

Put it into Writing

The Complete Communicator

Trainer's Guide

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1.	Introduction to the Series	
	About the subject.....	3
	Component parts.....	3
	Target audience.....	4
	Contents of the materials.....	4
	Using the materials.....	4
	Principles on which the courses are designed.....	5
2.	Introduction to Put it into Writing	
	Training objectives.....	7
	Resources needed.....	7
	Synopsis of the video Put it into Writing	8
	Learning points from the video.....	8
	Pre-course preparation.....	9
3.	Put it into Writing: The Workshop	
	Outline of the workshop.....	11
	Detailed programme – Day One	
	1. Laying the foundations.....	13
	2. Learning from the video.....	19
	3. Purpose.....	20
	4. Preparation.....	23
	5. Aspects of content.....	27
	6. Consolidating the day.....	35
	Detailed programme – Day Two	
	7. Review of previous day.....	37
	8. Application to given scenarios.....	38
	9. Looking around the organisation.....	40
	10. Application to work.....	42
	11. Action planning.....	44
4.	Handouts and OHTs	45
5.	Notes	66

About the subject

How we communicate with each other lies at the heart of all workplace activity. But what are we doing when we communicate? In most cases the aim is to influence the other person or people to gain a particular desired effect. Although personal power or status in the workplace may sometimes be the source of influence, the use of power is not an option for the majority of people. Influence is more likely to be a matter of persuasion. We achieve our goals through the words we speak, the way we write and the non-verbal signals we send out. Each of these three behaviours is the subject of a separate video, under the umbrella title of *The Complete Communicator*.

- **Put it into Writing** considers how to communicate clearly and persuasively in writing.
- **Feedback Day** explores how to give and receive both positive and critical feedback in a constructive way.
- **Communication Beyond Words** is about the power of our body language and non-verbal communication in affecting other people's behaviour.

Component parts

This training pack contains the following elements:

- a drama video
- a collection of 'Summary Scenes' at the end of the tape, capturing the key teaching points of the video
- Trainer's Guide
- Self-Study Workbook.

The same fictional company features in all three programmes. However, each video is self-contained and can be used without reference to the others.

Introduction to the Series

Target audience

The materials have been designed for use with all levels of staff, up to and including first line managers. They also provide different perspectives on the subject of using communication skills to influence.

Put it into Writing is designed as an introductory level course for people with limited experience of written communications.

Contents of the materials

Each Trainer's Guide contains all the materials needed for the facilitation of a one- or two-day workshop and includes:

- a workshop summary and detailed guide
- handouts
- OHTs.

The Trainer's Guide provides a comprehensive set of practical work-related activities, supplemented by background information, for trainers to draw on as needed.

The Self-Study Workbook in each pack enables independent learners to maximise the benefit they gain from watching the video. The contents prompt learners to make connections between their own experience and the drama, and to identify the new behaviours that they will implement in their work.

Using the materials

The contents of each Trainer's Guide offer a flexible resource that can be adapted to your particular needs. The activities have been organised into a logical sequence that also makes it easy to use the video effectively. However, if you are incorporating the materials into a workshop of your own design, then you may prefer to select the parts that are most relevant to your design.

The times given here are merely guidelines. The actual times will depend on the needs of your participants and on your judgement about what is important at any particular time.

The content of the training programmes relates only to the subject matter. For example, no detailed opening session is included because it is assumed that you will have your own preferred ways of welcoming participants, breaking the ice and dealing with administrative details. No start or finish times are indicated, though the individual activities do have a guide time attached to them. Similarly, break times are left to the discretion of the trainer.

Much of the work on the course is done in small groups. It helps to set these up at the beginning of each half-day, so that participants know who they are going to be working with and also work with different people. The seating should then be arranged so that the group can work as a whole or split up without having to move chairs. A convenient way of setting this up is for each work group to sit round its own small table, whilst still being able to see the OHTs and the trainer when necessary.

Principles on which the courses are designed

The pre-course work and the trainer's inputs and explanations of activities make clear the reason for the particular piece of course content, and how participants might benefit from it. This ensures that participants can answer the question: 'What's in it for me?', which is important for their learning.

If participants are to acquire new skills, they need opportunities to put into practice the insights they gain from the video, the trainer and from analysis of their own material. For this reason, the course contains many practical activities that are based on participants' own material.

Because participants work with material that they themselves have generated or that the trainer has gathered from within the organisation, the content of the course has real meaning and relevance. In some cases, the content chosen for Day Two will reflect actual issues that participants are facing in their jobs. Working on these issues will ensure that there is a transfer of learning between the course and their work.

Training objectives

By the end of the course, participants will:

- have analysed the purpose, content and style of their own recent written output
- be aware of how careful preparation can help overcome 'writer's block'
- understand the importance of clarifying the desired outcomes of their written communications
- have practised writing in a persuasive way
- have applied their insights to their own work requirements.

Resources needed

The workshop requires:

- a flip chart for the trainer and one for each small group
- an overhead projector
- handouts (included in this Trainer's Guide)
- OHTs (included in this Trainer's Guide)
- writing materials for participants.

Plenary sessions and group work should both be done in the same room. This will facilitate discussion and feedback within and between the small groups. It also makes it easy to allocate short activities to the small groups, and for them to feed back their thoughts to the whole group.

The training room should therefore be big enough to allow participants to work in small groups without the discussions of one group interfering with the work of another.

Introduction to Put it into Writing

Synopsis of the video *Put it into Writing*

Nisha and her colleagues, Marcus and Alan, are Business Development Managers, working for Talkwave Communications. Part of the company's business activity is to hire out mobile phones.

Whilst Nisha finds it easy to communicate in writing, both Marcus and Alan face considerable obstacles, not least in getting started.

Nisha helps them both to decide what it is they want to say, and to produce clear, fluent output that conveys the right message to the recipient. She advises them to start by considering the purpose of their communication and follows this with a technique for mapping out the content. She then draws their attention to the tone of their writing, and the effect this could have on the reader. Finally, after considering style and layout, she recommends that they check their work carefully for spelling and grammatical errors.

As a result of her tuition, Marcus and Alan feel more confident about their ability to achieve the effects they want in their written communications.

The summary scenes at the end of the drama are about:

- establishing the purpose of a communication
- using a spider diagram to map out ideas
- establishing the right tone
- laying out a piece of text so that it is easy to read
- checking for ambiguities, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

Learning points from the video

- Poor writing is unlikely to be persuasive writing.
- Many people share the same difficulties in putting words onto paper.
- The written word is potentially an influential means of communication.
- Establishing the purpose of a piece of writing, and the desired outcomes, is helpful in getting started.
- A spider diagram is a useful technique for mapping out the contents of what needs to be said. It also enables the writer to decide on a logical order for the points.

