

CHARACTERISTICS OF JOB-RELATED WRITING

Job-related writing characteristically serves six basic functions: (1) to provide practical information, (2) to give facts rather than impressions, (3) to supply visuals to clarify and condense information, (4) to give accurate measurements, (5) to state responsibilities precisely, and (6) to persuade and offer recommendations. These six functions tell you what kind of writing you will produce after you successfully answer the *who*, *why*, *what*, and *how*.

1. Providing Practical Information

On-the-job writing requires a practical “here’s what you need to do or to know” approach. One such practical approach is **action oriented**. You instruct the reader to do something—assemble a ceiling fan, test for bacteria, perform an audit, or create a website. Another practical approach of job-related writing is **knowledge oriented**. You explain what you want the reader to understand—why a procedure was changed, what caused a problem or solved it, how much progress was made on a job site, or why a new piece of equipment should be purchased.

The following description of the Energy Efficiency Ratio combines both the action-oriented and knowledge-oriented approaches of practical writing.

Whether you are buying window air-conditioning units or a central air-conditioning system, consider the performance factors and efficiency of the various units on the market. Before you buy, determine the Energy Efficiency Ratio (EER) of the units under consideration. The EER is found by dividing the BTUs (units of heat) that the unit removes from the area to be cooled by the watts (amount of electricity) the unit consumes. The result is usually a number between 5 and 12. The higher the number, the more efficiently the unit will use electricity.⁴

2. Giving Facts, Not Impressions

Occupational writing records what can be seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled. The writer uses **concrete language** and specific details. The emphasis is on facts rather than on the writer’s feelings or guesses.

⁴Source: New Orleans Public Services, Inc.

The discussion below, addressed to a group of scientists about the sources of oil spills and their impact on the environment, is an example of writing with objectivity. It describes events and causes without anger or tears. Imagine how much emotion would have been packed into a paragraph by the residents of the coastal states who have watched massive spills come ashore.

The most critical impact results from the escapement of oil into the ecosystem, both crude oil and refined fuel oils, the latter coming from sources such as marine traffic. Major oil spills occur as a result of accidents such as blowout, pipeline breakage, etc. Technological advances coupled with stringent regulations [can] reduce the chances of such major spills; however, there is [still] a chronic low-level discharge of oil associated with normal drilling and production operations. Waste oils discharged through the river systems and practices associated with tanker transports dump more significant quantities of oils into the ocean, compared to what is introduced by the offshore oil industry. All of this contributes to the chronic low-level discharge of oil into world oceans. The long-range cumulative effect of these discharges is possibly the most significant threat to the ecosystem.³

3. Supplying Visuals to Clarify and Condense Information

Visuals are indispensable partners of words in conveying information to your readers. On-the-job writing makes frequent use of visuals—such as tables, charts, photographs, infographs, flow charts, diagrams, and drawings—to clarify and condense information. Thanks to various software packages, you can easily create and insert visuals into your writing. Visuals are discussed in detail in Chapters 10 and 11, and PowerPoint and Prezi presentations are covered in Chapter 16.

Visuals play an important role in the workplace. Note how the photograph in Figure 1.6 can help employees to better understand and follow the accompanying written ergonomics guidelines. A visual like this, reproduced in an employee handbook or displayed on a website, can significantly reduce physical stress and increase a worker's productivity.

The following graphic devices in your letters, reports, and websites can also make your writing easier to read and follow:

- headings, such as “Four Keys to Effective Writing” or “Characteristics of Job-Related Writing”
- subheadings to divide major sections into parts, such as “Providing Practical Information” or “Giving Facts, Not Impressions”
- numbers within a paragraph, or even a line, such as (1) this, (2) this, and (3) also this
- different types of spacing
- CAPITALIZATION (use sparingly only when necessary)
- italics (easily made by a word processing command or indicated in typed copy by underscoring)
- boldface (darker print for emphasis)
- symbols (visual markers such as →)
- **hypertext** (Internet links, often presented underscored, in boldface, or in a different color)


³Source: The Offshore Ecology Investigation.

