

The Irwin

*Business
Communication
Handbook*



Writing and Speaking in
Business Classes

Kitty O. Locker

THE IRWIN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

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March 15, 1993

Dear Student:

Writing and speaking help you learn the concepts in a class, think critically, write and speak articulately, and become an active learner. You'll learn more, and, as an added bonus, you'll polish the writing and speaking skills that are essential for success in business.

The Irwin Business Communication Handbook is designed to give you the tools to do your best work in the writing and speaking you do for business classes. It helps you learn how to

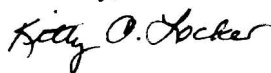
- Understand the assignment.
- Write clearly, forcefully, and correctly.
- Find sources and use them effectively in reports.
- Use visuals correctly and effectively.
- Give oral presentations.
- Work in groups to create collaborative documents and to prepare group presentations.
- Use your time effectively to get the best results in the shortest time.

In addition to using this book, take advantage of other services your community college, college, or university offers: a Writing Center, computer labs whose workers can show you how to use word processing and graphics programs, a center where you can videotape a speech or interview and play back your performance to see where you need to improve and what you already do well.

Good writing and speaking take practice. Like kicking a football or playing the violin, skilled performances in writing are based on hours of hard work. No one is "born" a writer; all of us can learn. This book can help you achieve your potential.

Writing and speaking are crucial skills for success on the job later as well as for success in college now. The time you put in will not only raise your grades but will also make you the effective communicator that every company wants.

Sincerely,



Kitty O. Locker

March 15, 1993

Dear Professor:

Writing and speaking are becoming an increasingly important part of many business classes.

Frequent writing and speaking assignments

- Help students learn the academic concepts covered in a course.
- Improve skills in critical thinking.
- Help students hone the writing and speaking skills demanded by business.
- Provide active rather than passive learning.
- Allow students to pursue topics of special interest within the framework of the course.

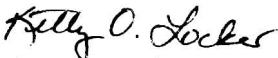
Sometimes, however, even faculty members who are committed to good writing wonder how they'll fit writing and speaking assignments into courses that are already packed. Further, business faculty may be unsure how best to teach writing and speaking skills.

Students may come to business courses with only one course in first-year composition. While this course builds confidence and provides a basic introduction to academic discourse, it may have focused on different genres or styles than business classes prefer. Many students' writing skills are rusty. Most of them need extra help to do well on their writing and speaking assignments for business classes.

The Irwin Business Communication Handbook is designed to provide the help students need to do their best work. It provides basic information about understanding assignments, the writing process, style, and (in two appendices) grammar and inclusive language. It focuses on topics that are important in business classes but not often covered in first-year composition courses: document design, group work, researching and writing reports, designing visuals, and giving oral presentations.

Encourage your students to use the *Handbook* as they prepare papers and presentations for your classes. They'll do better work, and you'll get the satisfaction of knowing that your students are building the skills they'll need for success in the twenty-first century.

Sincerely,


Kitty O. Locker

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Chapter 1

Understanding the Assignment

Short in-class writing assignments are designed to get you thinking, to allow the professor to see what you do and don't know, and to lead into class discussions. Out-of-class writing assignments allow you to show what you've learned, to integrate what you've learned with other ideas, and to develop a specific topic in depth. Presentations invite you to share information with the whole class.

When you get an assignment, pay attention to the verbs that describe what you're asked to do, to the genre or format you're asked to prepare, and to the purposes and audiences of the assignment.

What the Verb Asks You to Do

The verbs in the assignment specify various intellectual activities.

Analyze. Discuss the causes, effects, or implications logically and in detail. Draw on class notes and readings for the principles for your analysis.

Classify or Categorize. Group the items, stores, or policies logically. The principle of classification should help the reader understand the items in question. If class lectures or discussion suggest categories, be sure to mention them and explain why you are developing different ones.

Compare and Contrast. Identify the similarities and differences.

Define. Give the dictionary definition (from class notes or from your readings). Support the definition with an example if possible.

Discuss. When this verb stands alone, it often means to summarize, evaluate, and react to a statement. When you are asked to discuss something specific (for example, "Discuss the four elements of marketing strategy"), name each of its aspects (here, each of the four elements) and analyze each of them.

Give Examples. Name specific events or business decisions to illustrate your point. For example, after explaining what it means to position a product, you might use baking soda as an example of a product which was repositioned from a baking supply to a cleaning and freshening agent. Examples can come from class lecture and discussion, from your textbook, and from your own reading.

