Saint Mary's University

The 5 C's of Business Writing

Coherent (orderly, logical, consistent relation of parts)

Clear (understandable)
- Make sure sentences are not too long or complicated.
- Use appropriate language for the reader or audience.
  - Use technical terms if the reader is a specialist.
  - Use layperson's terms if the reader is not.
- Use natural sounding words and phrases.

Concise (direct)
- Say what needs to be said in the fewest possible words.
- Get to the point.
- The first draft is often too wordy. Edit, but include all relevant details.
- Do not confuse concise with abrupt (see courteous).

Courteous (tone)
- Adopt a "you" attitude – one that sees the other person's point of view.
- Treat the reader as you would like to be treated – with respect.
- Do not accuse, threaten, scold, or belittle.
- Remember that your business depends on good relations with customers and employees.

Correct (mechanics)
- Check spelling, punctuation, and grammar (proofread).
- Use correct format for letters or memos (do not forget to sign it).

General Guidelines for Business Writing

Fonts
- Font usage should be consistent throughout the document.
- Font size should also remain consistent; however, headings can have larger text.
- Simple fonts (e.g., Times New Roman, Calibri, or Cambria) should be used.
- Font sizes, 11 or 12 point are acceptable.

Numbers
- Numbers 1 to 10 are spelled out in business writing.
- Numbers 11 through infinity are used in numeric form.
- Percentages in text are to be spelled out as "percent." The symbol "%" should be avoided.

Spacing
- Spacing should be consistent throughout the document.
- Line spacing of 1.5 is acceptable, unless otherwise specified.

Other
- All acronyms should be spelled out and identified in parenthesis before being used in a report; e.g. United Nations (UN). For the remainder of the report, the acronym itself is sufficient.
- The ampersand (&) should not be used in place of the word "and."
- All other guidelines for academic writing apply as normal.