

Linguaskill Business Lesson Plans

Writing Lesson 1

Description

This lesson prepares learners for writing responses to the Writing Part 1 task. Learners are given structured practice in a sample task. They are introduced to the format and language of business correspondence and they practise a range of expressions for making suggestions and recommendations in this context. The topic of the lesson is e-commerce.

Teacher's Notes

Aims of the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to practise talking about e-commerce to raise awareness of the format and requirements of the Part 1 Writing task to raise awareness of the format and language of business correspondence to practise using a range of expressions for making suggestions/recommendations
Time required	45 minutes
Level	Suitable for B1 and B2 level
Materials required	Student's Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Procedure

1. Explain that the lesson will be on the topic of e-commerce, and check students' understanding of this term (i.e. websites used for buying and selling products online). The lesson will focus on language and skills which will help learners prepare for the Part 1 writing task in the Linguaskill Business Writing test.
2. Ask students to think of items they have recently purchased online and talk with a partner about the shopping experience (not the items they bought). What did they like and dislike about the websites they used?

In class feedback, elicit/prompt to make a whiteboard list of key features of online shopping websites, i.e. *speed, pictures, descriptions, payment, delivery*. Discuss with students what issues there might be with these features.

Answer Key

possible issues could be:

speed - slow loading times

pictures - unclear, not attractive, too small, limited detail, not enough pictures

descriptions - too short, not accurate, limited detail

payment - not enough choice of payment methods, slow checkout process

delivery - high charges, charges not clearly stated

3. Hand out **Student's Worksheet 1**. Ask students to read the sample Part 1 task and underline the points related to the discussion they have just had. In feedback, note that the task focus is on the company rather than on the customers, but explain how the brainstorming from the previous step is a useful planning tool, i.e. students can draw on personal experience to note down ideas at the planning stage.

Student's Worksheet 1

Answer Key

You have received this message from your managing director.

From: Callie Baxter

Subject: Website issues

The latest online customer reviews show that our products are popular, but our website is not user-friendly. This is affecting sales. I need to know the problems customers are experiencing and how we have dealt with the situation. I also need suggestions for improving the website.

Write an **email** to the managing director.

- say what the website problems are
- explain what action has been taken
- suggest how to improve the website

Write at least **50** words.

4. Ask students to look again at **Student's Worksheet 1** and focus on the 'Task requirements' question below the task. They should highlight on the task where the information for each question is given.

Answer Key

- a. What do you need to write? - an email
- b. Who do you need to write to? - the managing director, Callie Baxter.
- c. What information must you include in your answer? - the information in the text ('the problems customers are experiencing'; 'what action we have taken'; 'how we can improve the website') and the related bullet points.
- d. How much do you need to write? - at least 50 words

You have received this message from your managing director.

From: Callie Baxter

Subject: Website issues

The latest online customer reviews show that our products are popular, but our website is not user-friendly. This is affecting sales. I need to know the problems customers are experiencing and how we have dealt with the situation. I also need suggestions for improving the website.

Write an **email** to the managing director.

- say what the website problems are
- explain what action has been taken
- suggest how to improve the website

Write at least 50 words.

In feedback on this activity, discuss the following exam guidance with students:

- There is no need to include email formatting i.e. From:/To:/Subject: headers.
- Remind students that they should always check who they are writing to so that they can choose the most suitable register. In this case, a neutral/formal register is needed. Elicit appropriate opening and closing greetings.
- The bullet points summarise the information covered in the text. All three bullet points must be covered. It may not always be necessary to cover each point in the same amount of detail. Students should make sure they don't repeat information by allowing the points to overlap. For example, their suggestions for how to improve the website must not be the same as

- their explanations of what has already been done to deal with the situation.
- Writing more than 50 words will not be penalised, but this will impact on the time available for the Part 2 writing task. Total time for the whole Writing paper is 45 minutes. Students should aim to spend around 15 minutes on the Part 1 task and around 30 minutes on the longer Part 2 task.

5. Hand out **Student's Worksheet 2**. The worksheet has three different responses to the task on Worksheet 1. Ask students to work with a partner and choose the best response. Give them two minutes to read the responses and share their initial reactions. In class feedback, agree that response B is the best one and elicit some reasons (i.e. it covers all the points/ it's in a suitable register).

Now ask students to look at the table at the bottom of the worksheet and work with their partner to complete it. This will help them identify specific strengths and weaknesses in each response.

