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WRITTEN COMMUNICATION TIP SHEET

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This tool provides practical tips to help you improve your **writing** skills. Review each of the tips below and practice the ones that are the most relevant to your learning needs.

General tips

- Determine why you are writing before you start (e.g. to inform, to persuade or to explain).
- Write down a list of ideas (i.e., brainstorm) before you begin to write.
- Keep your writing short and to the point by setting a length or word limit.
- Write neatly so that others can read your writing.
- When writing numbers, spell-out the numbers from zero to nine, and use digits for numbers that are higher than nine (e.g. 15).
- Use words that are simple and easy to understand.
- Avoid using too many punctuation marks (e.g. exclamation points).
- Use a comma to indicate a break, a pause, or to separate ideas within a sentence (e.g.: Workers at the mine site live, work, sleep and eat in close quarters with their co-workers).
- Use a dictionary or spell-checker to verify the correct spelling of words.
- Proofread your writing several times to make sure that there are no grammar or spelling errors.
- Use formatting techniques to draw attention to important information (e.g. bold, underline, and/or italicize text where appropriate).
- Use headings to organize your writing into key sections.
- Avoid using the same word too often. Use a thesaurus to help you identify alternate words that have similar meanings.
- Only introduce one main idea in each paragraph.
- If you use someone else's words or ideas, make sure to reference the original author or source.
- Review your work to make sure that important information is not missing.
- Read your work out loud and listen for anything that sounds awkward or unclear.
- Ask a colleague, friend or family member to proofread your work and to provide feedback.

Simplifying wordy expressions

Many of the expressions we use every day should be avoided when writing. These wordy expressions often distract the reader. If a word or phrase does not add meaning to your writing, delete it or replace it with a simple term. This table will help you simplify commonly used wordy expressions.

Simplifying wordy expressions

| Wordy expressions | Simple terms |
|---|---|
| a large number of... | many |
| small number of... | a few |
| during the time that... | while |
| at all times... | always |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in view of the fact that... for the simple reason that... due to the fact that... | because |
| on a daily basis... | daily |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> at this point in time... at the present moment... | now |
| on one occasion... | once |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the event that... should it appear that... | if |
| in many cases... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> frequently often |
| it is probable that... | probably |
| despite the fact that... | although |
| under the provisions of... | under |
| in addition to... | also |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in order to... for the purpose of... as a means of... | to |
| in the near future... | soon |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by means of... on the part of... | by |
| in the meantime... | meanwhile |

Higher level tips

- Use a strong opening statement (two or three lines) to get your reader's attention.
- State the most important information first.

- Create an outline before you start to write; only list key points.
- Prepare a table of contents for long documents.
- Use the active voice to keep your writing simple and direct. Focus on the **person** or **thing** (e.g. use “Sylvain wrote the report” rather than “The report was written by Sylvain”).
- Give examples when information is complex or when you want to reinforce a point.
- Keep the use of technical terms to a minimum. If they must be used, make sure to explain them so that they are easily understood by the reader.
- Avoid unnecessary words and delete wordy phrases. **Tip:** Refer to the Simplifying wordy expressions section.
- Avoid using two words that have the same meaning in one sentence (e.g. close proximity; absolutely essential). Use one or the other.
- Try to use words that do not specify a gender (e.g. use “firefighter” instead of “fireman”).
- Use a colon [:] to introduce lists (e.g. the committee now includes the following people: the director, the administrative assistant, the analyst, and the student).
- Use a semicolon [;] to separate a complex series of items (e.g. there were employees from Ottawa, Ontario; Calgary, Alberta; and Montreal, Quebec at the conference).
- Use transition words to combine sentences with similar ideas or content (e.g. the weather forecast says it will be hot today; however, I am going to wear a sweater). **Tip:** Refer to the Writing practice and learning exercises for a list of transition words.
- Tailor your writing to your audience (e.g. use professional language when communicating with a client).
- Review your writing and anticipate questions your reader may have. Incorporate the answers into your writing.

Writing practice and learning exercises

Develop your **writing** skills by completing the following exercises. Use the Writing Tip Sheet to help you as you work through the exercises. A learning plan template is also included to help guide your skills development.

General practice exercises

1. Logical flow

When writing, ideas must be presented in a logical flow to be clear to the reader. For example, when telling a story your ideas should be written in the order that they took place.

The following sentences are in the **wrong** order:

- They walked back home together for lunch.

- She ran into her friend, Tim.
- Sabrina and Tim watched the birds and the frogs.
- Sabrina went for a walk in the forest.

Use the space provided below to re-order the sentences so that the story follows a **logical** flow.

