



# How to Be a Business Writing MVP

*Your Playbook to Better Writing*

By Cathy Miller

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## About Cathy Miller

I help businesses create their unique message and deliver it simply and clearly. I am a freelance business writer with over 30 years of professional writing experience from small businesses to Fortune 500 customers.

I started my own business in 2008, right in the middle of one of the worst economic times. I'd like to think I saw the handwriting on the wall (pardon the pun) and was ahead of the curve. My business provides all forms of online and print business writing, with specialties in white papers, case studies and ghostwriting services. As a licensed insurance agent, I have an added specialty in health care, corporate wellness programs, employee benefits and insurance. You can find samples of my work at the [Portfolio](#) tab at Simply stated business.

I created a business writing blog at [Simply stated business](#) and a health care blog at [Simply stated health care](#). I would love to have you drop by my blogs and share your view.

## About This eBook

This started out as a white paper and grew. I would say it is more an eBooklet than an eBook. Maybe when it grows up it will reach eBook status.

Much of the material began as blog posts at my business writing site. I pulled together tools for perfecting your business writing. If you are not a sports fan (at least not a basketball fan), I apologize for the sports-themed analogy. Just bounce the references you don't like.

I would love to hear from you about other topics you are interested in. You can reach me at [cathy@millercathy.com](mailto:cathy@millercathy.com).



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# Introduction

Each year, there is a selection of a Most Valuable Player (MVP) for the National Basketball Association (NBA). And every year, sports enthusiasts debate the criteria and the selection. While many of the winners appear blessed with natural talent, no MVP wins the award without a lot of hard work.

The same traits that make a basketball player an MVP help you succeed in business. This eBook explores those traits and applies them to a very basic business need – business writing.

If the topic makes you groan, this eBook's for you. If you already love business writing, are you game for another fan's perspective? After reading this eBook, if you still hate the thought of business writing, at least you will know what to look for when hiring someone to do the writing for you.

In 2004, a survey of 120 major American corporations, conducted by the National Commission on Writing, estimated firms spent \$3.1 billion on employee deficiencies in business writing.<sup>1</sup> Startling, isn't it? That was 2004. Don't you wonder what that figure looks like today?

The emergence of social media underscores the need for effective business writing. Businesses stake their reputation on business writing that has the potential of going viral overnight – not always for the right reason. The stakes are high. Does your business writing measure up?

This eBook helps you get in the business writing game to –

***Keep it simple, clear & uniquely yours***

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<sup>1</sup> "Writing and School Reform: Including the Neglected R," Report of the National Commission on Writing, May 2006

## Section 1: Your Passion for the Game

Peel away the layers of great business writing and you find passion. It's that energy-boosting force that drives your business – at least we hope it is.

### Is Your Business a Passion?

Think back to when you were little and your whole world centered on a single passion. At the time, you were sure you would die if you could not have that one special toy or be on the team with your best buddy. Whatever the passion, it made you happy.

Maybe that's what we are looking for when we talk about passion – the chance to recapture that feeling.

Now, think about why you started your business or accepted your current job position. Are you passionate about what you do? Were you before, but you're not now? Has your passion changed?

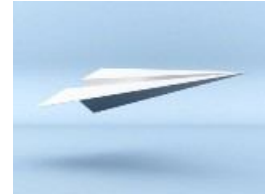
**TIP #1- IDENTIFY YOUR PASSION:** *Try this simple exercise. Make a list of the top five things you are passionate about. Think beyond work. What do you love to do? What makes you happy? After you have your list, look at each item. Rate each on a scale of 1 to 5 as to how prevalent they are in your life right now (1=non-existent; 5=huge part of your life).*

You now have a target list of things you need to “fix” or “foster.” Your results could mean anything from changing your career, taking personal time or reigniting a passion you once had.

Assuming your business made the list, let's move on to how you demonstrate your passion in your business writing.

## Keep it Simple

Technology and social media make it easy to share your passion with the world. Even if you never embraced the cyber world, there is plenty of help for delivering your message.



Skilled communicators know how to translate your passion into something others want to share.