Student's Worksheet 2

Answer Key

	Length Is the answer long enough?	Content Is all the necessary information included?	Register Is the answer in a suitable style for the reader?	Language Is there a good range of language?
A	Yes - 55 words	No. The second point (what action has been taken) is missing. The third point (how to improve the website) is not fully developed.	Too informal for an email to a managing director i.e. <i>Hi Callie; Thanks for ...; You're right; loads of/Let's ask</i>	Some words are copied from the task: <i>This is affecting sales</i>
B	Yes - 63 words	Yes, all points are covered	Yes - a neutral/formal tone, which is suitable for an email to a managing director. It is good to acknowledge the original	Words from the task have been rephrased i.e. <i>this is affecting sales > a fall in online sales</i>

			email (Regarding your message about our website) and to invite a response (Would you like me to research some possible companies?)	
C	No - only 41 words	Yes - all points are covered	The tone is a bit too direct. There is no reference to the original email. No opening greeting (i.e. <i>Dear Ms Baxter</i>)	The language is clear but the points are not very well connected. Some language has been copied from the task (<i>The website is not user-friendly</i>)

In class feedback, remind students that they need to demonstrate their own range of language, so they should avoid copying whole expressions from the task and use synonyms wherever possible.

Also tell students that there is a word count on the screen when they are taking the test, so they can check when they have reached the minimum 50 words.

6. Handout **Student's Worksheet 3**. The third bullet point in the task asks students to suggest ways to improve the website. Refer students to Response A on **Worksheet 2**, which uses *Let's* to make suggestion. Agree that this is too informal for the context. Responses B and C use neutral language, which is more suitable for a message to a superior at work (*We should/ought to*). Students complete the different ways of making suggestions with the correct form of the verb *to hire*.

Student's Worksheet 3

Answer Key

- a. My suggestion/recommendation is that we **hire** an IT company.
- b. We ought to/should **hire** an IT company.
- c. I suggest/recommend **hiring** an IT company.
- d. If we **hire** an IT company, they will be able to advise us.
- e. Perhaps we could **hire** an IT company.
- f. I think it would be a good idea **to hire** an IT company.
- g. Have you considered **hiring** an IT company?

In feedback, note the following points

- *I suggest/recommend* (c.) can also be followed by a noun only, for example *I suggest/recommend a review of our website*.
- example d. is a first conditional. A second conditional could also be used for a more hesitant suggestion.
- draw students' attention to the question mark needed at the end of example g.

7. Finish the lesson by asking students to think about the websites they discussed in step 2. Ask them to talk to a different partner and make suggestions about how the website could be improved, using some of the expressions from **Student's Worksheet 3**. As an extension task, students could write an email to the company in which they express their issues with the website and suggest improvements.

Student's Worksheet 1

Part 1 Writing Task

Sample task

You have received this message from your managing director.

From: Callie Baxter

Subject: Website issues

The latest online customer reviews show that our products are popular, but our website is not user-friendly. This is affecting sales. I need to know the problems customers are experiencing and how we have dealt with the situation. I also need suggestions for improving the website.

Write an **email** to the managing director.

- say what the website problems are
- explain what action has been taken
- suggest how to improve the website

Write at least **50** words.

Task requirements

- a. What do you need to write?
- b. Who do you need to write to?
- c. What information must you include in your answer?
- d. How much do you need to write?

Student's Worksheet 2

The texts below are all responses to the task on **Student's Worksheet 1**. Which one do you think is the best response?

Response A

Hi Callie,

Thanks for your message. You're right, we've had loads of complaints about the website recently. Customers say it's really slow and some of the information is wrong. This is affecting sales, because customers just buy from websites which are easier to use. Let's ask the IT department to have a look.

Thanks,

Jasper

Response B

Dear Ms Baxter

Regarding your message about our website, the fall in online sales is mainly due how long it takes to download pages and to checkout. Customers who have complained have been offered discounts, but we need a long-term solution. We should consider hiring an IT company to advise us. Would you like me to research some possible companies?

Regards

Jasper Clark

Response C

Ms Baxter

The website is not user-friendly. The main problems are the quality of the pictures and the product descriptions. We have removed some of the incorrect information. We ought to take new pictures and write new descriptions.

Yours,

J. Clark.

	Length Is the answer long enough?	Content Is all the necessary information included?	Register Is the answer in a suitable style for the reader?	Language Is there a good range of language?
A				
B				
C				

Student's Worksheet 3

Look at the different ways of making suggestions or recommendations. They are all suitable for neutral or formal business contexts. Complete the expressions with the correct form of the verb *to hire*

hire	hiring	to hire
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- a. My suggestion/recommendation is that we _____ an IT company.
- b. We ought to/should _____ an IT company.
- c. I suggest/recommend _____ an IT company.
- d. If we _____ an IT company, they will be able to advise us.
- e. Perhaps we could _____ an IT company.
- f. I think it would be a good idea _____ an IT company.
- g. Have you considered _____ an IT company?