ 150	15%	1500	3000
Quizzes	a c d – j	a b c d e g h i	/ 330	33%	300	600
Final exam (essay)	a c d – j	a b c d e g h i	/ 100	10%	750	1000
Portfolio (RA & DI revisions)	a c d – j	a b c d e g h i	/ 40	4%	300	500
<b>Total points and words possible</b>			<b>/ 1000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6,850</b>	<b>10,600</b>

**Godfather quizzes**

Ch. 1 \_\_\_\_\_ / 23

Ch. 2–9 \_\_\_\_\_ / 22

Ch. 10–11 \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

Ch. 12–13 \_\_\_\_\_ / 15

Ch. 14 \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

Ch. 15–19 \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

Ch. 20–22 \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

Ch. 23–24 \_\_\_\_\_ / 30

Ch. 25–26 \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

Ch. 27–28 \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

Ch. 29–32 \_\_\_\_\_ / 30

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_ / **180****How to Win Friends... quizzes**

Pt. 1: ch. 1–3 \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

Pt. 2: ch. 1–6 \_\_\_\_\_ / 12

Pt. 3a: ch. 1–6 \_\_\_\_\_ / 11

Pt. 3b: ch. 7–12 \_\_\_\_\_ / 11

Pt. 4: ch. 1–9 \_\_\_\_\_ / 16

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_ / **70****Mark My Words quizzes**

ch. 1–8 \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

ch. 9–16 \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

ch. 17–24 \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

ch. 25–32 \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_ / **80****CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:**

- Is the main idea of the writing clear?
- Does the writer appear likeable? That is, does the writing have a positive slant to it?
- Has all the necessary information—and only the necessary information—been included?
- Are grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and vocabulary correct?
- Is the presentation/format attractive and appropriate?
- Was the document submitted on time, as expected in the business world?
- Was the model followed?

**GRADING SCALE:**

98%–100% A+

93–97% A

90–92% A-

87–89% B+

83–86% B

80–82% B-

77–79% C+

73–76% C

72% or lower NC

**January**

- Wed. 26 Sec. 07 (**Online** till Mon., Feb. 14): Course intro (Q: What is business communication? A: Positive communication), req'd books, instructor intro, personal essay. Register with **sjsu2.peoplegrove** and **SJSU Handshake**.
- Thurs. 27 Sec. 06, 84: Course intro (Q: What is business communication? A: Positive communication), req'd books, instructor intro, personal essay, video intro (sec. 84 only). Register with **sjsu2.peoplegrove** and **SJSU Handshake**.
- Fri. 28
- Sat. 29
- Sun. 30
- Mon. 31 Sec. 07 (**Online**): **DUE: personal essay**. Class partners assigned; essay to partner. Introduce *The Godfather*. HW: read ch. 1 in GF.

**February**

- Tues. 1 Sec. 06, 84: **DUE: personal essay**. Class partners assigned; essay to partner. Introduce *The Godfather*. HW: read ch. 1 in GF. Sec. 84: video essay due.
- Wed. 2 Sec. 07 (**Online**): **GF quiz #1** (ch. 1). Discuss. Assign LinkedIn profile; offer models. Begin rough draft of profile. HW: continue with GF.
- Thurs. 3 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #1** (ch. 1). Discuss. Assign LinkedIn profile; offer models. Begin rough draft of profile. HW: continue with GF.
- Fri. 4
- Sat. 5
- Sun. 6
- Mon. 7 Sec. 07 (**Online**): **GF quiz #2 (ch. 2–9)**. Discuss GF. **DUE: LinkedIn profile**. Continue with GF.
- Tues. 8 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #2 (ch. 2–9)**. Discuss GF. **DUE: LinkedIn profile**. Continue with GF.
- Wed. 9 Sec. 07 (**Online**): Introduce action email assignment. **GF quiz #3 (ch. 10–11)**. Discuss. Introduce cover letter, resume, thank you letter, RA assignment
- Thurs. 10 Sec. 06, 84: Introduce action email assignment. **GF quiz #3 (ch. 10–11)**. Discuss. Introduce cover letter, resume, thank you letter, RA assignment
- Fri. 11
- Sat. 12
- Sun. 13
- Mon. 14 Sec. 07 (**In-person**): **DUE: action email. GF quiz #4 (ch. 12–13)**. Discuss. **Introduce RA**; begin search for RA article
- Tues. 15 Sec. 06, 84: **DUE: action email. GF quiz #4 (ch. 12–13)**. Discuss. **Introduce RA**; begin search for RA article
- Wed. 16 Sec. 07: **GF quiz #5 (ch. 14)**. Discuss. Go deeper into RA. Continue with GF.
- Thurs. 17 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #5 (ch. 14)**. Discuss. Go deeper into RA. Continue with GF.
- Fri. 18
- Sat. 19
- Sun. 20
- Mon. 21 Sec. 07: **DUE: cover letter, resume, thank you letter**. Discuss RA. Continue with GF. HW: Bring draft of RA to next class.
- Tues. 22 Sec. 06, 84: **DUE: cover letter, resume, thank you letter**. Discuss RA. Continue with GF. Sec. 06: Bring draft of RA to next class.
- Wed. 23 Sec. 07: **GF quiz #6 (ch. 15–19)**. Discuss. Sec. 06: Peer review of RA. Continue with GF.

