

Introduction

When you are talking to someone face-to-face, you have lots of visual clues to help you – your tone of voice, gestures, movements and eye contact. It may not be fair, but in the everyday world you are judged and influenced by all these criteria, and more – even your occupation, status, height, dress and the way you look. And like it or not, it's through the way you speak and look that you earn trust and confidence.

So, with none of these visual cues present in written communication, how do you earn trust and confidence when you write letters, reports, email messages or other business documents?

Earn trust and confidence by improving your writing style

In written communication you have to find other ways to evaluate the person who is 'speaking' (writing). People do that by looking at 'style'. Style means paying attention to proper spelling, punctuation and sentence construction.

Style also means:

- being creative in what you write and how you write
- making your communication look visually attractive by leaving a line space between each paragraph
- using numbered points or bullets appropriately
- using headings of a consistent style
- considering the appropriate tone in your writing
- structuring your messages logically.

I recently did a follow-up workshop for a client who had run my business writing workshop two months earlier. I asked the participants what had changed since our workshop. They told me proudly:

- We get straight to the point, using everyday language instead of beating about the bush with old-fashioned, useless phrases.
- Our messages are structured more logically so the reader can clearly see the action needed.
- We try to avoid the passive phrases that we used to use, like *Please be informed*, *Kindly be advised*, *Please find attached*, etc.
- We seem more approachable because our language is less formal and much more friendly, as though we are having a conversation.

Bingo! This is how to earn trust and confidence!

When conducting business today, using language effectively will go a long way towards achieving positive results. Good communicators go to considerable trouble to become competent in the English language, and it's often achieved gradually through a life-long learning process. Time, patience and hard work will bring enormous rewards and satisfaction, not to mention great results.

The language used in business today should be simple, courteous, relaxed and straightforward. Some of the key reasons why you need to work on your language in all your written communications are emphasised throughout this book. They are:

- 1 To establish relationships.** People get an impression of you from the first email they receive, so it's important to make a connection by using appropriate words and phrases. For example, 'We spoke' or 'As spoken' will not have the same effect on your reader as 'Thanks for your call' or 'It was great to speak to you'.
- 2 To communicate your ideas precisely.** Using unsuitable or incorrect expressions, or a long-winded writing style, will not give the reader the right meaning or the right impression. It will only lead to misunderstandings and lengthy correspondence to clarify.
- 3 To convey a good impression.** Clear, concise, accurate language will give an impression of efficiency, and will fill the reader with confidence. Careless or inaccurate expressions will do the opposite. Readers may question if such carelessness will extend to other business dealings too.

Model Business Letters, Emails and Other Business Documents, seventh edition, will help you create a great writing style that will build trust and confidence in all your relationships. With 100 great tips for better business writing throughout the book, this is your one-stop shop, your desktop companion, the only guide you will need to help you to write any kind of business correspondence.

Who is this book for?

Many people will find this book useful:

- **Executives and managers who regularly compose their own correspondence.** Many managers now compose their own correspondence on their desktop, laptop or notebook. These ready-to-use documents can be copied or adapted to meet your precise needs. They will help you to say what you want to say and achieve the desired results. You will be able to save time and do your job better, more effectively and easily, without scratching your head for ages thinking about where to start or what to write.
- **Overseas users.** Past editions of this book have been sold extensively from India to Indonesia, from Malaysia to the Maldives, from Singapore to Sri Lanka, from Hong Kong to Harrogate, from Shanghai to Sheffield, from Toronto to Thailand. Overseas users will appreciate the value of this comprehensive resource book. It will be especially useful in dealing with international business transactions using modern business language.
- **Students and lecturers.** Students following a business, professional, secretarial or administrative examination course often need to compose business letters and other business documents. You will find the guidelines, theory, specimen documents, four-point plans, definitions and checklists particularly useful in learning how to compose your own effective business correspondence.

How is the book organised?

I have organised the book so that you can hop around to the topics that interest you. Just dip in whenever you face a blank page or screen, and hopefully you will find some inspiration to get you started and some useful tips to help you finish the task.

This seventh edition has been completely restructured to make it much easier to find documents.

Part 1 Communication: An Overview. This is a must for everyone. Chapter 1 discusses the importance of building relationships in business today. It's no longer enough to get the job done. You have to develop great relationships first. In Chapter 2 you'll find a new section looking at sentence construction. Many people asked me for some basic advice on this, and I agree that it's necessary. After all, how can I expect you to write an email unless I first of all give you advice on how to use proper punctuation and sentence construction?

Part 2 Business Writing Basics. In this part you will find all the fundamentals of modern writing. Chapter 3 is a completely rewritten chapter on the importance of using 21st century business language. In Chapter 4 regular readers will be pleased to see my four-point plan here again – it's a favourite formula that helps people all over the world to structure documents logically. Finally in Chapter 5 we look at attractive presentation and display of business documents.

Part 3 Electronic Communication. This is a brand new part going into much more detail on electronic communication. No book on writing would be complete without a detailed look at email etiquette, which you'll find in Chapter 6, including lazy email habits and top tips for making the most of email. In Chapter 7 we look at writing for websites, blogs and social networking and in Chapter 8 customer care online.

Part 4 Routine Business Transactions. This part contains just that – enquiries, quotations, orders, invoices, all the correspondence making up a standard business transaction.

Part 5 General Business Correspondence. Here we have another completely new part, with examples of internal correspondence, secretarial correspondence, meetings documentation, personnel correspondence, reports and proposals.

Part 6 Creative and Persuasive Documents. In this final part, we focus on documents that require creativity and persuasion, documents that need to influence and convince in some way. A wide variety of documents are featured, including the specific writing skills unique to each one, such as complaints, goodwill messages, notices and advertisements, circulars, sales letters, press releases and business plans.

Appendix. You'll find the Appendix very useful. It contains spoken and written forms of address, plus a new section that I know you will love, courtesy of the Plain English Campaign: The A–Z of alternative words.

Special features

- As each new document is introduced, the format is illustrated in a specimen document, with notes highlighting every aspect of document presentation.
- Each section contains full explanations, discussion and theory regarding the various documents.
- Many specimen letters are boxed and include marginal notes that discuss important features of the text.
- Four-point plans encourage you to plan and structure your own documents effectively.

Look out for these special icons:



TIP Throughout the book you will find over 100 top tips for effective communication.



CAUTION You'll find some words of warning here, such as things to avoid or precautions to take.



CHECKLIST At the end of most chapters there is a checklist to remind you of the key points to remember.

Final word

A workshop participant once said to me, 'Rarely does a day go by that I don't pick up your book, browse through it, and find something that helps me with my writing.' That's what this book is all about.

I hope this reference book, with its emphasis on high-quality presentation, structure, language and tone, helps you to convey your messages appropriately and effectively. Remember that in so doing you will not only be helping to create and enhance the corporate image of your organisation, you will also be increasing your value to the company and playing a major part in its success.

By picking up this book you have already shown a desire to learn more about modern business writing. The solid advice and practical guidelines, combined with hundreds of sample documents, will show you how to develop effective written communication skills. The rest is up to you.

Good luck!

Shirley Taylor

PLEASE NOTE:

- 1 For reasons of consistency and simplicity and to avoid confusion, we have used the UK -ise spelling convention throughout this book. Readers should also be familiar with the -ize convention used in many countries worldwide.
- 2 The author and publishers feel that the advice in this book is sound. However, readers must seek legal advice if they are in any doubt.