Business Students Writing on the Job

DO 100WB GRADUATES HAVE THE NECESSARY WRITING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S WORKPLACE?

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Research Methodology

On-line Survey

- SJSU College of Business (CoB) graduates (CY 2013-2015)
- Quantitative
- Total Responses = 108

In-person Interviews

- CoB faculty recommended by Dean
- Qualitative
- Total = 4

Conducted in March-May, 2017

Survey Purpose

To assess whether CoB graduates felt they had the necessary writing skills to fulfill their current job requirements and to provide direction on how 100WB curriculum could be improved.

Faculty Interview Purpose

To gather anecdotal evaluations on the writing preparedness of CoB students for upper division business courses.

Survey Result Confidence

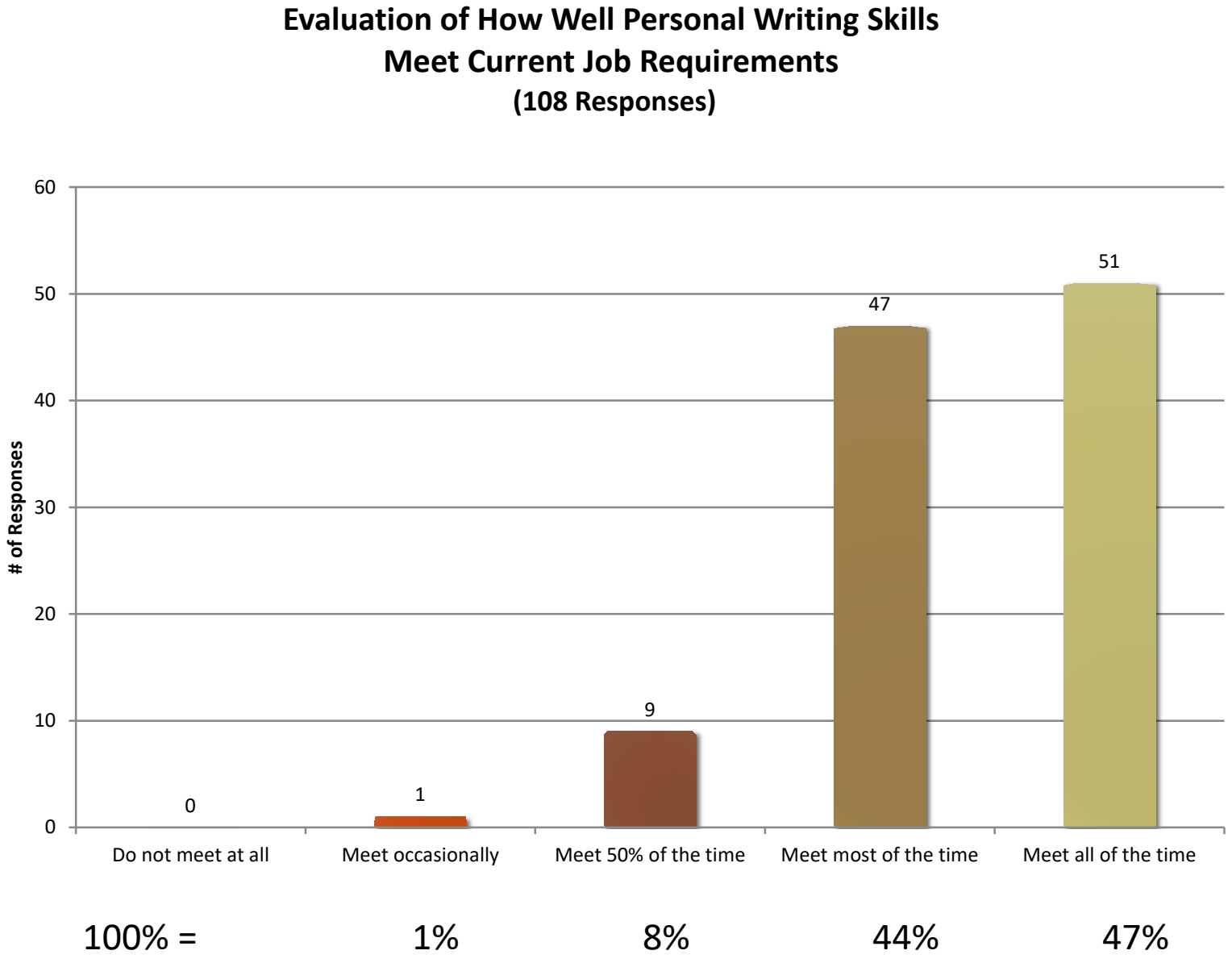
We can be 95% confident (level of certainty) that the whole population's response is between +/- 10 pts (margin of error) of the survey result.

E.g. If we surveyed 100% of the 3,627 CoB graduates who received this survey, their actual answer would be within a +/- 10 pt. range of the survey result.

