

Alternatives for Vague or Ambiguous Words

Vague or ambiguous words and phrases in business communication weaken your message and may cause confusion. The secret to better understanding is knowing when to be more specific.

Below are examples of phrases containing vague or ambiguous words (in BOLD) with possible alternatives.

| Vague or Ambiguous Phrases | "Be Specific" Alternative |
|--|---|
| The meeting was about an hour behind. | The meeting was delayed for an hour. |
| The team almost hit their target sales. | The team hit 98% of their target sales. |
| It appears to be lacking a strong closing. | The report lacks a strong summary. |
| We're approximately halfway. | The project is midway to completion. |
| The product got bad reviews. | Eight of ten purchasers rated the product's overall effectiveness as Poor. |
| In certain circumstances, that occurs. | The fitness device crashes when the charge falls to less than 10%. |
| I hope to get your feedback. | I welcome your feedback. |
| It looks as if we will have to do it again. | Our next step is to run the test again. |
| The project is nearly there. | The project should be finished Friday. |
| It is roughly what we expected. | The results produced the expected outcome, with a few exceptions. Specifically... |
| We need a lot of stuff to finish. | We need answers to these five questions to finish the project. |
| There are things we need to know. | We need to know the date, time, and location of the meeting. |

Alternatives for Vague or Ambiguous Words

(continued)

| Vague or Ambiguous Words | "Be Specific" Alternative |
|--------------------------|---|
| A lot, many | Twice a week (or other specific number) |
| Certain | Identify items (instead of writing "certain items") |
| Contact | Call, email, text |
| Do | Complete, finish, perform |
| Everything | List specific examples, items |
| Get | Acquire, attain, comprehend, understand, achieve |
| It | Define what "it" is (except if you defined the object in previous statement) |
| Kind (of) | The report was kind of late. |
| Nice | Use a description (instead of "nice" product, describe - compact, sleek) |
| Particular | Instead of "particular" result, describe the result. |
| Probably | You probably noticed... |
| Very | Substitute a strong word (very good > excellent, very short > brief, very expensive > costly) |