Thurs. 24 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #6 (ch. 15–19)**. Discuss. Sec. 06: Peer review of RA. Continue with GF.

Fri. 25

Sat. 26

Sun. 27

Mon. 28 Sec. 07: **GF quiz #7 (ch. 20–22)**. **Introduce DI**. HW: **Make appt. with interviewee**. Continue with GF.

### March

Tues. 1 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #7 (ch. 20–22)**. **Introduce DI**. HW: **Make appt. with interviewee**. Continue with GF.

Wed. 2 Sec. 07: **GF quiz #8 (ch. 23–24)**. Prepare list of questions for interviewee. Sec. 06: share with partner. Continue with GF.

Thurs. 3 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #8 (ch. 23–24)**. Prepare list of questions for interviewee. Sec. 06: share with partner. Continue with GF.

Fri. 4

Sat. 5

Sun. 6

Mon. 7 Sec. 07: **DUE: RA** (submit it to my email and to Canvas before 11:59 pm). Write intro to DI. Share with partner. Continue with GF.

Tues. 8 Sec. 06, 84: **DUE: RA** (submit it to my email and to Canvas before 11:59 pm). Write intro to DI. Sec. 06: share with partner. Continue with GF.

Wed. 9 Sec. 07: **GF quiz #9, #10 (ch. 25–26)**. Discuss DI. Continue with GF.

Thurs. 10 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #9, #10 (ch. 25–26)**. Discuss DI. Continue with GF.

Fri. 11

Sat. 12

Sun. 13

Mon. 14 Sec. 07: **GF quiz #10, #11 (ch. 27–28, ch. 29–32)**. Discuss interview for DI.

Tues. 15 Sec. 06, 84: **GF quiz #10, #11 (ch. 27–28, ch. 29–32)**. Discuss interview for DI.

Wed. 16 Sec. 07: Work on DI interview questions in class w/laptop, **begin Carnegie (prefatory material and Pt. 1, ch. 1–3)**. Students read portions.

Thurs. 17 Sec. 06, 84: Work on DI interview questions in class w/laptop, **begin Carnegie (prefatory material and Pt. 1, ch. 1–3)**. Students in Sec. 06 read portions.

Fri. 18

Sat. 19

Sun. 20

Mon. 21 Sec. 07: **Carnegie quiz #1**. Continue with DI and Carnegie. Students read portions.

Tues. 22 Sec. 06, 84: **Carnegie quiz #1**. Continue with DI and Carnegie. 06: students read portions.

Wed. 23 Sec. 07: **Carnegie quiz #2 (Pt. II, ch. 1–6)**. Continue with Carnegie. HW: work on DI.

Thurs. 24 Sec. 06, 84: **Carnegie quiz #2 (Pt. II, ch. 1–6)**. Continue with Carnegie. HW: work on DI.

