



# *Five Mini-Quizzes To Test Your Customer Service E-Mail Writing Skills*

Do you want to find out whether your staff has the basic skills needed to write clear, correct, concise e-mail to customers? (Or maybe you want to check your own writing skills!)

Use these five mini-quizzes for a quick skills check. Each mini-quiz takes just a few minutes to complete and tests one of the essential writing skills that customer service agents need to do their jobs. And don't worry; we've included the correct answers, beginning on page 8.

Each quiz corresponds to a chapter or skill set reviewed in our workbook [\*Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents\*](#). Any wrong answers? Consult the corresponding workbook chapter for easy-to-understand guidance and additional **Practices**.



**Mini-Quiz #1: Punctuate Correctly**

Punctuation seems easy. Use a period at the end of a declarative sentence; use a question mark at the end of a question. But where do you put a comma? What's the difference between a colon and semi-colon? As for the apostrophe, is *its* or *it's* correct? Test your knowledge of the most common types of punctuation used in customer service e-mails: period, comma, apostrophe, semicolon, and colon.

Write *C* next to the sentences that are punctuated correctly. Write *I* next to the sentences that are punctuated incorrectly. Then, go to page 8 to check your answers to Mini-Quiz #1.

	1. Each of the products registered on our system has a \$5, shipping and handling charge.
	2. Also, if you have a problem with another purchase (and we would hope you would not), please let the store manager know.
	3. You should go to our website: <a href="http://www.paulbfoods.com">www.paulbfoods.com</a> and click on the Products menu.
	4. I'm giving you two price quotes for the 16-night cruise you inquired about, Lorri; and I hope you'll contact me soon to reserve a stateroom.
	5. Home improvement loans are not subsidized by the federal government; therefore, applicants do not have to fill out the HL619 Form.
	6. Take a steam locomotive trip in Maryland's scenic Allegheny Mountains and enjoy a bit of our region's past.
	7. A total of \$26.84 will be charged to your credit card (please note that this charge will appear on your credit card statement from LITTLE IVAN ENTERPRISES).
	8. To sell an item, access it's detail page on our web site and click on the Sell button at the upper right corner of the screen.
	9. All our woodworking tools are backed by our Product Promise: if you are not entirely satisfied with a tool, return it to us at any time for an exchange or refund of its purchase price.
	10. This message is being sent by the Confidence.com autoresponder, so no live person will see your reply.



**Mini-Quiz #2: Select the Correct Word and Spell It Right**

Misspellings and incorrect word usage are the most common errors in customer service e-mails. How is your spelling? Do you confuse common sound-alike and look-alike words such as *accept* and *except*?

How do you score on spelling and word usage? Take Mini-Quiz #2 and see how you do. Circle 10 misspelled or incorrect words in this e-mail. Write the correct word or spelling in the blank space to the left of the message. Then, go to page 9 to check your answers to Mini-Quiz #2.

	<p>To: Millie Westerfield From: <a href="mailto:Customer_Support@BankWeb.com">Customer_Support@BankWeb.com</a> Subject: BankWeb System Maintenance</p> <p>Dear BankWeb Customer,</p> <p>In are continuing efforts two provide better service to our customers, we will be preforming system maintenance on the BankWeb site. The maintenance will begin on Saturday, September 14 at approximately 10 p.m. EST and is accepted to last eight hours. The system should be functioning buy 6 a.m. on Sunday, September 15. During this time period you may experience difficulties when makeing changes to your account or to any products and services you have purchased. Don't worry; you won't loose any data during maintenance. If you experience any problems, please log out and try again later.</p> <p>Please except our apologies for any inconvenience this may cause. If their are any questions, please send e-mail to Customer Support at <a href="mailto:Customer_Support@BankWeb.com">Customer_Support@BankWeb.com</a></p> <p>Thank you for your business. We are comitted to bringing you the best possible products and services to make your online business successful.</p> <p>Regards, Andrea Seale, Customer Support</p>
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### Mini-Quiz #3: Write for Global Customers

Customers contact you from many parts of the globe. And even customers in your zip code may not be native English speakers. Idioms, such as *spread ourselves too thin* or *think outside the box*, may be unclear to global customers who are confused by the expression's literal meaning.

Here is a customer service agent's e-mail response to a complaint about a Tranco coffee maker. Idioms and phrases that might be difficult for a non-native English speaker to understand are in **bold**. Edit this e-mail by substituting literal expressions in the space above the **bold phrase**. (For example, *try to do too much* would be a good substitute for the idiom *spread ourselves too thin*.) Then, go to page 10 to check your answers to Mini-Quiz #3.