Remember the early days of Flash? It seemed every website had Flash intros. A web of flashing, moving graphics with no apparent value, assaulted your senses as you quickly clicked off the site.

**Keep it simple.**

Don't lose your message  
in the delivery.

For us "seasoned" workers, we rued the day PowerPoint added animation to bullet points. We sat through endless hours of text dropping letter by letter from the sky until we wanted to take the fallen consonants and throw them at the presenter.

One last example – how many times have you watched a commercial and wondered what the heck they were selling? If the commercial ends and you still don't know, that's a big problem.

All of these are examples of losing your message in the delivery.

## Keep it Clear

Do you know what your message is? Your reflex response is probably, "Of course I do." Let's test that theory.



Have you ever arrived at a sales meeting and the prospect tells you that your allotted hour is now 15 minutes? Ouch. It happens.

Would you be able to deliver your message in 15 minutes and still make your key points? It pays to plan your message.

**Keep it clear.**

Stay focused on your  
message.

I'll share more detail in the following sections, but here are three questions for organizing your key points.

1. What is the problem – challenge – or point of the message?
2. What would you like the ending or outcome to be?
3. How do you get there? What's your solution?

Now it is easy to deliver that severely chopped presentation in a simple, clear message that is uniquely yours.

## Keep it Uniquely Yours

Putting your own spin on your product or service shows you are willing to take the risk of sharing a piece of yourself. It shows you believe in your business.

Being unique is especially critical if your business is in a highly competitive market. It's what gets you noticed in the marketplace.

Ask yourself – what's different about what you offer and how does the potential customer know it will work? If you have nothing unique, what's the motivation for a customer to do business with you?

Your business writing should spotlight what's unique and show how that benefits your prospect or customer.

## Putting it All Together

Set a high standard with your business writing and measure it by each of these elements.

- **Keep it simple** – don't lose your message in the delivery
- **Keep it clear** – stay focused on your message
- **Keep it uniquely yours** – believe in your business – it shows



**Keep it uniquely  
yours.**

Believe in your business.  
It shows.



## Section 2: Studying the Great Ones

The best NBA players are students of the game. They study the moves of the great players and incorporate what they learn into their game, making it their own. You can create great business writing from studying the great ones, while still keeping it uniquely yours.

### Where Do You Find Great Business Writing?

Has a friend ever recommended a movie to you that you thought was horrible? The same could be true about business writing. If you want to start a lively discussion, ask people for their opinion about Super Bowl ads.

We have different tastes when it comes to business writing. That is what makes us unique. Your business writing should provide an insight into what matters to you. If the writing is disorganized or careless, that will be your prospect's perception of your business.

So, how do you define great business writing?

### Breaking Down the Full Court Press

Business writing is all around you. At times, finding the great ones might seem like looking for the MVP when surrounded by opponents in a full court press.

**TIP #2 - COLLECT THE BEST:** *Create a folder – a physical or online folder – whichever you prefer. When you come across an ad, a sales letter or some other form of business communication you like, put it in your folder. After collecting a few samples, take a closer look at the business writing.*

Review the communication and answer these questions.

1. What first attracted me to this business communication?
2. How would I describe the writing?
3. Is there a clear message?
4. Do I gain anything from reading it?
5. Would I recommend the product/service/article to someone else?

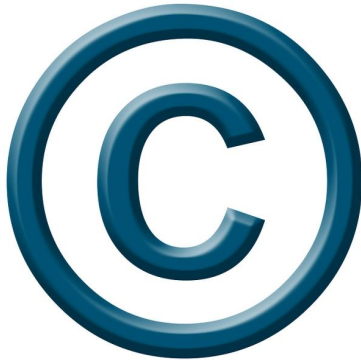
Compare your responses to the different reviews. Do you notice any patterns? Are there some you like more than others? If so, why?

Study the great ones and jot down what appeals to you. For example –

- Simple language, easy to read
- Good mix of short sentences with longer sentences
- Can relate to the problem/story/message
- Very descriptive, paints a picture
- Takes a complex subject and makes it simple to understand

Now you have your definition of great business writing.

