

Business Writing — Workbook

This workbook accompanies each module of Business Writing and contains hands-on exercises, structured worksheets, and action checklists to move your learning directly into your daily work. Complete each section as you finish the corresponding course module — the exercises are designed for real documents you are working on now, not hypothetical scenarios. The templates at the end are ready to open and use immediately.

Foundations of Professional Writing

Apply the three pre-writing questions, map your audience type, and rewrite a real document opening using BLUF structure.

Exercise: The Three-Question Pre-Write

Pick a professional email or document you wrote in the last two weeks. Answer the three questions below honestly before you revise it. Then compare your original opening sentence to the BLUF sentence you will write after completing this exercise.

- Who is the primary reader and what do they already know about this topic? (Name their role and their existing context in 1-2 sentences.)

- What is the single action or decision you want from them? (Write it as one specific sentence starting with a verb — approve, review, respond, attend.)

- What is the shortest path to that action? List the 2-3 pieces of information the reader absolutely needs and cross out everything else in your original draft.

Worksheet: Audience Mapping Worksheet

For your next significant document (memo, proposal, or report), identify every person who will read it and classify them by reader type. Use this to decide what to put in the body versus an appendix.
Document title or purpose

Reader 1 name / role

Reader 1 type (Decision-Maker / Implementer / Advisor / Auditor)

Reader 1 primary need from this document

Reader 2 name / role

Reader 2 type

Reader 2 primary need from this document

Reader 3 name / role

Reader 3 type

Reader 3 primary need from this document

Which section goes in the body (for Decision-Maker)?

Which sections go in appendices (for Implementers/Advisors)?

Checklist: BLUF Conversion Checklist

- I have identified one primary reader for this document
- My first sentence states the recommendation or decision — not the background
- My first paragraph contains the ask (what I need, from whom, by when)
- A reader who stops after paragraph one still has enough information to take the correct action
- I have moved all context and background to paragraph two or later
- I have removed any sentence that begins with 'In order to provide context...' or 'As background...' from the opening

Writing Effective Memos and Emails

Draft a one-page memo using the four-section structure, audit a real email for response-rate killers, and calibrate your tone to audience.

Exercise: Write a One-Page Memo from Scratch

Choose a real decision or approval you need from someone in your organisation in the next 30 days. Draft a memo using the four-section structure: Header, Purpose and Recommendation, Background and Analysis, Action and Timing. Keep it to one page. Time yourself — a well-structured memo should take under 20 minutes to draft once you know the BLUF structure.

- Write your subject line as a headline: state the recommendation AND the ask in one line (not just the topic).
- Write your Purpose and Recommendation section in exactly two sentences: sentence one is the recommendation and primary benefit; sentence two is the ask.
- List the three pieces of background context the reader needs that they do NOT already know. Cut anything else.
- Write your Action and Timing section: who needs to do what, and by what specific date?

Worksheet: Email Audit Worksheet

Choose three professional emails you sent in the past month that received no response or a delayed response. Complete the audit below for each one to diagnose the issue.

Email 1 subject line (original)

Email 1 — did the subject line communicate a recommendation or just a topic?

Email 1 — how many separate asks did it contain?

Email 1 — word count (approximate)

Email 1 — did it have an explicit deadline for the response?

Email 1 — rewritten subject line (make it a headline)

Email 2 subject line (original)

Email 2 — number of separate asks

Email 2 — rewritten subject line

Email 3 subject line (original)

Email 3 — number of separate asks

Email 3 — rewritten subject line

Common pattern observed across all three emails

Checklist: Plain-Language Self-Edit Checklist

- Every sentence in this document is 20 words or fewer on average
- I have replaced at least three passive-voice constructions with active voice
- I have replaced at least two noun-string phrases with a single verb (e.g., 'make a decision' !' 'decide')
- Every acronym is spelled out on first use
- I have removed all jargon that a smart outsider would not recognise
- I have run the Hemingway Editor or Word readability check and the grade level is 10 or below
- Each paragraph contains only one main idea
- I have deleted the last sentence of at least two paragraphs where it was a restatement of the first

Writing Winning Proposals

Build a complete proposal outline using PSEA, quantify the cost of inaction for a real business problem, and run the four-pass revision process on a draft proposal.

Exercise: Quantify the Cost of Inaction

Identify one business problem you are currently proposing to solve — or one you could propose to solve. Quantify what the problem costs if nothing changes. Work through the steps below. If you do not have precise data, use a conservative estimate with stated assumptions. The goal is a credible number, not a perfect one.

- State the problem in one sentence using observable, measurable terms (e.g., 'The manual invoice process takes X hours per week at a cost of \$Y per hour').
- Calculate the annual cost: multiply the per-instance cost by the frequency per year. Show your working.
- Add any secondary costs: error rate × cost per error, customer churn attributable to the problem, or delayed

revenue. State assumptions clearly.

- Write a single 'cost of inaction' sentence that will go in your proposal's Problem Statement section: 'If we do not act, this problem will cost the organisation approximately \$X per year in [specific cost category].'