To: Naveed@worldmail.com  
From: Rita@Tranco.com  
Subject: Re: Tranco coffee maker problem

Thanks for contacting us about your problem with your Tranco coffee maker. **Printed matter** explaining how to use the coffee maker should have been included. I'm attaching the instructions to this e-mail.

Using the coffee maker is **a snap**. The instructions **spell out** the procedure for brewing coffee. If you follow the instructions for brewing coffee **to the letter**, the coffee maker will be **up and running before you know it**.

**It goes without saying** that we are very sorry that you were inconvenienced. **As a rule**, instructions are put inside every box.

Sincerely,

Rita  
Tranco Coffee



### *Mini-Quiz #4: Use Plain Language*

Do your e-mails sound like they were written by the same person who writes tax forms? They shouldn't. Your customer service e-mails should be written in plain, easy-to-understand language.

Bureaucratic or "inflated" language often creeps into customer service e-mails. Some people use inflated language because they think it is more formal or even better English. But inflated language often makes something simple sound complex.

Here's a response from a customer service agent to an inquiry from a student who wants to pay for a college transcript with a check. The agent responds using bureaucratic and inflated language. Circle five words or phrases that create the inflated tone. Then revise the response by substituting plain language for inflated language. Then, go to page 11 to check your answers to Mini-Quiz #4.

To: [John@umd.edu](mailto:John@umd.edu)  
From: Registrar  
Subject: Transcript payment

Dear John,

We acknowledge receipt of your inquiry with regard to paying for a transcript by check. Please be advised that if you do not have a credit card, you cannot request a transcript using our online service. You can pay by check, but you must then complete a paper transcript request form. Please call 800-338-8787 and ask customer service to mail you the form. You must include a check (or money order) for the full amount when you send back your completed request form. Credit card payment results in faster processing. In the event that you fail to enclose payment, we cannot process your request.

Amelia  
Registrar's Office, University of Maryland



### ***Mini-Quiz # 5: Change Run-Ons into Full Sentences***

Clear sentences are the building blocks of clear messages. Because customers use the information in your e-mail to decide or do something, they like concise, definite sentences. One common sentence error is run-on sentences. Run-ons are usually two or more sentences patched together with commas.

Revise these run-on sentences to make them into full sentences. You may add or change words, or add punctuation. Then, go to page 12 to check your answers to Mini-Quiz #5.

1. Unfortunately, we do not have an e-mail support area for our credit card accounts, we request that you contact our Card Products Division at 800-555-9131.
2. Representatives are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.
3. Thank you for choosing a Marksman vacuum cleaner, because I do not know your model number, I don't know the exact nature of your plug/power cord problem.
4. It would be best if you took your ink-jet printer to an authorized dealer, perhaps the one you purchased it from can determine if there is a problem that can be corrected.
5. This is in response to your e-mail concerning FireFly smoke detectors, the FireFly photoelectric model 480 does not have battery back-up but should be vacuumed regularly to remove dust, dirt, and insects that can accumulate in the back of the detector.
6. Shut off the circuit breaker that provides electricity to that unit, place a screwdriver under the lip of the plug, and twist, this will move the plug off the pins of the detector.
7. I just tested your e-mail account and it is fine, an upgrade to the e-mail servers caused an unforeseen problem.



8. Please be patient as it may take 24 to 48 hours for some owners to respond, it will take more time if they are traveling.
  
9. Thank you for shopping at SuperToy, we sincerely appreciate your business and look forward to seeing you online again soon!
  
10. From the start page, you can continue an existing application, if your application has been submitted, you can add additional employers to your list.



**ANSWERS to Mini-Quiz #1: Punctuate Correctly**

Sentences with the correct punctuation are marked with a *C*. Incorrectly punctuated sentences are marked with an *I*. We've provided the correct punctuation for each of the incorrect items.