## When Imitation is Not Flattering



Before we move into the mechanics of business writing, let's have a brief look at the legal side.

Most business people know what plagiarism is – stealing someone's writing and presenting it as your own.

However, there are widespread misconceptions about copyrights. The biggest offenders are typically found on the internet and often are ethical, but misinformed owners of business blogs.

There is much more to copyright infringements than copying and pasting someone's writing as your own. I am by no means an expert or a lawyer, but the following are a few misconceptions concerning copyright laws.

**Misconception #1 – As long as I give credit to the author and publication, I can copy and paste it to my blog/website.**

This is the most common misconception I find in working with customers. If you did not receive permission, it is typically an unauthorized use of the copyrighted material.

The work of an individual is copyrighted as soon as they create it – *even if that individual did not register it for copyright protection.*

**Misconception #2 – If it's on the web, it is considered public domain so I can use it.**

Public domain is creative work that can be used freely by everyone and is not protected by copyright. Because so much of the internet is “free,” it has led to the mistaken belief that anything posted on the internet is public domain.

Any work's protection (for work created January 1, 1978 or later) starts when the creative work is “fixed in tangible medium of expression.”<sup>2</sup> That protection lasts for the life of the author, plus 70 years. Other rules apply for work created prior to 1978. Works of the United States government are excluded from copyright laws.

**Misconception #3 – Since I didn't use the whole work, I am okay under “fair use.”**

This is a tough one. What makes it difficult is determining when something goes beyond fair use. Basically, fair use means using a brief excerpt of creative work, typically credited to the author, which does not hurt the commercial value of the original.

For example, suppose a magazine you subscribe to charges for that subscription. You use excerpts from one of their articles on your blog. If your excerpt is extensive enough that your readers would have no need to subscribe for additional information, you may have gone beyond fair use.

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<sup>2</sup> Copyright Basics, Circular 1 Revised 07/2008, U.S. Copyright Office, Library of Congress

## **Things You Can Do to Protect Yourself**

You can see how complicated the copyright issue is. Here are a few things you can do to protect you and your business.

- Assume the creative work has copyright protection
- Read the copyright conditions of the website/blog – often found in the footer under “Terms and Conditions” or “Terms and Notices”
- Review your “fair use” excerpt objectively – could it hurt the commercial value of the original?

I will never be an attorney so don't take this as legal advice. When in doubt, do not use another person's writing. Okay, school's out on that subject. Let's move to the “how to” for great business writing.

## Section 3: Start With the Fundamentals

Basketball MVPs learned the fundamentals of the game a long time ago. What contributes to their success is they do not forget or ignore the fundamentals. When great free-throw shooters start missing their shot, they go to the gym and practice free throws – over and over again. Yes, even the great ones practice.

Great business writing requires fundamentals, a formula for success. This one I call the 3-1-3 formula –

- 3 for the set-up
- 1 for the idea
- 3 for the wrap-up

Let me show you how it works.

### It Starts With Ideas

You have a lot of great business writing ideas running through your mind. Or maybe you are the person who has to make sense out of the great ideas of someone else. Here are a few suggestions for getting started.

- Use notes – especially if you are a visual person
- Jot down ideas as they come – don't edit yourself
- If writing for someone else – have them just talk
- Use a recorder for “sound-bites”
- Use mind-mapping tools that diagram your ideas
- Use a combination or what works best for you



Now you need some way to pull it all together. When it comes to business writing, use the easy formula, 3-1-3.

## The Business Writing Formula

Think of any business writing as a story. It makes it easier to construct. There's a beginning that introduces the story, the middle that takes you on the journey and finally, the ending.

Remember those three questions we talked about earlier? Use those three questions for setting up your ideas.

### 3 Set-up Questions

1. What is the problem – challenge – or point of the story?
2. What would you like the ending or outcome to be?
3. How do you get there? What's your solution?

**TIP #3 – DEFINE THE IDEAL OUTCOME BEFORE FIGURING OUT THE SOLUTION:** *In order to deliver the best solution, you first need to know the problem and the desired outcome.*

When you write the story, you put the problem (1) first, then the solution (3), and then the outcome (2) – the happy ending.