- Careful preparation includes collecting all the relevant information before beginning to write.
- The tone of a letter, which is conveyed in the language used, is an important factor in achieving the outcomes that the writer wants.
- A well laid-out letter can help the reader to take in the information. Solid blocks of text and long sentences are not easy to read.
- It's important to check written work carefully, to avoid ambiguities and grammatical and spelling errors.

Pre-course preparation

For participants

The success of this course depends on the materials that participants work with. It is important that they:

- develop their awareness of their own approach to writing
- assess critically work that they have already written
- apply their learning to tasks that they will do in the near future.

They will gain most benefit from using their own material as far as possible. At least two weeks before the course, therefore, you should give them the following instructions.

1. Collect some typical examples of your written communications and bring them to the course. A representative sample might include short memos and letters to colleagues in your own department or other departments, and/or letters to customers and suppliers. Longer reports are outside the scope of this course. Don't try to choose only your best pieces of work. You will learn more by improving work that you are less satisfied with.
2. Keep a record for a week or so of each piece of writing that you do. Use the outline provided.

These instructions are reproduced in the preparatory handout entitled 'Pre-course preparation'.

Introduction to Put it into Writing

For trainers

It is also important that participants learn from examples of other people's work. It would therefore be useful for you, as the trainer, to develop your own library of well-written communications collected from the organisation.

If you can't find sufficient suitable examples, then take what is available and improve on it, so that you can present it as a good model. Company memos and e-mails to all employees often provide useful source material.

You may need to make minor amendments to the text to preserve confidentiality, even if you are using good material.

If you want to use poorly drafted material as an example of how not to write persuasively, then try to collect material from outside the organisation, and render it unattributable to an individual or to another company. It would be insensitive to use poorly drafted in-company material from an identifiable source.

Outline of the Workshop

Day One

1. Laying the foundations

- a. About the course
- b. Establishing a starting point
- c. Setting up working groups
- d. Collating materials gathered before the course
- e. Favourite strategies

2. Learning from the video

- a. What can the video teach us?

3. Purpose

- a. Establishing the purpose

4. Preparation

- a. Introducing spider diagrams
- b. Putting things in a logical order to make a persuasive case

5. Aspects of content

- a. Language that gets in the way
- b. Readability
- c. Tone
- d. The active versus the passive voice

Put it into Writing: The Workshop

6. Consolidating the day

- a. Consolidating the day

Day Two

7. Review of the previous day

- a. Review

8. Application to given scenarios

- a. Practice in writing persuasive documents

9. Looking around the organisation

- a. Looking around the organisation

10. Application to work

- a. Application to work

11. Action planning

- a. Action planning

I. Laying the foundations

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
1a. Trainer introduces the course		10
1b. Trainer establishes a starting point	OHT 1b Handout 1b	25
1c. Trainer sets up working groups		5
1d. Participants collate materials gathered before the course	Participants' own material	30
1e. Participants share their favourite strategies		10

1a. About the course

Approximate time needed

- 10 minutes.

Method

- Introduce the topic.

Content

'Writing needs care because it has an effect on the reader. Poorly considered writing may have the opposite effect from that intended.

Many people share the same blocks when it comes to putting words on paper, but there are ways of getting round them.

The course will focus on your own work – hence the pre-course work.

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

Much of the work will be done in small groups. These will change every half-day, so that you work with everyone else at some time during the course.

The spirit of the course is constructive, useful discussion. There are few absolute rights or wrongs about writing. Judgements are considerably influenced by personal taste and style.

The first day will focus on specific points that increase the effectiveness and persuasiveness of a piece of writing. On the second day, the emphasis is on applying the guidelines to more substantial pieces of text, and to text that you will generate for yourselves.' (Adapt the wording to suit the content of Day Two.)

(Invite questions from participants and deal with any areas of concern.)

1b. Establishing a starting point

Approximate time needed

- 25 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Display OHT 1b.
- Give instructions.
- Distribute Handout 1b.
- Debrief.

Content

'We'll start by considering how you want to improve your writing.

The need to communicate in writing produces different reactions in people. There are those for whom it is something difficult, that is put off until the last moment. Others dash off their words with impressive speed and ease, but ignore the finer points of expression and effect. For some, writing is full of pitfalls, with grammatical errors and spelling mistakes lurking in every sentence.

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

Many people who want to write more persuasively experience difficulties in one of the following areas. (Display OHT 1b.)

Overcoming the barriers to getting started

These are the blockages and difficulties you may face before you can actually put words to paper.

Preparing the content

This includes collecting the information you need and being clear about what you want to say.

Clarifying the desired outcomes

It helps to know what you would like to happen as a result of your communication and to bear this in mind as you write.

Using an appropriate style

Aspects of style include the words you use, the tone of your writing, the layout, and much more besides.

Using correct grammar and spelling

Are you confused between 'there' and 'their'? or 'your' and 'you're'? Should you start a letter with 'Dear madam'? 'Dear Ms Burns'? Or 'Dear Sue'? (Choose examples suitable to the level of skill in your participant group.) There's room for so many mistakes that the fear of getting things wrong can make you anxious and reluctant to put anything down on paper.'

Instructions

'Take a few minutes to reflect on how you would like to improve and to establish your priorities. (Distribute Handout 1b.) Use this short questionnaire to focus your thoughts.'

Debrief

Discuss with participants the needs they have and how they feel about writing.

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

1c. Setting up working groups

Approximate time needed

- 5 minutes.

Method

- Give instructions.

Instructions

‘Most of the activities you will be doing today and tomorrow will be done in small groups. You will change your group every half-day. I’d like to arrange the room now so that this morning’s groups sit together, and can easily switch into small group work and back into the whole group, without having to move chairs and tables each time.’

(Arrange people, chairs, tables, to your satisfaction.)

1d. Collating materials gathered before the course

Approximate time needed

- 30 minutes.

Method

- Give instructions.
- Elicit contributions from the group.

Instructions

‘Before we get into the detail of how to write persuasively, I’d like you to take a first look at the samples of writing that you’ve collected. We need to group them somehow, according to why they were written. Talk about this in your small groups and see which ones were written in order to influence someone in some way.’

(Use your judgement to decide when the groups are ready to move on. When they are ready, take feedback from the groups.)