I	1. Each of the products registered on our system has a \$5, shipping and handling charge.
Corrected punctuation	Each of the products registered on our system has a \$5 shipping and handling charge.
C	2. Also, if you have a problem with another purchase (and we would hope you would not), please let the store manager know.
I	3. You should go to our website: <a href="http://www.paulbfoods.com">www.paulbfoods.com</a> and click on the Products menu.
Corrected punctuation	You should go to our website, <a href="http://www.paulbfoods.com">www.paulbfoods.com</a> , and click on the Products menu.
I	4. I'm giving you two price quotes for the 16-night cruise you inquired about, Lorri; and I hope you'll contact me soon to reserve a stateroom.
Corrected punctuation	I'm giving you two price quotes for the 16-night cruise you inquired about, Lorri, and I hope you'll contact me soon to reserve a stateroom.
C	5. Home improvement loans are not subsidized by the federal government; therefore, applicants do not have to fill out the HL619 Form.
C	6. Take a steam locomotive trip in Maryland's scenic Allegheny Mountains and enjoy a bit of our region's past.
I	7. A total of \$26.84 will be charged to your credit card (please note that this charge will appear on your credit card statement from LITTLE IVAN ENTERPRISES).
Corrected punctuation	A total of \$26.84 will be charged to your credit card. (Please note that this charge will appear on your credit card statement from LITTLE IVAN ENTERPRISES.)
I	8. To sell an item, access it's detail page on our web site and click on the Sell button at the upper right corner of the screen.
Corrected punctuation	To sell an item, access its detail page on our web site and click on the Sell button at the upper right corner of the screen.
C	9. All our woodworking tools are backed by our Product Promise: if you are not entirely satisfied with a tool, return it to us at any time for an exchange or refund of its purchase price.
C	10. This message is being sent by the Confidence.com autoresponder, so no live person will see your reply.



**ANSWERS to Mini-Quiz #2: Select the Correct Word and Spell It Right**

The 10 misspelled or incorrect words are highlighted in yellow. The correct word or spelling appears in the left column opposite the incorrect word.

<p>our to</p> <p>performing</p> <p>expected</p> <p>by</p> <p>making</p> <p>lose</p> <p>accept</p> <p>there</p> <p>committed</p>	<p>To: Millie Westerfield</p> <p>From: <a href="mailto:Customer_Support@BankWeb.com">Customer_Support@BankWeb.com</a></p> <p>Subject: BankWeb System Maintenance</p> <p>Dear BankWeb Customer,</p> <p>In <b>are</b> continuing efforts <b>two</b> provide better service to our customers, we will be <b>preforming</b> system maintenance on the BankWeb site. The maintenance will begin on Saturday, September 14 at approximately 10 p.m. ET and is <b>accepted</b> to last eight hours. The system should be functioning <b>buy</b> 6 a.m. on Sunday, September 15. During this time period you may experience difficulties when <b>makeing</b> changes to your account or to any products and services you have purchased.</p> <p>Don't worry; you won't <b>loose</b> any data during maintenance. If you experience any problems, please log out and try again later.</p> <p>Please <b>except</b> our apologies for any inconvenience this may cause. If <b>their</b> are any questions, please send e-mail to Customer Support at <a href="mailto:Customer_Support@BankWeb.com">Customer_Support@BankWeb.com</a></p> <p>Thank you for your business. We are <b>comitted</b> to bringing you the best possible products and services to make your online business successful.</p> <p>Regards,</p> <p>Andrea Seale, Customer Support</p>
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**ANSWERS to Mini-Quiz #3: Write for Global Customers**

We've supplied substitutes for idiomatic expressions that might confuse global customers. The substitutes are written in parenthesis next to the words they replace.

To: Naveed@worldmail.com  
From: Rita@Tranco.com  
Subject: Re: Tranco coffee maker problem

Thanks for contacting us about your problem with your Tranco coffee maker.

**Printed matter** (*instructions*) explaining how to use the coffee maker should have been included. I'm attaching the instructions to this e-mail. Using the coffee maker is **a snap** (*easy*). The instructions **spell out** (*explain in detail*) the procedure for brewing coffee. If you follow the instructions for brewing coffee **to the letter** (*exactly*), the coffee maker will be **up and running** (*functioning*) **before you know it** (*very quickly*).

**It goes without saying** (*it is understood*) that we are very sorry that you were inconvenienced. **As a rule** (*normally*), instructions are put inside every box.

Sincerely,

Rita

Tranco Coffee



**ANSWERS to Mini-Quiz #4: Use Plain Language**

The words or expressions in **bold** type contribute to the e-mail's inflated tone. We've written plain language substitutes in parenthesis next to the words they replace. Did you find all five of these words and phrases? You may have substituted different expressions for the inflated language.

