

S A M P L E

Introduction

Lesson Aim

Define the nature and scope of writing.

INTRODUCTION

Why do we write? The reasons we write are many and varied and include:

- writing for enjoyment
- for business
- to achieve goals
- to gain the cooperation of others
- for support or approval
- to express our thoughts and ideas
- to promote ideas or encourage change
- to correct perceived misinformation
- to make a name for ourselves
- to sell products
- to change others' opinions
- to keep in touch with friends, family and others
- to show what we know
- to impress
- to criticise or complain
- to initiate change or a course of action
- for pleasure
- to learn
- to help us remember things

There is no end to possible reasons for writing.

Writing is made up of Forms, Conventions and Styles

Writing is a learned activity. We learn not only how to write, but how to write in established and accepted formats, depending on what we are writing. A person who wants to write more effectively and efficiently, must learn to use the appropriate forms of writing for different situations, for example: to use correct business forms for business, correct academic forms for study, and appropriate forms for creative writing.

So writing forms change to suit the situation, for instance, you might write business memos or business reports at work, short stories for publication in magazines as a hobby, and essays as part of your academic studies – each time using different 'conventions' for each form. And you will use informal and formal styles of writing according to your target reader. Writing that does NOT conform to conventions of form and take into account

the right style to suit the situation, may not be taken seriously, and may reflect negatively on the writer's ability and image.

All writing should be clearly understood by the reader. Whether you are dashing off a quick email to your workmates, preparing a complex business report, or writing an essay or short story, your writing needs to be clear and concise, well structured, and with correct spelling and grammar.

Some forms of writing for different situations are listed below:

Writing for Business

- memos
- business letters
- contracts, agreements and other legal documents
- advertisements and signs
- workplace reports
- emails
- proposals and applications
- policy and procedure manuals
- newsletters

Writing for Study

- essays
- reports
- dissertations or theses
- reviews and critiques
- summaries
- bibliographies
- short answers

Writing for Enjoyment or Self-Expression

- short stories
- novels
- children's books
- poems
- personal letters
- diary entries

In addition to the above, we write notes, directions, shopping lists, instructions, and many other kinds of documents in our daily lives, most of which are written in a fairly conventional form.

Some of these forms of writing are practical in nature. The purpose of a shopping list (for instance) is to list items; therefore we wouldn't use sentences in a shopping list because its purpose is to give us clear and instant information - rather than a dialogue or narrative.

Other forms have evolved over time into established and recognisable forms (most adults can easily distinguish between a letter and an essay for example).

Broader categories of writing relate to the kind of content. These broad categories include the following:

- fiction (includes all kinds of creative writing, such as stories, myths, legends, novels, plays)
- non-fiction (which can include business writing, news reports, books on philosophy, etc.)
- biography
- autobiography
- memoirs
- technical writing
- scientific writing
- business writing
- history
- poetry
- plays
- academic writing - and so on

What are Writing Conventions?

Conventions in writing help us to make our writing clear and easy to read, it also helps us to influence the way in which a reader interprets what we have written. Writing conventions encompass grammar, punctuation and spelling; they are the writer's tools. The writer who understands (and can put into practice) the correct use of writing conventions, possesses a powerful tool with which to influence their readers: a comma pauses the reader, a well-placed exclamation mark emphasises the writer's point, a full stop marks the end of a thought, and a new paragraph indicates a new train of thought. So in this way conventions can be used to speed up or slow down the reader, produce tension, stimulate thought or encourage reflection and so on.

Using an Informal or Formal Style in Writing

The style of writing you choose must be appropriate to your reader; you wouldn't choose an informal style of writing when writing an important business letter. Conversely you wouldn't write a formal letter to a friend or when you correspond with a work colleague.

Informal writing tends to be more personal, it may include jargon (for example 'you'll get more bang for your buck') or colloquialisms (e.g. commonly used expressions or words such as 'cheers', 'mate', 'mint' etc.), or contraction of words such as: I've (I have), don't (do not), who's (who is), haven't (have not), photos, TV (television) and so on.

Formal writing is usually comprised of long sentences, with no word contractions or use jargon or colloquialisms, and no familiarity between the writer and the reader. Formal writing tends to be complex, it often uses longer sentences. More consideration is given to the various topics the writing covers; formal writing includes introductions, explanations or elaborations and conclusions.

