



GUIDE TO **BUSINESS WRITING**

BY INSTRUCTIONAL SOLUTIONS



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WELCOME

Our company is based on a core belief: clear business writing is a huge competitive advantage. It is the currency that conveys a company's products and knowledge, and the primary connection with customers.

View our client list, read some client testimonials, and let's see how we can improve your organization's business writing.



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Business writing skills are crucial to your long-term success. Whether you're an admin or an executive, there is always room to improve, so we've created this Guide to Business Writing for you and your team to develop a stronger business writing foundation.

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GET STARTED WITH BUSINESS WRITING

Being successful in business requires skill with the written word. Additionally, conveying complex information in a logical and clear way is a major competitive advantage—no matter what industry you work in.

Enter business writing. If you or your team can communicate clearly at work, you will succeed. You will be able to communicate with colleagues and customers with ease, eliciting the action you want. You'll be understood, which can save you time and energy.

Below is a complete guide to business writing—from a clear business writing definition to tips on how to hone your [business writing skills](#).



WHAT IS BUSINESS WRITING?

Business writing is your opportunity to **improve your business communications**. It's very pragmatic and is a type of writing that enables a reader to know or do something.

When done well, **business writing** flows up, down, laterally, internally to bosses and teammates, and externally to customers. Good business writing follows an optimal writing process.

Business writing doesn't focus on you as the writer. It focuses on the reader. You transform complex information into something that's easy to understand. What you write is relevant to the reader.

This skill is the channel that transmits nearly all business work and insight and interaction. It is the lifeblood and foundation of strong businesses. Business writing also propels your career.



Learn how to write any business document well and receive feedback on your actual writing.

[VIEW OUR COURSES](#)

PURPOSE OF IMPROVING YOUR BUSINESS WRITING

Better business writing has tangible benefits for both large and small organizations—no matter your formal job title. We're all writers at work. Consider all the documents you might write in the office:

- [Business emails](#) and direct messages to keep work moving
- Memos and [reports](#) to inform team members
- Business proposals, company brochures, statements of work, presentations, and other business documents for work both within and beyond your organization

Knowing how to approach writing makes you more productive. When you write persuasively, you can drive potential revenue. Or you can better connect with customers through sales and marketing materials.

In short, [improving your business writing skills](#) helps you become a more effective communicator. This skill has a ripple effect on your organization and career.

CALCULATE THE TIME SAVINGS OF BETTER WRITING!

Assuming four participants are trained, annual time-saving benefits are **\$18,750** (assuming employees earn \$50,000 and write for four hours daily).

CALCULATE YOUR OWN ROI

FOUR TYPES OF BUSINESS WRITING

Each workplace has its own specific documents to write with varying scenarios. But all these documents can be distilled into **four main style categories** - instructional, informational, persuasive, and transactional writing.

Understanding these conceptual divisions will help guide your decisions about your document choice and goal.

1. Instructional writing

Instructional business writing provides the reader with the information needed to complete a task. The task may need to be accomplished immediately or it may be for future reference.

Instructional documents break down a process into steps that the reader can understand. These steps must take the reader's knowledge level of the topic into consideration. A user manual or a guide focused on allowing the customer to use a product is one example of instructional writing.

2. Informational writing

A large majority of business writing is purely informational. Documents are created for reference or record. It might not be the most glamorous of styles, but the information in these documents must be accurate and consistent to help organizations run smoothly.

A business report is the most common type of informational writing. Business reports communicate business and technical information, capture work completed, record incidents, finalize projects and recommendations, and act as an archive for organizations.

3. Persuasive writing

Persuasive writing is a common style for sales documents. The persuasive writing may be direct, with a focus on a specific item, or indirect, with a focus on developing the client relationship.