Organize your ideas from your list or mind-mapping into one of the 3 categories. Does it address the problem, the outcome or the solution?

### 1 Idea

Use one thought or idea per paragraph. Although I would love to take credit for *that* idea, it is a common and effective teaching for writing.

You probably have more than one idea under each of the 3 categories. Some may be related to others – ask yourself:

- Are the ideas separate and distinct?
- Is one idea an enhancement or build on another?

Mind-mapping is a technique used for creating a visual diagram of ideas. In mind-mapping, the analogy of a tree is often used. The trunk is the idea and the branches its enhancements or development. Think of the tree when trying to decide if an idea is separate (the trunk) or an enhancement or build on another idea (the branches).

### **3 Part Wrap-up**

The wrap-up ties together the beginning, middle and end of your story. As readers, we often get lazy. We scan business writing for salient points. Your wrap-up delivers the package (the problem), with the contents (your solution), and ties is up with a bow (the outcome).

### **Remember 3-1-3 for better business writing –**

**3** questions to set up your story

**1** idea per paragraph

**3** part wrap-up – Problem – Solution – Outcome

The NBA Champion Los Angeles Lakers are famous for their triangle offense. The strategy is the foundation for their games. Coaches make adjustments for different player combinations and opponents. Consider your 3-1-3 result as the foundation for your business writing. It is the starting point that you adjust for each business communication.

*Note: The 3-1-3 formula assumes you already have the basics of good grammar; however, even professional writers can use a refresher course. Several excellent resources are included at the back of this eBook.*

## Section 4: Reviewing Game Film

Win or lose, players and coaches review game film. They review their own game and they review game film of upcoming opponents. Reviewing your business writing and your competitors' writing offers valuable clues for improving your performance.

### Sizing Up the Competition

Before you start the 3-1-3 business writing process, it is a good idea to review the business communication from competitors. It helps you identify what is unique about your product or service.

Consider the following when doing your review.

- Read the communication through the eyes of your customers
- What are the strengths of the product or service?
- What are the weaknesses?
- Is there one feature that stands out?
- How does their product or service compare with yours?

Notice that the objective of the review is identifying what is unique about your product or service – not finding ways to slam the competition. A former boss of mine had a saying that always stuck with me –

*“ When you slam the competition, it just shows  
your product cannot stand up on its own merit. ”*

So, take that slam and turn it into a slam dunk for your product or service. The slam dunk in basketball is the exclamation point in a player's game. It is a high-flying show of everything the player loves about the game. Work on your game so your business writing produces a slam dunk.

Take the first draft of your business writing and perfect it – just like the pros do.



## Perfecting Your Own Business Writing

Once you have the fundamentals down, you can work on enhancing your business writing. Here are some ideas for changing good writing to great writing.

### The Simple Dribble

You may have noticed I have a love affair going with the word *simple* – a simple message, simple delivery and simple solutions. Even if the topic of your business writing is anything but simple, effective communicators know how to organize the writing and deliver it in a simple and clear manner.

Here are steps for creating a simple document, blog post or any other business communication.

#### 1. Read Out Loud

When reviewing your own business writing, start by reading it out loud. If you run out of breath before the end of a sentence or are muttering, “Huh?” you know it’s time for editing.

Silent reading plays tricks on our brain. Our brain knows the story and what we meant to say. When you silently read, the brain automatically converts what you’re reading to the correct content. It’s good to know that our brain has our back, but sometimes we need that brutal honesty.

Here are some of the advantages of reading out loud –

- You pick up on awkward sounding words or phrases
- You identify problems with the pacing or flow
- You hear overused words
- You recognize sections that require better explanation

You even find typos and punctuation errors that you missed when silently reading. Here’s a bonus tip – if you bore yourself when you read out loud, there is an excellent chance you’ll bore your readers, too.

## 2. Highlight Draft

This is definitely an “old school” technique, but then I was born before God invented computers. It means printing a copy of online business writing before publishing. While we hate killing trees, for most people editing works best when done on paper.

