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Workplace Writing

CTAE-FS-2 Academic Foundations: Learners achieve state academic standards at or above grade level.

Understanding and Goals

Unit Understandings, Themes, and Concepts:

Enduring Understandings:

Students will learn the importance and skills of good writing techniques in the work place. At least some form of writing is a vital component to almost all careers in today's job market. Writing with a purpose and for an audience can assist in having clear and concise writing.

Primary Learning Goals:

Essential questions:

- Why is being able to write in the workplace important?
- Why is understanding the purpose of your writing key to communicating to your reader?
- How can the organization of the content of the writing impact what the writing communicates?

Students with disabilities:

For students with disabilities, each instructor should refer to the student's IEP to be sure that the accommodations specified in the IEP are being provided within the classroom setting. Instructors should also familiarize themselves with the provisions of Behavior Intervention Plans that may be part of a student's IEP. Frequent consultation with a student's special education instructor will be beneficial in providing appropriate differentiation within any given instructional activity or requirement.

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Workplace Writing

What is workplace writing?

Delia works in a florist shop every day after school. She dreams of having her own nursery and doing public and private landscaping. The second week of her job, the owner of the shop asked Delia to write a few routine letters. Delia didn't panic, but she wanted to. She had never felt confident as a writer and wanted to tell that to her boss, but she didn't want to turn down his request.

Although Delia was surprised—yes, shocked—at her boss's request, she shouldn't have been. Many employees today are writing in the workplace. Delia's friend Ty, a physical therapist assistant, routinely writes reports about patients' responses to treatment. Carla, a police officer, writes reports about criminal suspects all the time. Ahmed, a legal assistant, told his boss an idea for the employee newsletter and was asked to submit a rough draft. All of these people—although they fill diverse jobs—write in the course of their work.

Employees are writing

Employees today are filling out forms, requesting information, sending memos, and filing reports. They're taking notes in meetings, composing summaries, drafting policy statements, and writing sales letters. They're putting out information in employee newsletters, responding to customer requests for information, outlining instructions in operators' manuals, and drafting new product descriptions. They're all writing on the job.

Readers need information

All of these people are using writing to communicate. Most of them never thought they



would be doing so much writing at work and don't think of themselves as writers.

But today's workplace thrives on information. And information is communicated through reading, writing, and speaking. Many workers today find themselves in a job that requires at least some writing. As the economy depends more and more on information and its expanding technology, jobs will require better skilled readers, writers, and speakers.

(continued on page 2)

What's inside!

In these pages, you will learn to:

- take charge of your writing improvementp. 4
- consider your readerp. 6
- plan and write a business letter.....p. 7
- say what you mean.....p. 9

Workplace writing *(continued from page 1)*

Writers make decisions

When an emergency medical technician writes a report about a recent accident she's covered, she thinks about what she wants to say and what the reader needs to know. As a writer, she decides what her purpose is, then she organizes her material and decides what format to use. A medical report is one kind of business document; a one-page brochure describing a hospital's patient services is another. Each one has a different audience. Physicians and medical personnel will read the accident report; the general public will read the hospital brochure.

Different kinds of documents are used for different audiences to accomplish different purposes. Writers think about purpose, audience, and format for all of their documents.

Purpose. The "purpose" of a business document is WHY it is written. Because workplace documents answer different needs, they have different purposes. Although any document may have more than one purpose, usually one purpose is most important.

Workplace writing:

- informs and gives information: it tells, explains, instructs
- persuades and seeks action: it sells the reader something—an idea, a service, or a product
- communicates goodwill; it spreads positive feelings, often appreciation

Audience. Writers also make decisions about the audience, or the reader of the document. Workplace documents address many audiences, or readers—people who have different wants or needs, interests, and levels of understanding. Just as workplace writers have varied purposes when they write, readers have different wants and needs when they read.

Often these wants and needs are affected by who the readers are. Typical workplace readers include:

- customers or clients
- supervisors and subordinates
- co-workers or peers
- the larger community or public

For example, the recreation department director who wants a budget approved would probably write differently for her boss than she would for a newspaper article about her new program for young adults. She may want to persuade the public to attend but give details on park problems to her supervisor.

Format. After a writer decides the purpose of a document and who's going to read it, the next step is determining its format.

Workplace documents come in many shapes and sizes: brochures, ads, reports, memos, letters, handbooks, manuals, policy statements, pamphlets, proposals, instructions, logs, recommendations, newsletters, press releases. You've probably seen some of these. Many writers keep a collection of examples for reference.

