

# ENGLISH FOR REAL ESTATE

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UPSELL YOURSELF

# FOREWORD

By Justin Boland, *Engel & Völkers Marbella*

For the past 27 years, I have been working in Real Estate in the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe, and Spain. My current role as sales director at Engel & Völkers, one of the world's leading Real Estate companies, also involves mentoring trainees. That's how Loes and I met. As a teacher, she prepares real estate students for the workplace by training them in effective communication in English. Interacting with these outstanding Belgian interns has inspired me to contribute to this book. After all, their already-acquired knowledge of language and communication skills allows me to focus on teaching them the tricks of the trade and passing on my own experiences and perspectives.

Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to reside and work in many countries, including Bulgaria, Ireland, Israel, the United Kingdom, and, most recently, Spain. English has proven to be unquestionably the most popular and crucial language in international real estate. I can say this with confidence because, for instance, some of the people I employ here in Spain may not speak Spanish fluently, yet they excel as industry leaders thanks to their English proficiency.

From an early age, I faced the challenge of dyslexia, which led me to rely heavily on verbal communication and active listening. As it turns out, I discovered that this is also the key to my success in real estate. My ability to listen, understand, show genuine empathy, and instill confidence helps me to expertly assist my clients through a sometimes emotional, yet critical, and rather difficult process. In other words, at each step of my journey, success was contingent on my ability to connect and say the right words.

I believe that there is great value in investing time and effort in learning effective communication, particularly in the context of global real estate. As such, this book will help any real estate professional who wants to start learning about professional and effective client communication in English.

Good luck on your journey towards professional growth and success!

Yours sincerely,

Justin Boland



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

‘If you are reading this, it is because you are looking for ways to be (more) successful in real estate. This book is the best gift you can give yourself today since you will be investing in your service and yourself, which is the best way to make money. So, if you want to reel in those international clients, choose to learn English for Real Estate.’

The book is divided into two parts: written tasks and oral tasks. In addition, the online materials included with this book contain answer keys, glossaries, and interesting media for every chapter, as well as additional chapters on grammar and pronunciation. You can download the online materials by scanning the following QR code.



These two icons indicate whenever it is useful to have a look at the online materials:

-  access the answer key in the online materials
-  access the content in the online materials

Throughout the book, you will find additional QR codes that lead to webpages, videos, and audio files needed to complete the exercises. Simply scan them with your smartphone to access this online content.

These two acronyms refer to the difference between British and American English:

UK    British English  
US    American English

Before you start with your first task, it is important to point out that even if you are a smooth talker, your message may be lost if you struggle with clear pronunciation or correct language. You can practise both using the online learning materials, as they are crucial for effective communication.

If you have any comments on *English for Real Estate*, please get in touch via [nina@owlpress.be](mailto:nina@owlpress.be)

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**PART 1**

**WRITTEN  
TASKS**

# 1

## WRITING BUSINESS TEXTS

You will learn how to write texts in business English, more specifically how to:

- apply a formal register
- use logos, ethos and pathos
- apply a conversational human voice
- adopt a client-centric communication style
- write positive, mixed, and bad-news messages.

## 1.1 LEAD-IN: THE SECRETS TO BUSINESS WRITING



First read the summary below and then scan the QR code to watch 'The Secret to Business Writing'. Complete the summary with words from the video.



### Do's ✓

1. connect to your \_\_\_\_\_ and draw them into your message
2. in business writing the name of the game is \_\_\_\_\_
3. answer the 5Ws and H: \_\_\_\_\_
4. identify your \_\_\_\_\_: jot down two or three key points before you start writing
5. emphasise your key points up front in your \_\_\_\_\_
6. use the \_\_\_\_\_ voice: subject + verb (no: to be's)
7. format matters: use \_\_\_\_\_
8. check for \_\_\_\_\_ as they show that you are competent and trustworthy
9. let someone else \_\_\_\_\_ your work

### Don'ts ✗

1. use \_\_\_\_\_ or initialisms, like COO or CRE, as clients might not understand these
2. avoid \_\_\_\_\_ language such as *maybe*, *think*, *seems like*: be confident



### Real estate acronyms explained:

- COO = certificate of occupancy
- CRE = commercial real estate

On the video Evelyn also mentioned that in order to write persuasive arguments the writer needs to use **logos**, **ethos**, and **pathos**:

- logos is an appeal to facts or knowledge
- ethos is an appeal to the authority, character, or reputation of the speaker
- pathos is an appeal to humanity or emotion.

For example, when you need to persuade a lead to work with your real estate agency, your argument could be:

‘With a 20-year track record in real estate (*ethos*) my clients are my top priority. If you read the online testimonials (*ethos*), you’ll see that 98% of our clients would recommend working with our agency (*logos*). I sell seven out of ten properties within three weeks and more than 50% were sold over the asking price (*logos*). If you want to sell your property with ease and minimum fuss, we can arrange an appointment any day of the week (*pathos*).’