Explain. Discuss in detail the reasons, results, or implications. Explanations often ask you to draw on principles or theories from class notes and your textbook, even if you are applying them to a case or a topic you have researched.

Evaluate. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of an article or argument. Identify your criteria for evaluation and support each judgment logically. Use information and theories from other readings as they are relevant. Criteria for evaluation may come from class lectures, discussions, and readings.

Summarize. Give the main points. If you are summarizing an article or a chapter, give its thesis or main point and the major arguments used by the author to prove the thesis.

Typical Academic Genres

The label or **genre** of an assignment sometimes suggests its format and content.

Abstract. Summarize an article. A summary abstract gives the thesis, the main points proving the thesis, and, in a long article, the major points proving each main point. A descriptive abstract lists the topics the article covers and indicates the depth of the coverage.

Give the full bibliographic information for the article at the top of the page. (See Chapter 6 for APA, MLA, and *Chicago Manual of Style* formats.) Some abstracts have very tight word limits; abstracts for class may be more flexible. If an abstract is very short (100 words), present it in a single paragraph. Longer abstracts should be divided logically into several paragraphs. Put the thesis in the first paragraph and devote one paragraph to each of the main points that proves the thesis. If the article is well organized, your abstract will present the proof in the same order that it is presented in the article.

Many academic journals print abstracts of articles. (See Chapter 6 for a list of some of the sources that print abstracts of articles in business periodicals.) If your instructor names a specific journal, read several of its abstracts to get a sense for length and style.

Book Report. Summarize the content of a book and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, using a knowledge of the topic from class notes, the textbook, and other readings.

Many journals print book reviews. If your instructor names a specific newspaper or journal, read several of its reviews to get a sense for the kinds of topics its reviewers discuss.

The tone of your book report depends in part on the purposes of the assignment. Oral

reports may be designed to expand the class' knowledge, so it is appropriate to spend most of your time summarizing what the book says in order to educate the class. In written reviews to be read only by the instructor, evaluation may be more important.

Case Analysis. Summarize the facts in the case and identify the issues, using concepts from class notes and readings. Complex cases have no simple right answer, since there are so many factors and possibilities. Identify the problems involved and the options available, and show which option you think is most likely to succeed. Defend your choice by using ideas from class lectures, discussions, and the textbook.

Essay. This genre is the most flexible in length and structure. Normally it has a title at the top of the page and is presented in paragraphs. Headings can make your document visually attractive; see chapter 7 for examples of headings.

Academic essays typically prove a thesis or main point, which is usually stated in the first or second paragraph. An overview paragraph early in the essay identifies the topics you will discuss in the order in which you will discuss them.

Letter or Memo. Address your document to a specific reader. Letters go to readers in other organizations; memos go to readers in your own organization. Both documents are single-spaced. A standard format for letters is **block format**, outlined in Figure 1.1. Figure 1.2 presents a standard format for memos. Headings are optional in both letters and memos.

Organize a letter or memo by putting the main point first unless you must persuade a reluctant reader or give bad news.


Letters and memos to real readers should be straightforward and friendly. For example, you may write a letter to a business client or a memo to team members about your progress on a group project. Think about what your readers need to know; write from their point of view.

Some instructors also assign letters or memos as more creative ways for you to explore a topic. For example, students at Washington University have been asked to write a letter "to the uncle who is financing your college education" explaining why accountants have more than one "value" for an item. This assignment requires that students explain and give examples of different concepts of value, just as they might in an essay. But creative students would also add a first and last paragraph and details designed to appeal to the imaginary reader, telling him about football or basketball scores, mentioning his investments or business, and referring to an upcoming visit.

Figure 1.1 A Format for Letters

State University

4300 Gateway Boulevard
Midland, TX 78603



August 10, 1991

Ms. Stephanie Voght
Stephen F. Austin High School
1200 Southwest Blvd.
San Antonio, TX 78214

Dear Ms. Voght: ← colon in mixed punctuation

Enclosed are 100 brochures about State College to distribute to your students. The brochures describe the academic programs and financial aid available. When you need additional brochures, just let me know.

Stephanie Voght

campus life, including football and basketball games, fraternities and sororities, clubs and organizations, and opportunities for volunteer work. The tape stresses the diversity of the student body and the very different lifestyles that are available at State.

Scheduling the Videotape

To schedule your free showing, just fill out the enclosed card with your first, second, and third choices for dates, and return it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. Dates are reserved in the order that requests arrive. Send in your request early to increase the chances of getting the date you want.

