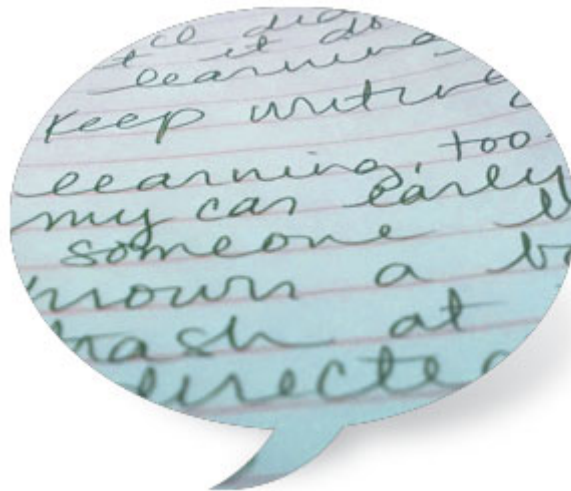




SupEFL: Supplemental Self-help in English as a Foreign Language
for Learners with Specific Learning Differences/Difficulties
(2014-1-DE02-KA200-001093)

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Self-Help Writing



Summary

This self-help learning module is suitable for learners of English who want to improve their writing skills. It will teach you how to say what you want to say in plain English.

This self-help learning module is suitable for you if:

- You have difficulties with spelling
- You are better in speaking than in writing
- It isn't easy for you to organize your thoughts
- Tend to go off on tangents when writing about a topic
- Are not sure how to write what you want to say

Required level of English language proficiency to read and understand this module:

B1 or higher (<https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cefr-en.pdf>)

Independent User	B1	<p>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.</p> <p>Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.</p> <p>Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.</p> <p>Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p>
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Estimated time to complete the module:

 2-3 hours

Objectives

Upon completion of this module you will be able to:

- Organize your ideas and express yourself clearly in writing
- Select the appropriate style, structure and format for your reader
- Edit your writing effectively before sending it to your reader

Methodology

This E-learning book is an open educational resource. It uses open-source technology and multimedia. It is mobile-friendly and device-independent. It is delivered online but there also is an offline version. The self-help learning program is designed for individual learners to work on their own and includes practice activities. It can also be used in a classroom as part of an instructor-led training program.



1. Introduction - What is Plain English?

Clear, simple and effective communication

Plain English is good, clear writing, saying what you want to say as simply and effectively as possible. Plain English uses simple language without being simple. Plain English focuses on the message and the reader. It uses only as many words as needed and avoids technical or complex language wherever possible.

The reader comes first

Plain English is written for the readers, using words they will know. Plain English is even more precise than traditional English because it avoids meaning that is open to more than one interpretation and possible errors.

This means that you - the writer - need to look at things from the reader's point of view. You may also need to rethink how you are going to structure and use your document. What does the reader need to know? What do they know and understand about the subject? What's the best way to organize your ideas so that they will be meaningful to the reader?



2. The Writing Process



I must admit, "I want to get filthy rich very fast" was an interesting cover letter opening.

2.1. Think about what you want to say

Begin your email, letter or document by asking yourself the most basic of questions: What do I want my business document to be about? What information do I want to get across to my readers? Your answers to these questions should fit into one short sentence.



2.2. Plan how to say it

Writing consists of two separate activities:

- formulating concepts and ideas (**the message**)
- putting them into words (**the statement**).

These two activities revolve around three basic steps:

- Organizing
- Writing
- Editing



2.3. Organizing yourself

Ask yourself:

Why are you writing the document?

Who is the document for?

- your target audience and use of language

What do you want to achieve?

- your objective

What does the reader already know?

- amount of information you must provide

Are you writing to a colleague or a customer?

- use of formal or informal language

Does the reader know the topic?

- use of technical terms and jargon

What supporting information and arguments will you need?

How will the reader benefit?

- Why should the reader respond positively?

What are the reader's interests and his likely objections?

- What does the reader want and what does he/she see differently?

How can I include the reader's interests and counter his objections?

- How can I show that I understand his/her needs?
- What must I tell him/her to get him/her to see things differently?



