



WRITING WORKSHOP

Session 1 Learner Manual

Workplace Education Manitoba would like to express appreciation to the following for supporting the development of this Continuous Learning Skills curriculum:

Employment and Social Development Canada (ERSDC) and Manitoba Education and Training.

This project was jointly funded through Human Resources Skills Development Canada and Entrepreneurship Training and Trade.

For more information, visit www.wem.mb.ca or contact info@wem.mb.ca

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS?



Objectives

Following this workshop, learners will have capacity to:

- Apply Writing skills learned in the workshop to successfully complete incident reports, business documents and other workplace forms.
- Use and recognize plain language in writing
- Distinguish audience and adjust writing accordingly

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: An essential skill in the workplace

Introduction

Based on a survey of employers across Canada, Written Communication was identified as one of the nine Essential Skills they look for when hiring employees. Written Communication or Writing when used effectively, can have a positive impact on the workplace environment in the following ways:

- positive engagement
- clarity
- shared understanding
- successful task completion
- increased productivity
- profit

Employers retain and promote employees who have efficient and competent Written Communication skills.

What are the Written Communication skills that employers look for?

They include the ability to:

- Use writing style appropriate to purpose, audience, and message
- Use vocabulary and language appropriate to purpose, audience, and message
- Accurately document information that includes the required facts and details, observations, recommendations, etc.
- Communicate ideas, messages, and factual information clearly, completely and accurately
- Organize ideas logically so others can easily understand
- Follow the conventions for grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Self-edit own writing
- Apply writing skills for completing tasks independently, with ease, and successfully in a workplace context

In every workplace, workers write notes, emails, memos, letters, reports, log book entries, and requests. These writing tasks require good writing skills, in order to ensure the written communication that an employee delivers is received.

Who receives an employee’s written communication?

Consider both Internal and External Customers:

- Coworkers
- Supervisors
- Managers
- Employers
- Owners
- Clients

Good writing skills allow you to communicate a message with clarity and ease. In today’s workplaces, we have many tools including email, texting, faxing, computer generated templates and online reporting that allow us to deliver our message quickly and easily to our audience. We no longer rely solely on delivering our message through face to face communication.

In contrast, poor writing skills can be a red flag for employers. For an employee or an individual who is seeking employment, poor writing skills can have far reaching consequences.

What do you think the consequences of poor writing skills are?

Some of the consequences could include:

- Breakdown of communication
- Loss of rapport with coworkers
- Loss of opportunities for promotion
- Loss of a reference
- Loss of job
- Loss of opportunity for hiring

For many of you, it has been awhile since you stepped out of the classroom. Maybe you are unsure of when to use commas, how to write a paragraph, or whether the word should be **that** or **which**.

What you do know is that in order for a workplace or organization and its employees to be successful, employees must write well. Through the activities and discussions we have already had in this workshop, you have communicated that learning to write well can:

- Advance your career- promotions \$
- Save your organization money- and lots of it
- Make you and your organization much more profitable
- Raise the level of well written communications – documents
- Increase clients/ customers
- Improve client relationships
- Improve everyone’s disposition (office rapport)

In order to see how this all fits together, and understand what we need to do to become competent successful writers for the workplace, we need to look at the process of writing also known as written communication.

Written Communication as Process:

Written Communication is a process that involves thoughtful planning and organizing, writing (drafting), revising and proofreading or editing. Writing experts suggest that the percentage of time the writer allocates to writing or composing one writing piece should be:

- ___ for planning/organizing
- ___ for writing
- ___ for revising / proofreading / editing

This breakdown applies to all writing tasks including; reports, letters, log books, instructions memorandums, email and so on.

From this we see:

- Writing is a well-thought out process which takes time
- Thinking about what you want to write begins well before the first word has been written
- Writing does not end until the proofreading has been completed and the written message has been sent.

Contrast the above information with the reality that:

- Most emails and texts use a minimal percentage (%) of time for planning and organizing
- The message is often sent without any revising or proofreading being done.

