HANDBOOK FOR GOAL ORIENTED WRITING:
Common Usage and Style Problems

by

Charlene W. Martindale

Copyright © 1998 by
Charlene W. Martindale
College of Business
Idaho State University
Pocatello, Idaho 83209-8020
Preface

This handbook addresses usage errors and style problems commonly found in student writing. Based on many years of experience teaching Business Writing, the author treats the most frequently recurring errors and problems. The examples quoted are all taken from actual student and business writing. By covering the most common errors, this handbook ensures easy and efficient student use. However, it is not intended to substitute for more comprehensive works such as The Business Writer’s Handbook (5th Edition, 1997, St. Martin’s Press) or the Harbrace College Handbook (12th Edition, 1996, Harcourt Brace). Every student or business writer should own and use such a comprehensive handbook as well.

The author grants permission to use this handbook to educational non-profit institutions with appropriate notice of copyright. Individual faculty members may photocopy the handbook for distribution to their own students without requesting permission or paying fees.

The right to reproduce the handbook or any portion thereof commercially and all other rights, including the right to use the handbook in databases or printed or electronically produced media, in whole or in part, are reserved to the author alone. Copyright © 1998 by Charlene W. Martindale, College of Business, Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho 83209-8020.
GOAL ORIENTED WRITING:
Common Usage and Style Problems

Business writing is goal-oriented communication. Thus, each letter, memorandum, report, or even informal note seeks to achieve a specific objective: to inform, to convey bad news (tactfully), to persuade. Most business communication simply seeks to inform. Because of the cost (the writer’s time, the reader’s time, materials, etc.) messages must be clear and concise. Obviously, unclear communication can result in even greater costs in decision-making situations.

THE PROCESS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Writing any business communication requires a logical process be followed. The purpose of the communication must be clear in the writer’s mind; the intended audience must be identified and analyzed; and a disciplined approach to identifying, selecting, and organizing details to create the desired effect on the reader must be followed. Effective communication results from a repetitive process of writing, evaluating, and revising.

1. **Know the Purpose of the communication.**
   Knowing the purpose of the communication is key to success—it is the first step toward enabling the writer to communicate effectively what is intended. Thus, it directly affects both clarity and conciseness. The effective message includes only the information required to create the desired effect on the intended audience.

2. **Analyze the Audience**
   The meaning in any communication is that received by the reader. If that is not the same as the writer intends or thinks he or she sent, no communication exists. In real business situations communications that allow or require the audience to interpret or “read between the lines” or to complete sentence fragments can lead to disaster. Careful audience analysis enables the writer to provide clearly just the information the audience needs and wants. Once the writer defines the purpose and analyzes the audience’s needs, he or she can read the communication from the intended reader’s point of view and can easily say with certainty, “I am (or am not) informed, persuaded, etc.”

Every classroom assignment assumes an audience. For example in a case study assignment asking students to recommend action, the audience will usually be a person or group at some management level. In other assignments, the audience may not be so clearly defined. By discussing that audience and its needs with the professor and other students, the writer can gain skill in selecting and organizing only the needed information.

Throughout most students’ education, communication instructors encourage them to write “more,” to use more examples, and to describe in more detail. As a result some students may not understand we use different writing styles for different purposes. Effective business communication is as concise as possible without omitting any important information, and students are actually confused a bit to be told, “your writing is too wordy.” The first step to overcoming that confusion involves understanding the purpose and the audience for any written communication.
3. Use a Disciplined Approach
Good writing requires a disciplined approach. After defining the purpose and analyzing the audience, the writer is ready for the next planning and writing steps.

1. **Identify** all the details/facts that appear related to achieving the desired effect on the specific audience.

2. **Select** details/facts.
   - include all necessary details
   - consider including other desirable detail to improve the tone or effect of the message

3. **Organize** the details for the desired effect.
   - identify the main ideas
   - identify and organize supporting details logically under the main ideas
   - place the most important ideas in positions of emphasis (first or last)

Organizing the details for the desired effect is crucial to ensure ideas are developed completely and organized logically.

4. Then: write—evaluate—revise—revise again!
WRITING PROBLEMS AND ERRORS

Different types of written communication demand different writing styles: the complex descriptive detail that makes a Hemingway novel successful does not work in business writing which, as noted earlier, requires a clear and concise style. Effective business writing also must be free of English usage errors. A number of style problems and usage errors are common in student writing. Careful proofreading and revision can eliminate most of them.

