

# Introduction

## How to Use the Writing *Workbook*

E-commerce has changed the way you hear from your customers. Increasingly, customers e-mail their questions and complaints and expect (quick!) e-mail responses. That means that writing is now an even more important skill for customer service agents. But your writing skills may be rusty. It's probably been a long time since your last English class. Or this may be the first time you've been required to write on the job. The *Workbook* is designed to help you polish your writing skills and to give you guidance and practice in writing good customer service e-mails.

### What Is the *Workbook*?

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For customer service agents, this *Workbook* is an ideal way to address different needs and writing skill levels. You can proceed at your own pace. Take the **Pre-Test** in **Chapter 2** to identify your strengths and weaknesses, then spend your time on those areas in which you need the most help.

If the word "grammar" takes you back to unpleasant memories of eighth grade English, don't despair. This *Workbook* is short on rules and long on practice. Do the e-mails in the **Practices** look like ones you answer every day? We hope so! All of the examples and **Practices** are adapted from actual customer service e-mails. (We've changed the names of companies, customers, and customer service agents. We've substituted fake URLs, phone numbers, and other contact information.)

You may be looking at this *Workbook* because your supervisor has advised you to strengthen your writing skills. Or perhaps your company is using the **Pre-Test** or **Competency Test** (available at [www.WritingWorkbook.com](http://www.WritingWorkbook.com)) to assess your writing skills. You may be completing the *Workbook* to qualify for a new job. Whatever the reason, you'll find the *Workbook* an efficient way to refresh the writing skills you need as a customer service agent.

## For Customer Service Agents— How to Use the *Workbook* to Improve Job Skills

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**Use the *Workbook* to review basic writing skills.** If you lack confidence in your writing skills, you may want to read all the guidance and do all the **Practices** in the *Workbook*.

**Use the *Workbook* to focus on particular writing problems.** Perhaps your grammar skills are strong, but you've never really understood how to use a comma correctly. You should go straight to **Chapter 6—Punctuate Correctly** and read the guidance and complete the comma **Practices** in that chapter.

### What's in the *Workbook*?

We take the word *Workbook* seriously. That means this *Workbook* is **meant to be worked in**. The *Workbook* is full of **Practices**. We've provided room for you to write and lots of white space where you can scribble notes. Neatness doesn't count. Building strong writing skills does!

### Writing Skills Review and Practice

**Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7** focus on specific writing skills. Each chapter contains guidance, examples, and practice. Many of the chapters also contain lists, checklists, and other writing tools.

### Skills Tests and a Wrap-Up Chapter

**Chapter 2—Pre-Test: Assess Your Writing Skills** will help you identify your writing strengths and the areas where you need help.

**Chapter 8—Put It All Together** gives you the opportunity to practice the writing skills you've learned by writing or editing complete messages.

### Writing Resources

We're often asked for suggestions on writing resources, so we've listed our favorite print and online writing resources to answer your grammar, style, and usage questions. We've also listed some resources that will give you additional writing practice.

## How Long Will It Take to Complete the *Workbook*?

How long it takes to complete the *Workbook* depends on how much of the *Workbook* you do. All told, you should be able to complete the entire *Workbook* in eight to ten hours. You say you don't have eight uninterrupted hours? Don't worry. The *Workbook* is structured so you can do it in short chunks—while commuting to work (assuming you're not driving!), during your lunch break, or during your child's soccer practice. Just pick up a pencil and work on your chosen chapter whenever you have time.

You may want to organize a group of friends or colleagues and do the *Workbook* together. Working in a group is fun, and you're more apt to do the **Practices** if you know your group is meeting.

## For Managers—How to Use the *Workbook* to Improve Your Staff's Writing

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The *Workbook* came about because we began hearing from companies about the difficulty of finding customer service agents with the writing skills needed to answer customers' e-mail. Some companies shifted telephone agents to e-mail and found that the agents' writing skills didn't match their product knowledge and phone skills. Other companies found that agents hired to write e-mail had rusty writing skills or were not experienced in business writing. Regardless of the situation, the *Workbook* offers the solution for getting customer service agents up to speed in the essential skills they'll need to write e-mail.

You can use this *Workbook* in several ways:

- Train agents who have the product knowledge but lack the writing skills to compose effective customer service e-mails.
- Help agents with weak writing skills improve their grammar and usage.
- Assess writing skills. Managers can use the **Pre-Test** to assess writing skills and the **Competency Exam** (available at [www.WritingWorkbook.com](http://www.WritingWorkbook.com)) to certify agents in essential writing skills.

The *Workbook* is a flexible training tool that can suit almost any training situation:

- **For self-paced instruction.** Agents can complete the entire *Workbook* as a self-paced writing course. Or agents can take the **Pre-Test** in **Chapter 2** to identify the skills they need to improve and then complete only the relevant chapters and **Practices**. Agents can use the *Workbook* during work hours or at home.