FIGURE 1.6 Use of a Visual to Convey Information

Using Your Computer Safely

By following the bulleted guidelines below, illustrated in the photo to the right, you can avoid workplace injuries when you are at your computer.

- To reduce the possibility of eye damage, make sure you stay 18 to 24 inches from the computer screen and always make sure your work area is well lit.
- To minimize neck strain, position your computer screen so that the top of the screen is at or just below your eye level.
- To avoid back and shoulder strain, sit up straight at a right angle in your chair with your shoulders relaxed and your lower back firmly supported (with a cushion, if necessary).
- To lessen leg and back strain, adjust your chair height so that your upper body and your legs form a 90-degree angle and that your feet are flat on the floor or on a footrest.



Courtesy of ErgoConcepts, LLC
© Deangelo Learning

- asterisks (*) to separate items or to note key information
- lists with bullets (like those before each entry in this list)

Keep in mind that graphic devices should be used carefully and in moderation, not to decorate a letter or report. When used properly, they can help you to

- organize, arrange, and emphasize your ideas
- make your work easier to read and to recall
- preview and summarize your ideas, for example, through boldface headings
- list related items to help readers distinguish, follow, compare, and recall them—as this bulleted list does

4. Giving Accurate Measurements

Much of your work will depend on measurements—acres, bytes, calories, kilometers, centimeters, degrees, dollars and cents, grams, percentages, pounds, square feet, and so on. Numbers are clear and convincing. However, you must be sensitive to which units of measurement you use when writing to international readers. Not every culture computes in dollars or records temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit.

The following discussion of mixing colored cement for a basement floor would be useless to readers if it did not supply accurate quantities:

Including permanent color in a basement floor is a good selling point. One way of doing this is by incorporating commercially pure mineral pigments in a topping mixture placed

to a 1-inch depth over a normal base slab. The topping mix should range in volume between 1 part portland cement, 1¼ parts sand, and 1¼ parts gravel or crushed stone and 1 part portland cement, 2 parts sand, and 2 parts gravel or crushed stone. Maximum size gravel or crushed stone should be ¾ inch.

Mix cement and pigment before aggregate and water are added and be very thorough to secure uniform dispersion and the full color value of the pigment. The proportion varies from 5 to 10 percent of pigment by weight of cement, depending on the shade desired. If carbon black is used as a pigment to obtain grays or black, a proportion of from ½ to 1 percent will be adequate. Manufacturers' instructions should be followed closely; care in cleanliness, placing, and finishing are also essential. Colored topping mixes are available from some suppliers of ready mixed concrete.⁶

5. Stating Responsibilities Precisely

Your job-related writing should make it absolutely clear what you expect from, or can do for, a specific audience. Misunderstandings waste time, cost money, and can result in injuries. Directions on online order forms, for example, should indicate how and where information is to be listed and how it is to be routed and acted on. The following directions show readers how to perform different tasks:

- Enter agency code numbers in the message box.
- Items 1 through 16 of this form should be completed by the injured employee (or by someone acting on his or her behalf), whenever an injury is sustained on the job. The term *injury* includes occupational disease caused by the employment. The form should be given to the employee's official superior within one week following the injury. The official superior is that individual having responsible supervision over the employee.

Other kinds of job-related writing deal with the writer's responsibilities rather than the reader's, for example, "Tomorrow I will meet with the district sales manager to discuss (1) July's sales, (2) the opportunities of expanding our market, and (3) next fall's production schedule. I will send a PDF of our presentation by August 3."

6. Persuading and Offering Recommendations

Persuasion is a crucial part of writing on the job. In fact, it is one of the most valuable skills you need in the business world. Persuasion means trying to convince your reader(s) to accept your ideas, approve your recommendations, or order your products. Convincing your reader to accept your interpretation or ideas is at the heart of the world of work, whether you are writing to someone outside or inside your company.

