


Practical English Writing Skills


A Complete Guide to Writing in English



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Introduction

Practical English Writing Skills is a guide to developing the writing skills we all need to function and succeed in our everyday lives—at home, on the job, and in school. Unlike any other writing text, this book addresses the simplest and yet most essential skills such as taking a message and writing a thank-you note, then builds to more advanced skills such as writing a résumé and making a bibliography. Along the way, each type of writing is discussed and explained in a straightforward, helpful way, treating the everyday tasks with as much respect as the more academic skills.

Practical English Writing Skills is for high school, junior college, and adult education limited English proficient students. It is also for English as a foreign language students planning to live/work/function in an English-speaking environment, and for the many native speakers of English who need help mastering a variety of basic writing skills. The format of the book also makes *Practical English Writing Skills* suitable for independent study: for students who want to improve their writing skills on their own without a formal language program.

This book covers all kinds of writing, from taking phone messages to writing term papers, and it provides the following for each type of writing:

1. A **Rationale** for doing this type of writing;
2. a list of the **Materials Needed**;
3. the **Skills Involved**;
4. **Important Vocabulary**;
5. an **Example** of the kind of writing to be practiced;
6. a step-by-step **Procedure** for doing the writing; and
7. a **Practice** activity: a real-life task that involves the kind of writing that's been discussed.

In addition, most of the lessons include an evaluation process to measure the success of the written practice.

Practical English Writing Skills is meant to be used as it best suits the user. Therefore, you can start at page one and follow through to the end; start in the middle and work backward and forward at will; or even start with the last chapter, if that's the one you need immediately. No matter where you begin, you will find that *Practical English Writing Skills* is not only a guide but also an easy reference book, much the same as your dictionary is. You can turn to this book anytime for information about whatever type of writing you need to do. The book was written with your needs in mind. Enjoy.

Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Introduction	v

<i>UNIT ONE: Notes and Messages</i>	1
-------------------------------------	---

CHAPTER 1: Leaving a Note	2
CHAPTER 2: Writing a Note	5
CHAPTER 3: Writing a Thank-You Note	11
CHAPTER 4: Taking a Message	18

<i>UNIT TWO: Letters</i>	25
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER 5: Requesting a College Application	26
CHAPTER 6: Writing a Cover Letter for a Résumé	37
CHAPTER 7: Requesting an Interview	46
CHAPTER 8: Writing a Letter of Complaint	56
CHAPTER 9: Ordering Tickets Through the Mail	64

<i>UNIT THREE: Applications and Résumés</i>	73
---	----

CHAPTER 10: Filling Out a College Application	74
CHAPTER 11: Filling Out a Job Application	97
CHAPTER 12: Writing a Résumé	104

<i>UNIT FOUR: Academics</i>	113
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 13: Making an Outline	114
CHAPTER 14: Writing an Autobiography	125
CHAPTER 15: Writing an Essay	131
CHAPTER 16: Writing a Book Report	138
CHAPTER 17: Taking Notes from a Lecture	145
CHAPTER 18: Taking Notes from a Reading	150
CHAPTER 19: Taking Notes from Multiple Sources	158
CHAPTER 20: Writing a Bibliography	178
CHAPTER 21: Writing a Term/Research Paper	186

<i>APPENDICES</i>	193
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APPENDIX A	194
APPENDIX B	195
APPENDIX C	196
APPENDIX D	203

UNIT ONE

NOTES AND MESSAGES



CHAPTER 1

Leaving a Note

There are many times we want to leave a note for someone. For example, if you're leaving home when everyone else is sleeping and you won't be back at your usual time, you might want to leave a note so no one will worry about you. If you want to remind someone to do you a favor or to call you later or to remember to meet you at a certain time, you can leave that person a note.



Rationale

At times, it is more considerate to leave a note for someone than to disturb that person; for example, you could leave someone a note if you want that person to remember

- > that you have an appointment together, or
- > that you won't be home for dinner, or
- > to pick up your clothes at the dry cleaners.

If you leave your message in writing, there's less chance the person will forget it—especially if that person is half asleep or busy with something else and not listening carefully. Another good time to leave a note is when you have a message for someone who isn't at home or isn't available to talk to you. When you leave a note, you can be sure that you have let the person know your message.



Materials Needed

paper, pen or pencil



Skills Involved

organizing thoughts; giving specific information; using correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations



Important Vocabulary

considerate thoughtful

disturb bother

do someone a favor help someone

note a short letter

organizing thoughts arranging information in a clear, logical order.

