

Writing skills for your support team

Must-have	Nice-to-have	Don't-need-to-have

Does this chat agent have big picture and small picture writing skills?

Topic: I just submitted my invoice #1749 but I forgot the 9 attachments. How can I add them to my submission?

- 14:46:27 **Jacob:** Thank you for contacting iPayables Support. In order to serve you more efficiently, please provide your vendor number and the customer you are trying to invoice.
- 14:46:45 **You:** Trying to invoice ABC Air Lines
- 14:47:20 **Jacob:** You should be able to go to Main Menu > Invoice Search > then search for the invoice, open the invoice, and add the attachments
- 14:47:25 **You:** Not sure about the Vendor number but the PO is 123456789
- 14:47:35 **You:** OK let me try that
- 14:47:43 **Jacob:** Let me know if that doesn't work for you.
- 14:49:14 **Jacob:** If you need further instructions on how to add an attachment once the invoice is open I can help you with that
- 14:52:50 **You:** I've got all the attachments uploaded but how do I submit them now?
- 14:53:08 **Jacob:** Is there a save button on the bottom right of the invoice?
- 14:53:37 **You:** No. The only button on the Invoice tab is Cancel
- 14:54:10 **Jacob:** Give me one second, I believe it should auto-save then but I will double check.
- 14:54:18 **You:** thanks very much
- 14:55:03 **Jacob:** Yep, it saves it automatically for you
- 14:55:17 **You:** so if I logout, I'll be OK?
- 14:55:43 **Jacob:** Yep! You can even exit out of the invoice, refresh the search page, and open the invoice to double check.
- 14:56:31 **You:** Thanks for your help. Happy Holidays!
- 14:56:42 **Jacob:** Thanks, you too! And you are welcome

Does this email agent have big picture and small picture writing skills?

From: Registrar@SilverSpringU.edu
To: John-Knapp@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Transcript

Dear John,

If you do not have a credit card, you cannot request a transcript using our online service. We do not accept debit cards. You can pay by check, but you must then complete a paper transcript request form. If you can't download the form for some reason, please call 800-111-2222 and ask customer service to mail you the form or reply to this e-mail. You must include a check (or money order) for the full amount due when you send back your completed request form. Credit card payment results in faster processing. If you fail to enclose payment, we cannot process your request.

Janice Sterling
Customer Technician, Registrar's Office – Silver Spring University

Does this social agent have big picture and small picture writing skills?

The screenshot shows a Twitter thread with three tweets. The first tweet is from Aleve (@aleve) dated Jan 15, featuring a video of a woman dancing and text promoting Aleve Back & Muscle Pain. The second tweet is a reply from Mike Connor (@michaelhconnor) dated Jan 15, questioning the product's ingredients. The third tweet is another reply from Aleve (@aleve) dated Jan 16, explaining the active ingredient and apologizing for confusion.

Aleve @aleve · Jan 15
Don't let back pain keep you from rocking all day. #Aleve Back & Muscle Pain gives you up to 12 hours of pain relief with just one pill. bit.ly/2NXJGNC

Mike Connor @michaelhconnor · Jan 15
And what makes this any different from th regular Aleve? Seems the same ingredients. I smell scam.

Aleve @aleve · Jan 16
Hi, while Aleve and Aleve Back & Muscle Pain contain the same active ingredient (220mg of naproxen sodium), we wanted to showcase that our products can specifically help with backaches and muscle pain. We apologize for any confusion.

Identify the true writing demands on support agents who work in your organization

Choose five of these writing skills that applicants must have to work for you

	A. Answer quickly; be productive
	B. Customize templates; freetext within templates
	C. Correct or counter the customer's incorrect information
	D. Use your company's brand voice
	E. Explain technical topics in plain language
	F. Use correct spelling, punctuation and grammar
	G. Use a friendly tone to build rapport and show you care
	H. Achieve first contact resolution
	I. Help customers define or explain their problems
	J. Integrate information from lots of sources into written service
	K. Encourage customers to take action or buy
	L. Summarize research you've done on the customer's account or issue

