Professional Business Writing

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Agenda

3:00 pm   Objectives for this session

3:05 pm   Case for action

3:15 pm   Characteristics of effective business writing

3:30 pm   Techniques to write effectively and efficiently

3:50 pm   Examples, examples, examples

4:00 pm   Case studies

4:25 pm   Final considerations

Learning Objectives

▸ Understand why effective writing matters

▸ Identify elements of effective business writing

▸ Learn techniques to improve effectiveness and efficiency

▸ Practice techniques learned

Case for Action

▸ The impression you leave – with your customer and your boss!

▸ Consider the life cycle of the document

▸ Consider the potential distribution of the document

▸ Consider the reason for the document itself and your odds of success with a poorly written or non-persuasive document

Applies To

Reports
Memos
Presentations
Emails

Characteristics of Effective Business Writing

- Achieves the desired objective
  - Understand why you are writing the document
    - to inform, to educate, or to persuade to action
  - Understand the audience
    - prior knowledge?
    - preferred amount of detail?
    - existing point of view?
    - level of receptivity to change?
- Creates a professional impression
  - Quality of work
  - Quality of writing

Achieves Desired Objective

	ACSM	OM	Individual	
Level of detail	◔	◑	◔	●
Level of formality	●	●	◔	◑
Level of significance	◑	◑	◔	●
Inductive vs. deductive style	↓	↓	↑	↑
Time available to read your report	◕	◔	◑	◑
Amount of interest in the topic	Varies	Varies	◔	●
Amount of prior knowledge	◔	◑	◔	●

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Characteristics of Effective Business Writing

Characteristics of Effective Business Writing

PRIORITY ↓
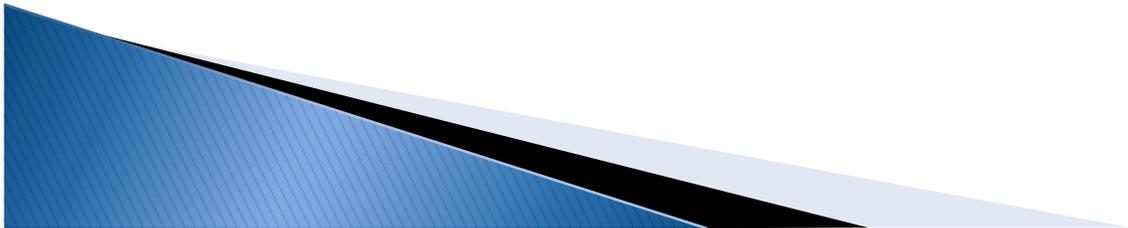
- **Grammatically Correct**
  - ▸ Correct English
  - ▸ No typos!
  - ▸ Complies with writing conventions

- **Accurate & Complete**
  - ▸ Reliable
  - ▸ Sufficient evidence
  - ▸ Appropriate caveats

- **Clear**
  - ▸ Enough information for uninformed reader to understand

- **Concise**
  - ▸ As few words as possible to communicate clearly and accurately

- **Persuasive**
  - ▸ Important information and a catalyst to action

- **Formal, Not Stuffy**
  - ▸ Polished and professional, but not arrogant or police/interrogation

Characteristics of Effective Business Writing

Focus on Conciseness

▸ The car <u>which</u> was red was traveling at a rate <u>of</u> speed <u>which</u> could be considered fast

▸ The fast red car

▸ The reconciliation of the payroll account had not been prepared in a timely manner.

▸ The payroll account reconciliation was not prepared timely.

▸ We were informed that the discrepancy in the pricing was adjusted via an amendment to ABC's contract whereby certain future work would be performed free of charge in lieu of excess cost charged earlier.

▸ Based on the amended contract, an overcharge due to a pricing discrepancy will be offset against future payments.

Characteristics of Effective Business Writing

Case Study

Dear (Private School) Parents,

Most of you will have noticed that your latest student statement shows a credit for the Advanced Deposit paid for 2008-09. The question is why are we trying to confuse you this year?

The reason is that the Business Office is converting to a newer version of the software system used. Because this conversion will occur in May the deposits we are receiving from you now cannot be deferred until your July 1 statement. A year from now we will revert to the less confusing method used in the past.

So, your account will appear to be less negative, and many will appear with a credit. Apologies for the confusion this will cause.

This means that your student account will be over credited, through the remainder of 07-08, by the Advance Deposit check amount you provided on registering your child for 2008-09. However the July 1 statement will revert you back to a true current situation.