STYLE PROBLEMS

This handbook divides style issues into wordiness and structure problems. The examples cited in these two sections illustrate ineffective style. Ineffective style, even if grammatically correct, results in poor or ambiguous communication. Wordiness problems include various constructions that use more words than necessary to express the writer’s intended meaning. These constructions waste time and money and may obscure intended meaning. Structure problems include basic sentence structures that often obscure meaning. Although the two issues are presented separately here, they frequently overlap: an awkwardly structured sentence is usually wordy. A writer who wants to be successful will strive to overcome wordiness and structure problems.

One of the most important points to remember is that you can improve almost any wordy, awkward sentence by identifying the actor and the action. Then you can construct a new, effective sentence that begins with the subject and uses a strong, active verb and clearly expresses the meaning you intend.

WORDINESS

Plain Wordy
Many ideas can be expressed better with fewer words. One important remedy is to use coordination and subordination effectively. Coordination means to connect equal words or ideas with words such as and or but. (Example: Fred graduated. Sam graduated. = Fred and Sam graduated.) Subordination means to connect words or ideas with words such as although or because. (Example: We were late. We missed our flight. = Because we were late, we missed our flight.) These strategies provide bonuses: first, the message is almost always more concise; and second, the connecting words emphasize the relationship between the ideas.

Change: The first thing that Olsen missed as a manager is that he needed to know what was going on in the important areas of getting the cable company started. These key areas are the installation of equipment, the communities’ responses, and the marketing of the start-up of the cable company.

To: First Olsen needed to know the status of getting the cable company started, equipment installation, communities’ responses, and marketing the start up.

Change: I appreciate the effort of the Quality Council members to obtain feedback on employees’ impressions of management commitment to our Continuous Improvement Process.
To: I appreciate your efforts to obtain employees’ impressions of management’s commitment to our Continuous Improvement Process.

Or: Thank you for obtaining employees’ impressions of management’s commitment to our Continuous Improvement Process.

Change: We will change the procedure Monday. We have found our previous procedure is too time consuming.

To: We will change the procedure Monday because it is too time consuming.

Or: Because our procedure is too time consuming, we will change it Monday.

**Indirect Sentence Structure**

English is a word order language, and we expect the subject to be first in a sentence. Indirect structures are wordy, do not begin with the subject (rather begin with *there are, there is, or it is*), and may result in inadvertent grammar errors.

Change: There is an industrial hot water heater that is presently not working.

To: An industrial hot water heater is not working.

Change: It is conceivable that we could be fined for each day of violation.

To: We could be fined for each day of violation.

**Note:** The pronoun *it* must be preceded by a noun from which it derives its meaning. In the original above, the beginning *it is* creates an error.

Change: I emphasize that there are only three variable frequency controllers that are planned for the upgrade.

To: Only three variable frequency controllers are planned for the upgrade.

Change: There is several questions that must be answered.

To: Several questions must be answered.

**Note:** Because we expect the subject to be first in the sentence, we can carelessly create grammar errors. In the example above, of course, the verb must agree in number with its subject, *questions*.

**Redundant**

Carelessly restating an idea or stating something obvious from context causes unwanted wordiness.

Change: I am writing this letter in response to your request for price information.

To: Following is the price information you requested.

**Note:** Your letter results from a person’s request. Restating the obvious wastes time and space. The appropriate positive response to a request for information is that information.
Repetitious
Careless repetition causes wordiness and often dullness. Also, since repetition is one way we emphasize an idea, careless repetition also results in unwanted emphasis.

Change: I would like to learn how to find information on the Internet so I can find information I need.

To: I would like to learn how to find information I need on the Internet.

STRUCTURE

Awkward
Sentences should be clear, concise, and easy to understand. Awkward structures often obscure the intended meaning.

Change: The discussion included the topic of what were our chances of winning.

To: We discussed our chances of winning.

Change: Concerns have been expressed by Bill Jones that we are wasting time.

To: Bill Jones thinks we are wasting time.

Change: The members of these boards are composed of senior executives from member organizations.

To: These boards comprise senior executives from member organizations.

Change: Policies were set by American Express itself as to service provided.

To: American Express set policy regarding service provided.

Or: American Express set service policy.

Choppy, Simple Sentences
Too many short, simple sentences make a reader feel as if he or she is traveling a very rough road. Although sentences should be as concise as possible, varied structure shows the relationship among ideas and maintains reader interest. Subordinating and coordinating logically related ideas eliminates choppy sentences and produces more concise writing.

