



Written the “write” way.

Workshop

**“How to Improve Your
Writing Skills”**

by
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AGENDA

✓ INTRODUCTION

- Writing is an Art and a Science.
- Plain Language Movement
- Recipe for Good Writing
- Writing Styles and Tools

✓ ELEMENTS OF GOOD WRITING

- Spelling (test)
- Capitalization
- Grammar (test)
 - 8 Parts of Speech – Building blocks of English
- Syntax
 - Phrases and Clauses
 - Subject-Verb Agreement – Conjugation of Verbs (test)
 - Parallel Construction
 - Dangling Constructions & Misplaced Modifiers
 - Contractions
- Punctuation and Spacing (test)
- Word Usage

✓ RESUMES

- Five Skills Employers Want
- DOs and DON'Ts

✓ COVER LETTERS

- Standard Form
- The Stand-out “T” Format

✓ THANK YOU LETTERS

WRITING IS AN ART AND A SCIENCE

- The **ART** – How we express ourselves with the words we choose.

Examples: Resumes, Cover Letters, LinkedIn Profiles – how we capture our qualifications, skills, experience, and accomplishments.

- The **SCIENCE** – Demonstrated in technical editing and proofreading.

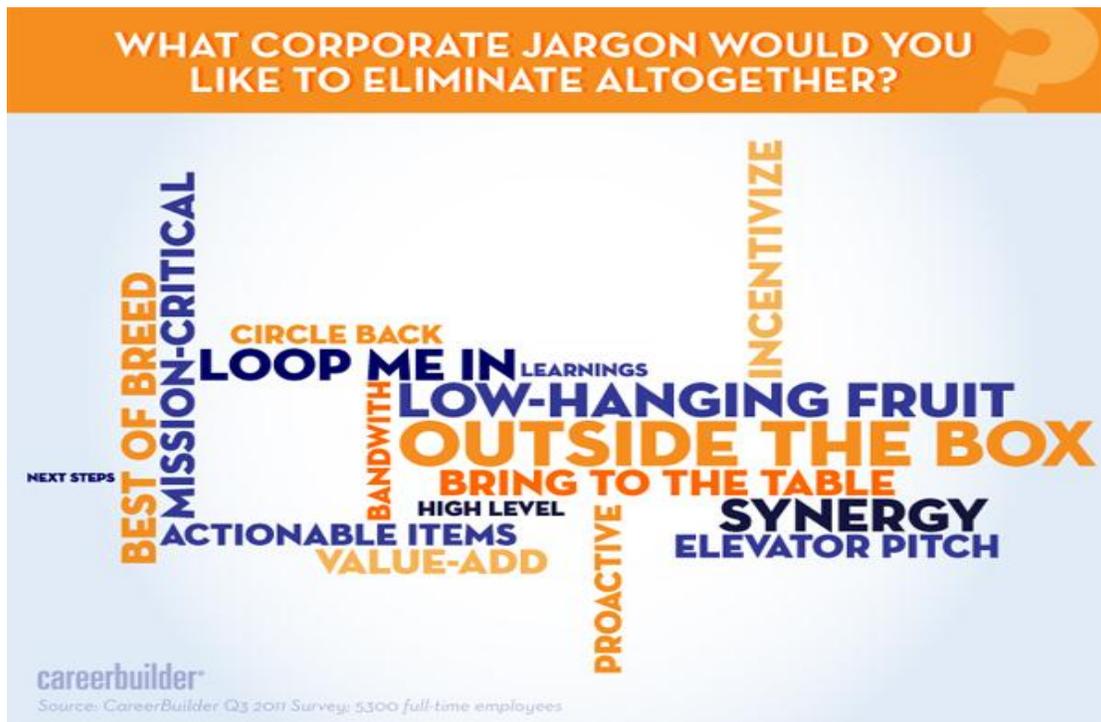
Examples: Technical aspects of grammar, syntax, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. How we organize and format our information.

THE PLAIN LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

- Plain Writing Act (Public Law 111-274) enacted in 2010.

Helps people realize the weight and value behind Plain Language:

- Obtain government benefits
 - File taxes
 - Mortgage apps
 - Insurance policies
 - Privacy Policies
 - Scientific Research
- International Plain Language Day – Oct. 13, 2011
 - World Conference in Stockholm, Sweden
 - To provide citizens with easy-to-understand information in written laws, regulations, privacy policies, etc.
 - So why does writing, putting pen to paper, scare us?
 - Certified Professional Writers Assn: “Schools teach writing as if it’s hard.”
 - Write like you speak (you may want to fit in) but.....
 - Avoid corporate jargon, slang, colloquialisms, and acronyms.
 - Ex: ROI – Use “return on investment.”



- The Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted a recent survey of what employers want in their employees:
 - 81% want better critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills.
 - 89% want more emphasis on *the ability to communicate effectively*.

- Much of what is good in speech – directness, clarity, flow – can be applied to writing.
 - If writing becomes harder than speaking, it’s because it’s not speaking.