(Name) will be happy to take your call to explain further. Though if he didn't receive 453 calls he will be much relieved.

The bottom line is this: Please pay the school the balance shown but adjusted for the Advance Deposit payment – which, to add to the possible confusion, is shown simply as "Payment Received".

Sincerely, and apologetically,

Director of Finance

Techniques to Writing Effectively

▸ Organize your thoughts logically
  ◦ Outline your document
  ◦ Consider process flow and sequence, start to end
  ◦ Think about related items – is there a bigger picture issue?
  ◦ What would you tell the CEO in the elevator about the results of your review – what are the 2 – 3 key messages?
▸ Put yourself in the place of the reader
  ◦ Level of familiarity
  ◦ Take their hand and lead them from one thought to the next with effective transitions in the writing
▸ Keep a dictionary and a grammar guide nearby
▸ Know standard writing conventions
▸ Review your draft
▸ Ask a trusted party to review your draft

How often do you apply these concepts to your writing?

Techniques to Writing Efficiently

- For reports -- write the background, scope, objectives and approach as soon as the planning memo is complete
  - *but one caveat – after you finish the testing and develop your observations – go back and check the background to ensure it provides enough context to understand your observations*
- Draft each initial observation as you complete the related tests
  - *but remember to look for common themes and groupings when you draft the report itself*
- Reuse prior written work that was effective
  - *but avoid sounding 'boilerplate'*
- Start early enough that you have time to set your draft aside for a day or two, and then re-read it
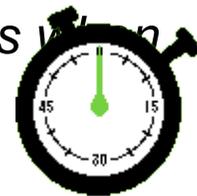
Examples, examples, examples

▸ **Background**
What information is needed to give context to the uniformed reader
Size or history of operation, systems used, reason for the review ….

▸ **Objective**
Why are we doing the review?
… to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of controls which are designed to ensure
authorization, accuracy, completeness, timeliness, security ….

▸ **Scope**
What was reviewed?
Timeframe, locations, functions, accounts, assertions, etc.

▸ **Conclusion**
Answers to the objective and ties to the scope *– what did we find relative to our objective?*
… controls designed to ensure accuracy appeared to be working effectively…

▸ **Observations**
The facts, the applicable standard, and the cause

▸ **Recommendations**
Should address the root cause of the problem

Observations & Recommendations

PRIORITY

| Grammatically Correct |
| Accurate & Complete |
| Clear |
| Concise |
| Persuasive |
| Formal, Not Stuffy |

▸ What did we find (test result)

▸ Why did it occur (root cause)

▸ What do we recommend (solution)
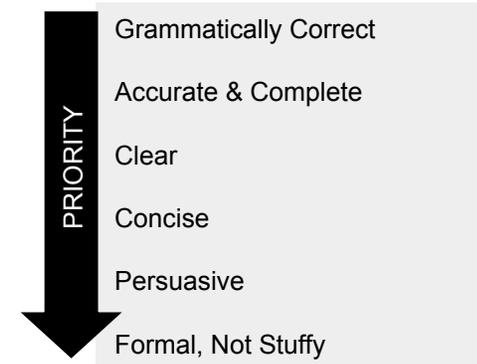
In our review of JTM, we noted that the system used cookies to enable SSO.

Authentication to the web interface of the JTM engineering system is facilitated through a single sign-on (SSO) mechanism that requires login to the company network. We noted that the JTM system retrieves the identity of the user from a cookie to enable SSO into the application. We recommend that management perform a security review of SSO mechanisms.

But,

Is this persuasive?

Does it sound like an important issue, or nit-picky?

Does this hold your attention, or is it boring?

Why should the reader care? *SO WHAT?*

Observations & Recommendations

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How could this be further improved?
Put yourself in the reader's seat.
?

▸ Is this a major problem?

▸ What objective isn't being achieved?

▸ What is the risk?
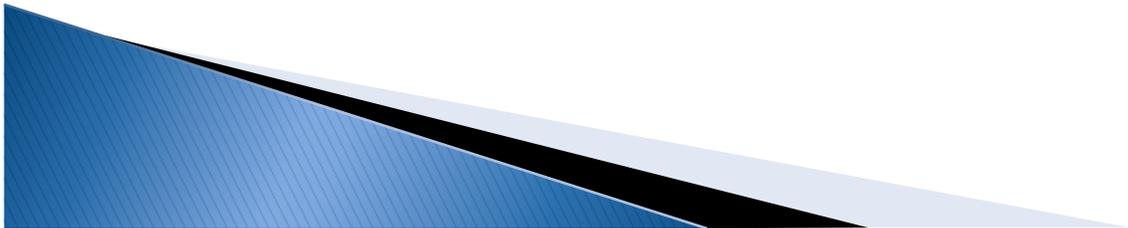
Observations & Recommendations

JTM is a proprietary system with a web-based interface that is used to manage critical engineering designs. Authentication to the web interface of the JTM system is facilitated through a single sign-on (SSO) mechanism that requires login to company network.