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

So, how many of your samples were written to influence?

(Wait for responses.)

Let's see what sort of influence you were trying to exert.

(Take examples. Then, if few examples of influencing were identified, ask to hear examples of those not considered 'influencing'.)

I'd like to hear some of the other examples you brought. What were you trying to do in those?

(It may be that with further prompting and questioning, participants will realise that, in fact, their material contains further examples of influencing. Whatever the case, identify the relevant examples and move on.)

We'll be referring to these examples later today, so will you please display them on a flip chart and position it near your group. Put your name on your sheets of paper. This is not so that we can criticise your work – merely so that we can address constructive comments to the right person.

Now let's look at the records of your written communication. Talk them over in your small group and decide how many of them were concerned with influencing.

(Allow a few minutes of discussion.)

Let's see how important – or not – influencing has been for you in the last week or two.

(Invite contributions. Make appropriate comments on the apparent importance of influencing. If it isn't important, it might be worth exploring why.)

Mark your list in some way to identify the 'influencing' items. We'll be making some additions to these as we go along.'

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

1e. Favourite strategies

Approximate time needed

- 10 minutes.

Method

- Give instructions.
- Elicit and record responses.

Instructions

‘Before we look at the video that I’m going to show you, I’d first like to see what goes through your mind when you want to influence someone through writing. Do you have any favourite strategies that you use?’

(Elicit answers. Probe what is said. Record examples on a flip chart for future reference.)

2. Learning from the video

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
2a. Trainer led discussion on 'What can the video teach us?'	Video	30

2a. What can the video teach us?

Approximate time needed

- 30 minutes.

Method

- Play the video.
- Check what points participants have remembered.

Instructions

'I'm going to play you a video about making your writing persuasive. We'll watch it straight through and then I'd like you to tell me what made an impression on you – what you particularly remembered from it.'

(Play the video and then elicit the points that participants particularly remembered. Explore with them how it relates to their own experiences. Refer to the self-assessment they have recently completed.)

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

3. Purpose

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
3a. Trainer input on establishing the purpose of a piece of writing	OHT 3a	40

3a. Establishing the purpose

Approximate time needed

- 40 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic and facilitate discussion.
- Show OHT 3a.
- Give instructions.
- Facilitate groups as they work.

Content

‘We talked earlier about the purpose of some of your written examples. I’d like to take a look at this in more detail now. Nisha, in the video, made the point very strongly that the starting point of any written communication should be why you are sending it. What do you hope to achieve by it?’

This is important for two reasons. The first is a very practical one. If you don’t know what you’re trying to achieve, you won’t know what to write.

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

The second is about where you put your energies. If you know what you want to achieve, you will be able to decide who you should be trying to influence – assuming that there's more than one person involved – and how you should be directing your efforts.

We'll deal first with what you should write.

Let me give you an example. Imagine you are angry because you spent a lot of money on a top-of-the-range washing machine, and after just three weeks its temperature control mechanism fails. You decide to write to the supplier. As you draft your letter, you find yourself venting your anger and elaborating on the inconvenience caused, your disappointment at the failure of such a prestigious brand, the items that were damaged by the excessive heat and so on.

If you saw a letter expressing all that anger, how would you interpret the purpose?

(Wait for contributions and respond appropriately.)

It would seem that what was most important for you was to express your feelings. What you haven't done is express the real purpose. You want a replacement machine (not a repair job) and compensation for your damaged clothes. So you should say so!

How might you redraft your letter, with that in mind? Work out in your small groups how you would begin.

(Wait a few minutes and then invite answers. Respond appropriately.)

So being clear about the outcome you want will affect what you write. OK?

Now let's look at the second reason why purpose is important. Have a look at this matrix with the subject matter on one axis and your relationship with relevant people on the other. (Show OHT 3a.)

It's about being strategic in your efforts to influence people.

If there are people who have a good relationship with you and are well disposed towards the subject, then you'll have an easy job. They are on your side already.

If, however, there are people who are against you and against the subject, then you have an almost impossible job, so don't waste your efforts.

Concentrate instead on the other people. If there are some who are for the subject, but against you, then work on your relationship with them. If they are for you but against the subject, then work on the subject. It's a question of knowing where to put your energies and emphasis.

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

Do you find yourself needing to influence groups of people? Let's hear about it and how this matrix might be relevant.'

(Facilitate a discussion, then move on to the activity.)

Instructions

'I'd like you to work now in your small groups and take another look at the samples you brought with you.

Each one of you in turn will pick out one example in which you were attempting to influence a person or people. Explain what your purpose was. Your fellow group members will discuss with you how well your writing reflected your purpose. If they think you could have written something different, then jointly work out a clearer way.

Take about 20 minutes for this, and then we'll discuss your outcomes.'

Facilitation

Walk around the groups as they're working to hear how well they are completing the task. When they are ready, facilitate a discussion of their outcomes. Help them sort out the real purpose if they aren't clear.

If it emerges that some people wished to conceal their real purpose, explore the consequences of this. If readers detect some ulterior motive, what will their reaction be? How likely are they to co-operate? What will be the consequences for the longer-term relationships?

4. Preparation

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
4a. Trainer introduces spider diagrams	OHT 4a Handout 4a Blank OHT	40
4b. Trainer input on putting things in a logical order to make a persuasive case	OHT 4b	15

4a. Introducing spider diagrams

Approximate time needed

- 40 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Show OHT 4a.
- Give instructions and distribute Handout 4a.
- Display blank OHT and begin new spider diagram.
- Facilitate groups as they work.

Content

'Nisha drew a rudimentary spider diagram to help Alan and Marcus plan their writing. (Show OHT 4a) Let's look at the basic principles of constructing such a diagram.

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

It has the following characteristics.

- There's a core concept at the centre.
- There are important themes radiating from this core concept.
- Each of these themes is broken down into branches showing sub-divisions of the theme.
- These sub-divisions in turn are broken down into more detailed branches.
- Single words are used for the main branches, rather than phrases, and are then broken down further. For example 'timing' is broken down into 'fitter's availability', 'delivery time' and 'own commitments'. Conventional notes might have had the availability of the fitter mixed up with the style of the units, the material from which the units would be made, etc. The brief, hierarchical version is more precise and evocative. It also keeps the mind open to possibilities, instead of closing in on the first option that comes to mind.
- The diagram can use colour to separate the main themes.
- A lot of information can be captured in one diagram.
- It's easy to make connections between things by joining them with arrows.
- Ideas occur in no particular sequence. They can be captured as they come to mind.
- Early versions may be messy. They can be redrawn if tidiness and clarity are important.'