Fri. 25

Sat. 26

Sun. 27

Mon. 28

### **SPRING BREAK**

Tues. 29

“ “

Wed. 30

“ “

Thurs. 31

“ “

### April

Fri. 1	“ “
Sat. 2	
Sun. 3	
Mon. 4	Sec. 07: <b>Carnegie quiz #3 (Pt. III ch. 1–6)</b> . 06: In-class work on DI (w/laptop). Continue with Carnegie.
Tues. 5	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Carnegie quiz #3 (Pt. III ch. 1–6)</b> . 06: In-class work on DI (w/laptop). Continue with Carnegie.
Wed. 6	Sec. 07: In-class work on DI (w/laptop). Continue with Carnegie.
Thurs. 7	Sec. 06, 84: In-class work on DI (w/laptop). Continue with Carnegie.
Fri. 8	<b>DUE (all sections): DI paper. Submit to email ONLY.</b>
Sat. 9	
Sun. 10	
Mon. 11	Sec. 07: <b>Carnegie quiz #4 (Pt. III ch. 7–12)</b> . Continue.
Tues. 12	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Carnegie quiz #4 (Pt. III ch. 7–12)</b> . Continue.
Wed. 13	Sec. 07: <b>Carnegie quiz #5 (Pt. IV ch. 1–9)</b> . TED talk – Daniel Pink “The Puzzle of Motivation.”
Thurs. 14	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Carnegie quiz #5 (Pt. IV ch. 1–9)</b> . TED talk – Daniel Pink “The Puzzle of Motivation.”
Fri. 15	
Sat. 16	
Sun. 17	
Mon. 18	Sec. 07: Introduce Ward. Distribute book. Begin reading in class. (HW: ch. 1–4)
Tues. 19	Sec. 06, 84: Introduce Ward. Distribute book. Begin reading in class. (HW: ch. 1–4)
Wed. 20	Sec. 07: <b>Discuss Ward ch. 1–4</b> . Continue w/reading. TED talk – Bill Eckstrom “Why Comfort Will Ruin Your Life.”
Thurs. 21	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Discuss Ward ch. 1–4</b> . Continue w/reading. TED talk – Bill Eckstrom “Why Comfort Will Ruin Your Life.”
Fri. 22	
Sat. 23	
Sun. 24	
Mon. 25	Sec. 07: <b>Ward quiz #1 (ch. 1–8)</b> . Continue w/reading.
Tues. 26	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Ward quiz #1 (ch. 1–8)</b> . Continue w/reading.
Wed. 27	Sec. 07: <b>Ward quiz #2 (ch. 9–16)</b> . TED talk – Will Stephen “How to Sound Smart in Your TEDx Talk”
Thurs. 28	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Ward quiz #2 (ch. 9–16)</b> . TED talk – Will Stephen “How to Sound Smart in Your TEDx Talk”
Fri. 29	
Sat. 30	
<b><u>May</u></b>	
Sun. 1	
Mon. 2	Sec. 07: <b>Ward quiz #3 (ch. 17–24)</b> . Continue w/reading.
Tues. 3	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Ward quiz #3 (ch. 17–24)</b> . Continue w/reading.
Wed. 4	Sec. 07: <b>Ward quiz #4 (ch. 25–32)</b> . TED talk – (TBD)
Thurs. 5	Sec. 06, 84: <b>Ward quiz #4 (ch. 25–32)</b> . TED talk – (TBD)
Fri. 6	
Sat. 7	
Sun. 8	
Mon. 9	Sec. 07: TBD
Tues. 10	Sec. 06, 84: TBD.
Wed. 11	Sec. 07: TBD. TED talk – Steve Jobs “Graduation Speech”

Thurs. 12	Sec. 06, 84: TBD. TED talk – Steve Jobs “Graduation Speech”
Fri. 13	
Sat. 14	
Sun. 15	
Mon. 16	
Tues. 17	
Wed. 18	
Thurs. 19	
Fri. 20	Sec. 06, 84: <b>FINAL EXAM. 9:45 am to 12:00 pm. Portfolios due.</b>
Sat. 21	
Sun. 22	
Mon. 23	
Tues. 24	Sec. 07: <b>FINAL EXAM. 12:15 – 2:30 pm. Portfolios due.</b>

### Course Goals

Students will develop advanced proficiency in college-level writing and appropriate contemporary research strategies and methodologies to communicate effectively to both specialized and general audiences. This course will focus on four broad areas of competence: mastery of discipline-specific genres, both oral and written; mastery of the mechanics and style appropriate to business communications; mastery of research strategies including the ability to locate, utilize, and cite appropriate sources; and mastery of the process of business writing.

### Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

Students shall write documents and make presentations that demonstrate college-level proficiency.

