UP Skills for Work

Writing

ABC LifeLiteracyCanada

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Canada

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Welcome to *UP Skills for Work!*

The program helps you build your skills for learning, work, and life, which include:

- Motivation
- Attitude
- Accountability
- Presentation
- Collaboration
- Time Management
- Adaptability
- Stress Management
- Reading
- Writing
- Numeracy
- Digital
- Problem Solving
- Confidence
- Communication
- Creativity and Innovation

These skills are used in nearly every job and in daily life. They also allow us to learn new skills and to adapt to changes. Improving your skills can help you to build a good life for yourself.

You can also take these courses on ABCskillshub.ca

This workshop

This workshop deals with the skill of writing.

Writing is more important than ever before. We use it every day at home and at work. We send text messages and emails instead of having conversations in person or on the phone. Good writing skills are useful in many different areas of life.

In this workshop, you'll think about your writing skills and why writing is important in your life. You'll also learn how to get better at writing.

What is writing?

Writing is an important tool that we use to communicate with our friends, family, and coworkers.

Skill words

Writing is communicating by putting words, numbers, and symbols on paper, a computer screen, or a phone.

There are many different kinds of writing:

- Formal or casual
- True or imaginary
- Personal or impersonal
- Creative or practical

Let's talk about it

Sometimes writing tells a story. Sometimes writing shares information to support an opinion or point of view. Writing can give "just the facts," or share thoughts and feelings. Writing also takes many different forms. A text message, a poem, a book, and the instructions on a paint can are all writing.

- What are some examples of different kinds of writing?
- Does every kind of writing use exactly the same skills?

Self-assessment

Think carefully about your writing skills. An honest assessment will help you understand your strengths. It will also help you decide what you'd like to work on.

Activity

Put an "x" in the box beside the statement that sounds most like you.

- ☐ I'm pretty good at writing and can handle most writing tasks.
- ☐ I can handle basic writing jobs, but I have some trouble with longer or more complex writing.
- ☐ I'm not very confident when I need to write things for work. I usually try to keep it short and simple.
- ☐ I find writing difficult and avoid it if I can.
- ☐ None of the above. Here's my situation:

Why do we write?

We write for many different reasons and for different readers. We may write for work or school, for fun, to express our thoughts and feelings, to connect with ourselves and others, or to create art.

Strong writing skills help us communicate better with other people. When we practice our writing skills, we can organize and share information in a way that's easier to understand. Writing can even help us understand ourselves better. It's also an important skill in many jobs.

Ask yourself...

Think about the following kinds of writing. Why would a person write each one? Who might read it?

- A text to a friend
- A work email asking to book vacation days
- A daily diary
- A to-do list
- A report for work
- A wedding speech
- A cover letter for a job application
- A facebook post
- A blog

Activity

What kinds of things do you write? Remember, you might write on paper, a computer, your phone, or a tablet.

Write down a list of some things you have written in the past few months.

Things I've written:

Ask yourself...

Think about the different things you've written.

- Which ones were easiest for you to write? Which ones were harder for you?
- Did you enjoy some of these kinds of writing? Would you rather avoid some of these kinds of writing?
- What does being a good writer mean to you? What does it look like? Feel like?

The writing process

Writing uses many different skills. Your writing skills can change over time. Think about it: are your writing skills the same as they were when you were younger? No matter how old you are or how you feel about your writing skills, you can always learn new things.

Writing can be challenging. For many people, it's hard to know where to start or stop. Writing is a process, and it's easier to write when you understand the process. The process of writing can be divided into four stages:

1. **Set your goals**
2. **Plan what to write**
3. **Write a draft**
4. **Review your work**

In this workbook, we'll look at some of the steps you can use at each stage of writing. You won't use every step each time you write. You can decide which steps are best for the writing you do. After all, you're the writer, and you get to decide how you do it.

We'll discuss the stages as if they're separate things. That makes it easier to learn about each one. But in real life, the stages can blur together. There's no one right way to write.

Stage 1: Set your goals

In Stage 1, we figure out a direction for our writing. It's like preparing for a road trip: first you need to know where you want to go.

In Stage 1, we take these steps:

- **Know your purpose**
- **Know your reader**
- **Choose your tone**

When you think about why you're writing, who you're writing to, and how you want your writing to sound, you're setting goals for your writing. These goals give you a direction for your writing.

Know your purpose

Each piece of writing has a **purpose**. When you write, ask yourself what your purpose is.

Your **purpose** is what you want your writing to accomplish.

For example, the purpose of a social media post could be to share something funny with friends, or to announce an important event.

