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## Clear, Correct, Concise E-mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents

### Introduction—How to Use the Writing Workbook

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### Chapter 1—What Makes a Great Customer Service E-Mail?

Great customer service e-mail does more than answer the question. Learn ten essential traits of responsive customer service e-mail.

### Chapter 2—Pre-Test: Assess Your Writing Skills

Complete this Pre-Test before you begin the Workbook. The Pre-Test will identify your writing strengths and weaknesses, and direct you to the section of the Workbook that focuses on each skill area.

### Chapter 3—Write Clear, Strong Sentences

Learn how to

- Write in the active voice  
- Put modifiers in the right place  
- Write full sentences, not run-ons or fragments  
- Choose strong verbs to give your writing power

### Chapter 4—Write with a Polite, Positive, and Personal Tone

Learn how

- Words affect tone  
- Personalizing your e-mail makes customers feel valued  
- Plain, simple language contributes to a polite, positive, and personal tone
Chapter 5—Select the Correct Word and Spell It Right

Learn

Why spelling matters
How to become a better speller
How to distinguish between confusing sound-alike and look-alike words

Chapter 6—Punctuate Correctly

Learn punctuation rules for the most common punctuation marks in customer service e-mail messages

period
comma
apostrophe
semicolon
colon

Chapter 7—Write for Global Readers

Learn how to

Identify idioms that are confusing to non-native English speakers and substitute easily understood phrases
Write short and simply to help non-native English speakers understand your e-mail
Write customer service e-mail that is sensitive to cultural differences
Write gender-neutral e-mail

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Writing and revising complete e-mail messages to customers
Applying what you’ve learned about writing strong sentences, using an appropriate tone and using correct punctuation and spelling
Writing for global readers

Chapter 9—Writing Resources

Learn about writing books and online resources to improve your writing.
Competency Test

Take the Competency Test (a supplement to this Workbook) to help you and your employer evaluate your writing skills. For information about the Competency Test, go to www.XXXXXXXXXXXXX.com or call E-WRITE at 877-XXX-XXXX.

List of Writing Practices in *Writing Workbook*

Chapter 3—Write Clear, Strong Sentences

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Practice 3.3—Change Fragments into Full Sentences
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List of Writing Tools in Writing Workbook

Checklist: Ten Traits of a Great Customer Service E-Mail
Plain Language Alternatives for Inflated Expressions
Checklist: Write With a Polite, Positive, and Personal Tone
Frequently Confused Words: Sound-Alikes and Look-Alikes
Checklist: Five Techniques for Making Your Writing Gender Neutral
Substitutes for Idiomatic Expressions Confusing to Non-native English Speakers
E-commerce has changed the way you hear from your customers. Increasingly, customers e-mail their questions and complaints and expect (quick!) e-mail responses. That means that writing is now an even more important skill for customer service agents. But your writing skills may be rusty. It’s probably been a long time since your last English class. Or this may be the first time you’ve been required to write on the job. The Writing Workbook is designed to help you polish your writing skills and to give you guidance and practice in writing good customer service e-mails.

What Is the Writing Workbook?

For customer service agents, this Workbook is an ideal way to address different needs and writing skill levels. You can proceed at your own pace. Take the Pre-Test in Chapter 2 to identify your strengths and weaknesses, then spend your time on those areas in which you need the most help.

If the word “grammar” takes you back to unpleasant memories of eighth grade English, don’t despair. This Workbook is short on rules and long on practice. Do the e-mails in the Practices look like ones you answer every day? We hope so! All of the examples and Practices are adapted from actual customer service e-mails. (We’ve changed the names of companies, customers, and customer service agents. We’ve substituted fake URLs, phone numbers, and other contact information.)

You may be looking at this Workbook because your supervisor has advised you to strengthen your writing skills. Or perhaps your company is using the Pre-Test or Competency Test (a supplement to the Workbook) to assess your writing skills. You may be completing the Workbook to qualify for a new job. Whatever the reason, you’ll find the Workbook an efficient way to refresh the writing skills you need as a customer service agent.
For Customer Service Agents—
How to Use the Writing Workbook

Use the Workbook to review basic writing skills. If you lack confidence in your writing skills, you may want to read all the guidance and do all the practices in the Workbook.

Use the Workbook to focus on particular writing problems. Perhaps your grammar skills are strong, but you’ve never really understood how to use a comma correctly. You should go straight to Chapter 6—Punctuate Correctly and read the guidance and complete the comma-use practices in that chapter.

What’s in the Writing Workbook?

We take the word Workbook seriously. That means this Workbook is meant to be worked in. The Workbook is full of practices. We’ve provided room for you to write and lots of white space where you can scribble notes. Neatness doesn’t count. Building strong writing skills does!

Writing Skills Review and Practice

Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 focus on specific writing skills. Each chapter contains guidance, examples, and practice. Many of the chapters also contain lists, checklists, and other writing tools.

Skills Tests and a Summary Chapter

Chapter 2—Pre-Test: Assess Your Writing Skills will help you identify your writing strengths and the areas in which you need help.

Chapter 8—Put It All Together gives you the opportunity to practice the writing skills you’ve learned by writing or editing complete messages.

Your manager may use the Competency Test to assess whether you’ve mastered the skills in the Workbook or to certify you for a job as a customer service agent.

Writing Resources

We’re often asked for suggestions on writing resources, so we’ve listed our favorite print and online writing resources to answer your grammar, style, and usage questions. We’ve also listed some resources that will give you additional writing practice.
How Long Will It Take You to Complete This Workbook?

How long it takes to complete the Workbook depends on how much of the Workbook you do. No chapter should take more than XX minutes. All told, you should be able to complete the entire Workbook in XX hours. You say you don’t have 15 uninterrupted hours to complete this Workbook? Don’t worry. The Workbook is structured so that you can do it in short chunks—while commuting to work (assuming you’re not driving!), during your lunch break, or during your kid’s soccer practice. Just pick up a pencil and work on your chosen chapter whenever you have time.

You may want to organize a group of friends or colleagues and do the Workbook together. Working in a group is fun, and you’re more apt to do the practices if you know your “group” is meeting.

For Managers—How to Use the Writing Workbook

This Workbook came about because we began hearing from companies about the difficulty of finding customer service agents with the writing skills needed to answer customers’ e-mail. Some companies who shifted telephone agents to e-mail found that the agents’ writing skills didn’t match their product knowledge and phone skills. Other companies found that the agents they’d hired to write e-mail had rusty writing skills or were not experienced in business writing. Regardless of the situation, the Writing Workbook offers the solution for getting customer service agents up to speed in the essential skills they’ll need to write e-mail.

You’ll find this Workbook equally useful to

- Train agents who have the product knowledge but lack the writing skills to compose effective customer service e-mails.
- Help agents with writing skills improve their English grammar and usage.
- Assess writing skills. Managers can use the Pre-Test to assess writing skills and the Competency Test (a supplement to the Workbook) to certify agents in essential writing skills.

This Workbook is a flexible training tool that can suit almost any training situation:

- For self-paced instruction. Agents can complete the entire Workbook as a self-paced writing course. Or agents can take the Pre-Test in Chapter 2 to identify the skills they need to improve, and then complete only the relevant chapters and practices. Agents can use the Workbook during work hours or at home.
• As the basis for instructor-led training. E-mail E-WRITE at info@ewriteonline.com or call 877-481-1869 for information about our customized training programs for customer service agents.

• For a group of agents working together to improve writing skills. Groups provide peer support in completing the Workbook.

This Workbook is a perfect solution to the logistical problem managers face: freeing all of their agents to attend a course on the same day (and leaving no one to respond to customers!).