



# Advanced Writing Skills

INDEPENDENT LEARNER'S GUIDE

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# SESSION ONE: COURSE OVERVIEW

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This is a course for those who already are good writers. Our time will be devoted to writing letters of recommendation, of persuasion, of refusal, or of action, that reflect current word usage and up-to-date formats. You can also learn some basics about writing business cases, proposals, and reports.

You must complete the *Business Writing That Works* course before taking this module.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you complete this course, you will be able to:

- Make your writing clear, complete, concise, and correct.
- Improve sentence construction and paragraph development.
- Deal with specific business requests.
- Create effective business cases, proposals, and reports.
- Thoroughly document sources that you use in your writing.

## PRE-ASSIGNMENT

Before starting this course, dig out a sample of a letter, memo, or e-mail you have written. You will be referring to this later in the module.

## THE CS OF WRITING

Writing well in business means that we write clearly, concisely, completely, and correctly. This means that writing is edited to avoid words that are not necessary, or do not convey a message as well as desired.

*In this session*, you will review the four C's in writing. You will refresh your editing skills and your ability to cut extraneous language from your text.

# WRITING CLEARLY

All writing should be clear, concise, complete, and correct. Good writers use plain language to express clear meaning. They write in a simple style that uses everyday words, which is different than writing academically or for leisure reading. They do not use showy words and ambiguous expressions in an effort to dazzle or confuse readers. They write to express ideas, not to impress others.

**What do you think this manager meant in the following message?**

“Personnel assigned vehicular space in the adjacent areas are hereby advised that utilization will be suspended temporarily Friday morning.”

You would probably have to read that sentence several times before you understand that you are being advised not to park in the lot next door on Friday morning.

Clear messages contain words that are familiar and meaningful to the reader. Whenever possible, use short, common, simple words to say what you mean.

## Familiar Words

Look at the following list. Can you decide which words your audience would be more familiar with?

Ascertain	Find out
Conceptualize	See/visualize
Encompass	Include
Hypothesize	Guess
Monitor	Check
Operational	Working
Option	Choice

Perpetuate	Continue
Perplexing	Troubling
Reciprocate	Return
Stipulate	Require
Terminate	End
Utilize	Use

## Precise Words

When you consider what you need to say and how to say it, do not give up a precise word if it says exactly what you mean. For example, “The report was on time,” is not as precise as, “The detailed, 12-page report was submitted on time.”

Likewise, “There is a change in our budget,” is less clear than, “There is a 10 per cent reduction in our budget.”

Another example: “The president of the company said we should contribute...” vs. “The president of the company [urged, pleaded, demanded] that we contribute.”

## Concrete Nouns

**Concrete nouns** help readers visualize the meaning of words. Concrete nouns name objects that are more easily imagined, such as desk, car, or an earring. On the other hand, **abstract nouns** name concepts that are difficult to visualize, such as automation, justice, integrity, and environment.

In business writing, you should help your reader see what you mean by using concrete language whenever possible.

## Jargon

Every workplace has some words and some terms that are particular to that industry or that business.

**What are some examples of jargon in your workplace?**

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**Why do we want to avoid using jargon in our writing?**

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**When is it appropriate?**

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We avoid jargon so that people outside our industry or organization will not be confused. It would only be appropriate to include jargon when we are writing to someone who we know for sure will not only understand but expect us to use that jargon.

**Name at least five words that could be called “internet jargon”:**

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## WRITING CONCISELY

Writing concisely means saying exactly what you mean in the fewest words possible and include all the details that are needed. How do we do this?

**Use the active voice when possible.**

- **Passive voice:** The groceries had been carried away by the manager.
- **Active voice:** The manager carried away the groceries.

Notice how much shorter the second sentence is, even though it contains the same information? It is also easier to read and understand.

## Watch out for adverbs.

Adverbs can add unnecessary bulk to your sentences. In his treatise *On Writing*, Stephen King says, “The road to hell is paved with adverbs.”