A note that says *Meet me at 3 P.M. Pick up my clothes at the dry cleaners. I'll be in front of the post office* is not as clear as *Meet me at 3 P.M. in front of the post office. Please pick up my clothes at the dry cleaners first.*

pick up get

remind tell someone to remember

specific information facts and details; *at 3 P.M. in front of the post office* is specific information



Examples

A.

Mom,
I won't be home until
4:30. I'm going to the
library after school
with Kim. Jean

B.

Jean,
I'll be at the office
until 5 P.M. The soup
is on the stove.
Please turn the burner
on low at 4:30. See
you later.

Mom

C.

Bill,
Please pick me up
in front of Brown's
Dept. Store on Main
St. at 4:45 P.M. I'll
be waiting outside.

Danya



Procedure

1. Use a piece of paper that is large enough to be seen.
2. Organize your thoughts and then write down your message.
3. Be sure your handwriting—including your signature—is easy to read, especially if there are times, addresses, or directions involved.
4. Put your note where it will be seen by the person you want to read it. If the note is for a family member, you might want to tape it to the refrigerator or on the bathroom mirror or next to the telephone.
5. Read your note again. Be sure your message is clear.



Practice

Now it's your turn.

TASK: to leave a note for someone

SITUATION: You leave the house before your brother is awake. You want him to pick you up at your friend's house at 6 P.M. Think about what he needs to know, and write a note to leave for him. *Be sure to give him specific information.*

Did you remember to give your brother this information:

- > your friend's name
- > your friend's address and telephone number
- > directions to your friend's house if he isn't familiar with the street?

If you forgot any of this important information, you may still be waiting to be picked up!

CHAPTER 2

Writing a Note

Most people don't realize how important notes are in our daily lives. Every day thousands of people write notes to thousands of others who read them, or try to. Sometimes note writers are in such a hurry that they forget to write so that others can understand their handwriting or their message. However, notes are just about the easiest thing to learn to write.



Rationale

Most of us write many, many notes in a lifetime. If you're in school now, for example, you might write a note to explain to your teacher why you didn't do a certain homework assignment if you're too nervous to just speak to the teacher. You might want to be excused from school early one day, and if you're eighteen or older you can write your own note explaining why. Another type of note might even be a short letter of apology to someone you're too shy to face in person, such as a friend you've been rude to. If you have children, you may want to make an appointment to see your child's teacher, or you may need to write an "excuse" for your child's absence or a note requesting that your child be excused from some activity on a particular day.



Materials Needed

unlined stationery, envelope, pen



Skills Involved

organizing thoughts; giving specific information; using correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations



Important Vocabulary

absence being away from someplace; for example, being away from school

apology saying you're sorry

closing a word or phrase used to end a letter. The closing is found just above the writer's signature and is always followed by a comma.

copy something that is exactly like something else; for example, if you want to have proof that you have written a certain note, you should make a copy of it to keep for yourself

excuse reason given for something; for example, many schools want a written excuse when a student returns from an absence

indented form a format for writing letters in which the first line of each paragraph is placed farther in from the margin than the salutation

margin the space that is left empty on the top, bottom, and sides of a page containing a note or other writing

modified block form a format for writing letters in which the margins are the same from the first line to the end. Nothing is indented. A blank space is left between paragraphs.

note a short letter

salutation the greeting in a letter, usually beginning with *Dear* followed by a person's name



Examples

A. Indented Form

right margin

The diagram shows a letter in indented form within a rectangular frame. Labels on the left side point to specific parts of the letter: 'top margin' points to the space above the date; 'salutation' points to 'Dear Mr. Garcia,'; 'left margin' points to the space between the salutation and the first line of the body text; 'closing' points to 'Sincerely,'; and 'bottom margin' points to the space below the signature. A label 'right margin' points to the space on the right side of the letter.

