

2.4.3: Emphasis

Learning Objectives

- Discuss appropriate ways to indicate emphasis in business writing

The correct amount of emphasis in business communications can help readers easily access the intended message. However, what is considered appropriate emphasis can differ drastically in this age of texting and social media. Remember that business communications are a part of a professional setting. While humans write the communications, the situation remains one company communicating to another or to a customer. This is not a personal communication that might include emotion or symbols for emotions.

Avoid	Try	Why
ABC Company loves the opportunity to fill your Pick n Pack order.	ABC Company appreciates the opportunity to fill your Pick n Pack order.	“Love” is an intense human emotion, not the emotion of a thing—a company.
Allied Sales is so sorry and apologizes for the trouble the late delivery caused your pets.	Allied Sales shipped the late order at its own expense with overnight delivery to make up for the missed shipment.	Apologizing can bring blame upon a company. Avoid doing so unless you consult the corporation’s lawyer. The company may not be all that sorry if the customer did not allow sufficient time. Move to the solution rather than increasing the focus on what went wrong.
Your order is appreciated!!!	Your order is appreciated.	The exclamation mark is clearly a mark of personal enthusiasm. Yet, most business communication is that “thing”—the company—rather than a human communicating. The introduction of this symbol in to business writing is relatively new. It can make the writer seem immature in the workplace.
Please see the corporate request. There are FIVE QUESTIONS TO Answer.	Please see the corporate request. There are five questions to answer.	Using all capital letters is construed as yelling at someone. This effect is further magnified when it comes in a downward message. Write well enough that the words communicate meaning clearly.
Recently, employees have erroneously entered wired rather than rewired on service orders.	Recently employees have erroneously entered <i>wired</i> rather than <i>rewired</i> on service orders.	Use of Italic font provides emphasis without the startling impact of all capital letters.
She wanted to be called Susan not Sue.	She wanted to be called Susan not Sue .	Use of bold font provides emphasis without the startling impact of all capital letters.
If a RX5 cable is shipped an EU45 must be shipped at the same time.	If a RX5 cable is shipped an EU45 <u>must</u> be shipped at the same time.	Use of underline font provides emphasis without the startling impact of all capital letters.

In the examples above, notice how italic, bold, or underlined fonts all provide emphasis in a similar fashion. Any of the three are equally helpful, and the choice should be made based on what the organization or the writer prefers.

The analogy that best suits emphasis in a message is to think of salt in food. Some salt is tremendously helpful and enhances the dish. Too much salt is off-putting and may even be sickening.

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