

Cultivating the Right On the Job Attitude

Your on-the-job attitude is important because it contributes to how well you'll fit into the work environment and determines how happy and successful you'll be there. Have a good attitude, and your boss and colleagues will know that you're a great match for the job. Have a bad attitude, and you're likely to feel not only the hot wrath of your boss, but the cold shoulders of your colleagues, too. Consider these suggestions for cultivating the right on-the-job attitude:

Observe the office environment. Keep your eyes and ears open during your first few weeks to find out things like the degree of formality in the office, the company culture, and the office hierarchy.

Do this: Listen to whether your colleagues address your boss by her/his first name or by "Mr." or "Ms."

Temper your enthusiasm. Your first lesson is that you won't endear yourself to more-seasoned employees by being an overzealous know-it-all. Pose good questions to co-workers and seek their advice for challenges you encounter as you learn the job. Since most people enjoy helping the newcomer, this is a great way to establish solid collegial relationships.

Do this: Ask for help with something, even if you think you know what you're doing. This will assure co-workers that you're not after their jobs and that you appreciate their expertise.

Accept criticism positively. Because you're new at the job, it's expected that you'll do work incorrectly, make mistakes, and blunder your way through a sometimes steep learning curve. When you receive feedback, avoid the tendency to become defensive or withdrawn.

Do this: Accept the criticism positively by asking for specific information about what you did incorrectly and giving yourself time to reflect in order to avoid making the mistake next time.

Obey working-hour rules. If work starts at 8:30 AM, be there at 8:15 AM to get settled, grab a cup of coffee, and be ready to start on time. Same thing at the other end of the

day—you work until close of business. Don't duck out early for, or return late from, lunch.

Do this: If you have a habit of hitting the snooze button, set your alarm earlier. In addition, try doing tasks like choosing your clothing and preparing your lunch the previous evening. If you have a tendency to oversleep, try an earlier bedtime.

Respect company policies. Many companies prohibit making personal telephone calls or checking personal e-mail. Other companies have policies regarding proper business apparel for employees. These policies are usually set forth in an employee handbook. Make sure you get a copy from the personnel office. Familiarize yourself with the policies in place at your company, then respect and follow them.

Do this: When in doubt, ask a co-worker. If you must make personal telephone calls, step outside on a break.

Writing Skills

Writing skills are essential to job success. The following sections offer a general overview of some of the most important principles you should know.

ADJECTIVE AND ADVERB USAGE

Adjectives are used to modify nouns. They can answer questions like:

Which one? What Kind? How Many?

Examples: **The long, detailed** report is your desk.

Four heavy, fire-proof doors are being installed.

Adverbs are used to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They answer questions like:

How? Where? To What Extent?

Examples: **Yesterday** Mr. Jones arrived late to work.
Tom responded **quite quickly**.

Note: Many adverbs end in *ly*.

Adjectives and adverbs have three forms: positive, comparative (used to compare two things or people), and superlative (used to compare three or more things or people).

Positive:

Adjective: Shelly is **careful** when doing data entry.

Adverb: Shelly **carefully** enters data.

Comparative:

Adjective: Shelly is **more careful** than Dennis.

Most comparative adjectives are formed by adding “er” to the end of the word.

Example: Today’s report is **longer** than yesterday’s report.

Some comparative adjectives are formed by adding the word “more” before the adjective.

Example: Jack’s personality is **more colorful** than Tina’s personality.

Adverb: Shelly enters data **more carefully** than Dennis.

When forming comparative adverbs, add “more” before the adverb.

Example: The report printed **more quickly** today.

Superlative:

Adjective: Shelly is the **most careful** employee in the department.

Most superlative adjectives are formed by adding “est” to the end of the word.

Example: Friday’s report will be the **longest** of the week.

Some superlative adjectives are formed by adding the word “most” before the adjective.

Example: Jack’s personality is the **most colorful** in the department.

Some adjectives are irregular and do not follow the above rules for forming comparatives and superlatives. Examples of irregular adjectives are:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
good	better	best
Bad	worse	worst

Adverb: Shelly enters data **most carefully** of all employees.
When forming superlative adverbs, add “most” before the adverb.

Example: The report printed **most quickly** on Wednesday.

The adjectives *this* and *these* refer to things that are nearby.

Examples: **This** chair does not fit under my desk.
These chairs are too high to fit under our desks.

The adjectives *that* and *those* refer to things are a distance.

Examples: **That** table near the door is too small for the room
Those tables near the door are too small for the room.

When the sentence contains a linking verb, be sure to use an adjective after the linking verb.

Example: I feel **bad** about the errors in my report to Mr. Jones.

“Feel” is a linking verb and requires an adjective behind it. Do not use the adverb “badly” in this case. Linking verbs can also be thought of as the sensing verbs.

Linking verbs include:

is look seem become smell sound taste appear

Compound Adjectives

When using more than one word to create your own adjective, hyphenate the words if they are used before a noun.