- What could be the purpose of a note to a friend in the hospital?
- What could the purpose be of an email to your boss reporting a problem you had with a customer?

When you understand your purpose it's easier to decide what to write next. It also helps you decide what to include in your writing and what to leave out.

Know your reader

Who will read your writing? Every piece of writing is written for somebody, even if it's just yourself. Knowing who you're writing to helps you decide how your writing will sound and look.

Your reader might be one person, a group, or even people you don't know.

Meet Mike

Mike has a bad case of the flu. He needs to send an email to his boss explaining that he can't come to work. He also needs to email his friends to tell them he is too sick to host their poker night.

At first, Mike thinks he will just write one email and send it to both his boss and his friends. That would be easiest, and he is sick, after all! But he realizes it would be better to write two separate emails.

Let's talk about it

As a group, let's talk about Mike's decision to write two emails.

- Who are Mike's readers? How are they different?
- Why do you think that Mike decided to send two separate emails?
- Think about Mike's purpose for each email. What do you think should be different about the two emails?

Choose your tone

You know your purpose and your reader. Now you need to decide what kind of **tone** to use when you write to them.

Skill words

Tone is the attitude or mood of your writing.

How do you want your writing to sound? Just like when you speak, your writing can have many different tones. For example, writing can sound funny, serious, respectful, friendly, or angry.

Activity

- What tone would you use for a birthday card to a child? Write your answer below.

- What tone would you use for a note to a neighbour who plays loud music in the middle of the night? Write your answer below.

There's no one right answer. The best tone for your writing depends on the exact situation. It also depends on the relationship you have with your reader.

Stage 2: Plan what to write

You've set your goals and you know where you want to go with your writing, but how will you get there? In Stage 2, you make your plan. With a plan to follow, writing can be much easier!

In Stage 2, you think about your goals and plan how you'll meet them. You gather your ideas and decide how they will fit together into a piece of writing.

When you take time to plan and organize your writing, the rest of the process can be easier.

The steps in this stage are:

- **Choose your form of writing**
- **Organize your writing**

Choose your form of writing

Now it's time to choose the **form** of your writing.

The **form** of your writing is its structure. There are different forms for different kinds of writing.

As a writer, you decide what form you want to use. Choosing a form that goes well with your purpose makes it easier for the reader to understand your writing. Choosing the right form can help you to accomplish your goals.

Activity

Here are some examples of forms that we can use for our writing. Put a check mark beside each form of writing to show if you have read or written it before.

Writing forms I've used

Writing form	Written	Read
Email		
Tweet		
Resume		
Note		
Poster		
Novel		
Work report		
Magazine article		
Text message		
School newsletter		

What form would you choose for these types of writing? There may be more than option that would work. Write your answer below each question.

- You want to ask a friend to go to a movie with you.
- You want to ask your landlord to fix something in your apartment.
- You want to let people know about a charity concert.
- You want to express your feelings about an experience.

Now imagine using a poster to communicate with your landlord, or writing a work report to express your feelings. Would that make it harder to accomplish your goals? Remember, form is a tool that can make your job easier!

Organize your writing

You have likely **organized** many things! Whether you organize a party or a kitchen drawer, you bring order to something. We need to organize our writing, too.

We **organize** our writing by grouping and ordering the information.

You organize your writing before you actually start to write. Plan out your main ideas and think about how they fit together. This gives you an outline to follow as you write. An outline can make writing easier and help make sure you stay on track. When you organize your writing, you also make it easier for readers to understand what you've written.

A shopping list is a simple form. It makes each item stand out so it's easy to see what to buy. But look at this shopping list below.

This shopping list has no clear order. If a reader gets these items in the order they are written, they will have to walk back and forth across the store several times. In the right-hand column, organize this list so it's easier to use.

Shopping list

Grocery list	Reorganized list
Milk	
Celery	
Chicken	
Paper Towels	
Cream	
Potatoes	
Hamburger	
Yogurt	

Did you put all the milk products together, all the meat together, and all the vegetables together?

Organizing writing is just like this. You:

1. Plan out the points you want to include
2. Figure out what points go together
3. Choose the best order

Choose your form before you organize! It's easier to organize your points when you already know if you're writing a list, an email, or a report.

But where do we start when we want to organize our writing? There's no right or wrong way to figure out your plan. Here are a few suggestions:

- Try using a **graphic organizer**, like the one on the next page.
- Make a list of the points you want to include, and then decide what order they should go in.
- Just start writing! Finish your first try and then move the sentences into an order that makes sense for you.