January, 11 19--

Dear Mr. Garcia,

Please excuse my daughter,
Connie Ballou, at 1:45 P.M.
today. We have an appointment
with Dr. Anne Ache at 2 P.M.
It was the only appointment
we could get. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Jane Ballou

B. Modified Block Form

top margin

March 15, 19—

Dear Marco,

salutation

I'm sorry I was so rude yesterday. I was nervous because of the big math test. When you asked to borrow my homework, I really got angry because I had worked so hard on it. Please call me later.

right margin

Your friend,

Ashok

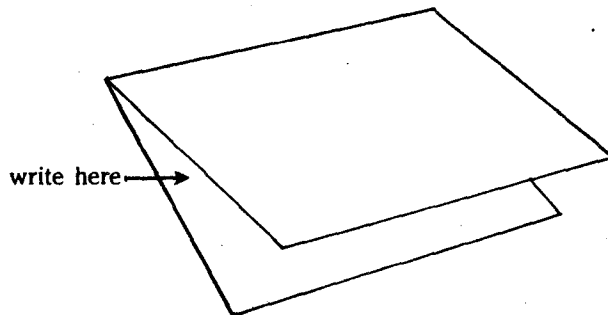
closing

bottom margin

left margin

► Procedure

1. Use a piece of unlined stationery. If your stationery is the fold-over kind, write on the inside.



2. Leave a margin on all four sides of the stationery.

3. Write the date in the upper right-hand corner.

June 9, 19—

4. Leave some space below the date. Then, starting at the left-hand margin, write *Dear* and the name of the person you're writing to. This is called the *salutation*. It is the greeting at the beginning of any note

or letter. The first letter of the first word and the names of any people in the salutation should be capitalized. Put a comma after the salutation.

Dear Mrs. Wang,

June 9, 19-

5. Below the salutation, begin your message. You can use modified block form or you can indent the first line.

Dear Mrs. Wang,

June 9, 19-

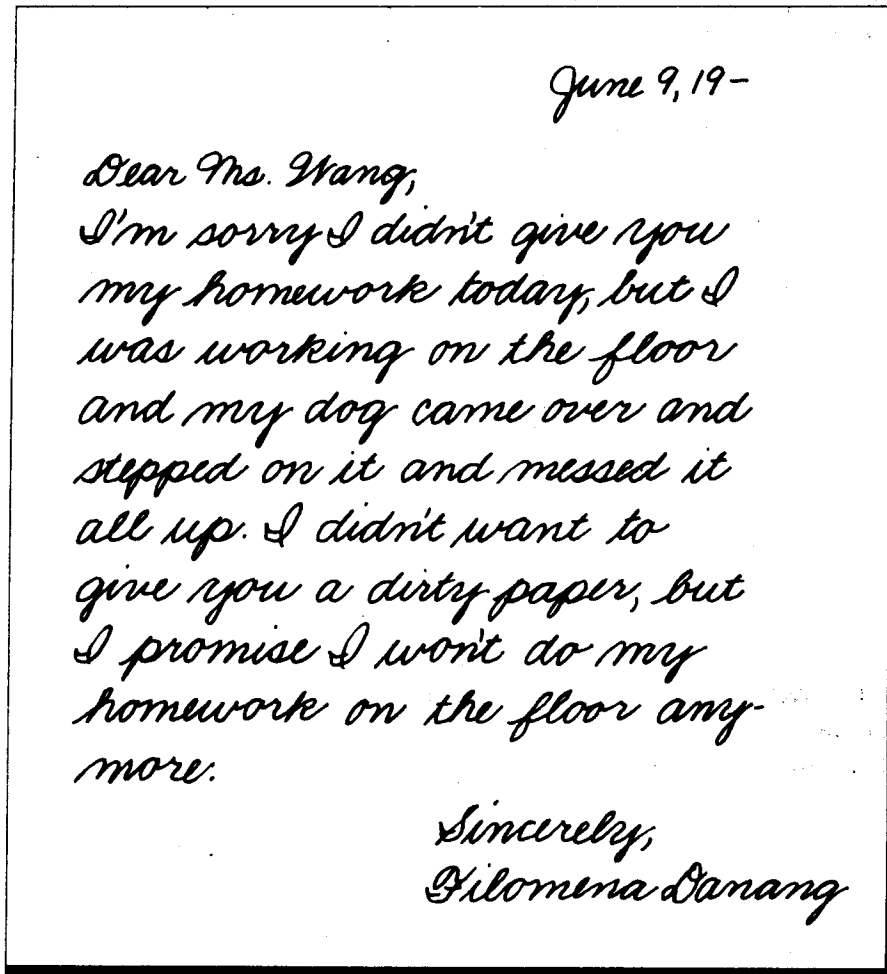
I'm sorry I didn't give you my homework today, but I was working on the floor and my dog came over and stepped on it and messed it all up. I didn't want to give you a dirty paper, but I promise I won't do my homework on the floor any more.

6. Under the message, on the right, end your note with a word or phrase that shows respect and how you feel. *Sincerely* is a good word to use because it says that you really mean what you say. This word or phrase is called the *closing*. The first word of the closing should be capitalized. Put a comma after the closing.

