

Read and Write to Succeed

Lesson Objectives:

- Improve writing skills
- Develop effective business writing techniques
- Use common forms of business writing
- Explain writing styles appropriate for various correspondence
- Improve reading comprehension
- Develop reading skills such as skimming and previewing

Please read the information below about reading and writing.

Every job involves reading and writing. Knowledge workers (workers who work with information and knowledge) are in high demand. Therefore, your career success will depend on developing strong skills in reading and writing.

To write well, you must define your audience, your purpose, and the subject. You must also do the following:

- Organize - Give your document a clear structure (format). Use a logical order; such as chronological (time) order or order of importance. Use subheadings and connecting words such as “however,” “therefore,” and “by comparison,” to guide the reader.
- Use a Formal but Friendly Tone - Match your *tone* (How does your writing *feel* to the reader?) to the situation. A businesslike, clear, approachable tone is correct in most business/professional situations. In a letter responding to a customer’s request, for example, you would write in a tone that is respectful and polite.
- Follow Appropriate Style - Use short, simple sentences and direct, comprehensible language. Avoid overused or complicated phrases, slang and inappropriate language.
- Rewrite and Revise - Write your first draft, then revise. Re-read and revise again. Reading your writing aloud can help you make sure that there are no awkward words or phrases. If you are unsure of your proofreading skills, ask a colleague or friend to read important documents you have written.
- Check Spelling and Grammar - Use a dictionary and style guide, as well as the spell-check tool on a computer program, to check your spelling, definitions, and grammatical rules. Carefully proofread your work before sending it out.
- Pay Attention to Presentation - Present your writing in a professional manner. Use consistent text formatting and spacing throughout, and make sure each page is crisp and unwrinkled. Follow standard formats for different types of business writing, such as e-mail, memos, letters, and reports.

Quick Tip: Read your own writing out loud. This technique can help you find mistakes and awkward phrases.

Write Clearly and Concisely

The most important rule of business writing is to be *clear*. Say things in the clear and simple terms. If your writing is not clear, stop and ask yourself what you are trying to say. You may discover that you do not know. Clarify your message, then start again. Write in the active voice and be specific. For example:

Write - "Our team won the annual sales trophy."

Rather than - "The sales trophy was awarded to our team."

Write - "Thirty-five customers cancelled their subscriptions because of the article on the mayor."

Rather than - "Our last issue wasn't that popular."

Choose words your target audience (the people who will read your writing) will understand. Replace slang or jargon (technical terminology related to a special activity or group) with words that are clear.

Master Business Correspondence

To write effectively on the job, you also need to master the basic formats of written business correspondence: e-mails, memos, and letters.

E-mail, or electronic mail, is a message sent over the Internet. Many businesses use e-mail to conduct their day-to-day business communication.

A memo, short for memorandum, is an internal (generated within and kept inside) company document that announces important information. For example, you might need to write a memo to announce an upcoming meeting or a policy.

A letter is an official printed document that communicates especially important information that need a permanent or more formal record, such as a job offer or legal announcement. Companies will usually print all business letters on their letterhead (pre-printed stationery that includes the company name and contact information, including the company logo). Letters are more formal because they always include a greeting and complimentary closing. A greeting is a beginning line, such as "Dear Ms. Smith." and a complimentary closing is an ending line, such as "Sincerely."

Quick Tip: Business letters are considered more formal than an e-mail messages or memos and are typically intended for customers and other contacts outside the organization.

Ingredients of Business Communication

Emails, memos, and letters look different but have similar parts. They all include:

- the name and contact information of the sender
- the date
- the names of the recipients and anyone who is “copied” on the communication
- a brief statement of the subject
- optional attachments or enclosures

State Your Purpose, Then Provide Supporting Details

Whether you are writing an e-mail, memo or letter, it is important to be brief and to the point. State a clear purpose at the beginning of the document, then provide supporting details.

When you write an e-mail or a memo, type the topic in the subject line of the message. An optional subject line can be included at the beginning of a letter as well, or the first sentence of the letter can be used to indicate the purpose.

Elements of Effective Business Writing

Many employers consider written communication skills one of the most important job skills an employee can have. The main reason for this, believe it or not, is that few people possess this skill. Poor communication causes employers to lose business and money. Therefore, the ability to write a message clearly and accurately is an important skill to have in the working world.