"Life at State College" will be on its way to give your high school students a preview of the college experience.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Mahler
Director of Admissions

Encl.: Brochures, Reservation Form

cc: R. J. Holland, School Superintendent
Jose Lavilla, President, PTS Association

2

August 10, 1991

August 10, 1991

cc: R. J. Holland, School Superintendent
Jose Lavilla, President, PTS Association

1" - 1 1/2"

1-2 Spaces

5/8" - 1"

1/2" - 1"

Center

Plain paper for second page

Triple space before each new heading

Same margins as page 1.

3-4 Spaces

Headings are optional in letters

Figure 1.2 A Format for Memos

Everything lined up at left

Double space

¶ I never has a heading 1"-1 1/2"

Double space between paragraphs

↕ 1/2"-1"

February 18, 1992

↕ 2-4 spaces

To: Dorothy N. Blasingham

From: Roger L. Trout R.L.T. Writer's initials added in ink

Subject: Request for Third-Quarter Computer Training Sessions Capitalize first letter of all major words in subject line

↕ Triple space

Could you please run advanced training sessions on using Lotus 1-2-3 and WordPerfect in April and May and basic training sessions for new hires in June? ↔ 5/8"-1"

Triple space before heading

Advanced Sessions on Lotus 1-2-3 ← Bold or Underline

Once the tax season is over, Jose Cisneros wants to have his first- and second-year people take your advanced course on Lotus 1-2-3. Plan on about 45-50 people in three sessions. The people in the course already use Lotus 1-2-3 for basic spreadsheets but need to learn the fine points of macros and charting.

If possible, it would be most convenient to have the sessions run for four afternoons rather than for two full days.

Same margins as page 1

Reader's name Page number Plain paper for page 2

Dorothy N. Blasingham 2 February 18, 1988

Also OK to line up page number, date below reader's name

↔ before the summer vacation season begins.

Orientation for New Hires Capitalize first letter of major words in heading

With a total of 16 full-time and 34 part-time people being hired either for summer or permanent work, we'll need at least two and perhaps three orientation sessions. We'd like to hold these the first, second, and third weeks in June. By May 1, we should know how many people will be in each training session.

Would you be free to conduct training sessions on how to use our computers on June 8, June 15, and June 22? If we need only two dates, we'll use June 8 and June 15, but please block off the 22nd too in case we need a third session.

Triple space before heading

Request for Confirmation

Let me know whether you're free on these dates in June, and which dates you'd prefer for the sessions on Lotus 1-2-3 and WordPerfect. If you'll let me know by February 25, we can get information out to participants in plenty of time for the sessions.

Thanks!

Memos are initialed by To/From/subject block Headings are optional in memos

Report. Reports are flexible, ranging from a single page to hundreds of pages. Reports can use letter or memo format; they can also use report format. In report format, you double- or single-space text, using headings for each main section. Figure 7.3 in Chapter 7 shows how to set up headings in reports.

A **research paper** presents the results of your own library or original research. Chapter 6 discusses strategies for finding information in print and online and explains how to use and document sources. If you're doing library research, organize previous work in a way that is useful to the reader. Rather than presenting the work chronologically, look for themes and topics. Which research have others built on? Which strands have died out? Which theories are now generally accepted? If you're presenting results of a survey, interview, or experiment, divide your report into Purpose, Procedures or Methods, Results, and Discussion.

A **short report** typically is addressed to someone in an organization and is divided by headings. It may use letter or memo format.

A **formal report** has a title page and a table of contents. The body may contain the following components:

- Introduction (Orients the reader to the report. Usually has subheadings for Purpose and Scope; depending on the situation, may also have Limitations, Assumptions, Methods, Criteria, and Definitions.)
- Background/History of the Problem (Orients the reader to the topic of the report. Serves as a record for later readers of the report.)
- Body (Presents and interprets data in words and visuals. Analyzes causes of the problem and evaluates possible solutions. Specific headings will depend on the topic of the report.)
- Conclusions (Summarizes main points of report.)
- Recommendations (Recommends actions to solve the problem. May be combined with Conclusions; may be put at beginning of body rather than at the end.)
- Notes or Works Cited (Gives documentation for sources cited in the report.)

Summary-Response. In the first half, summarize the article or chapter. In the second, tell how you personally respond to the article or chapter and evaluate it. What points do you identify with? Which do you question?

Understanding Purpose and Audience

Even assignments that seem very specific force you to create your own purposes and to analyze your audience.