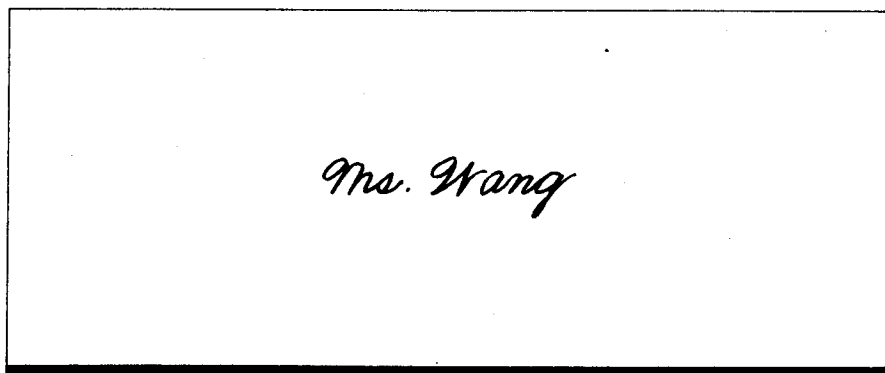
7. Sign your name below the closing. When you write to a teacher, it's a good idea to use your complete name.

Sincerely,
Gilomena Panang

The finished note should look something like this:



8. Put the note in an envelope and write the person's name in the middle of the envelope.

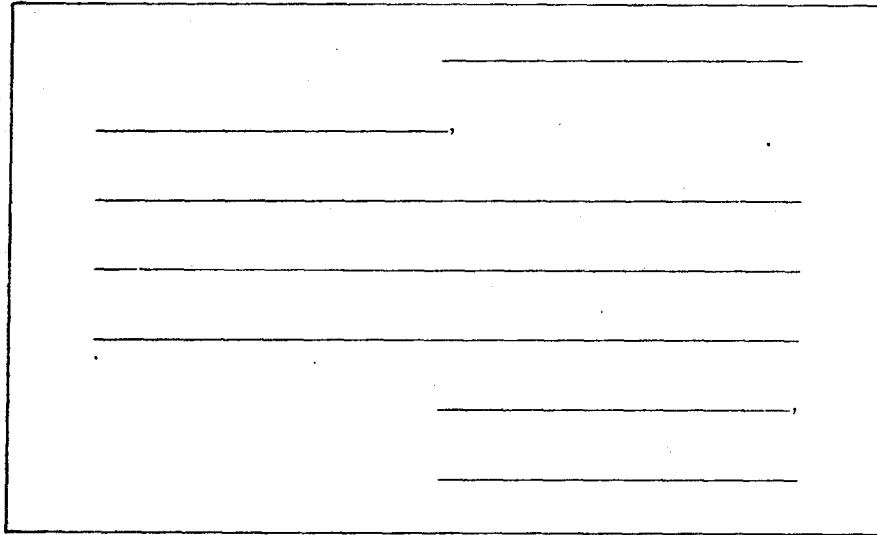


Practice

Now it's your turn.

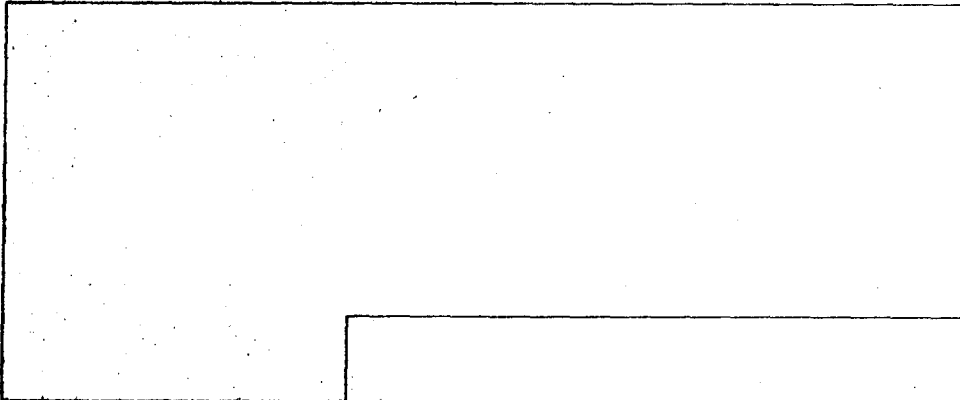
TASK: to write a note to someone

SITUATION: You want to leave school early tomorrow because you have to go take your driver's test. Write a note to the school principal, asking to be excused. Remember the form:

