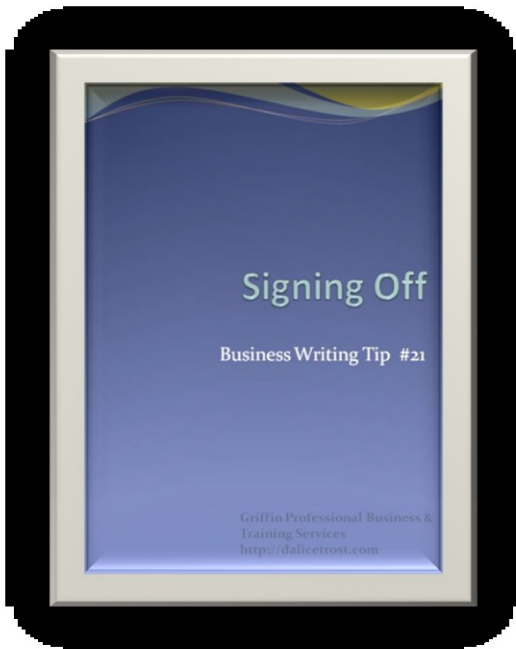


# Getting to Grips with Business Writing

## Business Writing Tips #21 - #25



### Tip #21

### Signing Off

How you sign off depends on whether you are writing a letter or an email, and whether you know the person's name or not.

When you don't know the name of the person (Dear Sir/Madam)	UK English: Yours faithfully US English: Sincerely, Yours truly or Best regards
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When you know their name (Dear Ms Jones)	Yours sincerely
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Other closings that are generally accepted in modern business correspondence, closings that I think are most appropriate for emails, include:

- Best regards
- Best wishes
- Kind regards
- Many thanks
- Respectfully yours
- Warm regards

With business correspondence, even if you know the person well, it is best to use a professional sign off like "regards" rather than sending hugs and kisses to the recipient. There are, of course, many less formal sign offs. I suggest you check your organisation's guidelines before using these:

Informal sign-offs are best kept for friends.

- Be good
- Be well
- Cheerio
- Cheers
- I'm out

- More to come
- Smiles
- Ta ta for now
- Take care
- Take it easy
- Until next time

While you may think that your correspondence is private, the truth is that many business emails end up in the public domain. Always remember that you are representing your organisation.

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### Tip #22

#### Be active, not passive

Whenever you can use the active voice rather than the passive. The sentence structure – subject, verb, object – is much more familiar to people and they can read it quickly.

In the active voice the subject performs the action.

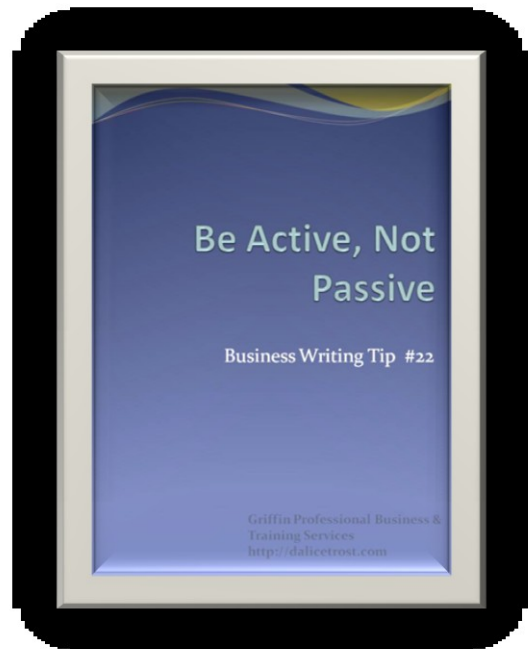
Compare, 'The dog bit me', and, 'I was bitten by the dog'. Both sentences mean essentially the same thing. My leg still hurts. But the emphasis is slightly different.

In the first example the dog bit me. It wasn't a cat or a tiger, or even a mouse. It was the dog. The dog, the subject of the sentence, is doing the action.

In the second example sentence I was bitten by the dog. It was I who was bitten. Not my friend, my sister, the cat... The emphasis is on the subject of the sentence, 'I'.

**Both the active and passive voices have their place in good, clear business writing.**

The passive voice is often used when the writer/speaker doesn't want to say who was responsible. Think of politicians stating, 'Mistakes were made'. The passive version saying who was responsible sounds clumsy. 'Mistakes were made by this government.' 'We made mistakes' is much cleaner, easier to understand.



