

Make It Stick

*Activity Pack*

Business Writing for the Digital Era

 **Helping lessons learned through training become part of *how we work*.**

**To the Learner Leader…**

This suite of activities has been designed to reinforce the key learning from the **Business Writing for the Modern Workplace** course. They have been designed to be led by team leaders or designated trainers and do not require training experience, though for best results we recommend that whoever is leading the activities understands the principles of adult learning and has some experience in leading learning activities.

The suite of activities will provide you with up to six months of learning reinforcement. We recommend that an activity is run each month following the Business Writing for the Modern Workplace course.

When running each activity:

* Ask the group to reflect back on the original course they attended:
  + What takeaways did they have?
  + What have they tried to implement?
  + When revisiting some of these activities for a second time, ask them what additional ideas or thoughts they have in applying the concepts and tools in the activities to their job.

Each activity will take 10-15 minutes to run depending on the size of the group.

There is one activity to a page. Each activity has a brief introduction followed by instructions for the trainer.

We suggest the following to optimise your learning experience:

* Have the group meet away from their normal workspace
* Make sure mobile devices are switched off so that everyone fully engages
* Make the environment ‘safe’ and encourage everyone to contribute
* Run these activities with everyone standing – try running them outdoors in the fresh air
* Have other team members take the lead and run an activity – this will build confidence and leadership skills
* Don’t be afraid to improvise – the learning needs to be about you and your group so make it meaningful
* When debriefing an activity, get the group to reflect on what the activity means for them and what they will do differently or continue to do that underscores the learning points from the activity

**Activities in this pack**

1. Purpose
2. Audience
3. Structure
4. Clarity
5. Concision
6. Proofing

**Activity 1: Purpose**

**Introduction**

The first key principle of writing is ‘purpose’. It is tied to ‘making it count’. The purpose must be clear to the writer and abundantly clear to the audience. Purpose answers the question: ‘Why am I writing this?’ There are many reasons why we write:

Inform?

Persuade?

Argue?

Warn?

Notify?

Enquire?

Propose?

Rebuke?

Invite?

Comply?

**Instructions**

Print out or project the following texts for participants to read.

Product Review posted on social media:

We replaced our decade old purple Vakume which was easily the best vac we'd ever had. The current model has some really fundamental design problems. The attachment holder obstructs access to the wand. The wand will not sit in the slot meant to hold it when being stored. It falls out every single time. Slot provided just not adequate to hold it but worse is when in use it will blow puffs of fine dust out of the air outtake vent on the back. It’s enough dust that we can easily see it coming out and it covers the vacuum in dust. We won't gamble our health or another $700 with Vakume.

What would be the purpose of responding to this post? Is there more than one?

What would you need to include in the response?

Petition delivered to local government:

A petition calling for a public enquiry on the issue of an independent enquiry into the rise in Council rates has been presented to the ABC City Council. The boxes contained over 4000 signatures. 1750 signatures are required to initiate a public poll on the matter. The petitioners have demanded a response in writing stating what action the Council will now take.

What would be the purpose of responding to the petitioners? Is there more than one?

What would you need to include in the response?

**Activity 2: Audience**

**Introduction**

Your audience and your purpose will influence what you write, your word choice and style.

Factors to consider with an audience include:

* They are giving of their time to read what you have written – so value it
* They may not be subject matter experts – so explain and provide context
* They may not be university professors – so simplify
* They may be seeing the information for the first time – so don’t assume
* They may not get your point – so make it obvious

**Instructions**

A particular format of writing is a media release where the writing is seeking to answer the following questions:

* Who? Who are the key players — your company, anyone else involved with the product? Who does your news affect/who does it benefit?
* What? What is new?
* Why? Why is this important news — what does it provide that is different?
* Where? Where is this happening/is there a geographical angle/is the location of business relevant?
* When? What is the timing of this? Does this add significance?
* How? How did this come about?

Consider writing a media release to address the following:

The Government has decided to issue a compulsory recall of all vehicles fitted with Failsafe airbags. Defective FailSafe airbags may cause injury to drivers and/or passengers. Drivers are urged to check whether their vehicle is affected, and if so, whether it is under active or future recall. If a consumer finds that their vehicle is under active recall, then they are urged to contact the supplier to arrange replacement of the affected FailSafe airbag as soon as possible. Suppliers will provide instructions on their website to assist consumers.

Ask the group to provide responses to the following questions:

* Who is the intended audience and what do you know about them?
* What tone should be used in the media release?
* What title will you use?
* What are the key facts you should include?

Then ask the group to draft a media release and critique it against the six key questions listed at the start of the instructions above.

**Activity 3: Structure**

**Introduction**

Structure is important in business communication as it provides signposts for the reader to make sense of what you have written. Structure applies to the document as a whole and to the paragraphs within. Structure is also important in more formal writing as the reader will have expectations about how a document will be structured.

If you are writing an email or a letter you need to give the reader a structure to follow:

Beginning – Explain your purpose for writing

Middle – Expand on the purpose and organise the topics logically in paragraphs

End – Reemphasise your purpose for writing and provide information if the reader wishes to follow up

**Instructions**

Ask participants to write an email with no more than four paragraphs that has the beginning-middle-end structure described above. Give each participant a different topic below:

* Responding to a complaint about overcharging a customer’s credit card
* Advising a direct report that you will not be able to approve their annual leave
* Asking a travel company for more information about their rates before you open an account with them
* Notifying a supplier that they have breached a condition of their contract
* Notifying the team that a new team member will be starting next week
* Apologising for a delay in shipping goods to a customer
* Negotiating a higher rate for a project that you are a consultant on
* Directing a member of your team to complete a task

If possible, project each email in turn onto a screen or wall so that everyone has the chance to read it. Discuss each piece of writing in terms of the following:

* Adherence to the beginning-middle-end structure
* Clarity of purpose
* Suitability of tone of the email
* A ‘call to action’ if the author wants something to happen from reading the email
* Whether the writing will have the intended effect on the reader
* Which of the topics listed caused the writer to think more deeply about what they were going to write? Why?