Summing up

Workplace writing is

- multi-purpose
- written for different audiences
- varied in format

Read ahead to learn more about standard letter formats, putting the main idea first, and saying what you mean. With effort and motivation, most people can become competent writers in the workplace.

In Activity 1 on the next page, you can find out how much you know about writing in the workplace.





How much do you know about writing in the workplace?

1

Activity 1. Are these statements true or false?

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Good writing usually has big words and long sentences. | T | F |
| 2. Experienced writers always make an outline before they begin to write. | T | F |
| 3. Revising a document primarily means checking for spelling and punctuation errors. | T | F |
| 4. Experienced writers rarely revise; inexperienced writers revise a lot. | T | F |
| 5. Writing is usually easy for experienced writers. | T | F |
| 6. Learning the rules of grammar is the best way to improve your writing. | T | F |
| 7. It's important to get most all of your thoughts down on paper before you start rereading and revising. | T | F |
| 8. Unclear wording and poor organization are two common problems in workplace writing. | T | F |
| 9. Errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammatical usage can distract the reader from the meaning of a document. | T | F |
| 10. In planning a document, what the writer wants to say is more important than what the reader needs to know. | T | F |

Take charge of your writing improvement

Now that you know how important writing is in whatever job or career you seek, how can you improve your skill and increase your confidence?

First, if you wish you could write better, you have plenty of company. Many people—even experienced writers—find writing difficult. But it's likely that you'll end up in a job where you have to write, perhaps even a lot. Your efforts and your desire to improve will go a long way toward helping you become a better writer. And never forget that writing improvement *is* possible.

Write as much as you can

You can't expect to improve at anything you don't do often. How did you get good at shooting baskets, playing the drums, or drawing landscapes? You did it, over and over again. The necessity for repetitive practice holds true for writing also. Look for writing opportunities at work, school, and at home, like reports of completed projects, memos, letters to friends who have moved away, notes to family, a daily or weekly journal for yourself. If you can, use a word processor so you can revise easily and proofread with a spell checker. The point is...just do it.

Get feedback on your writing

Ask people to read your writing, especially your letters and memos at work, and give you feedback. But, don't just hand over a document and say, "Tell me what you think." Most people don't know how to give feedback so you need to be specific. You might say:

Tell me what you think this paragraph says.

What do you think is the main point in this letter?

Tell me in your words what you think I'm trying to say in this report.

Try to avoid yes or no questions like, "Is this sentence clear?" It is better to ask, "What does this sentence say?" Asking your reader to put



your writing into his or her words—paraphrasing—is always a good idea.

Don't take the feedback personally

No matter what people say about your writing, don't argue. If you do, they'll never give you feedback again. Even if their feedback doesn't make any sense to you, don't argue! Just say, "thank you," and get some other opinions.

All writers—experienced and inexperienced—have to sort through the many comments they get and decide which suggestions to take and which ones to discard. In other words, don't be discouraged or confused by conflicting advice. As the writer, you're boss! You decide, based on what you want to say and what you think your readers need to know.

(continued on page 5)

Take charge *(continued from page 1)*

Read

Yes, read—magazines, newspapers, books—everything you can. Just as babies learn how to speak from listening to people talk, you learn to write by immersing yourself in the printed word. Reading is simply someone else’s writing. Through reading you learn the patterns of written language—where readers need more information and where they don’t. You also learn what words to use, as well as appropriate choices in sentence and paragraph structure.

So read as much as you can, especially examples of business writing, and know that you’re improving your writing.

Get additional help

If you’re really serious about improving your writing, get help. Register for business writing courses at your high school, community college or area adult education program. Check

your local library or bookstore for some of the many excellent books and resources available. Specific names and publishing information are listed on page 8.

Activity 2 will help you survey your attitudes toward writing.

clear sentences

good ideas

correct grammar

readable layouts

correct spelling

concise paragraphs

active voice

The keys to good writing

Organization

- identify the main idea
- select backup details
- use an easy-to-read format

Find out more about your writing

2

Activity 2. Directions: indicate your response for each item. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; U=undecided; D=disagree; SD=strongly disagree. Then, write a short paragraph in which you identify and explain three areas for self-improvement.

- _____ 1. I write letters and notes to friends and family members.
- _____ 2. I use writing to help me study and learn new subjects.
- _____ 3. I put off school or work writing assignments until the last minute and then I do them as fast as I can.
- _____ 4. I don’t think I write as well as most other people.
- _____ 5. I have a hard time figuring out what I want to say when I write.
- _____ 6. I don’t mind rereading and revising what I’ve written.
- _____ 7. I don’t mind having my writing evaluated.
- _____ 8. When I have to organize a long document, I don’t know where to begin.
- _____ 9. People who read my writing usually understand what I’m trying to say.
- _____ 10. Someone who writes well usually does better in school or work than someone who doesn’t.

