

Clear Writing and Government

Federal Contract Holder
GS-02F-0006X
Woman Owned Small Business
SIN 874-4
NAICS
611430, 541611, 511210, 561110

State of California
Certified Small Business
#1722900
Plain Writing Requirement
Govt. Code 6219
CA Training Bid Exemption
Management Memo 11-05

by Linda Vanderwold, CSP

Americas #1 Clear Writing Coach



FOREWORD



Hello, I'm Linda Vanderwold, founder of VanWrite Writing Consultants, LLC. I've worked with state and federal government agencies for more than 20 years. This report answers many of the questions government agencies ask, and provides additional information that may be useful during the contracting process.

In government, what do people mean when they talk about poor writing? Is it:

- grammar, punctuation and spelling,
- word choice,
- writing style
- document format, or
- content organization?

Good writing incorporates all the above, and many training programs teach some or all of these elements. However, good grammar does not guarantee clarity. When the writing is unclear, readers become frustrated and set it aside. When this occurs, readers fail to get your message, and the entire writing process became a big waste of time, energy, and money. Poor writing often creates more questions than it answers.



Government managers and supervisors realize clarity's importance; many government statutes and regulations require writing to be clear and straight forward.

Class participants often tell me 8-15 or more rewrite cycles are common in their organizations. Why so many? Most people do not know an objective way to measure writing clarity. Instead, they rely on the highly subjective "This Sounds Better" approach that changes the writing, but rarely improves clarity. Based on my work with the then Price Waterhouse, I accidentally invented an objective system that improves writing clarity measurably, and busts the subjective rewrite cycle. We call it the *VanWrite Clear Writing System*.

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GOV'T STATUTES -- CLEAR WRITING

New York was the first state (1978) to pass a law that requires contracts governing consumer transactions to be written in plain English, as opposed to legalese. Since then, Connecticut, California, and many others, including the Federal Government, have passed laws that require government and consumer documents to be written in clear and straightforward language. For example:

Federal Plain Writing Act of 2010

The Federal Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires all branches of government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner.

California Government Code 6219

California Government Code 6219 requires all state agencies to write in plain, straightforward language using a coherent and easily readable style. The requirement pertains to any written communication that is necessary for the agency to carryout its responsibilities.



COMPLIANCE IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

It's Not Your Fault



Writing clearly challenges most of us because school taught us to write “big”, and government jargon makes the problem even worse. Traditional clear writing guidelines and training often fall short because the advice is subjective: take out the unnecessary words, eliminate the jargon, use active voice... While helpful, this advice is difficult for most people to apply because it is subjective, open to interpretation.

Write Clearly On Purpose, Not By Accident

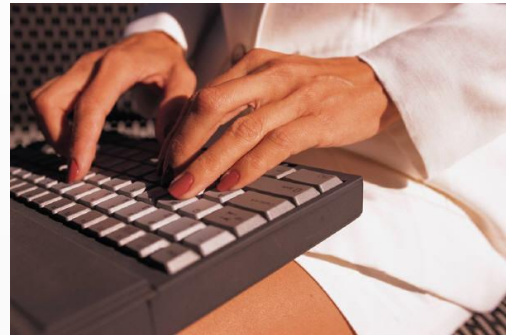
The VanWrite Clear Writing System focuses on the sentence, the kernel of all writing. Unclear and Clear writing exhibit distinctly different patterns. The VanWrite Clear Writing System uses these patterns to coach writers to clarity. Based on three simple rules, writers edit for clarity. The VanWrite Clear Writing System is proven, objective, easy to learn, and effective.

Every edit is based on an objective rule, not a “this sounds better” opinion.

Thousands of government employees have attended VanWrite programs. The most frequent comment we hear is “Thank you; I can use this immediately. Why didn’t they teach this in school?” As a bonus, the VanWrite Clear Writing System protects the training investment because it includes software; the software reinforces the clear writing system, and coaches writers every time they write. With VanWrite, writers write clearly on purpose, not by accident.

