

## English Corner



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### Style of Writing

#### I. Use formal words

In written communication, we use formal words - not informal words as in spoken communication. Use formal single-word verbs and avoid two or three-part verbs like phrasal verbs or prepositional verbs, as shown in the following examples. Words in the brackets are more formal counterparts of those in bold.

1. This business plan **looks at** [examines] the issue of staff turnover in the company.
2. This report **talks about** [discusses] the use of a new computer system in improving the payroll system.
3. The special task force **came up with** [suggested] an imaginative solution to the problem.
4. Official statistics show that food prices **went up** [increased] by 3% in February.
5. Our company intends to **cut down** [reduce] travelling allowances for senior staff in the coming year.
6. A working group was **set up** [formed] to review the staff appraisal system.
7. Such figures **bring up** [raise] a concern about staff professionalism.
8. The stock market **went up and down** [fluctuated] significantly last week.
9. We **worked out** [calculated] the mean responses for the frequency of staff taking sick leave in the past month.
10. A temporary staff member was hired to **help out** [assist] with the analysis of the data.

#### II. Use precise and specific words

Avoid simple general words such as **good, bad, big, small, get** and **thing** in written communication. Use precise formal words instead (like those in brackets).

1. Many of our staff members have worked in most of the **big** [major] companies in Hong Kong.
2. The facilities in the old building are **bad** [inadequate].
3. The performance of the contestants is **good** [satisfactory].
4. Employees can **get rid of** [eliminate] errors in their work by paying more attention.



5. The economic outlook is expected to **get better** [improve] in the coming year.
6. The company **got** [received] many orders in the first half of the year.
7. The director wanted his colleagues to **break down** [analyze] the problems before **giving** [suggesting] solutions to them.
8. Working hard is **a must** [necessary] for employees.

### III. Avoid contractions

Contractions - e.g. didn't, wouldn't, we'll - are all features of spoken English, and they have no place in written communication. Always write out the full form, as shown in the brackets in the following examples:

1. The speaker **didn't** [did not] prepare adequately for the seminar.
2. The speaker **would've** [would have] prepared had he known the audience would ask him questions.
3. In this proposal, I'll [I will] discuss the topic of how the worldwide economic turmoil might affect the HK economy.

### IV. Avoid direct questions

We do not have to work hard to get readers' attention in writing (unlike in presentations), so attention-getting devices such as direct questions should be avoided, and more straightforward statements used instead. Look at the following examples.

1. What factors lead to the present economic situation in Hong Kong?  
**A number of factors affect the HK economy.**
2. Do you know that the financial tsunami can affect the overseas business of our company?  
**The financial tsunami can affect the overseas business of our company.**

### Quiz:

Rewrite the following sentences to make the style appropriate for written communication:

1. The results of the experiment were really **great**.

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2. He carried out **a lot of** research into the SAR government.

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3. One of the **best things** about the new policy is that it helps employees **turn in really good** proposals.

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### Key:

1. The results of the experiment were very satisfactory.
2. He carried out a great deal of research into the SAR government.
3. One of the advantages of the new policy is that it helps employees submit effective proposals.