- Take the hardcopy document and highlight key ideas
- When reviewing, chunk it into smaller sections
- Highlight key words, phrases or statistics

There is no need to highlight whole sentences. Highlight enough of the sentence to understand the idea.

Is the idea in the right place? Does it add to the writing? Pull out your 3-1-3 formula.

- 3 - Is the highlighted area the problem, solution or the outcome?
- 1 - Is there one idea per paragraph?
- 3 - Is there a wrap-up of the problem, solution and outcome?

## 3. Edit, Edit, Edit

Take your notes and highlighted text. Begin editing.

- Remove excess words
- Edit the passive voice
- Strengthen your writing with figurative language

In business writing, the use of stories and figurative language creates visual imagery for your readers.

### Tips for Recognizing Passive Voice

1. Uses a form of be – is, are, was, will be, has been
2. Follows that with a verb or participle
3. Uses a past tense

EXAMPLE: The book has been (#1) completed. (#2, #3)

ALTERNATIVE: Cathy completed the book.

Figurative language makes your business writing:

- Interesting
- Easy-to-understand
- Memorable

Once you have rewritten your text, you are back to number one – read it out loud. Repeat the three steps until you have your slam dunk business writing.

### Creating Your Own Press

Storytelling is a popular formula for successful business writing.

Effective storytelling:

- Hooks your reader
- Invokes a response
- Encourages action

You know storytelling works for blogging, but how do you make it work for other kinds of business writing? How can it spice up a dry, technical report?

How do you tell a good story?

**Keep it Simple** – A good story is easy to understand.

If your reader ends your story with an expressive, “Huh?” you probably missed the mark.

## Examples of Figurative Language

### Metaphor

Substitutes a word or phrase for comparing two ideas or objects and uses it as a symbol.

EXAMPLE: The runner torched the track with his amazing speed.

### Simile

A type of metaphor that makes comparison by using the word “like” or a similar word.

EXAMPLE: The cat sat in the chair like a King overlooking his subjects.

### Personification

This figure of speech gives human characteristics to an object or non-human.

EXAMPLE: The door opened with a groaning complaint.

### Hyperbole

A hyperbole uses an exaggeration to make its point.

EXAMPLE: The day was so bright even the sun had to put on sunglasses.

1. **Take the Straight Route** – If you are like me, writing like you talk is not always the best idea. I have a nasty habit of going off on tangents when I talk. A sure sign of straying is when you see a giant question mark on faces, or the deer in headlights look. Neither is a good look.

Storytelling that rambles loses your reader.

2. **Give Your Story Spine** – Kenn Adams<sup>3</sup> is a playwright who developed the Story Spine for creating well-structured stories. It is a great tool, especially when you want to simplify something technical.

#### **The Platform**

Once upon a time...

Everyday...

#### **The Catalyst**

But one day...

Then something changed...

#### **The Consequences**

Because of that...

And then...occurred

And then...

#### **The Climax**

Until finally...

Then suddenly...

#### **The Resolution**

Ever since then...

And the moral of the story is...

And the funny thing was...



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<sup>3</sup> Kenn Adams' Adventure Theater, About Kenn Adams, available at [http://www.kennadamsadventuretheater.com/About\\_Kenn\\_Adams\\_.html](http://www.kennadamsadventuretheater.com/About_Kenn_Adams_.html) (accessed April 5, 2011).

**Keep it Clear** – Stay focused on your message.

Do not let your story upstage your message or topic. Your case study, white paper, marketing ad or other business writing has a point. The point is making a sale – a sale of your product, service or idea.

Even a well-told story bombs. You may leave them rolling in the aisles, but if all they remember is the story and not the point; close the cash register on that sale.

**Keep it Uniquely Yours** – Your readers relate to good storytelling.

It holds their interest so readers don't toss your business writing aside. This is your shot at being memorable, letting the reader know what's different about you and your business.

Your passion takes center stage.

### **Getting Help From Teammates**

No matter how skilled a business writer you are, you benefit from using team members in your editing process.