Change: I first wanted to see what our turnover was compared to other companies. I looked at the following data.

To: Because I wanted to see how our turnover compared to rates of other companies, I looked at the following data.
Dangling Modifiers
Introductory phrases must clearly refer to the appropriate noun or pronoun.

Change: While eating lunch in the cafeteria, the computer malfunctioned.
To: While she was eating lunch in the cafeteria, the computer malfunctioned.

Change: The problem was eventually solved, working with them.
To: Working with them, we eventually solved the problem.

Change: To evaluate the feasibility of the project, the plan will be compared with the present system.
To: To evaluate the feasibility of the project, we will compare the plan with the present system.

Change: After finishing the research, the project made sense.
To: After finishing the research, we found the project made sense
Or: The project made sense after we finished the research.

Change: Being a poor speller, a spell-check is important to me.
To: Because I am a poor speller, a spell-check is important to me.

Change: To receive an A grade, class participation is mandatory.
To: To receive an A grade, you must participate in class discussion.

Fragment
A sentence must have a subject and a verb. A sentence fragment communicates nothing, and the reader must complete its meaning—which may differ from that intended by the writer. Although some argue that a sentence fragment can be used “for effect,” as a rule it is unacceptable for business communications.

Change: Not only at risk of losing business to large competitors.
To: The company is not only at risk of losing business to large competitors.

Misplaced Modifiers
Because English is a word-order language, a modifier should be as close as possible to the word it modifies. Misplaced modifiers (words, clauses, or phrases) can cause an amusing but often confusing effect.

Change: Periodically you should have someone check the pressure.
To: You should have someone periodically check the pressure.
Change: All computer people are not effective writers.
To: Not all computer people are effective writers.
Change: We sent the brochure to four local firms that had three-color illustrations.
To: We sent the brochure that had three-color illustrations to four local firms.
Change: We agreed on the next day to change the order.
To: On the next day we agreed to change the order.
Change: We have similar fabricating plants in other states that have land treatment systems that have none of the problems that have occurred here.
To: In other states we have similar fabricating plants that have land treatment systems that have none of the problems that have occurred here.

Parallel
Compound sentence parts must be presented in the same grammatical form. Also, items in a list must be presented in similar grammatical forms.

Change: I not only feel honored to have been asked to be a reference for Jim, but I am also proud to say he is my friend.
To: I not only feel honored to have been asked to be a reference for Jim, but I am proud to say he is my friend.
Change: This was a problem because Brown needed to have a better understanding of cable television and also would be better informed of the expectations upper management had of him.
To: Brown needed to have a better understanding of cable television and of upper management’s expectations.
Change: The following recommendations were made regarding the position statement:
1. Stress that this statement is for all departments.
2. Start the statement with “If the company continues to grow, the following steps must be taken.”
3. The statement should emphasize both department managers and staff.
To: They recommended the following regarding the position statement:
1. Stress that this statement is for all departments.
2. Start the statement with “If the company continues to grow, the following steps must be taken.”
3. **Emphasize** that this statement applies to both department managers and staff.
Change: We will incur a cost of $4,500 to relocate the stairway and enlarging offices 2 and 4.

To: We will incur a cost of $4,500 **to relocate** the stairway and **to enlarge** offices 2 and 4.

**Passive voice**
The active voice enhances conciseness and clarity and results in a more interesting and readable style. The effective sentence emphasizes a subject (actor) doing something (acting); this is also the basic English sentence. The passive sentence shifts the emphasis from the actor to the object of the action and may obscure intended meaning. It is wordy because it always uses some form of the verb **to be** in addition to the main verb and often an extra preposition to identify the doer of the action of the main verb. Two short sentences illustrate the difference between active and passive: “The boy hit the ball.” “The ball was hit by the boy.”

Change: It was reported by purchasing that the new regulations will go into effect next month.

To: Purchasing reported the new regulations will go into effect next month.

Or: The new regulations will go into effect next month.

Change: Hurrying to complete the assignment, the paper was not revised.

To: Hurrying to complete the paper, the student did not revise it.

**Tone**
All aspects of a business communication must work together to achieve the writer’s intended purpose. Because the tone of a communication affects the audience’s reaction, it is an important consideration in goal-oriented writing. Archaic phrases, “purple prose,” and overuse of abstractions inhibit rather than enhance communication. For all but the most formal situations, use a conversational tone (within reason, the tone you use in speaking). By choosing simple words and using personal pronouns as appropriate, you will create a clear and concise message that the readers will feel is meant specifically for them. You should reject words that **may** affect the reader negatively. (Examples: choose **crucial** instead of **critical**, **eager** instead of **anxious**, **concern** instead of **complaint**.) When you must communicate bad news, you should emphasize what you **can** or **will** do rather than what you **cannot** or **won’t** do.