To: [John@umd.edu](mailto:John@umd.edu)  
From: Registrar  
Subject: Transcript

Dear John,

We **acknowledge receipt of** [received] your inquiry **with regard to** [about] paying for a transcript by check. **Please be advised that** [If] you do not have a credit card, you cannot request a transcript using our online service. You can pay by check, but you must then complete a paper transcript request form. Please call 800-338-8787 and ask customer service to mail you the form. **You must** [Please] include a check (or money order) for the full amount when you send back your completed request form. Credit card payment results in faster processing. **In the event that you fail to** [If you do not] enclose payment, we cannot process your request.

Amelia

Registrar's Office, University of Maryland



### ***ANSWERS to Mini-Quiz # 5: Change Run-Ons into Full Sentences***

We've revised these run-on sentences to make them into full sentences. The words and punctuation in **bold** type show our revisions. Your revisions may be different from these because, in most cases, there is more than one correct way to fix a run-on sentence.

1. Unfortunately, we do not have an e-mail support area for our credit card accounts; **therefore**, we request that you contact our Card Products Division at 800-555-9131.
2. Representatives are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. **We** sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.
3. Thank you for choosing a Marksman vacuum cleaner; **however, because I don't know your model number**, I don't know the exact nature of your plug/power cord problem.
4. It would be best if you took your ink-jet printer to an authorized dealer. **Perhaps** the one you purchased it from can determine if there is a problem that can be corrected.
5. This is in response to your e-mail concerning FireFly smoke detectors. **The FireFly** photoelectric model 480 does not have battery back-up but should be vacuumed regularly to remove dust, dirt, and insects that can accumulate in the back of the detector.
6. Shut off the circuit breaker that provides electricity to that unit, place a screwdriver under the lip of the plug, and twist. **This** will move the plug off the pins of the detector.
7. I just tested your e-mail account and it is fine; an upgrade to the e-mail servers caused an unforeseen problem.
8. Please be patient as it may take 24 to 48 hours for some owners to respond. **It** will take more time if they are traveling.
9. Thank you for shopping at SuperToy. **We** sincerely appreciate your business and look forward to seeing you online again soon!
10. From the start page, you can continue an existing application. **If** your application has been submitted, you can add additional employers to your list.

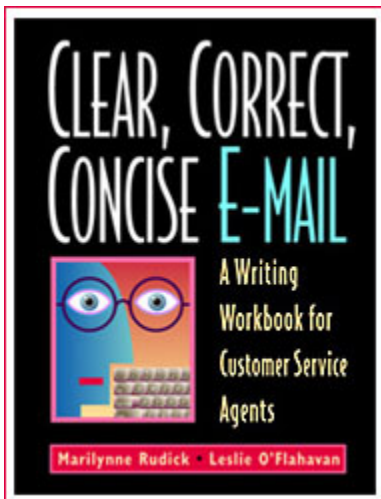


### **About E-WRITE and *Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail***

When we started our writing training and consulting company in 1996, e-mail was in its infancy and the Internet still a techie toy. But we were so convinced of the power of online communication that we boldly named our company **E-WRITE**. Since then, we've worked with organizations of every size and type, teaching them to improve their e-mail communication and write user-focused web content.

We have a special interest in teaching writing to the front line administrative and support personnel who communicate with customers directly, every day. We believe that writing is a teachable skill and that good writers are made, not born. Our approach to writing training is practical and hands-on. We've found that people learn best and are most receptive when the training focuses on the skills they need to do their job. We've drawn on that philosophy and experience in developing our workbook: ***Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail***.

### ***Find Out More about Purchasing and Licensing Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail***



***Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents*** is a cost-effective, self-paced method of teaching your staff to write customer service e-mail. The workbook is unique because it uses e-mail exchanges between customers and companies to teach customer service professionals the writing skills they need to communicate with customers. For more information, go to [www.WritingWorkbook.com](http://www.WritingWorkbook.com), send e-mail to [info@WritingWorkbook.com](mailto:info@WritingWorkbook.com), or call 1-877-481-1869.

Use the **E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam** to assess whether your staff and job applicants have the essential e-mail writing skills to communicate with customers. The **Competency Exam** has eight short answer sections and two scenario-based writing exercises. It comes with an **Administrator's Guide** that contains instructions for administering the **Exam**, answers and detailed explanations, scoring sheets for tallying and presenting **Exam** results, and color **Certificates** to award to staff who pass the **Exam** or complete the ***Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail*** workbook



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**The Fine Print:** When you license our workbook or exam, we'll give you a PDF of the materials and permission to use the materials for six months. You choose the start date for the six-month license period. Start right away, or a week or month from now. We also provide a two-hour Train-the-Trainer teleconference; we'll show you how to use our materials most effectively.