Writing Persuasively to Clients and Customers

Much of your writing in the business world will promote your company's image by persuading customers and clients (a) to buy a product or service, (b) to adopt a plan of action endorsed by your employer, or (c) to support a particular cause or campaign that affects a community. You will have to convince readers that you (and your company)—your products, technologies, and services—can save them time and money,

⁶Source: *Concrete Construction Magazine*, World of Concrete Center, 426 S. Westgate, Addison, IL 60101.

increase efficiency, reduce risks, or improve their image and that you can do this better than your competitors can. Communicating effectively through social media sites, for example, can help a company persuade customers about a new product or policy.

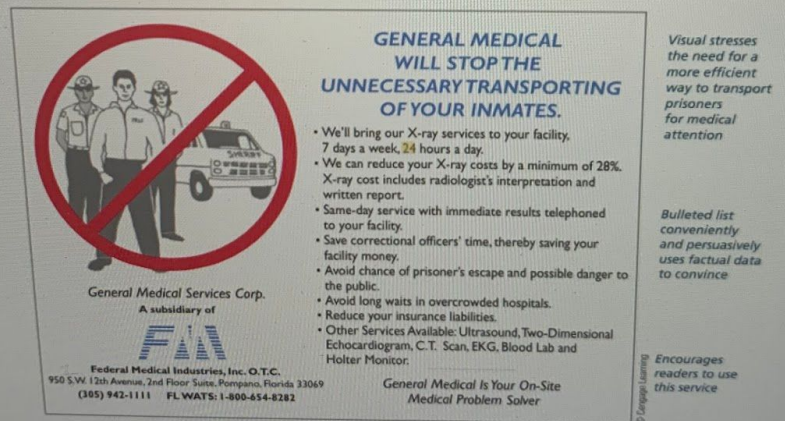
Expect also to be called on to write convincingly about your company's image, as in the case of product recalls (see Figure 4.11, page 143), customer complaints (see Figure 4.12, page 146), or damage control after a corporate mistake affecting the environment. You may also have to convince international customers that your company respects cultural diversity and upholds specific ethnic values.

A large part of being a persuasive writer is supporting your claims with evidence. You will have to conduct research; provide logical arguments; supply appropriate facts, examples, and statistics; and identify the most relevant information for your particular audience(s). Notice how the advertisement in Figure 1.7 offers a bulleted list of persuasive reasons—based on cost, time, efficiency, safety, and convenience—to convince corrections officials that they should use General Medical's services rather than those of a hospital or clinic.

Writing Persuasively to In-House Personnel

As much as 70 percent of your writing may be directed to individuals you work with and for. In fact, your very first job-related writing will likely be a persuasive resume and letter to land an interview with a potential employer.

FIGURE 1.7 An Advertisement Employing Persuasive Arguments to Convince Potential Customers to Use a Service



**GENERAL MEDICAL
WILL STOP THE
UNNECESSARY TRANSPORTING
OF YOUR INMATES.**

- We'll bring our X-ray services to your facility, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.
- We can reduce your X-ray costs by a minimum of 28%. X-ray cost includes radiologist's interpretation and written reports.
- Same-day service with immediate results telephoned to your facility.
- Save correctional officers' time, thereby saving your facility money.
- Avoid chance of prisoner's escape and possible danger to the public.
- Avoid long waits in overcrowded hospitals.
- Reduce your insurance liabilities.
- Other Services Available: Ultrasound, Two-Dimensional Echocardiogram, C.T. Scan, EKG, Blood Lab and Holter Monitor.

General Medical Services Corp.
A subsidiary of
FA
Federal Medical Industries, Inc. O.T.C.
950 S.W. 12th Avenue, 2nd Floor Suite, Pompano, Florida 33069
(305) 942-1111 FL WATS: 1-800-654-8282

General Medical Is Your On-Site
Medical Problem Solver

Visual stresses the need for a more efficient way to transport prisoners for medical attention

