First Impressions

AS YOU ENTER COLLEGE or the business world, you will have many chances to make first impressions. First impressions often occur through e-mails, cover letters, résumés, business letters, and other forms of non-face-to-face communication. This E-unit discusses how to make a good first impression even when you are not there in person.

Objective:

☑ Explain how business documents can help make good first impressions.

Key Terms:

🔑
business letter
cover letter
e-mail
job objective
letterhead

memorandum
personal business letter
recipient
reference initials
résumé

salutation
sender
subject line

Managing First Impressions Through Business Documents

Written communication is important in business and education. You will use it when applying for jobs or college. When you send written communication, it reflects your professionalism and abilities. It makes an impression on others. This lesson looks at forms of written communication and how you can make a good impression. First, you will review written forms of communication often used in business.

620004

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS

Popular forms of written communication in business include e-mail, memorandums, business letters, personal business letters, and résumés. This first section explains the basic parts of these types of communication. Understanding and following the professional standards and expectations is important when creating written documents. When you follow the expectations and standards, you give the impression that you know what you are doing.

FIGURE 1. E-mail is a very popular form of written communication.

E-mail

E-mail (electronic mail) is a method of sending and receiving messages electronically between personal computers over a computer network. The generally accepted e-mail format includes the name of the **recipient**, or the person receiving the message; the name of the **sender**, or the person writing or sending the message; the **subject line**, or main topic; and the body, or written message.

Memorandums

A **memorandum** (memo) is a written message sent from one person to another within the same organization or business. Memorandums are similar to e-mails. The format of a memorandum includes a heading, usually "Memo" or "Memorandum"; the recipient's name; the sender's name; the date; the subject line (in all capital letters); and the body or message of the memo.

Letters

A **business letter** is a letter that represents a company, not an individual. It uses formal writing. A business letter is printed on **letterhead** (company stationery) and includes the current date; the recipient's name and address; a greeting, or **salutation**; the body, or main message; and a closing, followed by the writer's handwritten signature and the writer's typed name and title. If an assistant keyed the letter for the writer, then the letter includes **reference initials**, or the initials of the person keying the letter.

A **personal business letter** is a letter from an individual to a business. This type of letter is more formal than a personal letter to a friend or relative. A **cover letter** is a type of personal business letter sent with other documents to explain more fully one's qualifications. The formatting of a personal business letter includes the writer's street address; the writer's city, state, and ZIP code; the current date; the recipient's name and address; a greeting, or saluta-

620004

tion; the body, or main message; and a closing, followed by the writer's handwritten signature and the writer's typed name.

Résumés

A **résumé** is a brief description of one's professional or work experience and qualifications. Parts of a résumé include personal information; a **job objective**, or a brief statement of one's employment goal; level of education; work/volunteer experience; and awards/accomplishments.

WRITING TIPS

You just read about the parts of different types of business communication. Now you will read tips for good writing, as well as what to avoid, in business communication.

E-mail

The following are tips for writing better e-mail. First, offer a short summary of your e-mail in the subject line. Second, keep the message clear and to the point. Third, always use proper spelling and grammar. Spell check your e-mail before sending it.

The following are things to avoid when using e-mail. First, avoid using all caps in the subject line. Second, avoid computer symbols and computer abbreviations, such as "u" for "you." Third, avoid abbreviations unless appropriately defined.

Memos

To write a better memo, keep the message clear and to the point, and use proper spelling and grammar. Avoid language and messages that are confusing or could be misunderstood by the reader. Use the same format (line spacing, font, etc.) throughout the memo.

620004

Business Letters

When writing a business letter, it is best to address the letter to a specific individual. The same applies if the letter is being sent to a committee. Business letters are always formal, not informal. Keep the business letter clear and to the point, and use proper spelling and grammar. Avoid using inconsistent formatting, such as different sizes and types of fonts or different margins or spacing.

Cover Letters and Résumés

When writing a cover letter, use the same font style and size throughout, and maintain consistent margins. The cover letter should be brief—no more than three or four paragraphs. It should be easy to read. The cover letter should use formal sentences and should remain professional and thoughtful. Use proper spelling and grammar. Avoid using slang, "cute" fonts, and the form-letter approach.

When writing a résumé, keep it to one page; state a job objective; and explain time gaps in employment. Keep the résumé clear, concise, and professional; use standard fonts; and, of course, check for spelling and grammatical errors. Things to avoid when writing a résumé include using "I," leaving out a job or creating a gap in employment, using colored paper, and choosing fancy or small fonts that make it difficult to read.

