

Business case decision

Subject: Assessment and selection of an online clear writing course

To: Group Manager, Corporate

From: Jane Citizen, Manager, Learning and Development

1. Purpose

To improve the basic writing skills of staff.

2. Recommendation

Ethos CRS's elearning course *From grammar to clear writing* is a sophisticated elearning course. Cost-effective and comprehensive, I recommend this as our best and first choice.

3. Issues

Some of our staff need to develop the skills to communicate ideas and information clearly and efficiently. At the moment, too many managers are working as editors, correcting and re-writing the work of primary authors. The result is a management group that is stretched for time and documents that too often do not meet our own high internal standards.

The issue is that many staff do not understand the fundamentals of writing, and therefore express complex ideas in an unclear fashion. Typically, our documents—emails, letters, decision and information briefs—contain too many words and too often words are arranged in a fashion that is almost random. There are two results. Our own decision-making is not as efficient as it should be and our communications with our clients and staff are not as clear as they should be.

Until recently, it was not possible to purchase an online writing course that was aimed at Australian professionals. In May 2010, Ethos CRS, an Australian training and elearning company, released *From grammar to clear writing*, a web-based elearning course. A free demonstration of *From grammar to clear writing* is available at: **elearning.ethoscrcs.com.au**

We calculate that to provide face-to-face training to the same high standard would be prohibitively expensive. This online option, however, offers us the opportunity to provide our staff with the basic skills that they need in a cost-effective manner. For a group of 100 trainees the savings to our learning and development budget are either \$113 500 for Canberra-based staff or \$259 100 for staff who are brought to Canberra for training (see table 1).

Improved standards of writing should also generate clear productivity benefits. Primary authors would produce better documents and managers would focus on important content.

Not all elearning courses generate a positive training outcome. In this case, however, the content of *From grammar to clear writing* is ideally suited to an online environment. Ideas and skills are developed sequentially—and trainees can progress through content in their own time and at their own place.

4. Financial and productivity implications

From grammar to clear writing offers clear direct savings for the learning and development budget (table 1).

Table 1. Savings from using *From grammar to clear writing* as a writing skills course

	100 trainees	500 trainees	1000 trainees
Savings if using <i>From grammar to clear writing</i> over face-to-face training, \$	\$113 500	\$567 500	\$1 135 000
Savings if using <i>From grammar to clear writing</i> over face-to-face training, out of location, \$	\$259 100	\$1 295 500	\$2 591 000

Full per person costings and assumptions are outlined in attachment 1.

In addition, the roll-out of this course should generate significant productivity savings. In table 2, I have calculated the direct savings that improved writing skills would generate. I have made no allowance for indirect savings (accommodation, material resources and computing).

Table 2. Productivity savings generated by improved writing skills

	100 staff	500 staff	1000 staff
Productivity savings if using <i>From grammar to clear writing</i> over face-to-face training, \$	\$325 000	\$1 625 000	\$3 250 000

I have assumed an average annual cost per person of \$65 000 and an improvement in writing efficiency of five per cent. No calculation has been made on the savings that result from the production of documents that are more effective and which realise better outcomes for the organisation.

The annual saving of \$325 000 therefore represents a minimum that can be expected if 100 staff members take this course.

5. Key Features

Our expectation is that *From grammar to clear writing* will engage trainees. They read, view, listen, practise with interactive exercises and complete tests as they progress through each module (attachment 2). The delivery system is sophisticated—video clips reinforce principles each step of the way.

The key features of *From grammar to clear writing* include:

- Content is identical for all trainees.
- Interactive exercises and examples engage trainees.
- Trainees are instantly provided with results and feedback.
- The content exists as a resource that can be revisited for the life of the active licence.
- Managers can automatically receive custom-made reports that outline the results and progress of trainees.

From grammar to clear writing is run through the internet and will be compatible with the current IT systems of our organisation. Ethos CRS offers a number of plans to support the smooth operation of *From grammar to clear writing*.

For further information on the features of *From grammar to clear writing* see attachment 3.

6. Description and functions

From grammar to clear writing consists of nine modules:

1. Sentences—simple and compound
2. Verbs
3. Nouns
4. Adjectives
5. Adverbs
6. Pronouns
7. Prepositions and phrases
8. Complex sentences
9. Clear writing.

Each module is made up of several sections. Trainees test their understanding of the course by working through interactive exercises, which can be repeated to promote understanding of concepts. Tests at the end of each module assess the trainee's overall understanding and are automatically averaged to calculate the final score.

Once trainees complete *From grammar to clear writing*, they are free to re-read chapters and re-do exercises until the expiry date of the course, two years from the date of purchase.

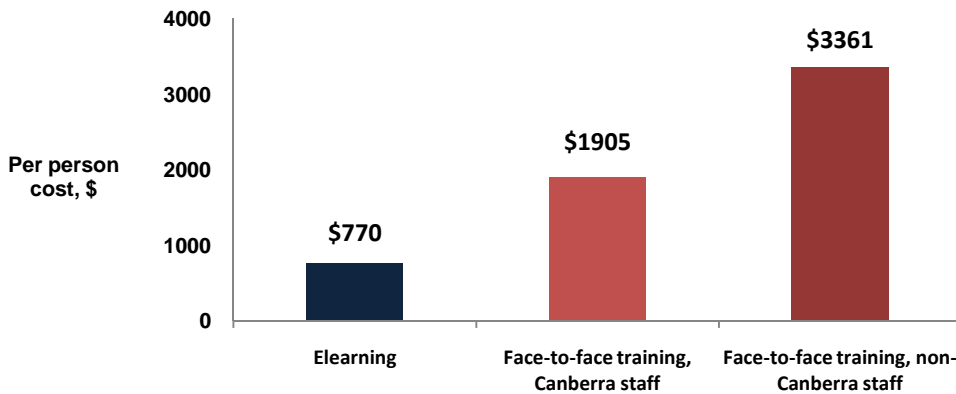
The system maintains a complete history of each trainee. Both the trainees and administrators can use the administrative functions to track activities, analyse test results and produce certificates of achievement.

