

**HANDBOOK
OF
BUSINESS
ENGLISH**

Handbook of Business English

Doris H. Whalen

College of Marin



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Preface

The world of business has always been characterized by flexibility and change. At the same time, fundamental skill requirements endure, among these the need for functional language proficiency—both spoken and written—on the part of all who work in the business world.

Handbook of Business English has been designed as a dual-purpose book. On the one hand, it is intended to serve as a textbook and reference manual in business English courses—especially when used in conjunction with the self-checking exercises provided; on the other, it will admirably serve the business person already on the job, both as a ready reference manual of acceptable English usage and as a means of reinforcing skills and updating previous language training.

The grammar of business English is the grammar of English taught to all students. Therefore, in this handbook the requirements of correctness and good usage have in no way been modified, diminished, or demeaned. On the contrary, because the typical business student's need for vocationally usable skills calls for a level of competency higher than average, coverage is complete and comprehensive. At the same time, since this is a handbook the format has been streamlined and simplified, with the material arranged primarily to expedite topic location. The organization within each section follows the order, respectively, of general topic, specific topic, rule, and example. Rules are stated clearly and concisely so that application becomes a matter of mechanics, not decision-making. In cases where opinion differs among various authorities, common business usage prevails. Authorities consulted include *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, the *American Heritage Dictionary*, *Harbrace College Handbook*, and the *U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual*.

The seventy-five self-checking exercises at the back of the book review the points of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word usage covered in the text. These exercises will be particularly effective in business English courses where this manual is used as a textbook, but they may also be of value to the office worker and to students in other courses as a means of self-testing and review.

Ease in locating and using information has been a major concern in the physical organization and design of the book. The numbered Table of Contents and comprehensive Index are organized to help the user locate specific subjects, rules, and terms quickly. The prominent sideheads that pinpoint the material are designed to speed the process of topic location. Within the text itself many cross-references clarify related topics, and examples abound of both acceptable and unacceptable usage (labeled, respectively, "Use" and "Avoid"). A comprehensive Glossary provides clear, easy-to-understand definitions of terms used throughout the book.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to acknowledge all those who have contributed so meaningfully to the publication of this handbook. Included among them are my students and colleagues at the College of Marin, many of whom suggested invaluable improvements; the research librarians who unsparingly gave of their time and expertise on my behalf; colleagues at other colleges who diligently reviewed the manuscript as it evolved from stage to stage; and the staff members at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, whose creativity created a handsome book from a pile of manuscript.

DORIS H. WHALEN

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1 The Sentence

A sentence is a group of related words that make a complete thought. This unit may be a question, a command, an exclamation, or a statement. Because forming good sentences is the essence of communicating effectively, it is important to understand what constitutes a sentence—even before breaking the words of the sentence into parts of speech. Parts of speech are discussed in the next chapter.

SECTION 1 Sentence Structure

1-A Subject/ Verb/ Predicate

The framework of the sentence consists of the *subject* and the *verb*. A sentence does not exist unless these two parts are present. Even a command, such as *Take advantage of this offer*, has a subject—always *you*—even if the subject is not included in the sentence. The subject of the sentence is the person or object that the sentence is talking about. It may be one word (*simple subject*), or it may be the simple subject and any words that describe it (*complete subject*). The subject may be compound—consisting of more than one noun or pronoun connected by a coordinating conjunction.

Usually an *object* or a *complement*, as well as modifiers, follows the verb. (If these terms are unfamiliar to you, see the Glossary, page 137.) The verb together with its modifiers and object or complement is called the *predicate*.

EXAMPLES:

David works in the mailroom.

simple subject *verb* *predicate*

My friend David has worked for several years in the mailroom.

complete subject *verb* *predicate*

David and Don handle and sort all outgoing mail.

compound subject *compound verb* *predicate*

subject

verb

complement

predicate

1-B

Sentence Order

The natural order of a sentence is: *subject/verb/complement* or *direct object*. The order may be inverted so that the verb precedes the subject. Questions, exclamations, and emphatic statements often appear in inverted order.

EXAMPLES:

My secretary answered the phone.

subject verb direct object

The president of the company is Mr. Martin.

complete subject *verb* *complement*

natural order

Whom did you call?

object verb subject verb

inverted order

1-C Clauses

A group of words containing a subject and a predicate is called a *clause*. An *independent (main) clause* makes sense standing by itself; a *dependent (subordinate) clause* cannot stand by itself because it depends upon some other part of the sentence to make sense. Classified as dependent clauses are: (1) the *adjective clause*, modifying a noun or pronoun; (2) the *adverb clause*, modifying the verb or indicating time, place, manner, cause, condition, degree, or comparison; and (3) the *noun clause*, used in any way that a noun may be used. Dependent clauses are introduced by subordinate conjunctions (see page 78). Adjective clauses are usually introduced by *that*, *which*, or a form of *who*; adverb clauses, by any of the many subordinate conjunctions such as *when*, *if*, *since*, *before*, *after*, and *because*; and noun clauses, by *that* and sometimes by *what*, *whatever*, *why*, *when*, or a form of *who*. Each of the dependent clauses is discussed with the part of speech to which it belongs. See pages 30, 65, and 72.

EXAMPLES: We use a modified-block letter style in our office.
one independent clause

The modified-block letter style, which is easy to type, is used in our office. one independent clause, one dependent adjective clause (underlined) If the modified-block letter style is used all of the time, it soon becomes automatic. one indepen-