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## Creating Effective Lists

### Guidelines and important tips for success:

- Be **judicious** with your use of lists; because of their formatting, lists can distract the reader if overused
- Break up long lists—if necessary, use headers to break up lists or simply condense your points
- Present lists in parallel structures:
  - Same type of sentence, clause, or phrase – note how the prior bullet points are **parallel structured** because they all begin with present-tense verbs; note how the points in this section are **not parallel structured** – “same” is an adjective and “if” is a preposition
  - Same part of speech – nouns and verbs work best and are more concise; note how each circular bulleted point above has started with a verb
  - If applicable, also use the same verb tense throughout
- Structure and punctuate the lead-in of the list correctly by using a colon; note how a colon follows “Guidelines and important tips for success” above
- Punctuate the list consistently; business style should be **crisp** and **energetic** and at times might deviate from the rules you might find in a style manual:
  - If you begin by using a period at the end of each bulleted point, continue using one throughout
  - If you begin by using no punctuation at the end (question marks excepted), then continue to do so throughout
  - If you are not consistent, your reader might mistake your inconsistency for sloppiness or a lack of knowledge, both of which could hurt your **credibility**

**Bulleting:** Bullets are used to avoid long, complicated sentences, to organize lists, and to prioritize information. Bulleted information assists your audience in remembering significant information. Many readers of business documents want to skim the text while also understanding key points. Using bulleted lists, then, can help your readers identify key points very quickly. Use bullets when you want to:

- Condense important parts of your content into a more readable, skimmable format
- Organize a series of related – but not chronological or sequential – items
- Isolate important points you want the audience to remember

**Listing:** Numbered lists indicate a specific order, usually a chronological order or a sequential/step-by-step order. As with bulleted lists, numerical lists help readers identify and understand key points quickly; however, these sorts of lists also show a relationship between listed items. For example, a list indicates that you cannot do step 3 of a process until the first two steps have been completed, or a list may indicate that item one is the most important item in the list.

- Clarify a step-by-step process the reader should follow in order to complete a given task
- Represent a chronological relationship in an easy-to-read manner
- Condense a long clause, phrase, or sentence into a more readable format
- Communicate the priority of certain items; the higher up on the list, the more important it is