Logically, this means that whenever your audience is more involved, you need to use more logos and ethos in your messages to convince them. Whenever your audience is less involved, for instance in social media marketing, you’ll need to appeal more to people’s emotions, or pathos.

## 1.2 CLIENT-CENTRIC COMMUNICATION

The ultimate secret to business writing is to write as client-centrally as possible, but what is that exactly?

A checklist for client-centric communication:

- short sentences
- split sentences
- linking words
- active voice
- simple sentence structure
- easy vocabulary
- avoid figurative speech, idioms, lingo, abbreviations, and acronyms
- positive and confident language
- ‘I (strongly) advise you to ..., so that you avoid ...’

- follow a 4-point plan: introduction, body, conclusion, and closing
- bullet points, headers, weblinks, and attachments
- formal register
- apply a hint of a conversational human voice: I, you/your, reader’s (sur)name
- correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.



Correct grammar often starts with the correct use of the English tenses. Many learners of English find this the most challenging aspect of grammar. Please check the online chapter ‘Correct grammar matters’ to discover the logic behind the formation of the tenses and a one-page summary that will blow your mind. The tenses have never been so clearly visualised!

### 1.2.1 STICK TO SHORT SENTENCES

Although many people feel that ‘good’ writing involves long sentences, you should strive to **compose short sentences** rather than lengthy ones. Short sentences are favoured because they are straightforward, clear, and concise. Next, linking words can be used to connect these brief statements. Long or run-on sentences, on the other hand, hinder reading and may make your text hard to understand.

*Original:* Essentially, sustainable development means maintaining development over time, but by the early 1990s, more than 70 concepts of sustainable development were in use; concepts that are significant, notwithstanding their number, because they serve as the foundation of how sustainable development can be achieved in the future.

Having a hard time reading and understanding this text? That’s hardly surprising given that there are several issues with it. Here is a rewritten version of that same text which shows you how you can stick to short sentences.

*Better:* Essentially, sustainable development means maintaining development over time. (1) **However** (2), by the early 1990s, more than 70 definitions of sustainable development were in use. (1) **Despite** their number (2), these definitions are vital because they are the foundation for achieving (3) future sustainable developments. (4)

How to stick to short sentences:

1. **split sentences** using a full stop or a semi-colon (;)
2. use **linking words**
3. use the **active voice** (instead of the **passive voice**)
4. **rearrange** and rewrite overly complex structures

## 1.2.2 SMART WORD CHOICE

Again, the aim is to be as clear and straightforward as possible, so stick to **plain English**: easy words and expressions that everyone understands. When writing to clients, avoid not only figurative language and idioms, but also typical real estate lingo, acronyms, and abbreviations. However, should you have to use the latter, always ensure that you also explain the real estate concept in plain English.

Another strategy involves using **positive language**. ‘Call me today to arrange a visit tonight’ is better than ‘If you don’t call me today, you won’t be able to visit the house tonight.’

Moreover, I am confident that you are aware that it’s better not to sound authoritative or dominant. ‘You must make an offer today or you’ll miss out on your dream home’ is not the way to go. Instead, use the golden combination of ‘I **(strongly) advise you** to make your offer, **so that you avoid** missing out on your dream home.’

My final piece of advice is to **sound confident** in your writing, so avoid words and phrases like ‘I think’, ‘perhaps’, ‘maybe’, ‘it seems like’, and so on. To be professional, you must sound accurate and know what you are writing about. For example, ‘I think you can extend the kitchen’ or ‘It seems like that might be a load-bearing wall’ shows you did not do your research adequately.

## 1.2.3 TEXT STRUCTURE

Always follow a 4-point plan:

1. **introduction**: start with your introduction and state why you are writing this message
2. **body**: give some details about your message
3. **conclusion**: outline the action(s) your reader must take and clearly state what you expect from your reader
4. **closing**: close politely by inserting a goodwill (i.e. the final positive concluding line you write just before the formal sign-off), your formal sign-off, and signature

Other ways to structure your text are to use **bullet points** for enumerations, **headers** for long texts, **linking words**, **weblinks** to longer instructions, and **attachments** with more detailed information. The key is not to cramp everything in your email or letter.

## 1.2.4 FORMAL REGISTER

Let’s get rid of extremes in your communication style. While older professionals can be quite distant in their communication style and perhaps sometimes a bit old-fashioned, millennials and younger generations often find it quite difficult to be formal and professional in their communication. Examples of extremes in communication styles:

- familiar register vs ceremonial register
  - hi, hello, hey, lack of grammar, spelling, punctuation vs overly descriptive sentences, too many adjectives, archaic word choice, complex sentence structures
- limited vocabulary range vs more difficult and old-fashioned vocabulary
  - be, get, make, go, know vs thrice, revert, as per, deem, hereby, herewith

Instead, use a **formal register** with a hint of a **conversational human voice**: try to uphold a natural, personal, and engaging communication style between you and your audience, while maintaining correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and business vocabulary. This does not mean that you – especially younger generations – can write an email, letter, report, memo, and so on, in the same fashion as you would send texts to family, friends, or children.

