

Build on your English!

A skills-based approach to business English Step-by-step writing

Step 1. Identify your target reader

- What is my **relationship** with the target reader?
Depending on the answer, choose the appropriate **register**: informal (friendly) or formal (official). (*I am writing to let you know about...* versus *I am writing to inform you about...*)
- **Why** am I writing to the target reader? What is **the purpose** of the piece of writing I am planning to send? What do I want the target reader **to do** after reading my message? Do I want to give or ask for information, to persuade, to give or ask for advice?
The answers will help you to focus on relevant content (step 2) and the most effective text type (step 3).

Step 2. Decide on the most relevant content

- What are the **main ideas** I want to convey?
Include about three ideas as the concentration span of an individual is quite limited and, besides, in a business environment, time is a valuable commodity.
- What **relevant vocabulary** items do I have to use?
For instance, when you write about company performance, your message should include key-phrases such as *corporate message, board of directors, agreed objectives, financial statements, cash flow statement, gross profit, net earnings* and so on.
- What **grammar structures** can best help me convey my ideas?
Decide on a time framework for your piece of writing. When you describe events completed in a past time interval, use the past simple tense (*We launched two new products last year*). When you refer to the present results of a past course of action, use present perfect (*We have successfully launched two new products*).

Step 3. Decide on the most suitable text type (e-mail message, memo, report, press release etc)

- Which text type will have the **impact** I want on the target reader?
- What are the **layout** characteristics of the text I have chosen?
Is it better to group ideas in **paragraphs** (as in an e-mail message) or by **sections** with headings (as in a report)?

Phrase bank – Basics

	Opening a message	Closing a message
Formal	Dear Sir/Madam,	Yours faithfully,
Neutral	Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms./Miss Peterson,	Yours sincerely, Best regards,
Informal	Dear Ben, Hi/Hello, Ben!	Best wishes, Bye for now.
	Formal/Neutral	Informal
Referring to a previous contact	Thank you for your e-mail message of... Further to our telephone discussion...	Thanks for your e-mail. Re your email...
Reason for writing	With reference to ... We would like to bring to your attention that...	Just a quick word about... Remember to...
Giving information	We are able to confirm that... We regret to inform you that...	I can tell you that... I'm sorry to tell you...
Asking for information	Could you send me some information about... I am interested in receiving...	Can you tell me a little more about... Please send me...
Requests	I would really appreciate it if you could ... Is there any way you can ...?	Can you...? Can I have...?
Offering help	I would be pleased to ... Would you like me to ...	Let me find that out for you. Do you want me to ...? Can I...?
Final comments	Please feel free to contact us again if you require any further information.	Drop a line if you need more help.
Closing remark	I am looking forward to + ing	Looking forward to + ing