

# Takin' Care of Business



Mr. Breitsprecher's Edition

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## Effective Business & Technical Writing: Lists

Lists are useful because they emphasize selected information in regular text. When you see a list of three or four items strung out vertically on the page rather than in normal paragraph format, you naturally notice it more and are likely to pay more attention to it. Certain types of lists also make for easier reading. For example, in instructions, it is a big help for each step to be numbered and separate from the preceding and following steps.

Lists also create more white space and spread out the text so that pages don't seem like solid walls of words. While rarely used in academic writing styles, lists are common used in technical, business, and web writing styles. Lists help readers follow a sequence of actions or events; and they break up long stretches of straight text.

### Vertical vrs Horizontal Lists

Vertical lists are itemized down a page. Vertical lists require more attention and this is why software like MS Word has buttons which create and format them for us.

Some lists are written horizontally as sentences and paragraphs. Horizontal lists features items that follow each other across the page from left-to-right. We can key horizontal lists easily as we key text and its accompanying enumerations.

Most importantly, use numbered lists for items that are in a required order (such as step-by-step instructions) or for items that must be referred to by item number. Use bulleted lists for items that are in no required

### MS Word: Bulleted or Numbered Lists

You can quickly add bullets or numbers to existing lines of text, or Word can automatically create lists as you type. By default, if you start a paragraph by typing an asterisk followed by a space, Word creates a bulleted list. Or if you begin by typing an actual number, then Word creates a numbered list. If you don't want your text turned into a list, you can click the **AutoCorrect Options** button that appears when text is automatically turned into a list and choose an option.

You can make a list with just one level or with multiple levels to include lists within a list. When you create a bulleted or numbered list, you can do any of the following:

- Use the convenient Bullet and Numbering libraries
- Use the default bullet and numbering formats for lists, to customize the lists, or to select other formats from the Bullet and Numbering libraries.

Bullets or numbers can be formatted differently from the text in a list. For example, you can click a number and change the number color for the entire list, for example, without making changes to the text in the list. MS Word can create lists using enumerations of all types, bullets, any text symbol, and even pictures.

order.

With in-sentence lists, there are no conventions when to use letters (a), (b), and so on, as opposed to numbers (1), (2), and so on. If you are in a numbered list and need a sublist, use lowercase letters, to contrast with the numbers. Otherwise, there seem to be no widely agreed-upon guidelines—just be consistent!

Use vertical lists as opposed to in-sentence lists when you want the emphasis provided by the vertical presentation. In-sentence lists provide only minimal emphasis; vertical lists provide much more.

Within an individual report, use in-sentence lists and vertical lists consistently for similar situations. For example, if you have topic overviews for each section of a report, use in-sentence or vertical lists for the overview—but don't mix them for that particular use.

Punctuation of lists can vary and lists do not need to be complete sentences. The key is to make sure that what punctuation or sentence structure may be used is consistent within that list. Whether horizontal or vertical, when a complete sentence precedes a list, it should end with a colon (:).

### Nested/Multi-Level Lists

A nested list contains two or more levels of list items. Nested lists can contain every combination of list type: numbered list items with lowercase-letter sublist items, bullets or other characters; and other combinations of these.

For most desktop publishing projects, it is best not to let a multi-level list become too complex. The goal of professional page layout is to create a document that looks inviting and easy to read.

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