Tips for a hint of a conversational human voice:

1. keep in mind that the reader is communicating with you, so stick to ‘I’ as much as possible; avoid ‘we’ and other plural forms
2. address the reader by his/her **surname** in any first communication, for instance ‘Dear Mr Dhondt’; later if the reader continues on a first-name basis you can adopt this and change your salutation to, say, ‘Dear John’
3. use ‘you’ or ‘your’ in your text when referring to the reader

The next subsections cover four characteristics of formal language that you can adopt when writing business texts:

1. **linking words** to write cohesive texts
2. **relative clauses** to write concise texts
3. **active voice** to write simple texts
4. **spelling and punctuation** to write correct texts

### 1.2.4.1 LINKING WORDS

The use of **linking words** is a hallmark of formal language. You must utilise powerful transitions in your writing if you want to be able to guide your reader in the direction you intend. For instance, you might wish to compare and contrast, show purpose or addition. Linking words, also known as connectives, join two clauses together (= **conjunctions**) or start new sentences that elaborate on earlier statements (= **sentence connectors**). Sentence connectors are frequently introduced at the start of a sentence, followed by a comma.



The most widely used linking words are ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘because’, ‘so’. However, there are many alternative, more formal, linking words to use when writing business texts. If you want to sound professional, it is advisable not to start formal sentences with these four common linking words.

Here is an overview of frequently used linking words.

- Make sure to pay close attention to the comma usage in each example sentence.
- If there is no example sentence provided, you can put the linking word in the previous example sentence as these linking words are used in the same way.

**1. Addition: you warn your reader that there are more ideas to come.**

#### Conjunctions

- not only ... , but also ...  
*The boy **not only** laughed, **but also** jumped out. (= this and that)*
- as well as  
*The boy was laughing **as well as** jumping out. (= and)*
- and ... too  
*The boy laughed cheerfully **and** jumped out **too**. (= and)*
- and  
*The boy laughed cheerfully **and** jumped out.*

#### Sentence connectors

- In addition,  
***In addition**, you may want to take your medication more regularly. (= and)*
- Additionally,
- Furthermore,
- Moreover,
- Next,
- Also,
- Further,
- Besides,
- What’s more,

- Again, (= meaning: you say it once more)
- After all,  
*You need to take your medication more regularly, after all.*
- Above all,  
*Above all, you need to take your medication more regularly.*
- ... too.  
*You need to take your medication too.*
- ... as well.

**2. Contrast: you tell your reader to watch out because we are doubling back and will now compare idea A to idea B.**

#### Conjunctions

- but/, yet  
*I like going to the gym, yet I resent the drive home afterwards.*
- although/though/even though  
*Although I like to go to the gym, I resent the drive home afterwards.*
- while/whereas  
*While I like going to the gym, I resent the drive home afterwards.*
- nonetheless  
*I resent the drive home afterwards but I still go to the gym nonetheless.*
- in spite of the fact that/despite the fact that + full sentence  
*Despite the fact that I like going to the gym, I resent the drive home afterwards.*
- despite + noun/ING-form  
*Despite liking going to the gym, I resent the drive home afterwards.*
- in spite of + noun/ING-form  
*In spite of her love for the gym, she resents the drive home afterwards.*
- even if  
*Even if I like going to the gym, I resent the drive home afterwards.  
(= whether or not)*
- instead of + noun/ING-form  
*Instead of improving, Lila got steadily worse.*
- ... instead./... alternatively.  
*Since the airfare for Paris is quite high this winter, we could go to Berlin instead. (= meaning: another option)*

- On the one hand ... , on the other hand ...  
*On the one hand Lila is steadily getting worse, and on the other hand she looks better.*
- In theory, ... , but in practice/reality, ...  
*In theory, Lila should be getting worse, but in reality, she is improving.*

#### Sentence connectors

- However,/Nevertheless,/In contrast,/On the contrary,  
*I like going to the gym. However, I resent the drive home afterwards.*
- ..., though.  
*I like going to the gym. I resent the drive home afterwards, though.*
- Nonetheless,  
*The gym? I resent the drive home afterwards. Nonetheless, I still like going there.*
- Anyway,/Even so,  
*I resent the drive home afterwards. Even so, I (still) like going there.  
(= meaning: despite that)*
- Instead,  
*We agreed to meet in the pub. Instead, he was waiting in the car park.  
(= meaning: in the place of somebody/something)*

**3. Sequencing ideas: watch out, there is an order to these ideas.**

#### Conjunctions

- The former ... , the latter ...  
*The former alternative is false, the latter true. (= meaning: 'the former' is used to refer to the first of two things/people mentioned; 'the latter' is used to refer to the last of two things/people mentioned)*

#### Sentence connectors

- First,/Second,/Third
- Firstly,/Secondly,/Finally,
- Finally,/Last,
- Lastly,

#### 4. Illustration: here is what that principle means in reality.

##### Conjunctions

- ..., such as  
I love to eat vegetables, *such as* beetroot, carrots, etc.
- ..., like
- ..., namely
- ..., for example,
- ..., for instance,
- ..., e.g.  
I love to eat vegetables, *e.g.* beetroot, carrots, etc. (= meaning: for example; usually followed by an enumeration)
- ..., i.e.  
I am a vegetarian, *i.e.* I don't eat meat. (= meaning: that is, namely, in other words; usually followed by a full sentence)
- ..., similar to  
*Similar to* the tankini, the halterkini features a top as well.
- both ... and  
I love salmon, *both raw and* cooked.

