

**Third Edition**

# **How to Write Effective Business English**

Your guide to excellent  
professional communication

Fiona Talbot



# CONTENTS

## 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 to business writing 9

Can you use 'I' in business writing? 10

Listen to readers' feedback 12

Choosing the right style 14

Ideal communication 17

The word power skills system: four easy steps to premier  
business writing 18

Your checklist for action 20

### 03 **Quality matters** 21

Shine through your writing! 21

To make mistakes is only human 21

How readers can react to written mistakes 22

Further costs of getting your writing wrong 24

You can never fully outsource your writing 27

Checking for mistakes 27

Proofreading tips 28

Your checklist for action 29

- 04 Writing across generations – for colleagues as well as clients 31**
- Pool communication strengths: the rewards of generational diversity 31
  - Write to get that job 33
  - Write to recruit 33
  - Use word power to develop your career and get the results you need 36
  - Write for your boss 37
  - When you're the boss, writing brings extra challenges! 39
  - Your checklist for action 43
- 05 Telling your story through social media 45**
- Social media has shaken 'the rules' of business writing 45
  - Get into the social media mindset 45
  - Get your business message to anyone, anywhere, anytime 46
  - What are the key objectives? 48
  - How do companies shine through their social media interaction? 51
  - Writing that creates trust can create a community 53
  - The long and the short of it: past, present and future 55
  - Further writing tips for key channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn 56
  - What excites people so much they want to share it? 62
  - Call people to action – and check it's worked 63
  - Telling your story 65
  - Your checklist for action 67
- 06 Standard or variant English? 69**
- 'Standard' and 'variant' English 69
  - Writing for both native and non-native English speakers 71
  - Some surprising problems with English for global business 71
  - Define business English within your company 72
  - Your checklist for action 73

**07 Writing globally? Or in multinational teams? 75**

- Looking at how you use English at work 75
- Converting thoughts into words, then into writing 77
- Better to ask if you don't understand something 78
- These features can perplex readers too 79
- Muddled business writing costs on so many levels 82
- Tune in to how English continues to evolve 83
- Non-native English writers can have an advantage! 84
- Your checklist for action 85

**08 E-mail and instant messaging 87**

- General 87
- Writing e-mails 88
- E-mail scenarios to watch out for 88
- Multilingual and other e-mail threads 89
- Structure your e-mails 93
- Designing how you write e-mails 94
- Instant messaging and texting 97
- Your checklist for action 102

**09 Punctuation and grammar tips 105**

- Why punctuation and grammar matter 105
- Punctuation and other marks 106
- Parts of speech and other grammar 107
- Paragraphs 112
- Verbs and tenses 113
- Agreement of subject and verb 115
- Comparison 118
- Fluidity in writing 119
- Your checklist for action 120

**10 Practical conventions and common confusions 121**

Writing a date 121

Time 124

Numbers 126

Measurements 127

Words that can confuse both native English and non-native  
English writers 128

Acronyms 130

Active and passive 132

Nominalization 133

Your checklist for action 134

**11 Paper is here to stay 135**

Letters 137

Traditional letter format 138

When flexibility is key, you need to adapt letter-writing  
templates 140

A letter that involves the reader with the company's  
narrative 142

Specific tips about addressing letters 144

CVs/résumés and cover letters 144

Your checklist for action 147

**Conclusion: what will you do  
differently – and better? 149**