Examples: once-in-a-life-time offer
home-based business

If the adjective that you created is used after the noun, do not use hyphens.

Examples: offer of once in a life time
business that is home based

Punctuating Adjectives

When using two or more adjectives to modify a noun, separate the adjectives with commas.

Examples: a long, detailed report
the large, empty meeting room

Do not use commas to separate adjectives when the first adjective is being used to modify the combined idea of the second adjective and the noun.

two independent adjectives

dependable, reliable car

productive, efficient assistant

first adjective modifies the combined idea

red sports car (sports car that is red)

productive administrative assistant (administrative assistant who is productive)

Special Note Regarding Adverbs

Adverbs such as hardly, nearly, barely, should not be used with negative verbs. These adverbs mean “only” or “just” and signify something “not quite.”

Example: He is barely finished with the report.

NOT correct: His is not barely finished with the report.

PRONOUN USAGE

Pronouns are used as replacements for nouns. A noun that is being replaced by a pronoun is called the antecedent.

Pronoun case refers to how pronouns are used in different parts of a sentence. When a pronoun is used as the subject of the sentence, use the subjective case of the pronoun.

Example: **She** comes in at 10 A.M.

Subjective case pronouns include:

she he it I you we they

When a pronoun is used as the object of a sentence, use the objective case of the pronoun.

Example: James wanted **her** to complete the project by Friday.

Objective case pronouns include:

him her it me you us them

When a pronoun is used to show ownership, use the possessive case of the pronoun.

Example: **His** son has joined **their** office.

Possessive case pronouns include:

my mine your yours his her its our ours their theirs

Kinds of Pronouns

There are three kinds of pronouns. The first kind of pronoun to be addressed is the personal pronoun. A personal pronoun is used to take the place of a thing or person.

Example: **You** will be at the office on time.

Personal pronouns include:

I me you it she he her him they them

Reflexive pronouns are used when the subject and the object of a sentence are the same. Reflexive pronouns end in “self” or “selves.”

Example: He wants the best for **himself**.

Reflexive pronouns include:

himself herself itself myself yourself themselves

Note: Be careful not to use substandard reflexive pronouns such as hisself and theyselves.

Relative pronouns are used to start independent clauses, and they refer to the noun or pronoun directly before.

Example: The report **that** is on the desk belongs to Jim **who** works in sales.

“**That**” refers to the **report**. “**Who**” refers to **Jim**.

Relative pronouns include:

who whom whoever whomever whatever that which

Note: That and which refer to things. Who, whom, whoever, and whomever refer to people.

Demonstrative pronouns identify nouns that do not necessarily appear in the sentence.

Example: **This** goes to Mr. Johnson in accounting.

Demonstrative pronouns include:

this that these those

Indefinite pronouns refer to no particular person or thing.

Example: **Anyone** wanting to park in the back lot can receive authorization from the parking department.

Indefinite pronouns include:

any anyone anybody anything none nobody several some

Indefinite pronouns are usually singular and require a singular verb.

Examples: **None** of the employees **knows** about the new policy.
Anyone of the current procedures **covers** that particular case.

Some of the indefinite pronouns are plural and require plural verbs.

Examples: **Several** of the employees **know** about the new policy.
Some of the current procedures **cover** that particular case.

Some of the indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural.

Examples: **Most** of the report **is** finished
Most of the reports **are** finished.

Note: Watch the number of things or people in the prepositional phrase following the indefinite pronoun to help tell if it is singular or plural.

PUNCTUATION BASICS

A period is used at the end of a statement or a polite command. A polite command is used when making a request.

Statement: Anthony has finished the interview with James.

Polite Command: Will you please send three copies of your resume' to James.

An exclamation mark is used to show strong emotion. Exclamation marks should be avoided in business writing.

Example: Here it is!

A question mark is used to end a question.

Example: When does your plane land?

A Comma Has Several Uses

Use a comma when joining independent clauses of five or more words:

Example: James went to the office early today, and
independent clause
Janice went to the office late.
independent clause

Example: Please order a binder, two black markers, three red markers, and a large white board.

Use a comma when directly addressing a person.

Example: Please send your mailing address to us, Mr. Jones.

Use a comma to set off a parenthetical expression only if the expression is not essential to understanding the sentence. A parenthetical expression can appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence.

Examples: In addition, your communication skills are excellent. (beginning)
His answer, incidentally, was exactly as we expected. (middle)
You should rewrite the report to your supervisor, in my opinion. (end)

Use a comma to set off an appositive that is longer than one word. Appositives are used to explain or rename nouns or pronouns that directly precede them. These are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Examples: Carleen Dearfield, the sales representative from AvaniX, is waiting for us in the conference room.
My friend Jenny is interviewing with Mr. Curtis now. (One-word appositive does not require a comma.)

A verbal phrase that comes before the main clause of a sentence should be set off by a comma.

Example: Working without a break, Val was able to finish the project on time.

One or more introductory phrases totaling five or more words should be followed by a comma.