Business and Technical Writing

The VanWrite system is equally effective for all types of government writing including human resources, accounting, engineering, scientific, law enforcement, and legal. To illustrate, we applied VanWrite editing principles to a difficult passage taken from a federal government regulation:



Extreme Example

Before VanWrite

In the case of an article that consists in whole or in part of materials from another country, has been substantially transformed in Canada into a new and different article of commerce with a name, character, or use distinct from that of the article or articles from which it was transformed. The term refers to a product offered for purchase under a supply contract, but for purposes of calculating the value of the end product includes services (except transportation services) incidental to the article, provided that the value of those incidental services does not exceed that of the article itself. (100 words, 2 sentences).”

VanWrite Revision

When an article contains material from another country, the article must be substantially transformed in Canada into a new and different article. The transformed article must have a name, character, or use distinct from the original article. The term "Canadian end product" refers to products offered for purchase under a supply contract. The new product's value calculation may include incidental services except transportation services. Incidental services cannot exceed the value of the article itself. (74 words, 5 sentences).

VANWRITE PHILOSOPHY

Good writing shouldn't be a mystery.

Clear, effective writing has never been more important than it is today because the computer and email made every employee a writer. Yet, many feel uneasy when they write. Some even hate it! VanWrite targets this issue with an effective, simple, non-academic writing method that coaches real people in the real work world.

We can help anybody write with more confidence! VanWrite takes the guesswork, mystery, and anxiety out of writing, and produces immediate, lasting results. With VanWrite, staff develop time-saving techniques to plan, write, and edit clear, concise documents the first time.



Learning Objectives



Participants learn the VanWrite system for clear business communication; as a result, management, and staff:

- conduct fewer and shorter meetings because they communicate much more concisely. In addition, the visual thinking and communication skills dissolve generational differences in the office;
- prepare shorter, more powerful documents that help readers **O**btain, **R**etain, and **A**ccess the writer's message easily;
- increase editing efficiency because they immediately recognize strong and weak sentence elements. All office writers become strong editors of their own **and** each other's work based on the objective VanWrite editing guidelines; simultaneously, all writers maintain their own style!

Course Content

We divide the VanWrite Clear Writing System program into two major components:

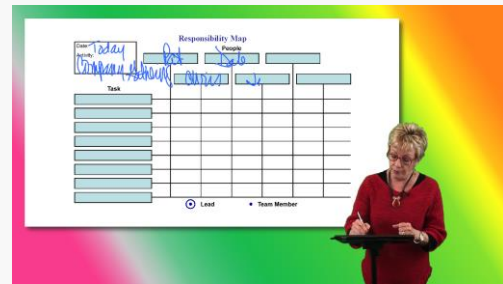
High Impact Thinking

This smart hands-on session teaches busy, stressed people how to bust the re-write cycle, the single most expensive office nightmare. VanWrite truly shows business people how to plan an entire project **before** writing a single sentence. We believe that it is never wise to think in complete sentences because every body thinks SO much faster than they can write/create sentences. The rewrite cycle proves this.

Visual thinking allows staff to work quickly and clearly; this is especially important when employers struggle with reduced staff and increased workloads.

VanWrite provides and demonstrates many templates that help professionals juggle competing priorities gracefully, manage projects efficiently, and facilitate better meetings. This session pivots on edutainment the audience will use at their work sites, AND at home! High Impact Thinking teaches leaders and staff new ways to grasp, develop, and share ideas quickly, skills that foster employee retention and motivation.

Materials include: High Impact Thinking Notebook, VanWrite Map Templates



Sentence Aerobics®

This amazing hands-on session shows participants how to edit for clarity. Using color, Sentence Aerobics targets the pulse points of any sentence and converts writing flab to muscle. It focuses on those sentence elements that increase Reader Comfort so the reader obtains, retains, and accesses the writer's message easily. Based on objective rules described in Linda Vanderwold's book, **Sentence Aerobics, Your GPS for Clear Business Writing**, this session goes far beyond grammar rules and writing tips.

