

Discussion Guide
The Manager's Guide to Business Writing
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Chapter 1. Write for Your Readers

Chapter Purpose

To understand the importance of the reader in any written communication

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of Chapter 1, you should be able to

Categorize your reader into an audience type.

Learn how to write “readable” letters, emails, etc.

Use the “Fog” index.

Learn how to write in a gender sensitive way.

Learn to respond to customer complaints.

Discussion Question

1. Who do you most commonly write to?
2. Is that person or group an expert, layperson, user or executive?
3. What if you're writing to a mixed audience?
4. How can you best respond to customer complaints?
5. What commonsense guidelines do you use to communicate respect in language?
6. Do you use gender sensitive or gender neutral words?

Chapter 2. From Purpose Through Process

Chapter Purpose

To use a single purpose in each communication

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 2, you should be able to

Know whether your memo informs, persuades, instructs or documents.

Write effectively with four stages.

Revise your writing.

Review grammar tips.

Discussion Questions:

1. What purpose do you commonly use in your communication?
2. How can you discriminate between “informing” and “instructing”?
3. What two stages of the writing process are most commonly used—planning, writing, revising or editing?
4. Which are most important?
5. How long is too long for a sentence or paragraph?
6. What’s the difference between revising and editing?

Chapter 3. The Power of Words to Express, Not Impress

Chapter Purpose

To learn how to write clearly and economically in a straightforward way

Chapter Objectives

When you finish chapter 3, you should be able to

Understand “clear” writing.

Know how to write economically.

Recognize the value of order.

Avoid trite phrases and clichés.

Write more positively.

Write actively

To eliminate weak words.

Discussion Questions

1. How can you make sure your readers understand you?
2. Should you always use fewer than 1 words per sentence?
3. What is the active voice and why use it?
4. Why not use italics to make the letter look stylized?
5. Is writing for the Web different than writing a letter or memo?
6. Is it okay to use all capital letters in emails?

Chapter 4. Structure Your Writing to Reach Your Reader

Chapter Purpose

To use formats to guide your readers and help you get started

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 4, you should be able to

Attract readers to your writing.

Provide easy-to-use formats to prevent writer's block.

Write effective emails.

Discussion Questions

1. Do your emails use short paragraphs and subject lines?
2. Do you use memos or have you switched to email?
3. What is the most important component of a persuasive letter?
4. How do you write a negative message without offending the reader?
5. When do you send "good news" letters?

Chapter 5. The Power of Visuals, White Space, and Headings

Chapter Purpose

To learn how to use white space, visuals and headings to grab and hold your reader's attention

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 5, you should be able to

Know when and how to use the right visuals.

Know how to use effective headings.

Know why to use white space.

Discussion Questions:

1. When does a table work better than a pie graph?
2. Should you ever use bar graphs to show percentages?
3. What visual should you use to show a trend over time?
4. How do you use white space to draw attention to your text?
5. How often should you use a subhead?
6. Why use headings at all?

Chapter 6. How to Start and Stop

Chapter Purpose

To learn how to write effective introductions and conclusions

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 6, you should be able to

Use techniques that attract attention.

Write a CPO introduction.

Hook and hold your readers with transitions.

End strong.

Discussion Questions:

1. Should you start with a quote, statistic or story?
2. What is more memorable-- a question or an anecdote?
3. Why is it important to forecast the organization of your letter or report?
4. How do you hold your readers after you've hooked them with your introduction?
5. Why should repeat major points in a summary?
6. Why should you end with a strong recommendation –even to your boss?

Chapter 7. Zero-Based Writing

Chapter Purpose

To write instructions that readers can understand

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 7, you should be able to

Write from ground zero.

Write clear practical description.

Write simple instructions.

Consider the format of instructions.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important not to assume anything when writing for laypeople?
2. How can you use visuals to clarify instructions?
3. Could you withdraw money from an ATM after reading my instructions?
4. How would you write instructions to get \$10 gasoline from a self-serve station?

Chapter 8. Dealing with Tough Situations

Chapter Purpose

To manage touch situations in written form

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 8, you should be able to:

Deliver bad news without offending.

Make negatives more positive.

Deal with angry customers.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why not say it like it is and directly dole out bad news?
2. How can you make a rejection letter positive?
3. Why do readers avoid negative messages?
4. How can you persuade them to at least read your bad news?
5. Does it make a difference to state problems more positively?

Chapter 9. Persuading Your Readers

Chapter Purpose

To learn techniques of persuasion to influence your readers.

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 9, you should be able to

Know how to use persuasion tips.

Use the problem/solution format.

Write powerful proposals.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you anticipate customer objections?
2. How do you get the readers to take action?
3. Can you expect someone to move from a negative to a positive position after reading your communication?
4. How can you clinch an argument?
5. How can you establish common ground with a reader?

Chapter 10. Reports, Reports, Reports

Chapter Purpose

To prepare effective types of reports.

Chapter Objectives

When you finish Chapter 10, you should be able to

Prepare an occasional report.

Write an activity report.

Provide a status report.

Construct a formal report.

Discussion Questions

1. What basics should you keep in mind for any report?
2. How can you ensure that your reader's perspective counts?
3. When should you provide a formal report?
4. What purposes does the cover letter serve?
5. Why does the table of contents matter?
6. How can you lure the reader with an executive summary?