Example:

- The dog moved much more quickly than the cat.
- The dog moved quicker than the cat.

## Do not be redundant.

Have you ever seen a sentence like, “I watched the colorful sun set in the west,” or, “I took off the purple-colored shirt”? Now, if the sun were setting in the east, that would be something to comment on, but we all know that the sun sets in the west. Likewise, you can safely assume that your readers know that purple is a color.

Similarly, watch out for words that mean the same thing: “We drained and emptied the tank,” could be replaced by, “We emptied the tank.”

## Replace clichés and metaphors.

When we speak with friends, our language can become full of words that do not belong in business writing. Try to avoid relying on clichés and metaphors to get your meaning across. Replace those phrases with words you really mean, and that other people will understand more easily.

**Clichés** are words and phrases that have been so overused that they lose their impact, even though they may be true. They include phrases like, “dumb as a sack of hammers,” “work like a dog,” or “right as rain.”

**Metaphors** are figures of speech that try and help us understand one thing through the story of another. For example, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare compared the world to a stage and all the people as merely players. Metaphors can get quite complex as they use analogy, rhetoric and parable.

While the application of a well phrased metaphor can be quite powerful in writing, metaphors usually do not belong in business writing. If you feel the temptation to write with strongly metaphoric speech, keep in mind that when you edit you will need to cut all that work out as you aim for writing that is clear and concise.



## Make your writing complete.

Complete writing means that you have included all of the important elements in your writing. The easiest way to think about this is to make sure that your writing includes the 5 Ws (who, what, why, when and where) and How.

You can accomplish complete writing by approaching each assignment like an investigative reporter to make sure you remember all of the required elements.

## ACTIVITY 1: MAKING CONNECTIONS

Look at the table below. Beside each phrase, write a more concise phrase that you could use instead of the phrase given. Construct the table in a word processed document and add to your unit task’s portfolio.

Instead of...	Write...
By means of	
Due to the fact that	
For the purpose of	
For the simple reason that	
In order to	
In spite of the fact that	
In this world today	
It is important that	
It is necessary that	
On the occasion of	
Prior to	
In anticipation of	
Until such time of	
With regard to	
In the neighborhood of	
Had an effect on	

# WRITING CORRECTLY

**What sources have you used to ensure your work is correct?**

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There are two aspects of correct writing that we will discuss here: style and facts.

## Style

Style refers to the method behind the writing that you do. If you are writing a document that must conform to particular style specifications (such as Chicago Manual of Style or the American Psychological Association, or a style guide created by your organization), you must make sure that it meets those guidelines. You will also need to ensure that your document is free of spelling and grammar errors.

Rules associated with style include whether there is a hyphen in some words (e.g. e-mail), how you treat commas, and so on.

**How can we ensure that our document is stylistically correct?**

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## Facts

An important component of correctness is factual precision. Did the budget actually come in at \$5,600 or was it the actual total on the financial statements, which show \$5,671? Was the temperature actually 67 degrees? Were the test results really positive?

There are a few ways to ensure that your document is factually correct. When writing, make sure you **list the source** whenever you include a fact. These sources can be for your own reference and not part of the final document, but they will help you when editing. These references will also help you answer any questions that readers may have later on.

If at all possible, make sure you go to the **original source**. If you find a newspaper article that quotes a particular study, for example, go back and find that study. In some cases, you may want to find multiple sources to confirm a particular fact. It depends on your audience and what kind of document you are writing.

It can also be a good idea to include **excerpts** from your source. For example, rather than try to explain a graph, it might be easier to include the graph itself. Make sure that you have the appropriate permissions and that the source is quoted if you choose to do this.

**Food for thought:** *Caveat lector* is Latin for “reader, beware” (or take heed).

**What kinds of sources might be used to check for factual correctness?**

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If you are going to use the **i**nternet as a reference source, remember these points.