Materials include: Linda's book, Sentence Aerobics® Notebook, Sentence Aerobics® Coach software license. (License period varies according to contract terms)

Poor Writing Costs More Than You Think

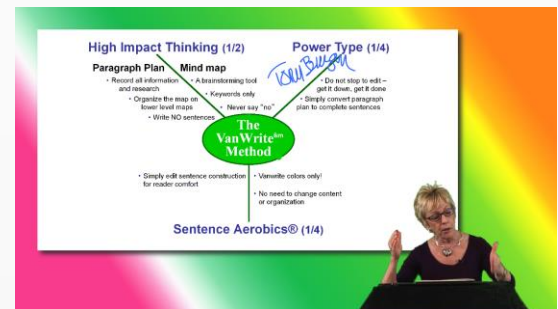
Course Formats

Online Program

VanWrite online training movies cover the same content as the onsite programs. As Linda writes on her table PC participants see every stroke displayed on the screen behind her. Her lively entertaining personality engages participants as they interactively work with her in their notebooks. Linda divided the program into short segments that participants view at their pace on their personal schedule. Segments must be watched in sequence. Previously viewed segments may be watched as often as the participants want. After the training, the participant's notebook serves as a quick reference guide.

Enterprise Program

The enterprise online program is effective in changing an entire organization's writing culture quickly. It is also the most cost effective.



Onsite Program In this format, Linda goes to the client's site. The 12-hour program is presented in either three 4-hour segments, or two 6-hour segments. The 4-hour segments are spaced a week apart to maximize learning. Group sizes range from 30 to more than 200. Large groups are the most effective because of the synergy that occurs among the participants. We prefer classroom style seating. In very large groups, theater seating with a writing surface is acceptable.