Instructions

'You are now going to practise in your small groups. You will jointly be drawing a diagram using the content of the video as your subject matter. I'll give you this handout to remind you of the basic concepts.' (Distribute Handout 4a.)

Facilitation

Put up a blank OHT. Draw a colourful centre, saying 'Content of video', and let them carry on from there in their small groups. Remind them that they should get big, broad themes initially and use just single words where possible.

Monitor their progress. This part of the exercise could take 10 minutes or so. Review their work when they have finished.

Then suggest that they redraw the diagram from the video to bring it into line with the guidelines given. Monitor the small groups. Offer help as required.

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

4b. Putting things in a logical order to make a persuasive case

Approximate time needed

- 15 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Display OHT 4b.
- Give instructions to small groups.
- Debrief small group discussions.

Content

'People often ask for guidance on how to organise their points into a logical order. Unfortunately, there's no general rule to give you. What I can do is suggest a framework that might be useful to you when persuading people to change their behaviour. (Display OHT 4b.)

(You could use the example below, or an example of your own, to show how this might work in practice.)

Imagine you are fed up with the mess in the kitchen area where you and your colleagues make coffee or tea.

The statement of purpose might be – I need your help in sorting out the mess in the staff kitchen.

You might state the problem or describe the situation like this – Every morning last week and this week, when I've come in, I've found dirty crockery in the sink, milk left out of the fridge and going sour, and tea bags and biscuit packets not put in the bin. (Note that the description should be strictly factual and accurate. It spoils your case to exaggerate or be vague.)

The implications might be – I find myself having to wash up and clear up before I can make myself a cup of tea. There are notices up about sharing the work, but they seem to be ignored. I find it a particular problem because I often have people coming in for an early meeting and I want to offer them something to drink.

Your strategy might be – I'd like us all to get together to sort out a way of tackling this.

A follow-up could be – We'll review our new plan in two weeks' time.'

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

Instructions

'I'd now like you to look at your own examples in your small groups. Each of you should select one where you wanted to persuade people to do something in a particular way. Apply the model to it and see how far it gets you.'

(An alternative would be to offer two or three issues that you know are relevant to participants. If you want to introduce some fun, you could ask participants to take an issue and write it up in the least persuasive way possible, before re-writing it effectively. Sometimes it's a salutary lesson to realise just how easy it is to use clichés and inappropriate language.)

Debrief

Debrief a selection of examples. The number you choose will depend on whether or not participants are able to apply the model.

5. Aspects of content

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
5a. Whole group exploration of language that gets in the way	OHT 5a Handout 5ai Handout 5aii	15
5b. Individual and small group work on readability	Handout 5b OHT 5b	25
5c. Trainer led discussion on tone followed by small group activity	OHT 5ci Handout 5ci OHT 5cii	60
5d. Trainer input and individual/small group examination of the active versus the passive voice		30

5a. Language that gets in the way

Approximate time needed

- 15 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Display OHT 5a.
- Distribute Handout 5ai.
- Give instructions.
- Debrief.
- Distribute Handout 5aii.

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

Content

'It's easy to confuse people by using unnecessarily complicated language. I've an example here of how this can be taken to extremes. (Show OHT 5a.) Can you work out what this says?

(If they need a clue, tell them it's a nursery rhyme. The answer is: Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon, etc.)

In the video, Nisha found that Alan had managed to write a substantial letter to Sue Burns but that he was unhappy with his style. She soon identified why. His choice of words was working against him. She pointed out that he struck a discordant note right at the very start with 'Dear Ms Burns'. Since he would call her 'Sue' face-to-face, he should have addressed her in the same way when writing to her.

She also pointed out that his subsequent language was full of stiff, pompous, official phrases that obscured his message.

He is not alone. Many business letters are written in this way and do a poor job at communicating with the recipient. They could be much more persuasive if they sounded more like the spoken word. For example, when we speak, we don't say: 'We are in receipt of your letter of ...' We'd say: 'Thank you for your letter' or 'We received your letter...' instead.

We wouldn't say: 'We have pleasure in enclosing a representative sample of our products for your favourable consideration.' What would we say instead? (*Wait a moment for a participant to answer.*) Yes. Something like: 'We have enclosed a sample of our products. We hope you like them' or '... we hope they meet your specification'.

And what does Alan's dreadful phrase 'Pursuant to...' actually mean? (*Wait a moment for a participant to answer.*) It's not a good way to start a letter. In fact it's a legal phrase used in the wrong context to mean 'In reference to...' But even that is unnecessarily formal. Alan could simply have said: 'Thank you for your letter...'

Another unnecessarily wordy phrase is that ubiquitous expression '... at this moment in time'. There's no need for five words when a single one like 'now' or 'currently' would do very well instead.

So the message is to write in a style that is more like speech instead of adopting a pompous business language. A word of caution is appropriate here, though. Spoken language is full of slang, and jokey buzz words that have a short shelf-life. It is peppered with colloquialisms that obscure rather than enrich and have no place in written communications. Effective, persuasive language is clear, simple and straightforward.

Let's look at some specific examples of unnecessary words.' (Distribute Handout 5ai)

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

Instructions

'Spend a few minutes individually translating each of these phrases into one or two words.'

Debrief

Go through the list of words, checking the accuracy of participants' alternatives.

Make sure that participants understand that, all too often, the longer phrase is chosen to give apparent weight and authority. In fact, the effect can simply sound pompous. It will rarely influence the reader positively. Distribute Handout 5a11 as a record of the alternatives.

5b. Readability

Approximate time needed

- 25 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Give instructions.
- Distribute Handout 5b.
- Debrief.
- Show OHT 5b.

Content

'You may remember from the video that Nisha talks about the impression a reader gets from a piece of writing. It's a visual impression, and so doesn't depend on the words the writer uses, or the way a message is phrased. It's more a question of layout. When text is full of long sentences and even longer paragraphs, it becomes difficult to read.'

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

Nisha encouraged Marcus to break up his text into separate paragraphs, so that he could help his reader to absorb what he was saying.'

Instructions

'I'm going to give you a handout (Distribute Handout 5b) on which has been written a very dense piece of text. The sentences are long and rambling, too.

Your task is to rewrite this into something clear and readable, capturing the essential points made in the text.

When you have a version of your own, compare notes with the rest of the group and come up with a definitive rewrite.

Then I'd like you to put this version up on your flip chart so that we can all come and have a look at it.'