If you are in doubt as to which style you should use, always err on the side of caution and use a more formal style.

Use the following to determine if your writing should be informal or formal:

- You are well acquainted with the person you are writing to (informal).
- The person is a colleague or friend (informal).

- Is the information you are conveying formal in nature (contracts, business deals etc.)? Even if you are familiar with your reader or are well acquainted some writing requires a formal approach irrelevant of this (formal).
- Is this a business letter or report? (Unless you are very familiar with the recipient, a business letter should be formal, and a report should *always* be formal).

What is Informal or Formal Language?

- I. The use of empathy or emotion (informal).
- II. The use of business or legal language (formal).
- I. Personal (informal).
- II. Impersonal (formal).
- I. Simple sentences (informal).
- II. Complex sentences (formal).
- I. Use of jargon or figures of speech or colloquialisms (informal).
- II. No use of jargon figures of speech or colloquialisms (formal).
- I. The use of the first or second person ('I', 'we' or 'you') (informal).
- II. The use of third person (e.g. 'he' 'she' 'it') (formal).
- I. Use of word contractions and acronyms (it's, TV) (informal).
- II. Use of full words (formal).
- I. Maybe subjective (informal)
- II. Always objective (formal)

The following table clearly shows some key elements and styles of common workplace documents.

Type of document	Purpose	Usual size	Usual style	Possible uses
Memorandum	To convey information within an organisation	Usually one page	May be informal	Report on new developments; reminder; distribute news to a group.
Letter	To communicate formally on a particular matter.	One or two pages	Usually formal	To inform, enquire, explain, confirm, persuade, or provide a permanent record of communication.
Fax	To communicate quickly on a particular matter	One page or more	Usually informal	Request information or service; give information; pass on documentation.
Instructions	To enable the reader to carry out a function or action	From very short to very long	Formal	Training; ensure correct product use; ensure correct equipment use;

				develop competency.
Leaflets and flyers	To create awareness of, and interest in an event or product	One page, can be folded	Informal to formal	To sell a product or service; to inform about an event; for general mail out or distribution.
Newsletter	To present current news about an organisation or relevant to it.	One page, both sides, or 3-4 A3 pages folded in half.	Informal and newsy	To build team spirit; to share news within an organisation; to acknowledge members' activities and achievements.
Questionnaire	To carry out research	From short to about 2 pages	Formal	To get customer feedback on products or services; for marketing research; to survey attitudes etc. within an organisation.

Elements of common workplace documents

WHAT IS EFFICIENT WRITING?

The purpose and context of writing will determine what we consider good writing. Generally, good writing is expected to communicate clearly, to have a message or meaning, and to be legible. However, in most situations, that is not enough. Good writing for business, study, or for any situation where information must be accurately and correctly communicated, or the message must get through (which covers most day-to-day writing) must also be clear, easy to understand, to the point, and **efficient**. So what does efficient mean? It means getting the desired result (being effective) without wasting of time, cost, or energy.

In other words, efficient writing is *effective* writing (it achieves the desired effect) that is also *concise* (free of unnecessary words).

So, what is effective writing, really?

Good writing is clear writing, but is clear writing always effective? No, not always, for instance, take this clearly stated piece of information:

Trickle down theory postulates that ideas and effects that occur in the higher levels of a hierarchy will eventually be felt in the lower levels of the hierarchy.

The message is clear (to a reader who understands all of this), but it may not be effective. For one thing, even readers who understand its meaning may not be persuaded that it's true, or may not see its relevance to the rest of the document, or may be put off by its language and tone. So the message may not have the desired effect: it is not an effective statement. For those readers who do *not* understand the meaning or the relevance of the statement, the message is both unclear and ineffective.

So, *effective* writing is writing that communicates the intended message clearly so that it is understood by the reader, and effectively (so that it has the desired effect - or a reasonable alternative - on the reader).

Good writing is direct.

A well written piece is direct and to the point. Whilst it is wise to present your message politely, it is important that the gist of the message still comes across clearly, without any room for misinterpretation.