Change: We have found that you did indeed return the goods as you alleged in your letter of complaint.

To: We agree you returned goods as you **indicated** in your letter of **concern**.

Change: If you pay the full amount, we will ship the orders we have been holding.

To: **When** we receive your payment, we will ship your orders.

Change: We won’t start repairing your car until we receive a deposit.
To: We will begin repairing your car when we receive a deposit.

**Transition**
Ideas should flow smoothly from sentence to sentence. The subordination and coordination that eliminate choppy sentences also improve transition. Words like therefore and pronouns are also important devices to show the relationship among ideas. Transition is an issue for the revision stage of the writing process, and effective transition “leads” the reader by showing how one idea relates to another.

Change: Patterns are represented graphically. Patterns are established concerning a particular characteristic.

To: Patterns are represented graphically. From these charts, patterns concerning a particular characteristic are established.

Change: Our insurance covers only our employees. We offer a detailed film of plant operations to groups like yours that request a tour.

To: Our insurance covers only our employees; therefore, we offer a detailed film of plant operations to groups like yours that request a tour.

**Vague “it”**
Like any other pronoun, it must be preceded by a noun from which it derives specific meaning. Without the noun, it has no meaning; and vague it constructions are usually wordy and may obscure intended meaning.

Change: It was a pleasure to speak with you by telephone.

To: I enjoyed speaking with you.

Change: But it should be noted that there is some risk associated with setting up a plant project.

To: But setting up a plant project involves some risk.

Change: I don’t feel it will do any good to start firing a bunch of people because that would only confirm that management was out to get the sales people.

To: Firing people would confirm management is out to get the sales people.

Change: At that time it appeared that there was no simple answer to our management problem.

To: No simple answer to our management problem seemed to exist.

Or: We could find no simple answer to our management problem.
Change: It is not financially feasible to implement a pay raise of that size.

To: Implementing such a pay raise is not financially feasible.

Or: We cannot implement such a pay raise.

**USAGE ERRORS**

English usage errors, including incorrect punctuation, are always unacceptable in business writing. Such errors suggest a lack of education and often obscure a writer’s intended meaning. This section addresses those errors that occur most frequently in student writing. However, every writer should consult a comprehensive handbook for complete coverage of usage issues.

In addition to commonly recognized grammatical errors such as subject-verb agreement, this section includes discussion of two punctuation marks, the **comma** and the **semicolon**, that must be used correctly. These punctuation marks are like signposts to the reader. When they are used incorrectly, the reader may receive a different message from that intended by the writer. Finally, the heading “Making sense (and nonsense)” introduces several real-life examples of writing that make no sense to the reader. The most effective way to identify and correct such expressions is to read aloud the writing in question. Then you can **hear** whether the message received by the reader is the one you intended.

**COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS**

**Gerund**
This verbal, ending in -ing, is used as a noun (a subject, a direct object, an object of a preposition, etc.). The possessive form of a noun or pronoun must precede the gerund.

Change: They must make up for the company not caring about them as people.

To: They must make up for the **company's** not caring about them as people.

Change: This would also increase the chances of them coming up with new ideas and even sharing existing ideas with the company.

To: This would also increase the chances of **their** coming up with new ideas and sharing existing ones with the company.

Change: The central problem with Sam increasing sales is the fact that management does not agree with his proposal.

To: The central problem with **Sam's** increasing sales is the fact that management does not agree with his proposal.

Change: Brenda gets answers such as them being hard workers and working well together.
To: Brenda hears about their being hard workers and working well together.

Change: The reason for Jurgen coming to St. Paul is to reduce costs.

To: The reason for Jurgen's coming to St. Paul is to reduce costs.

**Possessive Case**

Nouns that show possession must end with 's or s'. The possessive case of a pronoun never requires an apostrophe.

Change: She does not realize that because of the companies policy of low base salaries with bonuses salespeople are reluctant to share their strategies.

To: She does not realize that because of the company’s policy of low base salaries with bonuses salespeople are reluctant to share their strategies. (one company)

Or: She does not realize that because of the companies’ policy of low base salaries with bonuses salespeople are reluctant to share their strategies. [two or more companies]

Change: The investigator could tell her about the groups discovery.