Consider Your Reader



Jarrell works as an assistant to the manager of a company that rents buses to organizations for day and overnight trips. Because of a very successful season last year, the company has expanded its tours, changed many of its schedules, and added several brand-new vehicles to its bus fleet. Jarrell's boss wants his regular customers—a large and loyal group of senior citizens—to know all this information. He has asked Jarrell to look over a letter he has drafted and to make suggestions for revision. The draft Jarrell was asked to review is shown in the next column.

Jarrell tried to remember what she learned in the business writing course she had taken in school. When she got home, she reviewed her notes. Her instructor had stressed putting the main idea first. The textbook she used stated:

1. Present important information early in the document.
2. Take a positive approach.
3. Explain exactly what you mean. Don't assume the reader knows.
4. Present information from the reader's point of view.

Jarrell decided that the purpose of the letter was to give information, but she wasn't sure what was most important. As she reread the letter, she decided it was the expanded bus fleet. Then she switched to the fact that new trips were being offered. Then she thought it was the procedures for reserving a trip. Finally, she found the main idea hiding in the middle of the letter. She copied it onto a clean sheet of paper and got to work. In Activity 3 you start to revise a letter by focusing first on the main idea.

Main point, where are you?

3

Activity 3. Help Jarrell revise the letter printed below. With a partner identify the main point, and then decide what the supporting points are. Compare drafts with other people in your class. Then, read the next article for further instructions on revising this letter.

Dear Bus Patrons:

Enclosed please find reservation forms and a complete schedule of trips for our 20xx season. Our bus fleet has expanded and we have changed many of our schedules. We have new places to go, some new overnight trips, and a chance to see an excellent musical in Central City. We expect to have an even bigger and better season than last year.

XYZ Tours is planning an exciting spring, summer, and fall season. We plan to visit the Berson Gardens, the new Design Museum in Pepperton, and the historic Kellogg House. Our most popular trip—fall foliage in the Endless Mountains—is usually reserved well in advance. If you would like to schedule a day or overnight trip for your club or organization, or for yourself, you **MUST** make a reservation. It is not possible to hold a particular date without the required paper work.

Also, we had to replace two malfunctioning vehicles this year with brand-new comfortable buses. You're going to love them. They have wider seats, softer cushions, and more leg room.

We expect a great season this year and hope you'll join us. If you have questions, please call me.

Sincerely,

Plan and write a business letter

After Jarrell started to revise the manager's letter, she decided she needed to review the standard business letter format and content. She checked her course notes, looked in her business writing textbook, and found the following information:

Letter format

- ❶ **Letterhead.** If possible, use business stationery. A professional appearance is important.
- ❷ **Date.** Include the month, day, and year.
- ❸ **Inside address.** Include the reader's name, title, company, and complete address.
- ❹ **Salutation.** Use the standard, Dear, followed by the reader's name spelled correctly. If you don't know the name of the person, try to find out. If you can't, use the person's position, like Dear Service Manager. Whatever you do, avoid Dear Sir or Madam because it is stilted and old-fashioned.
- ❺ **Body of letter.** Contents of letter.
- ❻ **Closing.** Sincerely is the standard closing.
- ❼ **Writer's signature.** Include the writer's name and position typed below the signature.

Letter content

- ❶ **Purpose.** Identify why you are writing the letter. Jarrell decided that the manager's letter was written to inform customers of the tours and schedules of the new season, tell them how they could make reservations for these trips, and encourage them to patronize the company.
- ❷ **Main point up front.** State the purpose clearly and in the first sentence if possible.
- ❸ **Clear supporting details.** Include reasons and examples that clarify and expand the main point you're making.
- ❹ **Reader-centered language.** Use language that is positive, upbeat and "you-centered," written with the reader in mind.
- ❺ **Goodwill ending.** Close with a friendly, positive statement or paragraph.

Check the draft Jarrell's manager gave her and the standard letter format model on page 8. Activity 4 provides directions for revising this letter further.

Finish this letter, please

4

Activity 4. Review the draft of Jarrell's letter on page 6. In Activity 3 you started to revise this letter by identifying the main idea. Now finish your revision by doing the following:

- Start with the sentence that sums up the purpose of the letter.
- Reorganize your letter into several paragraphs with the details that back up the main point. Imagine yourself receiving and reading this letter. What details would encourage you to sign up for a trip?
- Build goodwill. Make the last sentence friendlier.
- Name the bus company and the manager.
- Write from the reader's point of view. Get rid of repetitive sentences. Use "you-centered" language. Example: change "we have new places to go" to "you can visit new places."