Food for thought: If you wouldn’t use the word in conversation, don’t use it in copy!

Winston Churchill: “Never use a **pound** word when a **penny** one will do.”

RECIPE FOR GOOD WRITING



Ingredients:

- Accuracy
- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Consistency
- Organization
- Persuasiveness
- Readability
- Utility

Directions: Blend well. Edit and proofread until well done.

WRITING STYLES

for writing, editing, and proofreading

AP Stylebook – Associated Press (journalism)

AMA – American Medical Association, American Management Association.

MLA – Modern Language Association, the Humanities (language and literature)

Chicago Manual of Style – Writers, Editors, and Publishers

Gregg Reference Manual – all purpose writing

Strunk & White – all purpose writing

Proprietary styles – know company standards

WRITING TOOLS

Dictionary – Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th edition (official dictionary of the Associated Press), updated every year.

Thesaurus

Microsoft Spelling & Grammar Review (includes Thesaurus)

SPELLING

Top 10 Misspelled Words in the English Language

From Business Writing.com

Misspelled:

acomodate

acknowledgement

deductable

indispensible

judgement

liason

perserverance

perogative

priviledge

seperate

SPELLING

Misspelled:

accommodate
acknowledgement
deductable
indispensible
judgement
liason
perserverance
perogative
priviledge
seperate

Spelled Correctly:

accommodate
acknowledgment
deductible
indispensable
judgment
liaison
perseverance
prerogative
privilege
separate

CAPITALIZATION

- Capitalize all proper nouns for a specific person, place or thing.

Ex: John, Mary, United States, Boston, England,
Gulf Oil, General Electric, Vice President

- Capitalize common nouns when they are an integral part of the full name for a person, place or thing.

Ex: Democratic Party, but...
Democratic and Republican parties
Ohio River, Vine Street, Western Hills

Other tips:

- Do not capitalize words such as department, program, agency, group – unless they are included in the official name.

Ex: Intensive Care Unit, Coronary Care Unit (ICU, CCU)

Prior Authorization program

Customer Service, but...

We provide excellent customer service.

- The AP is an excellent source for determining capitalization.

GRAMMAR: 8 PARTS OF SPEECH

1. Noun – Names a person, place, or thing.

- Proper or common
- Used as:
 - **subject** – Asks “who” or “what” *before* the verb.
 - **direct object** – Asks “who” or “what” *after* the verb.
 - **indirect object** – Asks “to whom”, “to what”, “for whom” or “for what”.
 - **object of preposition** – prepositional phrase
in the *bag*

2. Pronoun – Takes the place of the noun.

- **Personal**

- Subject: I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they
- Object: Me, you, him, her, it, us, you, them

- **Possessive** – My, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs

- **Interrogative** – Used in asking questions.

- Who – use when a subject can be substituted. Ex: *Who is coming?*
- Whom – use when an object can be substituted. Ex: *Whom do you prefer?*

- **Relative** – Used to refer to a noun or pronoun.

- Who – *Mr. Smith is the one who is going.*
- Whom – *Ms. Peters, whom I've never met, ...*
- Whose – *The Sr. center whose room we...*
- Which – typically used to introduce nonessential clauses.

Ex: *The revised report, which was done by Mark, is very impressive.*

- That – used to introduce essential clauses.

Ex: *He is the candidate that I prefer.*

3. Verb – Main part of a sentence.

- Shows *action or state of being*.
- Regular
 - most common
 - Ex: execute, executing, executed
- Irregular
 - forms change
 - Most irregular verb is “To Be.”
 - Ex: am, are, is, was, were, will be, has been, have been
- Tenses:
 - Present, past, future, etc.
 - All formed by the 4 principal parts of the verb: present, past, past participle and present participle.

4. Adverb – modifier, describes verb or adjective.

- Tells how, how much, or when.
- Regular adverbs typically end in –ly.
Ex: efficiently
- Irregular adverbs change form.
Ex: well, better, best
- Best to place them directly before or after verb.
Ex: You are working *efficiently*.

5. Adjective – modifier

- Describes noun or pronoun.
- Regular adjectives add –er or –est to the basic form.
Ex: loud, louder, loudest
- Irregular adjectives change form.
Ex: good, better, best
- Usually placed before the noun.
Ex: *productive* team
- Adjectives modifying pronouns are usually found after verb “to be.”
Ex: We are *productive*.

6. Preposition

- Introduces a prepositional phrase including an article and object.
- Avoid ending sentences with these!
- Ex: to, for, with, about, from, on, upon, up, down, in, out, etc. *to the workshop*

7. Conjunction

- Word or phrase that connects words, phrases or clauses.
- Coordinating: and, but, or, nor

Correlating: both...and, not only...but (also), either...or, neither...nor

8. Interjection

- Shows emotion, for emphasis, story-telling.
- Ex: *Wow!* What a weekend!

TEST YOUR SKILLS

Identify the following parts of speech:

1. about
2. developing
3. our
4. committee
5. well
6. conscientious
7. have been improving
8. but
9. leadership
10. conscientiously

SYNTAX

The structure of the sentence. The arrangement of and relationships among words, phrases, and clauses forming sentences.