Besides a fresh pair of eyes finding typos or misspellings, there are additional benefits.

To make it simple (there's that word again), have your teammates use the same questions you used for reviewing great business writing.

Here are those questions with a slight variation on the first one.

1. What do I like/dislike about this business communication?
2. How would I describe the writing?
3. Is there a clear message?
4. Do I gain anything from reading it?
5. Would I recommend the product/service/article to someone else?

## Drafting Additional Help

The following are additional tips for improving your company's business writing.

**Provide training** – Business writing courses come in all shapes and sizes from online to live workshops. The money spent on training is a good investment, especially when considering the hours lost on editing and responding to questions from poorly written communication.

**Internal review** - Develop a process for internal review of business writing. If possible, divide the tasks so one person reviews for typographical, grammatical and spelling errors and another person checks the technical accuracy. You cannot proofread too many times – particularly with online writing, where errors are common.

**Outsource** – In today's tight economy, businesses are doing more with less. Hiring an independent business writer helps in several ways. The improved focus on the project often improves productivity. The business writing projects are on-time and within budget. Communication often goes to market sooner, since in-house writers juggle other responsibilities that demand attention.

Here are seven tips for finding the right business writer for your business writing needs.

- 1. Define your project** – Start with what you are looking for. Do you need a business writer for industry articles, web content or a technical white paper? Perhaps it's all of the above. List all items where a business writer might help. It doesn't mean you contract it all – it merely helps you identify your business writing needs. It also helps in creating an ad for hiring. Next, identify priorities. What is your immediate need?
- 2. List credentials** – List what qualifications are important to you in a business writer. It is not unlike the process you go through in advertising and interviewing a person for a job at your company. It's a combination of skill sets and the right fit for your company. List the intangibles that are important to you, like a professional approach, someone you connect with or a good sense of humor.

**3. Dip your toe in** – Many businesses prefer using the services of a single writer. Others use a variety, based on the type of project. Whatever route you take, by narrowing your project, you can test the waters for your business writer. Let's say you decide you want several ghostwritten articles. By contracting a single article, you have a terrific opportunity to see how the writer works for you, without a huge time or money commitment.

**4. To niche or not to niche** – Take almost any subject and it's practically guaranteed there's a niche for it. The niche can be industry-related or writing-specific. For example, there are writers who specialize in ghostwriting, creating white papers or writing business plans. Then there are the generalists. You can find equally skilled generalists and specialists. You decide how important the niche is to your need. It's like deciding between a primary care physician or a specialist. If you love your family doctor and you are not having brain surgery, the services of your primary care doctor more than satisfy your needs.

**5. Plan your search** – Now that you defined the project and the credentials, the next step is starting your search. The good news is that the internet and social media has made it a whole lot easier. You have several avenues available to you.

- **Referrals** - One of the most effective ways for finding the right business writer is through referrals. Check with your business network for their recommendations. With so many companies working with a lean staff, outsourcing to an independent writer has become an effective productivity solution. As a result, it is easier to find business associates who use the services of an independent business writer.
- **LinkedIn**
  - Post *Jobs* for a fee or if you belong to a *Group*, post it on the *Group's Job Board* for free
  - Search under *People* for a business writer
  - Click on the *Advanced People Search* and enter *Keywords* and *Title*
  - Refine your search by clicking on appropriate *Industries* and specific *Connection* levels or *Groups* you participate in
  - Ask your *Group* for referrals
  - Review the *Profile* and *Recommendations* of individuals found through your search

- **Search Engine Research** – Use your favorite search engine to locate a business writer. This works best if you have very specific qualifications. Otherwise, you find yourself wading through a sea of writers who may be better at search engine optimization than writing.
- **Review websites/blogs** – One of the best things about looking for a writer is that you get a sneak peek at their work. Most candidates you discover have websites and many have blogs. This provides an opportunity for reviewing their writing style and the services they offer. Typically, their websites contain a portfolio of work. Take the time to look around to find those “intangibles” on your list.