Students shall be able to:

- a) Refine the competencies established in Written Communication 1A and 1B
- b) Express (explain, analyze, synthesize, develop and criticize) ideas effectively, including ideas encountered in multiple readings and expressed in different forms of discourse
- c) Organize and develop documents for diverse audiences, both professional and general, employing appropriate editorial standards for grammar, spelling, and register as well as for citation of primary and secondary sources
- d) Recognize, select, and use the basic activities of the writing process: prewriting, organizing, drafting, revising, editing, and peer review
- e) Employ research strategies, collect (locate, analyze, and evaluate) data from both primary and secondary sources, and follow the appropriate citation style
- f) Construct effective arguments
- g) Recognize and address issues of diversity in the audience (general vs. professional), gender/sexual orientation, age, and ethnicity
- h) Observe appropriate conventions and formats to enhance content and present information in an effective design
- i) Proofread and edit writing to improve clarity, accuracy, and effectiveness
- j) Understand how technology, group dynamics, and ethics affect business communication

### Competences

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- a) Apply a process approach to planning, writing, and completing (revising, editing, distributing) business messages
- b) Define the purpose of a business message and develop an audience profile
- c) Adapt messages to the needs and expectations of the audience
- d) Use technology appropriately to improve business communications

- e) Make ethical communication choices
- f) Work collaboratively in teams
- g) Communicate effectively across other cultures and languages
- h) Write effective routine, positive or negative messages
- i) Use effective strategies for persuasive business messages
- j) Plan and write research reports and proposals using APA format
- k) Plan, write and deliver effective oral presentations
- l) Develop a dossier including a cover letter and resume

### Online Tutoring Resources

- SJSU Writing Center: [http://www.sjsu.edu/writing\\_center](http://www.sjsu.edu/writing_center)
- San Jose Public Library online tutoring: <https://www.sjpl.org/Tutor>
- Peer Connections: <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu/>

### Course Format

This course will involve real and simulated business communication scenarios and will provide an opportunity for students to practice professional business behavior and etiquette, as well as practice team collaboration. Classroom activities will include formal lectures, group discussions, collaborative writing, individual writing, and quizzes. It is expected that students will attend every class. As in the real workplace, late work will not be accepted except in the case of an emergency and the instructor is notified before the class meeting.

### Class Rules and Participation

**Promptness:** Work must be submitted on specified due dates.

**Format:** All work should be typed, using appropriate business format — standard one-inch margins and spacing. In general, letters, memos and reports must use 12-point Times New Roman font and be single-spaced with two (2) blank lines between paragraphs. Students are expected to follow format guidelines for each assignment, which are presented in the course reader.

**Mechanics:** Errors in spelling or grammar affect the effectiveness of communications. Grading will reflect the seriousness with which these matters are often viewed in the working world. Students who need special assistance with any of these skills should seek extra help. See Tutoring Resources information above.

**Back-up Copies:** Save backup copies of your work on your hard drive, flash drives or CDs.

### Assignments

- Autobiographical essay.
- Cover letter, resume, and thank-you letter: Each student will prepare these for a prospective employer. Students will do job searches to identify the company and position for which they would like to apply.
- LinkedIn profile: Each student will create an up-to-date LinkedIn profile
- Action Email: Each student will identify a department, policy, environmental aspect, student service, or procedure at SJSU that they feel can be improved. Students will write a formal email to the appropriate campus officer requesting action on the issue.
- Rhetorical Analysis
- Discipline Investigation
- Two essays
- Quizzes based on class readings
- Portfolio

- Final exam

**Grading: Assignments will be graded A, B, C, or D/F/NC.**

A: Completes all parts of the assignment. The assignment is properly formatted, well-organized, well-developed, and displays a clear sense of audience and purpose. Student uses academic and professional language appropriately, including citations (in-text and references). Adheres to the conventions of written English. Adheres to the university policies on plagiarism, academic honesty and integrity.

B: Completes all parts of the assignment but may show some flaws in format, organization, development, sense of audience and purpose, or use of the conventions of written English. Adheres to the university policies on plagiarism, academic honesty and integrity.

C: Completes all parts of the assignment but shows weakness in basic format, organization, development, sense of audience and purpose, or use of the conventions of written English. Adheres to the university policies on plagiarism, academic honesty and integrity.

D/F/NC: Fails to complete all parts of the assignment or shows blatant deficiencies in the use of academic or professional English and/or fails to adhere to the university policies on plagiarism, academic honesty and integrity.

