

A Sample Outline of my Writing for Business Course

Introduction

Why good, clear writing is important in business
How writing differs from speaking
When and when not to put something in writing
In business writing, time is of the essence
Delivering bad and good news
Letter format

Effective E-Mail

Don't clutter people's mailboxes with unimportant messages
Think before you write, read before you send
Get to the point. Keep your message to one screen
Beware of jokes, sarcasm or ambiguity
E-mail format

Focus on Your Reader

You're not writing for yourself; you're writing for your reader
Change the "I" to "You"
Checklist for analyzing your reader

Get and Stick to the Point

The bottom line goes on top
Put the most important material first
When closing, look for the nearest exit
Avoid closing your document with platitudes ("Thank you for your continued commitment to ...") that weaken your message

Ask for Action

Clearly identify the action you expect from the reader
Show why the requested action makes sense
Give the reader sufficient time to perform the action

Plan Before You Write

Identify your purpose
Summarize what your document's about in one sentence
Prepare an outline before you write – it's a road map for where you're going
How to overcome the blank screen

Style and tone

Beware the business writing straitjacket. Adopt a natural tone
Avoid clichés
Avoid jargon

A Matter of Words

Use simple, 5-cent words
Use strong verbs
Embrace the active voice
Put the action in the verb
Limit adjectives, superlatives and exclamations
Change negative expressions to positive ones
Use connecting words

Sentences and paragraphs

One thought per sentence

One idea per paragraph

Keep it short – about 15 words per sentence, two or three sentences per paragraph

Use connecting words to maintain links between sentences and paragraphs

Editing

Editing is a one-word art: elimination

Try to cut down your first draft by one quarter

Check for grammar, spelling, staying on topic, etc.

Read your document out loud to ensure it sounds natural