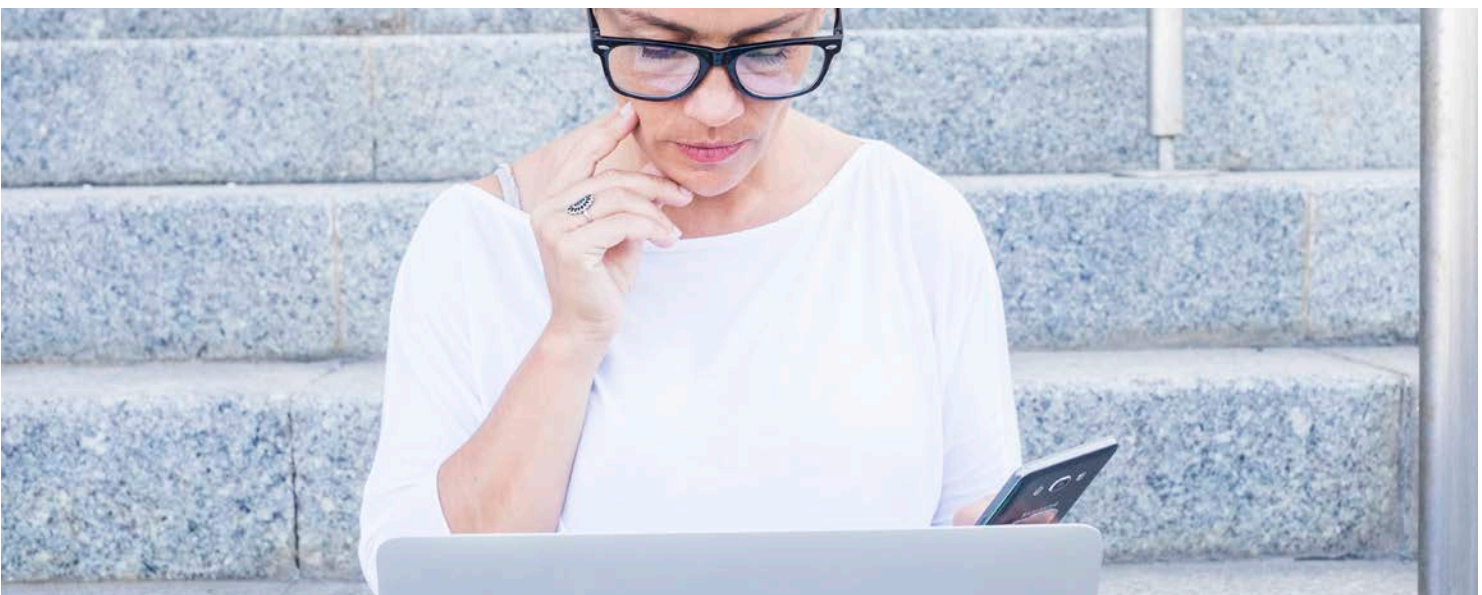
This type of writing has a two-fold goal: convey information and convince the reader that the presented information offers the best value. The message is designed to influence the reader's decision.

An example of persuasive business writing includes business proposals: these documents outline an offer of a product or service to a specific potential client.

4. Transactional writing

Transactional writing is used to progress general business operations and convey good and bad news. When you send everyday communications such as emails, you are completing transactional business writing.

Emails are a type of transactional writing. These documents are used to quickly communicate information between staff or clients in business activities. Transactional writing also includes **official business letters**, forms, and invoices.



BUSINESS WRITING VS. TECHNICAL WRITING

Technical writing and business writing are two important and popular writing styles. Often used interchangeably, you might wonder: aren't **technical writing and business writing** the same thing?

Not exactly. Granted, these two techniques are similar. Both styles are very reader-focused and overlap in their goal is to be accessible. They require concise language and specific word choices. Bulleted or numbered lists are often used for both styles to clearly present info. But one is not interchangeable with the other.

Business writing ranges from interpersonal to information to technical. Technical writing overlaps with business writing when a business person needs to convey technical information. In short, business writing = intention. Technical writing = instruction.

Tone is the key difference.

Business writing and technical writing differ in tone toward the target audience. The tone of business writing can vary, depending on the reader and the goal of the communication.

Technical writing rarely changes tone because its goal is to clearly and effectively explain something. Technical writing always has a neutral, competent tone. You're using language to effectively communicate instructions to the target audience.

Business writing is the best technique for anything outside of communicating instructions. If your goal is to provide neutral directions, go with technical writing.

[**DOWNLOAD OUR TECHNICAL WRITING GUIDE**](#)

FIRST STEPS IN CREATING A BUSINESS DOCUMENT

Getting started is usually the hardest part of writing. That's why we recommend following a specific writing process.

No matter what you're writing, a process helps you overcome writer's block and gives you an exact framework for writing clearly and efficiently. Here are some steps to follow when creating a business doc.



1. Think about your reader

Always consider your audience and their needs. Even if you have multiple audiences (e.g., managers to customers), identify the most specific audience you can.

This approach helps you brainstorm content and eventually write a focused document with manageable topics and themes.

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING TECHNIQUES

Our most popular business writing course teaches the optimal process required for writing any document. Instructor feedback is included.