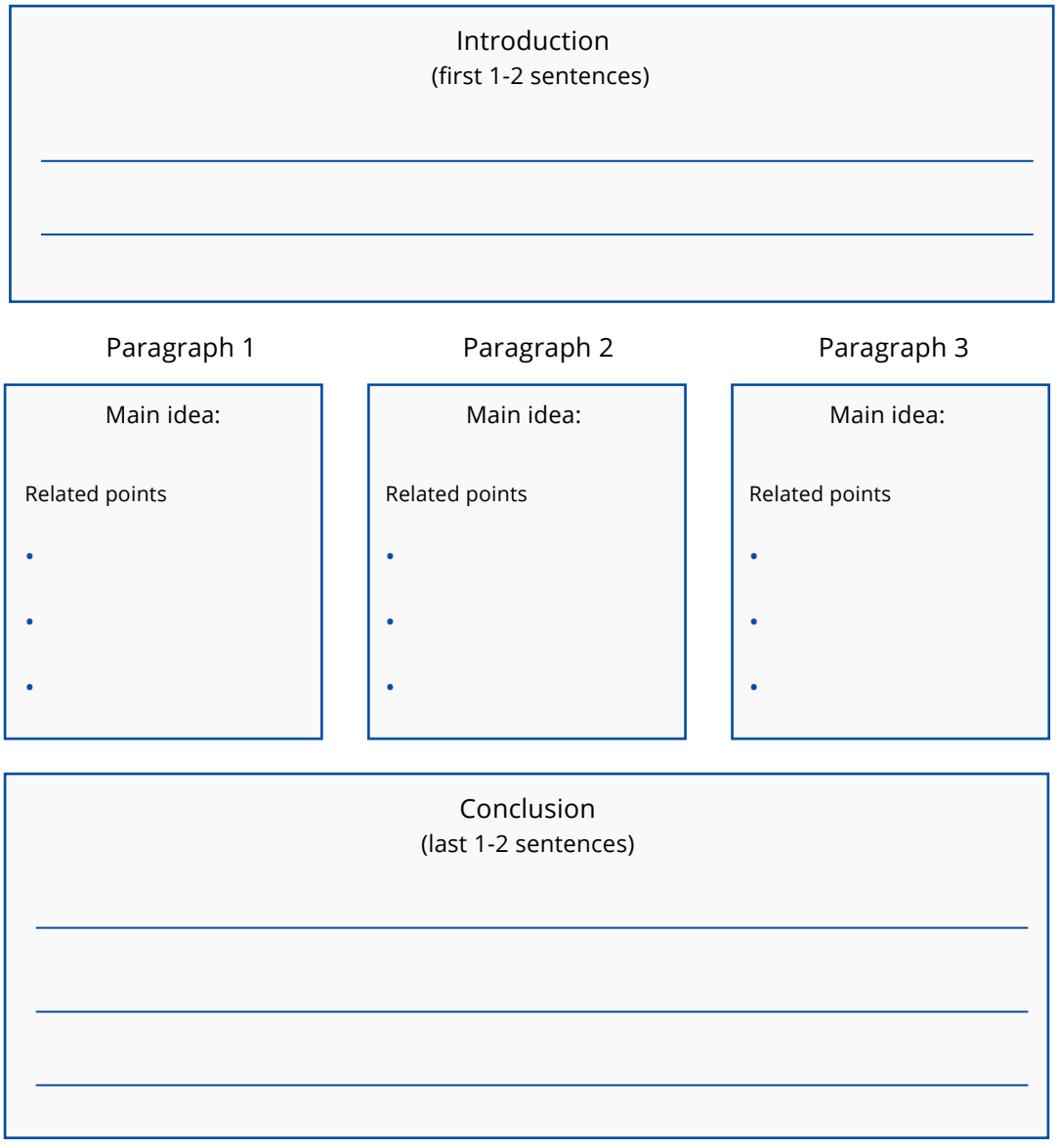
Experiment until you find out what works best for you!

A **graphic organizer** is a chart that uses shapes or boxes to plan and organize writing.

Using a graphic organizer

Some people find a graphic organizer like the one below helps them sort out their thoughts. This one is good for some forms, like a cover letter, or a report. There are graphic organizers for all kinds of writing. You can find more graphic organizers on Google. Or you can draw one that works for you.

Here's an example of a graphic organizer. This is an example only. You don't have to write anything.



Meet Sadie

Sadie has to write a job description for a new person she's hiring at work. She decides to organize her ideas before she writes it. She jots down a list of job duties, but as she looks them over, she thinks, "They're all over the place. It doesn't even sound like a real job."

Then she notices that many of the duties have to do with customer service. She starts a new list, makes a heading that says "customer service," and adds those duties under that heading.

