



Professional Writing Skills

Course Manual

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STATECIVILSERVICE
COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC TRAINING PROGRAM

PROFESSIONAL WRITING SKILLS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this 1-day class, participants will learn to write in a clear, concise style. Through lecture, examples, and practice exercises, participants will gain confidence in their ability to plan and to produce various forms of professional writing. Participants will learn how to identify and to correct their own grammar and usage problems. Strategies to revise and to proofread work will also be presented.

JOB/LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Write clear, concise, and action-oriented communication
- Adjust language, style, and level of written communication to fit the purpose and audience
- Maintain a professional and confident tone in written communication
- Use resources to help identify and correct grammar and usage problems

WHAT: *Personal Writing Inventory*

HOW: *INDIVIDUALLY*

1. Identify items that frustrate you in other people's written communication.
2. Identify items that you find challenging when writing.

SMALL GROUP

3. Discuss your answers.
4. Be prepared to share with the class.

10 GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL WRITING

STOP THE FRUSTRATION!

Many of the writing problems found in the workplace can be avoided if you follow 10 simple guidelines for professional writing. These are not in order of importance; they are in order of how they generally occur within the writing process.

#1 — YOU ARE YOUR WRITING.

#2 — YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES.

#3 — KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.

#4 — THINK IT THROUGH.

#5 — EMBRACE COLLABORATION.

#6 — WRITE FOR UNDERSTANDING.

#7 — CHECK YOUR GRAMMAR.

#8 — WATCH YOUR TONE.

#9 — CLARITY COUNTS.

#10 — CLEAN IT UP.

WRITING APPREHENSION TEST

WHAT: *Writing Apprehension Test*

HOW: INDIVIDUALLY

1. Read each item and put a check mark in the box that describes your attitude.
2. Score your test by adding all of the points in each column and then adding the columns together.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
I avoid writing.					
My mind seems to go blank when I start to write.					
Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.					
I am nervous about writing.					
I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.					
I don't think I write as well as most other people do.					
I don't like my writing to be evaluated.					
I am no good at writing.					
Total Columns					
Add Rows for Final Score					

*Adapted from Daly, J. A., & Miller, M. D. (2013). Writing Apprehension Test (WAT). Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Science. Retrieved from www.midss.ie

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A WRITER

You have 3 primary responsibilities as a professional writer; these three responsibilities should be in the forefront of your mind during different stages of the writing process, especially when you are reviewing your work.

3 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Promote
Yourself

Promote
Your Agency

Prove the **value** of your document

PROVING THE VALUE

Purpose

Expectations

Details

Contact

Thank

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Professional business writing is often used to influence someone's thoughts or ideas. In order to do this, you must adjust your content, language, tone, examples, and organization to meet the needs of your audience.

WHAT: *Geographical Identity and Language*

HOW: *SMALL GROUP*

1. List words, phrases, ideas, etc. that are unique to Louisiana.
2. Be prepared to share with the class.

DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Identity	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Who is the reader?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How much interaction do I have with the reader?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is the reader expecting this?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What is the principal concern and responsibility of the reader?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is this issue important to him/her?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How familiar with the topic is this person?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How does this person feel about the topic?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How much time does the reader have to devote to this?<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What are my reader's communication characteristics?

THINK IT THROUGH

As a professional writer, the most reckless thing you can do is write based on emotions, rather than purpose. Learning to check your emotions and write with your purpose in mind is another step towards becoming an effective writer. It is also important to take some time to think about what you need to write, why you need to write it, and how you are going to write it.

Emotions

Ask:

What am I feeling?

Do:

Check your emotions.

Purpose

Ask:

What do I want to accomplish?

Do:

Determine your purpose.

Consequences

Ask:

What may happen if I send this?

Do:

Be willing to accept the worst-case scenario.

Plan

Ask:

How should I write this?

Do:

Create a plan for your writing.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

Writing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is a common type of technical writing in the workplace. For an SOP to be effective, it must be written so anyone, regardless of experience, can follow it. This means it must be very clear, as well as concise yet detailed.

WHAT: *SOP Collaboration*

How: *SMALL GROUP*

As a group, write clear and concise directions for how to assemble your item (approx. 30 minutes).

COLLABORATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY— CONTINUED

WATCH YOUR TONE

Revising for Tone

Tone is the emotion embedded in your words. It conveys your attitude toward the reader and the topic. In writing, tone is conveyed primarily through word choice. Be mindful of your word choice. The words you choose show your level of professionalism and confidence.

