

- SAMPLE COURSE NOTES -

Effective Business Writing

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Course overview

This course is designed for sales, marketing and business professionals who need to achieve career advantage from their writing. Learning outcomes include being able to gain attention, inspire confidence and attract interest. You will learn the fundamentals of how to write emails that have positive effect, proposals which impress and documents which generate good response.

Delegates

This course is designed for those who write emails, reports, proposals and sales material in the course of their work.

Course outcomes

This course will give you the practical skills you need to generate business advantage through writing. In particular, you will learn how to:

- Apply correct grammar
- Write clearly, concisely and correctly
- Extract benefits and USPs from features
- Write persuasively
- Convey confidence and authority in your writing

1. Principles of Business Writing

At times you may wish to promote your products, services and ideas. Other times you may wish to persuade colleagues, customers or employers to take one course of action over another. Much of this will involve writing. To be successful, you need to know how to write effectively.

1.1 Why is it important?

Poorly written emails, reports and other documents reflect badly on you, your colleagues and your company. Mistakes, ambiguity and a poor writing structure lessen your ability to get your message across.

1.2 What is meant by effective writing?

Effective writing means writing correctly, clearly, concisely and in a way which will interest the reader. It means knowing what you want to say, how to say it and saying it with good effect.

1.3 Key components of effective writing

Effective writing is:

- Correct
- Clear
- Concise

It should also be:

- interesting and rhythmic
-

- **Correct**

Grammar, punctuation and spelling are correct. There is no ambiguity or likelihood of mistaken meaning.

- **Clear**

You know what you want to say and how to say it.

- **Concise**

Every word in every sentence contributes towards your meaning. Superfluous words, phrases, clichés and metaphors should not feature in your sentences.

Your writing is also:

- **Interesting**

Your writing is relevant and interesting to the reader. Your key messages are clear and well supported.

- **Rhythmic**

Your words and sentences flow in a sequence which is pleasing to the reader.

2. Apply Grammar

The purpose of grammar is to clarify meaning and to provide signposts for the reader. Words are classified according to the jobs they do. If grammar is a distant memory for you, below are some reminders. Don't worry if you think that this might purely be a grammar course, it is a long way from it! However, these words will appear during this course, so it is best to cover them now.

2.1 Nouns

Proper Nouns

These are nouns which require a capital letter such as:

- London
- Microsoft
- Parliament

Common Nouns

A common noun does not require a capital letter such as:

- system
- mouse
- programme

Collective Nouns

These describe a group of things such as:

- audience
- group
- team

It would be reasonable to conclude that collective nouns are plural, as in “the audience have voted.” However, you should decide whether the organisation is seen as a single entity or made up of individual people.

It would be more natural to write that “the team park *their* cars over there” rather than “the team parks *its* cars over there.”

Be consistent

Do not write: “The group *was* in London before *they* returned.” It is easy to change unintentionally from singular to plural within the same piece of writing. Concentration is needed.

Here’s another example of mixing singular with plural:

“The team *has* arrived in London. *They* will present their proposal to the board at our offices in the City, tomorrow.”

In this case, *they* will present sounds better than *it* will present, in which case it would be better to precede this with “The team *have* arrived...”

2.2 Pronouns

A pronoun is used instead of a noun. It is a reference word, standing for a name, for a person or thing or for a group of persons or group of things. Pronouns include:

I, we. (First person)

You (Second person)

He, She, It and They (Third person)

To avoid repetition, it is usual to use a pronoun for the second and subsequent mentions of the same person or thing in a sentence or succeeding sentences. In business writing, use personal pronouns to convey personal attention and responsibility.

I, we. In letters or emails (accompanying a report) it is reasonable to refer to yourself as I, and we and our, as the company. In a short letter type proposal, use “we” and “our” as an alternative to your company name. (Check this is in accordance with your company policy. Naturally, your company policy takes precedence.)

You. As long as it is clear to whom “you” refers, then use this personal pronoun. If there is potential for doubt, then repeat the name.