Debrief

Ask each group to read the versions produced by the other groups. Facilitate a discussion of how they have tackled the task. If it would be helpful, show OHT 5b. Point out how much more visually attractive and accessible it is compared with the density of text of the original version.

5c. Tone

Approximate time needed

- 60 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Give instructions.
- Show OHT 5ci.
- Debrief.
- Give further instructions and distribute Handout 5c.
- Debrief and show OHT 5cii.

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

Content

'Sometimes a piece of writing gives an impression that is contrary to the writer's intention. By using inappropriate language, the writer may fail to influence the reader, simply because the tone is wrong. We are all familiar with different tones of voice in our speech, and the way we use them and respond to them. Writing has a similar 'tone of voice' that can leap off the page and have a strong impact on people. It's therefore important to get it right.

We learn a lot about people's thoughts, feelings and reactions by the tone of their voice. The same can be said for the written word, though writers have more opportunity to control and refine the impression they make.

We'll explore the question of tone, and see how it's affected by the use of words. We'll do this in two parts. The first part will be done now and will be based on the example of a memo about expenses claims. The second part will be much more extensive and will form a substantial part of Day Two's activities.'

Instructions

'Take the following example. (Show OHT 5ci) The writer wanted people to follow a new procedure. The writing is polite and straightforward. It isn't full of long words, but somehow it conveys a stern, schoolmasterly tone. What gives it this tone? How is this likely to affect the ability of the writer to influence the reader?'

Debrief

Facilitate a brief group discussion. If participants are not able to define why the tone is unsuitable, make the following points.

- The title of the message is negative and even has legal overtones.
- 'It has been drawn to my attention' is a very formal phrase.
- There are no pronouns ('You' or 'I'). The text therefore sounds very impersonal.
- 'It is essential' sounds official.
- 'In future' is reminiscent of the last part of a school teacher's reprimand.
- 'Please ensure...' is also somewhat formal in tone.
- 'At the correct time' implies rules and regulations that must be followed.

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

Instructions

'Take the same paragraph and rewrite it in a more friendly manner.'
(Distribute Handout 5ci.)

Debrief

Discuss the rewritten versions. Check that they:

- are written in the active voice rather than the passive (e.g. '... that you complete every section' instead of '... that every section is completed')
- speak directly to the reader
- avoid stern phrases like 'essential', 'in future ...', etc.

Point out, though, that there are no hard and fast rules. A word like 'essential' may be appropriate in another context.

You may like to display OHT 5cii to show one way of improving the tone of the paragraph under discussion. Note that it also follows the model of stating the purpose, describing the situation objectively, stating the implications and offering a solution. It also has an appealing heading that will make people more likely to read it.

Facilitate the sharing of examples.

Round off by reminding participants of the importance of checking that their work has the impact they want, as well as checking for correct spelling and grammar.

Put it into Writing: The Workshop – Day One

5d. The active versus the passive voice

Approximate time needed

- 30 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Give instructions.

Content

'Another trap that Alan fell into is a very common one.

Contrast 'I sent you a letter' with 'A letter was sent to you'. In the first statement, we know who was doing what to whom. There is the pronoun 'I' at the beginning of the sentence. It is clear who has taken the action. So we call this the 'active voice'.

In the second sentence, it isn't clear. We don't know who the person taking the action was. So we call this the 'passive voice'. It's an important distinction to be aware of when you write, because there's all the difference in the world between the clarity and precision of the active voice and the relative dullness and vagueness of the passive.

A word of warning. Don't get the impression that the passive voice should always be avoided. It is often appropriate precisely because the writer wants to leave things slightly vague. It might also be the right thing to say to avoid sounding accusatory. You may prefer to say: 'The milk was left out of the fridge, and went sour...' rather than: 'You left the milk out of the fridge and it went sour...' Indeed, you may not **know** who left the milk out, and so you would **have** to use the passive in this instance.

Use of the passive voice may also be appropriate when the identity of the the person performing the action is irrelevant. For example: 'Dinner is served' is exactly right. It would sound odd for a Master of Ceremonies to announce: 'The catering staff have served dinner'.

In Alan's case, however, the passive voice was not appropriate. He would have been better using the active voice instead, and saying very simply: 'I sent you a letter...'. This would have been a clearer, more direct statement of what actually happened. It would also have reinforced the impression that he was taking responsibility for what had happened.

Put it into Writing:

The Workshop – Day One

Have another look now at your handout with the example of the 'Non-compliance with claims procedures' memo, because it contains several examples of the passive voice. In this case, it's the absence of first-person pronouns – no mention of 'I' – that gives the game away. It's 'the organisation' speaking, rather than the individual controller.

What examples can you pick out?

(Wait a moment for a contribution and respond appropriately. Then move on to the next part of the activity.)

Instructions

'In your small groups, read through each other's samples of written communication. Highlight any examples that you find of:

- 'official business language' instead of sentences that sound as straightforward as speech
- the passive voice instead of the active.

Discuss with each other how they might be written differently. Then share some examples with the whole group.'

6. Consolidating the day

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
6a. Trainer rounds off the day		5

6a. Consolidating the day

Approximate time needed

- 5 minutes.

Method

- Lead discussion.

Content

Before they leave at the end of the day, participants should have the opportunity to ask any questions that remain, and to hear what the next day's programme will be.

Explain that Day One has been about the specific techniques of writing. Remind participants briefly of the day's different activities and their purpose. (Leave the more detailed review of content until the beginning of Day Two.)

Day Two will focus on the application of the techniques on a broader scale. Explain that there will be two major activities during the day, one in the morning and the second after lunch.

7. Review of the previous day

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
7a. Trainer led review of previous day		15

7a. Review

Approximate time needed

- 15 minutes.

Method

- Give instructions.
- Facilitate debrief.

Instructions

'We covered a lot of ground yesterday, experimenting with how we can apply the messages contained in the video. Before we move on to today's programme, take a few minutes to review what we did.'

I'd like you to work in small groups and draw up a spider diagram of yesterday's content. At the centre, put 'Writing persuasively'.

You can have around 15 minutes for this. Then we will compare what each group has come up with.'

Debrief

Monitor progress. If they are busily engaged in the task and need more time, allow it.

Discuss any issues that arise from their recollections of the previous day's work. Identify gaps and invite participants to add the extra information to their diagrams.

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

8. Application to given scenarios

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
8a. Individual and group practice in writing persuasive documents	Handout 8a	135

8a. Practice in writing persuasive documents

Approximate time needed

- 135 minutes.

