

WORKSHOP 1 WRITING IN THE WORKPLACE

GOALS

- ▶ Understand the value of good writing skills.
- ▶ Identify the skills necessary for effective writing and communicating.
- ▶ Learn the importance of clarity and persuasiveness in writing.



©2001 PhotoDisc, Inc.

GO WRITE TO THE TOP

Business and Technical Writing Resources

- Video (26:00)
- CD-ROM Study Guide
- Instructor's Resource CD-ROM
- WebTutor
- ExamView Pro Testing CD-ROM

What's the Name of the Game?

In the short term, the store will lose the sales of people who leave because they are so angry about the mistake. In the long term, the store may permanently lose some customers who no longer trust the store advertisements.

Information is the “air” that businesses breathe to stay alive. E-mails, memos, project reports, proposals—companies today depend on clear, precise communication in a variety of formats. In most career fields, you can count on writing being a main component of your daily business. This workshop provides valuable tools for making your business writing effective, clear, and persuasive.

What's the Name of the Game?


Last Friday, Jalen's boss asked him to write a flyer announcing that a hot new video game, Bookieman, would go on sale at 7:00 Saturday evening. Jalen quickly wrote the flyer, which read:

**NEW BOOGIEMAN ON SALE!!!
SATURDAY MAY 1ST AT 7 O'CLOCK**

At 8 a.m. Saturday, Jalen arrived at the store and saw a line of nearly 50 angry people at the front door. One man yelled, “Hey, I've been in line for an hour. You said the sale started at 7!”

A young boy said to Jalen with a smirk, “Um . . . mister . . . do you have lots of **Boogiemans?**” The boy and his friends laughed hysterically.

Jalen realized that he had written “7 o'clock” instead of “7:00 p.m.” He had also misspelled Bookieman, the name of the game!

 **How do you think Jalen's careless writing will affect the store in the short term and in the long term?**

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Workplace Documents

The following list of typical workplace documents is only a sample of what you might write for your company.

- Product descriptions
- Press releases
- Memos
- Sales letters
- Policy statements
- Flyers and announcements
- Status reports
- E-mail correspondence
- Traditional letter correspondence
- Instructional manuals

Why Write?

Most workplace writing uses one or more of the following three basic purposes.

- **To explain, instruct, or describe.** A customer service representative might write to a customer to describe an upcoming promotion or to explain how to send back a damaged good.
- **To make a request.** A purchasing manager might write an e-mail to a vendor requesting a brochure about a specific product.
- **To persuade.** A construction manager might write a proposal to try to win the bid for a public works project. A persuasive message is similar to a request, in that it asks the reader to take action.

Say It in Plain English

You may have a vocabulary that rivals Shakespeare, but don't use overly sophisticated language in business documents. Business writing should be clear and concise.

- **Use simple, direct language.** Avoid using complicated words when simple words will communicate your message.
- **Be concise.** Say what you need to say in as few words as possible.
- **Focus.** Include the main points, and omit sentences that take the reader off track.
- **Prefer the active voice.** Instead of writing in the passive voice (“A new policy was adopted by the committee”), write in the active voice (“The committee adopted a new policy”).
- **Adopt a businesslike tone.** If you write with a strong, professional, positive tone, your message is more likely to persuade your reader.
- **Proofread!** Always check your documents (and e-mail messages) for proper grammar and spelling.

Key Ideas

- ★ **effective**—producing a desired or intended effect
- ★ **persuasive**—having the power to convince someone to do or believe something
- ★ **active voice**—a sentence construction in which the subject performs the action expressed in the verb; the subject acts (Maria threw the book on the floor.)
- ★ **proofread**—to read a document very carefully to check for spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes

Tools of the Trade

This workshop presents important strategies for making your business writing effective, clear, and persuasive. Review Key Ideas, definitions, and the guidelines presented in Tools of the Trade. Encourage learners to brainstorm many different types of documents that employees have to write in the workplace.

Introduction to Workplace Writing

View and discuss Segment 1: *Introduction to Workplace Writing*. Running time: approx. 3:00.



INTRODUCTION TO WORKPLACE WRITING

Segment 1

Prepare to learn about writing in the workplace! This video segment will help you understand such topics as developing good writing skills on the job and what's required for effective workplace communication. You'll also learn the importance of clarity and persuasiveness in your workplace writing.

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action.

—William Shakespeare

Using constructive feedback is an essential part of writing in the workplace.



Post-Viewing Questions

1. Answers will vary. Learners may have written sales reports, communications with customers, e-mail of various forms, memos, etc.
2. Answers will vary. Ways to improve business writing may include using simple, direct language; being concise; focusing on main points; using the active voice; using a professional tone; and proofreading for errors.

