

Sample pages

Introduction – pages 2-5

Unit 1 – pages 6 - 10

Unit 2 – pages 10 - 12

Welcome to your course

This course is designed to help you achieve a high level of skill in your business writing. With a good skills base your work will be:

- more confident in tone, because you know that what you write is correct and appropriate
- more cost effective, because your work will be easier to write and easier to read
- more professional, which will reflect well on you, your department or company.

The course is interactive, with many opportunities for you to practise what you are learning. You can also take advantage of a tutor if you wish. He or she (the same one will work with you throughout the course) will mark your end-of-session exercises and answer any other questions you have.

The course is not a ‘back-to-school’ grammar lesson. It is practical, not theoretical, and deals with real business needs and situations. In particular the course reflects the following guidelines. The course:

- promotes writing as a business tool – a means of communicating, recording and marketing. Business writing is not just a necessary evil; each writing task has a purpose and your skills will help you achieve that purpose.
- uses your existing skills as a starting point. You will probably find you can write very well already. The course will build upon your knowledge and will not expect you to start all over again.

continued...

Welcome to your course... continued

- asks you to *think* about the process of writing. In many cases there are no ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’; you will have decisions to make. The course will help you to make the best decisions.

- provides checklists to help your decision making. There are a number of reference pages, which you can print out if you wish, for quick decisions on what is best practice.

Finally, we hope your Writing for Business course will give you considerable encouragement, so that you will no longer think of writing as a chore but as a valuable tool that you can use with both confidence and skill.

Please enjoy your course.

Using the pages

There are five types of page in the course:

Information pages

... provide the main route through the course, introducing new topics and building upon the skills already learned. Many of these include simple activities. These are the main pages that will be used for most of the work.

Exercise pages

... contain exercises to reinforce the skills covered and provide continuous self-assessment. Answers are provided.

Checklists and good practice pages

... are found throughout with summaries of skills learned, sets of guidelines and more advanced skills for optional further study.

Tutor supported exercises

... appear as one per unit. The exercise will be fully introduced and the participant's answer can be forwarded to a tutor for assessment and discussion.

Reference pages

... occur from time to time and contain information which may be valuable but is not essential.

When you open any unit you will find a contents page followed by the first information page of that unit. We recommend you follow the information pages throughout a unit, doing the exercises and activities as you go.

Working with your personal writing tutor

At the end of each of the five units is an exercise that will be marked by your personal tutor; you will have the same tutor with you throughout the course.

This exercise should be completed in a simple word processing format. You can then email the document, either as an attachment or embedded within the email. If you prefer you can post a hard copy.

Please remember to include:

- your name
- password
- unit number.

The assessment will be returned promptly to you. You will be informed if an assigned tutor is away on holiday. You can either wait for him or her or ask for somebody else to mark your work.

Having your questions answered

Your password will give you access to an on-line forum.

You can write in your own question and receive a prompt answer which will be posted on the site. Alternatively you can look through the existing questions and answers to see if your query has been covered before... thus giving you an immediate response.

We keep an eye on the content of this course to ensure that it is both accurate and relevant. We genuinely welcome feedback from users. If you think our advice is outdated or inappropriate, please let us know. Similarly if we have made spelling or grammar mistakes please tell us... gently.

Writing is difficult to categorise. It is a technical skill in which there are few hard and fast rules. It is a 'soft' skill but with a hard commercial edge. It is easy to learn but very difficult to master. Good luck with your studies.

Course contents

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Editing your work

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Setting an appropriate tone

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Engaging your reader

Unit 5 Making your writing work

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Reports

Presenting text – headings, bullets lists etc.

Numbers and technical language

Consistency and other issues

Unit 1

Basic business writing – easy to write, easy to read

**“Using six key skills – and a little bit of thought – you can
achieve effective business writing every time.**

It’s guaranteed.”

The fundamentals of good business writing

In this unit you will learn the skills to produce simple and effective business communications, every time you write. We can call this ‘effective writing’ and it is the basis for all good business communications.

The remaining units of the course will help you develop this effective writing into something we call ‘writing for effect’. When writing for effect you will be able to influence and persuade your readers by good use of grammar, style and tone.

Effective writing



Writing for effect

Remember, your writing should always have a purpose (to inform, persuade, provide details, explain etc.) so make sure you are using the right type of writing to achieve that purpose.

Before any piece of writing



Before any writing, take a few moments to think about these key questions.

What... is the content?

Make sure you have the necessary information available so you don't need to interrupt the writing process. Every time you break from the writing there is a chance of it becoming disjointed or repetitive. Each time you re-start you will have to think back to what you have already written.

Who... are you writing for?

This is a key question. Is your audience an individual or a group of people, internal or external, a colleague or a client? How informal can you be, can you use jargon, how do you address this person? Will your document be shown to others, not just the immediate recipient?

