KESTON SCHOOL

WORK & WEALTH · FREE SAMPLE

Clear Writing at Work

Write emails and messages people read, understand and act on

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

By the last page you will know your point before you type, put the ask where busy people see it, cut any message to the length it needs, and handle status updates, requests, pushback and bad news in writing without endless back-and-forth.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Clear Writing at Work Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Messages Get Ignored

Your messages are not ignored because people are rude. They are ignored because they are hard to act on, and this chapter shows you where.

It is Tuesday afternoon. On Friday you sent your manager a long, careful email about the vendor contract. You explained the background, listed the three options, mentioned the budget and said you would love their thoughts. No reply. On Monday you sent a short nudge. Still nothing. Then, in a hallway or on a video call, your manager says, “By the way, what did you need from me on the vendor thing?”

You needed a decision. It was in there. It was in the fourth paragraph, after the background, folded into a sentence that started with “I was also wondering whether.”

Your manager did not ignore you. They opened the message on a phone between two meetings, saw a block of text with no clear request, and filed it under “read properly later.” Later never came.

If that scene feels familiar, you are not a bad writer. You are a normal writer in a workplace that runs on messages. This book is about writing them so they get read, understood and acted on the first time.

The writer knows, the reader does not

Every unclear work message has the same root. When you write, you already know what you mean. You know the background, why it matters, what you want to happen and by when. All of that lives in your head, so your draft feels complete to you.

The reader has none of it. They arrive cold, often in the middle of something else. They see only the words on the screen, in the order you put them. If the important part is buried, vague or missing, they cannot ask you in the moment. They have to guess, reply with a question, or put the message aside.

This gap between what the writer knows and what the reader sees explains most of the frustration of working through email and chat. It is not about grammar or vocabulary. Plenty of people with excellent grammar write messages nobody can act on.

Three ways a message stalls

Most stuck messages fail in one of three ways. You will probably recognize all three in your own inbox.

1. **The buried ask.** The request is there, but it sits in the middle or at the end, after paragraphs of context. Skimming readers never reach it.
2. **The missing ask.** The message shares information, thoughts or worries, but never says what the reader should do. “Just a heads-up” can mean “no action needed” or “please fix this today.” The reader has to guess.
3. **The tangled thread.** Several topics, questions and updates are mixed in one message. The reader answers the easiest one and the rest disappear.

Each one leaves the reader with work to do before they can even start on your request. Busy people postpone that kind of work.

> **Key idea:** A message fails not when it is badly written, but when the reader cannot quickly tell what you need from them.

Why longer and more polite fails

When a message does not get a response, most people try one of two fixes.

The first is adding more. More background, more explanation, a longer list of reasons. The thinking is that the reader did not understand, so they need more information. Usually the opposite is true. The reader understood that the message was long and decided to deal with it later. Adding length makes the delay worse.

The second fix is adding more softness. Extra greetings, apologies for bothering, phrases like “no worries if not” and “whenever you get a chance.” Warmth is good. But when softness surrounds the request, it also hides it, and it signals that the request is optional. A reader with forty other messages will take you at your word.

Neither fix touches the real problem: the reader still has to dig for the point. The tools in this book work differently. They move the point to where readers look, cut what stands in front of it, and shape the message so acting on it takes seconds.

What this book covers

This book is about everyday workplace writing: emails, chat messages, status updates, requests, meeting recaps and short documents of a page or two. It is not about creative writing, grammar rules or long reports, and it will not ask you to sound like someone else. Your voice stays yours. What changes is the order, the length and the shape of what you send.

You will learn one foundation principle, three practical tools, and how to use them in the messages you write every week, including the awkward ones.

Try this

For the next seven days, run a simple message audit. It takes about five minutes a day.

- At the end of each workday, look at your sent messages. Pick three that needed a reply or an action from someone.
- For each one, note what happened: acted on quickly, answered with a question, slow reply, or no reply at all.
- For any message that stalled, look at it the way a stranger would. Mark where the actual ask appears: first lines, middle or end. Note whether it was there at all.

At the end of the week, count how many stalled messages had a buried ask, a missing ask or a tangled thread. Most people find one pattern shows up far more than the others. That pattern is your starting point.

Keep the audit page. You will use it again in later chapters to see what has changed.

Before you start fixing anything, it helps to understand how your reader actually meets your message, which is the subject of the next chapter.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A message fails when the reader cannot tell what you need from them.
- Writing longer or more politely rarely fixes an unclear message.
- A one-week audit shows exactly where your messages stall.

→ Workbook, section 1

01 Why Messages Get Ignored

Find out where your own messages stall.

FILL IN

One-week message audit

Day	Message (to whom, topic)	Result: quick / question / slow / none	Where was the ask?

CHECKLIST

My stalled messages had

- [ ] A buried ask
- [ ] A missing ask
- [ ] Several topics tangled together
- [ ] No deadline
- [ ] No named owner

The pattern that showed up most in my week, and one example:

RATE IT

How often do my messages get acted on the first time?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 · almost never

10 · almost always

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Clear Writing at Work and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:

01 Why Messages Get Ignored

02 How Busy People Read

03 The Price of Fuzzy Messages

04 Know Your Point First

05 Put the Ask on Top

06 Cut It in Half

07 Make It Easy to Scan

08 Five Messages You Write Weekly

09 When Clear Feels Risky

10 Make Clarity a Habit

11 Writing That Builds Trust

12 Mistakes & Checklist

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