Good writing skills involve composing written or printed communications. It requires the presentation of clear, logical thoughts. The following are some techniques that will help improve your writing:

Pre-writing

Pre-writing includes everything you do before you actually start your document: researching your topic, making an outline, brainstorming, and talking to people to gather information. Pre-writing exercises help you organize your material and narrow your focus. It helps you present clear, organized ideas, and saves you time and energy when you actually start writing.

- *Outlining* helps you organize your ideas and is a great way to begin a writing project or structure notes. Outlining was covered in previous activities/assignments. To review, outlining includes writing down major points or ideas in a numbered list. Then, write supporting details or subtopics under each major point. Use your outline to check that your ideas flow in a logical order. You may need to rearrange, combine, or delete elements of the outline as you continue to develop your ideas.
- *Free writing* is simply writing everything that comes to mind about a topic, in any order. Free writing helps you get your ideas flowing and is especially helpful if you find yourself stuck or unsure of where to start.

Taking Notes

Notetaking was covered in previous activities/assignments. To review, taking notes helps you remember facts and keeps your attention focused. When you take notes, both your mind and your hands are involved in listening. Here are a few tips about how to take good notes:

- Do not try to write down everything a speaker says. Instead, focus on key words and main ideas. Jot down summaries in your own words.
- Use bulleted lists, asterisks (stars), and arrows to show relationships among ideas.
- Note any questions you have or actions you need to take.
- Review, re-write, or type your notes to be sure you understand concepts or instructions.

Revising

A first draft is your first attempt at a written document. A good writer reviews and rewrites text. Rephrase sentences that are repetitive or unclear. Cut unnecessary words and paragraphs, and make sure your ideas flow in a logical order. Even though an introduction is the first part of any document, it is often helpful to go back and write an introduction or make introductory statements *after* the other information is organized.

Today, few written communications, in the workplace, are handwritten. The majority of written and printed communications are prepared with a keyboard or keypad. Therefore, basic keyboarding skills is a tool that will be helpful in almost any work setting.

Focus on Reading Skills

You are likely to spend as much time reading as you do writing on the job. You will use reading to acquire, evaluate, and interpret information in a variety of ways. For example, you will skim help-wanted ads to find job openings, you will read to correctly fill out a job application, you will need to read and respond to e-mails, memos, and letters, you will need to read instructions and reports, and you will also need to re-read your own writing before you send or present it to others.

Previewing

Previewing means reading key parts of a written work that help you predict its content. To preview, look at book and chapter titles, headings, photos and photo captions, and key terms. Previewing prepares you for what you will read and helps you retain (keep) and understand what you have read.

Skimming

Skimming means reading quickly through a book or a document to pick out key points. To skim, look at the first sentences of paragraphs, as well as key terms and phrases. Skimming is helpful when you need a general idea of what is in a written work but do not have time to read it fully.

Taking Notes

Taking notes is a reading skill, as well as a writing skill. Writing down main ideas, useful quotes,

questions, new vocabulary, and your own summaries of information helps you understand and recall what you read. Not taking can be especially helpful when you are reading technical information, or when you are preparing for a meeting at work.

Monitoring Comprehension

To be an effective reader, you also need to check your own comprehension (remembrance and understanding of what was read). Stop at the end of every section or page and assess what you have just learned. Restate the main concepts in your own words. If you have trouble remembering or describing what you have read, re-read and review. You may need to read a passage two or three times in order to fully understand it.

Critical Reading

Like critical thinking, critical reading involves analyzing, thinking clearly, and evaluating. Think critically about what you read and distinguish between facts and opinions. A fact is a truth that can be proven. An opinion is a belief or preference and cannot be proven, even if it is based on facts. As you read, ask yourself:

- Is this a fact or an opinion?
- Do I agree with the author?
- Why or why not?
- What have I experienced that can help me relate to this passage?
- What can I infer (figure out) from this passage that is not stated directly?

Different kinds of texts require different kinds of reading. A textbook, for example, contains mostly facts. An editorial in a newspaper contains mostly opinions. Use different reading strategies to get the most out of each kind of text.

Communication is the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver. Communication skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading are crucial to your future success.