

CHAPTER

5

# BUILD

CREATE CLARITY & COHERENCE

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7 EMAIL MESSAGES

## LINK & LEARN

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Required  
Reading



Tips &  
Optional



Examples



Activity

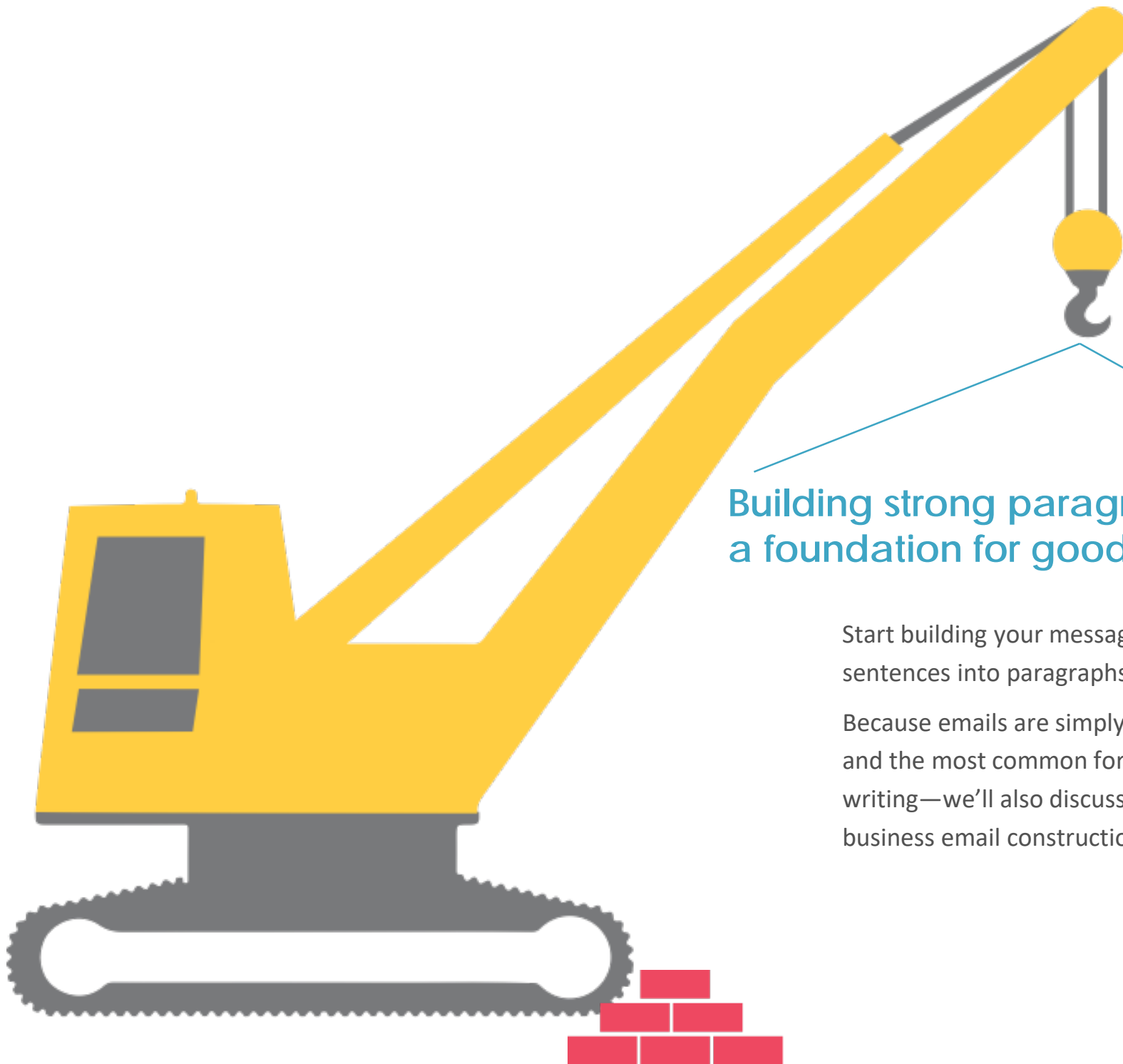


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*This is Chapter 5*





**Building strong paragraphs creates a foundation for good writing.**

Start building your message by combining sentences into paragraphs.

Because emails are simply sets of paragraphs—and the most common form of business writing—we'll also discuss best practices for business email construction.



## SECTION ONE

# PARAGRAPHS

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Readers don't like solid walls of text. Long paragraphs seem to demand too much time and effort. When you break messages into short paragraphs—highlighted by headings, guided by transitions, and framed by white space—you make your message more inviting.