**OTHER IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES**

1. Statement of Plagiarism: The LLD Department would like to emphasize that we adhere strictly to the rules against plagiarism as set forth in the SJSU Catalog. The Catalog defines plagiarism as follows:
  - 1.2.1 Plagiarism. At SJSU, plagiarism is the act of representing the work of another as one's own (without giving appropriate credit) regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements. Plagiarism at SJSU includes but is not limited to:
    - 1.2.2 The act of incorporating the ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, or parts thereof, or the specific substance of another's work, without giving appropriate credit, and representing the product as one's own work; and
    - 1.2.3 Representing another's artistic/scholarly works such as musical compositions, computer programs, photographs, paintings, drawing, sculptures or similar works as one's own. (available at <http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/policies.html> - Student Responsibilities - Discipline – Policy on Academic Dishonesty – 1.0 Definitions of Academic Dishonesty)

Should a student plagiarize in any Linguistics or LLD course, the instructor will report the student to the University's Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Also, points will be deducted from the assignment/course depending on the severity of the policy violation.

To become acquainted with what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, the following SJSU website offers definitions, policies, and links to useful websites offering guidelines in plagiarism prevention. Students are fully accountable for understanding these policies.

[www.sjlibrary.org/services/literacy/info\\_comp\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.sjlibrary.org/services/literacy/info_comp_plagiarism.htm)
2. Academic integrity statement (from Office of Judicial Affairs): Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University and the University's Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.pdf>

- 3 Academic Honesty: Faculty will make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct in their courses. They will secure examinations and their answers so that students cannot have prior access to them and proctor examinations to prevent students from copying or exchanging information. They will be on the alert for plagiarism. Faculty will provide additional information, ideally on the green sheet, about other unacceptable procedures in class work and examinations. Students who are caught cheating will be reported to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University, as prescribed by Academic Senate Policy S04-12.
- 4 Campus policy in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with DRC to establish a record of their disability. DRC's phone number is 924-6000.
- 5 For policies on add/drops academic renewal, withdrawal, etc. see <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/gradesdrop.htm>.
- 6 Expectations about classroom behavior; see Academic Senate Policy S90-5 on Student Rights and Responsibilities. (<http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/s90-5.htm>).
- 7 If you would like to include in your paper any material you have submitted, or plan to submit, for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Integrity policy S04-12 requires approval by both instructors. (<http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.pdf> and academic dishonesty [http://sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial/Academic\\_Dishonesty\\_Policy.pdf](http://sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial/Academic_Dishonesty_Policy.pdf)).

See posted information in classroom for evacuation plan for the classroom.

### Some tips for writing

1. If you are emailing someone and need a response, put a question in the Subject: line. For example:

**SUBJ: Can I book the conference room on Friday at 10 am?**

The question mark will get his or her attention and you will most likely get a response.

2. Style: If you are uncertain about how to achieve the appropriate style in your writing for a particular purpose, think of your words as clothes. To wear the right clothes to an event, you must know the occasion and perhaps even the dress code. The same is true of writing. Know who you are writing for and what the occasion is. If you cannot ascertain that, write formally and modestly. If nothing else, your writing will show the respect you have for your audience.

3. Be direct: use short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs whenever possible, but always be polite.

4. Avoid the passive voice. Use the **active voice** whenever possible. For example:

**Passive (p.v.)** (*wordy, less direct, stating existence not action, over-reliance on the verb "to be"*)

**Active** (*shorter, specific*)

**Forty engineers were hired by Tesla.**

**Tesla hired forty engineers.**

**Many new courses were offered by SJSU in 2018.**

**SJSU offered many new courses in 2018.**

**A mistake was made by Human Resources.**

**Human Resources made a mistake.**

Note that the passive sentences above use the verb "to be." In general, avoid using the verb "to be." Use verbs that show *action*, in the active voice.

Caveat #1: Sometimes we must use the passive because we don't know for sure who or what did the action. For example:

**Passive**

**Active**

**The earth was created about 4.54 billion years ago.**

**? (Actor is unknown)**

**President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963.**

**?**

**The rear tire on my bike was deflated.**

**?**

Caveat #2: We may prefer the passive when we do not want to emphasize the actor at the expense of the acted upon. For example:

1) "Dianne Feinstein became Mayor when Dan White assassinated George Moscone in 1978."  
(active) *OK*

2) "Dianne Feinstein became Mayor when George Moscone was assassinated by Dan White in 1978."  
(passive) *BETTER*

5. Eliminate dangling or misplaced modifiers and participles in your writing, because they make your meaning unclear.

Exercise: Rewrite the following sentences so they are clear. (You may use more than one sentence and change some words. Just make your meaning clear.)

