

3 Stages of

BUSINESS

WRITING

Stage 1: Plan

- Decide on a desired outcome and come up with your key message. Consider writing it down and sticking it some place you can see as you're writing.
- Consider your readers. What do they need to learn, and what approach will make the most impact?
- Make a to-do list and fix a rough timeline, e.g. gather reports, schedule interviews, write an outline, work out a first draft, get compliance approval, make revisions.
- Come up with the main points you need to cover. Write them out in separate sentences, being as specific as you can, then list them in the correct order. If you need to include a call to action, write that down as well.
- Do your research and get to know your subject matter. Feel free to think outside the box with your search terms.
- Think about whether illustrations or graphs would be appropriate and helpful.
- Some writers prefer to come up with opening and closing statements at this point, while others prefer to wait until the end of Stage 2.

Stage 2: Write

- Escape the distractions and silence that phone to help you get in the zone. For some, this means solitude; others prefer the anonymous hum of a café.
- Using your main points as a guide, organise your research logically to help get your arguments across.
- Flesh out your main points. Spell out your claims and support them with relevant research and statistics.
- Be sure to jot down ideas that come to you, no matter how outlandish; you might find them useful later.
- Use paragraphs liberally. They are helpful for separating ideas, making it easier for readers to digest your arguments.
- Try to insert your call to action without disrupting the flow of the piece. It might be helpful to repeat it once or twice.
- While it's tempting to stop and polish as you're writing, this will slow you down. Once you've found your pace, keep writing until the end of the section, at least. If you must stop, begin the next sentence to help jog your memory when you come back to it.

Stage 3: Refine

- After your first draft is complete, read it through and fine-tune as necessary. This could mean clarifying ideas and removing redundant or unnecessary details.
- If there is time, let it sit – overnight, if possible. A fresh perspective is helpful for clarifying ideas and sharpening your writing.
- Read your piece from your audience’s perspective. Are your arguments and call to action clear? Does your reader need any additional information that’s missing?
- Address the main issues with your piece. A wordsmith can happily refine for days, but try to limit yourself to the biggest flaws, depending on the time available.
- Ask yourself: Has your key message been communicated, and have all main points been laid out? Are the sentences accurate and easy to read, and do the paragraphs flow well? Have unnecessary words been omitted?
- If possible, get another person to read it to ensure the piece is complete from a reader’s perspective.
- Do a final proofread, checking for grammatical errors and typos.