Your words should clearly represent the point of your letter, article, memo or other piece of writing. Imagine your disappointment if you went to an expensive restaurant and ordered the 'Succulent, delicately spiced mince encased in a fine pork shell on a creamy bed of lightly salted Solanum tuberosum' - only to be given sausages and mash!

- Direct language will increase the chances that your reader will understand what you are trying to say.
- Direct words and sentences will also increase the chances that your reader will keep reading.

Efficient writing is objective.

Unless you are writing a piece for publicity reasons, advertising or advocating for a cause, you should try to maintain an objective stance.

Even if you are arguing a point, you can be far more effective if you fill your argument with facts which support your stance rather than emotional language detailing your feelings about the issue.

If you can present an idea clearly and meaningfully without forcing your own emotions on the reader, you have achieved a breakthrough in communication.

For example:

Most journalism aims to be objective; giving multiple different perspectives on a story. When this does not happen, there is uproar.

A journalist's own political perspective should not be evident in an article.

The following article is from the news.com.au website on the 26/10/2010. Although the first sentence does seem to present the journalist's perspective, it is also possible that it has been included for a catchy dose of humour, before the journalist goes on to present all of the differing aspects of the story.

Q&A shoe throw: Protester 'throws like a girl', Howard laughs it off.

The protester who threw his shoes at John Howard on live TV has said he wanted global attention, but so far he has mostly been told he throws "like a girl".

The protester, named as Peter Gray, has spoken about the incident on ABC radio in Melbourne this morning, as Mr Howard was laughing off the confrontation on commercial radio.

Mr Gray staged the stunt after asking Mr Howard on the ABC's Q&A program how he defended committing Australia to the Iraq war, in light of recent tolls of the civilian death toll seven years after the conflict. He threw both shoes at Mr Howard, saying "that's for the Iraqi dead", but neither hit the former prime minister.

"I wanted to throw my shoes at John Howard and have the rest of the world see it, certainly," Mr Gray has said. "I certainly didn't want to hurt the man but I certainly wanted to make my point known."

But he has admitted most of the reaction has been critical of him, his aim and his aim. "Quite a few people said I throw like a girl."

Speaking on Macquarie radio this morning, Mr Howard made light of the incident. "Is anyone here taking their shoes off? I'm looking around," Mr Howard joked during a studio interview.

"All in a night's work," he added. "I've been thrown at by experts so why should I worry about that?"

While Mr Gray is copping flak for his lack of precision and power and questions are asked about security standards on the set, Mr Howard also has experience with high-profile aim fails, as this infamous YouTube clip shows: (The clip is not included in these course notes for obvious reasons).

The former PM was also blindsided when he was quizzed by David Hicks about why he was left at Guantanamo Bay military prison for five and a half years.

Mr Howard, who was promoting his memoir *Lazarus Rising* on the program, stood by his decision to send troops to Iraq, had no apology for the treatment of Mr Hicks and defended his approach to asylum seekers.

No shoes, no service

Mr Gray criticised Mr Howard about his decision to go to war in Iraq in his question and persistently interrupted the answer before he launched his protest. ABC staff removed him from the studio.

A female audience member then shouted: "You've got blood on your hands", before walking out of the studio.

Mr Howard took the incident in his stride. "It's all right, don't worry. Forget it, forget it. Relax," he told host Tony Jones who apologised for the breach.

An audience member told Mr Howard "if that's all they've got to throw at you, you've got nothing to worry about".

According to an ABC source the man later asked if he could pick up his shoes tomorrow, but staff refused.

The incident had echoes of an infamous incident when former US president George W. Bush was nearly hit by two shoes thrown by an anti-war protester during a trip to Iraq in 2008. Mr Howard was a strong advocate of the US-led invasion of Iraq.

In a video message to Mr Howard, Mr Hicks asked why he had been left so long in Guantanamo Bay and about the military commission trial he faced. Mr Howard said Mr Hicks was not a hero and he knowingly associated with the Taliban after September 11.

Climate, apology, history

Mr Howard said he would wear the criticism about his refusal to apologise to the Stolen Generation and he still had "doubt" saying while many people who were removed suffered, many were advantaged.

On climate change, Mr Howard said he was "a climate agnostic".

