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Ever thought of updating your writing skills?

Review of '***Business of Writing Online Program***' and **Business Writing Style Guide**
produced by Verne Ordman & Associates Pty Ltd

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Have you ever got tired of those drafts being returned with grammar and layout problems? Do people misread your emails, forcing you to send another 'clarifying' email? Have you ever struggled to get the tone right for a difficult letter? Do you struggle to get your word count down in assignments? Do you get your tenses mixed up? Are you always amending drafts of your team members? If you have answered yes to any of these questions, then read on...

The ***Business of Writing Online Program*** is a program designed to improve writing for work. The program is available online, through face-to-face delivery and through a ready reference book. This review covers the online program and the book.

At every opportunity, the online program helps the writer make sure that the reader can understand what has been written. Too often information is written down from the perspective of the writers – what they want to get across – rather than presenting information so the reader can understand and know what to do next.

How does the program work?

There are 12 courses with sub-topics, explanatory text, activities and assessment tasks. The optional assessment process gives good feedback. You can start and stop topics. During the activities, pop up boxes tell you why you have chosen a correct or incorrect answer and you can redo questions. For each topic there is extensive supporting information and templates, which can be downloaded for future reference.

The program takes time and concentration, but is worth it. You may wish or need to do some topics more than once (I certainly did) but as you can access each topic four times, you have plenty of opportunity to absorb and reinforce the information.

What did the course cover?

The courses covered a wide range of straightforward and complex activities including the following.

- Planning and constructing documents
- Preparing instructions, requests and complaints
- Debunking common grammatical myths
- Constructing lists using numbers and bullets
- When to use active and passive tense, especially for those difficult letters
- How to shorten sentences and avoid over use of adjectives

What was it like to use?

Navigation between screens and courses is clear and you always know where you are and how to move back. The table of contents tells you how long you took for each lesson, how many times you have accessed each lesson and your assessment mark. There is a mixture of on-screen activities, such as true or false, entering text and multiple choice. Any comments on interface can only be personal. For me, the online text is small in a few places and some of the colours to highlight different components were not the easiest to read. Some of the scroll boxes could have displayed a bit more information, especially when you have to read and answer questions for activities. These interface issues may have been a limitation of the software, but did not detract from my ability to work through the courses.

What did I learn?

I have been writing for business and academic purposes for over 25 years, but I still learnt much. I learnt how to be consistent with punctuation in bullet points and how to make sure my sentences are not too long. One topic I found particularly helpful was on how to use passive voice to present less than positive news so the reader will not get offended. I have noticed a change already in my emails to make sure the reader knows what to do next and if I want a response.

Who should do this program?

This program will help you if you have to write something at work, such as emails, reports, letters, procedures, job applications or study assignments. It will help you structure your documents, put yourself in the shoes of the reader, and improve the professional image of you, the writer.

Available separately to the online course and part of the face-to-face workshop is a spiral bound small (in size) book with many of the tips included in the program. It is presented as a quick ready reference for layout, different styles of headings, when to use text, or single numbers and date formats.

Whatever your preference for learning, through face-to-face, undertaking an online course or reading, there is a combination that will suit you. Today we write more rapidly than we used to and with email being the predominant medium, we are sending information to far more people than we used to. What we write needs to make sense to the reader and not be insensitive or confusing, even if it is bad news. We can all benefit from thinking more about how information might be read and this program can help.

More information

The website of Verne Ordman & Associates Pty Ltd can be accessed through: www.businesswriting.biz or call and speak with Verne, Rozanne or Wendy on 02 9130 6856. The website contains extra information of the services on offer, interesting business writing articles, as well as a Business Writing Discussion Forum. There is a particularly interesting Style Guide Challenge.