

February 22, 2003

INTRODUCTION:

On Feb 26/27 please bring two copies of your WSJa#2. The first copy you will turn in as usual. The second copy will be used for in class editing by another student.

This email provides generic comments on WSJa#1 slides. As should be expected, the WSJa#1 slides of every student would be improved by one or more of the following suggestions. Many of the other suggestions below would not have been applicable to a given student's WSJa#1 slides, but almost certainly will be applicable to future WSJa slides.

ISSUE COMMENTS:

As should be expected, there was a limited array of stories selected by the 40+ students. Immediately below are some questions I suggest you ponder with respect to the "Due Diligence" WSJa and the articles. Some of these questions will be nonsensical except to those students who choose a specific article. Other of these questions, while targeted at the core of a specific article, apply equally well to many other articles. You should be able to spot the question motivated by your articles and you should be able to answer those two questions as well as the generic questions.

1. It is theft if, at the end of day one, an IPO's market price is double its offering price. Why, how, and by who?
2. Is it feasible for a strategic alliance to reduce constraints on the production function (i.e., more is less)?
3. When, if ever, are emotional claims (e.g., founder or family) on a corporation legally relevant? Is greed different?
4. Is it both factually and legally feasible for a firm's SEC filing to avoid unilateral mistake by consumers?
5. Who would buy a franchise that everyone knows is losing money?
6. Is the future so lacking in objectivity that it is not objective?
7. As a question of law, when does the client "know" that the client may not justifiably rely upon the advice (i.e., expert opinion) of counsel?
8. Is a correct accounting value the true value?
9. Should privity be necessary for justifiably reliance upon gratuitous advice?
10. Does a consumer's receipt of notice --of a technical notice when the notice is part of the terms of an adhesion contract-- bind the consumer?

COMMENTS APPLICABLE TO PROFESSIONAL WRITINGS:

There is a difference between written and spoken English. This difference increases as the requisite formality of the document increase. Slides for professional presentation are quite formal. Let me start with ten items that an attentive author of a professional document will do.

[1: if/then] A sentence that starts with or starts its principal clause with the word "if" should (except when justified by artistic considerations) use the format "If

... , then ...". All too often, the author sets up the reader for a logical connection and fails to deliver. Frequently, the author's sentence structure fails to unambiguously identify the logical conclusion of the sentence.

[2: ie&eg] The abbreviations "i.e.," and "e.g.," spring from Latin. They mean, respectively, "that is" and "for example". Each of the letters in the pair requires a period. When these phrases are used in English, these phrases call for a comma.

[3: contractions] "Don't do it." is appropriate in spoken English, but should be avoided in professional English. Do not use contractions in written English. However, when quoting a person, the quote should be accurate and when writing in dialect the spoken dialect should be faithfully displayed.

[4: acronym] Unless an acronym is universally known by the intended audience (e.g., USA), then an acronym's first use should be within a parenthetical comment following the full term that is being reduced to the acronym: for example, "United States of America (USA)". In longer documents (e.g., with chapters), until such time as the author can safely assume all readers of the new chapter will know the acronym, then the author should treat the first use of the acronym in that new chapter as the first use of the acronym.

[5: numeral homonyms] This task is very hard to do. Newspapers have so conditioned readers to violate this linguistic rule that one is hard pressed, at first to accomplish the task of professional writing. However, once mastered you will notice an appreciable reduction in reader confusion. Do not use homonyms of numerals adjacent to numbers. For example, write "between 2 and 4" rather than "from 2 to 4".

[6: consistent scale] When writing of numbers it is common to limit the number of digits and use the English word for the number of trailing zeros. For example, rather than typing "\$1,000,000" an author tends to type "\$1 million". Such brevity can assist the reader in comparing two numbers. For example, it is much easier for the average reader to compare "1st and 2nd quarter sales of \$1.1 million and \$2.2 million" than it is for the average reader to compare "1st and 2nd quarter sales of \$1,100,000 and \$2,200,000". However, the reader is quite likely to be lead very far astray if the author mixes and matches strikingly similar English words of vastly different meanings. For example, a poor author will write "1st and 2nd quarter sales of \$1.1 million and \$2.2 billion" while a good author will write "1st and 2nd quarter sales of \$1.1 million and \$2,200.0 million". Since the vast majority of readers could not explain the difference between a million and a billion, you will aide and better inform the vast majority of readers when you write \$2,200.0 million instead of \$2.2 billion.

[7: significant digits] (*Long ago and far away in math you learned about significant digits. Take a moment to think and try to remember what you knew. Are you now ready to read on?*) At the end of the last paragraph, does not that ".0" look sort of funny at the end of \$2,200 million? Do not delete that ".0" unless you also delete the ".1" on the \$1.1 million. Either, mathematically you data have the precision to see \$100,000 or it does not. To write "\$1.1 million and \$2,200 million" is to inform a knowledgeable reader that the author does not know math and should not be believed.