Mr Howard said the "totality" of his book was "overwhelmingly favourable" to his treasurer Peter Costello and the leadership tensions were "understandable" but the duo had left a "great legacy".

"History is about what you do and what Peter and I did together was build an Australian economy that was bullet proof," he said.

Mr Howard urged Liberals to "hold their nerve" and keep Tony Abbott as Opposition Leader. "I think the Liberal Party would be mad to have anybody else," he said. "I'm a 150 per cent Abbott man."

He said it was "too early to make a judgment about Julia Gillard as Prime Minister" but he doubted she could deliver serious reform because of the "cosmopolitan collection" she had to put together to stay in office.

He said Kevin Rudd would "never return" as PM, but asked if he might make a comeback, Mr Howard evoked one of his most controversial statements about the GST: "Never ever".

This article supplies numerous perspectives on the story afoot. You hear from the protestors, the politician, the television station and the audience. You do not really hear the journalists own opinion - just a detailed account of the events as they occurred.

It is not the best example of writing with clarity. Clarity is lost in the middle as the story jumps from flying shoes to David Hicks to global warming and the GST (Goods and Services Tax).

Perhaps the article could have been tied together a little better by re-arranging some of the paragraphs so the story didn't hop from the protester, to David Hicks, and then back again. Obviously entertainment is a key element of this particular story so the journalist has a little more freedom than usual.

Variety

Good writing includes variety. Can you imagine watching a dance made out of the same three moves, with no high and low points, no rhythm and no emotion? It would either be very dull or very strange - probably both.

The same is true of writing. Your writing needs to offer the reader variety. You can't keep using the same words over and over and over and over and over and over (you get the point) again. Like the dance, your writing should take the reader on a journey, devoid of clichés, bursting with new observations and engaging them in an intellectual tete-a-tete (it should be interesting).

If you find you are employing the same words relentlessly – use a thesaurus!

Summary of the Key Points So Far

- clear writing communicates the message
- clear writing is objective
- interesting writing offers the reader variety
- effective writing gets results
- concise writing doesn't waste time or space
- efficient writing is clear, effective, and concise
- efficient writing produces effective written communication

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

To be able to communicate well, we need to know how communication works. In this section, we will look at how we communicate, and learn some basic communication principles.

First, let's look at some definitions of communication:

"The process by which information is passed between individuals or organisations, by means of previously agreed symbols."

(Communications in Business, Peter Little, Longman, 1974)

"Communication is the process of detecting, assigning and organizing meanings and values. It frequently involves an attempt to transfer such meanings and values to other people in ways which will develop response and affect behaviour. It is thus, very often, a relating and interacting process."

(Handbook of Communication Skills, Tolmie and Tolmie, Prentice Hall)

"Communication is the transmission and receiving of messages, intended or unintended, between two or more parties, that are interpreted by those parties to make meaning, intended or unintended." (Anonymous)

Clearly, we can define communication in different ways. However, theorists and communications teachers agree on some key points about communication, no matter what form it takes:

- Communication never occurs in a vacuum (it always occurs in a context, and is influenced by that context).
- There is a person who sends (or transmits) the message and at least one other person who receives the message.
- The giver and the receiver interpret the message through their personal perceptions.
- Sender and receiver might perceive the message in the same way (this is clear communication) or they may perceive it differently (this can be unclear communication, and it is ineffective communication).
- Words or statement in a communication never have fully developed meanings (in other words, their meanings are never self-evident, and are always open to interpretation).
- There are many ways that a message can be communicated.

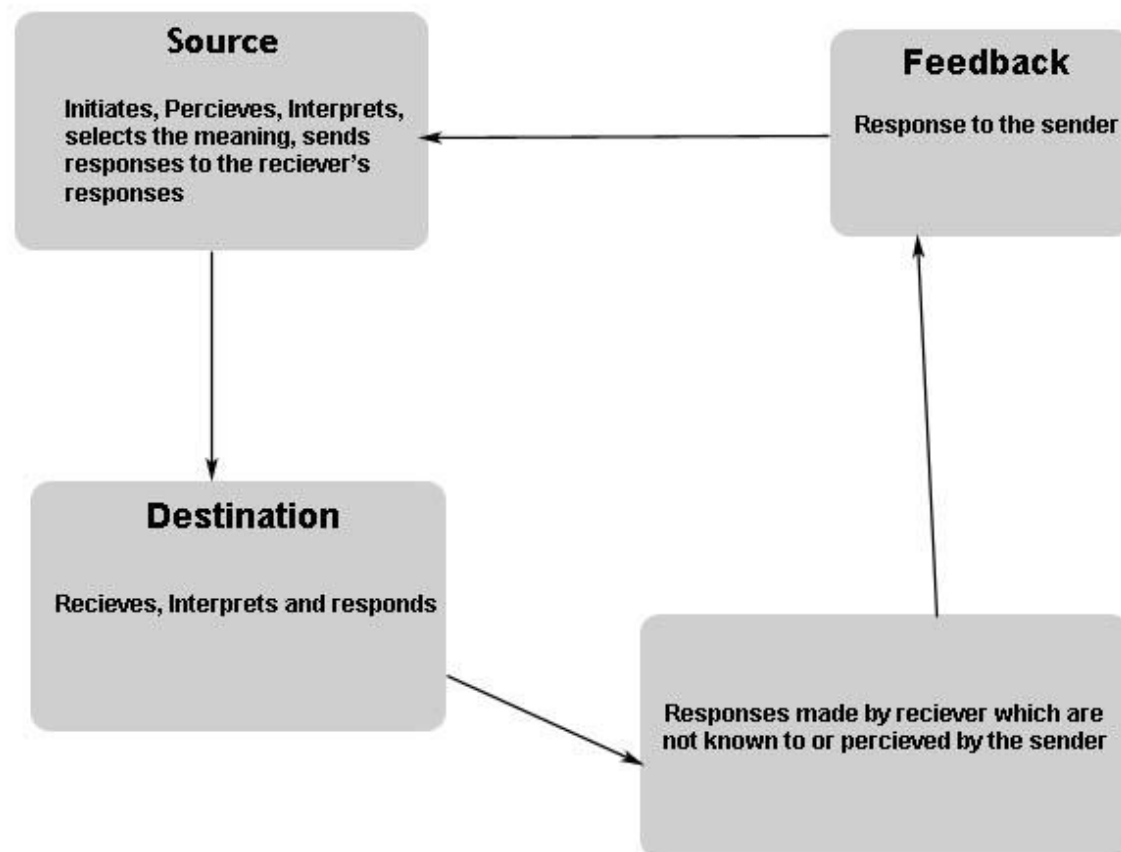
- The meaning of a message will change or develop as the message is elaborated, or also sent in other ways (e.g. the sender can explain the message, clarify the message, reinforce or undermine the message with body language, or demonstrate the meaning through illustrations or actions).
- Good communication involves interaction. It is not enough for "A" to tell "B" something. Communication also involves responding, responding to the response and making adjustments to ensure that the message is fully and effectively communicated. In other words, good communication always involves feedback.

Communication can occur between:

1. Individual to individual.
2. Group to group.
3. Group to individual.
4. Individual to group.

The Communication Process

The basic pathways involved in communication are illustrated in the following diagram.



The communication process

Types of Communication

Communication can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal communication involves the use of spoken and written words. Non-verbal communication involves other signals or messages: images, music, colour, sound, how close or far we stand to someone, etc. Some theorists include body language in the category of non-verbal communication, whereas others treat body language as a separate area of communication. Body language refers to what is communicated through the body: posture, gestures, facial expression, eye contact, tone of voice etc.). Body language can be intended or unintended: much of it is unintended, and we are not even aware that we are communicating.

Many communication experts assign greater importance to non-verbal communication in ordinary conversation than they assign to verbal communication. In *Communication without Words*, Albert Mehrabian gives the following weighting to the different kinds of communication that occur normal conversation:

Impact of messages:

- 7% verbal (i.e. what you say)
- 38% vocal (i.e. how you say it)
- 55% facial (i.e. the way you move your eyes, raise your eyebrows, smile or frown etc.).

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

A channel refers to what we communicate through (speech, sound, a telephone, radio etc.). We can communicate through only one of these modes, but usually we use a combination of two or more.

