

Lesson 1: Writing for Non-Technical Audiences

Explaining complex ideas clearly to executives, clients, and stakeholders who don't share your technical background.

CEFR Level:	B2–C1	Duration:	60 minutes
Industry:	Engineering / Technology / R&D;	Format:	Instructor-led with slides

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify why technical writing often fails to communicate with non-specialists
- Apply plain language principles to simplify complex information without losing accuracy
- Structure written communication using the inverted pyramid model
- Revise technical sentences to improve clarity for mixed audiences

Materials

- Slide deck (Lesson1_Writing_for_Non_Technical_Audiences.pptx)
- Whiteboard / shared screen for live rewriting
- Printed or digital copy of the practice activity paragraph (Slide 9)

Lesson Procedure

Phase 1: Warm-Up & Context Setting

Time: 0:00–0:08 | **Duration:** 8 min | **Slides:** 1–3

- Display title slide. Briefly introduce the lesson topic and why it matters for technical professionals.
- Ask: *"Think of a time you received a message you didn't understand. What made it confusing?"* Allow 2–3 responses.
- Present the scenario on Slide 3 (engineer–VP miscommunication). Ask students to identify what went wrong.
- Walk through the stats on the right side of Slide 3 to establish stakes.
 - *Don't lecture here — draw out student experience. The scenario should feel familiar to them.*
 - *If students are quiet, share a brief personal anecdote about miscommunication in a professional setting.*

Phase 2: The Curse of Knowledge

Time: 0:08–0:18 | **Duration:** 10 min | **Slides:** 4–5

- Introduce the concept using Slide 4. Read the definition aloud, then pause for reactions.
- Walk through the two columns: "What You Think" vs. "What They Experience." Ask students which column matches their own writing habits.
- Transition to Slide 5 (Before & After). Read the BEFORE paragraph aloud and ask: "Who is this written for?"
- Read the AFTER version. Ask students to identify specific changes and why each one helps.

→ The Before & After is the most important slide for building intuition. Don't rush it.

→ Push students to name specific differences (shorter sentences, defined terms, impact/benefit framing) rather than just saying "it's clearer."

Phase 3: Three Plain Language Principles

Time: 0:18–0:30 | **Duration:** 12 min | **Slides:** 6–7

- Present each principle on Slide 6. For each one, read the example aloud and ask students to generate their own.
- **Principle 1 — Use Everyday Words:** Elicit 3–4 jargon terms from students' own fields. As a class, brainstorm plain equivalents.
- **Principle 2 — Shorten Your Sentences:** Write a long sentence on the board. Have students split it into two.
- **Principle 3 — Lead With the Point:** Give students a background-first paragraph and ask them to rewrite the opening sentence.
- Present Slide 7 (Inverted Pyramid). Explain the structure and connect it to Principle 3.

→ This is the core teaching block. Pace yourself — each principle needs both explanation and practice.

→ For Principle 1: accept that some technical terms can't be replaced. The skill is knowing when to define vs. replace.

Phase 4: Common Pitfalls

Time: 0:30–0:38 | **Duration:** 8 min | **Slides:** 8

- Walk through Slide 8. For each pitfall, read the description and ask students if they recognise the pattern.
- Focus on **Acronym Overload** and **Burying the Lead** — these are the most common issues in technical writing.
- For each pitfall, read the "Fix" aloud. Ask one student to restate it in their own words.

→ Keep this brisk. It's a review/reinforcement section, not new heavy content.

→ If time is short, cover only the first two pitfalls and mention the others as reference.

Phase 5: Practice Activity

Time: 0:38–0:53 | **Duration:** 15 min | **Slides:** 9

- Display Slide 9. Read the instructions and the original paragraph aloud.
- Students work individually for 8–10 minutes to rewrite the paragraph for a non-technical audience (the COO).
- Pair students to compare rewrites (3–4 minutes). Each pair identifies: What did you cut? What did you rephrase? What did you lead with?
- Call on 2–3 pairs to share their strongest rewrite. Highlight effective choices.

→ Circulate during individual work. If a student is stuck, ask: "What's the one thing the COO needs to decide?"

→ There's no single correct answer. Reward clarity and audience awareness, not a specific wording.

Phase 6: Wrap-Up & Key Takeaways

Time: 0:53–1:00 | **Duration:** 7 min | **Slides:** 10

- Display Slide 10. Read each takeaway and ask students which one they'll apply first.
- Quick round-robin: each student shares one specific change they'll make in their next piece of writing.
- Close with: *"Clarity isn't about dumbing things down — it's about respecting your reader's time and making sure your expertise actually reaches them."*

→ End on a practical note. The goal is that students leave with one concrete action, not just a feeling of having learned something.

Differentiation Notes

For stronger students (C1): During the practice activity, ask them to write two versions — one for the COO and one for a project manager who needs more technical detail. Compare how the level of detail changes while the structure stays the same.

For students at B2: Pre-teach key vocabulary from the practice paragraph before the activity (e.g., *degradation, provisioning, remediation*). Focus on Principles 1 and 3 — everyday words and leading with the point — rather than all three simultaneously.

Assessment

Formative assessment throughout via student responses and the practice rewrite. Evaluate rewrites against these criteria:

- **Audience awareness:** Does the rewrite address what the COO needs to know and decide?
- **Plain language:** Are jargon terms replaced or defined? Are sentences under 20 words on average?
- **Structure:** Does the rewrite lead with the key message and follow the inverted pyramid?
- **Accuracy:** Is the core information preserved, even though the phrasing changed?