- **As the basis for instructor-led training.** E-mail us at training@WritingWorkbook.com or call 877–481–1869 for information about our customized training programs for customer service agents.
- **For a group of agents working together to improve writing skills.** Groups provide peer support in completing the *Workbook*.

This *Workbook* is a perfect solution to the logistical problem managers face: freeing agents to attend a course on the same day (and leaving no one to respond to customers!).

## **Names Have Been Changed . . .**

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Before writing this *Workbook*, we collected hundreds of customer service e-mails—the good, the bad, the ugly. They helped us determine the *Workbook* content and provided the raw material, examples and **Practices**. However, as they say, “names have been changed.” We’ve “cleansed” the e-mails, changing all identifiable information such as company and agent names, URLs, tracking numbers, phone numbers, and other contact information. To the best of our knowledge, all identifying information is fictitious.

## **E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam: A Companion to this Workbook**

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Many managers need a tool to help them assess the writing skills of agents or job applicants. We’ve developed the **E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam** for that purpose. Use the **Competency Exam** to evaluate agents’ and applicants’ e-mail writing skills—the skills taught in this *Workbook*.

Use the **Competency Exam** to

- assess current customer service agents’ writing skills
- assess job applicants’ writing skills before hiring them
- identify your staff’s need for writing training
- certify customer service agents’ e-mail writing competency
- test agents’ writing proficiency and score their performance after they have completed the *Workbook*

## Use the Competency Exam “Off the Shelf” or Customize It

The exam includes a writing exercise that requires the exam-taker to respond to a customer’s e-mail. You can use our writing exercise, or you can customize the **Competency Exam** by substituting your own e-mail writing exercise. Whether you use the test “as is” or customize it, the **Scoring Checklist** will help you to score the writing exercise.

**Order the Competency Exam** at the *Workbook* Web site: WritingWorkbook.com.

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### More Information on E-Mail Writing at [www.WritingWorkbook.com](http://www.WritingWorkbook.com)

Visit us online for more information about writing e-mail to customers. The Web site contains additional materials to supplement the *Workbook*. You’ll find two printable certificates to download:

- A *Certificate of Completion* you can award to agents who successfully complete the *Workbook*
- A *Competency Certificate* you can award to agents who pass the **E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam**

You’ll also find articles related to customer service e-mail. Check our Web site frequently for new articles and companion materials.

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## About the Authors and E-WRITE

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When we started our writing training and consulting company in 1996, e-mail was in its infancy and the Internet still a techie toy. But we were so convinced of the power of online communication that we boldly named our company **E-WRITE**. Since then, we’ve worked with organizations of every size and type, teaching them to improve their e-mail communications and create user-focused web content.

We’ve customized our courses and workshops for Fortune 500 companies, Internet start-ups, federal and local governments, and nonprofits. We’ve developed courses and workshops for American Airlines, Coca-Cola, Fannie Mae, Prudential, Humana, The College Board, Key Bank, Pan American Health Organization, the U.S. Air Force, FedWeb, and The National Wildlife Foundation. Participants in our courses and workshops include high-level executives, marketing teams, and web teams as well as customer service agents.

We have a special interest in teaching writing to the front line administrative and support personnel who communicate with customers directly, every day. We believe that writing is a teachable skill and that good writers are made, not born. Our approach to writing training is practical and hands-on. We've found that people learn best and are most receptive when the training focuses on the skills they need to do their job. We've drawn on that philosophy and experience in developing this *Workbook*.

We've written extensively on e-mail and online writing. Our articles appear in our e-mail newsletter, **The E-Writing Bulletin**, and in numerous online publications, magazines and newsletters. We've written web content and e-mail marketing materials for Sallie Mae; NIH's National Human Genome Research Institute; the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum and National Museum of American History; OvationTV; the Consumer Electronics Show; WebSmart Kids; the Appalachian Regional Commission; Adoptions Together; and Eco-Artware.com, among others.

## How To Contact Us

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## Thanks to Those Who Helped Us

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## How to Buy *Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents*

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Like Starbucks’ infinite variations on coffee, this *Workbook* is available in a variety of formats: **print, CD, or PDF download**. You also can purchase a **license** for multiple copies at a substantially reduced price.

To buy the **print** or **CD version** of the *Workbook*:

- Use the order form at the end of the *Workbook*
- Order online at [www.WritingWorkbook.com](http://www.WritingWorkbook.com)
- Order by phone: 877-481-1869
- Fax your order: 301-718-8021

To purchase the *Workbook* as a **PDF Download**, go to [www.WritingWorkbook.com](http://www.WritingWorkbook.com).

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