

7 Tips to Improve Employees' Writing

Do you find yourself editing every piece of writing that your staff produce? Are you embarrassed by error-filled reports, proposals, and emails? Do employees miss deadlines for proposals and grants because they can't organise their writing time?

Improving writing within an organisation writing is a challenge, but it's not impossible. Here are seven tips to improve the standard of writing in your organisation.

Set the Stage

1. Purchase a comprehensive, trusted style guide such as the *Style Manual*¹ then use it for all editing decisions and disputes. Don't impose *your* pet peeves and grammatical foibles on the rest of the team.

Coach and Train for Better Writing Skills

2. Continually upgrade skills with writing workshops, either public or in-house. If you have a Human Resources department, have them do a training needs analysis to identify clearly the learning need, then consult with them on the best way to meet that need.
3. Keep your own skill set up-to-date by attending training courses yourself. Too often participants in my writing courses say to me 'My manager should be on this course'. Sadly, it's true. Many managers, all too keen to edit someone else's writing, have an outdated skill set, or are relying on memories of fifth grade to guide them as to what's right and what's wrong.
4. Throw away the red pen on printed hard copy. Anyone who monitors or edits another's writing should be using *Track Changes*, a feature of Microsoft Word that allows editors to make comments in a document without changing it.
5. Use your coaching skills to improve writing performance. Always talk about what's good about the writing first, then focus on where it may have fallen short of the mark. Set mutually agreed-upon goals and targets with milestones to mark progress.

Respect the Process of Writing

6. Be respectful of the employee's time and other work commitments. Handing someone an assignment late on Friday afternoon only shows lack of respect both for the individual and the task. Plan writing activities just as you would any project. Don't force employees to sandwich writing time between ongoing daily duties, meetings, phone calls, email, and a variety of other interruptions.

Reward and motivate

7. Let staff know how important good writing is. Have a quarterly or annual award for 'most improved writing'. Include snippets of writing advice in the internal staff newsletter or intranet. Don't forget that a simple 'Well done!' can go a very long way to improve morale and productivity.

¹ *Style Manual for authors, editors and printers*. 6th Edition. John Wiley & Sons. 2008.