Why... are you writing?

Every writing task will have a purpose. Is the writing to provide information or too influence the reader? Or is it a combination of both? Is the form of communication you have chosen the most appropriate? Should you be writing at all... would a diagram or a phone call be better?

How... will you achieve your aims?

Before you begin, ensure that the form and style of writing you have chosen will achieve the purpose. Would a letter be better than an email? Is the report too long? Are you following the correct house rules?

Remember, minutes spent thinking might save you hours in writing.

Exercise 1.1 – discovering the skills you have



One of the best ways to start learning about writing is to review the skills you already possess. This exercise, which you can assess yourself, will help you identify what skills you already have.

Suggested time

3 minutes reading and thinking

5 minutes writing (spend less time if you can)

Imagine you are attending a course in person and have been asked to write about yourself as a form of introduction. You have been asked to be brief and informative.

Write three sentences to contain the following pieces of information:

- your name
- something about the type of writing you normally undertake
- where you live (or where you were born)
- the name of the company you work for (or whether you work for yourself, are unemployed etc.)
- something about your general working life – ambitions, experience, journey to work, qualifications etc.
- something you find difficult about writing, or something you hope to learn from the course.

Have a go at this task now. Take no more than five minutes in writing.

Guidance on assessment is provided on the next page.

continued...

Exercise 1.1 – assessment



Like many of the exercises in the course your ‘score’ is not the most important thing. More important is giving you some things to think about. However, you can score one point for every ‘yes’ answer and read the notes that follow each answer. If your total is four or five, you’ve done very well.

Have you got three full stops (exclamation marks and question marks count as full stops too)? Yes/No

It’s an important skill to be able to write in response to instructions. It shows a good level of skill.

Have you covered all the six points? Yes/No

You must include the essential information – in this case the six points requested.

Have you re-ordered the six points? Yes/No

This is probably essential to fit the information well within three sentences. Reorganising information is an important, but often unconscious, skill.

Have you used between 50 and 100 words? Yes/No

This is probably the optimum length for something that is meant to be brief and informative.

Read the piece out loud (or in your head) one more time. Is the punctuation correct, making you pause where you need to? Yes/No

You may find that you want to pause in places where you don’t have a comma, semi-colon or full stop. Try to ensure that your punctuation matches exactly how you want somebody to read the text.

Unit 2

Building on the basics – punctuation and sentence power

“Punctuation, which is not hard to learn, is the key to writing powerful sentences and conveying complex messages. You probably have most of the skills already.”

Punctuation and sentence construction



In this unit you will learn how to build upon your basic skills and how to create more powerful communications. You will learn that punctuation and sentence construction are closely linked. If you have a good knowledge of punctuation you will be able to write good sentences.

At the end of the unit is a brief grammar guide. This is for reference only and will help you understand some of the terms used in talking about grammar, punctuation and sentence construction. It is not essential that you know this stuff!

Before you begin work on Unit 2 it is worth reminding yourself of the six key skills that were introduced in Unit 1. These are on the next page.

Punctuation marks



Punctuation helps us build sentences that can convey meaning more effectively.

Punctuation marks are signposts to the reader, explaining where to pause, what is a quote, when the sentence is posing a question etc. Remember to think about using punctuation both correctly *and* creatively.

Punctuation marks can be divided into three groups.

1 Get these right – it will show if you don't

comma

full stop

exclamation mark

question mark

apostrophe

2 These are useful – they help you write more creatively

semi-colon

colon

dash

brackets

ellipsies

3 You'll meet these – you may as well get them right

hyphen

inverted commas

full points

Comma



The simple comma is the most important and frequently used mark. There are three main uses of the comma:

- to allow extra information to be inserted
- to separate items in a list
- to provide a simple pause (often doing the same job as 'and' or 'but').

Look at these examples:

The photographs from the client, both prints and transparencies, have been scanned in and are ready to print.

In addition to the client, the proofs have been checked by the advertisers, sponsors, exhibitors and museum management team.

The brochure is a great advertisement for digital technology, printed to give the best possible gloss finish.

NOTES

1 When inserting extra information, don't forget that the commas work in pairs (see the example above). If you were to remove the words between the commas, and the commas, the sentence should still work.

The photographs from the client, both prints and transparencies, have been scanned in and are ready to print.

The photographs from the client have been scanned in and are ready to print.

Notes continue...

Comma (continued)



2 In a list there should not normally be a comma immediately after the penultimate entry and before the word ‘and’ (see the example on the previous page).

3 Many people learn that commas should not be used as well as ‘and’ or ‘but’. This is a good rule but not a hard and fast one. Think about how strongly you want to emphasise a pause. Look at these two sentences. Which makes the bigger impact?

The brochure is a great advertisement for digital technology, printed to give the best possible gloss finish.

The brochure is a great advertisement for digital technology and printed to give the best possible gloss finish.