To: The investigator could tell her about the group’s discovery.

Change: The plant managers responsibility is to strengthen the overall effort.

To: The plant manager’s responsibility is to strengthen the overall effort.

Change: It’s sales have dropped from 60 to 3 percent of market share.

To: Its sales have dropped from 60 to 3 percent of market share.

Change: The primary problem in this case is lack of a common goal between Hauser Food Company and it’s workers.

To: The primary problem in this case is lack of a common goal between Hauser Food Company and its workers.

**Note:** Clearly, correctly forming the possessive case of nouns leads to the preceding error although it’s should be easily recognized as the contraction for it is.

**Pronoun Agreement**

The noun to which a pronoun refers must be clear, and any pronoun must agree in number with the noun from which it derives its meaning.

Change: The company would become aware their compensation plan is deficient.

To: The company would become aware its compensation plan is deficient.
Change: Since their yearly bonuses were based on team performance measured against the sales plan, it decreased every time the sales plan increased.

To: Since their yearly bonuses . . . the sales plan, they decreased every time the sales plan increased.

Concerns about gender bias lead to incorrect use of the plural their to refer to a single noun that includes both sexes (student, teacher, etc.). He is traditional. He/She is cumbersome and awkward. A better solution is to avoid the problem by substituting an article or changing the noun from a singular to a plural form.

Change: Every student must turn in their [or his] assignment on time.

To: Every student must turn in the assignment on time.
Or: Students must turn in their assignments on time.

Relative Pronouns
These pronouns link dependent clauses to main clauses and substitute for a noun in the main clause; the relative pronoun must agree with the noun for which it substitutes. Who and whom always refer to people; that and which refer to things.

When to use that and which?
That introduces clauses essential to the meaning of the main clause (restrictive).
Which introduces dependent clauses that offer additional information, like an afterthought (nonrestrictive). Because clauses introduced by which are not essential to the basic meaning of the main clause, they are always set off by commas.

When to use who and whom?
Who introduces both restrictive and nonrestrictive dependent clauses; it always refers to people. Who is the subject of a verb; whom is the direct or indirect object or the object of a preposition.

Change: She is seen as a management outsider and not “one of them” by the sales people that she knows.

To: She is seen as a management outsider and not “one of them” by the sales people whom she knows.

Or: She is seen as an outsider and not “one of them” by the sales people.

Change: A person that Olsen had no great affection for in the first place supervised him.

To: A person for whom Olsen had no great affection in the first place supervised him.
(Note the proper location of the preposition for preceding whom.)

Change: The company fails to see how this affects the rapport between those in the field and who they must report to.
To: The company fails to see how this affects the rapport between those in the field and those to whom they must report.

Change: Most of the recent concern has been about the sales department, which is headed by the Director of Sales, who is over the Regional Sales Managers.

To: Most of the recent concern has been about the sales department, which is headed by the Director of Sales, who is over the Regional Sales Managers.

Change: In December, I discussed with you some of the items which we look at in trying to qualify a buyer.

To: In December, I discussed with you some of the items that we look at in trying to qualify a buyer.

Subjunctive
This mood in the be verb (to be) expresses something 1) contrary to fact, or 2) conditional, or 3) hypothetical, or 4) purely imaginative.

Change: If I was you, I would think about hiring an assistant.

To: If I were you, I would think about hiring an assistant.

Change: If their idea of targeting the older generation was known, the company as a whole could increase sales and profits.

To: If their idea of targeting the older generation were known, the company as a whole could increase sales and profits.

Change: Peter would have been more of an influence on the project if he would have been involved from the beginning.

To: Peter would have been more influential on the project if he had been involved from the beginning.

Verbs (subject-verb agreement)
Verbs must agree in number with the nouns or pronouns for which they express action.

Change: Concern about food additives and preservatives have increased price competition.

To: Concern about food additives and preservatives has increased price competition.

Or: Concerns about food additives and preservatives have increased price competition.

Change: They discuss ideas for selling all day; and then everyone, including Sam, go to dinner.
To: They discuss ideas for selling all day; and then everyone, including Sam, goes to dinner.

Or: They discuss ideas for selling all day, and then they all go to dinner.

Change: There is a couple of responses about benefits.

To: There are a couple of responses about benefits.

Or: A couple of responses address benefits.

Change: Conversation with local shippers reflect their feelings about the tax.

To: Conversation with local shippers reflects their feelings about the tax.