**6. Make that initial contact** – If you received a referral, sending an email with the specifics of the assignment to your candidate is a good first step. Like most referrals, it is helpful to include how you obtained the writer’s name. It is a good idea if you make the first contact in writing. First, it helps focus on the specifics of the assignment. Second, it is a good way to determine how responsive and professional the writer is in his or her reply. Finally, it establishes a respect for each other’s time. I highly recommend a follow-up call, but set aside a specific date and time.

**7. Nail down the details** – Depending on the writer, his or her initial response may include a fee estimate or your follow-up discussion may cover this topic. Business writers handle fees in a number of ways. Some charge by the hour, some by project fee, and others by a per word count. My preferred method is a formal written proposal that specifies the scope of services, timelines, fees and terms of the contract.

Whatever the arrangement, it is good business to have the agreement in writing. Experienced writers know this and have formal contracts.

It is also a good idea to have the writer sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA), either one developed by your company or one the writer provides. I would have serious reservations about a business writer that balks at signing a contract and/or NDA. Writers may suggest changes to the terms, but should agree to the formal documents (unless you cannot agree to terms).



Hiring a business writer to represent your brand and your business is not a process you rush. Finding the right business writer has the potential for building a long-lasting partnership that supports your business writing objectives.

## Planning Strategy

An NBA coach would never go into a game without a game plan. Reviewing game film, running practice sessions and integrating different team members dictate the type of adjustments a coach makes to the game plan.

Developing a business communication strategy provides a game plan for evaluation. It's your own game film on the effectiveness of your business writing. Develop your strategy and use it as the game plan for measurement.

Here is a 10-step outline for creating your communication strategy.

1. **Create your vision statement** – Where do you want to end up with your business?
2. **Identify your customer** – Who will be the target for your communication?
3. **Define your objectives** – Do you want to create leads? Educate? Announce a new product or service?
4. **Establish your budget** – This step is one many small businesses skip – it is essential for the decisions you make.
5. **Select your communication vehicles** - What combination is the most effective for objectives and budget? e.g., social media, white papers, case studies, industry articles
6. **Assign roles and responsibilities** – Who does the writing? Who manages the process?
7. **Develop your message strategy** – What problem are you trying to solve for customers? How are you different? What is your call to action?
8. **Develop a timeline** – What is the frequency for communication? Any new product/service rollout?
9. **Establish benchmarks** – What are the specific measurements for success? e.g., Leads, visibility/awareness of your business, sales, customer satisfaction
10. **Create a contingency process** - What happens if a communication strategy is not working? How do you troubleshoot?

## Do You Throw Out the Old Game Plan?

If you have a communication strategy in place – congratulations. Now you have a tool for evaluating your business communication. Start by asking these questions.

- What worked?
- What didn't?
- Was it the message?
- Was it the execution?
- Was it the method of communication?

Throwing out the communication method may not be the answer.

For example, perhaps you started a business blog. You feel it failed miserably.

- You have very few subscribers
- No one ever comments
- It did not generate any new leads
- It was a major drain on resources

Ask yourself – are there steps you could take that improve results?

- Are you maximizing the marketing of your blog? e.g., through social media
- Do you have the right content?
- Are you engaging readers? e.g. asking for comments, creating polls
- Should you outsource writing?
- Should you outsource the blog management?

### Question Your Marketing Strategy

- Are you in touch with how your customers communicate?
- Is there better strategy for spending your hard-earned dollars and time?
- Would it be more effective to focus on one signature communication?

e.g., a well-written, well-marketed white paper

Look at each business communication and develop its own marketing strategy. Just as the same game plan won't work against every NBA opponent, the same marketing strategy won't work for every business communication.

## Section 5: Final Score

If you are passionate about your business, it deserves great business writing. Whether you are a 'natural' when it comes to writing or someone who has to work at your game, your business writing is the ticket to your success.

Great business writing shares your passion for your business. Learn from your great business writers. Start with the fundamentals, and then step up your game through editing and polished writing. If business writing is still not your thing, hire a great freelance business writer. Find one that knows how to take your passion and create a winning result.

