

Job Explorer: My Dream Job-Lesson 11

Topic: Writing Skills for Business

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Discuss the importance of using writing skills in business
- Explain tips for writing effective business emails and letters
- Write sample emails and letters employee using some of the tips they learned

Materials:

- Worksheets #11A, #11B, and #11C

Focus Question: How important is it for people in business to write well?

Teaching Strategies:

Introduction:

- Ask students to do the following:
 - Respond to the following question with one these replies--very important, somewhat important, not important or not sure: How important is it for a business person to have good writing skills? Explain your answer give reasons for your opinion.

Body of the lesson:

Tell the class that today they will be discussing the importance of having writing skills in business and some tips to promote more effective writing skills.

- Distribute Worksheet #11A, "Writing for Business." Have students follow the directions for the exercise on the worksheet. Then, have them explain their answers to the following:
 - What headings did you suggest for each of the four paragraphs that appeared in the exercise?
 - What are some of the things you learned about writing for business from this worksheet?
 - Why does the author of the worksheet say that, "Keeping paragraphs and sentences relatively short is helpful when putting together virtually any kind of communication involving business writing?"
 - What is the most important thing you learned about writing for business from this worksheet?
- Distribute Worksheet #11B, "Emails." Have students follow the directions for the exercise on the worksheet. Then, have them explain their answers to the following:
 - What did you learn about writing emails from these tips?
 - What is meant by the following suggestion: Never begin a message with a vague "This"--as in "This needs to be done by 5:00?"
 - Which of these tips was most valuable to you?
- Pair students with a partner. Have them exchange the emails each wrote. Have each partner critique the others email. Then, as part of the whole-class discussion, have students explain their answers to the following:

- What did you find most difficult about writing your email?
 - What is the most valuable lesson you learned about writing emails from the suggestions you received from your partner?
- Distribute Worksheet #11C, “Letter.” Have students follow the directions for the exercise on the worksheet. Then, have them explain their answers to the following:
 - Explain what the reading means when it says, “Writing for business is different than other kinds of writing?”
 - What does the author of this worksheet mean by saying “focused and specific” when writing for business?”
 - What did you find most difficult about writing your business letter?

Summary/Assessment:

- Have students exchange their business letters with the partner previously assigned to review the email written for Worksheet #11B. Have each partner critique his/her partner's letter. Then have the class explain their answers to the following:
 - What was the most valuable lesson you learned about writing a letter for business from the critique by your partner?
 - What piece of advice about writing for business would you give to a friend?

Worksheet #10A, “Writing for Business”

Exercise: The worksheet below was taken from a web page titled “Business Communication Writing.” Four of the paragraphs from the web page appear below, however the subheading from each of the paragraphs was omitted. Write in your own subheadings on the four lines provided.

I. _____
There are many types of business communication writing methods and styles that influence how companies, corporations, governments, and institutions communicate with each other and share information. You might be surprised to learn that the various types of business communication writing – including emails, letters, and formal invitations – are actually similar in style.

II. _____
Business writing is a critical aspect of how people can share information with each other in an efficient, professional manner. Businesses work both online and offline, sharing information via letters with each other – especially since most communication is done away from the telephone and is instead completed via email. We are often encouraged to write more simply and succinctly – in reality, most of our written communication these days involves some form of business writing. Formality is a critical element of how business writing is conducted today. In fact, each document has to be considered as a legal document, and should be considered an important facet of a company or organization’s communication system. Keep in mind that any information shared with business writing can be read by bosses, superiors, and administrators in an organization.

III. _____
Here are a few types of business communication writing that you might come across in your work: advertisements, emails, snail mail, manual writing and writing about technology, recommendations and proposals, papers, and summaries. People also use business writing to ask for a job, to inquire about opportunities, or even to resign from a current position.

IV. _____
The main feature of business writing that ties all forms (memos, emails, letters, documents, etc.) together is the style. Keeping paragraphs and sentences relatively short is helpful when putting together virtually any kind of communication involving business writing. No matter what kinds of documents you are writing, the style should be concise, clear, and convey information in an effective way. Make sure that when you write, you can ensure that the writing style is simplified, streamlined, and organized. If you are describing information for the benefit of another party, or if you want to showcase your skills, use effective, targeted language that will be very clear for a reader who skims your work. Even though there are different types of business communication writing, you can know that the simple style is effective in all sorts of written documents.