Is this a concern? When would it be a concern? Why would it be a concern?

Here's the proof:

Attendees at a recent business seminar were asked, "How many of you receive badly written reports, letters, and emails? Every person raised their hand.

What were some of the writing problems that the attendees identified?

Some of the complaints that were shared included:

- Run - on sentences
- Writing that rambles and is unclear
- Punctuation and grammatical errors
- Misused words
- An offensive or annoying tone
- Improper or no greeting
- Lack of organization

The following statement suggests that writing well is a challenge for employees and also for employers.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT IN THE WORKPLACE, WRITTEN MISCOMMUNICATION ACCOUNTS FOR A SIGNIFICANT % OF ERRORS & MISTAKES

Thoughts:

Being Clear

Most individuals would think that the bathrooms of commercial airplanes are an unlikely place to find examples of good written communication and examples of miscommunication; however, the bathrooms of commercial airplanes offer excellent examples.

This example requests the publics' cooperation in a way that is simple, direct, clear, concise, accurate, and in no way offensive or funny.

- Please do not put objects such as air sickness bags, diapers, and towels in the toilet.

Are these examples clear, concise, direct, and accurate?

- "Discarding anything but toilet tissue in the toilet can cause external leaks and create a safety hazard."
- "Please use the trash container for anything other

These examples are inaccurate. The message states that the only thing that should go in the toilet is toilet paper.

What about these examples?

- “Please do not deposit any article in the toilet” and “Do not put any article in the toilet.”
-
-

These examples are clear, concise, and direct. They are however, inaccurate because they state the facility should not be used.

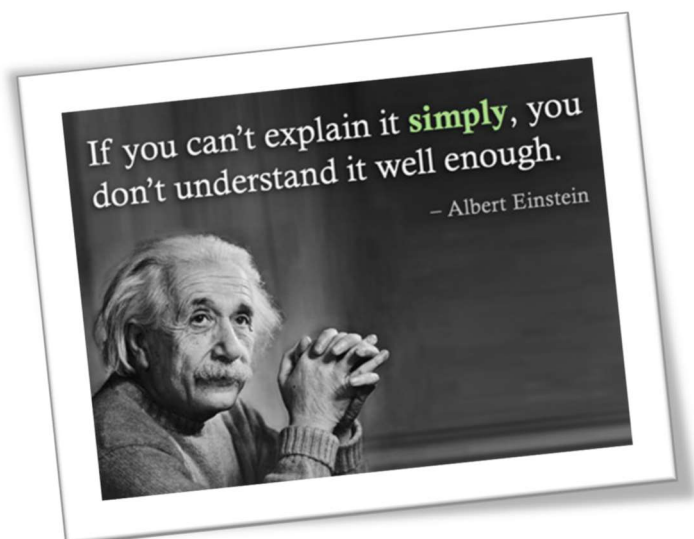
How about this example?

- Please do not throw towels, diapers, napkins, bottles, razor blades or objects in the toilet.
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The word object is redundant because all of the items listed are objects. Throw is also inaccurate as this suggests that if you placed them gently in the toilet that would be okay.

Our writing should be clear, simple and direct in plain language.

Photo: themetapicture.com/dear-college-professors/



Plain Language

Plain Language is Communication that your audience or readers can understand the **first time** they hear or read it.

WHY Use Plain Language

We don't want to waste a lot of time trying to translate difficult, wordy documents.

The Government of Canada calls for plain language to be used in its communications with the public:

"The obligation to inform the public includes the obligation to communicate effectively. Information about government policies, programs and services should be clear, objective and simple, and presented in a manner that is readily understandable. Messages should convey information relevant to public needs, use plain language and be expressed in a clear and consistent style"*

Plain Language:

- Shows customer focus
- Communicates effectively
- Eliminates barriers
- Reduces time spent explaining

Goals of Plain Language

- Help the reader **find** the information
- Help the reader **understand** the information
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Remember: If your document doesn't do both, it's not plain language.

