

# BUSINESS-WRITING Manual

A Companion to *Write for Business*



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## Who is UpWrite Press?

UpWrite Press is a team of authors, trainers, and designers devoted to helping people write and communicate more effectively in their workplaces. Our workplace is a Civil War–era barn, where we created the best-selling Write Source series for teaching writing from kindergarten through college. Now we bring our proven techniques to the business world.

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# Preface:

## The Business of Writing





# Introduction

Good writing is good business. Every day, business people like you write to do their work: sending e-mails, reporting on projects, developing sales materials, making presentations, and drafting proposals. Business success—yours and your company’s—depends on the quality of your writing.

## How will this manual improve my writing?

As a companion to *Write for Business*, this manual offers the following:

- **Part 1** provides **22 strategies for effective business writing**, helping you produce strong ideas, logical organization, professional voice, clear words, smooth sentences, correct copy, and reader-friendly design.
- **Part 2** includes special sessions on the **four forms of business writing**—correspondence, reports, proposals, and instructions.

With to-the-point instruction, exemplary models, and practical activities, the *Business-Writing Manual* will help you improve every document you write. To get started, simply turn the page. There you’ll find the first principles of business writing and an introduction to the seven traits of great writing.

# How can I improve my business writing right now?

Apply these seven principles whenever you sit down to write:

## 1 Set positive goals.

- **Consider timing**—deadlines, urgency, and efficiency.
- **Know what you want**—the measurable outcome or “payoff.”
- **Build relationships**—within and beyond the company.
- **Think of your company’s mission**—and write accordingly.

## 2 Write directly to readers.

- **Think of position**—the powers and responsibilities of the reader.
- **Consider motivation**—the person’s knowledge, motives, and attitude.
- **Respect diversity**—gender, ethnicity, and ability.
- **Find common ground**—shared goals and experiences.

## 3 Master the writing process.

- **Prewrite** to gather and focus your thoughts.
- **Draft** to get your ideas on paper (or in the computer).
- **Revise** to improve ideas, organization, and voice.
- **Refine** to correct words, sentences, and every last punctuation mark.

## 4 Follow good models.

- **Check the models** in this manual and in *Write for Business*.
- **Keep files and templates** of good writing.
- **Copy, paste, and modify models** to fit the given situation.

## 5 Benchmark with the seven traits.

- **Strengthen your ideas.**
- **Improve your organization.**
- **Create a professional voice.**
- **Select clear words.**
- **Write smooth sentences.**
- **Correct any errors in your copy.**
- **Use a reader-friendly design.**

## 6 Package it professionally.

- **Create a strong design**—white space, graphics, and fonts.
- **Use appropriate materials**—stationery, folds, and inks.

## 7 Be a team writer.

- **Test important documents** before sending them out.
- **Ask for and give honest feedback** that improves each piece of writing.

## Activity P1

# Assess Your Business Writing

- Think about the types of documents that you have sent and received in the past week—from e-mail messages to reports. Then answer the questions below.

- 1 Each day, how much time do I spend writing at work?
- 2 What kinds of documents do I receive regularly, and why?
- 3 What kinds of documents do I write regularly, and why?
- 4 What kinds of reactions have I gotten to my writing?
- 5 What do I believe works well in my writing?
- 6 What problems do I see in my writing?
- 7 What are my priorities for this workshop? What do I want to improve?

## How can I benchmark my writing?

Use the seven traits to make sure your writing is clear, concise, and compelling. Here are the seven traits, what they do, and which specific strategies in this book will help you improve your use of them.