- Make sure you are using reputable websites, with verifiable, reputable sources.
- If you are in doubt of the accuracy of the site, find another way of checking the fact.
- If at all possible, go back to the original source and use it as a reference.
- Always keep notes of the name of the site, the URL, and the date you visited it. You may even want to save a copy of the webpage to your local computer.

# CHOOSING YOUR SOURCES

Brainstorm some possible resources for each of these projects.

**Brochure with time management tips:**

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**University paper on dinosaurs:**

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**Newspaper article on the emergence of internet fraud:**

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**Internal company e-mail on budget items:**

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**Company memo recommending a product:**

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# SESSION THREE: WRITING MECHANICS

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The stronger your writing skills become, the easier it will be for you to write. Writing skills are developed by getting lots of practice, so take every opportunity you can get to write. Reading is also a way to build writing skills as you immerse yourself in good writing.

*In this session*, you will build your skills and knowledge to add depth to your own writing. We will focus on building paragraphs with emphasis, unity, and proper structure. You will also learn how to use emphasis, rhythm, and voice in your writing.

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### Emphasis

The most emphatic position in a sentence is the ending. The emphasis tells the reader which are the important words or ideas in a sentence.

Consider the following versions of the same sentence:

- “The deadline is December 30th for applications for overseas assignments.”
- “December 30<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for applications for overseas assignments.”

**Make this sentence more emphatic: “We need a new distribution system.”**

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You can also use bullets, italics, bolding, or all capital letters to make your point stronger. Use these effects sparingly, however; overusing **visual emphasis effects** can actually lessen the impact if you use too much of it.

Although capital letters are associated with shouting in text messaging and social media, this is simply the result of other formats not being as available (italics and bullets, for example). Know your audience well enough to understand whether the use of capital letters will get them thinking

about social media and detract from your message, or whether they see them with the emphasis that is intended.

Sometimes we want to de-emphasize bad news or painful responses by using general words rather than vivid words, burying the bad news in the middle of a sentence, or putting it in a dependent clause. (Example: “We have a plan that will allow you to meet your immediate needs on a cash basis since we cannot issue you credit at this time.”)

No matter what kind of news you are delivering, it is important to include the four Cs, and to keep your message professional and polite.

## Sentence Unity

Unified sentences contain thoughts that are related to only one idea.

For example, look at this sentence: “Our insurance plan is available in all provinces and you may name anyone as your beneficiary.”

A better way to write this would be as two sentences, “Our insurance plan is available in all provinces. Furthermore, you may name anyone as your beneficiary.”

## Sentence Structure

There are three types of sentences: simple, compound, and complex.

**Simple** sentences express one idea. They have a noun or pronoun and a verb. A sentence is simple as long as it remains one clause, containing one predicate. “John laughed” is a complete two-word sentence. We could add modifiers or prepositions and the sentence would still be simple.

A **compound** sentence has two or more main clauses, each containing a subject and a predicate, each describing an action complete in itself. The clauses in the compound sentence are joined by a connective (and, but, or, nor, for, or so), by a semi-colon, or by a colon.

If however, one part of the sentence depends on the other (if the one is the cause of the other, for instance) we have a **complex** rather than a compound sentence.

Here are some examples:

- John hit the ball. (**Simple**)
- Little Johnny in the third grade hit the ball out of the park. (Still **simple**)
- Little Johnny in the third grade hit the ball out of the park and it broke the window in his grandmother’s house. (**Compound**)

- Little Johnny, who had been practicing all summer, hit the ball out of the park and it broke a window in his grandmother’s house, which was located directly behind the park. (**Complex**)

Keep most sentences short in order to keep them clear. There is nothing wrong with having a long sentence every now and then, but work to keep the average length of your sentences to fewer than **17 words**. Vary the length of your sentences to make your writing more interesting. Read your work aloud so that your message is not getting lost in short, clipped sentences (which can sometimes sound aloof or even rude).