##### Sentence connectors

- For example,  
I love to eat vegetables. *For example*, pickled beetroot is one of my favourites.
- For instance,
- To illustrate,

#### 5. Reason and purpose: you tell your reader about the why or cause.

##### Conjunctions

- due to/because of + noun  
Increasing unemployment is spreading *due to* the economic downturn.
- due to the fact that/because/since/as/seeing that/in that + full sentence  
Increasing unemployment is spreading *due to the fact that* the economy is deteriorating.
- as a result of  
Increasing unemployment is spreading *as a result of* the economic downturn.

- so (that)/in order that  
I asked him to move *so* I could see the screen better.
- so as + to-infinitive  
I asked him to move *so as to* see the screen better.
- in order + to-infinitive  
I asked him to move *in order to* see the screen better.

#### 6. Result: you give your reader the consequence or result of your previous statement.

##### Conjunctions

- so  
Our agency is expanding *so* we are taking on extra staff.

##### Sentence connectors

- Therefore,  
Our agency is expanding. *Therefore*, we are taking on extra staff.
- As a consequence,
- Consequently,
- As a result,
- Hence,
- Thus,
- So,

#### 7. Conclusion: this summarises and ends the discussion and may have special importance.

##### Sentence connectors

- In short,/In a nutshell,/In brief,  
*In short*, COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on the world economy.
- To summarise,
- In summary,
- To conclude,
- In conclusion,



**EXERCISE 1: Complete the sentences below with a suitable linking word.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ to your application for the post of real estate agent, we would like to offer you an interview. **(addition)**
- Your quote for installing 15 solar panels was very competitive. \_\_\_\_\_, we'd like to accept your quotation. **(result)**
- Thank you for your professional advice. \_\_\_\_\_, we'd like to thank you for your overall support on this development project. **(addition)**
- \_\_\_\_\_ we liked your offer, we do not think it is suitable for us at this time. **(contrast)**
- We agree that a heat pump is the best option. \_\_\_\_\_, the initial cost of the installation makes the renovation unfeasible (= not possible) at the present time. **(contrast)**



**EXERCISE 2: Connect the following ideas using a suitable linking word. Often there are multiple correct rewritings. Mind your commas.**

- Thomas is an excellent realtor. Thomas has no background in real estate. **(contrast)**
- The safety glasses are well below standard. The hard hat is unsuitable. **(addition)**
- A removals van could be bought. The possibility of hiring a removals van should be considered. **(contrast)**
- Over the past five years they have bought 15 listings with us. I think we can safely say they are one of our top clients. **(reason or result)**
- Her application was rejected. The applicant was unable to convince the panel that she had the right soft skills. **(reason)**
- WHISE is an easy-to-use CRM software. Your business will grow when using WHISE. **(conclusion)**
- The copying device is precise, small and silent. The hire rate is really pricey. **(reason, contrast or result)**
- The weekly maximum for overtime is four hours. Some put in more than six hours. **(contrast)**
- A successful realtor is good at engaging people in conversation. Complete strangers. **(illustration)**
- An increasing number of our employees have left in recent months. Recruiting new employees is proving to be challenging. **(addition)**

### 1.2.4.2 RELATIVE CLAUSES

Strong writing features **relative clauses** as they allow you to write concisely. Compare the following sentences:

#### RELATIVE CLAUSES

A	John's mother hates chocolate and she lives in Scotland.	B	John's mother, <b>who lives in Scotland</b> , hates chocolate. (= <b>non-defining relative clause</b> )
C	Some children hate chocolate. That is uncommon.	D	Children <b>who hate chocolate</b> are uncommon. (= <b>defining relative clause</b> )


I hope you notice that sentences A and C are both longer and less complex, while sentences B and D are not only shorter but also more fluent and eloquent.

Sentences B and D contain relative clauses. There are two types: defining relative clauses that comprise necessary information, and non-defining relative clauses that comprise unnecessary/additional information you don't need in order to understand the main clause.

Let's go back to the examples. About sentence B, the fact that John's mother lives in Scotland is additional information and is not needed in order to understand whose mother we're referring to. In sentence D, however, the defining relative clause 'who hate chocolate' is necessary to understand what kind of children we are talking about. If we were to leave out this relative clause, the main sentence would say: 'Children are uncommon.' and you would ask: 'What children are uncommon?' Therefore, the information 'who hate chocolate' is necessary to understand the main sentence. What follows is a short overview outlining the major differences between these two types of relative clauses.



DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSE	NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSE
1. <b>Necessary</b> information	1. <b>Unnecessary</b> or additional information
2. <b>No</b> use of <b>commas</b>	2. Use of <b>commas</b>
3. Relative pronouns: <b>that, who, which, whose, when, where</b>	3. Relative pronouns: <b>who, which, whose, when, where</b> (not: that)
4. <b>Can omit the relative pronoun</b> if it is the object of the verb of the defining relative clause, e.g. This is the dog that I saw. = This is the dog I saw. The defining relative clause is 'that I saw'. What did I see? That. This means that 'that' is the direct object of this relative clause and the verb 'saw', which means that we can omit it.	4. Cannot omit the relative pronoun
USE OF RELATIVE PRONOUNS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who</b> = people</li> <li>• <b>That</b> = people, animals, things</li> <li>• <b>Which</b> = animals and things</li> <li>• <b>Whose</b> = possession</li> <li>• <b>When</b> = time</li> <li>• <b>Where</b> = location</li> </ul>	

 For more exercises and information on relative clauses, check the online chapter 'Correct grammar matters'.



**EXERCISE 3:** Highlight the relative clauses in this text about real estate mogul Leona Helmsley. Some of the relative clauses are incorrect. Correct them and put in commas where necessary.



A mogul – quite different from Harry Potter's muggles – is synonymous with a magnate: a person who is very rich, important, and powerful.

### Real estate mogul Leona Helmsley sentenced to prison

12 December 1989

Leona Helmsley, that was called the 'Queen of Mean' by the media, received a four-year prison sentence, 750 hours of community service, and a \$7.1 million fine for tax evasion in New York. She became the object of disgust and contempt when she remarked that 'only the little people pay taxes'.

Leona's husband which name was Harry Helmsley was among the richest real estate moguls in the world, with an estimated \$5 billion to \$10 billion in property assets. The couple had a grand mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut, in addition to their extravagant penthouse that overlooked Central Park. At one point in time, they even owned the Empire State Building.

Leona who worked from the Helmsley Palace on Madison Avenue was severely disliked by her staff. Rarely, if ever, did she pay contractors on time, many of whom filed lawsuits to get even a little fraction of what they were due. Many pieces of their personal furniture were written off as corporate expenses, and there have been allegations that the Helmsleys pressured suppliers into giving them free furniture.

Federal Judge John Walker publicly criticised her after her conviction, saying that her actions were the result of 'naked greed' and the 'arrogant idea that [she] was above the law'. Leona Helmsley was sent to prison in 1991 and released in 1994.

In 2002, Helmsley whose spouse, Harry, passed away in 1997, was back in court after being sued by Charles Bell, a former worker which claimed Leona fired him simply because he was gay. Helmsley was ordered to pay him more than \$11 million in damages. At age 87, Helmsley passed away in August 2007. She left \$12 million to her dog, who was named just like Leona was, Trouble.



**EXERCISE 4: Make the following into one sentence using relative clauses. You can use that/who/whose/which/where. If you can omit the relative pronoun, do so. Mind the punctuation.**

1. We stayed at the Hilton Hotel. Our realtor recommended it.  
We stayed at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. He was looking for his sales folder this afternoon. He has found it now.  
He has found \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. (context: Abigail has one child, a daughter) She showed me a photo of her. She turns out to be a property manager.  
Abigail showed me \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. (context: we had a job opening) Many people applied for the job. Few of them had the necessary credentials.  
Few of the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Willy is practically never home. His job requires a lot of travelling.  
Willy \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Charlie is one of our best-performing realtors. He has been working for us for six years now.  
Charlie \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 1.2.4.3 ACTIVE VOICE

Another characteristic of strong formal writing I wish to highlight is the **active voice**. Compare the following sentences:

A. Jake wrote a letter. (= active voice)

The subject (Jake) does the action (write).

B. A letter was written (by Jake). (= passive voice)

The subject of the passive voice (a letter) does not do the action (write). It is inactive and, therefore, is a passive subject. It also takes longer to process passive sentences because the actor is put only at the very end of the sentence. As a result, you should avoid the passive voice in strong formal writing.

However, the passive voice does have one benefit as it allows you to omit the actor (= the person who has done something). Read the example:

C. You have not paid my salary yet. (= active voice)

D. My salary has not been paid yet (by you). (= passive voice)

Sentence D sounds less accusing than sentence C and is favoured in the example. I don't think it is a good idea to storm into your boss's office saying: 'Sorry, you haven't paid my salary yet.'

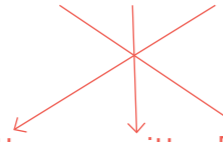
How to create passive sentences:

Active sentences follow the subject-verb-object structure. If you take another look at sentences A and B, you can see that the subject of the active sentence (Jake) becomes the by-agent at the end of the passive sentence, and the direct object (a letter) becomes the subject of the passive sentence. You can always leave out the by-agent in passive sentences, though.

## ACTIVE VOICE

Jake wrote a letter.