Consider the following:

- Think of why the user needs to read your document
- Keep in mind the average user's level of technical expertise
- Write to everyone who is interested, not just to experts
- Even an expert will prefer a clearly written document

Organize to serve the reader:

- Anticipate questions an informed reader is likely to ask
- Organize writing to answer questions in the order the reader will ask them

Simple tips to keep your writing plain:

- Keep things short
- Use:
 - ✓ Headings
 - ✓ Short Paragraphs
 - ✓ Short Sentences
 - ✓ Everyday Words
 - ✓ Lists
 - ✓ Tables
- DUANUT (Don't Use Acronyms No-one Understands Them)

How do you plan on keeping your language and written communication plain?

What impact does plain language have in your workplace?

Practice! Read the difficult sentences. Then rewrite the sentences in a plain style to improve their readability. Be careful to try and keep the same meanings as those of the original sentences.

1. Please inform all your students that classes have been cancelled in order to facilitate increased student participation in this year's open house.

2. At my most recent place of employment, I utilized AutoCad and Excel.

3. If you have any further questions in regard to the aforementioned problems, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

4. Enclosed please find the recodes of the unpaid loans that have accumulated over the past five years.

5. Subsequent to my interview for the position of junior software engineer, I wrote a thank- you letter to the company's human resource manager.

6. This is to inform you that your correspondence of October 16 has been received by us.

7. Prior to November 20, kindly advise us of approximately how many people will be attending the workshop, so we can arrange for refreshments and seating.

8. The vehicle operator brought the truck to a stationary position in close proximity to the ditch.

Source: The North West Territories Literacy Council; Yellowknife, NWT

The Process of Effective Communication: Planning and Organizing:

In an effort to ensure our writing is clear, simple and direct, we must also plan and organize. This happens before the writer even begins to put pen to paper.

Planning and organizing starts when the writer takes time to analyze the writing task. This involves the topic, the purpose, audience, and the requirements of the task (length, form, tone, informal or formal document).

Audience:

Who is your audience?

Your audience is the person or people who will read your report, letter, log book email, etc.

Audience in the workplace could include:

- Clients
- Colleagues
- Managers
- Supervisors
- Members of your team
- Other employees
- Partner teams
- Groups within your organization
- Groups from other organizations

Each of these groups and individuals have different needs and expectations. As a writer, you will want to:

- Get your point across to make it easy for your reader or readers (audience) to understand
- Put yourself in the reader's shoes. Your reader will feel comfortable and you will have earned that reader's trust and possibly his or her business. When you know your audience, you can design your materials to satisfy their needs and expectations and allow them to get the information they need from the document you have written.

Audience analysis deserves serious attention. It involves more than just learning a few details, such as your reader's company and position.

The following are some defining characteristics of audience

- Education
- Experience
- Job Responsibilities
- Relationship to the project

Age, gender, nationality, culture, values and beliefs are personal characteristics that also define audience.

Below are questions related to the audience defining characteristics and personal characteristics. Asking yourself these questions prior to writing will help you determine the best format, vocabulary to use, structure, tone, etc. to meet your audiences' needs and expectations.

- What is the reader's primary spoken language?
- How does the reader prefer to be addressed?
- What form of business communication does the reader use most? An executive from a leading computer company does not look at anything but electronic correspondence. Emailing her would be your best bet.
- What matters most to the reader in a written document? Does the reader prefer brevity to details?
- Does the reader have a sense of humor?
- What type of business language is the reader accustomed to? Technical lingo, medical lingo, and so on

The Audience Analyzer can help you best customize your message in order to be an effective communicator.

Audience Analysis	
Analyze	Who is/are the recipient(s)?
Understand	What is their knowledge of your message?
Demographics	What is their age, gender, education level, position?
Interest	What are their interests or investment to your message?
Environment	What is your relationship to the audience? What is their likely attitude to your message? Have you taken cultural differences into consideration?
Needs	What information does your audience need?
Customize	How do you adjust your message to your audience?
Expectations	What are your audience's expectations?

Understanding your audience will help you to make decisions about how you will write your document.