

# Workplace Genres

Workplace writing is any kind of writing or composing you do in a business or professional setting. Sometimes this is referred to as business writing. Much like academic writing, workplace writing is also produced “on demand.” You are usually asked by your manager to compose something specific because of the particular job you are doing.

Workplace writing usually responds to a need that someone has. For example, you write a resume and cover letter in response to a job opening because you need a job and your potential employer needs an employee, or you create a presentation to help pitch a solution for a client’s problem. Other typical purposes of workplace genres are to communicate ideas to internal or external audiences, to analyze situations so that you and your colleagues can make informed decisions, to report on the progress of a project, or to persuade your reader to take a certain action.

The readers of workplace genres can be divided into internal or external audiences. Often you create something that is distributed within a company, such as a memo written to members of your team that captures the salient points discussed for an upcoming sales meeting. At other times you direct your message outside the workplace; for example, you might deliver a proposal for a new medical records system to a local hospital.

The types of genres chosen are usually dictated by the situation, the task, and the audience. If you wanted to quickly communicate something to a few coworkers, such as a follow-up communication after a meeting, you would send an e-mail. However, if you needed to communicate something more formally, such as a serious safety or other issue you discovered, you might choose a report to your supervisor that would be delivered in hard copy to emphasize the seriousness of the issue.

## WRITE

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You may or may not have experience writing in workplace genres, but you certainly have experience writing in academic genres. How do you think writing in academic genres might help prepare you to write in workplace genres? Imagine you are in an elevator on your way up to a job interview. To your surprise, the person in the elevator with you is your interviewer. She asks you to explain how your experience writing as a student might make you a good on-the-job writer. Turn to a classmate, and answer the question.

Your choice of workplace genres, just like other genres, is always based on the rhetorical situation. You want to determine your purpose and audience, and then choose the best ways to approach and reach that audience. For example, if you were searching for a job on campus and you saw a notice for an open position for a student worker to assist people at the Student Life Desk, you would most likely submit your resume and a cover letter to the person who oversees the desk. Your purpose would be to get the job, and your audience would be the person who is doing the hiring.

Some typical workplace genres are memos, which are internal and generally fairly short informational updates; reports, which can be internal or external and are generally long and complex, giving a rich analysis of a situation, often with recommendations; proposals, which usually outline costs and plans associated with taking a particular course of action; and presentations, in which someone shares information live with an audience, often accompanied by PowerPoint slides or other visuals. Workplace genres often depend to some degree on templates, which provide a standard structure to documents. For example, some companies have templates for trip reports, so that when an employee returns from a business trip, she can simply plug in information about where she went, what purpose the trip had, and what the outcome was.

Below is an example of a cover letter by job applicant Julia Nollen. The letter accompanied a resume that she submitted when applying for a position as a marketing assistant. Shown here is an excerpt of that letter, with abbreviated marginal annotations. For a complete version of the letter and Nollen’s resume, see [Chapter 8, “Workplace Genres”](#).