

Business English

English writing comes in many styles: academic, creative, formal, business, and several others. Parts of each style can overlap, making it difficult to understand when and how to use each kind. Business English or business writing is the style used in the professional world. This style is needed to complete job applications, communicate with potential employers, create professional website bios, write emails to employers and supervisors, and compose other kinds of job-related writing as well. This handout is a general guide for how to use standard business English and etiquette when establishing a new professional contact.

Business English Tone

Business English is direct and concise while still being friendly and cordial. Below are some sample sentences that are too casual, too blunt, and just right for business writing.

Writing an Email to a Potential Employer

Casual: I think it'd be cool to work at your company. What do graphic designers do?

Blunt: Please tell me more about the graphic design position at your company.

Business: I am interested in pursuing a graphic design position at your company and would like to learn more about the job. Are you available to discuss this position? My availability is below.

Sending an Application to a Potential Employer

Casual: I finished my app. It's attached in this email. Thanks for your time.

Blunt: My completed application is attached below.

Business: I have completed my application and attached it below. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your response.

Writing to a Potential Employer to Schedule an Interview on a Messaging App (e.g., LinkedIn)

Casual: I am free on Friday. Let's meet up around 1 pm.

Blunt: I am available on Friday. We can meet at 1 pm.

Business: I am available on Friday at 1:00 pm. Does that time work for you?

Following-Up After a Meeting, Interview, Prior Discussion, or Other Interaction

Casual: Hey, I gave you my hiring paperwork a couple weeks ago. How's the processing going?

Blunt: I sent you my hiring paperwork last week, but you did not respond to me. What happened?

Business: I submitted my hiring paperwork two weeks ago and haven't received any updates yet, so I wanted to check in and ensure there haven't been any issues. Please let me know if my paperwork has been processed or if there is anything I can do to help with the process.

Asking a Clarifying Question

Casual: Can I put the project I'm working on right now in the survey?

Blunt: You said to list all UX design projects. Explain if this means current projects, too.

Business: Your previous email says we should include all our UX design projects in the annual survey. If I am currently working on a project, should I include it in the survey?

Business Email Etiquette

Knowing what tone to use while writing in business English is important, but knowing how to format information is also necessary. The sections below outline what information should be included in a business email.

Step 1: Greetings/Salutations

Dear is the most common and acceptable way to begin an email. However, once you have built a relationship with the recipient of your email, using *hi*, *hello*, *good morning*, or *good afternoon* is also acceptable.

Step 2: Honorifics

Honorifics are titles that precede someone's name. The most common honorifics are *Ms.* for women and *Mr.* for men. Avoid using *Miss*, *Mrs.*, and *Madam* for women unless your recipient has specified otherwise; these honorifics are historically tied to a woman's marital status, which is irrelevant and inappropriate to comment on in a modern working environment. If you are unaware of your recipient's gender identity, *Mx.* can be used as a gender-neutral alternative. If your message recipient holds a doctoral degree, *Dr.* is appropriate.

Step 3: Use Surnames

When first communicating with someone, it is best to address them by their surname (last name) in the salutation until they've indicated otherwise.

Step 4: Introduce Yourself and Your Purpose

If you are contacting someone for the first time, state your full name and briefly summarize why you are contacting them in a sentence or two. Here is an example:

Dear Ms. Adbaal,

My name is Citlali Guerrero, and I recently learned about the open computer science position at your company. I am excited to learn more about it. Would it be possible to arrange a meeting with you to discuss this position further?

Being direct and concise about what you are requesting from the recipient is important. Here is an example of unclear communication:

Dear Ms. Adbaal,

My name is Citlali, and I recently learned about the open position at your company. I was wondering if I could learn more about the position.

This message does not provide a full introduction or list the specific position. It also does not indicate if you would like to be sent more resources/information about the position, request a meeting with the recipient, be directed to someone already working in that position, or something else. Every email should have at least one clear item, task, or request.

Step 5: Thank You

It is appropriate to give thanks to the recipient of your message. Common phrases for this purpose include *thank you for your time*, *I appreciate your feedback*, *thank you for considering me*, and many others.

Step 6: Closing

The most standard sign-off is *best*, but *regards*, *best regards*, *thank you*, *thanks in advance*, and similar variants are also common and acceptable. For more formal situations, like contacting someone for the first time, *sincerely* can also be used.

Feeling pressure to stand out when applying for jobs or working in the professional world is common, but an email signature is not the place to be unique. Avoid excessive and unprofessional sign-offs like *thx*, *-[name/initials]*, *yours truly*, *with love*, *have a blessed day*, or other similar variants. You should also avoid using emojis, inspirational quotes, colorful or large fonts, and other distracting elements.

Personal pronouns can also be added after your name in an email sign-off, but this item is up to the sender's personal discretion.

Additional Tips

List your availability first: When requesting a meeting with someone, list your availability in your initial email so the recipient can easily find what time works for them. Without this step, the time it takes to finalize a meeting time will be prolonged.