2.4. Organizing your ideas

Outlines are useful in planning and developing a document. They provide a structure for developing ideas. They allow the writer to determine the desired logical sequence of thought and ideas. Outlines also serve as a reminder to ensure the writer covers all the points. There are three basic approaches:

Mind Map

This is a graphic presentation of ideas. A core word, phrase, concept or idea is written in the center of the page. Related ideas branch out from the center. Further ideas are clustered around these branches. Mind mapping is a creative approach to brainstorming. It helps the writer generate different ideas before arranging them in a sequence.

Traditional Outline

Following is an outline showing you how to structure your ideas, information and arguments. You will have to outline your email or document to take your reader to where you want him to be.



Sample Outline

INTRODUCTION

No more than three sentences:

- I. Attention-Getter
Something the reader can easily relate to
- II. Central Idea or Main Point
Your message or objective, what you want the reader to think or do
- III. Relate topic to reader
How the reader stands to benefit from following your proposal or solution

MAIN POINT (Only use one main point per email.)

- Supporting point
- Supporting point
- Supporting point

CONCLUSION

- I. Summary of the main point
- II. Appeal or call to action
- III. Closing lines that relate back to the introduction and strengthen the relationship



Checklist

Creating a checklist of points to cover is a similar non-graphic approach to mind mapping. This is a list of words and phrases to cover key points. It does not have to be arranged in any sequence initially. When completed, you can structure the ideas by numbering them.

Checklists can be converted into a traditional outline.

Activity: Use a mind map, a traditional outline and a checklist to draft upcoming emails. You may combine any of the previously listed methods or adapt them to meet your needs. See which method suits you best.



3. Writing in plain English



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How do you spell "yo, bro"?

Write the way you talk in words your reader will know

Imagine you're actually standing in front of your reader.

- What would you say?
- You will want to talk to your reader in everyday language that is
 - friendly,
 - honest and
 - easy to understand.

Start to write in the same kind of language you would use if you were talking directly to the reader.



Here are some examples of expressions commonly used in email communication:

Formal

Informal

Greeting

Dear Sir or Madam

Hi Jane, Dear Jane

Dear Mrs. Smith

Previous contact

With reference to your email of...

Thank you for your email of...

Regarding your email of...

About your email of...

Concerning your email of...

Reason for writing

I am writing with regard to ...

I'm writing about.../Here's the ...

We would like to point out that ...

you wanted.

Giving information

I'm writing to let you know that...

Just a note to say

We regret to inform you that...

Unfortunately, ...

Attachments

Please find attached...

I've attached...



Formal

Informal

Asking for information

I am writing to enquire about...

Can you tell me...

Requests

I'd be grateful if you could ...

Please could you

Promising action

I will ...

I'll ...

I will contact you again shortly.

I'll get back to you soon.

I'll look into it.

Offering help

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Do you want me to ...?

Shall I?

Feel free to contact me if you have any further questions. My direct line is ...

Let me know if I can help in any way, my cell phone number is...

Closing remarks

I look forward to your reply.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Farewell

Your faithfully

Bye for now

Yours sincerely

Best wishes

Faithfully yours

Kind regards



Activity 1 : Please respond to the following email in a formal and an informal email.

1st May 20XX

Dear John Doe:

Thank you for your reservation request at Sample Hotel. We are pleased to confirm that we are holding the following accommodation for you:

May 25 - 27, 2 nights, superior double room with breakfast, 2 guests

Check-in time is as of 1 PM. Check-out time is by noon.

Please transfer the outstanding amount of 200 USD to our bank account within the next 5 days.

We look forward to your stay!

Cordially,

Jane Smith

Imagine that you were offered a discount of 10% as a frequent guest during your last stay at the Sample Hotel by the manager Peter Roberts. Further, you were told that you could pay on arrival. Please formulate a formal and an informal email in response.



Sample version of Formal Email

Formal Email

Dear Mrs. Smith:

With reference to your email of May 1, I would like to point out that Peter Roberts offered us a discount of 10% during our last stay at your hotel. He also confirmed to us that we could pay on arrival. I'd be grateful, if you could check that with him. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

John Doe

Sample version of Informal Email

Informal Email

Dear Jane:

Thank you for your email of May 1. During our last stay, Peter Roberts, offered us a discount of 10% and told us that we could pay in cash. Please check that and let us know. Have a great day!

Best wishes,

John



4. Use of language



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Yes, Hrrmwik, the commission edited a bit your address speach.