In general, aim for paragraphs with three to five sentences. Occasionally, you might use a single-sentence paragraph for emphasis. Other times, you might need a longer paragraph to complete your thought.



Most paragraphs  
should be about

**3 to 5**  
sentences long.

Owl: Purdue Online Writing Lab





# TELLING V. SHOWING

## BEGIN WITH A TOPIC SENTENCE

The first sentence in each paragraph should introduce your topic and inform the reader of the paragraph’s purpose. These **topic sentences** provide a framework for your paragraph and allow you to deliver content on a unified theme. Write topic sentences clearly so that busy readers can **get the gist of your argument by skimming** the topic sentence of each paragraph.

## SUPPLY SUPPORTING DETAILS

Advance from the general to the specific—both within paragraphs and from paragraph to paragraph. Concrete, specific details give your claims (and you) credibility. As author Bryan Garner asserts: “People don’t care about—or even remember—abstractions the way they do specifics.”

Develop your arguments and examples by carefully selecting evidence-based details that lead your audience to draw the conclusions that you want them to make. Read the examples in Figure 5.1 to see how to show, not tell.



SHOW don't TELL  
Read Bryan Garner's article [Writing Emails that People Won't Ignore](#).

NO	YES
She’s not a good employee.	She missed the last four employee meetings, showed up late for two client meetings, and lost key sales data.
Our sales team is doing great.	Our team made 35% more sales this quarter than during the third quarter last year.
There are not enough funds for pay raises.	Our analysis shows that we need to increase productivity by 8% or reduce expenses by 3% to afford a pay raise of 5%.
The retail industry is not what it used to be [vague].	<p>Traditional retailers struggle to compete with the wide margins and low overhead of online retailers. [specific]</p> <p><b>Supporting details:</b> Seventy-one percent of shoppers believe they will get a better deal online than in stores.</p>

FIGURE 5.1





## TRANSITION EXAMPLES

- Establish a sequence** **At first**, consumers are hesitant to buy online, **but after** just a few online shopping experiences, they seem to prefer online shopping.
- Set up a contrast** **And yet**, nothing can quite replace the experience of traditional shopping.
- Provide an example** **For example**, online shopping carts do not lead to online dressing rooms. Merchandise from online stores cannot be tried on—or even touched—before purchasing.
- Add a point** Processing returns **also** feels inconvenient and expensive for most shoppers.
- Concede a point** **Even though** returning online merchandise is easier than it has been in the past, packaging items for mailing and paying for shipping still feels burdensome.
- Conclude** **On the whole**, consumers are shifting to online shopping with increasing loyalty.

FIGURE 5.2

## MAKE SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

Transition words and phrases guide readers not only from paragraph to paragraph in a document, but also from point to point within paragraphs. When used well, transitions don't call attention to themselves.

**Awkward Transition:** *And thus we can deduce that online sales play an important role in the retail industry.*

**Smooth Transition:** *Clearly, online sales play an important role in the retail industry.*

Transitions might give emphasis, add points, set up contrasts, establish sequences, signal conclusions, or orient readers. See Figure 5.2 at left for some examples.

Keep a list of transition words nearby to help you form links in your writing.



SECTION TWO

# EMAIL MESSAGES

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Let's look at the principles of good paragraph writing in action by applying them to email messages for business.

Most email messages are short and direct. Follow the **4A's** to grab readers' attention, structure your content, and close your email message.



*Never **SEND** an email before proofreading it.*



*Be friendly, but don't gush. Give yourself a budget of **ONE** exclamation point per email.*



ALUMNI ADVICE



*"In my emails, I bold my key action items or questions and then change the color to something that stands out. This one addition helps me to get a better response rate and helps people to answer my questions. It doesn't work all the time (people are people), but it does help."*

Stephen Godfrey  
Senior Technical Consultant,  
Master of Information Systems,  
Brigham Young University, Class of 2014



## EMAIL APPLICATION ONE

# USE PARAGRAPHS

The example on the left is an uninviting wall of text. The right example uses paragraphs to divide the meaning into sections and make the email more visually appealing. Which would you rather read?

NO

To: Brad Smith <brad.smith@email.com>  
From: Bryce Jones <brycej@email.com>  
Subject: I had an idea

We're expanding our marketing efforts into Arizona, and I think our two companies would benefit by collaborating on a custom health-cost software package. We've nearly finished our health-cost analysis algorithms. If you are still working on your health-cost visualizations, I believe that our analysis package and your visualization package together would give us both an edge on the market. If you are interested, let's have our teams meet and work out details on the APIs this month. I've attached a list that Jen Clark, our market research analyst, put together of businesses in the Phoenix area that would benefit from our co-developed application. Jen has strong connections, and we'd be happy to share our connections with you if we proceed on this exciting project. Let's discuss this by phone. Are you free on Monday or Tuesday?

