

BUSINESS WRITING EXERCISES

These four business writing exercises and activities will help trainers add a creative touch to their lessons on business writing.

Business leaders have consistently cited the declining writing skills of graduates as one of the major training challenges that face them in the workplace. Indeed, some have identified business writing as one of the more difficult forms of communication for employees to master.

Yet, business writing is an integral part of success for many people in business, especially those in supervisory or management roles. Trainers and professors have been responding to this need by increasing the emphasis on business writing in the classroom.

Business writing includes writing memos, reports, performance evaluations, e-mails, press releases, and policy manuals, among others. Organized writing tells readers that the writer is organized in thought as well as writing. Poorly written and disorganized communication tells the world that the writer is a sloppy, disorganized thinker. The basic rules for planning good business communication are:

1. Write with your intended audience in mind.
2. Know your objective.
3. Decide which essential information to include.
4. Decide how to present the information.

The following activities can help instructors teach business writing to their students. It will help them practice writing, identify weaknesses in writing, and learn to be organized and disciplined.

You've Got Mail

Have students write a business letter. You may provide a topic or let them choose. Once the business letter is written, have them exchange it with another student. They should read the letter and evaluate it using the following criteria:

1. Is it organized well? Does each paragraph contain a topic sentence? Are ideas presented in a logical order?
2. Is it clear? Does it use plain English? Does it use specific words and concrete nouns?
3. Is it concise? Does it use active verbs and strong words? Does it include only what the reader needs to know?
4. Is it accurate? Is all information correct? Does it use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation?
5. Is it courteous and friendly? Do I use positive expressions? Is it free of bureaucratic, pretentious, and legalistic language? Is the tone appropriate?
1. Have the students then write a one-page letter providing feedback to their classmate on their writing style. Encourage students to be constructive and supportive.

Is It Good or Bad?

Gather several samples of business writing—memos, press releases, business reports, etc. You may be able to find some examples on the Web, in business magazines, or from internal school communication. Have students examine each piece of writing. For each piece of writing, have them determine what could be done to improve the writing. Then have them list what things are done well.

Jumbled English

Visit Web sites where the Bad Writing Contest Winners are published. Many sites publish the results and can be found by doing a search at any search engine. Copy the winning paragraphs onto separate sheets of paper. Divide students into several teams and give each team a copy of one of the paragraphs and a dictionary. Tell them they have 10 minutes to read the sentence and translate it into plain English. Give a prize to the group that comes the closest to making sense out of any of them. Discuss what makes each selection bad and how it could have been improved upon. Have them write a memo explaining the faults in the paragraph and explaining how to revise it.

Daily Improvements

Have each student keep a personal journal in which they are required to write at least three paragraphs each day. The journal should cover such topics as what they learned in the class, what they learned during internships or their workplace, business experiences of friends and relatives, and other business-related subjects. Tell them to keep the journal for at least two months and at the end of the two months to read back and evaluate whether their writing has improved and, if it has, in which ways.