[8: nouns not pronouns] Spoken English was developed prior to the telephone. Accordingly, spoken English presumes eye-to-eye contact. The ability to

truncate the formal content of spoken English springs from this eye-to-eye contact. (Accordingly, much of what follows also applies to telephone conversations.) In face-to-face conversations spoken English slips towards greater shared understanding and familiarity. A written document does not provide that stream of information. Thus, while spoken English is replete with the use of inherently ambiguous indefinite pronouns of the first, second, and third person while at the same time providing for communication with a high fidelity of thought transmission, the same is not true for written English. Let us try an example where a buyer (male) is talking with his attorney (female) about the landlord's (female) performance. We have three parties, one male, and two females. What does the following sentence mean: "She told her that she could not do that or he would sue her."? Read that sentence twice. First, read that sentence assuming the both "she" are one female and both "her" are the other female. Second, read that sentence assuming the first she and the second her are the same female as well as the second she and the first her are the same female. Increase your use of nouns and decrease your use of pronouns. Only use one sex specific pronoun per sentence or paragraph.

[9: tab] The block style of paragraph is profitable for bookbinders but confuses readers when authors do not use the same level of formatting skill as bookbinders. A paragraph that starts left justified and is not preceded by a black line can not be discerned as the beginning of a paragraph unless the last line of text of the prior paragraph is noticeably short. This is bad. Ideally, authors will both start a paragraph with a tab and precede the new paragraph with a blank line.

[10: proof read] Often it is neigh on impossible for an author to "see" typographical errors after reading the document multiple times. Spell checkers can not "see" many errors, especially if the author too swiftly clicks "Ignore", or far worse clicks "Add". Ask someone to proof read your important documents. Very simple errors will be glaringly obvious to a new reader. Common errors can be as simple open quotes without a close quote, or a lack of number agreement between verb and its noun.

COMMENTS APPLICABLE TO TYPING REQUIRMENTS

Typing requirements when not followed generate an automatic grade loss of 5% of the assignment grade. Those that were ignored on WSJa#1 include 24 font, bolded, black print on a white background (i.e., start with a genuinely blank slide). Read email #27 for new TYPING REQUIREMENTS.

COMMENTS APPLICABLE TO POWERPOINT SLIDE GENERICALLY

Your WSJa uses two slides. The first slide is a classic PowerPoint slide and the second slide is traditional prose.

[A: forced line breaks] Do not let your computer do --all-- of your layout. You should control the image on the slide, especially the text image. Most programs use a line wrap feature: when the typed text is longer than one line, then the computer wraps the text onto the next line. This is a great feature that, I would guess, is responsible for most the productivity gains that computers have generated. Do not eliminate the line wrap, but do take control of the line wrap. The author can

force a line wrap with the two key combination of shift+enter. Look at most of my old exams and quizzes and you will note how I force line breaks to assist the reader by placing whole phrases on one line and emphasizing concepts by isolating the text on one line. On a slide this type of emphasis and isolation is even more dramatic and needed.

[B: white space] Often, less than the whole slide is needed to say all that is going to be said. How should the empty white space be used? Just left by default at the bottom of the slide? No. Take control of the white space and use it to create emphasis of the text. Do you have three bullets, two of which are a pair? Within the pair separate the two by one blank line and visually isolate the third item by separating it by at least two blank lines. Centering is a way of using white space. Centering without forced line breaks almost always reduces the readability of the text. Centering with forced line breaks doubly keys the reader as to important text and uses white space well.

[C: background] Most novice PowerPoint users are so enamored with the pallet of pre-formatted background choices that these authors overload their readers. The author's choice of background should be made so as to evoke in the reader some specific thought or emotion related to the content of the slides (e.g., seasonal motifs). All backgrounds are distracting. Thus, the background should distract the reader towards a desired destination. Backgrounds have the advantage of reducing the useable slide area so as to force the author to say less on a slide. Most authors say too much on a slide. (Your even slides are not "slides", rather they are in prose.) Some students slides had fragments of formatting. To obtain a truly black slide use the menu option File|New|General|Blank Presentation|empty slide at lower right. To enter text on this truly blank slide, use the menu option Insert|Text Box which will make your cursor active so that you can position the new textbox on the slide. To set the font face to 24 Tahoma bold black use the menu option Format|Font and click Tahoma, and bold, and 24, and select the color, and then check the default box, and finally click OK. One aspect of the "background" of a slide is the transition feature of slides in presentations. In the menu option Slide Show|Slide Transition the author may change the method by which a slide comes to be displayed on the screen. In a non-short presentation, there should be multiple transition styles; this helps keep the audience awake. Transitions are distracting and thus should distract the reader towards a desired direction. If a presentation contains multiple segments (e.g., chapters), then all slides of a chapter might be set to use the same type of transition. If a presentation has a recurring theme, then new slides reintroducing that theme could be set to use the same transition. Avoid sound effects. The variation in sound cards between machines often results in a freeze or a crash. (In CBA, every effort to use the typewriter sound effect has caused a freeze or a crash.) Do not use sound unless you can verify the sound effect actually will work on the machine upon which you will make the presentation. Also, be sure to set the volume level.