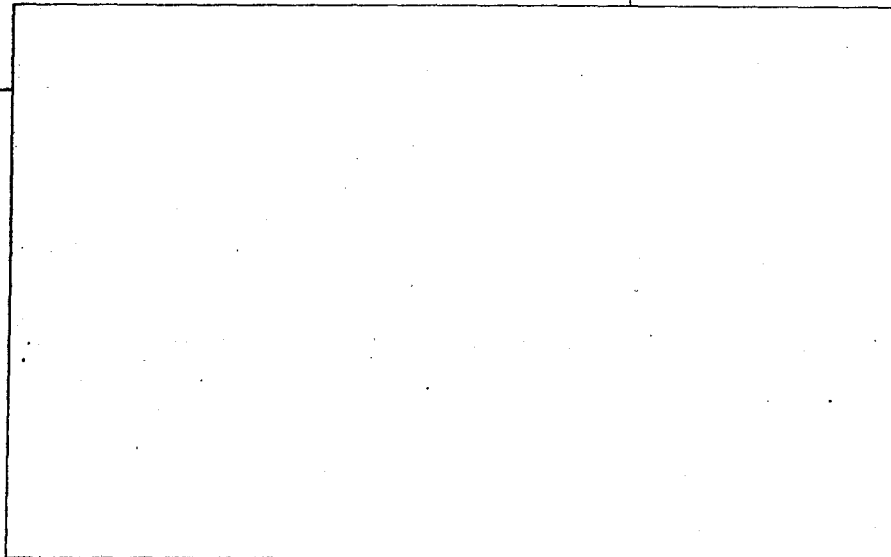


A rectangular box containing seven horizontal lines for writing a note. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across most of the width of the box.

Remember to write carefully so the other person can read your handwriting easily. After you finish writing, read your note again to make sure you haven't made any mistakes.



A rectangular box for writing a note, positioned to the left of a larger box below it.



A large rectangular box for writing a note, positioned to the right of a smaller box above it.

CHAPTER 3

Writing a Thank-You Note

We write thank-you notes for many reasons at different times in our lives. For example, you have just had a surprise birthday party. Guests brought gifts to your party, and out-of-town relatives sent gifts by mail. You thank people at the party, but you also want to write each one a note afterwards, naming the particular gift he or she gave you. Writing a thank-you note shows you appreciate the time, effort, and money spent by someone who brought or sent you a present. Of course, you could make phone calls or buy thank-you notes that say it already; but since someone thought enough of you to make or buy a gift for you, you want to show the same thoughtfulness.

Another time you might write a thank-you note is when someone has done something special for you. You want to show your appreciation, so you write a note thanking the person for being so kind.

Another occasion for writing thank-you notes might be when someone close to you has died. Friends visit you to help you in your time of sorrow. Later, you send notes thanking them for caring.



Rationale

Someone has taken the time, energy, and money to buy or make a gift for you or to show you in some nice way that you are special. To express your appreciation, you take the time and energy to thank the person with a short note, especially if (1) you received the person's gift by mail, (2) you received many gifts at the same time and you want to let the giver know you are aware of and appreciate his or her particular gift, or (3) the note is in response to a kindness or special favor.



Materials Needed

unlined stationery, matching envelope, postage stamp, pen, dictionary

to check spelling, correct name and complete address of gift giver, information about kind of gift received



Skills Involved

writing simple sentences; using correct punctuation, spelling, and capitalization; expressing thanks; showing gratitude by mentioning specific gift given and something special about it



Important Vocabulary

closing a word or phrase used to end a letter. The closing is found just above the writer's signature and is always followed by a comma.

come in handy be useful

grateful thankful, appreciative

indented form a format for writing letters in which the first line of each paragraph is placed farther in from the margin than the salutation

margin the space that is left empty on the top, bottom, and sides of a page containing a note or other writing

matching envelope an envelope that is the right size and color for the stationery you are using

modified block form a format for writing letters in which the margins are the same from the first line to the end. Nothing is indented. A blank space is left between paragraphs.

note a short letter

return address the name and address of the person sending a note or letter

salutation the greeting in a letter, usually beginning with *Dear* followed by a person's name



Examples

A. Modified Block Form

top margin		December 29, 19--	
salutation		Dear John,	
left margin		Thank you for the beautiful sweater. I really love the color.	
closing		Sincerely,	
bottom margin		Marsha	
			right margin