## Paragraph Size

One excellent guideline to follow is to **limit each paragraph to one idea**, unless you are linking related thoughts. If you are comparing the old and the new, for example, it makes sense to bring them together in one paragraph. Otherwise, stick to one idea.

Complicated information, or a discussion of several ideas, generally needs to be broken up into separate paragraphs to be easily understood.

Keep paragraphs short when possible. While paragraph length depends on content, creating paragraphs that are concise will help to frame your ideas or arguments and present them well. A good rule to follow is to question the sensibility of paragraphs that are longer than 12 lines. An **average length of nine lines** generally makes for good readability in business writing.

Ordering a paragraph is a challenge for many writers. There are several methods that you can use:

- General to specific, or specific to general
- Least important to most important, or vice versa
- Spatial (for example, describing a room from left to right)
- Chronological
- Question and answer
- Pros and cons

**What other organizational techniques have you used?**

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# PROPER PARAGRAPHS

Read each paragraph and determine how the information is ordered:

1. It is summer again and employees begin to wistfully dream of their summer vacation. Why do we need a summer vacation? Some people are sun-worshippers, so they need some time to get out in the sun and soak up some rays. Other people are do-it-yourselfers with a list of projects they have lined up for those long summer days when darkness comes late into the evening. Finally, there are those who just want a break from their work.

**Ordering Method:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. When I was a young boy I dreamed of being a firefighter or a police officer. As I grew older, I saw myself training as a paramedic, rushing to accident scenes to save lives. Gradually, however, I realized I had the talent to work with figures and ended up as a chartered accountant. Now I find myself yearning for the adventure I never had.

**Ordering Method:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. In any painting project there are some important steps to follow, such as choosing a color that is complementary to its surroundings, taping off the areas that should not be painted, preparing the surface by sanding or filling holes, and most importantly, choosing the proper painting tool in order to do a professional job.

**Ordering Method:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. There is a lot to be said for living in the country. Usually it is a quieter place to live, with less traffic and fewer people around. Property taxes are usually lower, because we pay for fewer services. The air is fresher without pollution from car exhausts and manufacturing plants and we can see the stars at night. However, there is that long commute to work since we are not on a bus route, and we have to drive back to the city if we want to take in a movie or a concert. Now I am responsible for my water and my garbage disposal and we always wait longer than urban people for electricity to be restored after a storm.

**Ordering Method:** \_\_\_\_\_



5. Generally I prefer outdoor sports that let me just get away from it all. I like to feel the wind in my hair and the smell of salt water in my nostrils. For me, that means a day of sailing or perhaps some deep-sea fishing.

**Ordering Method:** \_\_\_\_\_

## MORE ON PARAGRAPHS

Paragraphs also must also have unity, coherence, and emphasis.

### Unity

In good paragraphs, the emphasis is on oneness: one theme with which the writer focuses the readers' attention. This theme should be stated in the first sentence of the paragraph.

### Coherence

Coherence is achieved by carefully organizing your thoughts/material and then using mechanical devices such as:

- **Parallelism** of similar (terrorize/tyrannize) or contrasted (on the other hand) structure and words.
- **Repetition** (during one/during another) forces the reader to recall what came before and focuses their attention. Recall Winston Churchill's "We will fight them" speech.
- Use demonstrative adjectives (this, that, these, those) to refer to the concept that is the theme of the paragraph. In an opening sentence, if you referred to one evening, in the next, you would say "that day" to point back to the evening (emphasis!!!).

The most important part of coherence is using **transitional terms** to bridge thoughts together by:

- Adding one point to another (also, besides, in addition, further)
- Showing similarity (likewise, in other words)
- Showing cause and effect (since, as a result, consequently)
- Showing differences (yet, nevertheless, despite, on the other hand, conversely)
- Expressing emphasis (chiefly, primarily, more important, mainly)

## Emphasis

A little while ago we discussed how the most important part of a sentence is the end. Paragraphs are the same, in that the **ending is slightly more important than the beginning**. Strong writing throughout the paragraph is important, however, because although weak closing sentence can fail to wrap up the entire paragraph, a paragraph will not always recover from a weak opener.

