

Write 2 the Point!



**Designed to Improve
Business Writing**

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Introduction

If I had known my son was going to be president of Bolivia, I would have taught him to read and write. - Enrique Penaranda's mother

Business writing is a skill

Good business writing makes it possible to create memos, letters, reports and other documents that are easy for people to read and understand. Basically, the aim of business writing is to craft writing that prompts action whether it be to inspire readers to learn more about a topic, change their ideas about an issue or spur them to act sooner. This manual outlines the basic steps to becoming a better business writer.

Many people think writing is difficult. Certainly successful novelists and playwrights spend many hours planning, revising and agonizing over their products. But that's creative writing which includes many descriptive words.

In comparison, business writing is short, simple and to the point. The ability to write clearly and succinctly for business purposes isn't inherited or a skill with which you are born. Rather, it is a process or a series of steps. Once learned, it needs to be practiced.

Benefits of this course

You can become a better business writer by learning and applying the process outlined in this manual. But you may have to restructure your way of thinking a bit. This manual will show you how to get started. It will also show you how to develop skills most of us never learned in school where editing and revising documents are typically the focus.

Few people are really skillful writers, so by becoming a good business writer, you will be recognized and in demand. You will be more credible and valuable to your organization and colleagues.

Learning this manual's lessons will improve your ability to organize and convey your thoughts and desires. You will have greater confidence in your writing abilities and have less anxiety when faced with writing tasks.

Your writing may be your first contact with an organization or person. So, as a writer you have the opportunity to create and maintain good relations with the public and other organizations by crafting messages that are clear, concise and to the point. Ultimately, your writing speaks for you and your organization.

What does your writing say about you? Maybe it's time to sharpen your pencil and your skills.

*Excellent writing translates
into the ability to:*

- ✓ *think well*
- ✓ *analyze problems*
- ✓ *make decisions*
- ✓ *persuade others*

*These are leadership qualities and
skills that can be learned and
developed.*

DIAGNOSTIC WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the following topics, and compose a two- or three-paragraph writing sample.



1. Describe your job responsibilities in a memo to your personnel office.
2. Recommend a change in a policy or procedure to your supervisor.
3. Write a letter applying for a job you'd like to have.
4. Write a letter, memo or something similar to what you write on a regular basis.
5. Choose your own topic.

A Simple Approach to Business Writing

*Clear writing is just talk put into ink.
- Jonathan Price*

Getting Started

Business writing can be intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. In fact, mastering the skill of business writing can be fairly easy. The trick is to break a writing task into individual steps starting with defining your objective. From there, you move on to the next in a series of logical steps with each effort building on the previous until you have a finished product. This manual will take you through each of the steps. And before long, you too will be able to craft clearer, more effective products with greater confidence.

Like most important tasks, good business writing takes planning. You might be eager to clear a job off of your desk, but it's best to spend time thinking before you start to write.

First, consider your purpose. Determine what you want to have happen as a result of your product. Ideally, your reader will be prompted to take action, learn something new or change his or her feelings about a topic. **If the desired action doesn't occur, or if no one learns anything new, you've most likely wasted your time and your reader's.**

Inexperienced writers often skip the planning phase and just start writing. The result is often an unfortunate product, directed at no one in particular, that usually goes off on a tangent frustrating and confusing its readers.

Instead, start with these steps. They will help you get to the heart of the reason for your writing:

Establish Your Purpose

- ✍ Determine your goal
- ✍ Analyze your reader
- ✍ Define your content

Writers who take time to think about what they want to achieve, how to address their readers and how to approach their subject usually produce writing that achieves its purpose.

This can't be stressed enough: Until you know **why** you are writing, **to whom** you are writing and about **what** you are writing, you probably won't be very successful in your writing.

At work, your documents must be written to inform, persuade or task your readers to take action. This type of writing is different from academic writing which is something you produce for a teacher to show how well you've learned a lesson. People at work don't have the time, interest or tolerance for academic writing.

Determine your goal

Ask yourself what effect you want to achieve with your letter, memo or report. Do you want to get information, levy a task, inform of status, ask for help, influence a decision? Even if you only want to convey information, as most documents do, you still must have an expectation that the reader will do something

with the information or feel differently after reading it. That expectation must be considered in determining your goal.

Analyze your reader

It's easier to write if you know something about your reader. To whom are you writing, and what do you know about the person or people? Knowing your reader helps you to tailor your goal and subject. If you're writing to someone you know, your task may be easier than if you don't know the reader. Conduct a reader analysis by asking yourself:

1. Who are my readers?
2. What are their attitudes toward me, my organization and my material? (Are they receptive, hostile or indifferent?) What are their views, biases and other predispositions in general?
3. What do they know about the subject at this point? How do they feel about it?
4. Will this piece be informational, or will my readers have to do something?
5. How do I want them to respond?
6. How are they likely to respond? Are they likely to cooperate or resist?
7. What objections or questions are they likely to have?

Your answers will help determine the length, scope, content, structure, development, style and tone of your message. **The basic principle here is that you are not writing for yourself - you are writing for your reader.**

If you're responding to a letter from someone you don't know, try reading between the lines. What might you gather about the writer of this next letter?

Dear Sir or Madam:

Since my husband died five months ago, I have written to your agency repeatedly to request benefits for my five children under the age of 18. (Copies of correspondence are enclosed.) In that time I have received exactly one response from a bureaucrat, who didn't even sign his name, telling me to fill out and return a form. I did that over a month ago, but since then I've heard nothing. (A copy of the completed form is enclosed.) My children and I do need those benefits, and we're entitled to them! I demand they start immediately.

*Sincerely,
Jessica Cove*

Reading between the lines tells you Ms. Cove is a recent grieving widow. You also know she is organized (because she has provided copies of all of her correspondence) and feels she has been mistreated by impersonal "bureaucrats." She also is obviously frustrated, even angry. Recognizing all of this helps you know Ms. Cove better; it allows you to put yourself in her shoes. Analyzing Ms. Cove makes responding to her easier.

If you're writing to a group, consider what most people have in common. Keep in mind that human beings, not case numbers or files, will read what you've written. Even if you know nothing about your readers, you do know that people like to be treated with courtesy and respect. They don't like their time wasted. And because people prefer good news to bad, strive to be positive in your wording.