Writing For Impact and Influence

Course Summary

Description

Learn the skills for drafting and writing clear and effective business communications for business or government environments e.g. reports, business cases, emails etc. Participants in this course are taught a proven and effective reader anchored communication model, strategies to remove or minimise barriers to effective communication, and tips to improve overall written communication effectiveness.
Central to learning in this course is a comprehensive case-study with practical application of the guidelines taught in the class. Participants begin by writing a document outline that describes how they will structure what they will write in their assignment, and then write a sample generic business case that includes key document sections: the background/problem statement, an analysis of options to solve the business problem, a recommendation, and an executive summary. The sample business case is then reviewed and critiqued by the instructor, and participants receive confidential individual written feedback on their work.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Define effective communication, the communication process, and apply strategies to overcome barriers to effective written communication in the workplace,
- Apply the 4 rules of effective written communication
- Know Your Audience
- Know What Your Audience Wants to Know
- Know What You Want to Communicate
- Separate “Nice to Know” from “Need to Know” Information
- Create effective and easily understood business documents from complex technical documents, e.g. describe technical and/or complex subject matter using easy to understand “plain language”,
- Write clear and concise sentences i.e. shorter and audience focused,
- Write effective sentences and paragraphs using accepted principles of grammar, syntax, common language use, paragraph structure, and sentence organization,
- Adapt their preferred writing style to create effective audience tailored business communications,
- Effectively incorporate appropriate tone (e.g. using active voice versus passive voice), reader focus and other readability enhancements into business documents.

Topics

- Introduction to the Course
- The Communication Process and Barriers to Effective Communication
- Know Your Audience
- Effective Business Document Structure
- Using Outlines to Structure and Organize Your Information
- Writing Style and Flow
- Effective Sentence Structure
- Enhancing Readability
- Using Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Other Specialized Words
- Writing Effective Paragraphs Using Accepted Principles of Business Paragraph Structure
- Combining Sentence and Paragraph Construction Techniques for Cohesiveness and Unity
- Document Layout and Design
- Workshop/Application
- Conclusion

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Course Summary (cont.)

Audience

Anyone who wants to improve their written communication skills. Note: This class includes extensive practical application – participants are strongly encouraged to bring a laptop or tablet device if they prefer to type instead of write by hand.

Prerequisites

Ability to read and write in English at the grade 12 level.

Duration

Two Days

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Course Outline

I. ***Introduction to the Course***

Participants are introduced to the topic and discuss the importance of, and benefit to themselves and their audience, of being able to create effective written business focused documents.

Participants also receive an introduction to what will be covered in the course and information about how the course will be conducted. Participants describe their purpose for participating and their goals for attending the course.

II. ***The Communication Process and Barriers to Effective Communication***

A. Group Workshop & Presentation
B. Participants work in groups and present their conclusions that define effective communication (written and verbal) and identify barriers to written communication together with strategies to overcome the identified barriers. Specifically participants:
    1. Define effective written communication.
    2. Identify specific barriers to well written communication and strategies to overcome them.
    3. Define the term “know your audience”.
    4. Define the term “know what you want to say”.

III. ***Know Your Audience***

A. Lecture & Interactive Discussion.
B. Participants learn how to identify their audience’s interests and how to create an effective “audience profile” they can use when writing their business documents. Includes a discussion on writing to influence others, and encourage others to take action.

IV. ***Effective Business Document Structure***

A. Lecture & Interactive Discussion
B. Participants learn to apply the principles of effective business document structure and how to organize information in a typical business document. This structure is applicable to various standard business documents e.g. general reports, business cases etc. Participants learn how to draft and write:
    1. An executive summary,
    2. The main document body,
        a. includes using individual document sections or chapters as appropriate,
    3. Additional supporting information e.g. an appendix, etc.
    4. Cross referencing other information (non-academic). Includes a facilitated discussion about want information should be included in each section of the document, and how to structure informal communications e.g. e-mail.

V. ***Using Outlines to Structure and Organize Your Information***

A. Presentation, Lecture & Interactive Discussion and Practical Application
B. Participants discuss and practice how to effectively begin drafting a business document using a proven outline methodology to create the document structure.

VI. ***Writing Style and Flow***

A. Facilitated Lecture with Application Exercise
B. Participants discuss the importance of writing style e.g. technical, business technical and casual, and explore guidelines for giving written documents “flow” to increase ease of reading.

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Course Outline (cont.)

VII. ***Effective Sentence Structure***

A. Presentation, Lecture & Interactive Discussion with Application Exercise
B. Participants explore how to write clearly and concisely incorporating the following sentence construction techniques and concepts:
   1. Using proper Syntax,
   2. Using Active Voice versus Passive Voice (and when to use one versus the other)
      Includes a facilitated discussion on using a style manual, and style guides to help create standardised and consistent documents.

VIII. ***Enhancing Readability***

A. Lecture, Interactive Discussion with Application Exercise
B. Participants explore the value of incorporating the following techniques to enhance readability:
   1. Active Voice vs Passive voice – when and why to use each
   2. Informal tone,
   3. Positive tone,
   4. Reader-Centered Focus,
   5. Linking words and phrases,
   6. Using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Index.

IX. ***Using Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Other Specialized Words***

A. Group Workshop & Presentation with Application Exercise
B. Participants discuss and learn how to properly incorporate and use acronyms, abbreviations and other specialized words when writing business documents with the emphasis on using these a little as possible and using “plain language”.

X. ***Writing Effective Paragraphs Using Accepted Principles of Business Paragraph Structure***

A. Lecture, Workshop and Application Exercise
B. Participants explore and practice using the following paragraph structures, and learn the principle of “placing most important information first.”
   1. Direct Structure – Top Down Structure – including when and how to use,
   2. Indirect Structure – Bottom Up – including when and how to use.

XI. ***Combining Sentence and Paragraph Construction Techniques for Cohesiveness and Unity***

A. Lecture and Application Exercise
B. Participants explore how to organize ideas into paragraphs to create a unified cohesive document structure.

XII. ***Document Layout and Design***

A. Workshop & Group Presentation
   1. Apply the principles of “chunking” to the format, design and layout of a report.
   2. Apply the principles of business document layout and design to make documents easier to read.

XIII. ***Workshop/Application***

Participants work through several examples and are required to submit a final written assignment (e.g. a persuasive argument, a comparison between two options with a recommendation, a simple business case or other relevant document) at the end of the course for feedback.

XIV. ***Conclusion***

Participants finalize their writing assignment and submit their completed business case to the instructor for individual review