Worksheet: PSEA Proposal Outline Worksheet

Use this worksheet to build the logical spine of a proposal before writing full prose. Complete each cell before drafting. If you cannot answer a cell, you have a gap in your argument that will weaken the proposal.

Proposal title / subject

Primary decision-maker (name and role)

Problem: what is the specific, observable problem? (1 sentence)

Problem: how is it quantified? (\$, %, hours, customers affected)

Problem: what is the cost of inaction per year?

Solution: what is the specific recommendation? (1 sentence)

Solution: what does it NOT include (scope boundary)?

Evidence #1: quantitative data point supporting the solution

Evidence #2: case study or comparable organisation

Evidence #3: logical mechanism — why will this solution work?

Top anticipated objection from finance (cost/ROI)

Pre-emptive rebuttal to finance objection

Top anticipated objection from operations (disruption/timing)

Pre-emptive rebuttal to operations objection

Ask: exact amount, named approver, and deadline

Checklist: Four-Pass Revision Checklist

- Logic pass complete: the problem justifies the solution and the ask is proportionate to the evidence
- Logic pass: the executive summary matches the body — same recommendation, same numbers
- Clarity pass: each paragraph has one and only one main idea
- Clarity pass: I have cut at least 20% of the original word count
- Language pass: active voice is used throughout the recommendations and action sections
- Language pass: all Latinate noun-strings have been replaced with verbs
- Proof pass: every number has been cross-checked against its source
- Proof pass: no placeholder text remains (TBD, INSERT, CHECK)
- All three anticipated objections have been addressed in the document body
- The executive summary stands alone as a complete one-page argument

Executive Summaries and Document Polish

Draft a one-page executive summary using SCQA, apply the five formatting non-negotiables, and complete the 10-point pre-send protocol on a real document.

Exercise: Write an Executive Summary Using SCQA

Take a report, proposal, or analysis you have already written (or are currently working on). Compress it into a one-page executive summary using the SCQA framework. Write each component in the order shown below, then combine them into a flowing single page. Target: 250–350 words total.

- Situation (2 sentences max): State the stable current reality that both you and the reader know to be true. Use specific numbers where possible.

- Complication (2 sentences max): What has changed, emerged, or been discovered that makes the situation no longer stable? This is the tension that creates urgency.

- Answer (3-4 sentences): State your recommendation clearly. Include the primary quantified benefit, the investment required, and the timeline. End with the specific ask.

- Read your SCQA aloud. Time it — it should take under 90 seconds. If it takes longer, cut the longest sentences first.

Worksheet: Document Formatting Audit

Open your most recently completed professional document and complete this formatting audit. Score each item Yes or No. A score below 7/10 means the document has formatting issues that may undermine its credibility.

Document name / type

Number of distinct heading levels used (target: 3 or fewer)

Is body text left-aligned? (Yes/No)

Is line spacing between 1.15 and 1.5? (Yes/No)

Is bold used sparingly (1 instance per paragraph max)? (Yes/No)

Are there any underlined words that are not hyperlinks? (Yes/No — flag if Yes)

Number of font families used (target: 1)

Are tables used for any comparison of 3+ options? (Yes/No — if no table, should there be?)

Does the footer include document title, date, and page number? (Yes/No)

Is the colour palette one accent colour + black + grey? (Yes/No)

Total formatting score (out of 10)

Top 2 formatting changes to make before next send

Checklist: Pre-Send Quality Control Protocol

- Subject line or title communicates the recommendation, not just the topic
- First paragraph contains the recommendation and the specific ask
- Every number in the executive summary matches the corresponding number in the body and appendices
- Every challenged claim has a cited source
- No placeholder text remains anywhere in the document
- The ask names a specific person, a specific amount or action, and a specific date
- All hyperlinks have been tested and open correctly
- Document version number and date appear in the footer
- The executive summary has been read aloud without stumbling
- A smart outsider could understand and act on this document without a briefing call

Your Action Plan

1. Before writing any document this week, answer the three pre-write questions (reader, action, shortest path) and write them at the top of your draft as a private header — delete before sending
2. Rewrite the subject line of your next five outgoing emails as headlines that communicate the recommendation and the ask, not just the topic
3. Draft one business memo using the four-section framework (Header, Purpose and Recommendation, Background and Analysis, Action and Timing) and keep it to one page
4. Apply the 30% cut rule to a document you have already sent — open it, set a word-count target of 70% of the original, and edit to hit it without losing essential meaning
5. Map the audience for your next proposal using the four reader types and plan which content goes in the body versus an appendix
6. Quantify the cost of inaction for one real business problem you are responsible for and write a one-sentence cost-of-inaction statement
7. Build a PSEA outline for your next proposal before writing any prose — fill every cell in the worksheet before opening a blank document
8. Write one executive summary using the SCQA framework; read it aloud and time it; cut until it takes under 90 seconds
9. Apply the 10-point pre-send checklist to every high-stakes document before it leaves your desk for the next 30 days
10. Identify one colleague whose business writing you respect and ask them to do a peer review swap — you review theirs using the four-pass method, they review yours