Bulleted list conveniently and persuasively uses factual data to convince

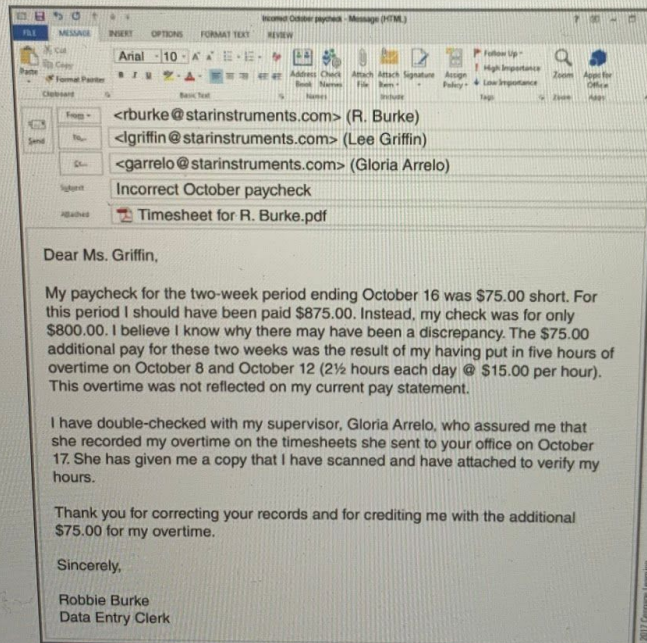
Encourages readers to use this service

On the job, you may have to persuade a manager to buy a new technology or lobby for a change in your office or department. To be successful, you will have to evaluate various products or options by studying, analyzing, and deciding on the most relevant one(s) for your boss. Your reader will expect you to offer clear-cut, logical, and convincing reasons for your choice, backed up with persuasive facts.

As part of your job, too, you will be asked to write convincing memos, emails, letters, blogs, and websites to boost employee morale, encourage them to be more productive, and compliment them on a job well done.

Figure 1.8 is a persuasive email from an employee to a manager reporting a payroll mistake and persuading the reader to correct it. The email contains many of the other characteristics of job-related writing we have discussed. Note how the

FIGURE 1.8 A Persuasive Email from an Employee to a Business Manager



writer provides factual, not subjective, information; attaches a PDF of his timesheet (a type of visual); gives accurate details; and identifies her own and her immediate supervisor's responsibilities. The writer's tone is suitably polite yet direct.

ETHICAL WRITING IN THE WORKPLACE

One of your most important job responsibilities is to ensure that your writing and behavior are ethical. Writing ethically means choosing language that is right and fair, honest, and complete in all the documents you prepare for your employer, co-workers, customers, and vendors. Your reputation and character plus your employer's corporate image will depend on your following an ethical course of action. It takes a long time to build trust, and only a second to destroy it.

Many of the most significant phrases in the world of business reflect an ethical commitment to honesty and fairness: *accountability, public trust, equal opportunity employer, core values, global citizenship, good-faith effort, truth in lending, fair play, honest advertising, full disclosure, high professional standards, fair trade, community involvement, and corporate responsibility.*

Unethical business dealings, conversely, are stigmatized in *cover-ups, dodges, stonewalling, shady deals, spin-doctoring, foul play, bid rigging, employee raiding, misrepresentations, kickbacks, hostile takeovers, planned obsolescence, insider trading, price rigging, and unfair advantage.* Those are the activities that make customers angry and that local, state, and federal agencies may investigate.

Employers Insist on and Monitor Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior is crucial to your success in the workplace. Your employer will insist that you are honest, adhere to professional standards, show integrity, and exhibit loyalty in your relationships with clients, co-workers, supervisors, and vendors. You will be expected to know, honor, and comply with your company policies and procedures, as outlined in the employee or agency handbook (see "Writing Procedures for Policies and Regulations," pages 510–513), and you will also have to follow your profession's codes, regulations, and methods.

On the job, employers can legally monitor their employees' work—electronically, through cameras, or by personal visits. Some of these visits are not announced (such as the "secret shoppers" who report on the customer service they receive). How many times have you made a call to an organization and heard, "This call may be monitored for quality assurance"? According to a survey conducted by the American Management Association, monitoring employees has risen 45 percent in the past few years and extends to their voicemail, email, social media, and other Internet uses.

Employers monitor the behavior of their employees for several reasons:

- to determine if a worker is doing his or her job properly
- to identify employee wrongdoing
- to make sure all calls are returned, emails answered, and information provided promptly and accurately