Make certain that your final version is neatly typed and easy to read. An example of a correctly formatted letter is shown on page 8.

Factoids

- Managers want their employees' writing to be clear, concise, well organized, grammatically correct, and spelled correctly.
- Of the 60 million people who write on the job, 60% do so reluctantly.
- An important reason people have difficulty writing is they edit too early in the process

XYZ Business School ①
Wayne, PA 19087

May 4, 20xx ②

English Department
Harvey High School ③
399 St. Clair Street
Winfield, IL 60190

Dear Colleagues ④

Thank you for asking about block style letters. ⑧

Block style letters are popular because they are so easy to ⑨
type. Every line begins at the left margin.

Since this letter is typed on letterhead stationery, there is no ⑩
heading. If it had been typed on plain stationery, the heading
would begin at the left margin.

⑤
This letter illustrates open punctuation; there is no punctuation
following the salutation and closing. Did you notice that the ⑪
number of spaces following the date line was increased from
two to four? This can help to make a short letter more
attractive.

⑪
We think you will agree the block style letter has a clean, ⑫
modern appearance.

Sincerely ⑥

Patricia Kendall
Department of Communication ⑦

Say what you mean

You've revised a letter, now tackle a memo. What is a memo? Short for "memorandum," it is a document that is sent inside an organization, school, or business.

Note the format in the memo below. Since the document will not go through the U.S. Post Office, no inside address is needed. Commonly written on company letterhead, the memo's TO and FROM lines identify who will receive the memo and who wrote it. The date is always included as well as what the memo is about—the SUBJECT line.

Now look again at this memo. It's hard to read and filled with big words that don't say anything. The writer needs to follow some basic guidelines for effective business writing. Read the memo below and decide what the writer is trying to say.

TO: All Staff
FROM: Midori Chay,
Personnel Director
DATE: October 7, 20xx
SUBJECT: Designated Areas for the
Purpose of Non-Staff
Personnel Locating a
Space for Their Cars

It has come to our attention recently that clients, potential customers, and other persons find it difficult to locate an area in which to park their car. Many complaints have been received regarding this matter over the past year. In some cases, people have been tardy for meetings and conferences with our personnel because they cannot find a place for their car.

As a courtesy to all people who visit our facility, please refrain from using non-staff personnel's spaces as areas in which to park your car.



What's wrong with this memo? Quite a lot. As you gain more experience writing and reading business letters and memos, you'll get impatient with writing that's unclear and hard to follow. Here are some tips to help you say what you mean in plain English.

- Keep it short. Look carefully at each word to see if it improves the meaning of the document. Eliminate repetitive words that take up space, like "meetings and conferences," instead of "meetings."
- Get rid of unnecessary expressions. Several phrases are not needed, like "regarding this matter" and "it has come to our attention."
- Use simple words. Simple language is more effective than wordy phrases like non-staff personnel.
- Make it clear. If you keep it short, avoid unnecessary expressions, and use simple language, you will be on your way to saying what you mean.

Activity 5 provides a number of words, sentences, and paragraphs for you to practice these guidelines.

Plain English, please

5

Activity 5. Draft a plain English version for each of the following words, sentences, or paragraphs. All of the examples are taken from the memo on page 9. You may use the suggestions offered in numbers 6 and 7. Try to think of the whole document as you revise each word, sentence, or paragraph. When you finish the activity, put the separate pieces together in to one, easy-to-read memo.

1. tardy _____
2. refrain _____
3. people who visit our facility _____
4. non-staff personnel _____
5. designated areas for the purpose of non-staff personnel locating a space for their cars
6. Many complaints have been received regarding this matter over the past year. In some cases, people have been tardy for meetings and conferences with our personnel because they cannot find a place for their car.

Over the past year, many _____

7. As a courtesy to all people who visit our facility, please refrain from using non-staff personnel's spaces as areas in which to park your car.

As a courtesy _____, please _____

_____ }

Words business writers need to know

As a writer on the job, you will come across many new words. A few commonly used words in business writing are defined below:

document—any written business communication, such as a letter, memo, report, proposal, manual.

format—the parts, appearance, and arrangement of a document; for example, the memo format includes a subject line, the letter format includes an inside address.

organization—an important key to successful business writing; how ideas and thoughts are put together in a document; elements of good organization include a clearly stated and obvious main idea, details and examples that support the main idea, and an easy-to-read arrangement or layout.

concise—brief, pointed, not having extra words or phrases. Business writers value clear documents that don't take lots of time to read.