Findings

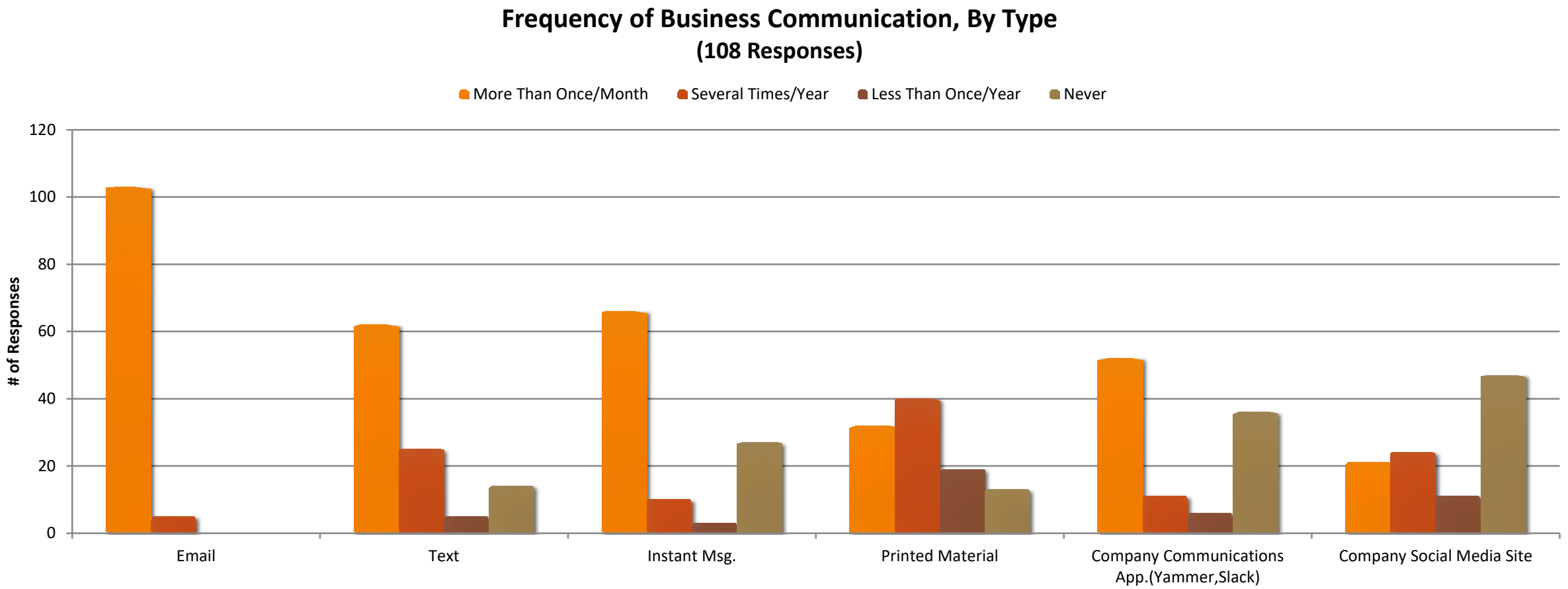
Results of Survey

The Good News

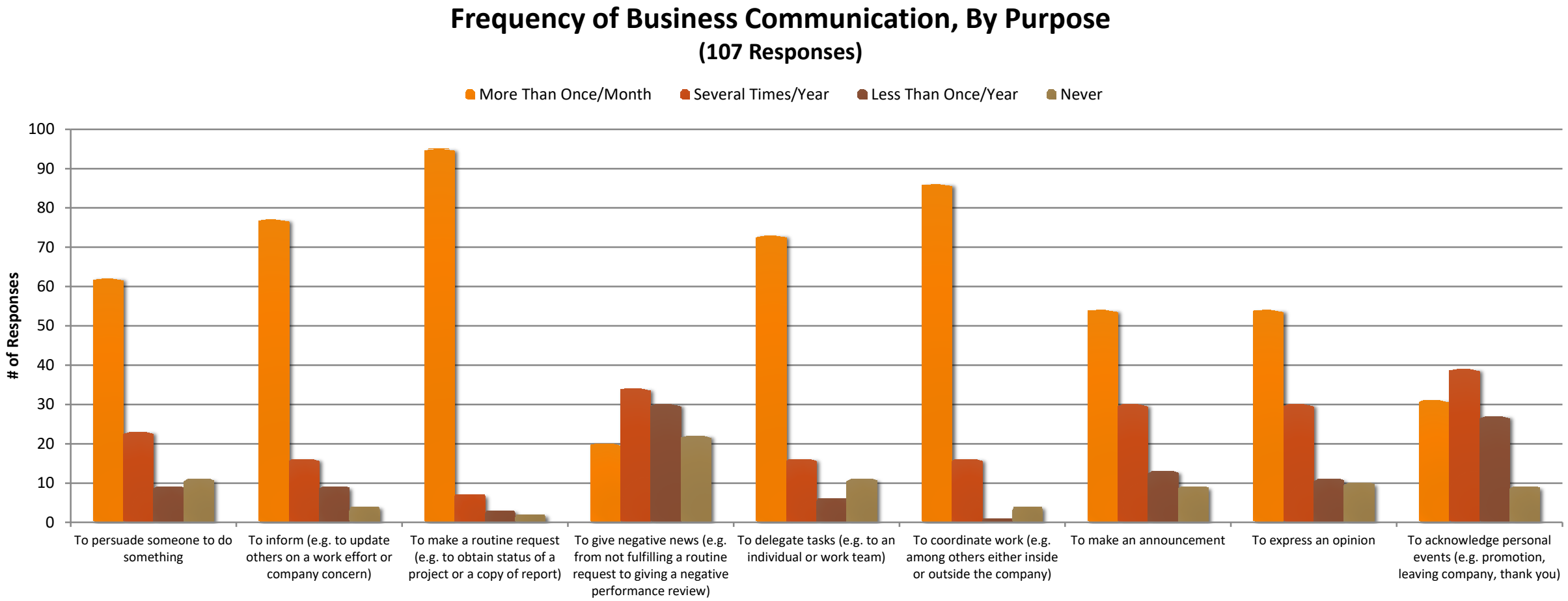


100% =	1%	8%	44%	47%

