

# Contents

*Preface* ix

## **Introduction** 1

### **01 Why are you writing?** 3

Who are your readers? 3  
What's the purpose of your writing? 4  
Readers take just a few seconds to judge your writing 6  
How formal or informal do you need to be? 7  
Your checklist for action 8

### **02 Business writing for today** 9

Winning business through English 9  
Academic writing compared with writing for business 9  
Can you use 'I' when you write in business? 10  
Listen to readers' feedback 12  
Choosing the right style 15  
Ideal communication 17  
The Word Power Skills system: four easy steps  
to success 18  
Your checklist for action 20

### **03 Quality matters** 23

Shine through your writing! 23  
To make mistakes is only human? 23  
How readers can react to written mistakes 24  
Further costs of getting your writing wrong 27  
You can never fully outsource your writing 30

- Checking for mistakes 30
- Proofreading tips 31
- Your checklist for action 31

## **04 Telling your story through social media 33**

- There's a new type of business writing 33
- Get into the social media mindset 34
- More about social media 34
- What are the key objectives? 37
- Some major platforms out there 40
- How do companies shine through their social media interaction? 41
- Writing that creates trust can create a community 42
- The long and the short of it: past, present and future 44
- Further writing tips for key channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn 46
- What excites people so much they want to share it? 52
- Call people to action – and check it's worked 53
- Telling your story 55
- Your checklist for action 57

## **05 Defining business English 59**

- 'Standard' and 'variant' English 59
- Writing for both native and non-native English speakers 61
- Some surprising problems with English for global business 62
- Define business English within your company 64
- Your checklist for action 64

## **06 Writing English for global business 67**

- Looking at how you use English at work 67
- Writing problems faced by non-native English writers 69

- Problems with non-native English writing for native English speakers 71
- Problems posed for native and non-native English writers alike 72
- Business writing as communication 76
- English continues to evolve 78
- Non-native English writers can have an advantage! 79
- Your checklist for action 80

## **07 E-mail and instant messaging 83**

- General 83
- The rise and rise of e-mail 84
- E-mail scenarios to watch out for 84
- Multi-lingual and other e-mail threads 85
- Structure your e-mails 89
- Designing how you write e-mails 90
- Instant messaging and texting 93
- Your checklist for action 97

## **08 Punctuation and grammar tips 99**

- Why punctuation and grammar matter 99
- Punctuation and other marks 100
- Parts of speech and other grammar 101
- Paragraphs 106
- Verbs and tenses 106
- Agreement of subject and verb 109
- Comparison 111
- Fluidity in writing 113
- Your checklist for action 113

## **09 Writing tips for everyday business 115**

- Writing a date 115
- Time 118

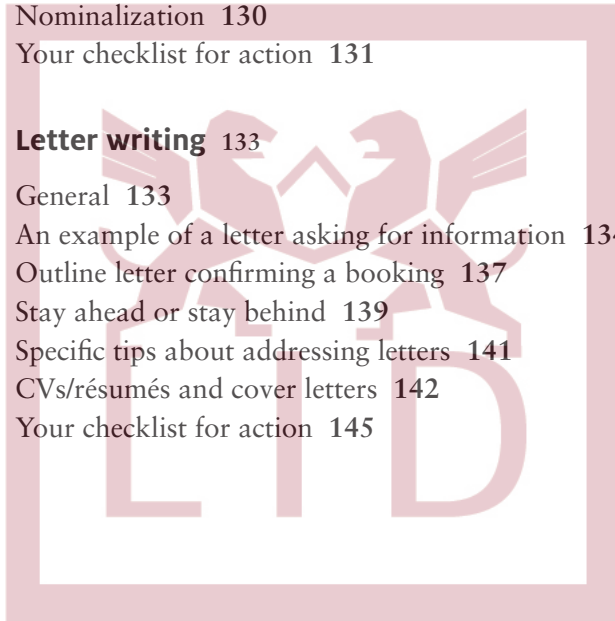
Numbers 120  
Measurements 121  
Your checklist for action 122

## **10 Common confusions and how to avoid them 123**

Common confusions for both NE and non-NE  
writers 123  
Acronyms 127  
Active and passive 129  
Nominalization 130  
Your checklist for action 131

## **11 Letter writing 133**

General 133  
An example of a letter asking for information 134  
Outline letter confirming a booking 137  
Stay ahead or stay behind 139  
Specific tips about addressing letters 141  
CVs/résumés and cover letters 142  
Your checklist for action 145



# Preface

*Don't just be enthusiastic in #socialmedia. It's passion, not management speak, that engages readers throughout all your corporate communications.* **FIONA TALBOT**

## Who is this book for?

---

If you are in business (or are preparing to enter the workplace) and you grasp the inescapable fact that the written word takes centre stage in business communication today, then this is the ideal business English primer for you. Its extensive task-based guidance provides a toolkit for developing the highly prized workplace skills that bosses need.

