

Survey Complete

In the following self-assessment, you will be asked to evaluate yourself with regard to each of the practices listed.

Source: Pete Cardon

Read each statement and select the rating that reflects how often you engage in the practices listed. There are no right or wrong answers. After completing the self-assessment, read the feedback that explains how to understand your score and interpret your results.

You must respond to all statements in order to receive full credit for this self-assessment activity.

1. I make sure I gather all the facts.

Rarely/Never
 Usually
 Sometimes
 Always

2. I think carefully about what the facts mean.

Rarely/Never
 Usually
 Sometimes
 Always

3. I take time to think about what my audience wants and needs.

Rarely/Never
 Usually
 Sometimes
 Always

4. I spend time envisioning how my audience will respond.

Rarely/Never
 Usually
 Sometimes
 Always

Always

5. I map out the main supporting ideas for my primary message.

Rarely/Never **Sometimes**

Usually
Always

6. I think about how the gist of my message could be captured in one short statement.

Rarely/Never **Usually** Sometimes

Always

7. I check the message for logical consistency.

Rarely/Never **Usually** Sometimes

Always

8. I make certain the tone is positive (as appropriate).

Rarely/Never **Usually** Sometimes

Always

9. I ensure that the tone is other-oriented.

Rarely/Never **Usually** Sometimes

Always

10. I reread the message to make sure everything is correct.

	Rarely/Never		Sometimes
		Usually	
		Always	
Score			
Score			33/40
Range 33 to 40	0	You may be a strategic writer.	
		33	40

Effective business writing is essential to effective performance and advancement in most organizational contexts. This self-assessment is intended to allow you to evaluate your use of the skills associated with effective business writing, and to offer some direction as to how you might improve.

The text lays out a three-step process to effective business communication. The first step, and the one which research indicates the best business writers spend the most time on, is planning. Questions 1 through 6 of the self-assessment are meant to assess the three elements of planning – information gathering and analysis (questions 1 and 2), audience consideration (questions 3 and 4), and thinking about the overall message (questions 5 and 6). You can see the parallel between the importance of this first step in the process and the number of questions devoted to this step. If your scores are lower on these items, you may want to give particular attention to planning before writing.

Questions 7 through 9 address the actual writing of the message, the second of the three steps. Here, particular attention is given to the design of the message and its overall tone. We are quite familiar with the phenomenon of tone in oral communication – the same words spoken with different tones carry very different messages. Likewise, tone is important in written communication. Thus, not only does the message need to be evaluated for its factual accuracy, it also needs to be evaluated for its tone. If this is not part of your writing habit, you should make it so. The final question addresses the issue of reviewing your written communication before sending or submitting it.

Lower scores on this self-assessment are an indication you need to be more thoughtful about your approach to writing. Higher scores indicate you are on the way to be an effective business writer. Regardless of your score, look for confirmation (or not) of your self-assessment in the feedback you receive from others about the quality of your written communication.

There are two keys to improving your writing skill. First, you need to write using the three step approach outlined above and in the text. The more you practice this systematic approach to writing, the more ingrained the process will become. Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of quality writing is the element of time. Simply put, it takes time to write well. The three-step process is an indication of this. It takes time to gather the pertinent information and organize it in a way which is sensible and compelling. It takes time to actually write the message. And most importantly, it takes time to review your writing. Every teacher and instructor is familiar with the phenomena of receiving written material from students which obviously has not been reviewed by the author, much less anyone else. Good writers know they need to carefully review their own writing. And they also know they should ask trusted colleagues to carefully review the draft message to ensure for overall quality, with particular attention to accuracy and tone. So, to address this first action step, you should budget time for all three steps of the writing process which entails, at a minimum, starting early.

The second key is to seek out clear, honest, and detailed feedback on the quality of your writing. While this feedback can include the review of others before the message is sent or submitted, the point here is more to look for feedback after the message has been sent. In an educational context, this means asking your instructor to be brutally honest in the feedback and for you to not be defensive when the feedback is given. In addition, many universities have writing centers which exist precisely for the purpose of providing feedback which is honest, clear, and helpful. You should take advantage of these services whenever possible. The only way to improve communication is to be told what works and what doesn't work. While you may think you have communicated well, if your audience does not agree, you need to adjust your approach.

It is easy to think about writing quality as a topic limited to long form memos, academic papers and the like. While it is true these are important venues for effective communication, in our increasingly digital

and connected world, writing extends to Facebook posts, email messages, texts, and chat sessions. While it is likely true you neither can afford or need an extensive time period to write such communications, the three-step process of planning, writing and reviewing is still important. When you send any written communication, you should take time to plan what you want to say, write it carefully, and then review it. For example, autocorrect programs often make “corrections” which are incorrect. Taking the few seconds necessary to re-read your text message before you hit send can be incredibly valuable.

Remember your score on this self-assessment, while useful for self-understanding, should not be over-interpreted. First, as with all self-assessments, it is only as valuable and as helpful to the extent you have been accurately self-reflective in your responses. Second, every person is complex, and it is impossible to fully capture your uniqueness in a short self-assessment. Third, you may well find your writing skills may change over time, particularly as you proceed through your educational requirements, or you may come to understand what your actual abilities are only later in life. Finally, in contrast to some other of our personal characteristics or abilities which are hard to change, writing can be much improved by asking for help (that is, using others in the review part of the writing process). So, if your scores are lower than you hoped, you have a clear path to improvement.