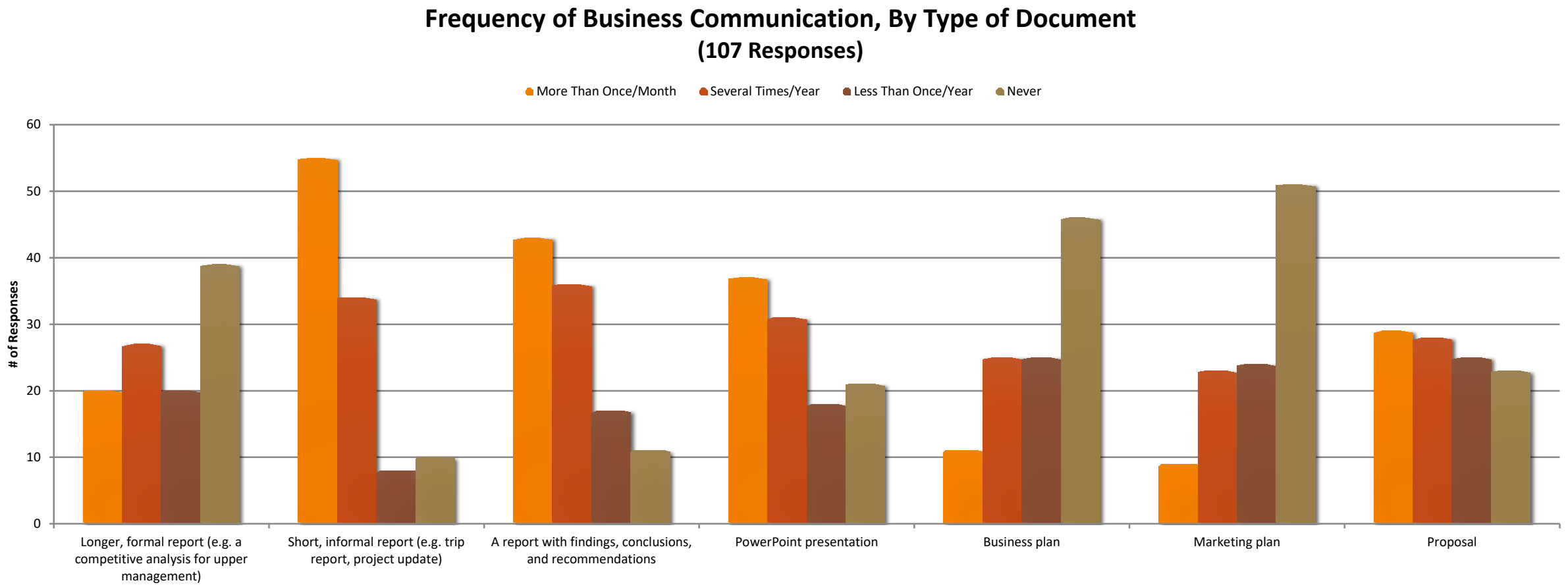
Email: Most Frequently Used Medium



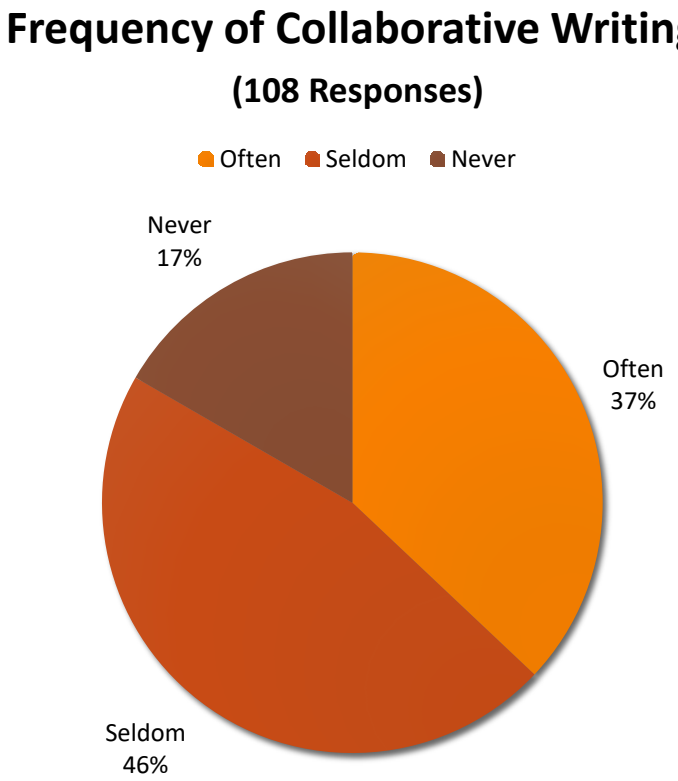
Top Purpose for Writing: Routine Requests