So write, “Barbara chaired the meeting” rather than, “The meeting was chaired by Barbara”.

If you use the passive voice, make sure you know why you are using it. Use it carefully and deliberately.

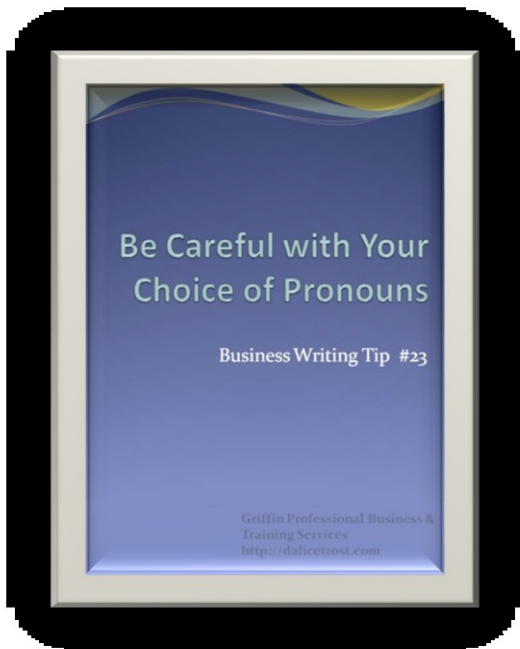
‘The economy was a mess. We’re going to fix it.’ The implication is someone else messed up the economy. The speaker is distancing themselves from the mess and identifying themselves with fixing it.

This is quite different from, ‘We messed up the economy. We’re going to fix it.’

So, in summary, there are two main things to consider when deciding which voice to use.

1. Most readers find the active voice easier to read and understand
2. Think about what you want to emphasise and whether you want to identify who or what is responsible

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### Tip #23

#### Be Careful with Your Choice of Pronouns

Pronouns seem to confuse people but they’re really not difficult. The form of the pronoun that you need to use depends on whether it is a subject or object in the sentence.

If it’s a subject, it performs the action. Use *I, he, she, the, we, who*.

If it’s an object, it receives the action. Use *me, him, her, them, us, whom*

Not really so confusing, is it?

#### Examples

Here’s an example with an incorrect sentence, and a way to work out if it’s incorrect or not, and how to fix it by stating the unstated verb.

Jacob is older than *her*.

To work out if it’s correct, put in the verb that is understood, not stated.

Jacob is older than *she* is.

So the correct pronoun is *she*.

Jacob is older than *she*.

Another example showing where the confusion comes from having a list of nouns:

The competition judges awarded certificates to Carol, Ziad and *myself*.

To work out the correct pronoun, just remove the others from the list.

The competition judges awarded certificates to *myself*.

Wrong. You wouldn't say that, would you? You would say, 'They awarded certificates to me.'

The correct sentence is:

The competition judges awarded certificates to Carol, Ziad and me.

This second error, using *myself* incorrectly, is very common. I see it just about every day, and hear it more often. To make sure you're not making the error, just take the others from the list.

If you've written, 'Please copy it to John and myself', think about how you would say it if you took John out. "Please copy it to me." Put John back in and it's still "me".

Writing well is not just something that you do for pure delight. You may, in fact, hate writing. But your business writing is a reflection of your organisation and its brand. Potential customers will judge your organisation on the messages they receive. If they are full of poor grammar, typing errors and spelling mistakes, your potential customers may think that your work is shoddy, not up to par. Pronouns may seem like small things, but it's important to get them right.

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### Tip #24

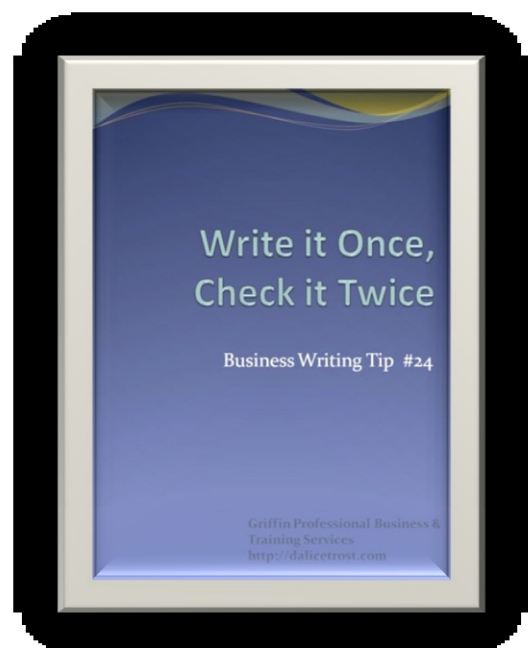
#### Write it Once, Check it Twice

Do you remember the Christmas song *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. When I was writing this post, a couple of lines of this song sprang into my mind:

***He's making a list***

***And checking it twice***

I suggest you take a lesson from Santa. When it's important to get things right, checking it twice really helps.