Or: Conversations with local shippers reflect their feelings about the tax.

**Verbs (inconsistent tense)**

Verb tense must be consistent throughout a document and also must be appropriate to the intended meaning.

Students’ case study write-ups often exhibit inconsistent verb tense problems. (Basically, present tense refers to now, future tense to tomorrow, and past tense to yesterday.) People are most comfortable writing in the present tense, yet the student preparing the study has already read the case and may try to refer to it in the past tense. The problem occurs when the writer inadvertently slips back to the comfortable present tense. The best way to avoid this problem is to view the case in the present tense: after all, it still exists right there on paper.

Change: Our farm customers have been busy planting their wheat and sugar beets. Then more rains arrived and slowed the work.

To: Our farm customers were busy planting their wheat and sugar. Then more rains arrived and slowed the work.

Or: Our farm customers were busy planting their wheat and sugar when more rain slowed the work.

**Amount/number**

Amount is used for a mass; number is used for something that can be counted.

Examples:

Ensuring compliance with EEO regulations requires an incredible amount of time.

The number of discrimination-based lawsuits has increased greatly since 1990.

Similarly, the word less refers to a mass or amount and fewer refers to discrete items that can be counted. Less is most often used incorrectly as a substitute for fewer.

Examples:
This box has less sand in it than that one. This solution requires less time than the other. This box has fewer marbles in it than that one. February has fewer days than March.

**Because/as**
Do not substitute as for because—it causes confusion. You may substitute for or since for because.

Change: She must earn Jay's trust and respect as the rest of the group looks up to him.

To: She must earn Jay's trust and respect **because** (or **since**) the rest of the group look up to him.

**Between/among**
Between is used to relate two items or persons; among is used to relate more than two.

Examples:
Studying the issue represents a compromise **between** ignoring it and implementing a change.

You can choose **among** three courses of action--studying the issue, ignoring it, or implementing a change.

**Like/as**
Like is a preposition; as is a conjunction. (Use **like** with a noun or pronoun that is not followed by a verb. Example: She worked **like** a slave to finish her paper.)

Change: The only way she can do this is to spend a lot of time with the Florida group to understand why they feel and operate **like** they do.

To: The only way she can do this is to spend a lot of time with the Florida group to understand why they feel and operate **as** they do.

Change: Brenda acted **like** promotion motivated her decision to accept the job.

To: Brenda acted **as though** promotion motivated her to accept the job.

**Neither/nor and either/or**
These connectives must be paired.

Change: He did not worry about marketing nor did he consider community response.

To: He **neither** worried about marketing **nor** considered community response.

Or: He did not worry about **either** marketing **or** community response.

**Your/you're**
You're is a contraction of you are.

Change: Any time your going to visit an operation, its manager will appreciate prior notice of your agenda.
To: Any time you're going to visit an operation, its manager will appreciate prior notice of your agenda.

**PUNCTUATION**

Commas and semicolons indicate the relationship among ideas; misuse confuses the reader. Their use is clearly explained in most language handbooks. The following examples of the most common misuses of punctuation illustrate the type of entries found in such reference books.

**Commas**

Separate introductory clauses and phrases from the main clause with a comma. No comma is used if the dependent structure follows the main clause.

Example:

Because Jay is looking out for them, they feel he is the boss.
They feel Jay is the boss because he is looking out for them.

Separate non-essential elements from the main clause with commas.

Change: Hauser Food Products the largest producer of baby food in the country is in the mature stage of the product life cycle.

To: Hauser Food Products, the largest producer of baby food in the country, is in the mature stage of the product life cycle.

Separate two independent clauses that are connected by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor) but do not contain other commas.

Example:

The product line is mature, and the top brass is trying to diversify.

Most writers use far too many commas; and the old adage, "when in doubt, leave it out," makes some sense.

A comma should never be used to separate compound parts of a clause (although items in a series are separated with commas).

Change: This would give her the opportunity to build trust with the salespeople, and show her marketing and sales expertise

To: This would give her the opportunity to build trust with the sales people and show her marketing and sales expertise.

**Note:** The comma separates to from show although the sense is to build and to show.

Change: The team feels he protects them from the company, by making sure they get their bonuses.
To: The Team feels he protects them from the company by making sure they get their bonuses.

Change: Cooper believes there must be a better way to sell the products, and wants the people in the field to help him develop it.

To: Cooper believes there must be a better way to sell the products and wants the people in the field to help him develop it.