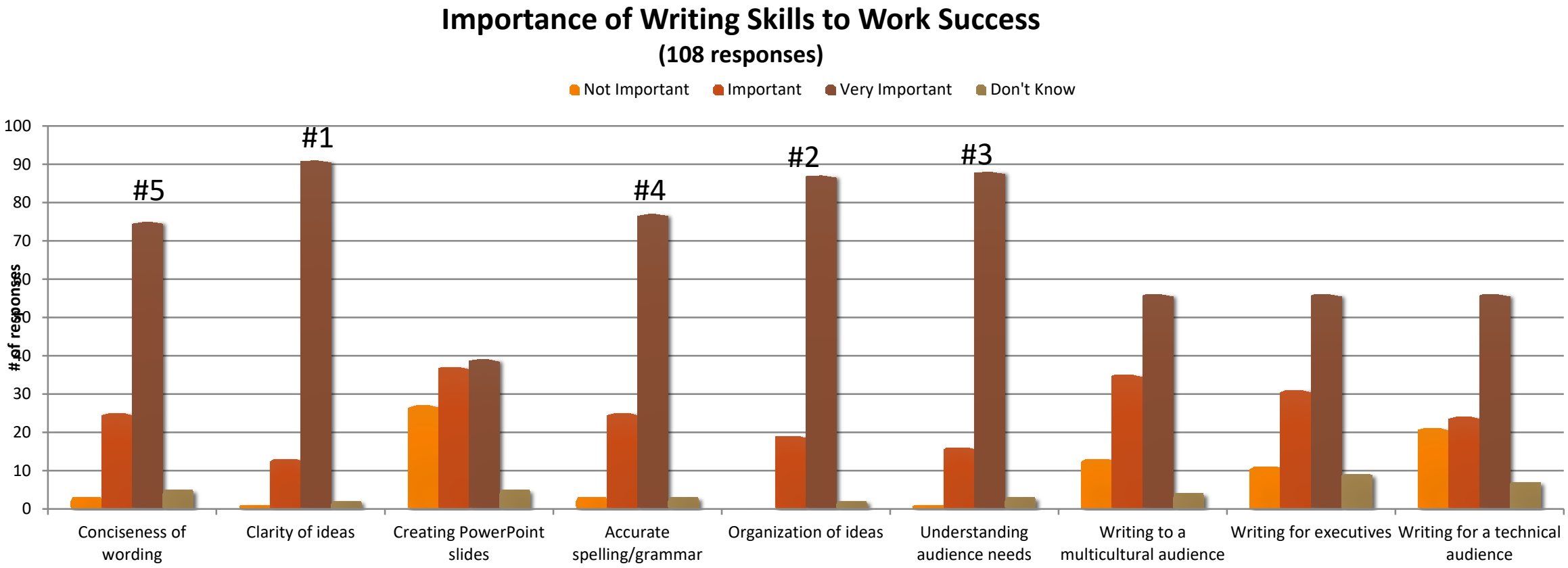
Most Frequent Type: Short, Informal Reports