Sadie finds some duties that are about keeping the store clean and organized, so she puts them under a new heading, "Store maintenance."

Now she feels like her writing is more organized. Her plan is going to make writing the job description a bit easier.

Let's talk about it

It's helpful to know how to plan your writing, but not every type of writing needs to be planned.

- How can we know when to spend time planning, and when to skip this stage?
- What is an example of a kind of writing you would want to plan carefully?
- What is an example of something you could just plan in your head, or maybe not at all?

Stage 3: Write a first draft

Your planning is done. You're ready to start writing!

But starting to write is not always as easy as it may seem. Finding the right words to express what you want to say can be tricky. Luckily, you don't have to get it all right on your first try! In this stage, you start with a **draft**.

In this section, we'll take these steps to write a draft:

- **Review your goals and plan**
- **Think about word choice**
- **Deal with writer's block**

We will also learn some tips for writing a first draft.

Skill words

A **draft** is a rough copy or "first try" you make when writing. Then you work on it to turn it into your final version.

There is a lot to keep in mind when you are writing something important or long. But in your first draft, you don't need to worry about it too much. The important thing is to get your ideas down on paper, or on the screen.

Review your goals and plan

Remember the stages we've talked about so far? Before you start your draft, it's a good idea to review your goals. Try to keep them in mind as you write. Ask yourself:

- What is my purpose?
- Who is my reader?
- What tone am I aiming for?

If you made a plan to organize your writing, then you also have a guide you can use while you write your draft.

Think about word choice

Earlier, we talked about your writing tone. But how do you give writing a tone? It's mostly through the words you use. Your word choice communicates your tone.

Have a look at the beginning of these emails. What tone do you think these emails are using? Write your thoughts under each example.

"Hey there! How are you and your kiddos?"

"Dear Sir or Madam"

If you're not sure if your word choice matches your tone, try reading it to yourself out loud. Does it sound the way you hoped? If not, which words could you change?

Deal with writer's block

Have you ever had the feeling that you just can't start writing? Like you just don't know where to start? This is very common, and can happen even after we've done a great job planning what to write. Many people call this **writer's block**.

Writer's block is what we feel when we can't think of what to write.

Meet Jorge

Jorge has been staring at the computer screen for 15 minutes. "This is super hard!" he tells his coworker. "I know what I need to say. I just can't get started!"

Let's talk about it

Many of us have experienced writer's block. Talking about it can be helpful.

- There are many causes of writer's block and every writer faces it sometimes. Self-doubt can be one cause. Can you think of others?
- What could Jorge do to get over his writer's block?
- Can you think of any other strategies for getting started? Write your ideas below.

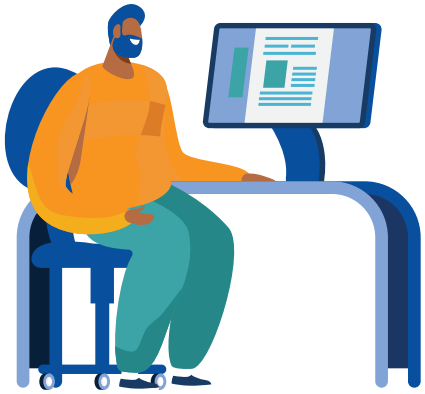
Tips for writing a first draft

As you're writing, here are some things to think about:

- Stick with the form you've chosen. Try to keep your structure consistent.
- Remember the tone you're aiming for. Does your word choice match your tone?
- Focus on the information that you wrote down in your plan. If you add new points, think about where they fit in.
- Follow your plan to organize the information, but remember you can change the plan if you need to!
- Don't worry about making it perfect. This is just your draft. You will have a chance to polish it up in the next stage.

Writing Tip

If you have time, it's a good idea to take a little break from your writing. That way, you can go back later and read it with fresh eyes.



Stage 4: Review your work

Once you've written your draft, it's time to review your work and decide if you want to make any changes. Are you happy with the information you've included, the way you've organized it, and how you've worded it? Are the spelling, grammar, and punctuation correct?

In this section, we'll talk about **editing**.

You'll also get a checklist to use when reviewing your work.

Editing

Editing is an important part of the writing process. No matter how good your writing skills are, editing can help make your writing better.

Skill words

Editing is making changes to writing to fix mistakes and improve wording, organization, tone, and spelling.

Part of the reason we edit is to make our writing clearer. When our writing is clear, it's easier for readers to understand what we mean. Here are some things to think about when you're editing:

- In clear writing the sentences and paragraphs are in an order that makes sense. They lead the readers along so they don't get confused.
- Long, complicated sentences are hard to keep clear. Simple is often safer.
- Correct grammar and punctuation also help make your meaning clear to readers.