One very effective way to get emphasis is to **vary both sentence length and paragraph length**. While there is no optimum length, most effective paragraphs can say what they need in six or seven sentences, but should rarely exceed nine or 10.

**Complicated information**, or a discussion of several ideas, generally needs to be broken up into separate paragraphs to be easily understood.

## Rhythm

You should also vary the length and structure of your sentences so the pace of your writing does not become too monotonous or too choppy.

Sometimes you may want to use long sentences to develop rhythm or to take a lilting or rolling approach. In the following paragraph, however, the ideas unfold too slowly. Note that the sentences are similar in both length and structure.

“The Unicorn Corporation will close its plant in North Branch next fall. The closing will occur because of monetary cutbacks. The closing will put 500 people out of work. Monetary cutbacks will also close a plant in South Branch. Next fall, 200 employees will be laid off and another 200 reassigned.”

This example also demonstrates a different problem where the information is overly compressed and the reader must retain a lot of information.

“Next fall, because of monetary cutbacks, the Unicorn Corporation will close plants in North Branch, where 500 people will be put out of work, and in South Branch, where 200 employees will be laid off and 200 will be reassigned.”

## Voice

There are two voices: active and passive.

The **active voice**:

- Is direct (The manager pressed the button on the photocopier.)
- Reduces length
- Clarifies the sentence
- Produces a crisper, more vital style

The **passive voice**:

- Is indirect (The button on the photocopier was pressed by the manager.)
- Reverses the normal subject-verb-object pattern
- Includes some form of the verb be, followed by a past participle (was pressed)
- Usually considered weak, obscure, wordy, and lacks vigor

**Examples:**

- Passive: "Be assured that action will be taken." (What action will be taken, and by whom?)
- Active: "I assure you that I will act."

If you find yourself using past participles like:

- Was given
- To be accompanied
- Had been shown
- Will be measured
- Is being removed

Then stop and consider whether an active structure might not be more effective. However, if you are writing to break bad or unpleasant news, the passive voice is less direct and will weaken the link between you and the **bad news**. The passive voice focuses on actions rather than personalities; it helps you be impersonal and tactful.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Re-write the following sentences to change the emphasis. The first one is completed as an example.

**Example:** I was born in Melbourne.

- I was *born* in Melbourne (and as a result I know lots about Melbourne).
- I was born *in* Melbourne (not outside of Melbourne).
- I *was* born in Melbourne (to emphasize someone who is questioning whether I am from there or not).

**The photocopier is out of toner.**

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**I have a car but I do not drive it to work.**

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# SESSION FOUR: DEALING WITH SPECIFIC REQUESTS

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Writers with advanced skills are able to create documents with a clear purpose. This is useful when writing requests for information, letters of reference, letters of refusal, and persuasion pieces.

*In this session*, you will learn to reply to all of these types of requests. As you work through the material, we encourage you to think about how to use these documents in your workplace.

## TYPES OF LETTERS

You may have to prepare different types of letters:

- Requests for information
- Letters of reference (recommendation)
- Letters of refusal
- Letters of persuasion

### Information Requests

The most emphatic positions in a letter are the first and last sentences. Readers tend to look at them first. Capitalize on this tendency by **putting your most significant statement first**. The first sentence of an information request is usually a question or a polite command. Do not explain or justify your position unless you believe your request will be refused. This saves time and immediately tells the reader what you want.

The **body of the letter** can provide the necessary details. Make it easy to read and use highlighting techniques to make the main points stand out, such as lists and bullets. Items in a list are much easier to read than items bunched in a paragraph. They should also be phrased in a similar or parallel fashion.