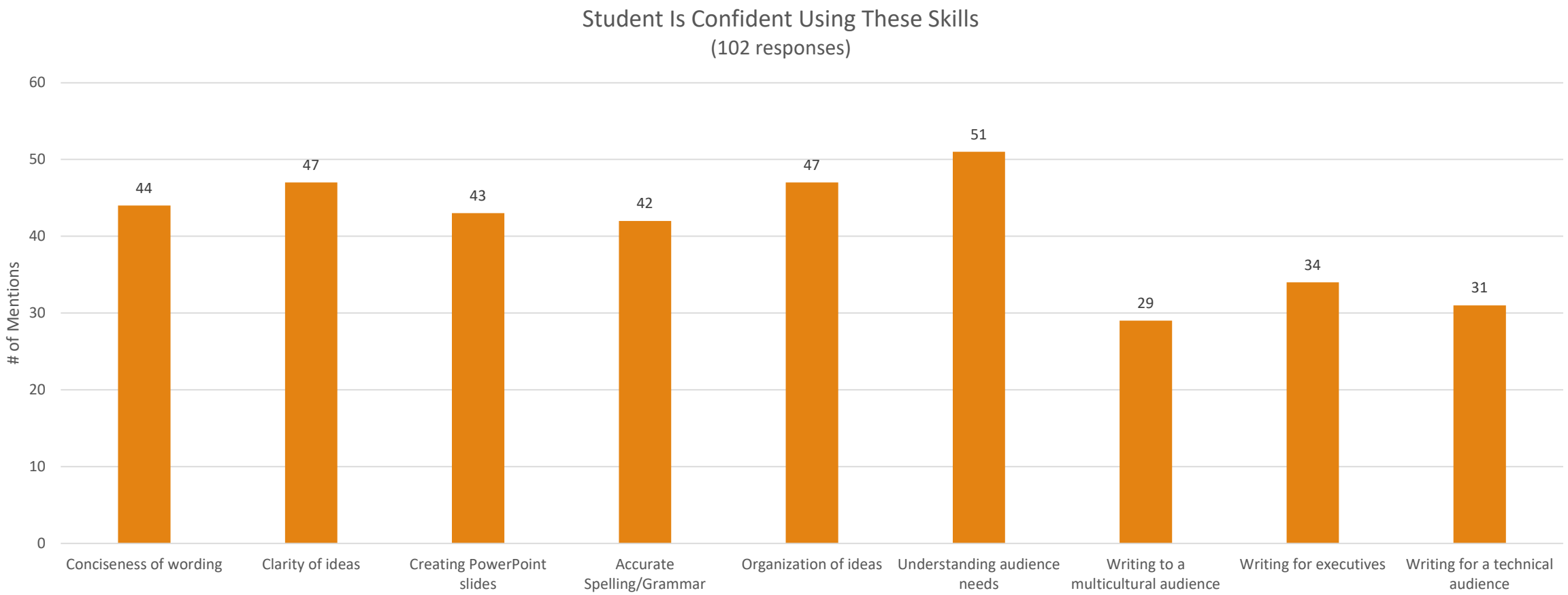
Frequency of Collaborative Writing: Low



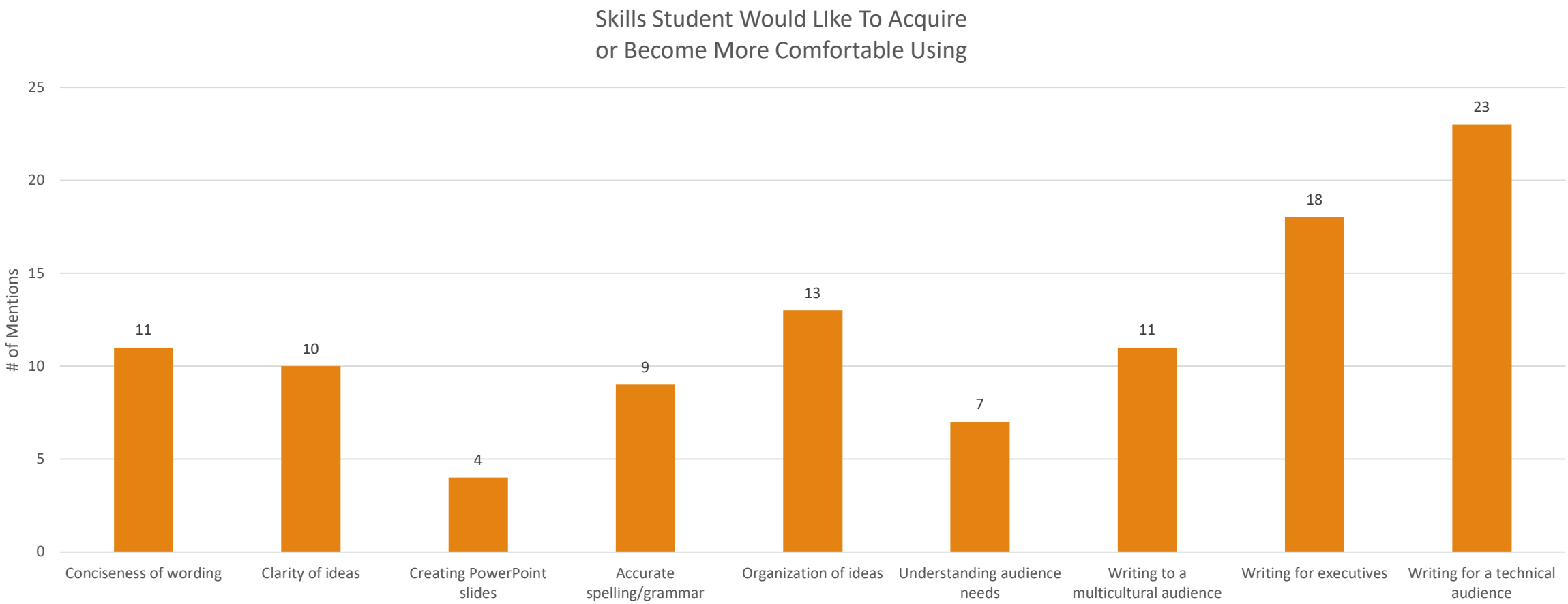
Keys to Success: The Big 5



Writing Skills: Feel Confident Using



Writing Skills: Improvement Desired