Some common channels are:

- direct speech (speaking directly to another person)
- media (video, TV, film, radio - not to a particular listener/s)
- paper (personal letters, memos, reports, documents, notes, etc.)
- computers (emails, web pages etc.).
- print media (books, magazines, newspapers etc.)
- visuals (pictures, charts, paintings, photos, graphs, diagrams etc.)
- body
- music

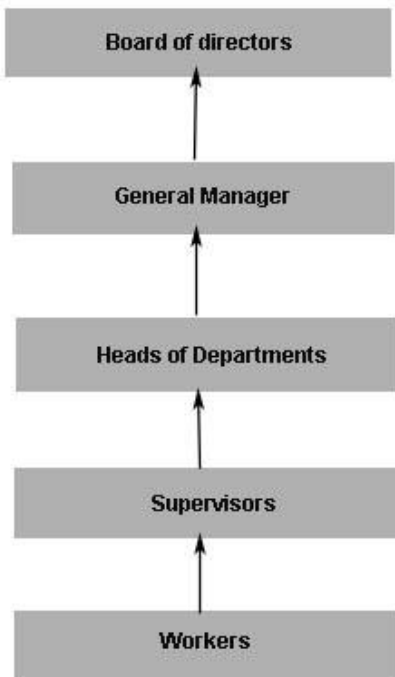
In the earlier section, we saw a chart demonstrating a person-to-person communication channel. This is a simple channel, but more often, communication channels are more complex.

Examples

A radio announcer is communicating to his panel operator who is controlling the technical aspects of the broadcast (timing, volume, tone, background music etc.). At the same time the announcer is communicating with his listeners (even though they are largely an unknown quantity: he needs to try to foresee their reaction and respond even though he cannot know for sure what they are thinking).

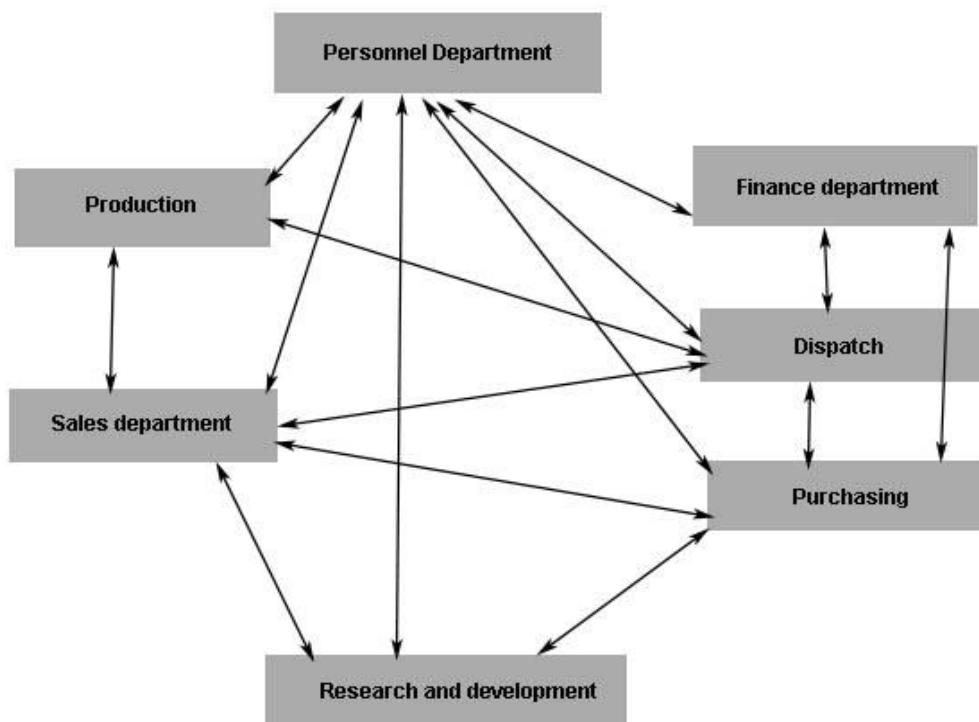
A company maintains communication channels between individuals within each department, and communication between groups, which are actual departments. The personnel department maintains a communication channel between the department (a group) and each employee (individual) throughout the whole company.

Vertical Internal Communications in a business



Vertical communication channels

Horizontal Internal Communications



Horizontal communication channels

To achieve effective communication in any organisation, it is important to define the roles of both individuals and groups. If responsibilities are clearly delineated, communication becomes much easier and more effective.

COMMUNICATING EFFICIENTLY

The following steps will help us achieve better communication:

1. Think about the message you want to get across, and state it to yourself, clearly.
2. Decide on the methods you will employ to best get the message across.
3. Arrange the message logically. Break it into several parts, and choose the best way to organize them.
4. Express your message clearly. Use appropriate language and other methods concisely and effectively.

WRITING FOR A PURPOSE

Good writing does not just happen. It is purposeful, meaningful, relevant, and appropriate to its intended readers, and it is easy to understand. To achieve these criteria, the writer must first ask and answer several questions:

- What do I want this writing to achieve? (What is its purpose?)
- Who will read it?
- What will be the content of the writing? (What might the anticipated readers need to know, want to know, and like to know?)
- How can I best communicate this information to achieve my purpose? (What language, layout and format will be most suitable?)

Purpose

Very often, you are given your purpose by someone else, a teacher or employer, who requests you to do the writing. However, that person may not clearly state why you are writing. Therefore, your first task is to ask what that person wants your writing to achieve. Possible goals are:

- to report
- to explain
- to clarify
- to gather information
- to find out exactly what they want
- to correct misinformation
- to persuade
- to apologise
- to justify

Also consider what *you* want to gain from the writing task. Personal goals in business or study situations can include all of the above, as well as:

- to impress your employer or teacher
- to demonstrate your writing skills
- to demonstrate your knowledge on a certain topic
- to get a promotion or good grades

- to achieve a good reputation
- to achieve outcomes important to *you*

Your Reader

Many documents will be read by more than one person. For instance, you might write a memo to your department, but it might also go to your boss. Therefore, you should identify likely readers of your document, and consider what they want and expect, and how they might interpret your message.

Like all forms of behaviour, writing is governed by certain cultural and social expectations. For example, in most countries, business writing is expected to be more objective, formal and factual than creative writing, or writing for magazines. It must also be formatted according to standards established in that country. In an increasingly global economy, business writing must also meet international expectations. Students must also be able to meet international standards.

Despite these international standards, however, different cultures might have quite different ideas about what is acceptable or expected. For instance, in some countries, direct requests, statements and refusals are acceptable, while in other countries, directness may be considered rude and immature. Different cultures might have quite different formal ways of starting and ending a letter. For example, in some English-speaking countries, it is polite to complement the reader and to wish them good health. In others, it is acceptable to simply address the reader as Dear Mr. X, and then get straight to business. In yet others, it is common to use the reader's first name and to sign with your first name after the first communication between you.

There are also many English words which mean different things in different cultures. In Australia a vest is a waistcoat. In England a vest is what Australians would call a singlet. A thong, in Australia, is an item of footwear which the English would call a flip-flop.

It is important to meet the expectations of your intended audience regarding what is appropriate. Until you become more familiar with your reader and his/her way of communicating, the safest action is to be more formal.

Content

Decide what your readers need to know, want to know, and would like to know. For example, imagine that you are writing a short report on a conflict in the workplace. You might include the following:

- *need to know*: a description of the problem, who is involved, and possible solutions
- *want to know*: some consequences of the problem; circumstances contributing to the problem
- *would like to know*: your recommendations based on first hand experience; how a similar problem was successfully resolved; staff viewpoints on the problem

The content can also vary from culture to culture.

Method of Communicating

These decisions include:

- what style of writing to use – formal or informal
- what format to use – e.g. a memo, a notice on the board, a newsletter article, a report, a letter etc.
- what language might be most effective – positive and friendly or cool and distant? Persuasive and emotive or neutral and factual? It also includes choosing the best words to communicate your message

TERMINOLOGY

- exposé
- plagiarism

- typographical error
- synopsis
- précis
- phrase
- clause
- paragraph.

SUGGESTED READING

English Grammar *by John Mason and the Staff of ACS Distance Education*

Chapter 1: pages 5, 14 and 17.