Method

- Distribute Handout 8a.
- Give instructions.
- Debrief.

Instructions

(Divide the whole group into not more than four small groups. Three participants per group is ideal. Four in a group is the maximum that is practical. Give a copy of Handout 8a to each participant. Assign one scenario from the handout to each small group. Then give the following instructions.)

‘Each of you has been allocated one scenario from Handout 8a. I’d like you to work on this individually for not more than 30 minutes. I’m allowing this time because I want you to think carefully about who you are addressing, what their position might be, and how you can put your case persuasively. You will then write your final version on a sheet of flip chart paper.

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

When you have all done this, I'd like you to reform in the small groups, based on the scenario that was allocated to you. So we'll have a group of Scenario 1s, a group of Scenario 2s, and so on. Take a flip chart for your group. Pin up the sheets on which you have been writing.

You will then spend 15 minutes in your small group reading each other's work and discussing how you approached the task.

Then we will continue in the whole group. To do this, we will start with the Scenario 1 group. They will show us their flip charts. When we have read them, they will explain to us why they wrote as they did, and what differences they discovered in the way each of them viewed the task.

The rest of us will ask questions or give feedback, depending on our reactions.

When we have finished this stage (which might take around 20 minutes), we will repeat the procedure with the Scenario 2 group, and so on until all groups have had their work reviewed.'

Debrief

Facilitate a discussion of the pieces of work on display. Ask each person to make notes on the feedback they received and to commit publicly to trying to improve something in the next round.

Repeat the same process with a new set of scenarios.

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

9. Looking around the organisation

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
9a. Activity in pairs, followed by whole group review	Examples collected by trainer	90

9a. Looking around the organisation

Approximate time needed

- 90 minutes.

Method

- Introduce topic.
- Give instructions.
- Debrief activity.

Content

(This activity is the second part of the section on Tone (5c) on Day 1. Its success depends on the ability of participants to find sufficient material to work with. It is advisable for the trainer to collect samples of memos, e-mails, etc, in advance, in order to supplement the examples that participants find. It is also worth the trainer doing a preliminary search in order to provide some suggestions about where participants should look.)

‘The purpose of this activity is to find out how persuasive your organisation is in its directions, notices, memos, documents, invitations to join in leisure activities, etc. The sources of these will be around the building – on noticeboards, in the canteen, in cloakrooms, on fire escapes, in the car park. In fact, anywhere. They will be persuasive

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

or directive in different degrees. We will discuss the appropriateness of the tone when the whole group reconvenes.'

Instructions

'Your task is to find a partner and spend the next 45 minutes touring this building, looking for information. The information you want is anything written that attempts to tell, encourage or persuade people to do something. Roam as far and wide as you can in the time. I suggest you look in the... and ... but there are lots of other places, too.

Make a note of the words used in anything that you find.

When you return, we will discuss how your examples are trying to influence people and the appropriateness of their style and tone.'

Debrief

Facilitate a discussion on how the examples sought to persuade their readers.

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

10. Application to work

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
10a. Individual activity followed by small group discussion of real work issues.		60

10a. Application to work

Approximate time needed

- 60 minutes.

Method

- Give instructions.
- Debrief the activity.

Instructions

'We've reached the point where we take everything we've explored so far and apply it to actual work situations that you are facing.

Spend about 10 minutes reflecting on the challenges that face you.

We'll then list them on a flip chart and see if there are any common themes. You will then divide up into pairs or small groups, according to interest in particular topics.

You will discuss your tactics and prepare whatever written documentation is appropriate. Write it up on a flip chart.

In this exercise, your discussion will be wider than it has been in previous activities. You should start by considering the whole picture, and where a written communication fits in, and what form it should take – i.e. whether it should be a letter, a memo or an e-mail. There may be other things to consider, too.

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

The outcome of this activity should be something already worked out that you can take back and implement in your work.

You have around 50 minutes for this, before we reconvene as a whole group and share the outcomes of your debate. In your feedback to the whole group, you should summarise the issue you have discussed, outline your plan and then show us what you have written.'

Debrief

Ensure that everyone has a fair hearing and receives constructive feedback.

Feedback Day: The Workshop – Day Two

11. Action planning

The session at a glance

Activity	Materials	Estimated Time (minutes)
11a. Individual activity to produce an action plan which is then shared with the whole group	Handout 11a	45

11a. Action planning

Approximate time needed

- 45 minutes.

Method

- Give instructions.

Instructions

'The most important part of any training course is what happens when you get back to work. So now is the time when you stop and reflect on what you have been doing in these two days and what you are going to do differently when you return.

To help you draw up an action plan, I suggest you follow the structure in Handout 11a.

Spend 15 minutes drawing up your plan. Be as detailed as you can. Refer to the pieces of work you have been doing. Then make a short presentation to the whole group that explains what you plan to do.'

End of course. Thank the participants for their hard work and wish them well.

Pre-course preparation

Date:

Before you attend the course, there are two things you should do.

1. Collect some typical examples of your written communications and bring them to the course. A representative sample might include short memos and letters to colleagues in your own department or other departments, and/or letters to customers and suppliers. The most useful examples will be those where you want to change something, point out or resolve a problem, or canvass ideas and opinions. Longer reports are outside the scope of this course. Don't try to choose only your best pieces of work. You will learn more by improving work you are less satisfied with.
2. Keep a record for a week or so of each piece of writing that you do. Record at least ten examples, using the outline provided below. Note that 'Purpose' refers not to the subject matter, but to the outcome(s) you were trying to achieve.

My written communications between..... (date) and (date)

Type of communication (e.g. memo, e-mail, letter)	Recipient	Purpose(s)/Outcome(s)
--	-----------	-----------------------

Many people want help in:

- overcoming the barriers to getting started
- preparing the content
- clarifying the desired outcomes
- using an appropriate style
- using correct grammar and spelling.

How do you feel about writing?