S    V    O




## PASSIVE VOICE

A letter was written [by Jake].

S    'to be' in  
the tense  
of active  
sentence  
+ past  
participle    by-  
agent

In terms of tenses, you apply the same tense used in the active sentence to the verb 'to be'. Sentence A: wrote = simple past, so 'to be' in the simple past = was. After 'to be' we add the past participle of the main verb. The main verb is 'to write'. The past participle of 'to write' = written.

To rewrite sentences from passive to active is simple as the correct tense can be easily deduced from the passive voice. Take another look at sentence B: what tense is 'was'? It is the simple past. Hence, you put your main verb in that same tense: wrote. The key is always to look at the form of 'to be' in passive sentences. Second, the by-agent becomes the subject and the subject of the passive sentence becomes the direct object of the active sentence. In other words, the by-agent comes at the beginning and the subject comes after the verb of the active sentence.

 For more exercises and information on the active and passive voice, check the online chapter 'Correct grammar matters'.



**EXERCISE 5:** Rewrite the following sentences in the active voice if required. (1) If there is no subject mentioned, invent one. (2) This exercise will focus your attention on identifying passive constructions and using them when appropriate as certain sentences are better in the passive voice. If that is the case, do not rewrite them. (3) Write 'OK' if the sentence is already written in the active voice.

1. The staff were being spoken to by the supervisor in the afternoon.
2. The current status report has been attached by me.
3. A design fault had been found.
4. Was the new intern welcomed by HR?
5. We must offer our clients a customised service.
6. The accounting records are being reviewed by our auditor.
7. Before the end of the day, the new report had been approved by the manager.
8. After the merger, most of the senior managers were fired.
9. The recommended guidelines for replacing equipment should be followed.
10. The major points of the feedback are quickly applied, but they are also quickly forgotten.
11. Is it possible that our shipment could be delayed?

### 1.2.4.4 SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION MATTERS

Correct spelling and punctuation will gain you respect, trust, and credibility, which, in turn, will lead you to success. The opposite is unfortunately also true: make errors with language and people will perceive you as incompetent and sloppy.

- ✓ Can you explain or draw the differences in meaning between these sentences?

#### Commas matter

Let's eat, Grandpa

Let's eat Grandpa

I find inspiration in cooking my friends and my cat.

I find inspiration in cooking, my friends, and my cat.

#### Colons matter

A woman without her man is nothing.

A woman: without her, man is nothing.

#### Hyphens matter

Forty five-pound banknotes: £200

Forty-five pound banknotes: £45

Man eating frog

Man-eating frog

#### Semi-colons matter

I'm sorry I love you.

I'm sorry; I love you.

#### Apostrophes matter

Eat your dinner!

Eat. You're dinner!

Finding punctuation less trivial? I do hope so!



**EXERCISE 6:** Find 13 spelling and punctuation mistakes in this email. Underline the mistakes in the text.

Dear Rob

just a quik message to tell you that the information fort he new market-  
ing leaflets has finaly arrived Could you put of the leaflet mailing untill  
i'm back? Ill contact you next week to update you on tomorrows visit to  
Spain.

Thanx.

Kind Rgrds

Rachel Green



**EXERCISE 7:** Here are 20 commonly misspelled English words. Can you correct them?

- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. bisness     | 11. publically  |
| 2. colleague   | 12. completly   |
| 3. accomodate  | 13. dissapoint  |
| 4. wich        | 14. embarasment |
| 5. recieve     | 15. existance   |
| 6. untill      | 16. finaly      |
| 7. occured     | 17. knowlege    |
| 8. seperate    | 18. fourty      |
| 9. government  | 19. neccessary  |
| 10. definately | 20. succesful   |



Finally, a common misspelling is the genitive case, which is used for showing possession. For instance, should it be:

- 'Loes' house' or 'Loes's house'?
- the 'Greys's house' or the 'Greys' house'? (*referring to a family*)
- 'Loes and Alessandro' house', 'Loes's and Alessandro's house', or 'Loes and Alessandro's house'?

In all three examples, the correct answer is the last option. For more exercises and information on the genitive, check the online chapter 'Correct grammar matters'.

## 1.2.5 WRITING PRACTICE

- ✓ **EXERCISE 8:** Rewrite the following texts to clients to make them client-centric messages. The underlined parts should be rewritten.
- A. Hi Tim Hanks, we thank you for letting us know! The agency wishes one a lot of success in one's search for the ideal home, I hope you find your's.
- B. As per our teleconversation this morning, I am sending you this email to kill two birds with one stone: I think your ad is ready to publish and I am in need of the soil certificate you said you had. Should you have any questions, kindly revert.
- C. Hello Hilary Banks, thank you for your message. The structure has a lot of windows and not every window cleaner is equipped to wash such a high-rise building. A great company was found to wash your windows. We came across Soap Window. They clean the windows every two months. They will return on Wednesday. (*suggestion: change the rhythm of the text by using a linking word, a relative clause and the active voice*)



'To kill two birds with one stone' (= figurative speech) means to solve two problems with one single action.