Our brains work faster than our fingers. This means that we think more quickly than we can write, or type.

The result is that sometimes we miss out words. As our fingers rush across the keyboard, or push our pen across our notepad, words rush out, while other words rush into our brains.

What can we do? Of course we don't want to think slowly. I mean, have you ever tried to slow down your thinking? Your brain naturally resists that.

Simple solution. Check your work once you've finished.

Check for missed words. Check for typing mistakes. Check for grammatical errors. Check your logic (your brain doesn't always put things in the right order).

Then check it again.

Remember though, something strange can happen when we check our own work. Our brains think they're being very clever. They fill in the gaps. Even if we've left something out, our brain knows it was meant to be there. So we 'see' what should be there, rather than what is.

The second thing that happens is our brains like to get on with things. I figure they're not too keen on going back over things we've done. So the first time you check something you might even be thinking about the next item on your 'to-do' list.

If it's an especially important piece of writing – your division's contribution to the annual report, a grant submission, a press release, etc. – try and leave it for a few hours before you do your final check. And get someone else to check it as well.

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### Tip #25

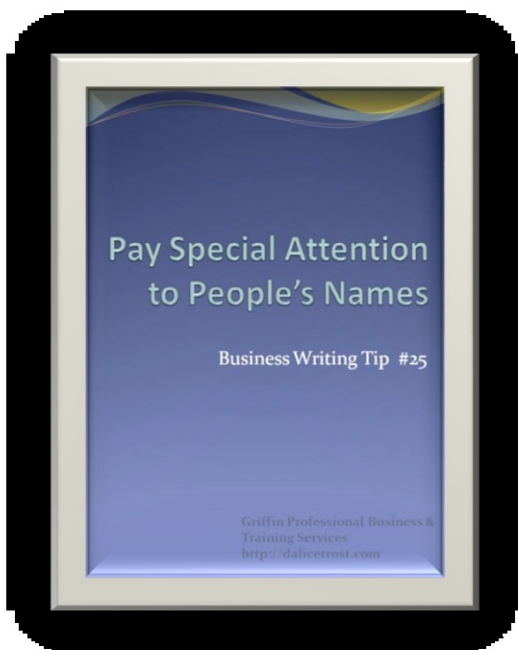
#### **Pay Special Attention to People's Names**

**A person's name is the most important word in their personal dictionary.**

Getting it wrong gives the impression of carelessness, and if you're careless about names, what else might you be careless about?

Think of this. You're in a crowded room – it's a party, or a networking function. You're standing with some people talking. Then, from somewhere across the room, you hear your name. There might be all kinds of other noises around – people talking, music – but still, when someone says your

name, you hear it.



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We are tuned in to hearing our own names. In 2006 Carmody and Lewis reported on an experiment they had done. Their findings provided 'evidence that hearing one's own name has unique brain functioning activation specific to one's own name in relation to the names of others'.

Spelling a name incorrectly is not a minor error. It is an error that everyone will notice if it's their name that's misspelt. And once someone finds an error, subconsciously they're on the lookout for more. It damages the credibility of what you have written; it damages your credibility; and by extension it damages the credibility of the organisation you are writing for.

So take extra care with people's names.

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## Getting to Grips with Business Writing

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### About the Author



Dalice Trost is a freelance B2B copywriter, TEFL teacher and corporate training provider. She works with companies and individuals to ensure that they are communicating effectively in English. Her extensive network of experienced, proven international trainers in all aspects of business differentiates her from the crowd of corporate training providers. Visit her website at <http://dalicetrost.com> for details of the corporate training and business services she offers through her Prague based company, Griffin Professional Business & Training Services.

Dalice has worked in both the public and private sectors in Australia and the UAE, and is now enjoying European life in the Czech Republic. She spent more than 10 years working for a major B2B conference and training provider developing conference and training programs in just about all aspects of business. Her first Kindle ebook, *A Busy Person's Guide to Networking*, is available from Amazon. Follow @dalicejt on Twitter.

For more Business Writing Tips visit Dalice's blog at:

<http://dalicetrost.com/blog>