- Consider each item in the list below and rate it on the following three-point scale:

1. Very true
2. Somewhat true
3. Not true

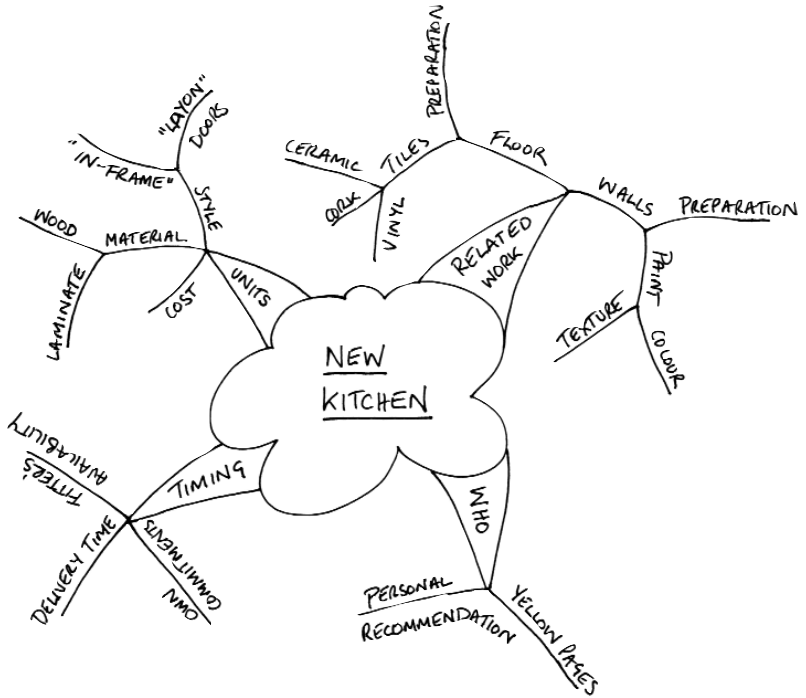
- | | | | | |
|-----|---|--|---|---|
| 1. | I put off writing until the last minute. | | 2 | 3 |
| 2. | It's difficult to work out what I need to say. | | 2 | 3 |
| 3. | I sometimes lack the information I need for a particular piece of writing. | | 2 | 3 |
| 4. | I find it difficult to put words down on paper. | | 2 | 3 |
| 5. | I don't always achieve the effect I intend from my writing. | | 2 | 3 |
| 6. | My writing doesn't flow: it doesn't sound natural. | | 2 | 3 |
| 7. | I don't know how formal or informal I could or should be when I write. | | 2 | 3 |
| 8. | My boss tells me that it's sometimes difficult to work out from my writing exactly what I mean. | | 2 | 3 |
| 9. | I'm nervous about making grammatical errors and mistakes in spelling. | | 2 | 3 |
| 10. | I'm not sure how to address people when I write to them. | | 2 | 3 |

Influencing Strategically

- Are people for or against the subject?
- Are they for or against you?

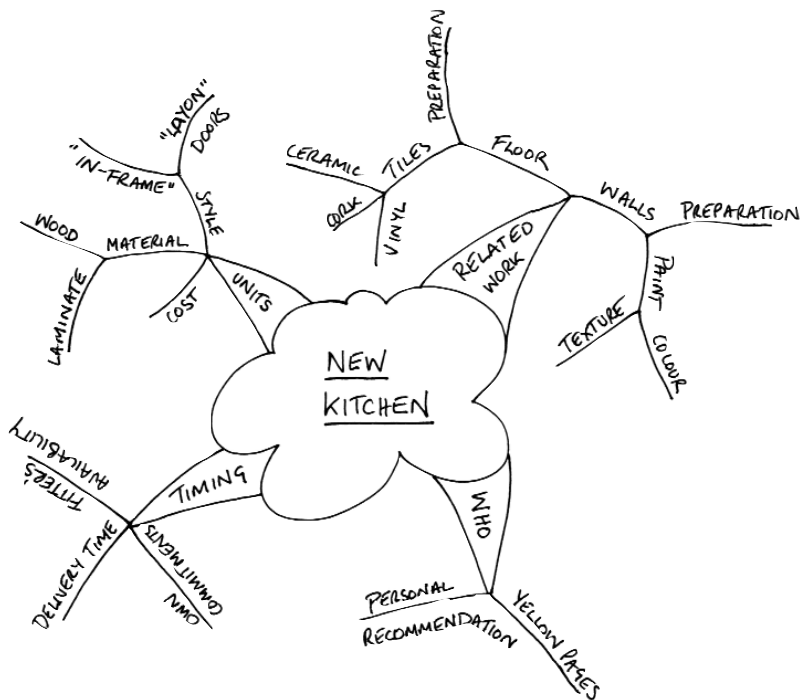
Subject			
For it	✓	✗	
Against it	✗	✓	
	Against you	For you	
		Relationship	

Example of a spider diagram



Handout 4a

Example of a spider diagram



Putting a persuasive case

- Purpose
- Problem or situation
- Implications
- Strategy or solution
- (Follow up)

What is this all about?

The amazing feline musicianship demonstrated in connection with a rustic member of the violin family occasioned among spectators a diversity of reactions including, in the case of a female bovine quadruped, translunary saltation; in the case of a diminutive canine, cachination; and in the case of two articles of tableware, collusive flight.

Handout 5ai

Using simple words

Substitute a single word for each of these phrases.

- A large number of... ..
- A certain number of... ..
- At the present moment in time... ..
- For the reason that... ..
- In the event that... ..
- In a satisfactory manner... ..
- In the great majority of cases... ..
- Of a serious nature... ..
- With a view to... ..
- On the grounds that... ..
- Owing to the fact that... ..
- Give positive encouragement to... ..
- Not infrequently... ..
- In the vicinity of... ..
- In this day and age... ..
- At the present time... ..
- Has the ability to... ..

Using simple words

Possible answers (though you may prefer other alternatives)

- A large number of... many
- A certain number of... some or a few
- At the present moment in time... now
- For the reason that... because
- In the event that... if
- In a satisfactory manner... satisfactorily
- In the great majority of cases... mostly or usually
- Of a serious nature... serious
- With a view to... so that
- On the grounds that... because
- Owing to the fact that... because
- Give positive encouragement to... encourage
- Not infrequently... often or sometimes
- In the vicinity of... near
- In this day and age... today or now
- At the present time... now
- Has the ability to... can or is able

Handout 5b

Making text readable

- Your task is to work on the paragraph below, and to make it more readable.
- You will first do this individually and then compare notes with others in your small group.
- Then write up your jointly agreed version on a flip chart.

A newspaper article published some time ago made some interesting points about some basic rules of influencing people at work, first tackling the issue of whether a manager should use the telephone or attempt to persuade someone face-to-face. It came down in favour of the telephone when the manager has a strong case and thinks that she will be able to win the argument, the logic behind this being that face-to-face, the manager might have to cope with the non-verbal indications of the other person's discomfort, whereas over the phone, she can put her case without having to face this emotional difficulty. The article suggests certain rules to follow, the first of which is to bear in mind, when trying to change someone's mind, the importance of keeping an argument straightforward, and not undermining the main and strongest point with several subsidiary ones because these can so easily lead to distracting arguments, during which the main argument is forgotten. The second point relates to consistency, meaning that it will undermine an argument to change tack half-way through, particularly if the argument is brought in because the original one has been strongly challenged and the proponent of it feels on weak ground and therefore tries to shift into a different area.

