

Use Lists and Bullets to Clarify and Emphasize

An effective alternative to using conventional sentences is to set off important ideas in a – a series of words, names, or other items. Lists can show the sequence of your ideas, heighten their impact visually, and increase the likelihood that readers will find your key points. In addition, lists simplify complex subjects, highlight the main point, ease the skimming process for busy readers, and give them a breather. Consider the difference between the following two approaches to the same information:

Narrative

Owning your own business has many advantages. One is the ease of establishment. Another advantage is the satisfaction of working for yourself. As a sole proprietor, you also have the advantage of privacy because you do not have to reveal your information or plans to anyone.

List

Owning your own business has three advantages:

- Ease of establishment
- Satisfaction of working for yourself
- Privacy of information

When creating a list, you can separate items with numbers, letters, or *bullets* (a general term for any kind of graphical element that precedes each item). Bullets are generally preferred over numbers, unless the list is in some logical sequence or ranking, or specific list items will be referred to later on.

Lists are easier to locate and read if the entire numbered or bulleted section is set off by extra space before and after, as the preceding examples demonstrate. Furthermore, when using lists, make sure to introduce them clearly so that people know what they're about to read.

Bibliography:

Courtland L., B., & John V., T. (2007). Completing Business Messages. In D. Parker, R. Butera, & M. Boos (Eds.), *Business Communication Essentials* (3rd ed., pp. 104-105). Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall.

¹Lists are effective tools for highlighting and simplifying material.