Attachment 1. Cost comparison: face-to-face versus *From grammar to clear writing*

The costs of the two options, face-to-face training and *From grammar to clear writing* online are shown in figure 1. The cost of elearning is substantially less than face-to-face training:

- **60 per cent** in the case of staff based in Canberra
- **77 per cent** in the case of staff based outside Canberra.

Figure 1. Per person cost of elearning versus face-to-face training



In assessing these costs, care needs to be taken. The listed elearning cost of \$770 is the retail price for one course. Ethos CRS will provide our organisation with a range of pricing options. Typically, organisations receive discounts for group purchases or for the purchase of an organisation licence.

For example, if we were to negotiate a group price for *From grammar to clear writing* of \$655 per person—a discount of 15 per cent over the retail price—then savings generated by the elearning option increase to:

- **66 per cent** in the case of staff based in Canberra
- **81 per cent** in the case of staff based outside Canberra.

Cost assumptions for non-Canberra staff

1. Assumes a three-day course.
2. Delivery cost based on publicly advertised per day cost of courses run by the Australian Public Service Commission (three days in total); assumes no development charge.
3. Courses delivered in Canberra.
4. Three days accommodation costs and travel allowance calculated according to standard Australian Taxation Office rates.
5. Assumes transfers of \$200.
6. Assumes a refundable return airfare cost of \$500.

Cost assumptions for Canberra staff

1. Assumes a three-day course.
2. Delivery cost based on publicly advertised per day cost (three days in total) of APSC writing courses; assumes no development charge.
3. Courses delivered in Canberra.

Attachment 2. Interactive, engaging and informative

The screen shot in figure 2 shows a page from the first module of *From grammar to clear writing*. Every module contains informative text, video, interactive exercises and a test.

Figure 2: Screen shot of the first module of *From grammar to clear writing*

The screenshot displays the user interface of the course. At the top, a dark blue header contains the title "From grammar to clear writing" in white. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "MY COURSE", "RESOURCES", "DEFINITION OF TERMS", and "HELP". A secondary navigation bar shows "SENTENCES—SIMPLE AND COMPOUND" in a box, with "PREVIOUS" and "NEXT" buttons flanking "2 / 20". The main content area is titled "1. Introduction" in orange. It features a video player showing a man reading a newspaper in a bar, with a play button overlay. To the right of the video is a text box containing a paragraph of text. Below the video and text is a sub-heading "The heart of clear writing is clear ideas." followed by a paragraph and a bulleted list.

From grammar to clear writing

MY COURSE RESOURCES DEFINITION OF TERMS HELP

SENTENCES—SIMPLE AND COMPOUND

PREVIOUS 2 / 20 NEXT

1. Introduction

A phenomenally beautiful tenor voice like that, the rarest of boons, which Bloom appreciated at the very first note that he got out, could easily, if properly handled by some recognised authority on voice production such as Barraclough and being able to read music into the bargain, command its own price where baritones were ten a penny and procure for its fortunate possessor in the near future an entrée into fashionable houses in the best residential quarters, of financial magnates in a large way of business and titled people where, with his university degree of BA (in business in its way) and

The heart of clear writing is clear ideas.

As a professional, your job is to present ideas in the clearest way possible. It is to give the reader the information that enables them to:

- decide on an issue
- act in a particular way
- understand complex ideas
- understand procedures or processes.

The course caters for different learning styles; the result is a group of trainees who are motivated to do well and who want to learn.

Attachment 3. Features of *From grammar to clear writing*

Easy-to-use

From grammar to clear writing is designed to be easy-to-use, our trainees require only basic computer skills to take the course.

Consistent training

All trainees, no matter where they are or when they participate, will receive the same training.

No time or place boundaries

From grammar to clear writing is accessible from anywhere with internet connection and at any time of day.

Multimedia content

Each module consists of informative text, videos, graphics, interactive exercises and a test.

Active—not passive—training

Using *From grammar to clear writing*, trainees progress at the pace that suits them.

Ongoing resource

Trainees can return to earlier parts of the course and re-view the content, to ensure their understanding. After completing the final test, trainees can continue to re-read the content and re-do the exercises.

Additional resources

From grammar to clear writing comes with a range of additional resources. These include a course manual, a comprehensive glossary, a help section and downloadable documents with further information on grammar rules.

Assessment

Each trainee can view their results as they progress through the course and will receive a certificate on its completion.

Security

A secure registration and login system protects users. Sensitive data is secured in multiple ways from password-protected entryways through industry standard 128-bit encrypted connections (Secure Socket Layers: SSL) and ultra-strong data encryption on the server.

Ongoing support

Ethos CRS's purpose is to provide an effective and reliable product. Ethos CRS offers a number of plans to support the smooth operation of *From grammar to clear writing*.