

Reviewed by Marieke Steuben for  
Lguide.com

**B**usiness writing is one of the most difficult, dreaded, and under-appreciated skills in the business world. It's also hard to teach online. Hands-on practice is still the best way to improve writing skills. More important, good courses should address how business writing differs from other kinds of writing.

We looked at a wide range of online writing courses and evaluated a sampling of them here. They're rated on a five-star scale, with five-star courses being the best that e-learning has to offer and one-star courses wasting your time and money.

Highly recommended

★★★★★ *Reader-Based Writing for Business Writers*: 4 to 6 hours, US\$54.95. Publisher: KCI

KCI offers the most comprehensive and challenging online writing course. It's built around the following process: brainstorm, organize, write, and revise. At each stage, the course explains several writing methods and provides sample documents. You critique the samples, then compare your findings with those of others. The course also makes you responsible for judging your own writing and scoring yourself on the review questions. The ongoing writing assignments give you real experience, if you're willing to work through them. For an additional fee, KCI offers individualized feedback. The course also connects you to online writers' references, including KCI's style guide.

★★★1/2 *The Effective Business Writer*: 1 hour, US\$24.95. Publisher: Syntrio

If you're looking for something more fun and less intimidating, try Syntrio's offering. It's short but packed with engaging tips and exercises. The course is structured around common problems, including wordiness, lack of clarity, and passive voice. The colorful layout aids retention, and graphics lead to more detailed explanations. Exercises give valuable practice: You edit documents, then compare your rewrite

with the course's version. A punctuation guide and planning worksheet are valuable references. New and experienced writers alike should find helpful tips.

Recommended

★★★ *Business Communication Series*: 5 to 7 hours, US\$144. Publisher: MindLeaders

This three-course series covers many aspects of business writing and explains different types of documents. Detailed examples make this series worthwhile, but the courses lack interactive exercises for hands-on practice. The first course gives beginners a good grasp of planning documents, using correct word choice, and writing effectively. The other courses cover the purpose and structure of various document types, including memos, faxes, email, and formal reports. All of the courses provide useful checklists. In our opinion, this series works best as a reference or refresher tool.

★★★ *Writing for Business*: 1 hour, US\$149 for 1 year of access to all Harvard ManageMentor courses. Publisher: Harvard Business School Publishing

Though an extremely short course, it includes an impressive number of hints, checklists, and worksheets. If you're

looking for step-by-step help on brainstorming, organizing material, drafting, and editing, you'll use nearly every screen. The course also outlines specific steps for different document types. This course may not be exhaustive, but it's a good review. However, the lack of examples was disappointing.

Adequate

★★1/2 *Effective Writing*: 2 hours, US\$95. Publisher: Maxim Training

This course's detailed question-and-answer format keeps you involved. Maxim Training explains how to structure and draft documents and make effective word choices. Maxim also offers a readability formula that's cumbersome and more trouble than it's worth. For most of the course, you watch a draft document move through revision stages, and that's the problem; you just watch. The course quizzes you periodically, but answering multiple-choice questions about editing doesn't teach you how to write or edit.

Not recommended

★★ *High Impact Business Writing Series*: 4 to 6 hours, US\$299.85. Publisher: SkillSoft

This SkillSoft series will increase your anxieties about business writing. Three long courses smother you with vague tips and patronizing suggestions. The courses tell you to follow such rules as capitalization, without offering explanation. We found few specific details or concrete examples, whether on grammar or different document types. Multiple-choice questions ask you to regurgitate exactly what you just read.

### At a Glance

- ***Reader-Based Writing for Business Writers***: This long, inexpensive course is rigorous and detailed, including great practice opportunities.
- ***The Effective Business Writer***: A brief, inexpensive course that offers good editing practice and useful resources for later reference.
- ***Business Communication Series***: An expensive course that thoroughly explains different business writing forms but doesn't offer enough practice. It works better as a refresher or reference tool.
- ***Writing for Business***: This course explains different business writing forms but offers no practice.
- ***Effective Writing***: This course is thorough but too passive. It offers no opportunity to practice and has some confusing tools.
- ***High Impact Business Writing Series***: This course is too vague and offers no practice opportunities or concrete details.

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