Increasingly, English is the language of choice in the information age, widely used on the web and in multinational gatherings. It may not be the predominant language of the group, but is the most likely to be understood by the majority – at least at a basic level – so becomes a powerful tool for communication and inclusion. In the age of social media, the English language has commercial global currency. It can give the power to reach out not just to English-speaking home markets but internationally too.

So this book is aimed equally at native and non-native English speakers (who are proficient to intermediate level and above). Whichever you are, you will uncover valuable tips on how to get your business English writing right on every level.

## Be effective by writing content of value

---

Effective writing is no longer just about traditional reports, presentations, letters and so on. Today, writing skills matter more than ever: in e-mail, instant messaging, infographics and social media – even in the fast-growing medium of video storytelling where meaningful captions and calls to action are key.

Today's need is for content of value. And content means every word you use in every business writing task you do. Everything should add up to make great corporate communication.

Bosses need people who can write well, grab attention for the right reasons, influence, persuade, reflect brand and values and enhance reputation... all in the shortest time.

And if you are a start-up operating from home, you too can have the same potential global reach as the large corporate. The rules of engagement involve writing to impress, sell messages, values, products or services, and create a following and brand reputation based on trust. These principles are the same for all.

### How does the book work?

---

The book will work for anyone who is a native English speaker or proficient in English to intermediate level and above.

It teaches my four-step Word Power Skills writing system which is now used worldwide. It's about:

- identifying the right messages at planning stage, communicating these clearly and interestingly so that people understand you – and want to read on;
- being professional and getting the results you and your readers need.

The book describes scenarios every office encounters and gives practical advice on how to write successfully. The real-life examples make great discussion points with bosses and colleagues – and you will be able to customize the tips for your every writing task.

The beauty of the system is that it works across traditional and emerging new channels.

## **You may have to unlearn some things you learnt at school**

---

Writing English for business today is unlikely to be the same as the writing you were taught at school or university. Apart from getting your punctuation and grammar right, the similarities often end there. With countries the world over facing a shortage of people with key communication skills, employers cry out for people who can impress, sell messages, values and brand, consistently and professionally.

## **Get results!**

---

Just take a look at my methods, focus on the elements that apply to your business writing and make sure they become an intrinsic part of your real-life performance.

Enjoy using word power as a free resource – indeed my clients find they buzz with it! Enjoy too the benefits of immediate results and sustainable improvements.

Good luck on your journey to success!

Fiona Talbot  
TQI Word Power Skills

# Introduction

**T**his book is an essential guide to keep with you, by your desk or on your travels. It provides a wealth of answers to help you impress and shine through effective business English writing for the modern workplace.

Look on it as your introduction to being the best! By the time you reach the end, you will be more confident and more competent in writing English.

As well as dealing with traditional writing, this book shows how writing for social media has turned the world of business writing inside out. It actually needs a whole new mind-set and an integrated approach to work.

This 'new kid on the block' relies on the written word – and is vying for centre stage. It's also making us reassess all corporate communication in its light. Responsive businesses will grasp the need to welcome its ascendancy; the complacent will fail to give it the attention it deserves. The only constant now is communicating professionally and credibly at all times – and the writing system you are shown throughout the book works across all tasks and every medium.

You will be developing a key transferable skill that employers welcome and that can open doors for your career, since English is the global business language of today.



# Chapter One

## Why are you writing?

### Who are your readers?

---

Throughout this book I use the terms readers, target readership, customers and audience interchangeably. A ‘customer’ can be a person who buys goods or services from a business, or can be a person you deal with in the course of your daily work. The term applies just as much to internal colleagues, suppliers, those in the public sector etc as it does to those who are external consumers.

### ***Your audience can be anyone and everyone***

Where you know your target audience’s profile, you have an immediate advantage. The digital age is all about customizing products and services to suit the individual customer. It works for communication too. By what means does your target readership like to receive messages? Are you able to match their needs and cultural expectations and engage their interest because you know their profile? It’s great news if you can.

But there’s something new happening as well. The potential global reach of your e-writing (which includes social media) is really exciting. The business that operates from home can have as loud a voice as the large corporate. Your messages may (perhaps unexpectedly) be forwarded on by others, even go viral. So every business message, personalized or not, had better be professional! Nothing should be open to misinterpretation or cause offence, even unintentionally.

Many practical examples and scenarios in this book relate to sales or customer pitches. Because we're all consumers in our private lives, we can relate to and understand these examples. What I would like to stress is that the concepts apply equally to every scenario in the list that follows. Think of lobbying; think of politics; think of charities; think of fundraising; think of promotions.