The world is full of potential customers, just waiting to spread your word – or your business writing blunders.

Protect yourself against poor business writing –

- **Keep it simple** – don't lose your message in the delivery
- **Keep it clear** – stay focused on your message
- **Keep it uniquely yours** – believe in your business – it shows

Wishing you continued success!



## Appendix: Business Writing Hall of Fame

The list of inductees in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame includes players, coaches and even referees. It recognizes basketball requires different kinds of talent.

Great business writing requires different talent as well. The following are just a few that I find helpful. Included are links (URLs) with text versions. Please note that the links were active at the time of publishing. There is no guarantee that the site information will remain accurate.

### **Business Writing Basics**

[BUSINESSWRITINGBLOG](#) – Lynn Gaertner-Johnson teaches business writing and is an expert that keeps it simple. The site offers tips from grammar and punctuation to business writing etiquette.

Lynn is also the founder of [SYNTAX TRAINING](#) that offers business writing courses and train-the-trainer programs. If you want comprehensive, simple-to-understand business writing tips, BusinessWritingBlog is a great source

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://www.businesswritingblog.com>

<http://www.syntaxtraining.com>

[PURDUE ONLINE WRITING LAB \(OWL\)](#) – This is a favorite resource of mine. OWL offers over 200 resources, including help on writing, grammar, style guides, and English as a second language.

The simple layout of the site makes finding answers easy. OWL is the Master of writing education.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

## **Business Writing Basics (continued)**

**GRAMMAR GIRL** – This site offers “Quick and Dirty Tips” when you cannot remember which spelling or form is the right one.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>

**THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE (ONLINE)** – This electronic version helps when you are writing formal business documents that require citations. The site offers a Quick Guide and a Questions and Answers section. Full access requires a subscription, however; it is very reasonable (\$35 per year at the time of this publication) and larger companies receive discounts for multiple members.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/CMS\\_FAQ/new/new\\_questions01.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/CMS_FAQ/new/new_questions01.html)

**YOUR DICTIONARY** – The online site offers not only spelling and definition assistance, but also grammar and reference articles.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/>

## **Copyright Information**

**COPYRIGHT.GOV** – Here is the source that contains the legal language regarding the copyright law.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://www.copyright.gov/>

## Copyright Information (continued)

**JONATHAN BAILEY** – This writer and a webmaster has a fabulous site dedicated to copyright protections and plagiarism, called **PLAGIARISMTODAY**. It began from his own experience with having his work plagiarized, but the site is about much more than plagiarism. You never know what passion will produce.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://www.plagiarismtoday.com/>

**BRAD TEMPLETON** - This is a very helpful site on copyright **BASICS** and **MYTHS**. Something I learned at Brad's website was that even using links to sites *might* be a violation. We need to watch for future changes as the law adjusts to modern technology.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

<http://www.templetons.com/brad/>

**COPYLAW.COM** – This site also has useful information on copyright myths.

*Link or copy and paste into your browser –*

[http://www.copylaw.com/new\\_articles/copy\\_myths.html](http://www.copylaw.com/new_articles/copy_myths.html)

## **Photo Credits**

iStock Photo

[http://www.istockphoto.com/file\\_closeup.php?id=10960848](http://www.istockphoto.com/file_closeup.php?id=10960848)

Star File #: 10960848

[http://www.istockphoto.com/file\\_closeup.php?id=7764338](http://www.istockphoto.com/file_closeup.php?id=7764338)

Paper Plane File #: 7764338

[http://www.istockphoto.com/file\\_closeup.php?id=9588771](http://www.istockphoto.com/file_closeup.php?id=9588771)

Searching-Magnifying Glass File #: 9588771

BigStock Photo

<http://www.bigstockphoto.com/image-374672/stock-photo-copyright>

Copyright Image Stock Photo ID: 374672

<http://www.bigstockphoto.com/image-1479824/stock-photo-which-one>

Ideas Stock Photo ID: 1479824

<http://www.bigstockphoto.com/image-1637585/stock-photo-open-book>

Open book Stock Photo ID: 1637585