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-
-
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Answers: 1) Sabrina went for a walk in the forest. 2) She ran into her friend, Tim. 3) Sabrina and Tim watched the birds and the frogs. 4) They walked back home together for lunch.

2. Transition words

Transition words connect ideas. The table below lists examples of words that can be used to connect ideas within a single sentence, or to connect two separate sentences.

| Transition words | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Purpose: To indicate a cause or reason | Purpose: To indicate an example | Purpose: To compare |
| because | for example | although |
| due to | specifically | however |
| since | in particular | whereas |
| as | for instance | similarly |

Practice using transition words to connect ideas by filling in the blanks with the appropriate word(s):

- a) Tania arrives at work every morning at 8:00 sharp; _____, she did not arrive until 8:20 this morning. Her car would not start _____ the temperature dropped to -25 degrees Celsius last night.
- b) _____ the recent increase in demand for potatoes, farmers took special care of this year's potato crop. _____, some farmers covered their potato plants with a clear film to protect them against the autumn frost, _____ others planted Yukon Gold potatoes, known to be one of the hardiest potato varieties in North America.

Suggested Answers: 1) however; 2) because; 3) Due to; 4) For example; 5) whereas.

Higher level practice exercises

- Memorandum
- To:
- From:
- Date:
- Subject:
- [Salutation]
- [First Paragraph]
- [Second Paragraph]
- [Closure]
- [Signature]

1. Writing memos

Practice writing effective memos using the following guidelines. A sample layout has been provided to demonstrate the basic format requirements of a standard memo. **Tip:** Memos can be written using a word processor or in email format.

- Keep your memo brief and to the point (1 or 2 pages).
- Make sure that relevant information is in the heading, including the names of the recipient(s) and sender(s), the date, and the subject of the memo.
- Use the subject line to clearly state what the memo is about. The subject line should be brief to grab the reader's attention.
- Send the memo only to those who need to read it.
- Do not include sensitive information that is more suitable for a face-to-face discussion.
- Specify the purpose of the memo in the opening sentence of the first paragraph.
- Provide background and supporting information if required. Include longer pieces as attachments.
- List key points using bullets or numbers.
- State recommendations for further action in the second paragraph.
- Finish the memo by stating any actions you want the reader to take.

2. Effective writing

Use this step-by-step process to practice your writing skills:

1. **Prepare:** Identify the purpose of your writing and answer the following questions: What am I writing? What is my main objective? What do I want to achieve? Who is my audience?

2. **Getting started:** Brainstorm. Use your creativity to generate ideas for what you are writing about.
3. **Research:** Gather information from various sources to ensure that you have a good understanding of your subject before you begin writing.
4. **Plan:** Create an outline to help organize and structure your writing.
5. **Write:** Write a first draft focusing on your main message. Concentrate on writing down all of your ideas. Include supporting details or interesting facts in your writing.
6. **Edit:** Review your work. Check to make sure that your writing is clear, organized, well-structured, and that you have used the appropriate language, tone and style. Check for grammar and spelling mistakes. Make any necessary revisions.
7. **Get feedback:** Ask a friend or a colleague to look over your revised work and provide feedback.
8. **Write a final draft:** Complete a final version, incorporating any necessary changes noted in the feedback provided and any additional changes you may have. Read over your work to ensure that there are no mistakes.

Additional learning exercises

- Find a writing mentor – someone who has strong writing skills and who would be willing to work with you on improving your writing skills. A mentor can be a colleague, a friend or a family member.
- Ask your mentor to review your work and identify areas that are unclear, sentences that could have been structured better, or ideas that need to be more fully explained. Make revisions based on their feedback.
- Use a dictionary to find five words that are unfamiliar to you. Read the dictionary definitions for each word, and then write a story that incorporates all five words.
- Review writing samples or templates that are found in your workplace (e.g. memos, letters, newsletters) and/or in your community (e.g. information bulletins, event calendars, local newspaper articles).
- Make note of the style (e.g. factual vs. informative) and tone (e.g. serious vs. light-hearted) used to structure your writing accordingly.

My learning plan

Complete this worksheet to help guide your skills development. Set a target date to reach your goals and use this date to track your progress.

My learning goal is to improve my **writing** skills by:

-
- (insert date)

Tips or practice exercises I can use to improve my **writing** skills include:

-
-

Additional resources (e.g. books, courses, workshops, co-workers and/or supervisors, etc.) to help improve my **writingskills** include:

-
-

Additional learning activities (e.g. job shadowing, new work responsibilities, volunteering in my community, etc.) to help improve my **writing** skills include:

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Examples that show I have improved my **writing** skills include:

End of Module

EduVantage wishes every aspirant the very best in harnessing this important skill of written communication.

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