Post-Viewing Questions

1. What types of writing have you done in the workplace?

2. What improvements could you make? How would they help your writing?

ON THE JOB

Say What You Mean

Steve works in the human resources department of a large manufacturing company. One of his jobs is to write memos to inform employees of changes in company policies. He writes about everything from changes in the company healthcare plan to changes in the rules for employee work breaks. Yesterday, Steve's manager asked him to write a brief explanation of a new policy regarding overtime hours. Steve wrote:

To Whom It May Concern:

It has recently come to the managers' attention that some workers here are failing to adequately inform your supervisors of the hours during which they intend to work after normal company hours. This problem, albeit a minor infraction of corporate policy and procedures, is causing some employees to have their overtime hours reported erroneously to the payroll department. With this thought in mind, managers have made the request that all employees endeavor to tell their supervisors the exact hours they plan to work after normal company hours. You should plan to tell your supervisor well in advance of the time you are planning to work late.

We thank you for your consideration of this communication and we hope that you understand our reasons for reporting this problem to you. If you should have any questions, or if you need any additional information about this memo, please contact a manager as soon as possible.

Steve copied the memo and tacked it on announcement boards throughout the company. Within an hour after he distributed the memo, managers were flooded with questions. Employees didn't seem to understand the new policy. Steve's manager met with him later in the morning to explain the problems with his memo.



Analyze Steve's memo. What problems do you think Steve's manager found?

On the Job

Say What You Mean

Steve should have written the memo in "plain English." He could have made his point with fewer words. In the Practice section, learners will rewrite Steve's memo.

PRACTICE

Practice

1. A sample memo:

To: All Employees

From: Steve Smith,
Human Resources
Associate

Date: January 3, 2003

Subject: New policy
regarding overtime
hours

Please note the
change in our over-
time-hours policy.
Beginning today, if you
need to work late on a
particular day, please
advise your immediate
supervisor before 5
p.m. of that day.

If you have any ques-
tions, please talk to
your immediate super-
visor.

1. Work with a partner to rewrite Steve's memo, which appears in "On the Job." Be sure to follow the guidelines for effective writing. Compare your memo with the memos of other groups.
2. As the only writer in a small tool manufacturing company, you're called upon to write everything from advertisements, to correspondence, to instructional manuals. Suppose your boss has just given you the following three writing assignments. What type of document (you can choose one or more than one) would you use for each assignment?
 - a. Apologize to CutQuick, your biggest client, for shipping the wrong quantity of band saws, and tell them they're receiving a 25 percent refund on the shipment.
 - b. Describe the newest features of your company's socket wrench to potential customers who will be attending the upcoming national tool convention.
 - c. Tell everyone in the company not to park in Lot A next week while painters work on the building.

SUMMARY

2. a.) letter correspondence or e-mail correspondence
 - b.) product description, flyer, or brochure
 - c.) memo, policy statement, or e-mail
- Simple, natural language is the best way to communicate your message.
 - The ability to write clearly will help you succeed in any workplace.
 - A workplace document is never complete until it has been proofread.



On the Net

A dictionary, thesaurus, and grammar resource all in one, this excellent Web site also provides hundreds of language-related links, including multilingual dictionaries and language translators. Check it out:

www.yourdictionary.com

REVIEW QUESTIONS



1. List at least five types of documents you might be asked write in the workplace.

2. Describe two purposes for workplace writing.

3. List and describe at least four guidelines for effective writing.

Review Questions

1. Possible responses are: Product descriptions, press releases, memos, sales letters, policy statements, flyers and announcements, status reports, e-mail correspondence, traditional letter correspondence, and instructional manuals.
2. To explain, instruct, or describe; to make a request; or to persuade.
3. Use simple, direct language; be concise; focus; prefer the active voice; adopt a businesslike tone; and proofread.

PROJECTS

1. Interview a person who works in an occupation that interests you. Ask what kinds of documents he or she writes on a regular basis (e.g., memos, proposals, e-mail). Also ask about the primary purposes of the documents. Does this person write to persuade, or to make requests? Summarize your findings in a one- to two-page report. Describe how you might use your communications skills to write similar documents effectively.
2. Choose a document that you have written recently, or a document that you are presently writing. Rewrite the document following the guidelines presented in this workshop. Show both the “before” and “after” documents to a friend, and ask the friend which of the documents is easier to read and understand.

Projects

Have learners complete one or both of these projects as homework or an out-of-class assignment. Encourage them to work in pairs or small groups.

Final documents should demonstrate an understanding of proper correspondence forms and reasons for workplace writing. Do not judge documents on formatting or appearance, but do require writers to use clarity, conciseness, correctness, and a businesslike tone. Encourage learners to gather feedback from peers.