The quality of the information obtained from a request often depends on the clarity of the enquiry. Analyze your needs, organize your ideas, and frame your request logically, and you are likely to receive a meaningful answer.

Use the **final paragraph** to ask for specific action, to set an end date if appropriate, and to express appreciation.

## Letters of Recommendation

Here are some guidelines you may want to follow when writing a letter of recommendation.

- Identify the reason for writing.
- Suggest the confidentiality of the recommendation.
- Establish your (or your manager's) relationship with the client.
- Identify the length of employment and job duties, if relevant.
- Describe the applicant's professional and personal qualities.
- Describe the applicant's relationship with others.
- Include specific details and examples that illustrate the applicant's personality and performance.
- Be especially careful to support negative comments with verification. (Not that he was slower than other receptionists, but he answered 25 calls an hour while most receptionists averaged 40 an hour.)
- Compare the applicant with others in his or her field.
- Offer an overall rating of the applicant.
- Summarize the significant attributes of the applicant.
- Draw a conclusion regarding the applicant.

## Letters Refusing Requests

When you must refuse a request and you feel the refusal is likely to antagonize, upset, hurt or anger the reader, use the indirect approach. Try the following writing plan:

- Start with a buffer that identifies previous correspondence either incidentally or as a subject line, and then begins with a neutral statement on which both reader and writer can agree.
- Then add a key word or phrase that leads naturally to the explanation.
- The explanation presents valid reasons for the refusal and avoids problem words that will be seen as negative. The bad news can be de-emphasized to soften the blow. Avoid language that causes hard feelings.
- If possible, suggest an alternative or a substitute, or perhaps a compromise.
- Renew good feelings with a positive statement, without referring to the bad news.

These same general principles of indirectness are appropriate whenever bad news must be delivered. You may worry that the indirect approach is unethical or manipulative because the writer deliberately delays the main idea. But consider the alternative: breaking bad news bluntly can cause pain and hard feelings. Remember, “It is not what we say, but how we say it.” Your goal is to be a compassionate yet effective communicator.

## Letters of Persuasion

The ability to persuade or to sell an idea is a key factor in the success you achieve in your career and in your interpersonal relationships. Persuasive individuals are highly valued in today’s organizations. Persuasive individuals become decision-makers because their ideas generally prevail.

Persuasion is necessary when resistance is anticipated or when ideas require preparation before they can be presented effectively. Persuasion requests are generally more effective when they are indirect because the writer has the opportunity to lay the groundwork before actually making the request.

Persuasive appeals generally fall into two broad groups: emotional and rational. **Emotional appeals** are associated with the senses. They include how we see, feel, taste, smell, and hear. Strategies that arouse anger, fear, pride, love, and satisfaction are also emotional.

**Rational strategies** are those associated with reason and intellect. They appeal to the mind. Rational appeals include references to making money, saving money, increased efficiency, and making the best use of resources.

## ACTIVITY 2: KEEPING IT REAL

Choose one of these tasks:

- Write a letter of recommendation for a subordinate, a colleague, or your boss (pretending that you are his boss), being honest and fair.
- Write a letter that says “no” to a request for you to volunteer as chair of a fundraising committee.
- Write a persuasive letter about something you are currently dealing with at work. (If you cannot think of a topic, persuade your manager to enroll you in a course on presentation skills.)
- Respond to a typical information request that you normally receive, applying the skills you have learned today.

When you have written this business letter (ensuring you set it out correctly and check your sentence structure, grammar and punctuation) place it in this unit task’s portfolio.



# SESSION FIVE: ONLINE BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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Social media and blog writing, and proper documentation when doing this type of writing will be explored in this session.

## BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS

The word “blog” is a shortened form of “web log,” which is essentially a journal maintained on a website. (A traditional equivalent would be a newspaper or magazine column.) Blogs consist of words, images, and/or links. Often they are personal accounts of trips, hobbies, or life experiences, but more often, companies are tapping into the vast network of blogs to engage customers and share their messages.