## What's the purpose of your writing?

---

People sometimes think of business writing as a 'soft' skill as opposed to the 'hard' skills of finance, law, IT etc. But I think this description is misleading. The label 'soft' can give the impression that business writing is an easy skill, which it certainly is not. Business writing can impact on the whole business cycle; it can win business, it can lose business and it can communicate the framework by which results can be achieved.

This is why, at the outset of my training workshops, I always take time to ask people why they actually write in their job and what outcomes they seek, individually and as teams. I ask clients to write down why they need to write in their businesses, and the following aspects of business writing always come top of the list:

- to inform or record;
- to cascade information;
- for compliance;
- to seek information;
- to write specifications;
- to achieve a standard;
- to write reports with recommendations;
- to persuade;
- to promote services.

Usually far lower on the list (and sometimes only when prompted by me, on the lines of ‘Aren’t there any other reasons?’), they record such things as:

- to engage interest and involve;
- to get the right results;
- to sell;
- to support customers;
- to improve life for customers;
- to create a following;
- to influence;
- to change things/innovate/disrupt;
- to enhance brand and reputation;
- to show our personality;
- to reflect our values;
- to eat, breathe and live our vision.

Notice how the most inspirational aspects of writing are the ones that are listed as an afterthought!

Why is this? Maybe companies need to focus more on how powerful business writing can be and how their employees need to think creatively about how best to harness this virtually free resource. Think about what writing really means for your company and which aspects of your business it covers.

**Activity:** Each time you write, first ask yourself:

- 1 Why am I writing?
- 2 What are my/my company’s values and objectives?
- 3 Do I have a definite or outline profile for my target audience?

- 4 What are their values and needs?
- 5 How will I align my message(s)?
- 6 What style, vocabulary (and medium, where you have a choice) are likely to suit them best?
- 7 How can I project my company's 'personality' and create an opportunity to shine myself?

Your writing simply won't work if you don't first plan what you need to achieve!

## Readers take just a few seconds to judge your writing

---

The written word is unforgiving. When I read, I judge what I see written for what it is. If I am looking for products or services, what I see can be what I think I get. If it is your writing, I will judge both you as an individual and your company on the basis of how you expressed yourself at that point in time. That's how important writing is.

It's commercial folly that many written messages lead to confusion and misunderstanding – even when a company is writing in its native language. Poor writing can also lead to customer complaints. At the least, this complicates relations with customers – even if we manage to convert a complaint to a positive experience.

The worst scenarios are where customers walk away from the companies concerned, and tell others about the bad experience they have received or think they have received. That's the impact that ineffective writing can have. It becomes quite clear that if, as customers, we do not understand or like what supplier A is writing, we prefer to buy from supplier B, who cares enough about our needs to get the message right. And if this takes less time, so much the better.

## ***No body language signals in writing***

When we communicate face to face, people around us attach importance to the signals given by our body language. These are said to account for 55 per cent of the impact we make when giving a talk. Our voice can account for perhaps 38 per cent – and our words just 7 per cent.

This is because, in face-to-face communication, unlike writing, we don't need to focus just on words. We can ask if we are not sure what is being said. We can look for clues from the speaker's facial expression or tone as to the gravity or levity of the subject matter. These will help our understanding and focus our attention (or not!).

But with writing now taking centre stage in today's workplace (think e-mail, instant messaging, social media), it's the words that are crucial. Unless the writer is there in front of you, time will elapse before you get answers to any questions you have. That is, if you have the time or inclination to ask questions. At the very least, it means that writers need to think twice, spellcheck – in fact, double-check – that their words are saying what they mean them to say.

## **How formal or informal do you need to be?**

---

Business writing is in a state of flux. One thing you will notice is that business writing in English is becoming increasingly diverse in style. Different styles may even coexist within the same company. It can be bewildering for reader and writer alike as I will show throughout the book. Generally speaking, the move in business English writing is not only towards more 'people' words, but also towards more informality, largely thanks to social media.

This can be a special challenge for some cultures. Asian cultures, for example, place great emphasis on hierarchy, where

people of senior grades are treated with noticeably more deference and respect than those in junior grades. Informality can also be a challenge for nationalities where there is a distinction between a familiar and a formal form of the pronoun 'you'. Even Western cultures can do this; for example, French makes a distinction between *tu* (informal) and *vous* (formal). Such cultures can try to compensate for this lack of distinction by writing more elaborately for what they see as the 'formal you' as opposed to the 'informal you'. This doesn't necessarily work.

## Your checklist for action

---

- Recognize writing as a fundamental skill for you as an individual and for your business.
- Develop and improve your writing at every opportunity to impress, influence, and boost your career.
- Remember that English business writing – in its many forms – is your most common route to market. Be the best.