- **Phrase** – 2 or more words conveying a single thought, forming a part of a sentence, but **not** containing a subject and predicate.
Ex: *Judging by the response, ...*
- **Clause** – A group of words containing a subject and verb.
 - Dependent clause – Not a complete thought, cannot stand by itself. Subordinate clause
Ex: *If we exceed our sales goals,*
 - Independent clause – A complete thought, stands by itself. Main clause
Ex: *If we exceed our sales goals, we will win a trip to Hawaii.*
- **Subject-Verb Agreement** = correct verb conjugation:
 - 1st, 2nd, 3rd persons, singular and plural
 - Used with corresponding form of the verb.
 - With a compound subject, verb agrees with *second* subject: *My love of language and teaching skills drive my passion for helping others. (Test)*



- **Parallel Construction**

- Express parallel ideas in parallel form.
- Adjectives should be paralleled by adjectives, nouns by nouns, dependent clauses by dependent clauses, etc.

Wrong:

Your new training program
Was *stimulating* and a
challenge.

The sales reps have
already started *using*
the new techniques
and *to produce higher*
sales.

Right:

Your new training
program was
stimulating and
challenging.

The sales reps have
already started *using*
the new techniques
and *producing higher*
sales.

- **Dangling Constructions and Misplaced Modifiers**

Wrong:

I saw two co-workers get into a fist fight while jogging down the street.

I suspect that my assistant accidentally dropped the report I drafted in the wastebasket.

Right:

While jogging down the street, I saw two co-workers get into a fist fight.

The report I drafted has disappeared. I suspect that my assistant accidentally dropped the report in the wastebasket.

• Contractions

General rule - informal writing only!

- Does not belong on resumes, cover or thank you letters. OK on LinkedIn.

- *Exception:* May be used in business communications where the company is emphasizing an easy, colloquial tone.

- A word or phrase is shortened by omitting letters with an (').
 - can't = cannot
 - don't = do not
 - won't = will not
 - let's = let us
 - you're = you are
 - we're = we are
 - they're = they are
 - should've = should have (not should of!)
 - would've = would have
 - could've = could have

Punctuation and Spacing

- **Period (.)**
 - Used at the end of a complete sentence.
 - Insert one space after period (two spaces on resumes)
- **Colon (:)**
 - Typically used for lists.
 - Insert one space after colon.
- **Semicolon (;)**
 - To separate two complete sentences.
 - Insert one space after semicolon.
 - Ex: *Workers in the computer industry don't get fired; they get "uninstalled."*
- **Comma (,)**
 - Used the most – Use with caution!
 - Used in a compound sentence:
 - *Mary just got her master's, and she is now looking for a job in sales. But...*
 - *Mary just got her master's and is now...*
 - Used in transitional expressions:
 - *I plan on attending the meeting; however, I may be late.*
 - Used in a series:
 - *"I'm spending time, effort, and money in my job search."*

- **Question Mark (?)**
 - Used after a question at the end of sentence.
- **Exclamation Mark (!)**
 - Used to express surprise, emotion, determination
 - Limit its use in business writing!
 - Acceptable in emails and text messages.
- **Apostrophe (')**
 - To form contractions (Ex: we're)
 - To form plurals of lower-case letters (Ex: pj's, your p's and q's)
 - To form possessives (Ex: Apple's products, my boss' approval, Jones' address)
 - Never used to denote plurals with upper-case letters (Ex: HMOs, MDs, PCs, 401Ks)
- **Quotation Marks ("....")**
 - To quote information.
 - Commas and periods typically go *inside* quotes. (preferred by the AP)

- **Parentheses [()]**
 - To offset information.

- **Dash and Hyphen**
 - Not the same marks! (But only one key.)

 - **Dash**
 - Used to denote abrupt change, for an emphatic pause, or to further explain.
 - Between dates on a resume.
Ex: 2000 – 2012
 - To create – type a space after hyphen.

 - **Hyphen**
 - To hyphenate words.
Ex: detail-oriented
 - Check dictionary for words using prefixes.
Ex: “non”, “co.”

REMEMBER:

Without punctuation, you have nothing but run-on sentences!

WORD USAGE

affect (v) vs. effect (n)

complement vs. compliment – *That which brings to completion vs. praise, flattery.*

follow up (v) vs. follow-up (n)

set up (v) vs. set-up (n)

farther vs. further – *more distant vs. more, additional*

i.e., = that is

e.g., = for example

I (subj. pronoun) vs. me (obj. pronoun)

She is as interested as I (am).

He helped by driving my sister and me.

Its vs. it's – *poss. pronoun vs. contraction*

proved vs. proven – *past part. vs. adj.*

prior vs. previous – *synonyms*

set vs. sit – *to affect something vs. an action of someone*

toward vs. towards – *U.S. uses toward*

use vs. utilize – *best option, concise vs. technical, special process.*