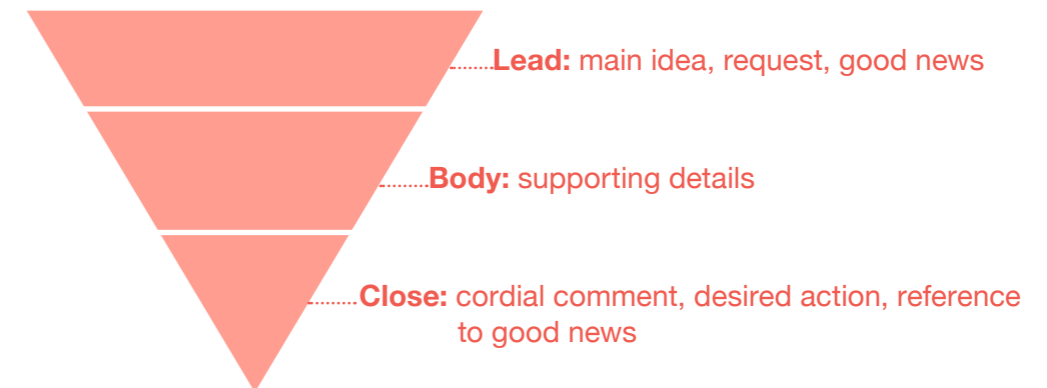
## 1.3 TEXT ORGANISATION

You'll have to organise your text differently depending on the type of message you're writing, whether it be positive, mixed, or negative.

### 1.3.1 POSITIVE MESSAGES

When writing a general email, request, enquiry, routine reply, or positive message, you can usually apply the **direct approach** as the recipient will normally be interested in, pleased, eager, or neutral about what you have to say. The direct approach can be visualised by an inverted pyramid, which shows how positive messages can be organised.

#### DIRECT APPROACH



According to this inverted-pyramid structure, you start with your most important information, or main idea, followed by supporting details. If necessary, you continue with general information. You end with a cordial comment, specific desired action, or reference to the good news.

Mixing our 4-point plan with the direct approach means that you use the **introduction** to explain why you are sending your email, the **body** for supporting details, **goodwill** for a cordial comment, and insert a proper **closing** with formal sign-off and signature.

## 1.3.2 MIXED MESSAGES

What if your message is mixed and you have to deliver mildly disappointing news? Then, you should put the mildly **disappointing news in a positive context**.

*Original:* No, that plot of land is not build-ready land unfortunately.

*Better:* This plot of land is **improved land**, which means it already has access to services and **utilities** such as power, water, gas, telephone, etc. You may start construction after the local land register issues you a **building permit**. The fact that it isn't **build-ready** makes it better value for money.

The improved text is less negative and places more emphasis on how the receiver would benefit from buying this plot of land. Be cautious, though: you should only include negative information in this kind of communication if you can accurately predict that the audience will react favourably.



**EXERCISE 9:** Write a mixed-news message according to the guidelines above. Add information if necessary.

Context: a buyer is interested in purchasing a piece of land of 2,000 square metres currently priced at €700,000 or €350/m<sup>2</sup>. She finds this too pricey and asks if an offer of €600,000 or €300/m<sup>2</sup> would convince the seller. The answer is negative as €700,000 is a fair price for this rare and large plot in such a prime location. There is, however, currently a subdivision permit for the division of the land into two plots of 1,500m<sup>2</sup> and 500m<sup>2</sup>. People are, of course, always free to **make an offer**.

## 1.3.3 BAD-NEWS MESSAGES

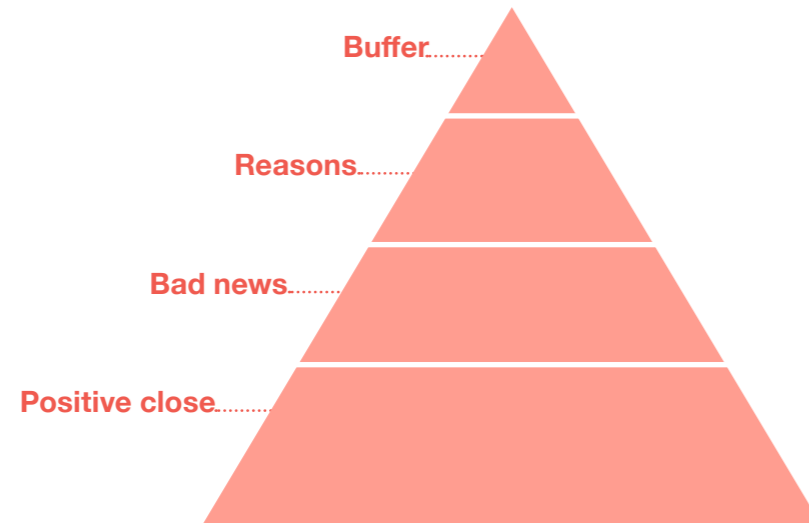
Assess the situation carefully before deciding how to deliver bad news. Depending on the situation, your text organisation changes. For routine positive messages you can apply the **direct approach** and the same is true for negative messages in certain contexts:



The direct approach then begins with the bad news, moves on to the reasons for this negative news, and concludes with a positive remark intended to maintain a positive relationship with the recipient.