| 1. Strong IDEAS   | Strategies |
|---|------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The piece focuses on a main point.</li> <li>Supporting points are logically developed and well explained.</li> <li>Information is accurate, precise, complete, and current.</li> </ul>   | 3-5        |
| 2. Logical ORGANIZATION   |            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The writing has a strong opening, middle, and closing.</li> <li>The organization fits with the audience and purpose.</li> <li>Details follow a clear order.</li> <li>Transitions link sentences, paragraphs, and sections.</li> <li>Lists and headings make information accessible.</li> </ul> | 6-8        |
| 3. Professional VOICE   |            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The tone is positive, polite, confident, and convincing.</li> <li>The piece shows attention to the reader's perspective.</li> <li>The voice connects with and encourages the reader.</li> </ul>  | 9-11       |
| 4. Clear WORDS  |            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Words are fresh, natural, and understandable.</li> <li>Key words and technical terms are precise and defined.</li> <li>Language respects gender, ethnicity, and ability.</li> </ul>  | 12-14      |
| 5. Smooth SENTENCES   |            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentences are concise and easy to read.</li> <li>Lengths and patterns are varied.</li> <li>Active and passive voice are used effectively.</li> </ul>   | 15-17      |
| 6. CORRECT Copy*  |            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics are correct.</li> <li>Correctness guides the reader and makes a positive impression.</li> </ul>  | 18-19      |
| 7. Reader-Friendly DESIGN   |            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Format is complete and consistent.</li> <li>Page design makes the document attractive and easy to read.</li> </ul>   | 20-22      |

**\*Note:** For in-depth treatment of correctness, see the “Proofreader’s Guide” in *Write for Business*.

**Activity P2****Assess and Edit Using the Seven Traits**

- Study the promotional letter below. Using the seven traits, identify and mark weaknesses in the message. Then rewrite the letter to fix the weaknesses.

March 11, 2011

Ms. April Wadsworth,  
Belles Lettres Books,  
The Harbor Mall:  
Bar Harbor, MA 046093427

Dear ms. Watsworth,

Do you like art? Many Bar Harbor businesses see it as their duty to participate in The Purchase Awards Program. The program works because business people agree to attend ArtBurst and also agree and promise to purchase artwork (at a designated dollar amount), hence attracting artists and visitors. Everyone's a winner with the Purchase Awards Program!

I am the director of the Hancock County Arts Council. This council sponsors each year ArtBurst—a fair where artists display and sell their work. Well-known artists like William Drummond and Leslie Blass and many local artists like Susanna Reese show their wares: beautiful stained glass, classic landscapes in oil and watercolor, glass sculptures, wood work, pots, and much much more. ArtBurst is a real art feast for the community. Artbust will be help this year in Central Park on Saturday, May 7. ArtBurst brought in last year many artists and thousands of visitors that were good for the local economy, I am proud to say.

Completion of the enclosed application form will ensure commitment and participation in this grand event! Therefore, I implore you to please give this request due and proper consideration.

Yours Sincerely;