**John walked confidently into the meeting with his friend laughing.** (What's unclear about the sentence? **Answer:** We don't know if John, his friend, or both of them are laughing.)

Better: *John was laughing when he walked confidently into the meeting with his friend.*

**Now almost 82 years old, the doctor said mom was in great health.** (What's unclear?)

Rewrite: \_\_\_\_\_

**Walking along the sidewalk into town, a big dog blocked our way.** (What's unclear?)

Rewrite: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Avoid jargon (specialized language) unless it is expected by your audience (some fields, such as education, are jargon-heavy. Examples in education are *social promotion*, *teacher-centered*, *student-centered*, *teacher of record*, *learning community*, *service learning*, *learning resource center*)

7. Avoid tired, clichéd expressions such as *going forward*, *at the end of the day*, *reboot*, *it's all good*, *I'm down for that*, *it is what it is*, *go Yankees!*, *the new normal*, etc. They can reflect dull, lazy, and shallow thinking.

8. Never write more than two pages on any subject if possible

9. Check your quotations. Statements in quotes must be *exactly* what a source said or wrote.

10. Never send an important letter or email on the day you write it. Read it aloud the next morning — and then edit it.

11. Get a trusted friend to read it as well and to suggest improvements and make corrections. Not all errors will be grammatical. For example, what is the error in this sentence?

"The novel about the Black Lives Matters movement should be shelved with true accounts of the African-American experience."

12. Before you send your email or letter, make sure it is crystal clear what you want the recipient *to do*.

13. Avoid using the verb "to be," which is bland, static, and — depending on how it is used — imprecise. For example:

He is a good citizen. (*What does that mean?*)

Better: He votes in every election and volunteers at the polling station.

14. If you want ACTION right way, don't write. Go and tell the person what you want.

## Writing in Plain English

(Adapted from several authors on the Creative Commons and Medium websites. All rights reserved.)

I thought it would be helpful to list the most common problems I've encountered in academic writing.

## Common problems

- Long sentences
- Passive voice
- Vague nouns
- Abstract words
- Unnecessary details

## 1. Long sentences

Here's a long sentence from a professor's email:

**"SJSU is facing a severe budget shortfall compared to last year and various departments of the university may have to reduce their headcount of support staff, including workers in academic divisions, facilities, and athletic programs."** (35 words)

Here's one possible "plain English" rewrite in two sentences, for greater clarity:

**"The state has cut funding to SJSU compared to last year. (11 words) Therefore, SJSU may have to lay off office assistants, janitors, coaches, and trainers."** (13 words)

(NOTE: The second sentence could be further shortened (and strengthened) by replacing "lay off" with "fire," but sometimes we must use a "softer" word to express an unpleasant truth, often to protect the feelings of those affected.)

The plain English rewrite uses everyday words, short sentences, active voice, and specific nouns that speak directly to the reader.

Do you think the rewrite captures the meaning of the original? Would you write it differently?

I encourage you to write your own plain English versions to fit your views and your needs.

Although the principles that follow may sound deceptively simple, if you use them, your writing will improve dramatically.

## 2. Passive voice

The plodding verbosity of most business documents makes readers yearn for clear words and short sentences. The quickest fix lies in using **the active voice with strong verbs**. Strong verbs are guaranteed to liven up and tighten any sentence, virtually causing information to spring from

the page. When you start to rewrite or edit your work, highlighting all the verbs can help. You may be surprised by the number of weak verbs, especially forms of “to be” or “to have” that you’ll find.

The time you spend searching for a precise and strong verb is time well spent. When a verb carries more meaning, you can dispense with many of the words used to bolster weak verbs.

Weak verbs keep frequent company with two more grammatical undesirables: passive voice and hidden verbs. In tandem, they add unnecessary length and confusion to a sentence.

Here's a quick refresher on the active and passive voice:

***active:***            "The investor buys the stock."

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence, the investor, performs the action, buying the stock.

***passive:***            "The stock is bought by the investor."

In the passive voice the subject, the stock, is acted upon. The person or the thing doing the action is introduced with “by.”