[DOWNLOAD THE OUTLINE >>](#)

MOST POPULAR COURSE • BEDROCK SKILLS • ALL DOCUMENT TYPES

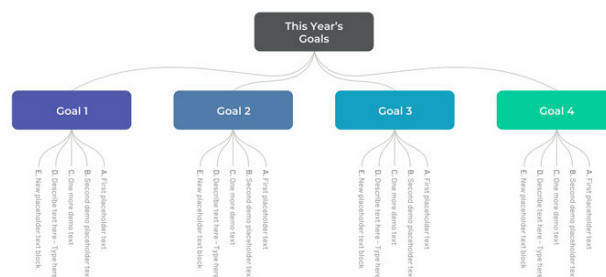


2. Consider your delivery or presentation method

Now that you know your reader, determine what genre or medium you'll use to deliver your message. What format makes the most sense for your audience? Here are a few delivery method examples:

- Presentation
- Formal report
- Video call
- Series of email attachments

If a written document makes the most sense for your reader, begin brainstorming what content the audience will need.



3. Brainstorm

Now that you've analyzed your audience and determined the right format for your delivery, you can dig a little deeper and ask yourself more subtle considerations about these readers.

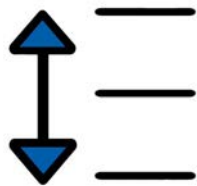
Because you've spent time thinking about your audience and the type of delivery that meets their needs and yours, you should have a much easier time giving shape to your ideas for this project.

Once you have your content completely planned out, you can then begin drafting your business document.

HOW TO FORMAT YOUR BUSINESS DOCUMENT

You've analyzed your audience. You've taken the time to generate content ideas and plan your content based on your reader's needs. You are now ready to write the first draft of your document.

But what's the most effective and efficient way to format your document? Every document is different, but similarities exist.



Use white space

Business documents should be visually easy for your reader to digest. White space helps with this. It is the space between your words, paragraphs, and visual elements. White space makes your document easier to skim and read..

Add paragraph breaks every time you start a new thought to create white space. Another tip? Keep your paragraphs short. If your paragraphs are over seven lines (not sentences), the reader will typically skim over the content—all they see is a big block of text!

White space does not include using two spaces after a period.

[Learn more about this highly-debated grammar rule >>](#)

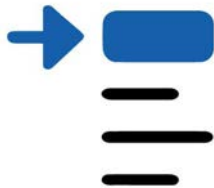


Use lists

Lists such as numbered lists or bullets are one of the easiest ways to incorporate white space and make your business document format more effective. Readers can identify the items discussed, absorb content, and pay attention to what is important.

Use a numbered list if you are introducing a certain number of items, use a numbered list. If not, use **bullets**.

[Learn how to punctuate your bulleted lists >>](#)



Add headings

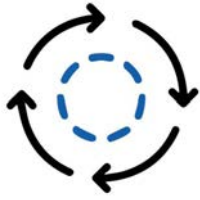
Break up content and guide the reader through the document by using headings. They serve as signposts, helping busy readers to skim through and come away with a decent understanding of the content. Here's an example:

SALES STRATEGY FOR XYZ PRODUCT

Readers can see what information the section includes: a sales strategy

The headings hook their attention and encourage them to keep reading. Incorporate headings and subheadings into emails, reports, proposals, etc.

[Get detailed instructor feedback on your actual business writing >>](#)



Maintain visual consistency

Don't overwhelm your reader with a lot of visual elements such as adding a mix of bold, italics, and color throughout a document. While tempting to incorporate, too many different emphasis techniques cause the eye to bounce around the page.

Choose one design element for main points, such as bold, and another for sub-points, such as italics. Be consistent with these elements with your business document formatting to make it easier to skim for understanding.

[Here are some great visual suggestions for email writing >>](#)



Close clearly

Give your reader clarity when closing a document. For example, if your document needs a response, make sure your closing visually elicits the desired response.

This might be a "NEXT STEPS" heading before the last paragraph of an email. In a report, you might add a section heading such as "ACTION PLAN." Visually highlight what you want your reader to do next.

[We've written some great closing examples in this article >>](#)

10 TIPS FOR BETTER BUSINESS WRITING

1. Plan first

We've already established that thinking about your reader and planning your content's purpose is an important first step. However, it deserves re-emphasis. All of us by nature want to jump straight into drafting before planning.

The truth is that drafting gives us a (sometimes false) sense of accomplishment. And, drafting is easier than planning. Planning, however, is crucial to the writing process.

2. Start where it's easiest

Often, the first sentence of a document or email is the hardest to write. But the great news is that you don't have to start there.