Why is business getting interested in blogging? Because it brings results!

Here are just a few of the reasons more and more businesses like to blog:

- It helps drive traffic to their website. It is cheaper than buying ads and more successful than having people find their site by accident!
- It lets that traffic see all the other great things they have on their website.
- It helps to establish them (and their business) as an authority in their field.

In a blog, the author builds credibility through consistent interactions, accurate postings, and topics of interest. Many blogs also have a commenting feature that allows readers to participate in the conversation or share their own views.

A blog feature can be added to an existing website, or a site can be started specifically for blog posts. The cost of blogging is primarily time and expertise. To be effective, blogs should be posted consistently, frequently, and in a timely manner, especially if the goal is to build credibility as a subject expert.

## Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for blogging.

**Read as many blogs as you can. Pay attention to what is working (and what is not!).**

Pay attention to things like page layout, length of posts, pictures, color, and, of course, the content.

**Explore your options.**

Depending on who is hosting your hub site, a blog space may also be offered, or you can have one created for you. You can also look at some of the popular blog sites that offer free spaces, such as Blogger and WordPress.

**Be brief.**

With people's very short attention spans, blog posts need to be concise. Seth Godin, who writes about marketing and has a brilliant blog, sometimes creates posts that are only a few hundred words long. Whether you are creating short, informative pieces that are less than 500 words, or longer, more introspective pieces, you want people to read, remember, and think about your blog.

**Choose a voice.**

The tone of what you say should reflect who you are, what your company stands for, and catches people's attention. You can explore being informative, being controversial, asking questions, and having some fun.

**Do NOT assume that you are a writer unless you have those skills.**

If you are new to writing as well as to blogging, behave like a student and learn what you need to do.

**Add tags or keywords.**

This will help you find your old posts and categorize things. It will also help people find what you are writing. Make sure that you set up some kind of analytics, too, so that you can see which posts attract attention, which ones did not, and who is reading them.

**Keep and reuse your old posts.**

If your content is good, it has staying power. A blog post you wrote six months or a year ago that remains relevant can be included in another blog post or re-posted to Twitter because it seems like a timely topic. For example, if you write a great series of blog posts for health and safety week this year, you can refer back to them again at the bottom of a health and safety post that you write next year.

### **Keep up the interest and do not be afraid to do a little recycling!**

Check back with your company plans and remind yourself what you are trying to accomplish and how you intend to get there.

Here are a few examples:

- Seth Godin: <http://sethgodin.typepad.com/>
- Chris Brogan: <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/blogging/>
- Top Rank: <http://www.toprankblog.com/>

These blogs are provided as examples of effective communication; TEIA takes no responsibility for their content.

## CONNECTING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a firmly established element of the media, and it is going to continue to evolve and wrap its way throughout our lives in intangible ways. Every media release, public appearance, and annual report, as well as aspects of information that used to be kept protected, are now found within social media. If you are going to embrace your role within your company, you need to embrace social media.

Social media has been embraced much more quickly by individuals than businesses, although big business is slowly getting on board as well.

Social media platforms (such as Facebook) have increased their integration with our personal lives by being accessible on desktops, tablets, and smartphones. It started as a website to visit and post status updates. Now, it offers a dedicated chat service; a personalized experience; ability to add photos and videos; and applications for gaming, shopping, and more. In addition, many social platforms now work together so that you can access all of your social information in one place, meaning that information you post on one service pushes to other platforms as well.

The overall trend seems to be that social media is becoming a bigger part of an individual's life. Businesses are starting to understand that they need to use these platforms to catch people's attention.

Consider your involvement with social media. Record any thoughts in the space provided.

- Do you know how to find information on all the big social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Digg, Tumblr, Flickr, LinkedIn, Google+, and others that will come up from time to time? What about news services and blogs?