To illustrate: 'I am sorry to inform you that the house has been sold as your offer was **outbid**. You now have my personal number, so if you see other interesting listings don't hesitate to call me.'

However, if you can predict that your audience will be displeased, surprised, uninterested, or unwilling to act accordingly, you can apply the **indirect approach**. You can hopefully already guess that this is, in fact, the opposite of the direct approach.



By starting with a buffer, which is a neutral statement to establish common ground, and the reasons for the bad news beforehand, the reader is prepared for the negative message. The indirect approach, though, is not intended to hide or delay unpleasant news. Instead, the aim of this strategy is to soften the impact and aid readers in accepting the situation. When executed properly, it is a fantastic illustration of client-centric communication that pays close attention to the feelings of others.

For example: 'For the past week, we have contacted each other several times. I want to thank you for your openness and willingness to find solutions. As the deadline to pay passed last Monday, the **option contract** has ended. That contract states that a **compensation** of €7,500 should be transferred to the seller's account if the contract is cancelled. Therefore, please **transfer the outstanding balance** of €7,500 to GB73MIDL07009398427711 by 25 August. Thank you for **complying with the terms of the contract**. Should you need further assistance, you can contact me at any time.'

The example below shows five additional tips when writing bad news. Can you work out what these tips are?

#### CLIENT'S EMAIL

Hello Margaret

I thought we had agreed that the plumber would come today at 1 p.m. It is now 2 p.m. and he still hasn't arrived yet. What happened?

Cheers

Lily Collins

#### YOUR REPLY

(1) Dear Ms Collins

(2) Thank you for your email. I understand this is annoying and I do apologise for this issue, Lily. I'll be pleased to sort out this issue for you.

(3) We believe it is important to make clear arrangements. (4) Therefore, I have called the plumber just now and he assured me that he will be at your place in 15 minutes. He apologises to you as his prior appointment took longer than he had foreseen. He promises to call you 5 minutes before his arrival. I hope this arrangement still works for you?

(5) Again, my sincerest apologies for the inconvenience caused.

Kind regards  
Margaret Thatcher  
Property Manager

Cobelpro  
4/10 Sint Lazaruslaan  
1210 Brussels, Belgium  
0032 2 503 48 11  
[www.cobelpro.eu](http://www.cobelpro.eu)

1. Always address the client by **his/her name**.
2. Thank the client, show understanding, and – if necessary – apologise. Many forget to show emotion or **empathy** but this is networking 101. Useful phrases:
  - I'll be pleased to sort out this issue for you.
  - I hope I can shed some light on this soon.
  - I see what you mean and can appreciate your concern.
  - I can see what you mean.
  - This is all very clear to me now.
  - I appreciate your understanding in trying to resolve this problem.
  - I would like to take a look at this issue from another perspective.
3. Tell the client how you **work hard to ensure quality** and how the mistake happened.
4. Explain what you have done to **rectify** the matter and what will happen now.
5. Write a **closing apology** and go the extra mile when appropriate.



**EXERCISE 10: Complete this bad-news message. There is extra information in brackets and sometimes the first letter is given.**

I am s\_\_\_\_\_ (1: regret) to inform you that  
 d\_\_\_\_\_ (2 – linking word: reason) to unforeseen circum-  
 stances, we have hit a major p\_\_\_\_\_ (3: issue). This means  
 that, u\_\_\_\_\_ (4: sadly), we will be \_\_\_\_\_ (5: not  
 able) to meet the original deadline. D\_\_\_\_\_ (6: in spite of)  
 our best efforts to finish the building work \_\_\_\_\_ (7: prep-  
 osition) time, the problem has been c\_\_\_\_\_ (8: created) by  
 poor weather conditions, which have forced the whole project to come  
 to a complete standstill. \_\_\_\_\_ (9 – linking word: result), we  
 have not been able to get the extra materials we needed and this unfor-  
 tunately has not helped the situation. I, t\_\_\_\_\_ (10 – linking  
 word: result), propose that we look for the extra materials while every-  
 thing has stopped. Furthermore, we should also find some additional  
 temporary staff to help us with this problem once the weather improves.  
 However, we will still need to reassess the s\_\_\_\_\_ (11: time-  
 table) and find a new deadline that will s\_\_\_\_\_ (12: work for)  
 all parties.



**EXERCISE 11: Rewrite this bad-news message according to the guidelines discussed above.**

The original reply: 'Unfortunately, the property is registered as residen-  
 tial real estate. So, the answer is negative.'

Situation: a client contacts you about a residential listing and asks if this  
 house can be turned into a mixed-use property. However, the property  
 is classified as heritage (a listed building) and cannot be converted into  
 a mixed-use property.



Mixed-use real estate includes both commercial and residential  
 space.