MAINTAINING A PROFESSIONAL TONE

SLANG		COLLOQUIALISMS (everyday expressions)		CLICHÉS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y'all • You know? • OK or okay • My bad • Awesome • Hang out • Chill out • Geek • Epic fail • Dunno • Gonna • Wanna • Rip off • Neat • Stupid • Wow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bull or BS • Cheesy • Luck out • Cool • Guesstimate • Flaky • Goofy • Lamé • Grubby • Grungy • Do-over • Mickey-mouse • Folks • Sucks • Nuts • Crazy • No way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kind of / Sort of • A lot of • A couple • A little bit • Throws me off • Not really all that bad • Fall through the cracks • Beat around the bush • No clue • Fly through • Make waves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hit a road-block • Slip away • A big deal • Wrapping up • Guess what • Way more • Look out for • Pass up • Threw me for a loop • Spot on • Slip away • Fixing to • In a jam • Pumped up • Way too 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do more with less • Break down the silos. • Throw him under the bus. • It is what it is. • Take it to the next level. • Bite the bullet. • Run it up the flagpole. • Think outside the box. • If push comes to shove... • To be honest... • With all due respect... • Touch base... • In the pipeline... • Raise the bar... • Get our ducks in a row... • Wrap our heads around... • It's a win-win. • Step up to the plate...

MAINTAINING A CONFIDENT TONE

EXPRESSIONS SHOWING DOUBT	ABSOLUTES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe • I think • I guess • Maybe • In my opinion • Could be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All • Always • Every • Everybody • Everyone • Forever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must • Never • Nobody • No one • None • Only

CLARITY COUNTS

Revising for Clarity and Conciseness

Message clarity is determined, in part, by the conciseness of the writer's message. Writers often "over-write" or elevate their prose in an attempt to sound professional. This highly formal style can actually reduce understanding. Say what you need to say without adding unnecessary words.

REMOVE REDUNDANCIES

COMMON REDUNDANCIES

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absolutely certain• Actual fact• Add an additional• Added bonus• Advance forward• Advance reservations• Advance warning• Alternative choice• And etc.• Anonymous stranger• Ask the question• At the present time• Basic essentials• Filled to capacity• Circulate around• Collaborate together• Completely finished• Definite decision• Depreciate in value• Difficult dilemma• Direct confrontation• Each and every• Eliminate altogether• End result• Enter in• Estimated roughly• Exact same | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fall down• Fellow coworker• Final outcome• First of all• Foreign imports• Free gift• Future plans• Joint collaboration• Largest ever• LCD display• Local residents• Major breakthrough• May possibly• Meet together• Merge together• Mix together• Mutual cooperation• Mutually dependent• Native habitat• Natural instinct• Never before• New beginning• New invention• New recruit• None at all• Off of• Old adage | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Past experience• Pick and choose• PIN number• Plan ahead• Possibly might• Postpone until later• Proceed ahead• Reason why• Refer back• Repeat again• Revert back• Rise up• Safe haven• Same exact• Same identical• Serious danger• Spell out in detail• Still remains• Therapeutic treatment• Tiny bit• Total destruction• True facts• Ultimate goal• Unexpected surprise• Usual custom• Warn in advance• Written down |
|---|--|--|

CUT QUALIFIERS

Remove qualifiers such as:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very• Pretty | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Little• Just | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Somewhat• Rather |
|---|---|---|

CLARITY COUNTS — CONTINUED

REPLACING OVER-WRITTEN PHRASES WITH BASIC WORDS

REPLACE	WITH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the fact that • Owing to the fact that • On the grounds that • This is why • The reason for • Being that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since • Because • Why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the fact that • Regardless of the fact that • Notwithstanding the fact that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although • Even • Though
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the event that • If it should transpire • Under the circumstances which 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the opportunity to • Is able to • Is in a position to • Has the capacity for • Has the ability to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In reference to • In regards to • Concerning the matter of • Where _____ is concerned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is crucial that • It is necessary that • It is important that • Cannot be avoided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must • Should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to • In anticipation of • Subsequent to • At the same time as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before • After • As

GROUP ACTIVITY

Revising for Clarity and Conciseness

Directions: As a group, revise each statement for clarity and conciseness.

WORDY VERSION	CONCISE VERSION
The website has made available many of the things you need to know in order to make a decision about what car to buy.	
Working under Joe as a mentor who helped me develop skills was a very effective working situation.	
At this time, we find ourselves advancing upward along the proverbial tributary without the proper means of locomotion.	
If you find yourself avoiding utilization of a specific skills set, you are in distinct danger of the possibility of finding that skill atrophied beyond the possibility of future usage.	
After booking a ticket to Baton Rouge, I packed up my bags and arranged for transportation by taxi to the airport. Once there, I checked in, went through security, and boarded the plane. But problems beyond my control led to a three-hour delay before the flight took off.	
Our department has five employees. They do an excellent job Monday through Thursday, but Fridays are a heavier workload and they are unable to keep up with the rush of activity on that day and thus find themselves falling behind.	
It is imperative that we make a decision on this issue immediately.	
During the time of year from January 1 to March 31, a majority of the people who bought cars decided on buying blue cars that had a shiny appearance.	

FINAL ASSESSMENT

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

WHAT: *Instructor and Course Evaluation*

HOW: Applying the guidelines covered in today's class, write an evaluation of the instructor and the course.

NAME:	P#:	AGENCY:
EMAIL:	DATE:	LOCATION:

FINAL ASSESSMENT—PAGE 2

NAME:

P#:

AGENCY: