

Business Writing 101

Business writers write to get work done – to recommend actions.

Business organizations exist to produce and distribute products, whether that product is steel, a WEB browser, or an opera. In the increasingly competitive, global marketplace, businesses must constantly evolve.

Rarely do business writers write to learn, to communicate what they know, or to give a glimpse of how their mind works. Instead they write to solve problems, to propose new strategies, to store vital information, to negotiate new contracts, to map out the future direction of the company, to track quality control benchmarks, to report earnings to stakeholders, etc.

Audiences for business writing:

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| Managers | Employees | Customers |
| Engineers | Lawyers | Regulatory agencies |
| Stockholders | Executives | Government officials |

Writing within non-academic, business contexts can best be described as "transactional" or as "writing to do." Business writers often recommend and support strategic courses of action to their readers.

Basic formatting expectations include: “CONSISTENCY”

- Times New Roman
- 12pt. Font
- 1” Margins
- Everything is Left Justified
- Power Point slides are limited to no more than 35 words per slide
- Relevant pictures included where required
- Any required signatures (business letters) need to be in Black or Blue pen



On the next page you will find a very brief overview of some of the differences between classroom and business writing in the contexts within which these kinds of writing are produced.

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| Prompt | <i>Students</i> write because their instructors require them to write. Instructors design the assignments. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> write either at their own initiative or because someone in the organization expects them to write. Professionals often create and define their own tasks. |
| Audience | <i>Students</i> often write for one reader, their instructor. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> often write for large and complex groups of people, various stakeholders who have different needs and interests. |
| Genre | <i>Students</i> write exams, essays, journals, term papers, oral reports, etc. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> write memos, letters, proposals, reports, performance evaluations, business plans, marketing plans, audit reports, sales presentations, manuals, handbooks, contracts, etc. |
| Process | <i>Students</i> (too often) write an assignment alone and deliver it to the instructor without showing their writing to anybody else. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> solicit feedback from others before publishing their documents and often work together to compose documents. |
| Structure | <i>Students</i> often write an introduction with a thesis, a body that substantiates the thesis, and a conclusion. They structure their writing according to the requirements of their topic, thesis, and instructor's expectations. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> often write a table of contents, an executive summary, company descriptions, industry analyses, strategic analyses, and recommendations. They structure their writing according to what their audiences need to know to do what they need to do. |
| Design | <i>Students</i> follow the formatting requirements prescribed by their instructors, usually 1" margins all around, double-spaced, twelve-point font, with page numbers and a title. This creates a dense, blocky style with paragraph indentations. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> design their documents to be visually attractive. They frequently incorporate much white space into their documents; make the structure of their documents visible by using headings and subheadings, and list information using bullet points. They also incorporate visual information such as graphs, charts, logos, and pictures into their documents. |
| Style | <i>Students</i> write complex sentences and lengthy paragraphs to develop the complexity of their ideas. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> typically write shorter, simpler sentences and include much less paragraph development if they use paragraphs at all. |
| Tone | <i>Students</i> establish a knowledgeable yet inquiring tone in their writing that shows they have gained a measure of control over their topic and thesis. |
| | <i>Business Writers</i> establish a tone that best represents the ethos their company wants to project and that fits the expectations of their audience. |