Note: The comma separates the subject from the second half of the compound verb: Cooper believes . . . and wants . . .

Change: They tend to give general answers, and not the real reason.

To: They tend to give general answers and not the real reason.

Semicolon
The semicolon signals major change, and its uses are specific.

Compound sentence with no connecting word
Research indicates we need change; we are going to develop R&D capability. (The writer chooses the semicolon rather than a period to indicate a very close relationship, perhaps cause/effect between the two ideas.)

Compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor) when either clause contains a comma.
Although the company remains profitable, research indicates we need change; and we are going to develop R&D capability.

Note: The compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction and no internal punctuation is separated by only a comma: "Research indicates we need change, and we are going to develop R&D capability."

Compound sentence with a conjunctive adverb (therefore, however, moreover, etc.).
Research indicates we need change; therefore, we are going to develop R&D capability.

Items in a series if one (or more) contains internal commas.
. . . the marketing report; the progress report, with appropriate supportive data; and the investigative report . . .

MAKING SENSE AND NONSENSE
The meaning received by the reader must be that intended by the writer, and the ideas must be expressed clearly and concisely. The following examples illustrate how not to write. They transmit no meaning, unintended meaning, or confused meaning.

Same problems as above. (fragment)

Then share their information, pool it, and come up with some new strategies. (fragment)
Such as concern about food additives, preservatives, and the competition has increased competing on the basis of price. (no sense at all)

Show the employees that is worth their time and effort to explore new markets. (really confusing fragment)

A percentage of the profit for the salesperson based on yearly profit for the implemented idea. (fragment)

The feeling of the older high school educated vs the college educated people is something that the company will just have to work through by involving the regions in goal setting and then holding them to it will hopefully provide a chance for these people to put aside this feeling to make their goals. (no sense)

I can only apologize, and assure that reviews have been done, and another family does not perceive measures taken to make your perceptions. (no sense)

Lack of creativity and new ideas for selling the products were not being expressed by the sales teams for different reasons. (confused and confusing)

In the past workers expressed that if they do not open up and sales increase then the plans for the following year show an increase as well. (not clear)

With the market changing so quickly, the input of the people on the front line is critical and they just might have the ideas to further the market share, which in this case they have shown a whole other market segment with is using the product where the lid should be kept on this. (no sense)

It seems to interfere and detract the salesman from his normal duties. (word choice: distract)

This situation wouldn't provoke a pressure situation to overlook the real problem, but it would overlook profits for that period of time. (no sense)

Lastly the person could have been better if they were trying to get Olafson to became a better general manager. (substandard usage, meaning not clear)

Once Jurgens was in contact with Olafson he immediately began to question him down on issues up to that point had never been brought up to him prior to this point. (no sense)

Beverly Hills should inform new managers of issues that need to be cleared and discussed with home base and receive clearance such as salary increases. (misplaced modifiers obscure intended meaning)

In Knowles reason for firing Olafson was that he could not control constructions costs. (no sense)

Upon Chuck's interaction with the St. Paul system, Peter was unclear of what his new position was. (no sense)

Knowles' claim that he could not get Olafson to concentrate on details was simply a stately excuse. (stately?) (unintended meaning)
Commonly Misspelled and Misused Words

Professors Bill Stratton and Jim Jolly, and former Professor Tom Steele encountered the following list of errors in students' writing and created "user friendly" corrections.

Advice-- noun--an opinion or guidance offered (He gave advice.)
Advise-- verb--to offer counsel or advice (I advise you to move quickly.)

Affect-- verb--to influence (The loss of my dog affected me deeply.)
Effect-- almost always a noun--impact (What will be the effect of the budget reduction?)
-- occasionally a verb—cause, bring about, or execute (The new chief will effect some changes.)

Allot-- to distribute or apportion (They will allot one vote to each person.)
A lot-- meaning a whole bunch (Rambo has a lot of muscles.)
Alot-- no such word

All right-- not alright
Always-- not allways
Among-- not amoung

Analyze-- not analyse (which is the British spelling)

Anyway-- nevertheless, anyhow (You must finish the job anyway.)
Any way--one or some path or route (Add the ingredients any way you want.)

