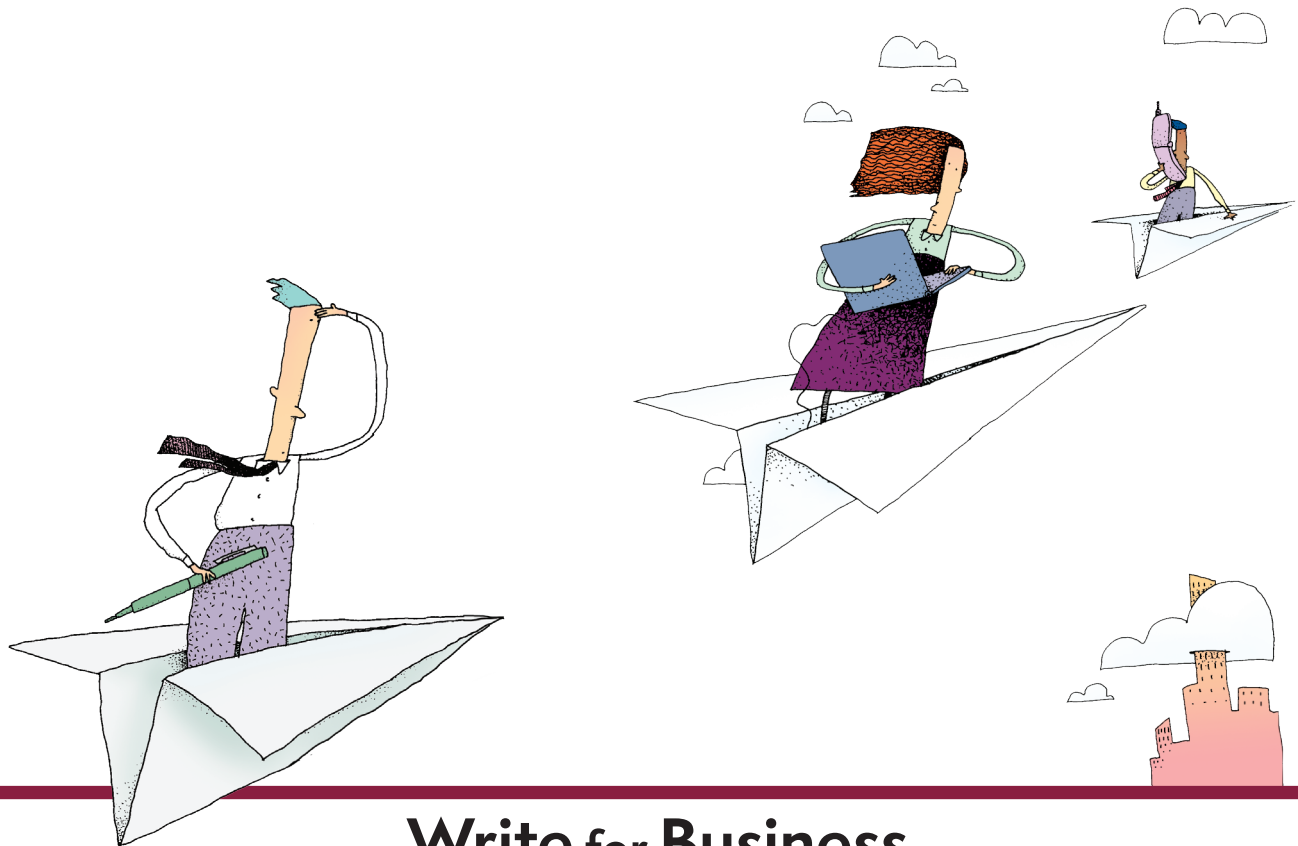


The Key Forms of Business Writing

What are the key forms of business writing?

Different workplace situations call for different types of writing, but most businesspeople will end up writing and/or reading four key forms: correspondence, reports, proposals, and instructions. The *Write for Business* Guide (writeforbusiness.com/guide) helps you create these forms using guidelines, models, and checklists.

Form	Description
Correspondence	includes emails, memos, and letters—essential forms of day-to-day business communication.
Reports	share the information needed for businesses to prosper.
Proposals	lay out plans to meet a business's needs, from developing a new market to solving a problem.
Instructions	provide the how-to documents that help a business and its clients carry out their work.



Write for Business

Key Form: Correspondence

Why correspond in writing?

Members of any business must regularly correspond, either in person, by phone, or through writing. Written correspondence is preferred when

- your message is complicated and detailed,
- you and your reader need a record of the communication,
- you have a large and scattered audience, and/or
- you do not need immediate feedback.

What makes correspondence effective and productive?

To get results, correspondence must be positive, clear, orderly, and prompt. After all, the purpose of corresponding is to communicate with individuals or groups to accomplish something.