Readers understand sentences in the active voice more quickly and easily because it follows how we think and process information. Many times the passive voice forces readers to take extra mental steps as they convert the passive into the active.

To recognize the passive voice, ask yourself:

Does the sentence use a form of the verb “to be” with:

- another verb in the past tense; and
- a prepositional phrase beginning with “by”?

Remember that it’s harder to recognize the passive voice when the object (the phrase introduced with “by”) is left out, e.g., "The stock is bought."

When you rewrite the sentence in the active voice, **use a strong verb**. These examples show how strong verbs and the active voice transform sentences, making them shorter and easier to understand.

**Note: Don’t ban the passive voice; just use it sparingly**

As with all the advice here, we are presenting guidelines, not hard and fast rules you must always follow. The passive voice may make sense when the person or thing performing the action is of secondary importance to another subject that should play the starring role in sentence. Use the passive voice only when you have a very good reason for doing so. When in doubt, choose the active voice.

### Find hidden verbs

Does the sentence use any form of the verbs “to be,” “to have,” or another weak verb, with a noun that could be turned into a strong verb? In these sentences, the strong verb lies hidden in a nominalization, a noun derived from a verb that usually ends in *-tion*. Find the noun and try to make it the main verb of the sentence. As you change nouns to verbs, your writing becomes more vigorous and less abstract.

*OK*

*Better*

"We made an **application**..."

We **applied**..."

"We made a **determination**..."

We **determined**..."

"We will make a **distribution**..."

We will **distribute**..."

*OK:* "We will provide appropriate **information** to shareholders concerning..."

*Better :* "We will **inform** shareholders about..."

*OK:* "We will have no stock **ownership** of the company."

*Better:* "We will not **own** the company's stock."

*OK:* "There is the possibility of prior Board **approval** of these investments."

*Better:* "The Board might **approve** these investments in advance."

### 3. Vague nouns

If you use **specific nouns** the clarity of your writing will dramatically improve. Observe the difference between these two sentences:

**OK:** "The university promised to offer affordable and healthy food choices for its students."

**Better:** "President Jim Clark promised to offer organic meals to students for under \$10."

## 4. Abstract words

In a study conducted at Carnegie-Mellon University, a cognitive psychologist and an English professor discovered that readers faced with complex written information frequently resorted to creating "scenarios" in an effort to understand the text. That is, they often made an abstract concept understandable by using it in a hypothetical situation in which *people performed actions*.

You can make complex information more understandable by giving your readers an example using one investor. This technique explains why "question and answer" formats often succeed when a narrative, abstract discussion fails.

Here is an example of how this principle can be used to explain an abstract concept—**call options**:

For example, you can buy an option from Mr. Smith that gives you the right to buy 100 shares of stock X from him at \$25.00 per share anytime between now and six weeks from now. You believe stock X's purchase price will go up between now and then. He believes it will stay the same or go down. If you exercise this option before it expires, Mr. Smith must sell you 100 shares of stock X at \$25.00 per share, even if the purchase price has gone up. Either way, whether you exercise your option or not, he keeps the money you paid him for the option.

Although it is impossible to eliminate all abstractions from writing, always use a more concrete term when you can.

### **Relevant quotes:**

"Use concrete terms and your readers will have a clearer idea of your meaning. You enhance your words when you allow readers to visualize what you say." — Bryan A. Garner

"Language that is more concrete and specific creates pictures in the mind of [your] listener, pictures that should come as close as possible to the pictures in your mind." — William Lutz

Read this list of progressively less abstract terms and consider how you might make abstract concepts in your own papers more concrete:

Asset --> Investment --> Security --> Equity --> Stock --> Common stock -->

### One share of IBM common stock

#### A. Omit superfluous words

Words are superfluous when they can be replaced with fewer words that mean the same thing. Sometimes you can use a simpler word.

#### *Relevant quote:*

“...the most valuable of all talent, that of never using two words where one will do.” — Thomas Jefferson

#### *superfluous*

in order to

in the event that

subsequent to

prior to

despite the fact that

because of the fact that

in light of

owing to the fact that

#### *simpler*

to

if

after

before

although

because, since

because, since

because, since

Another source of superfluous words is “shotgunning”: letting loose a blast of words hoping at least one conveys your intended meaning. The simplest solution here is to replace your laundry list of adjectives with a single word or phrase that adequately expresses your intended meaning.

Omitting superfluous words is one of the easiest ways to improve your disclosure document because it doesn’t require you to revise sentence structure.