Capitol-- the building in which a legislature assembles (The capitol is in Boise.)
Capital-- a city that is a seat of government (Boise is the capital of Idaho.)
-- wealth in money or property (The firm had a capital of $2,000,000.)
-- first or foremost (as in a capital letter or capital idea or capital city)

Catalog or catalogue--not catelog(ue)

Category--not categrogy

Choose-- to make a selection (Everyone must choose a color.)
Choose-- past tense of choose (She chose red.)
Chosen-- adjective (a chosen people), past participle of the verb choose (I have chosen to participate.)
Choosen-- no such word

Company's-- singular possessive (The company's work force is strong.)
Companies-- plural of company (I have worked for three companies.)
Companies'-- plural possessive (The companies' CEOs met with the President.)
Convenience-- not convience, convienence, or any other corruption

Council-- an assembly of persons (The City Council meets on Tuesdays.)
Counsel-- the act of giving advice or the advice itself (Counsel him about tardiness. Give me your counsel)

Definitely-- not definately
Desirable-- not desireable
Develop-- not develope

Elicit-- to bring out or draw forth (He tried to elicit a response.)
Illicit-- against the law or not permitted (They were illicit drugs.)

Explanation-- not explanation

Immigrate-- to enter and settle permanently in a foreign country (Pilgrims immigrated to Plymouth.)
Emigrate-- to leave one country or region to settle in another (They emigrated from England.)

Imminent-- about to occur, impending (The storm was imminent.)
Eminent-- prominent, standing out (Lincoln was an eminent President.)

Irrespective or regardless-- not irregardless; there is no such word.

It’s-- contraction of it is (It's in the bag.)
Its-- possessive (The cat was in its box.)

Likelihood-- not liklihood

Loose-- not fastened or restrained (My button is loose.)
Lose-- to suffer loss, to be unable to find; mislay (I hope I don't lose my button.)

Loyalty-- not loyalty

Morale-- noun--state of spirits of a person or group (Morale in the unit was high.)
Moral-- adjective--ethical, righteous (She was a moral person.)

Of course-- not of coarse (Coarse means rough, harsh, or crude.)

Orient-- not orientate--verb meaning to make familiar or become acquainted with a situation

Perceive, receive, deceive, etc.--remember the rule, "i before e except after c."
Contrast: achieve, in which i does not follow c.

Personal-- pertaining to a particular person (He tended to his personal affairs.)
Personnel-- the folks who work someplace (not personal or personell)
Principal-- first in rank, authority, degree, etc. (He clarified his principal point.)
Principle-- a basic truth, law or assumption (He based his argument on principle.)
Proceed-- not proce--to go forward (He proceeded along the path.)
Precede-- not preceed--to come before in time or order (Latin preceded French.)
Questionnaire--two n's, one r, and an e on the end
Rapport-- not repore, rapore
Recur, recurring--not reoccur, reoccuring
Regardless-- not reguardless or irregardless
Respondent, apparent, consistent, dependent, etc.-- not respondant, etc.
Revert to-- not revert back to (which is redundant)
Sales-- noun--volume of that which was sold (Sales were $6MM last month.)
Sells-- verb--to exchange for money (He sells cars for General Motors.)
Separate-- not seperate--remember, "There's a rat in separate."
Sight-- something that is seen (You are a sight for sore eyes.)
Site-- a place or location (Gettysburg is a Civil War site.)
Cite-- to quote as an authority or example (Always cite your references.)
Sophomore-- not sophmore
Supposed to, accustomed to, used to-- not "He was suppose to go," not "They were accustom to the climate.” not "They were use to being first." (Used to is an English idiom meaning accustomed to.)
Their-- possessive, third person plural pronoun (Their house is on 6th street.)
There-- adverb--meaning at or in that place (The car is over there.)
They're-- contraction of they are (They're not going to the game.)
Don't confuse these three. (They're in their car over there.)
Then-- at that time (I did it then.)
Than-- conjunction--introduces the second element of a comparison of inequality (I am taller than Bill.)
To-- in the direction of (He went to the library.)
Two-- the number following one and preceding three (He checked out two books)
Too-- adverb--meaning also, more than enough (The test was too hard.)
Undoubtedly-- not undoubtably
**Unique** -- one of a kind; an "absolute" term without qualification or degree. Hence, one cannot correctly say or write "more unique," "very unique."

**Whether** -- conjunction--if it is so that, whatever is the case, either (Do you know whether class will be cancelled? They are growing older whether they like it or not. She passed the examination, whether by knowledge or chance.

**Weather** -- the state of the atmosphere (The weather is fair and sunny.)

**You're** -- contraction of you are (You're invited to a party.)

**Your** -- possessive pronoun--belonging to you (That is your car.)

**Yore** -- time long past (That's what was done in days of yore.)