In making the assignment, the instructor expects you to demonstrate your knowledge of the principles and theories of the course as well as your writing ability. But you need a more

specific purpose to create a good paper or presentation. What are you trying to prove? What one thing do you want your audience to know? A good paper or presentation has a main point that can be expressed in a single sentence. The more specific your purpose is, the better the paper or presentation is likely to be.

- Weak:** The purpose of this paper is to discuss Exxon's response after the Valdez spill.
- Better:** The purpose of this paper is to argue that violations of five business communication principles made Exxon's response to the Valdez spill ineffective.

When your audience is your instructor, he or she probably expects you to use the terminology and concepts you are learning in the course. Simply regurgitating material from lectures and readings is unlikely to be enough: show that you understand the material and can apply it. Incorporate related material from other business classes and examples from current business events. (Keep up with business by reading *The Wall Street Journal* and a good business magazine such as *Business Week*, *Forbes*, or *Fortune*.) Instructors are busy people. The clearer and more well written your paper is, the more your instructor will enjoy reading it.

When your audience includes business people, avoid academic terminology. Make your recommendations clear; prove your points. Use lists and headings to allow this busy audience to skim a document; use visuals to make your points dramatically in a presentation. (See Chapters 8 and 9 for discussions of visuals and presentations, respectively.)

When your audience is your classmates, use what you know about their knowledge and interests to decide what information to include and how to present it.

Chapter 2

Using Your Time Effectively

To get the best results from the time you spend, spend only a third of your time actually "writing." Spend at least one-third of your time planning your approach, gathering information, and organizing what you have to say. Spend another third of your time evaluating what you've said, revising the draft to better achieve your purposes and meet all the parts of the assignment, editing your draft to correct any errors in grammar or mechanics, and proofreading the typed copy.

The Ways Good Writers Write

No single writing process works for all writers all of the time. However, good writers seem to use different processes than poor writers.¹ Good writers are more likely to

- Realize that the first draft will not be perfect.
- Write regularly.
- Modify the initial task if it's too hard or too easy.
- Have clear goals focusing on purpose and audience (rather than goals focusing on how long the assignment "has to be").
- Have several different strategies to choose from.
- Use rules flexibly. If a rule is making it hard to write, abandon it--at least for this draft.
- Wait to edit until after the draft is complete. Too-early editing cuts off the flow of ideas.

Brainstorming, Planning, and Organizing Business Documents

Sometimes you'll find it easy to think of ideas. If ideas won't come, try the following techniques.

- Try **brainstorming**. Think of all the ideas you can, without judging them. Consciously try to get at least a dozen different ideas before you stop. Brainstorming helps writers

get over the tendency to be overcritical or to develop a mental block after they've thought of one idea or approach. The first idea you have may not be the best.

- Try **freewriting**.² Make yourself write, without stopping, for 10 minutes or so, even if you must write "I will think of something soon." At the end of 10 minutes, read what you've written, identify the best point in the draft, then set it aside, and write for another 10 uninterrupted minutes. Read this draft, marking anything that's good and should be kept, and then write again for another 10 minutes. By the third session, you will probably produce several sections that are worth keeping--maybe even a complete draft that's ready to be revised.
- Try **clustering**.³ Write your topic in the middle of the page and circle it. Write down the ideas the topic suggests, circling them, too. Drawing circles may help to unlock the nonlinear part of your brain, increasing your creativity. When you've filled the page, look for patterns or repeated ideas. Then use these ideas to develop questions for a survey or content for the body of a report. Figure 2.1 presents the clusters that one writer created about business communication in the United States and France.

Thinking about the content, layout, or structure of your document can also give you ideas. Jot down ideas which you can use as the basis for a draft. For an oral presentation or a document with lots of visuals, try creating a **storyboard**, with a rectangle representing each page or unit. Draw a box with a rough visual for each main point. Below the box, write a short caption or label.

Choosing an organizational pattern can also help you write efficiently. You can use a pattern for a whole document or for a paragraph or two in a larger document. The following patterns are useful for essay exams and reports:

Comparison/contrast

Identify the similarities and differences between two or more options.

Cause-effect

Identify the cause of a problem and its effect. Or start with the effect (the current problem) and identify the causes.

Classification

Divide your data into categories. The categories might be geographic in an essay on the countries in the Common Market, functional in a report on different ways to invest capital in foreign markets, spatial in a report on the best way to arrange goods in a grocery store.

Chronological

Start at the beginning and tell what happened.