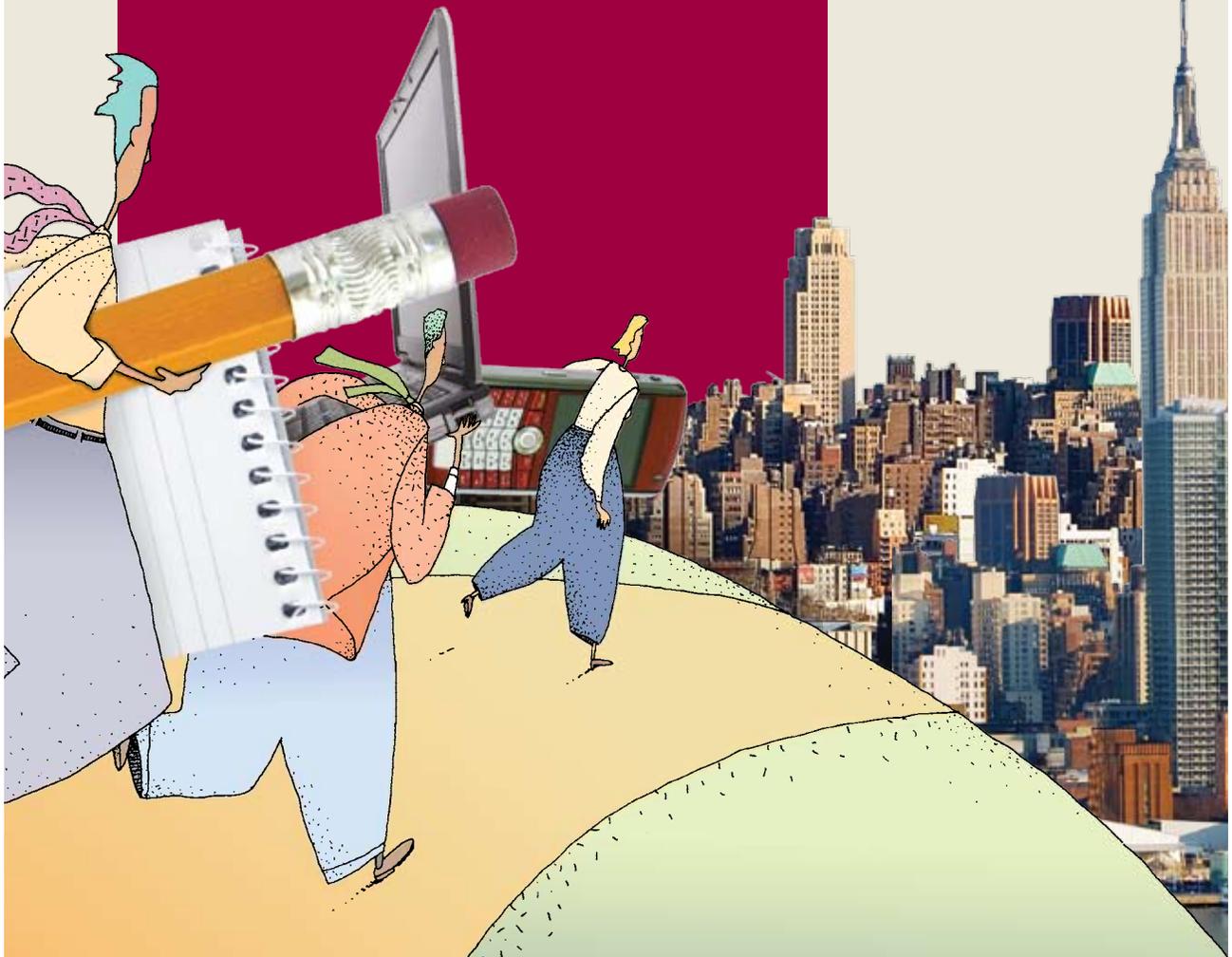


Lawrence King, Director

**Your 7-Traits Assessment****Ideas****Organization****Voice****Words****Sentences****Correctness****Design**

# Part 1:

## Strategies for Effective Business Writing





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## Introduction

On any given day, an average business produces thousands of e-mails, letters, memos, reports, and proposals. That's a great deal of writing—sometimes without much actual communicating.

This section of the manual will help you cut through the communication haze. You'll learn 22 simple strategies that will make your writing much more effective. Each strategy targets one of the seven traits of effective business writing. Specifically, you will learn to do the following:

- **Develop Strong IDEAS**
- **Strengthen ORGANIZATION**
- **Use a Professional VOICE**
- **Choose the Best WORDS**
- **Improve SENTENCES**
- **Edit for CORRECTNESS**
- **Create a Reader-Friendly DESIGN**

## My Goal

To understand and practice the four steps to clear business writing.

### Strategy 1:

## Write a Document in Four EZ Steps

Clear business writing results from following four basic steps:

1. Prewriting
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Refining

### What is prewriting?

Prewriting is the process of finding your focus, gathering details, and organizing your ideas. During prewriting, you should

- identify your purpose.
- consider your readers.
- think about the context.
- perform any necessary research.
- develop a list or outline.
- choose a document format and design.

### What is drafting?

Drafting is the act of writing your message. During drafting, you should

- flesh out your outline.
- write an opening that focuses the document.
- create a middle that provides important details.
- draft a closing that indicates action or follow-up.