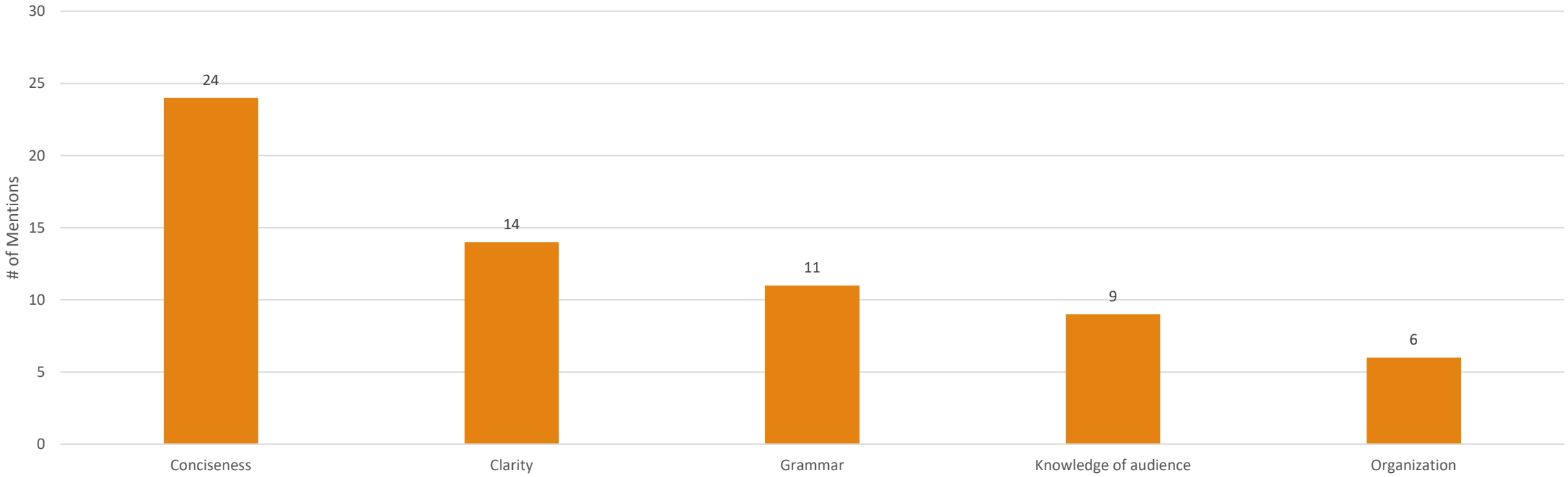


Student Suggestions to Improve 100WB

Based on your experience, what suggestions do you have to help us improve writing instruction for undergraduate business majors?

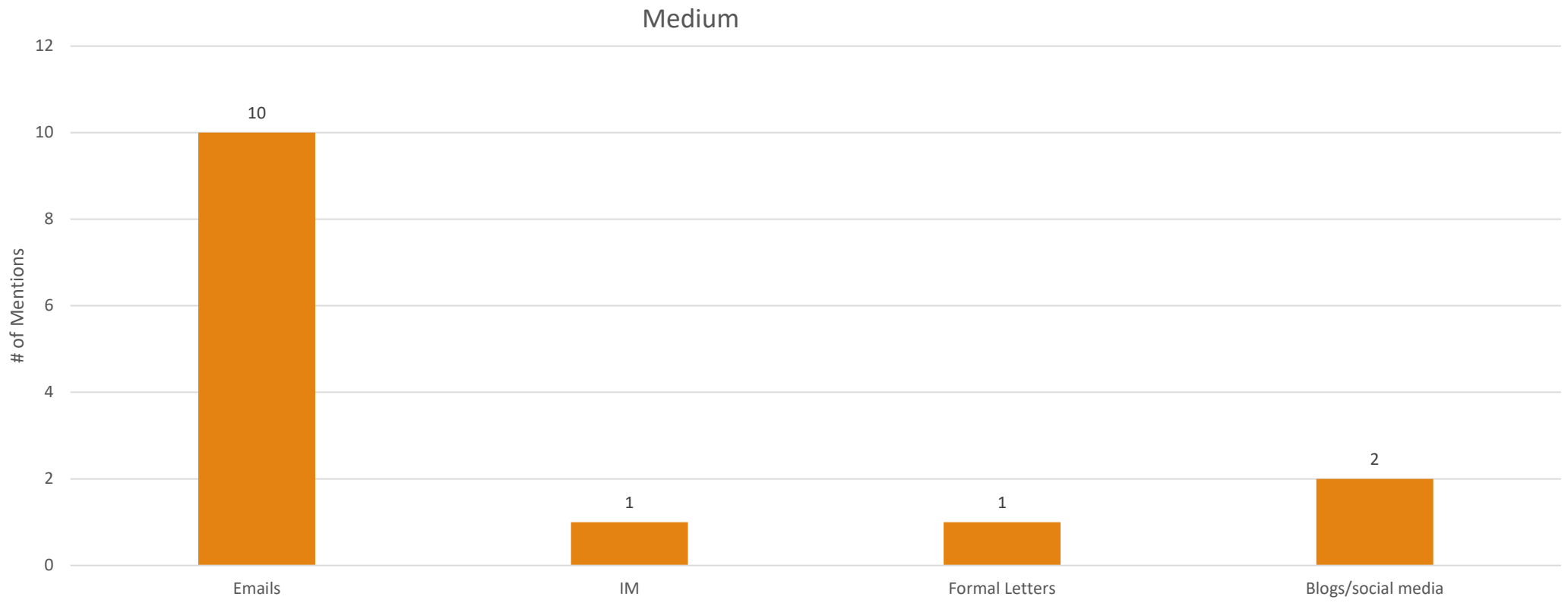
(86 responses)