Example: At the beginning of the month, we clear all account balances.

Note: If the introductory phrase contains fewer than five words, do not use a comma.

Example: In July we plan for our fall quarter.

When a dependent clause starts a sentence and is followed by an independent clause, use a comma.

Example: If you need help, please call before 2 P.M.

When using a dependent clause at the end of a sentence, use a comma only if the clause is an afterthought.

Example: I will be leaving early today, if that meets with your approval.

Degrees, titles, and professional designations that appear after a person's name must be set off by commas. Jr. and Sr. are exceptions to this rule.

Example: Ed Parkins, Ph.D., will be our presenter in January.

Example: Matthew Konswinski, M.D., was not in attendance.

Example: Albert Reinhart Jr. will accompany us on our factory tour.

When using figures, use a comma between two or more unrelated figures.

Example: In 2004, 238 new employees joined our company.

Example: Please order 250, 45-inch fluorescent bulbs for the warehouse.

Calendar years, zip codes, and identification numbers such as serial numbers and model numbers do not require commas.

Calendar years: 1995 2005

Zip codes: 55447 06823

Identification numbers: 03-05-95559

Use a comma in a sentence when a word has been omitted, but is understood.

Example: Our Oregon office has six attorneys; our Minnesota office, two attorneys. (A comma appears in place of the word **has**.)

A verb phrase contains a verb and all of its modifiers:

Example: ran very quickly toward the open door

A prepositional phrase contains a preposition and its object:

Examples: to the tree
toward the door
in the desk drawer

A verbal phrase begins with a gerund, an infinitive, or a participle:

Gerund: Skiing in the mountains can be dangerous.

Infinitive: I like to see the sun rise.

Participle: Built long ago, the cabin contains only a small fireplace.

Sentence Types

Simple sentences contain one independent clause.

Example: The report was written by Tom Smith.
independent clause

Compound sentences contain two or more independent clauses.

Example: The report was written by Tom Smith, and
independent clause
it was edited by Jack Jones.
independent clause

Complex sentences contain one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.

Example: While the report was written by Tom Smith,
dependent clause
Jack Jones did the editing.
independent clause

Compound-complex sentences contain two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

Example: While Sara Simons did the research,
dependent clause

the report was written by Tom Smith, and
independent clause

it was edited by Jack Jones.
independent clause

There are many ways to combine clauses to create interesting compound and compound-complex sentences.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subjects and verbs must always agree in number. A singular subject must have a singular verb associated with it. A plural subject must have a plural verb associated with it.

In its simplest form, this rule is easy to remember. Singular subjects require a singular verb and singular verbs usually end in “s.”

Example: The third section of the report contains our
singular subject singular verb
financial information.

Conversely, plural subjects are often followed by verbs that do not end in “s.”

Example: The reports on the desk contain vital financial
plural subject plural verb
information.

Problems occur when the subject and verb of a sentence are separated by phrases.

Example: Each of the reports is available on our Web site.
subject verb

The true subject of the sentence is **each**. **Each** is singular and is associated with the singular verb “**is**.” The subject and verb in this sentence are separated by the prepositional phrase “of the reports.”

USING EFFECTIVE WORDS

In most writing that is done for business purposes, it is important to remember to be clear and to the point. Use absolutes and quantify statements.

Poorly worded: The report written by Mr. Smith contains many errors.

More clear: The report written by Mr. Smith contains 25 errors.

Poorly worded: Our sales increased in June.

More clear: Our sales increased by 60 percent in June.

Avoid using qualifiers in your business writing. Qualifiers are phrases that make your writing seem less professional and credible.

Qualified: The numbers show, I think, that we can expect a further increase in sales.

Qualified: You will, in my opinion, be satisfied with the service that you receive from our company.

In both of these sentences, the author has qualified the statements by adding “I think” and “in my opinion.” These phrases are not necessary. The information should be understood by the audience. After all, the audience is reading the work in an attempt to learn what the author thinks and what his or her opinion is.

Even though it is important to be concise in business writing, it is also important to be descriptive. Do not be afraid to add interesting descriptors.

Example: She answered the question.

More interesting: She thoughtfully answered each difficult question. (If indeed the questions were difficult and her answers were thoughtful.)

More interesting: She casually answered each simple question. (If indeed the questions were simple and her answers were casual.)

Example: Mr. Johns wanted the promotion.

More interesting: Mr. Johns desired the challenges offered by the promotion.

Your writing can be enhanced by careful use of a thesaurus. A thesaurus can aid you in choosing words that are more interesting to the reader. If you are able to make your writing more interesting, your audience will be more inclined to read.

Here is a list of commonly used words and some more interesting words with the same meanings:

Common	More Interesting
effective	potent operative dynamic efficient successful
practical	pragmatic effective feasible
problem	query issue puzzle enigma
strong	robust stout stalwart vibrant
good	worthy competent thorough pleasant valid
bad	unfavorable noxious defective hurtful