Adapted from: <http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/style-and-usage/types-of-business-communication-writing.html>

Worksheet 10B “Emails”

Exercise: Read the handout below and complete the exercise that follows.

Ten Quick Tips on Writing a Professional Email

1. Always fill in the subject line with a topic that means something to your reader. Instead of writing "Decals" or "Important!," write something more specific like, "New Hiring Policies."
2. Put your main point in the opening sentence. Most readers won't stick around for a surprise ending.
3. Never begin a message with a vague statement such as "This needs to be done by 5:00." Always be specific explaining what you're writing about. For example, "Here are my suggestions regarding the new hiring policy."
4. Don't use ALL CAPITALS (no shouting!), or all lower-case letters either.
5. As a general rule, PLZ avoid textspeak (abbreviations and acronyms): *you* may be ROFLOL (rolling on the floor laughing out loud), but your reader may be left wondering WUWT (what's up with that).
6. Be brief *and* polite. If your message runs longer than two or three short paragraphs, consider (a) reducing the message, or (b) providing an attachment. But in any case, don't snap, growl, or bark.
7. Remember to say "please" and "thank you."
8. Add a signature block with appropriate contact information (in most cases, your name, business address, and phone number, along with a legal disclaimer if required by your company). Don't clutter the signature block with a clever quotation or artwork.
9. Edit and proofread before hitting "send." You may think you're too busy to sweat the small stuff, but unfortunately your reader may think you are very careless.
10. Finally, reply promptly to serious messages. If you need more than 24 hours to collect information or make a decision, send a brief response explaining the delay.

Adapted from: <http://grammar.about.com/od/developingessays/a/profemails.htm>

Exercise: Using the tips above, write a sample email to your boss on the other side of this page. The email should include the following information: you are requesting meeting with your boss for the purpose of giving your opinion about the company's new hiring policy. You oppose the new policy, especially the fact that new hires, like yourself, will not be able to receive raises for at least three years.

Worksheet #10C, “Letters”

Exercise: Read the worksheet below and complete the exercise that follows:

This handout will help you write business letters required in many different situations.

Principles to keep in mind

1. Business writing is different than other kinds of writing

Writing for a business audience is usually quite different than other kinds of writing. Business writing strives to be crisp and succinct rather than creative; it stresses specificity and accuracy. When you write a business document, you must assume that your audience has limited time in which to read it and is likely to skim. Your readers have an interest in what you say insofar as it affects their working world. They want to know the “bottom line”: the point you are making about a situation or problem and how they should respond. Business writing varies from the conversational style often found in email messages to the more formal style found in contracts. In business writing, as in all writing, you must know your audience. In most cases, the business letter will be the first impression that you make on someone. Though business writing has become less formal over time, you should still take great care that your letter’s content is clear and that you have proofread it carefully.

2. Be focused and specific

Business writing should be clear and concise. Take care, however, that your document does not turn out as an endless series of short, choppy sentences. Keep in mind also that “concise” does not have to mean “blunt”—you still need to think about your tone and the audience for whom you are writing. For example, instead of saying, “Nobody liked your project idea, so we are not going to give you any funding,” it would be better to say: “After carefully reviewing this proposal, we have decided to prioritize other projects this quarter.”

3. Where to begin

Reread the description of your task (for example, the advertisement of a job opening, giving instructions for submitting a proposal, or assignment prompt for a course). Think about your purpose and the requirements mentioned in the description of the task. List these requirements on piece of paper. This list can serve as an outline to govern your writing and help you stay focused. Next, identify qualifications, attributes, objectives, or answers that match the requirements you have just listed. Strive to be exact and specific, avoiding vagueness, ambiguity, and generalities. If there are industry- or field-specific concepts or terminology that are relevant to the task at hand, use them in a manner that will convey your competence and experience. Avoid any language that your audience may not understand.

Adapted <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/files/2012/09/Business-Letters-The-Writing-Center.pdf>

Exercise: Following up on the meeting with your boss about the company’s hiring policy (see Worksheet #10B), she asks you to write a formal letter to her in one page or less. In the letter, she would like you to give the reasons why are opposed to the company’s hiring policy which prohibits giving raises to new employees for at least three years.