Bryce

YES

To: Brad Smith <brad.smith@email.com>  
From: Bryce Jones <brycej@email.com>  
Subject: Let's Collaborate

We're expanding our marketing efforts into Arizona, and I think our two companies would benefit by collaborating on a custom health-cost software package.

We've nearly finished our health-cost analysis algorithms. If you are still working on your health-cost visualizations, I think that our packages together would give us both an edge on the market.

Take a look at [this list](#) that Jen Clark, our market research analyst, put together of businesses in the Phoenix area that would benefit from our co-developed application. Jen has strong connections, and we'd be happy to share them with you if we proceed on this project.

If you're interested, our teams could meet and work out details on the APIs this month. Let's discuss this by phone. Are you free on Monday or Tuesday?

Bryce





## EMAIL APPLICATION TWO

# USE VISUAL SIGNPOSTS AND TOPIC SENTENCES

Visual signposts catch the reader's eye. Bold text, bullet lists, and indents all highlight your important points. Topic sentences help readers "get" your message even if they simply skim your email.

NO

To: Amy Wright <amy.wright@email.com>  
From: Adam Kim <akim@email.com>  
Subject: Get better soon!

Amy,

Sorry you missed the meeting last week! That cold sounds really rough. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help.

It was a good meeting. Not as much rambling as usual. We just covered the basics like the new client list, the ongoing audit, the yearly initiatives. Nothing new to report that you wouldn't have guessed. Oh, and HR came by and gave us all an update on the new health insurance. It looks really good. It will cost most of us less and should cover more. I'm stoked. Oh, yeah, and we're supposed to send any tweets about the company on to someone in CX. Then they'll take over. Well, get better soon.

Adam

YES

To: Amy Wright <amy.wright@email.com>  
From: Adam Kim <akim@email.com>  
Subject: Report on June 12 meeting

Amy,

I hope you're feeling better. Here's a quick report on the June 12 meeting that you missed:

- **CLIENTS** New clients are up slightly. We have lost Case and Quest but signed FastUP and one startup with promise (Coral).
- **AUDIT** The audit drags on but is projected to finish by August. Victoria needs your billing files by the end of this month.
- **CX INITIATIVE** Using Twitter as a customer response tool has increased interaction with our millennial clients by 75%. Libby will continue overseeing our Twitter account—she's been phenomenal!
- **HEALTH INSURANCE** Our new health insurance (Advantage) will cost us 7% less and cover 15% more. Here's [the link](#) to the signup form. It's due by 5 p.m. next Friday, June 25.

Looking forward to having you back in the office soon. Take care.

Adam



## EMAIL APPLICATION THREE

# INCLUDE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Support your ideas, but find the balance between giving enough and too much information. You don't want to overburden your reader, but you need to be credible. Use hyperlinks or attachments to provide more specific details.

NO

To: Melanie Morgan <mmorgan@email.com>  
From: Raj Singh <rajie@email.com>  
Subject: Update on office furniture

I'm so stoked that we get to buy new office furniture. My back has been killing me lately and I'm thinking it might be this dumb chair I've been sitting in. It's definitely not as comfortable as it looks. Hahaha. And there's the desks. No cord pull holes at all, just a slab, and the workmanship is so shoddy that it's always wobbling whenever I push back to go get snacks. (Forty times a day.) So yes, we definitely need new furniture. We get to decide what to buy. We could go to Ikea, or we could order online. Brad said we have a budget of \$2,500. What are you thinking? Should we even try to match the stuff in the back office, or just get something comfortable? I am thinking we should just go for comfort, but I don't know. I've started looking at the manufacturers and it looks like SitSmart, PosturePod, Wellesley, and BrainComfort are good. We have to decide whether we want to go local or order it shipped to us. I have so many things I want in a good chair, like posture control and height control, also mesh so we don't get too hot in the summer. But those are more expensive. I don't know. It's all so complicated, but I'm glad we get an upgrade!

Raj

YES

To: Melanie Morgan <mmorgan@email.com>  
From: Raj Singh <rajie@email.com>  
Subject: Update on office furniture

Brad finally approved a budget of \$2,500 for new office furniture!

I've attached a spreadsheet listing our current inventory. Hopefully, with the budget, we will be able to replace all of our desks and chairs.