Instead, look at your document sections. Write the one that is easiest or most interesting for you. Once you begin writing, the interconnectivity of thoughts will ignite, and the rest of the document will be easier to write.

3. Don't use big words

Avoid flaunting big vocabulary in your business writing. Remember that you want to easily transmit ideas and information. Unless a big word will help you most effectively communicate your message, aim to use **short words**.

4. Edit as the last step

No matter how much you want to edit while you draft, wait. It's actually unproductive (and increases your writing time) when you try to fix grammar errors and sentence structure while drafting.

We also recommend using a grammar tool like [Grammarly](#) to help you better catch grammar errors.

5. Use reader-focused wording

Have you ever noticed how companies often use the word “you” in marketing emails? “Get *your* discount today!” “*You* could save \$X.” This is known as reader-focused wording and it can help increase reader engagement.

It’s the opposite of writer-focused wording which uses words like “we” and “our.” Be judicious with reader-focused wording as it can feel smarmy or similar to a marketing pitch. But it can be very effective if used judiciously.

6. Use a confident tone

Sound confident in your writing by applying two techniques:

- Shorten your sentences.
- Avoid the comma-and sentence structure (i.e. “, and”)

Confident writing sounds competent, calm, and assuring.

7. Watch out for common business grammar errors

Grammar errors are part of writing. They’re also individual because every writer makes different errors. That said, below are the most common grammar errors we see in client writing:

- fused or run-on sentences
- sentence fragments
- hyphen errors
- me, myself, and I errors
- introductory clause comma errors

Focus on what is incorrect to determine what are your most common errors to improve.

8. Avoid jargon

Business jargon. Corporate lingo. Buzz words. Whatever you call it, jargon creeps into business writing too often. There is even a book that addresses this problem, “Why Business People Sound Like Idiots.” Here are a few common terms:

- *ASAP*
- *Actionable*
- *Raise the bar*
- *Touch base*

Prove your subject area expertise by cutting the jargon. Use terms that everyone can understand. Spell out acronyms. Your goal is audience comprehension—not to sound impressive.

[Read our list of 127 jargon examples and how to correct them >>](#)

Use our Jargon Grader tool to identify and remove jargon in your own business writing.

TRY THE JARGON GRADER



9. Deliver bad news well

Delivering **bad news** via writing doesn't have to be difficult. Depending on what you believe the reader's response will be, choose a direct or indirect technique to deliver the message:



Direct

Jump straight into your bad news. Also, present a brief rationale with the bad news in the first paragraph to help your reader accept the decision.



Indirect

Buffer your bad news if the message will cause your reader to emotionally disconnect. Do this by beginning with a neutral and relevant statement such as a compliment. You can then give the bad news with the rationale behind it.

10. Be selective with passive voice

As a general rule, use an active voice as much as you can in business writing. But there are times when passive voice makes more sense.

Use **passive voice** for the following reasons:

- **To emphasize the result of an action or if the agent (person doing the action) is unknown or not important.** This is super common in scientific or technical writing, the news, or historical accounts.
- **To describe a process.** As you can imagine, this is commonly used in scientific and technical writing.
- **To use an impersonal or indirect tone, which suggests formality, impartiality, or objectivity.** Passive voice makes sense in formal documents or announcements.

Improve your business communications even more by following these other 87 tips >>

CHOOSE THE BEST BUSINESS WRITING COURSE

Communicating clearly through written text is a huge competitive advantage in any industry. Specifically, this skill helps individuals and teams succeed at work. A business writing course helps you take your writing to the next level.

How to choose a business writing course for groups.

DOWNLOAD THE GROUP GUIDE



How to choose a course for individuals.

DOWNLOAD THE INDIVIDUAL GUIDE

SUMMARY

Business writing isn't an optional skill. It's the foundation of successful business operations and communications.

It also takes practice to hone; measuring, tracking, analyzing, and determining if changes need to be made on a weekly basis. But when you invest the time to develop these skills and become an effective communicator, your organization benefits--both internally and externally with customers.

Get in-depth writing training with Instructional Solutions. We have been delivering online business writing courses since 1998, following optimal online and adult learning principles. [Click here to learn more.](#)



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**Enroll in a course created
with your unique writing
requirements in mind**

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Our company is based on a core belief: clear business writing is a huge competitive advantage. It is the currency that conveys a company's products and knowledge, and the primary connection with customers.

Business writing brings great value to those who are good at it. Our goal is to help our clients be the best at it.

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