**Activity 4: Clarity**

**Introduction**

If your writing isn’t clear, it is unlikely to achieve its purpose. Clarity is achieved through a combination of other writing principles:

* The purpose is well defined
* It is concise
* It has structure
* It meets the needs of the audience
* It has been proofed

**Instructions**

Ask participants to rewrite the sentences in the table below (left hand column) to state their intended meaning more clearly.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Original Text** | **Rewritten with clarity and brevity** |
| The website is now fully operational with the ecommerce functionality all set up. | The website is launched. |
| We are continuing our efforts that we began last fiscal year to pursue patent infringers in an effort to monetize the value of our extensive patent portfolio. | We are pursuing patent violators. This helps protect the value of our patents. |
| In the fourth quarter, we paced our promotional activities to avoid the holiday season promotion clutters in the market. | We paced out promotional activities in the holiday season to make them more effective. |
| The new company and its management team have invested a substantial amount of their time and effort in laying the groundwork for the company’s unique value proposition to its potential customer base while setting the stage for developing its brand of products. | The new company is developing its marketing plan. |
| We believe the confusion associated with our warrant accounting has caused some potential investors to eschew the company due to the complexity of our earnings calculations. | Investors want simpler accounting for our warrants. |
| The company’s customer-centric business model provides a strong value proposition to consumers. | Consumers like our prices and services. |
| We are cognizant that we must address our debt situation and our pending line of credit maturity, but we ultimately believe striving to improve our core business is a fundamental component of a solution for all parties in this regard. | We will cut debt as we build the business. |
| Questions may be posed to management by participants on the call and in response the company may disclose additional material information. | Executives will answer questions during the call. |

Debrief

* Of the principles that are required to achieve clarity, which of them do you most need to work on?
* Which forms of writing (twitter, email, reports etc) require greater clarity (or not)?

**Activity 5: Concision**

**Introduction**

Writing quality is affected by space and time, by how many characters or words you have at your disposal and by how much time you have within which to write. At the other end of the continuum too much time and too much space within which to write can lead to lazy and laboured writing where the reader is the ultimate loser.

**Instructions**

Ask each participant to complete each of the following activities and once done, project their writing so that everyone in the group can read it. The group is to then critique each piece of writing based on how well it meets the brief below.

Activity 1 – 100 words of less

You are to explain a complex subject (e.g., blockchain) in 100 words or less including as much information as possible without being vague. Assume that your audience knows very little about your subject. Choose a subject you love or one you know very little about.

Activity 2 - Haiku

You are to write a Haiku on any subject that you wish. A Haiku is a poem with a strict form of seventeen syllables, in three lines of five, seven and five. The poems don’t have to rhyme, but they force you to make every word count. They also make you consider how words sound and how sentences flow together.

Here are two examples:

An old silent pond...

A frog jumps into the pond,

splash! Silence again.

The west wind whispered,

and touched the eyelids of spring:

Her eyes, primroses.

Debrief:

* What are the benefits of being concise in your writing?
* What are some of the challenges with doing so?

**Activity 6: Proofing**

**Introduction**

To deliver your best work you need to adopt the discipline of editing and proofing, or have someone unfamiliar with what you have written take on this task. A fresh set of eyes can pick up far more than the original author when editing and proofing.

Proofreading is the final action performed on a piece of writing. It should focus on finer details such as spelling, grammar, punctuation and typographical errors. These details, if allowed to go unchecked, can alienate your audience.

**Instructions**

Ask participants to bring with them a piece of their own writing (no more than a page) that they have edited and proofed.

First, ask each participant to proofread the following piece of writing. The errors have been highlighted.

The past decade have witnessed the rise in popularity of the fictional monster known as the zombie. Form movies and TV shows to iPhone apps and bestselling novels, the zombie has permeated popular culture. What if a zombie plague was possible? Surprisingly, there are quite a few sceintists who have taken a serious look at the the causes and probability of a zombie panademic occurring in the real world. They have broken down the common symptoms of zombie virus sufferers to determine what might actually be going on in there half-eaten brains. The most common symptom of the zombie illness is the lumbering gate, which indicates a loss of coordination and neurological damage. This may go hand in hand with the classic loss of intelligence and penchant for moaning. Second, the insatiable zombie appetite for other humans could be associated with lost hyptothalamic functioning. Zombies rage; one-track minds; and inability to remember loved ones are all symptoms of severe brain damage as well, with different areas of the brain being effected. So, what should you do if your ever face-to-face with a zombie? Much like with T-Rex in Jurassic Park, do not run and find somewhere to hide. Zombie’s suffer from something like Bálint’s syndrome, which causes the sufferer to only see whatever requires the most attention.

Now ask the participants to swap the piece of writing they have brought with a partner and have the partner proofread it.

Debrief:

* What errors did a fresh pair of eyes pick up?
* Why do we struggle at times to edit and proofread our own writing?
* Why do we sometimes put off editing and proofreading?
* How can we ensure that we make editing and proofreading part of our writing process?