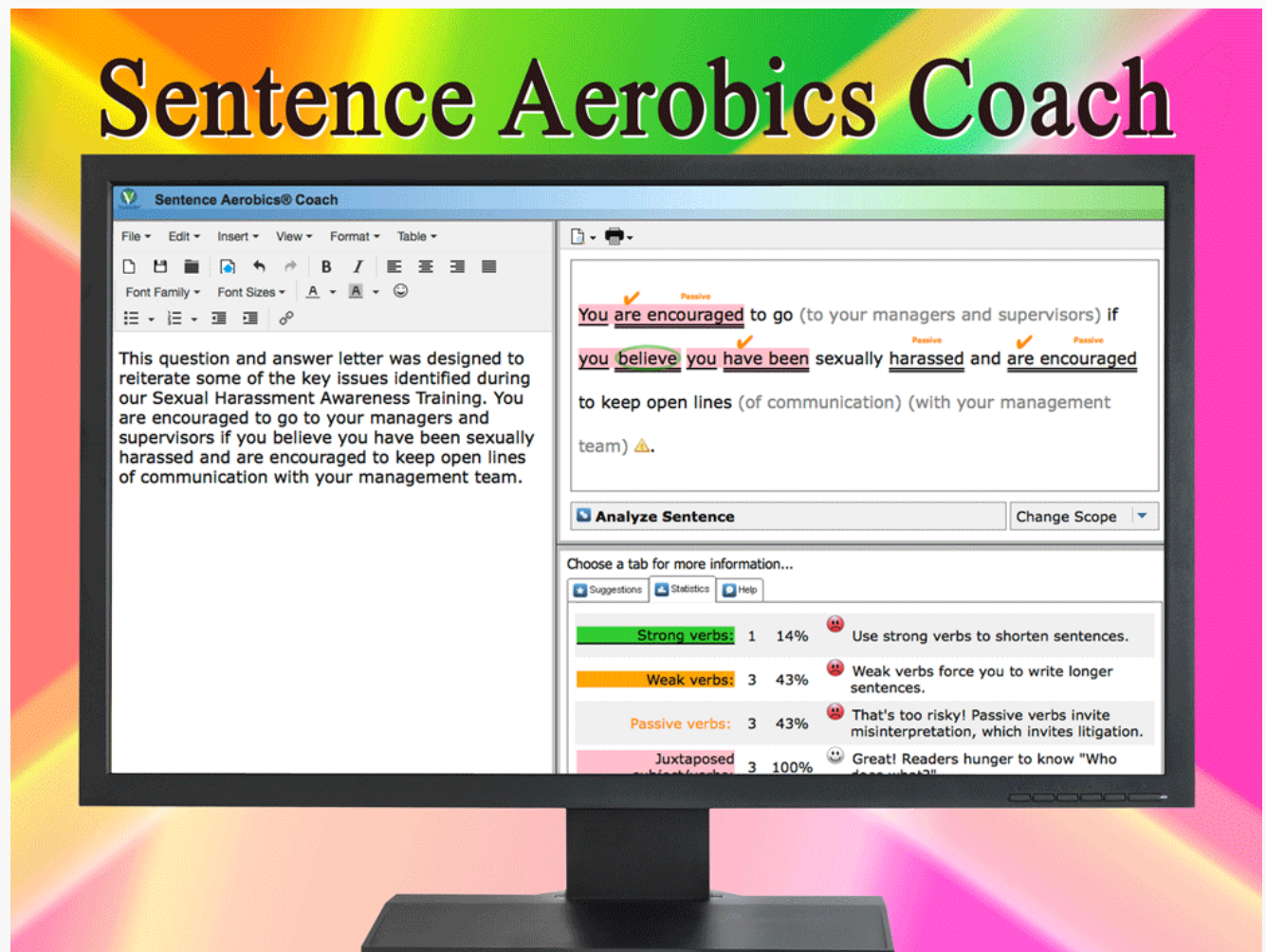
Materials

Student materials include a *High Impact Thinking Notebook*, a *Sentence Aerobics Notebook*, *VanWrite* map templates, Linda's book *Sentence Aerobics*, *Your GPS to Clear Business Writing*, and a quick reference card. Onsite classes receive professionally printed materials. Online participants download the same materials.

Sentence Aerobics Coach Software

Each participant receives a desktop or an online Sentence Aerobics Coach software license. (License period determined by contract) The software protects the training investment because it coaches participants every time they write. The software applies VanWrite markups to the writer's document. The markups target unclear writing, and coach writers while they revise for clarity.

The software also provides an analysis of the entire document that indicates the documents overall reading ease, Reader Comfort.



CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT

Thousands of state employees have attend Linda Vanderwold's onsite programs. She has worked in more than 30 state agencies, and with groups such as Information Technology Leadership Academy (ITLA). Onsite class sizes range from 30 to more than 200.

The VanWrite Clear Writing System provides the most benefit when entire business units learn the system together. Until now, state workload, meeting space, and travel logistics often made large-group training impractical. Not any more! Linda Vanderwold has taken her entire clear writing program online. Now everyone in the organization, including remote field offices, can quickly benefit from the VanWrite Clear Writing System at the times and places they choose. The program is even better than onsite programs, because employees proceed at their own pace. Participants can review program segments as often as they like. Unlike onsite programs, participants also have access the VanWrite VIP website for continuing online coaching support. Members can participate in monthly Q&A webinars, access additional tools, and view additional movies on clear writing topics.



To learn more about VanWrite and this fabulous new opportunity, contact us at [VanWrite](http://VanWrite.com), 800-800-0898. We would be pleased to discuss your department's unique enterprise needs for clear writing. We also offer volume discounts.

DGS EXEMPS TRAINING FROM COMPETITIVE BIDDING

On November 28, 2011, the California Department of General Services exempted training contracts from advertising and competitive bidding. Contract cost must not exceed \$50,000 in any 12-month period. For details see [MM 11-05](#).