### What is revising?

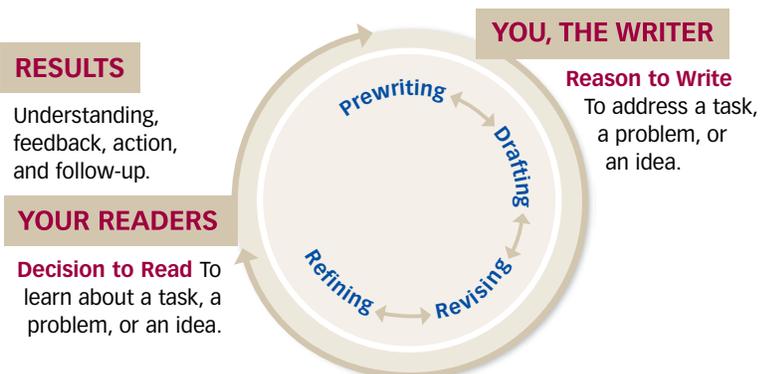
Revising is the process of fixing weaknesses in content. During revising, you should

- add, cut, and clarify content.
- test your ideas, organization, and voice.

### What is refining?

Refining is fine-tuning the document before sending it. During refining, you should

- check word choice for clarity and conciseness.
- edit your sentences for smoothness.
- proofread for correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.
- finalize the document's design.



## Activity 1

# Understand the Steps

- Draw a line to match each of the four steps listed on the left with two appropriate activities listed on the right.

## 1 Prewriting

a. Add material to provide extra clarity.

b. Make sure every sentence ends with correct punctuation.

## 2 Drafting

c. Think about purpose, readers, and context.

d. Make sure you have used a voice that fits your message and audience.

## 3 Revising

e. Create a final design, including graphics.

f. Write an opening, middle, and closing.

g. Convert your outline into a first draft.

## 4 Refining

h. Create an outline to organize your ideas.

### Follow-up:

The steps of the writing process are meant to break an overwhelming task into small, manageable chunks. Think of a major writing task that you face on the job. Next, break that task into steps. What would you do during prewriting, drafting, revising, and refining? Share your answers with another participant.

### My Goal

To understand the purpose, reader, and context of each message.

## Strategy 2:

# Analyze the Situation

Every message has a unique writing situation, with a specific purpose, reader, and context.

## How do I identify my purpose?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What **result** do I want?  
A clear result is *exact, realistic, and measurable*.
- Do I want to **inform** my reader?  
To inform is to *explain, describe, report, outline, or analyze*.
- Do I want to **persuade** my reader?  
To persuade is to *request, sell, convince, apologize, evaluate, or complain*.

## How do I profile my reader(s)?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my **relationship** with my reader?  
Think of the strength of the *relationship* and *position* of the reader.
- What does my reader **know** and **need to know**?  
Match details to a *specific reader* or to a *broad audience*.
- What does my reader **need** or **want**?  
Decide how your reader will *feel about* the message.
- What do I want the reader to **do**?  
Think of the reader's *responsibility* and *authority*.
- What **secondary readers** may view the message?  
Imagine *who else might read* the document.

## How do I understand the context?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the **history** of the situation?
- What is the **current climate** relating to this issue?
- What **hurdles** might block my message?
- What **time window** do I have for sending this message?
- What **support materials** should I send with the message?
- How should I **follow up** with the reader?

**Activity 2****Analyze Specific Situations**

- For each situation below, analyze the purpose, the reader, and the context.

**1** A news release announcing your company's major contribution to a charitable foundation

**Purpose:**

**Reader(s):**

**Context:**

**2** Instructions to staff about using the company's new e-mail system

**Purpose:**

**Reader(s):**

**Context:**

- Identify a document you often generate (e.g., a monthly report, a sales proposal, an e-mail to a supplier). Analyze the situation and brainstorm key writing decisions.

**Purpose:**

**Reader(s):**

**Context:**

**Writing Decisions** (what you *should* and *should not* do):

## My Goal

To build messages out of solid claims.

**STRONG CLAIM:** A power washer will clean the peanut-cooking room better than our present method cleans it.

**WEAK CLAIM:** We need to do something about the peanut-cooking room.

## Strategy 3:

# Develop Strong Claims

A claim is simply a statement in your writing. Solid business writing is built upon strong claims.

## What makes a claim strong?

A strong claim

- uses sound **logic**.
- is supported with solid **evidence**.
- is **precise** and **clear**.
- is ethically **responsible**.

## What types of claims can I make?

Use a combination of claims of **truth**, of **value**, and of **policy**.

