



AI TOOLS FOR BUSINESS WRITING

AI is a powerful tool that is transforming business and business communication. Those who are open to this new technology may find it [increases their productivity and creativity](#). Those who ignore it [may be left behind](#).

[More than half of US workers report using AI](#), but despite this, the ethics and norms of its use in business are unsettled. Can you incorporate AI into your writing process without losing trust? Will your communication skills atrophy if you overrely on it?

The short answer to these questions is that AI tools are just that—tools. They are powerful in skilled hands and for the right task. But AI cannot do your thinking for you. You risk your credibility – or worse – when using AI for tasks for which it's unsuited.

This guide explains how AI tools can both improve and hurt your business writing. It shares risks, benefits, and useful strategies for incorporating AI into your writing process.

The Risks of AI-Generated Content

AI tools like ChatGPT are inherently limited. They are created by analyzing vast quantities of texts to learn patterns, grammar, and context. They then use that training to generate the most *statistically likely* response – NOT the most accurate response. This leads to many weaknesses that are not always obvious. Here are three specific examples:

- **Hallucinations:** You cannot trust AI to be truthful. It creates *plausible* content – not necessarily accurate content. And it will “hallucinate” facts that are deceptively weaved into otherwise accurate information. To avoid damaging your credibility, you should always cross-check and verify anything it writes.
- **Blandness:** Because AI uses patterns from vast quantities of text, it writes like the “average” person. This results in generic and uninspired content. Whether you’re writing a cover letter for a job or delivering a pitch to investors, it doesn’t pay to blend in with the crowd. To be truly persuasive, rely on your unique creativity and judgment – not AI-generated text.
- **Lack of depth:** AI’s strengths lie in straightforward communication tasks. But it falters when handling complex or high-stakes messages. You need to develop and refine your own communication skillset for these important scenarios. If you use AI as a crutch, your growth as a communicator will stagnate.

Drafting your Message with AI?

You must carefully consider how you use AI for your routine business writing—emails, memos, letters, reports, etc. While AI has a dizzying array of abilities (e.g., writing code, analyzing data, creating charts,

simplifying complex ideas), most of these uses won't help you with your writing. In fact, using AI without a strategy may actually hurt you as a communicator.

For example, we recommend NOT using AI to draft your emails – even if you're starting from an outline. Two reasons:

It won't connect with your audience. It's true that tools like ChatGPT can write drafts quickly. They're also good at applying structure. But the prose is generic and doesn't reflect the nuanced needs of a specific audience. In tests we've done, ChatGPT regularly produces "C" level work -- even when we provide a detailed outline with carefully selected persuasive elements. Yes, it's possible to start with an AI-generate draft and make improvements. But it takes so much revision to reach an "A" level that you will save time and improve the quality by drafting the message yourself.

Writing is thinking. Even with a detailed outline, you still need to follow the Communication Development Strategy to write your draft. The relationship between ideas, the transitions, the careful word selection, etc., are all driven by your audience and purpose. If you rely on AI for drafting, not only will your message weaken, but you will also weaken. You won't know your content as deeply as you should (e.g. how well do you handle Q&A?), and you will not be as nimble at adapting on the fly (e.g. can you pivot your message in the moment?).

Recommended Strategies

Though we don't recommend drafting your message with AI, there is real value to using it in more limited ways. Here are four specific uses that you may find valuable. There are others, but consider these as a starting point:

1. **Brainstorming:** Use ChatGPT to generate ideas or suggestions to incorporate into your message. This can provide you with new perspectives and help you overcome writer's block. However, don't begin brainstorming with AI. The "anchoring effect" may cause you to overvalue the first ideas you hear. And if ChatGPT came up with them, they are likely to be quite poor!

Example prompt: *"My finance team has a problem with meeting attendance. The new hires are disengaged and feel they don't have a role with the club. We're worried these new employees won't be familiar enough with the policies and culture of the team to take on leadership positions in the future. You are an expert business consultant. Give me 10 specific and creative ideas for how we could improve attendance."*

2. **Editing:** Ask ChatGPT to review and provide feedback on your drafts. It can catch mistakes, identify areas of improvement, and suggest alternative phrasing or structuring.

Example Prompt: *"You are an expert editor. Review this email and suggest 15 specific changes for improvement. Each suggestion should be detailed and provide an explanation of why the change would improve the email. Focus only on improving the grammar, style, clarity, and use of concrete language. Do NOT revise the email. Simply create a list of these suggested changes in bullet point format. Here's the email:*

3. **Concision:** ChatGPT can help you improve your concision, but you must use it in a targeted way. AI lacks a nuanced understanding of the audience and purpose to decide which content to keep or cut. But at a mechanical level, they are adept at cutting unnecessary words and clauses.

Example prompt: “You are an expert business writer. You are writing to [insert Audience here] in order to accomplish [insert Purpose here]. Rewrite this paragraph in three different ways to be more concise. The style should be simple, direct, and conversational. Here is the paragraph: <paste sentence here>”

4. **Generating Challenging Questions:** ChatGPT can generate challenging questions your audience may have. This will help you identify key counterarguments and address gaps in your argument. When doing so, you must include a detailed audience analysis. Otherwise, the results will be generic and have little value.

Example prompt: “You are Sharon, president of ABC Consulting Services, a consulting firm focusing on financial services. You founded ABC 10 years ago, and have grown the organization from just yourself to a team of 8. You care for your employees but have a high bar for quality. You work long hours and expect commitment from your team as well. Your two main goals are preserving the reputation of the firm and growing the client list. You are very frugal with managing the operating budget. You have a cheery, optimistic personality and tend to downplay bad news. You care deeply about all of the members of our club. You just received an email from one of your club members proposing [insert proposal here], and you disagree with this goal. Create a bullet list of 10 challenging questions that you would. Here is the message: <paste message here>”

CONCLUSION

AI is a valuable tool to improve your business writing skills – but only when used strategically and responsibly. Remember to use your critical thinking skills, consider the risks, and leverage AI’s strengths to enhance your learning experience.