



# Write Well? But Why Should We Bother?

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*Do you ever wonder whether it is worth the time and effort to write effectively? Why bother? After all, it IS more work to write well than to dash something off and be done with it.*

*In this article, I answer the question “Why bother?” I’m hoping the answer validates your writing efforts and gives you encouragement for the good fight—or the “good write.”*

*I’ve also included ideas for improving business writing—your own and your team’s.*

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**At the end of a recent writing class, a participant raised an important issue.** She described a team meeting in which everyone sat around a conference table and for an hour pulled the necessary information out of a research paper one of them had written. “No one complained,” she said. “We all sat there and did the work.”

**She wondered whether it makes sense to take the time to write well,** when people on her team seem perfectly willing—time after time—to struggle through a document to find what they need. She asked, “Should I really do anything different?”

**Why bother writing well?** To answer that question, we need only read a few sample performance statements found in the Mission and Goals of our organizations:

1. We strive for positive results.
2. We use best practices to complete our jobs effectively.
3. We create opportunities to increase value for our stakeholders.
4. We are aligned with company strategies and goals.
5. We engage in continuous learning, seeking opportunities to increase our skills and knowledge.

**Writing badly is the antithesis—the exact opposite—of the behaviors described.** When we allow ourselves and our team members to write badly, we are not striving for positive results—we are contributing to mediocrity.

**We close our eyes to best practices and complete our jobs inefficiently** when we allow ourselves and our coworkers to write badly. We stifle opportunities to increase stakeholder value, and we undermine company goals and strategies.

**We ignore our own skill development** when we allow ourselves to write badly, and we slow down our coworkers’ learning.

**Good writing is worth the bother.** It’s worth it not only to support excellent performance in our organizations. It’s worth it to support our own professional development. When we write well, we can contribute clearly and confidently in our current and future positions.

**To improve your writing if it isn’t as good as it could be, try these suggestions:**

- **Study a good book on business writing;** then try its methods. For a list of excellent



books, visit the Recommended Books page on our web site, [www.syntaxtraining.com](http://www.syntaxtraining.com).

- **Ask your readers or your supervisor for specific feedback** after you have tried new techniques. For example, ask, “Was it easier to compare the quarterly data in this new table? Or would you prefer it in the paragraph format I have used in the past?”
- **Pay attention when your documents get the response you seek**—and when they don’t. When they don’t, think of what you might have done differently in the document to help your reader respond positively.
- **Focus on your reader.** Before writing anything, think about what you want your reader to do, and what he or she requires from you in order to do it. When you write, be sure to answer your reader’s questions.
- **Talk with the experts in written communication** in your company. Ask them for examples of effective writing to use as models.
- **Save well-written documents you receive.** Note what makes them easy to read and respond to, and use them as models. Also, use your own well-written documents as inspiration.
- **Practice. Volunteer to write** meeting minutes, announcements, and procedures, or draft an article for the company newsletter. Ask respected writers for suggestions on your drafts.

#### To improve your team’s writing, try these:

- **Collect and circulate examples of excellent writing** from team members. Include notes about why the writing is effective or how it helps you do your job efficiently.
- **Thank team members** for their well-written documents. Let them know that their good writing saves you time and effort.

- **Let writers know which parts of their documents are most important**, and offer suggestions for highlighting that information if it is being buried.
- **Suggest that the team create and implement writing standards.** Sample standards: “We highlight action items so they are easy to find. We define acronyms or spell them out the first time we use them.”
- **Brainstorm lists of “Needs” and “Pet Peeves” in a team meeting.** To the Needs list, add the items that readers in the department need in order to respond efficiently to a document; for example, a clear subject and a deadline. Pet peeves are things that drive people crazy: run-on sentences, misspellings, and unorganized documents.

Gain agreement on which Needs and Pet Peeves are important to the team, and create writing guidelines from them.

Let’s borrow a quote from the beloved character Winnie the Pooh, who time and again said, “Oh bother!” When it comes to business writing, “Oh bother! *Please* bother to write well.”

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The mission of Syntax Training is to help employees and managers write better. Syntax Training courses provide participants with tools, tips, strategies, skill practice, feedback, and job aids to help them write better, guaranteed. The company is located in Seattle, Washington, USA.

For more information, visit <http://www.syntaxtraining.com>

For more tips on business writing, visit Lynn’s blog: <http://www.businesswritingblog.com>

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