Readability

- There are some basic rules that will help you to win an argument.
- If you have the choice between using the telephone or trying to persuade someone face-to-face, choose the phone if your argument is strong. This way you will be less distracted by the emotions of the person on the other end of the line.
- If your argument is weak, then meet your opponent face to face. This lessens his or her opportunity to gain an advantage over you.
- You will put your argument most strongly if you:
 - keep it straightforward
 - stick to your main points and avoid subsidiary ones
 - express yourself consistently, avoiding sudden changes of tack.
- If you don't observe these rules, you will give your opponents opportunities to challenge what you are saying.

A poorly written memo

- Non-compliance with claims procedures

It has been drawn to my attention that claim forms are being submitted without certain information. It is essential that every section on the form is completed as unless this is done, it is impossible to process the claims and make correct payments. This is leading to delays and complaints from those awaiting repayment of their expenses. In future, please ensure that the required information is supplied at the correct time.

Chris Marks
Financial Controller
Claims division

A poorly written memo

- Non-compliance with claims procedures

It has been drawn to my attention that claim forms are being submitted without certain information. It is essential that every section on the form is completed as unless this is done, it is impossible to process the claims and make correct payments. This is leading to delays and complaints from those awaiting repayment of their expenses. In future, please ensure that the required information is supplied at the correct time.

Chris Marks
Financial Controller
Claims division

A friendly alternative

- Processing your claims quickly

We would like to be able to process your claims within our target response time.

We've noticed that some of your claims forms lack certain important information. If we don't have that information, we have to get back to you to ask for it, and so there's a delay in paying you. I'm sure you would like your money refunded as soon as possible, so do please help us to help you by making sure that you complete all the sections on the form. Then we'll do our best to turn things around within three days.

Many thanks

Chris
Claims Division

Scenario 1: Co-ordinating the fundraising

- Your town council is committed to building a new community centre, containing meetings rooms, a sports/recreation hall and a bar. In order to spread the cost, the council is seeking financial support from the local business community. In return, it is offering to name rooms after major donors.
- Your company is anxious to be well thought of in the community. It would also like the publicity from having a room named after it, though it isn't making too much of this internally. It is putting its case to the Council on the grounds of the special fundraising efforts the staff will make, and its record as a significant employer and 'good corporate citizen' in the town.
- It is also writing to the different divisions in the company to rustle up support for a series of fundraising events, hoping that the divisions will compete with each other to raise the most. The greater the amount raised, the greater the likelihood of having a prestigious room named after the company.
- Your task is to write to the divisions inviting them to raise funds for the Centre and asking for a volunteer to co-ordinate the fundraising activity.

Scenario 2: Supporting the fundraising

- Your town council is committed to building a new community centre, containing meetings rooms, a sports/recreation hall and a bar. In order to spread the cost, the council is seeking financial support from the local business community. In return, it is offering to name rooms after major donors.
- Your company is anxious to be well thought of in the community. It would also like the publicity from having a room named after it, though it isn't making too much of this internally. It is putting its case to the Council on the grounds of the special fundraising efforts the staff will make, and its record as a significant employer and 'good corporate citizen' in the town.

Handout 8a (continued)

- It is also expecting the different divisions in the company will rustle up support for a series of fundraising events and compete with each other to raise the most money. The greater the amount raised, the greater the likelihood of having a prestigious room named after the company.
- Your task is to write an open letter/e-mail (or whatever you choose) to staff, explaining the project, telling them who has volunteered to co-ordinate the fundraising in their division, asking them to generate ideas for fundraising events, and urging them to give their full support.

Scenario 3: Car sharing

- You own your own company. You have a strong commitment to protecting the environment. Knowing that many of the people who work in your organisation live near each other, you believe that the number of cars being driven to work each day could be considerably reduced if people would share transport.
- Your task is to write an open letter to all your employees, telling them how you see the situation, explaining the scheme that you have worked out for rewarding those that share transport, and urging them to co-operate.

Scenario 4: Office layout

- You are a senior manager with considerable autonomy to organise things your way. You are convinced that your staff spend too much time in their individual offices and that they would work more effectively if they had more contact with each other. This would happen if the office space was changed to an open-plan design.
- You don't like to impose change on them, and so you have discussed with them ways of increasing their contact. They have agreed to consider the possibility of an open-plan layout. They do have certain reservations, but you think they may be willing to accept the proposal.
- Your task is to write an open letter to them, in the hope of persuading them that an open-plan office would be a pleasant and effective work environment.

Scenario 5: Health and Safety Representative

- You are recently appointed to your first managerial position. You have received a request from a more senior manager to put forward the name of someone willing to act as Health and Safety Representative. Since you don't yet know your staff very well, you decide to write an open letter asking for a volunteer.
- Your task now is to write that letter.

Scenario 6: Time off for Christmas shopping

- You are the Union Representative for a large number of Union members, many of whom are women with family responsibilities. They want you to ask the management to allow time off during working hours for them to shop, and therefore to avoid shopping on the Saturday before Christmas. You know that management is not very amenable to such requests, so you will have a hard job. What will you write?

Scenario 7: Time keeping

- The company recently introduced new working hours to make sure that the office was always manned. Although staff are now allowed to go home 15 minutes earlier than before, they have had their lunch break shortened by the same amount of time. What has happened is that they accept the early departure time, but retain the old one-hour lunch break.
- Your task is to get them to work the new hours, which now form part of their contract.

Handout 8a (continued)

Scenario 8: Helping out with induction

- You are the supervisor in a busy customer service department. The Personnel Officer has asked you to organise at least three people who are willing to spend time with two new entrants on their induction programme. You know that your team have willingly offered their time in the past, but have felt aggrieved because they felt taken advantage of. The last time it happened, they vowed that they wouldn't be so helpful the next time.
- You are not quite sure what happened and why they feel aggrieved, but you suspect there was confusion over how much time they were being asked to give to the new entrants.
- As you are going to be out of the office for two days, you don't have the opportunity to speak to your team personally. Your task, therefore, is to write to them and to persuade them to help the newcomers.

Notes

Notes