[C: margins] The TYPING REQUIREMENTS do not specify margins on slides. There are three types of margins for slides: printing, displaying, and reading. Most printers can only apply ink as close as 0.5 inches from the edge of the paper. If a

slide is to be reduced to hard copy, then margins should be set with the printer in mind. Generically, use at least 0.6 inches. The overhead display of a slide (via projector rather than printed overhead) can use the entire surface of the slide. However, readability typically calls for some margin. Most software has a default "force to fit" option that will assume the author knows what the author is doing when the author puts too much text within a fixed space. The force-to-fit option will, without notice to the author, reduce the font size and kerning to squeeze the text into the available space. Forced to fit text, rarely, is readable.

[D: bullets] Slides tend to use bullets rather than sentences. All sentences always have periods. Bullets do not. A bullet (typically) starts with some marker. PowerPoint offers a host of bullet styles. Like backgrounds, all bullets are distracting and should be selected to distract the reader in a desired direction. The "bullet" should be followed by a tab and the text, and when the text line wraps the wrapped text should be indented. This is called a hanging indentation. With an inserted textbox on a truly blank slide you may use a pre-formatted bullet with the menu option Format|Bullets and Numbering where you can select from a set of choices. Or, you may create your own bullets (e.g., use characters * or > as the bullet) and use the menu option View|Ruler to be able to set a hanging indentation by grabbing the square under the bottom pyramid and pulling it to the right by the desired indentation and then grabbing the top pyramid to set the left margin. How many bullets should there be on a slide? That is a question of art. Generically, there should be no more than between 3 and 5 bullets per slide, and fewer is better than more. How much content should a bullet contain? Again, that is a question of art. Generically, a bullet should contain no more than between 1 and 3 lines of text, and fewer is better. A slide delivers key points rather than expansive exposition. Prose does exposition. A presentation should contain between 0.5 and 1.5 slides per minute of presentation, with the smaller number more appropriate if there is more text on the slides and the larger number of slide more appropriate if more of the slides merely are transitional image slides.

COMMENTS ON THE FIRST SLIDE

After that necessary and lengthy diversion into generic comments on professional writing and slide construction, let us now return to specific comments about your (plural) WSJa#1 efforts.

[I: citation] The odd numbered slides are to start, at the top of the slide, with a -full- bibliographic citation. A full bibliographic citation for a newspaper article would allow the reader to swiftly find the article on a microfiche copy of the newspaper. What would you want if you were to do that search? **[Ia]** Clarity would be a big plus. Punctuation with appropriate spacing is much clearer. Commas and semicolons are followed by a blank space while periods and colons are followed by two blank spaces. **[Ib]** The citation of newspaper articles typically gives primacy to the article title, rather than the author on the by line. **[Ic]** The title of a newspaper article is within quote marks while the title of the newspaper is indicated either by underlining or by italics. **[Id]** Typically, the column where the article is printed is indicated in the -full-

bibliographic citation. **[Ie]** Some newspaper articles start and end on one page, others start on one page and then are continued on another page. A -full- bibliographic citation gives the start page and column, followed by the continuation page without column.

[II: slide content] **[IIa]** Since these four slides are in a pre-set pairing, to repeat the article title at the top of the slides is unhelpful redundancy. **[IIb]** Recall that the even slides are PowerPoint slides while the odd slides are prose. **[IIc]** The article selection reflects critical thinking when the student selects a WSJ article that is centered on a concept that is not expressly mentioned by the article.

COMMENTS ON THE SECOND SLIDE

[a redundancy] See **[IIa]** above.

[b topic] In addition to item **[9 tab]** above, helpful author will start prose paragraph with key concept emphasized (e.g., underlined). For example, when a slide explores Due Diligence and a second and/or third concept, each of those two/three core concepts to the prose paragraphs would orient the reader.

[c paragraphs] The odd slides should have more than one paragraph. There should be no more paragraphs than there are bullets on the paired even slide, preferably fewer.

[d build] The prose of the odd slide should build upon, rather than repeat, even slide. The reader of the odd slide already has read the even slide. Repetition on the even slide wastes very scarce space.

[e flush] Unlike a bullet, which uses a hanging indentation, a prose paragraph should not use hanging indent. The first line should start with a tab, See **[9 tab]** above, and the lines that wrap should be flush on the left margin.