I researched replacements, focusing on stability, cord access ports, lumbar support, and height adjustment. I've narrowed our options to the following:

Local (already assembled):

- [SitSmart](#) at OfficeBarn
- [BrainComfort](#) at Furnishall

Online (assembly required):

- [Wellesley](#) from ModernOffice,
- [PosturePod](#) from Saunders

Look these over and let me know what you think—you may have other feature priorities. Let's make a decision by Thursday at noon.

Raj

## EMAIL APPLICATION FOUR

# USE TRANSITIONS

Transitions help your audience follow the path through your email and understand the relationship between your paragraphs.

Note: transitions are in **green** to help you notice them—no need to color them in actual emails.

**NO**

To: TEAM  
From: Doug DeWitt <doug.dewitt@email.com>  
Subject: I have an idea

Team members,

Our website looks a lot better since the update, and I really like the new brochures. Thanks for helping to increase sales this month.

You'll find some cupcakes in the break room. Feel free to help yourself. Maybe some of the changes we have been trying to make have worked? It looks like you have been smiling more and listening better, and maybe you have not been using the same old memorized pitch? I really want to keep up the momentum we were getting last month.

Remember the steps we talked about last month about being cheerful on calls and customizing your responses. It really makes a difference.

Keep up the good work. Management is really happy about the new website and brochures, but you guys and your work are the main thing.

Sincerely,

Doug

**YES**

To: TEAM  
From: Doug DeWitt <doug.dewitt@email.com>  
Subject: New phone approach is working (and cupcakes!)

Team members,

Congratulations on a 16% increase in sales this month—our highest month-to-month improvement yet. Well done! Take a moment to celebrate your achievement by enjoying some cupcakes in the break room.

**In an effort** to keep up the momentum, I want to review some of the positive steps that we implemented last month.


**Before** answering the phone, smile as you make the connection. **After** greeting callers, listen carefully to their concerns—**before** you begin to make a pitch. **Once** you think you know the purpose for their call, reflect on what they said, **and then** customize the pitch to their concerns. No more memorized responses, please.

**As you demonstrated last month**, YOU are the ones who make the biggest difference when it comes to sales. **Of course**, we are grateful for recent improvements to our website and brochures, but when it comes to closing the deal, you make it happen. **In short**, you are irreplaceable.

Doug

# BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TECH TIPS

## TEXTING

Texting is becoming more common in business. Generally, save texting at work only for quick questions or reminders. Information you may need to reference again is best conveyed via email. To get a handle on texting for business, read *GetVoip's* infographic: [The 10 Commandments of Business Texting](#),  which shares such essential reminders as “Thou Shalt Not Text Bad News” and “Thou Shalt Not Text Sensitive or Privileged Information.”

## EMOJI :)

In your first professional emails, don't use emoji. Acceptable use is still evolving, and you can't be sure how your recipient will react to seeing them in your email. But if you find that your correspondent uses them freely, go ahead and respond in kind. As with exclamation points, use them sparingly. Emoji can improve the energy and humor of an email, but too many make you look immature and overeager.



Unclear exactly what a particular emoji means?  
Check out the definitions in the [Emojipedia](#).

## WHAT ABOUT GIFs?

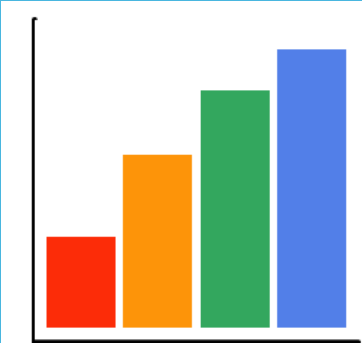
Communicating with funny internet GIFs is classic office fun, but be wary of using them in more traditional workplaces.

However, the use of GIFs and other visuals is increasing. Organizations like [General Electric](#) and [Disney](#) now have official collections available on [giphy.com](#).

You might create a GIF to illustrate an office process or demonstrate a trend. In 2015, [Google sent an animated GIF](#) to a reporter instead of replying “No Comment” — getting its message across very quickly.

Stoke your imagination!  
Pretend the bars are moving. ↘

Create a GIF to add motion to a message, illustrate a process, or highlight a trend.



GIF credit: Giphy.com

# IN CONCLUSION

Use these examples to start building clear, concise paragraphs today.

Create paragraphs deliberately by using **strong topic sentences**, meaning-clarifying **transitions**, and just the **right amount of detail**.

When you use paragraphs to write strong emails and reports, your messages are more likely to be read . . . and acted upon.



# LEARN MORE

Suggestions?  
Click **HERE**



## ARTICLES

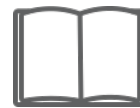
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