We noted that the JTM system retrieves the identity of the user from a cookie to enable SSO into the application. Cookies are subject to several attacks and may not provide a secure mechanism to transfer sensitive information such as user identity and credentials.

A malicious user with network connectivity to the company intranet may gain access or escalate his privileges to the JTM application, and thus the critical designs stored in it, in an unauthorized fashion by tampering with the information contained in the cookie.

We recommend that management implement standards-based authentication/SSO mechanism to login users into JTM application.

Further, management should include a security tollgate as part of the design and subsequent rollout of systems containing sensitive information that requires sign-off from Information Security.

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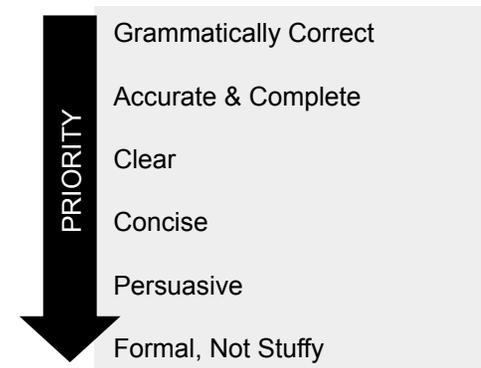
Case Study – How could these be improved?

Current Test Result	Improved Test Result
In our review, we noted that the review of data center access logs which is to be performed monthly was not documented.	
We noted that some of the files in the BlackStar system have not been classified or labeled in accordance with company information classification guidelines.	
Our review of the password file identified a lack of compliance with the Information Security Policy as several passwords were easily guessable, or were not of sufficient length, and had not been changed in more than 6 months.	

Case Study – How could these be improved?

Current Observation	Recommendations to Improve
We noted that the documented procedures to perform quarterly audits on Cheetah VOBs and UNIX NFS shares are not followed. Instead, a report listing the allocation of root privileges to various users is produced for management review.	
Logging is not turned on for the UNIX workstations used to access the Cheetah algorithms VOB.	
Adequate SOD has not been implemented for the development, test and production environments of the AR system.	
Oracle is configured to over-apply payments received from customers for transactions towards credit memos for both US and Korea.	
Three out of 12 credit memos reviewed had not been approved.	

Case Study

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

Our primary objective was to assess the effectiveness of controls in ensuring only authorized user have access to highly confidential data. In addition, we wanted to provide recommendations for protection of confidential data related to merger and acquisition (M&A) transactions. We reviewed marketing and engineering data only and did include employee data in our review.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall, our audit determined:

▸ Standard security configurations do not appear to have been applied on all servers within the Company and some workstations are known to send email directly bypassing the corporate mail server.

▸ Adequate technical safeguards have not been identified to control leakage from laptops.

▸ The coverage provided by existing Decovvex implementation does not cover the entire network.

▸ The existing security training course has been completed by 427 Company personnel since its launch in 2002 and does not appear to be mandatory. The existing training course primarily focuses on patent protection and does not adequately cover protection of trade secrets or other confidential data.

▸ Twelve of 117 pricing files reviewed were not marked as confidential as required by Company policy and were not stored on secure servers

▸ There are no policies or procedures for identifying or protecting sensitive data during the due diligence phase of M&A transactions

Executive Summary Suggestions - Consider

▸ What was the objective and what was our result against that objective?

▸ What are common themes?

▸ Why should the reader care?

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Final Considerations

▸ Does your document look professional?
   ◦ Format, consistent spacing, visual presentation
      • Print it and review; do NOT rely on an on-screen review
      • Consider the use of graphs and charts to more clearly communicate detail and add visual interest

▸ Are you positive there are no references to other audits in headers/footers /file properties?

▸ If you've used 'track changes' or 'comment boxes' to record editorial changes, have all been deleted or accepted prior to sharing with the reviewer or the customer?

▸ Is your report READY for review? If you are sharing a draft for suggestions and comments to help you finalize it, make sure the reviewer knows that.

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