Subject line: The subject line should be in title case and accurately and specifically reflect the content of the message. For example, "Revisions" is too vague, but "Website Design Concept Revisions" is brief yet sufficiently informative.

Politeness: Once you have built rapport with your recipient, say something pleasant at the start of your email. Common phrases include statements like "I hope you enjoyed your weekend," or "It was nice to meet you at the company lunch last week."

Emphasis: Avoid using all caps for emphasis—bolded, italicized, or underlined text is a better option because all caps is usually interpreted as yelling.

Leave white space: Avoid writing long paragraphs that appear as a single block of text. If your message is long, revise for concision and include paragraph breaks to divide the text.

Proofread: Always be sure to proofread your message before hitting send! Emails are often sent in a rush, but refined emails show professionalism, care for the job, and respect for the recipient.

Complete Sample Email

Hello Mr. Wang,

My name is Harrison Liu, and I am an editorial intern at Hardback Publishing. I attended your presentation at our headquarters last week and found it inspiring. I have a manuscript that I would like to receive your feedback on. Please let me know if you're available to discuss the publishing potential of my work. My availability is listed below.

Monday, 5/19, 3:00-6:00 pm

Thursday, 5/22, 9:00-11:00 pm

Friday, 5/23, 2:00-4:00 pm

I greatly appreciate any advice you may have for me. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Harrison Liu

He/Him/His

Helpful Phrases for Business English

Although speaking informally is acceptable in day-to-day situations, business English has a set of common words and phrases that are considered appropriate for professional settings. The chart below includes some common examples.

Casual	Business	Example Sentence
get	receive	I received your completed paperwork.
need	require	I require more resources to complete my presentation.
talk about	discuss	I would like to discuss the hourly wage for this position.
get in touch	contact	I contacted the IT department about my computer problems.
make sure	ensure	I want to ensure I have completed my application correctly.
to tell you/them/ someone	inform	I will inform my supervisor that we are ready to move forward in the production process.
talk more about	elaborate	I would like to elaborate on the ideas presented in the meeting this morning.
fix the problem	resolve the issue	I have a meeting with the marketing department tomorrow to resolve the issue.
extra help	further/ additional assistance	We will require additional assistance to complete our marketing campaign.
tell you	notify	I wanted to notify you that I have an opening in my schedule tomorrow at 3:00 pm.

Activity 1: Detect Tone

Choose which sentence is too casual, too blunt, and just right for each sample business situation.

1. *Asking an Employer About Wages*

- Tell me what the hourly wage for this position is.
- If possible, I would like to discuss the hourly wage for this position.
- Let me know how much I will be paid.

2. *Following-Up After an Interview*

- Thank you for interviewing me. When can I expect to hear back from you?
- Hey, thanks for the interview. When will you make a decision?
- When will I know if I got the job?

3. *Contacting a Colleague for the First Time*

- a. Hey, it's cool to be working with you.
- b. Hello, I look forward to working together.
- c. I will enjoy working with you.

4. *Asking for Feedback*

- a. Give me feedback.
- b. Could you let me know what you're thinking?
- c. I would appreciate your feedback on my project.

5. *Requesting a Deadline Extension*

- a. I will be unable to complete my report by Wednesday. Can I submit it on Friday instead?
- b. I will submit my report on Friday because Wednesday is not enough time.
- c. I can't do my report by Wednesday. Is it cool if I finish it on Friday instead?

Activity 2: Convert Casual English into Business English

For each sentence below, find a more professional way to replace the underlined words. There are several correct answers.

- 1. I have attached the document below. Give me a heads up if there are any issues.
- 2. I got your email about the agenda for our next meeting.
- 3. The Finance Department told me about my filing mistake.
- 4. My coworker needs extra help with their presentation.
- 5. I like the suggestions you gave me on my marketing ideas.
- 6. I am not free at that time. Can we reschedule?
- 7. I want to tell you that my schedule changed, and I can no longer attend the meeting.
- 8. I am searching a job at Google.

Answer Key for Activity 1

1. *Asking an Employer About Wages*

- a. Too blunt
- b. Just right
- c. Too casual

2. *Following-up After an Interview*

- a. Just right
- b. Too casual
- c. Too blunt

3. *Contacting a Colleague for the First Time*

- a. Too casual
- b. Just right
- c. Too blunt

4. *Asking for Feedback*

- a. Too blunt
- b. Too casual
- c. Just right

5. *Requesting a Deadline Extension*

- a. Just right
- b. Too blunt
- c. Too casual

Answer Key for Activity 2

- 1. I have attached the document below. Please notify me/let me know if there are any issues.
- 2. I received your email about the agenda for our next meeting.
- 3. The Finance Department contacted/notified me about my filing issue.
- 4. My coworker requires additional assistance with their presentation.
- 5. I appreciate the suggestions you gave me on my marketing ideas.
- 6. I am unavailable at that time. Can we reschedule?
- 7. I would like to inform you that my schedule changed, and I can no longer attend the meeting.
- 8. I am seeking a position at Google.