Write in short sentences. Have only one or two ideas in each sentence. If you need to explain a term or a point, use a separate sentence.

Use only as many words as necessary.

Organize your thoughts into brief paragraphs, with one central topic in each. This makes your writing easier to read and understand.

Try to use the present tense throughout. While you should write using present tense, letters may require you to tell a story in the tense that it occurred. If, however, you are giving instructions, present tense is the easiest for your readers to understand.



Use Active Rather Than Passive Voice

With an **active** verb, the three parts appear in a particular order: **subject** then **verb** then **object**. For example:

John (**subject**) led (**verb**) the meeting (**object**).

“Led” is an active verb here. The sentence says who is doing the leading before it says what is being led.

With a passive verb, the order is reversed: **object** then **verb** then **subject**.

The meeting (**object**) was led (**verb**) by John (**subject**).

“Led” is a passive verb here. The sentence says what is being led before it says who led the meeting.

You can see that by making the sentence passive, we introduced the words “was” and “by.” This made the sentence more complicated. Passives make your sentences longer, can be confusing and are less lively.

Many people often write in the passive voice. For example:

Bookings will be handled within five days.

In this sentence, it is not clear who will be carrying out the action. The reader may also be uncertain about what “handled” means. But writing the same sentence in the active voice is far more direct:

We will reply to your inquiry within five days.



The reader now knows who will be carrying out the action and what to expect from you.

There are exceptions, in which you should use the passive:

- When you don't know who the actor is or you want you to hide the actor -
“The agency has been chosen to provide the service.”
- To make something less hostile. “This invoice has not been paid” (passive) is softer than “you have not paid the invoice” (active).

Avoid nominalisations

A nominalisation is a type of abstract noun. In other words, it is the name of something that isn't a physical object, such as a process, technique or emotion.

Nominalisations are formed from verbs. Like passive verbs, too many of them make writing boring and impersonal. And because they are merely the name of things, they sound as if nothing is really happening in the sentence.

For example:

Verb	Nominalisation
discussed	discussion
investigated	investigation
implemented	implementation



Activity: Please rephrase the following sentences in plain English

1. The guests were welcomed by John Doe.

2. The current booking has been attached.

3. Errors were found in the booking but steps have been taken to correct them.

4. The recommended guidelines for making bookings were followed by us.

5. The booking will be reviewed by the supervisor before it is sent to the manager.

6. We had a discussion about the matter.



7. There will be a closure of our facilities on May 23.

8. The implementation of the new method has been done by our team.

9. There is an arrangement to pay the hotel on arrival.

10. There needs to be an investigation why the original rooms that were booked by us on the telephone are not available anymore.



5. Editing your document



I made a short checklist to help you...

Editing checklist

1. Check your email for spelling and grammar mistakes.
2. Are all the adjectives, adverbs and other words used really necessary?
3. Does the email have a logical structure to support your main message?
4. Does your email address the needs and interests of the reader?
5. Does your email attract the interest of the reader in the beginning by stating something that is of interest?
6. Does your email end with an appeal or call for action?
7. Have you included a closing remark to strengthen your relationship?



6. Points to remember



- Use a short, clear subject line.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Include just one main subject per email.
- Use lists where appropriate.
- Use bullet points instead of continuous text.
- Use “you” and “we.”
- Use words that are appropriate for the reader.
- Use active verbs and avoid nominalisations.
- Check your spelling and basic grammar using spelling and grammar tools.
- Tailor your email to the reader in terms of formality.
- Use emoticons in less formal emails. These written forms of body language or gesture are often used in less formal emails to help the recipient understand exactly what you mean. ;-)



7. Practice Activities

Activity: Here are some activities that you can further practice what you have learned:

- Write an appropriate response to the following email:

I have tried to call you but can't reach you.

The hotel is booked out.

I never got your email.

- Write emails with the following requests:

Before I book a room in the hotel I would like to know...

I would like to book a flight to...

I would like to order...

- Confirm the details of a telephone call that you had recently.
- Imagine you have met someone and would like to see them again. Arrange a meeting with them.
- Complain about a product or service
- Cancel a meeting
- Think of a recent situation where you had to provide information, ask for help or clarify an issue with someone. How would you prepare your email using what you learned, and how would you structure it?