Characteristics of Effective Communication

Characteristics	Examples
Effective correspondence . . .	
• addresses a person whenever possible, not a title or department.	Dear Sarah or Dear Ms. Falwell
• opens with an informative subject line or opening sentence.	Subject: Promotion of Mona Vail to Full-Time Graphic Artist
• stresses benefits to the reader.	An updated shopping cart would reduce customer frustration and increase sales.
• uses “you” in positive situations but avoids it in negative ones.	I appreciated your workshop at the Radisson, especially your explanation of . . .
• assumes a team approach.	We offer our customers a line of safety equipment unmatched in the industry.
• includes lists, short paragraphs, and headings for easy reading.	We’ll discuss these items: 1. Shawn Greer’s internship. 2. His last two evaluations. 3. His letter of recommendation.
• avoids business jargon.	Let’s rethink our fall catalog. <i>(instead of)</i> The corporation ought to redeploy marketing initiatives vis a vis the end-year selling vehicle.
• is timely, but never sent in anger.	Thank you for meeting with me last week at the national sales meeting.

Key Form: Reports

Why write reports?

Reports offer businesses and organizations the information they need to produce, evaluate, and carry out their work. Reports, long and short, help businesses by . . .

- creating a record for routine and special activities;
- documenting details related to incidents, projects, and studies;
- checking results of work, plans, and production; or
- evaluating options and making decisions.

What are the common types of reports?

The chart that follows identifies the main types of reports, along with their goals. To determine which type of report to use, you need to identify your purpose and your reader.

Types of Reports

Type	Examples	Writer's Goal
Incident	accident, breakdown, error, or stoppage	Examine a situation to determine causes, effects, and solutions.
Periodic	weekly, quarterly, or annual; evaluation, department, or status	Provide information at regular time intervals so work can be tracked.
Progress	initial, interim, completion, or follow-up; activity, campaign, project, or grant	Provide details about how a project or job is progressing.
Trip	conference, convention, customer service, field, inspection, sales trip	Share results of activities that happened away from the workplace.

How should I organize reports?

Opening

- **Label the report** with a title, your name, your reader's name, the date, a subject line indicating the topic, and any identifying information such as a reference number.
- **Introduce the report's purpose**, provide background, and preview topics covered.
- **Summarize your main points**, conclusions, and recommendations if you want to be direct.

Middle

- **Organize details according to your purpose:** chronological, problem-solution, cause-effect, classification, comparison-contrast.

Closing

- **Summarize main points**, provide conclusions, give recommendations.

Key Form: Proposals

Why write proposals?

The noun *proposal* means “plan.” Whenever an individual in a business or organization puts forth a written plan, he or she is developing a proposal. Proposals are critical to a business’s success because they suggest action, innovation, and problem solving. To write a strong proposal, make sure that you . . .

- know your audience,
- make clear the benefits of your plan,
- sound reliable and credible,
- provide examples of past success stories, and
- present an eye-appealing, easy-reading final draft.

How should I organize proposals?

Opening

- **Label your proposal** with a title or a subject line that promises productive change, your name, your reader’s name, the date, and any reference numbers.
- **Introduce your proposal** by providing background and establishing the theme—the need to be met, the problem to be solved, and the benefits to be gained.
- **Summarize your proposal** if you want to be direct. To be indirect, do not include the summary.

Middle

- **Define the problem or need.** Explain its importance, limits, causes, effects, history, and connection with larger issues.
- **Review any past attempts to solve the problem,** noting their successes and failures. (If the reader is aware of the need or problem, be brief and informative. If the reader is unaware or resistant, build a persuasive case about the problem or need and its importance.)
- **List criteria for a solution.** What should a solution accomplish?
- **Compare alternative solutions.** Then promote the best one.
- **Prove the solution’s workability** by highlighting outcomes, requirements, budgets, schedules, and methods of monitoring.

Closing

- **Summarize the problem** or need and alternative solutions.
- **Provide conclusions** about the best solution—results and benefits.
- **Review your recommendations** for implementing the solution.

How can I plan a proposal?

Answer these questions to help plan a proposal. Give careful thought to each one before writing an answer.

1. **Who** is the intended audience?
2. **What** is the purpose of the proposal?
3. **When** do I need to complete the proposal?
4. **Where** will I find information to use in my proposal?
5. **Why** is this proposal necessary?
6. **How** should I proceed?

Key Form: Instructions

Why write instructions?

Instructions help organizations and their clients carry out their work. Plant workers need instructions to use equipment, lab technicians need safety guidelines, managers need protocol for employee reviews, and so on. Effective instructions are clear, complete, chronological, and current.

How should I write clear instructions?

Write your instructions in direct, active sentences. (*Use the pivoting tablet for customer signatures*, rather than *The pivoting tablet should be used for customer signatures*.) Also use strong command verbs (*remove, apply, rinse*, and so on).

address	download	inspect	press
align	drag	lift	print
begin	drain	load in	pull
call up	drill	lock	push
change	drop	loosen	raise
check	ease	lower	remove
choose	enter	make	replace
clean	fasten	measure	reply
click	fill	move	review
clip	find	notify	rinse
close	flip	oil	roll
connect	follow	open	rotate
cut	identify	place	save
delete	include	plug	saw
dig	insert	pour	upload

How should I organize instructions?

Organize instructions chronologically (by time). Use a numbered list and transitions like these.

first	start by	to begin	before you start
second	continue with	afterward	when that is done
third	be sure to	next	next you should
last	finish by	finally	wrap up by