- Describe and demonstrate the profiles on some of your favorite sites. Or, you can demonstrate your own profile. Check out the sites of their own organization as well as competitors when they have time.
- Even if your company decides not to participate in posting on any of those sites, you should have monitoring set up to see what your competition, stakeholders, customers, and the general public are saying.
- Be careful with what you post! Never over-share and be aware of posting too much of your personal information, not for your immediate security and for the longer-term reputation you may have. Once we could forget silliness in our past, but in today's world if it was on social media, it will come back to haunt and perhaps damage you.

## DOCUMENTATION

If you use data from secondary sources when you are writing, the data must be documented, meaning the source of that information must be cited. Using someone else's ideas without giving credit for them is **plagiarism**. Even when you paraphrase and put others' ideas in your own words, that should be documented.

**Use direct quotations sparingly.** There are three situations when you will find it useful to quote someone's exact words: when they are an expert and you want to emphasize their opinion; when you want to use their exact words before you criticize them; or you want to repeat identical phrasing because of its precision, clarity, or aptness.

This is not a fun part of writing, but it does have its uses. Citing sources strengthens your arguments and shields you from charges of plagiarism.

The greatest challenge is that all business writers do not follow the same formatting style. Some companies that do a lot of report writing will specify a **particular style**. Styles continue to evolve, which makes things a little more complicated.

There are several frequently used style guides including:

- American Psychological Association (APA)
- Harvard Style Guide

The most common one in Australia is the APA method.

**Electronic sources** generally follow print source formatting, although you will often not have page numbers. You should also include the date that you accessed the information. You must include the entire URL, since sources can be moved.

There are also many **academic disciplines** (including science, legal, journalistic, government, medicine, business, and industry) that require a particular style depending on their documentation system. These can vary around the world so if you are working in law, you would need to see what the Australian legal system expects in terms of citations.

For the most recent updates, we suggest that before you start your documentation, you refer to the actual handbooks, internet sites, or subscribe to current versions of the text that you need.

As with many of the rules we cite with writing, the important thing is to be consistent. Do not mix two or more styles within one document. As you can see, different styles can lead to very different results.

**One author, in Chicago Manual style:**

Lynne Truss. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, New York, Gotham Books, 1993

**One author, in American Psychological Association (APA) style:**

Truss, Lynne (1993). *Eats, shoots & leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation*. New York, Gotham Books, 1993

**One author, in British Broadcasting Corporation News Style Guidelines:**

*Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, Lynne Truss, Gotham Books, New York, 1993



**What word choices will you change?**

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**How can you add emphasis to this piece of writing?**

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**How can you re-write paragraphs to make them stronger?**

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# COURSE SUMMARY

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Congratulations! You have completed the course **“Advanced Writing Skills.”**

In this course, writers were given tools to further improve their writing, along with learning about different kinds of writing.

First, we looked at making writing clear, complete, concise, and correct.

We also explored improving sentence construction and paragraph development.

Next, we looked at dealing with specific business requests.

Then we discussed creating effective business cases, proposals, and reports.

Next, we discussed blogging, social media and proper documentation of sources.

The last part of the course involved applying to your own writing what you learned.

**You should now feel ready to tackle different kinds of writing in a clear, concise, complete and correct manner.**



## Recommended Reading List

If you are looking for further information on this topic, we have included a recommended reading list below.

Bates, Jefferson D. *Writing with Precision*. Penguin, 2000.

Birkets, Sven, and Donald Hall. *Writing Well (Longman Classics Edition)*. Longman Classics, 2006.

Guffey, Mary Ellen. *Essentials of Business Communication*. South-Western College Pub, 2006.

Kessler, Lauren. *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2003.

King, Stephen. *On Writing*. Pocket , 2002.

Strunk, William, and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition*. Longman, 1999.

Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. Gotham Books, 2006.

Zinnser, William. *On Writing Well*. Collins, 2006.