

# Top 10 Business Writing Mistakes That Cost You Money

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In business, every word counts. This holds true for writing, too, particularly now when so much of business takes place through the Internet and e-mail. Not to mention, money is tight and every message needs to have maximum impact. Don't let small mistakes in your business writing leave a negative impression on potential customers. Here are the top 10 common errors in business writing and tips for how you can avoid them.

**No. 10: Don't forget to spell check.** We've all received resumes and letters with spelling errors; don't make the same mistake. Spell check every business e-mail or correspondence you send. Most e-mail programs have this function, so take advantage of it. In many cases, nothing can sour the tone of a future partnership faster than a grammatically incorrect correspondence filled with spelling errors. *One note of caution:* Don't rely on your computer's spell check function to differentiate between homophones, words pronounced alike but spelled differently, such as their, there and they're or compliment and complement.

**No. 9: Don't forget to include a salutation.** How many business e-mails do you receive that fail to greet you by name? Starting an e-mail without a salutation is akin to starting a conversation in the middle. A salutation marks the beginning of a correspondence in a letter or e-mail, and omitting one is not professional. Worse yet, your e-mail could be confused for spam, since an e-mail without a personal salutation usually means the message went to many people simultaneously.

**No. 8: Don't forget your signature.** Everyone receives a lot of e-mail nowadays. How frustrating is it to receive one without a proper signature line? Perhaps you remember the person based solely upon his or her e-mail address, but perhaps you don't. If their e-mail seems important enough, you have to spend time investigating who they are and for what company they work. Even if you do happen to remember the person, failing to include a signature demonstrates a lack of respect for the recipient's time or workload. Always include a salutation and a signature in every e-mail correspondence, even if the other person doesn't do the same for you.

**No. 7: Don't use jargon, acronyms, slang or "Internet speak."** At best, using acronyms makes you appear lazy. At worst, they confuse your reader. Using jargon isn't any better. Best case scenario, you seem aloof; worst case, your reader feels stupid. Examples of Internet speak include "LMAO," "noob," "l33t" and "rofl." Do know what these all mean? If you don't, how does that make you feel? Other mistakes include using slang, curse words or words that illicit the improper tone (such as "dude" or "wazzup.") Avoid them all. Business will rarely shy away from you for being "too professional."

**No. 6: Don't use emoticons.** A close cousin to jargon and acronyms are emoticons (punctuation in the form of a "face"). Eventually you may reach an informal level of communication that warrants an emoticon, but let the other person breach this ground first.

**No. 5: Don't forget to include a call to action.** Every business communication, on one level or another, involves some type of selling. You are either selling yourself, your company, your idea, your product, your service, etc. There needs to be a call to action. It can be as simple as ending an e-mail with

an "I look forward to hearing back from you" or "Please let me know if this schedule works for you" at the end, but one way or another, every correspondence needs to inform the recipient of your expectations regarding their next step. Who knows? It may be easiest for them to follow your suggestion.

**No. 4: Don't make it the wrong length.** Business correspondence comes in a variety of forms or formats, and

each one has an appropriate length. Contracts are supposed to be long and detailed. E-mails are supposed to be short and sweet. Recognize what you are writing and keep your length standardized. If you write a 100-word contract, no one is going to take it seriously; if you write a 1,000 word e-mail, no one is going to read it. Give people what they expect at the length they expect it.

**No. 3: Don't forget you could be quoted.** Recently, there was an e-mail from a company's accounting department posted on the Internet for everyone to read. It was addressed to the employees of that company, presumably with an understanding of confidentiality, since it contained private information about that company's finances. Nevertheless, there it was on a public forum. Whenever you write any e-mail, assume anyone could potentially see it — from your competition to your own mother.

**No. 2: Don't use absolutes.** Since you now realize your writing can come back to haunt you at any time, it is best to avoid writing in absolutes. Avoid using terms like "never" when you can use "rarely." Don't use terms like "will be" when you can use terms like "may be." Upon initial reading, the reader won't recognize the difference, and down the road, if your feet are held to the fire, words that are not absolute are more defensible.

**No. 1: Don't include unnecessary information.** In other words, cut to the chase. Since every word counts, be as succinct and applicable as possible. Including superfluous information opens yourself up to a variety of mistakes: it makes your writing unnecessarily long; it increases the chances of breaking one of the aforementioned rules; it communicates to the other person that you are unable to censor, prioritize or organize; and it could contain information that turns your "sale" into a "bail."

No one is perfect, but if you take the time to make sure your business writing avoids these 10 basic pitfalls, you will be that much closer to succeeding while wielding a pen ... or keyboard.

*Brent Sampson is the best-selling author of "Sell Your Book on Amazon," as well as "Self-Publishing Simplified" and "Adventures in Publishing." As the president and CEO of Outskirts Press, located globally at [www.outskirtspress.com](http://www.outskirtspress.com), Sampson offers full-service, custom self-publishing services to authors seeking a cost-effective, fast and powerful way to publish and distribute their books worldwide. In addition, he consults with clients on writing, editing, Web site design, e-retailing and e-marketing, and entrepreneurship. Contact him at [www.outskirtspress.com](http://www.outskirtspress.com).*