**Claims of truth** argue that something is or is not accurate or correct. Note how the following truth claim is carefully argued.

The current cleanup procedure in the peanut-cooking room is labor intensive, costly, wasteful, and unsanitary.

**Avoid truth claims that are exaggerated, impossible to prove, harmful, or libelous.**

**Claims of value** argue that something does or does not have worth. Note how the following value claim refers to a known standard (cost savings and client satisfaction).

Replacing our current cleaning equipment with a power washer would save money and improve client satisfaction.

**Avoid value claims based on individual preference or emotional bias.**

**Claims of policy** argue that something should or should not be done. Note that the following policy claim is practical and desirable.

After checking several retailers, I recommend that HVS purchase a Douser washer, the most powerful washer in its price range.

**Avoid claims of policy that are simply complaints or wishful thinking.**

## EZ Insight

You can build a solid case by starting with claims of truth and value and ending with claims of policy. Truth and value claims create a strong foundation, and policy claims call the reader to take action.

### Activity 3

## Evaluating Claims

- Using the criteria on the previous page, revise the following weak claims. Note that you may have to add details.

**1 Truth Claim:** Rising gas prices are taking us out of the frying pan into the financial fire.

**2 Value Claim:** A good-sized donation will help needy people a lot.

**3 Policy Claim:** I don't like the direction that this security proposal takes us in.

- Select a subject area from the list below and use it to draft claims of truth, value, and policy. Exchange these claims with a partner and evaluate each other's work.

department budget  
e-mail policies  
medical benefits

cell-phone technology  
product competition  
environmental regulations

online sales  
service expansion  
public relations

**Truth Claim:**

**Value Claim:**

**Policy Claim:**

## My Goal

To use effective methods for supporting my claims.

### Strategy 4:

## Support Your Claims Effectively

### What is effective support?

The most effective support offers convincing evidence—enough to explain and back up your statement. Here are different types of support and what they accomplish.

- **Observations and anecdotes** give an eyewitness perspective—powerful but potentially subjective.  
**I checked the lift trucks to see if they were producing more CO than normal. All lifts were in good working condition.**
- **Examples and demonstrations** give specific instances, making general statements concrete and observable.  
**Replacing our current cleaning equipment with a power washer would have distinct benefits. The intense pressure quickly removes even the oiliest material from hard-to-reach places.**
- **Statistics** offer quantitative data but need to be current, relevant, and accurate.  
**Factory CO levels have exceeded 35 ppm, and many office spaces have experienced levels of 40-80 ppm. OSHA recommends 25 ppm.**
- **Expert testimony** offers insights from an authority, but experts don't know it all, and sometimes they disagree.  
**After checking several retailers and consulting *Consumer Reports*, I recommend that HVS purchase a Douser power washer.**
- **Predictions** forecast future events using logical analysis of present facts.  
**The shipping area shows the best potential for using electric lift trucks. Shipping lift trucks do not travel long distances or use ramps.**
- **Analysis** examines a topic through cause and effect, comparison and contrast, classification, process, or definition. Analyses must be clear, or they muddle the topic.  
**High CO levels force us to use summer exhaust fans during the winter. However, using these fans reduces humidity and shrinks wood used for manufacturing.**
- **Tests and experiments** provide hard data developed through the scientific method.  
**By testing one washing method against the other, I discovered that our current cleaning method costs \$53.15 per day, whereas a power washer reduces that figure to \$13.05.**

## Activity 4

# Plan and Draft Support

- For each claim below, identify the type(s) of support you would provide and why.

**1** I recommend that Mona Veal be promoted to full-time status as a graphic artist for Slenk Manufacturing. (Note: For the complete memo, see p. 179 in *Write for Business*.)

**Type(s):**

**2** Hawkeye Casualty has canceled your auto-insurance policy effective January 31, 2010. (Note: For the complete letter, see p. 116 in *Write for Business*.)

**Type(s):**

**3** The paving project is consistent with the City of Ada's economic and transportation planning.

**Type(s):**

**4** Hobbits could become a profitable niche market for our line of toe rings.

**Type(s):**

- Select one of the claims above. Draft a paragraph that begins with the claim and then provides support for it. Create details as needed.