More Emphasis on These Skills

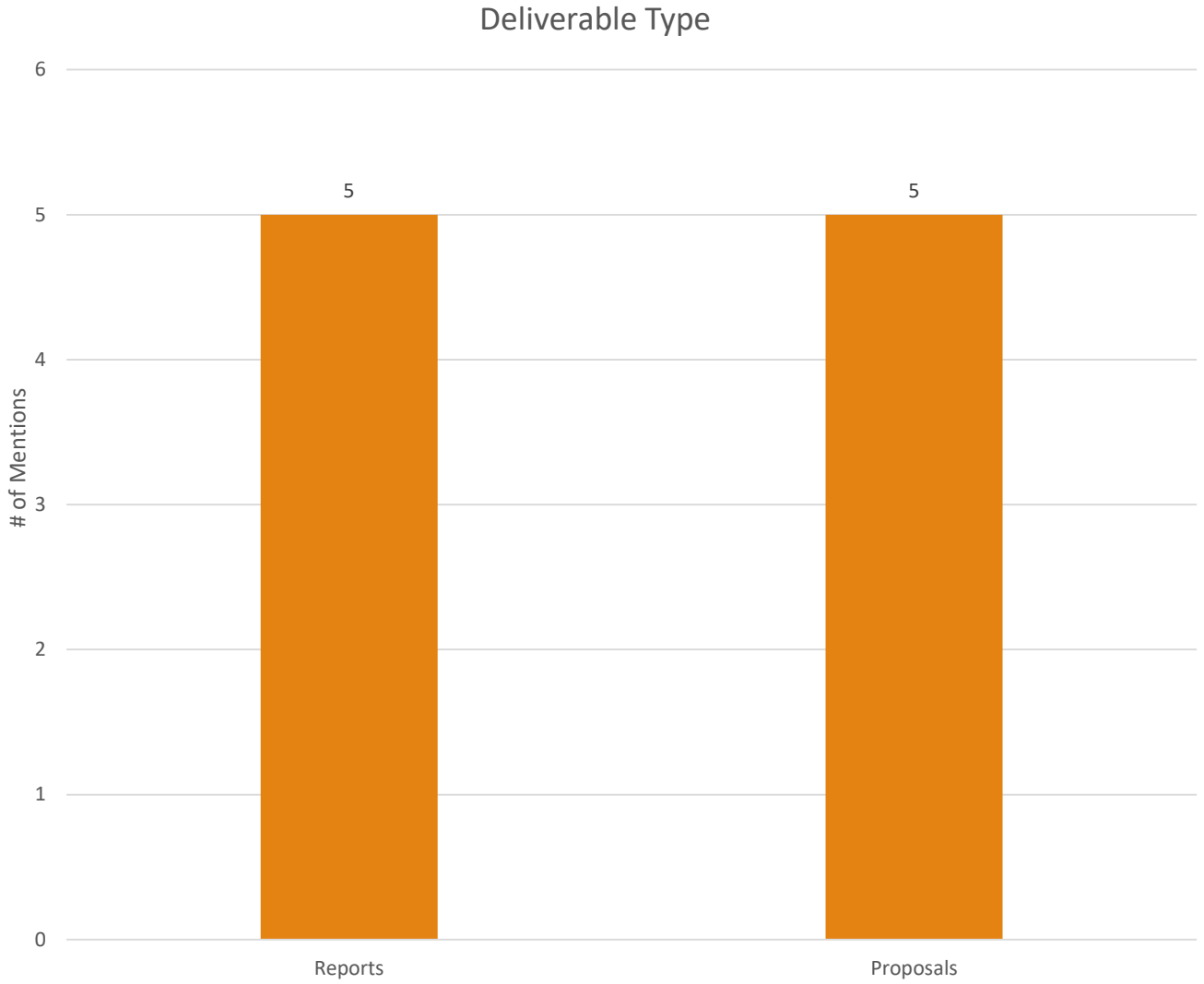


1-2 mentions: Writing for Execs, Tech/Product related, Persuasion, PowerPoint

Medium to emphasize: Email

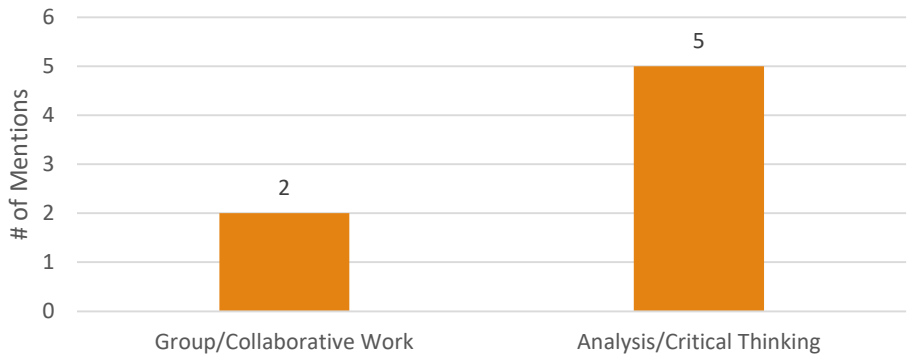


Most Mentioned Types: Reports and Proposals

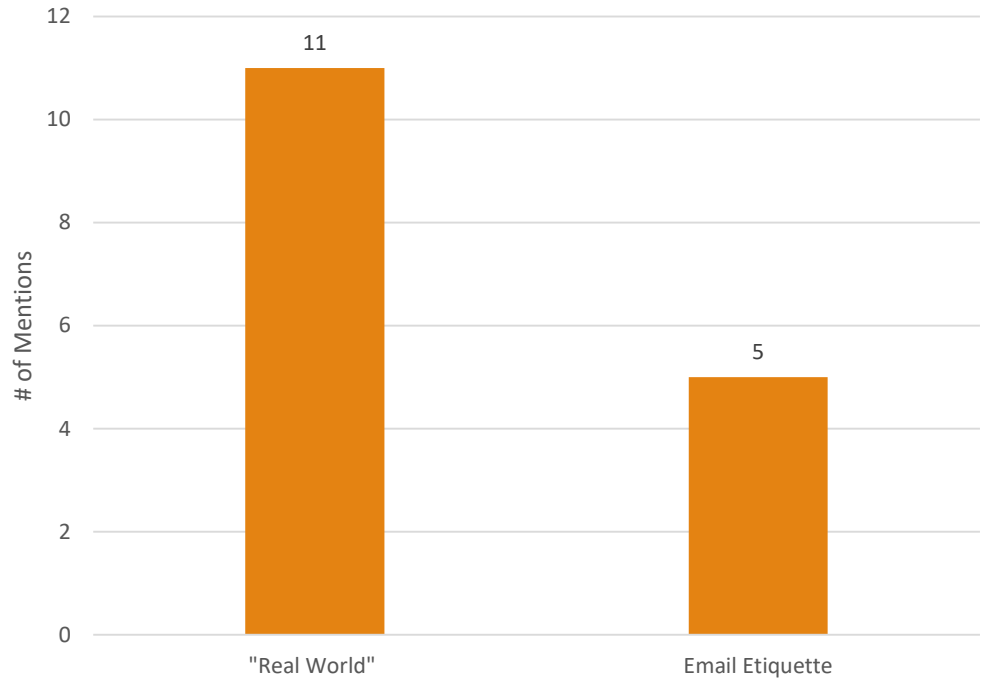


More Real World Scenarios

PROCESS



CONTENT



Faculty Selection and Participation

Selection:

- Recommended by Acting Dean Malu Roldan (4 CoB faculty)
- Valued good writing

Participation:

- Input on student survey questions
- 45 minute interviews

Faculty Interview: Summary

Faculty mentioned “The Big 5”, but with different emphasis.

- Organization
- Audience
- Grammar

More Often Mentioned

- Clarity
- Conciseness

Less Often Mentioned

Faculty Comments: Organization

- No organization of ideas---need outlining skills.
- “Too stream of consciousness.” Need to practice outlines.
- Claims need substantiation with details. “Every sentence or next one should have data”.
- Stronger support of arguments.

Faculty Comments: Audience

- Lack of knowledge of expected formality: $5,000 scholarship nomination mistake.
- Learn to say “no” to your boss.
- Lack ability to think about audience well. “Think of someone reading this that isn’t in the class”.
- Practice the same message with inward and outward-facing audiences.

Faculty Comments: Grammar

- Spell checker not used---fragments.
- One ex-CEO rejected reports that had a lot of grammar mistakes.
- Need to avoid hyperbole (e.g. “astonishing results”)
- Overuse of commas
- Proofreading/editing skills are badly needed