Let's talk about it

Editing can be hard, and it can take up a lot of time.

- Is every kind of writing worth taking the time to edit?
- What are some types of writing that are worth editing very carefully?
- What are some types of writing you would not edit?
- Is there anyone in our lives who can help us with editing?

Writing Tip

One of the best and easiest ways to improve your spelling, grammar, and writing is to read a lot. As you read more, you will start to get a sense of what "looks right" and "sounds right."

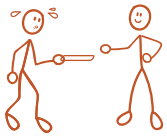
It's not easy to edit your own writing! You know exactly what you mean, so your writing will make sense to you. But will it make sense to readers?

Meet Claire

Claire writes a lot of emails at work. Before she sends an email, she always reads it out loud at her desk. This helps her to catch any small mistakes she might have made when she was writing.

Meet Antoine

Antoine has three kids. He feels like he's always writing letters to their teachers to check in. Antoine uses a computer program called Microsoft Word. It's a helpful tool that can check his spelling and grammar.



Meet Kareem

Kareem is a student. When he has writing assignments due, he asks a friend to read his work. It's scary for him to ask for help. But his friends have helpful feedback that he wouldn't have thought about.

Activity

Editing can be hard work, but you don't have to do it on your own! Do any of Claire, Antoine, or Kareem's editing strategies sound like they would work for you? Write any strategies that you'd like to try below.

Editing checklist

As you read through your work, ask yourself:

- Have I included all the important information? Do I need to add anything?
- Is there information that isn't useful to my purpose that I should cut out?
- Does every sentence in a paragraph belong there? Is anything off topic?
- Does my tone sound the way I want it to?
- Does my word choice match my purpose, the tone I've chosen, and my readers?
- Are there any confusing phrases or sentences? Does anything sound wrong?
- Does the order of my information make sense?
- Did I check the spelling, grammar, and punctuation?

Using the writing process

In this workshop, we've talked about the process of writing and the steps you can take to help you stay on track. We broke the process into four stages:

1. **Set your goals**
2. **Plan what to write**
3. **Write a draft**
4. **Review your work**

If you're writing something complicated, it can take a while to go through all four stages. If you're writing something small or simple, you might plan it very quickly in your head and skip the reviewing stage. For example, you wouldn't use a graphic organizer to plan a text message to your sister!

Meet Yarran

Yarran likes to do a good job on everything he does, and he hates to make mistakes. He does great work, but sometimes takes a long time to finish a job. Every Friday Yarran has to write a short report on the week's work. This week, as usual, he's late submitting his report. He asks his boss for a few more minutes to check it over. His boss is frustrated. Yarran's boss reminds him that it's just an informal report, and that it doesn't need to be perfect!

Meet Amina

Amina is also a good worker, but in a different way from Yarran.She likes to check things off the to-do list. She works fast, but sometimes doesn't pay enough attention to details.

Her Friday report is always on time, but sometimes she makes spelling mistakes, or forgets to include all the information her boss needs. This makes it hard for her boss to understand what she's written. Sometimes, her boss gets frustrated. She wishes Amina would spend more time checking her work.

Let's talk about it

Sometimes you might want to be quick like Amina. Other times you might want to be slower like Yarran. Both are okay!

- How do you know how much work to put into a writing project?
- How do you know when your writing is done?
- Can you think of a type of writing you sometimes do, either at work or at home, that is not worth spending a lot of time on?
- Can you think of a type of writing where you would want to carefully go through all four stages?
- What can you do if you run into obstacles during the writing process?

Keep on writing!

The best way to get better at writing is to practice. Use the stages you've learned in this workshop. The more you practice, the better your writing can become.

Remember to practice at home! Try one of these short writing tasks:

- A note to your supervisor asking to change your shift
- A letter to catch up with a friend who moved away
- A note to a new babysitter with instructions for looking after your kids and how to reach you
- One of your own real-life writing tasks

Congratulations!

You've completed the *UP Skills for Work* **Writing** workbook. You've taken a step in building skills for learning, work, and life.

What did you learn about yourself as a writer? Think about your attitude and your skills. What do you want to achieve as a writer?

For the last activity, we hope you will make a **pledge** to continue building your writing skills.

A **pledge** is a serious promise to yourself or to others.

The pledge can be personal, or you can share it with others.

My pledge

I pledge to work on my writing skills by:

Sometimes a pledge needs an **action plan**: a list of steps you'll take to make your pledge happen.

My action plan

What do I need to do first?

Who will support me?

How will I overcome setbacks and obstacles?