Close-up: less is more

Oscar Wilde was a British playwright who lived and wrote in the early part of the twentieth century.

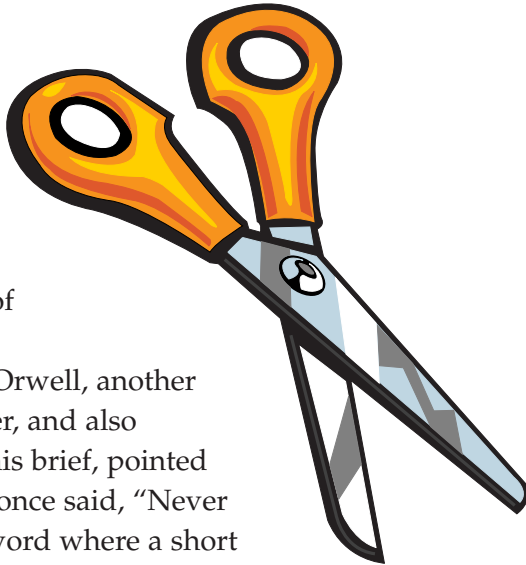
Once, a friend of his, who had not heard from him in some time, was pleasantly surprised when a letter finally arrived. Attached to the first page was this note from Wilde:

“Sorry to write such a long letter: I didn’t have time to write a short one.”

Wilde was a writer known for his sharp wit and his keen sense of humor.

George Orwell, another British writer, and also known for his brief, pointed statements, once said, “Never use a long word where a short one will do.”

What do you think these two authors meant by their remarks? In Activity 6 you can take the time to be concise.



Activity 6. Pretend you are Wilde or Orwell and review the memo you revised in Activity 5. Count the words in your revised memo. If your revision is less than 55 words and keeps the original meaning, you did a great job! If not, keep cutting. And don’t forget to shorten the subject line.

6

Coping with information

When you went to buy car insurance, did you read the fine print? When you purchased your bike, did you read the instructions for cleaning and repair?

Information is important to all of us as readers. And we depend on writers to present this information so that we can understand it. Readers depend on writers for information on important topics like explanations of health care benefits in an employee handbook, facts on automobiles in a consumer newsletter, or reasons for supporting a company’s revised budget in a report.

What do writers do with information? Writers find information, check its accuracy, select what they think readers need to know, organize it, and then present it as clearly, concisely, and effectively as possible. Good writers don’t assume that readers understand. They create effective business documents that give readers the information they need and want.

Wrap-up: a summary

- Many jobs in the workplace require writing.
- Workplace writers make decisions about purpose, audience, and format in every document they write.
- Workplace documents inform, persuade, or communicate goodwill.
- Workplace documents are written for customers, supervisors, co-workers, and the public.
- Workplace documents are formatted into reports, memos, letters, proposals, newsletters.
- The standard block letter format is one of the most commonly used business documents.
- Putting the main idea first helps the reader understand what the document is about.
- Concise and simple language is found in the best kind of workplace writing.

Speaking, writing, doing

Now you have a chance to practice what you have learned. The following four exercises ask you to apply your new skills. Do your best work as you practice.

1 Letter of introduction. Write a letter introducing yourself to someone at school or work. Possible readers: one of your classroom teachers, a former or current coach, or your new boss. Write about your career goals and the steps you are taking to prepare for that career. Also, include personal strengths and limitations that may affect your ability to get the job you seek.

Write your letter from a third person’s point of view. For example, begin by introducing

yourself as “This letter introduces (your name), a student in your fifth period class, or a candidate for the position of night manager.” Throughout the letter, refer to yourself as he or she or as Ms. or Mr.

This letter draft can be helpful in seeing yourself as others do. Share your draft with class members and get their reactions. Ask them specifically to identify your main points. You may wish to actually send this letter to the intended reader or to revise it for your own file.

Speaking, writing, doing

3 Be prepared. Get ready for your writing responsibilities at work. Find out what kind of writing you are likely to do in your occupational area. Collect samples of writing from several different workplaces, especially in jobs or career fields that interest you. Make a chart similar to the chart in number 2; identify

each document, its purpose, and its audience. Then select one document from the samples and analyze it. Write a paragraph or two to explain whether you think the document serves its purpose well or whether it can be improved. Make suggestions for improvements you think are needed.

My job or career field: _____

Document	Purpose	Audience
<i>customer newsletter</i>	<i>informs about new services</i>	<i>customers</i>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



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