- Errors seen: Commonly confused words; subj-verb agreement; jargon; using wrong pronoun, esp. not knowing that “company” is “it”.
- Grammar is an issue for the minority (10%).

Faculty Comments: Clarity

Clarity of purpose of writing is very important.

Explaining complex ideas clearly is needed.

Faculty Comment: Conciseness

“Stressing word count can be a negative. Stress covering the subject instead.”

Conclusions

Conclusions

1.) Room for improvement to have skills to meet job requirements.

- 44% “most of the time”
- 9% “half the time or less”

2.) Important skills for success: Conciseness, Clarity, Organization, Audience, Grammar.

3.) Most common purpose = Routine Tasks (e.g. requesting, coordinating, delegating, informing)

4.) Email, texting, IMs---most frequently used.

Conclusions (con’t)

5.) Want “real world” business scenarios.

6.) Short more common than long.

7.) Semi-formal more common than formal.

8.) PowerPoint used frequently & competently.

9.) New skills desired: writing for execs and technical audiences

Implications

Ideas to Consider for 100WB Curriculum

Implications

1.) Integration of “Top 5” into all assignments (Organization, Audience, Clarity, Conciseness, and Grammar).

- Impact on lesson plan sequence, assignments, evaluation?

2.) Fewer long reports, more shorter assignments.

- How to achieve 8,000 goal?
- Impact on workload (students and instructor)?

3.) Need to develop a resource of “real world” scenarios as assignment prompts (e.g. case studies, current news, textbook examples)

- Collaborative effort?

4.) Re-evaluation of purposes of assignments

- E.g. Are ”giving negative news” and oral presentations needed?

Discussion?