PROOFREADING

Before you send any written communication, you must proofread the writing. Never send written communication without proofreading…NEVER! It is good practice to set the written communication aside for a day or two before coming back to proofread it. Formatting, spelling, and grammar are all areas of proofreading.
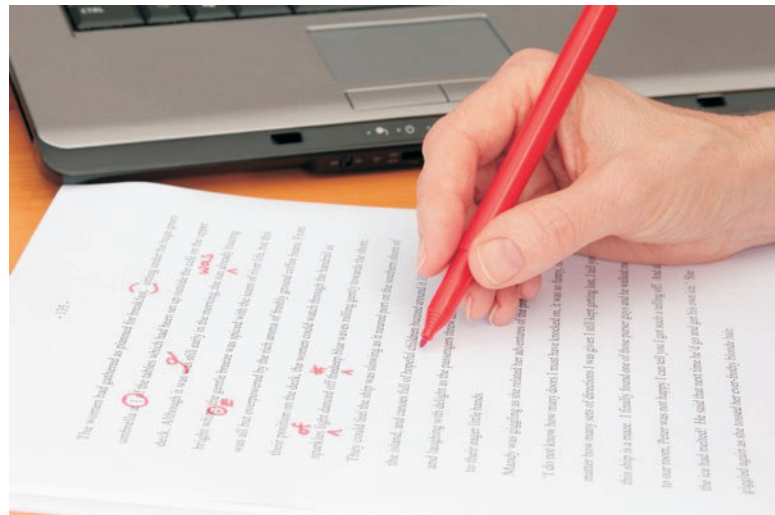

FIGURE 2. Proofreading.

Formatting

Formatting includes such things as page margins; spacing; alignment of headers, footers, and paragraphs; and font size and style. Traditional rules governing the formatting of some types of business communication have been presented in this E-unit. Conduct an online search of trustworthy sources for more information on formatting.

620004

Spelling and Grammar

Spelling and grammar are obvious areas of proofreading. A professional communication with spelling errors or grammatical errors sends the message that you do not care enough about the job to double-check your written communication. The employer will think, "If this person sent me communication with spelling and grammatical errors when applying for the job, then the person would probably keep making these

FIGURE 3. A dictionary can be used to help check for spelling errors.

errors as an employee." On the other hand, when you make a good impression with your written communication, the employer will think that you are a better candidate for the job. The same is true when sending an application to a college. If the application essay and materials you send are well written, the college is more likely to see you as an excellent prospective student.
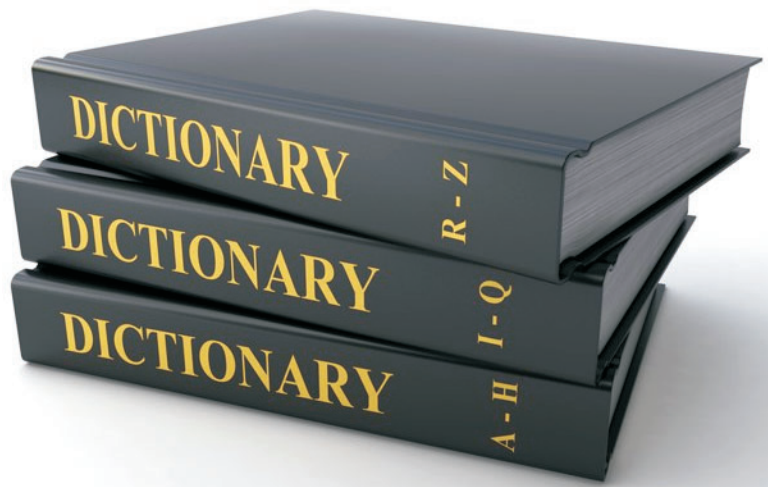
Summary:

Written communication is important in business and education. You will use it when applying for jobs or college. When you send written communication, it reflects your professionalism and abilities. Examples of written communication are e-mail, memorandums, business letters, personal business letters, cover letters, and résumés.

Good writing habits include keeping the communication short and to the point, addressing the communication to a specific person, and following traditional formatting rules.

Things to avoid are using slang or abbreviations, using fancy and different-sized fonts, and sending communication with misspellings or poor grammar. A best practice is to set the communication down for a day or two and then come back to proofread. Proofreading areas include checking page margins, spacing, alignment of headers, spelling, and grammar.

A well-written and -formatted communication leaves the best first impression.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. What are three types of written communication?

620004

2. What are differences between business letters and personal business letters?

3. What are two purposes of a cover letter?

4. What are three tips for better written communication?

5. What are three things to avoid in your written communication?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Search for a job in the paper. Write a cover letter that articulates the job for which you are applying, describes why you are a good candidate for the job, and requests an interview.

Web Links:

Business Letters
http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/business-letters/

The Proper Business Letter Format
http://sbinformation.about.com/od/bizlettersamples/a/letter-format.htm

Business Letter Writing Skills for Professionals
http://suite101.com/article/business-letter-writing-skills-for-professionals-a169503

620004