Open-ended scenario-based writing assessment

Customer's email	Fact sheet
<p>To: Sales@GreenGrassNow.com From: Lisalaporta@gmail.com</p> <p>Subject: Need information about lawn mowing services</p> <p>Dear Green Grass Now,</p> <p>I am interested in your lawn mowing services, but I want to know whether I can afford your service. I can probably afford about \$75 per month. Do you have a limited service option for people like me who are on a budget? I have a small yard with several trees and three flower gardens and a large vegetable garden.</p> <p>Thanks, Lisa LaPorta</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three pricing plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Full summer of lawn mowing (April through October) for \$600. – Monthly fee (weekly mowing) of \$100. – With the "Mow As You Go" pricing plan, you pay for each mowing. The cost is \$35 per mowing for quarter-acre lawns and \$50 per mowing for half-acre lawns. • Green Grass Now, Inc. offers the following services in addition to lawn mowing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Renovate overgrown gardens – Install decks and fences – Design and install garden lighting – Install automatic irrigation systems – Build water gardens and install fountains • If you call Green Grass Now, Inc. for a free estimate, we will give you a free lawn analysis, complete with a soil test from your lawn, a \$50 value. • Customer can reply to this e-mail or call 1-800-111-2222.

Want to Hire Agents Who Have Great Writing Skills? Ask These Interview Questions

So, you want to hire support agents who can communicate with your customers via email, chat, and social media. Who doesn't? But this range of writing skills—and enthusiasm for writing to customers all day long—isn't common. How can you discover whether the applicant sitting across the table from you or smiling nervously at you in a Zoom meeting has the writing skills to connect with your customers?

Ask specific, meaningful questions about writing during the interview. It'll take a little work to figure out whether an applicant has excellent writing skills or even competent ones, but it's worth it. It's painful to discover after you've made an offer that your new employee is a poor writer.

Pose these questions during the interview, and you'll learn whether the person you're thinking of hiring has the writing chops to do the job.

1. **Do you like to write? Why?** Liking to write isn't a prerequisite for on-the-job success, but it's one good indicator. The Why? follow-up should give you some indication of whether the answer is sincere. If the applicant says, "No, I really don't like to write," I'd think twice about hiring them to respond to your customers in email, chat, or social.
2. **What are your writing strengths and weaknesses?** Of course, you want to know what an applicant is or isn't good at, but the best reason to ask this question is to get a sense of how well the applicant can talk about writing, which is an important skill of its own. Even if your dream is to hire agents who are great writers in all support channels, realistically, you'd like to hear—directly from the applicant—what kinds of writing they're good at and what they need to improve.
3. **How much writing have you done in your previous jobs?** (Use a specific measure.) Good writers know how much they produce. "In our live chat channel, I completed about 10 chats per three-hour shift with our premium customers" or "I answered between 20 and 30 e-mails to customers each day" would be good answers to this question.
4. **How do you measure the success of your writing?** Does the applicant believe, as you do, that good writing accomplishes something? And if so, what? Do they use measures familiar to the support world, such as a customer satisfaction score or first contact resolution? Do they use social media measures of success, such as likes, comments, and shares?
5. **Can you describe three different writing tasks you had on your previous job? Can you arrange them in order of difficulty, listing the easiest one first?** There's no right answer to this question, but it will reveal a lot about the applicant's writing experience.
6. **Can you cite one grammar or punctuation rule you are absolutely certain about?** A job interview is stressful enough; you probably don't want to torture the poor applicant with a grammar quiz. But asking a prospective customer service agent to cite one rule, just one, will indicate whether this person is comfortable with the mechanics of writing. It's a fair question, not a tricky one.
7. **Have you mentored or helped anyone else become a better support writer?** If so, what steps did you take? While not a writing skill per se, mentoring others involves the ability to explain what's wrong with a chat, email, or social response and help the writer improve it. These are important skills for anyone who'll be part of a support team.
8. **When you have problems with your writing, what steps do you take to improve?** This question may help you get a sense of whether the applicant will take writing feedback well or—even better—seek it out.

OK, maybe asking all these questions would make for a long interview and an applicant who's feeling besieged, so select the ones that resonate with you and provide the insights you need.