He, She, It and They

2.3 Verbs

Verbs assert action. They are “doing words” such as to run, to fight, to work, to manage.

When “to” is included, this is called the infinitive. The voice-over for Star Trek famously says “to boldly go”.

Grammarians insist that the correct form of words should be “to go boldly” since “to boldly go” splits the infinitive, i.e. “to” is split by “boldly” from the verb “go”.

Here is another example:

“Can tax payers ever hope to fully recover their investment in banks?”

This probably sounds better than moving *fully* after *recover* in this sentence.

Split your infinitives only when it sounds better to do so.

2.4 Grammatical mood

The Indicative

I made the bed

The Subjunctive

If I were you, I would make that bed.

Imperative

Make that bed!

2.5 Adjectives

Describing words: blue, large, fine, good. An adjective describes a noun: a *fine* system.

2.6 Adverbs

Most adverbs (but not all) end in *ly*. An adverb describes a verb: He worked *slowly*.

2.7 Conjunctions

These are joining words such as: and, but, since, because.

Such words are useful to make copy flow.

I was late *because* the train was slow.

2.8 Prepositions

These are placed in front of a noun or pronoun. They include words like *by, with, from, to, at, in* or *on*. The man sat *in* his car.

2.9 Synonyms

These are words that have the same meaning as others. For example:

Warm, temperate and *balmy*. *Fast, rapid* and *speedy*.

2.10 Antonyms

These are words which convey the opposite meaning. For example:

Light is an antonym of *dark*

Dangerous is an antonym of *safe*

2.11 Metaphors

A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes something to convey something else - the real meaning. When someone says "He's gone off the rails," this doesn't actually mean that he has fallen off the railway line, but rather that he is not doing what he should be doing. Here are some examples:

- Working nine to five means that you are a member of the **rat race**
- She has a special **place** in my heart
- **Drowning** one's sorrows
- He is at the **height** of his career
- Education is the **gateway** to success
- Life in the **fast lane**
- He followed in his father's **footsteps**

Avoid using a metaphor unless it is one which 99% of your readers would commonly use in exactly the same context.

2.12 Similes

A simile compares two different things in order to create a new meaning using the words “as” or “like.” (He’s *like* a dog with two tails). In other words, he is very happy.

Whilst you may use this phrase when speaking, it is best to avoid all similes when writing.

2.13 Clichés

A cliché is an expression or idea which is so overused as to have lost its impact. It is best to “avoid clichés like the devil!” Here are some more to avoid:

Bated breath	Gory details
Bitter end	Hot pursuit
Blazing inferno	Market improvement
Blissful ignorance	Open secret
Brutal reminder	Plagued by misfortune
Chequered career	Serried ranks
Cherished belief	Sweeping changes
Daylight robbery	True colours
Deafening crash	Weighty matter
Foregone conclusion	Whirlwind tour
Glaring omission	Wreak havoc

2.14 Analogies

An analogy is a logical proposition which often demonstrates how two things are alike by pointing out shared characteristics. For example:

“Running this business is how it must feel to ride two horses at the same time.”

Whilst you may use this phrase in normal speech, it is best to avoid analogies in writing.

2.15 Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two purposes:

1) To show you that some letters have been removed to shorten a word

For instance:

Have not becomes **haven't**

I will becomes **I'll**

They are become **they're**

2) To show you that something belongs to something else

For instance:

The **manager's** car. (The car belonging to the manager)

The **director's** office. (The office belonging to the director)

The **client's** computer (The computer belonging to the client)

In these cases the apostrophe goes before the "s" and denotes that the object belongs to someone or something (singular).

If an apostrophe is inserted after the "s" this denotes the object belongs to some people or some things (plural).

The **managers'** car (The car belonging to the managers)

The **directors'** office (The office belonging to the directors)

The **clients'** computer (The computer belonging to several clients)

Exceptions

It is can be shortened to *It's*

However: "The client has its system located on in its premises" requires no apostrophe.

This is to differentiate the meaning of "its" from it's (it is).