**OK:** The following summary **is intended only** to highlight certain information **contained elsewhere** in this Prospectus.

**Better:** This summary highlights some information from this Prospectus.

**Relevant quote:**

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words...for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.”

— Strunk and White

**B. Write in the “positive”**

Positive sentences are shorter and easier to understand than their negative counterparts. For example:

**OK:** Persons other than the primary beneficiary may not receive these dividends.

**Better:** Only the primary beneficiary may receive these dividends.

Also, your sentences will be shorter and easier to understand if you replace a negative phrase with a single word that means the same thing. For example:

<b>negative compound</b>	<b>single word</b>
not able	unable
not accept	reject
not certain	uncertain
not unlike	similar, alike
does not have	lacks
does not include	excludes, omits
not many	few
not often	rarely
not the same	different
not ... unless	only if
not ... except	only if

not ... until

only when

***Relevant quote:***

“There’s not much to be said about the period except that most writers don’t reach it soon enough.” — William Zinsser

**C. Use short sentences**

No one likes to read a sentence that’s two pages long. And yet, lengthy, information-packed sentences choke many prospectuses today. To complicate matters further, these sentences are filled with jargon and legalese. The longer and more complex a sentence, the harder it is for readers to understand any single portion of it.

***Relevant quotes:***

“A subject may have so many qualifications that readers forget what it is before they find out what it does.” — Claire Kehrwald Cook

“Clearness is secured by using the words...that are current and ordinary.” — Aristotle

**D. Replace jargon and legalese with short, common words**

Ruthlessly eliminate jargon and legalese. Instead, use short, common words to get your points across. In those instances where there is no plain English alternative, explain what the term means when you first use it.

If you have been in the financial or legal industry for awhile, it may be hard to spot jargon and legalese in your writing. Consider asking someone outside the industry to check your work for incomprehensible words.

Last, don’t create new jargon that’s unique to your document in the form of acronyms or other words. It’s asking too much of your readers to memorize a new vocabulary while they are trying to understand complicated concepts. This holds true for individual and institutional investors.

**E. Choose the simpler synonym**

Surround complex ideas with short, common words. For example, use *end* instead of *terminate*, *explain* rather than *elucidate*, and *use* instead of *utilize*. When a shorter, simpler synonym exists, use it.

**F. Keep the subject, verb, and object close together**

Short, simple sentences enhance the effectiveness of short, common words. We've covered a number of guidelines for writing shorter sentences, but there are a few more you can use to streamline your writing further.

To be clear, sentences must have a sound structure. Here are a few ways to ensure yours do.

The natural word order of English speakers is *subject-verb-object*. Your sentences will be clearer if you follow this order as closely as possible.

### **G. Keep your sentence structure parallel**

A long sentence often fails without a parallel structure. Parallelism simply means ensuring a list or series of items is presented using parallel parts of speech, such as nouns or verbs.

In this section, we've shown each parallel structure we've used in bold.

Here's an example from a mutual fund prospectus that lacks parallel structure:

#### ***OK***

If you want to buy shares in Fund X by mail, **fill out** and **sign** the Account Application form, **making** your check payable to "The X Fund," and **put** your social security or taxpayer identification number on your check.

#### ***Better***

If you want to buy shares in Fund X by mail, **fill out** and **sign** the Account Application form, **make** your check payable to "The X Fund," and **put** your social security or taxpayer identification number on your check.

#### ***Relevant quote:***

"Parallelism reinforces grammatically equal elements, contributes to ease in reading, and provides clarity and rhythm." — Horner/Webb/Miller

### **A few terms to know (*to be continued*)**

**OJT**            On the job training

**ROT**            Return on Tuition

**Excel Pivot Table** The pivot table is one of Microsoft Excel's most powerful — and intimidating — functions. Powerful because it can help you summarize and make sense of large data sets.

"It is one thing to look at data and tease out trends / correlations. It is a much deeper thing to understand broader macro trends and relationships that the data supports or even local micro nuances. An even more important piece is asking yourself, "Well, that's nice, but what do I do with this information?" And by far the most important is actually executing a strategy that was developed using the data." (Data: what you learn from a great book, relationships, a powerful mentor, and/or serious friends about yourself. Not so much teachers -- you do not spend enough time with them.)

**Homophily** People's affinity for doing business with people like themselves.