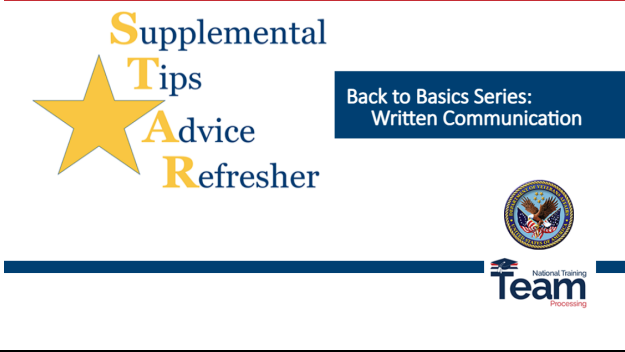




Slides	Instructor Script
<p data-bbox="203 338 824 394">»</p> 	<p data-bbox="850 338 1508 415">Welcome to Supplemental Tips, Advice and Refresher Training, or STAR Training.</p> <p data-bbox="850 464 1500 663">This lesson is part of a series focused on topics related to your daily work tasks, called Back to Basics. In this lesson we will discuss professional and efficient written correspondence.</p>
<p data-bbox="203 743 824 800">»</p> <h3 data-bbox="402 785 621 814">Navigation Controls</h3> <p data-bbox="277 856 607 877">At the bottom of your screen is a navigation toolbar</p> <p data-bbox="277 888 451 909">You can use the toolbar to:</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="394 942 444 963">Rewind <li data-bbox="394 974 467 995">Pause/Play <li data-bbox="394 1005 500 1026">Move backward <li data-bbox="394 1037 488 1058">Move forward 	<p data-bbox="850 743 1511 852">At the bottom of your screen is a navigation toolbar. This toolbar allows you to rewind, pause, or move backward or forward.</p> <p data-bbox="850 905 1511 936">Please select the forward button to continue</p>
<p data-bbox="203 1157 824 1213">»</p> <h3 data-bbox="232 1234 472 1264">Lesson Objectives:</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="237 1283 456 1304">• Discuss common errors found <li data-bbox="237 1325 542 1346">• Identify elements of good business writing <li data-bbox="237 1367 493 1388">• Examine correspondence examples <li data-bbox="237 1409 505 1451">• Review plainlanguage.gov guidelines and VA Style Guide 	<p data-bbox="850 1178 1511 1577">As mentioned, this lesson will focus on written communication. The goal is to provide instruction on how to compose your written correspondence to best serve our Veterans and Stakeholders. We will discuss common errors and fundamentals of good business writing. We will also look at examples of written correspondence and review the guidelines provided by plainlanguage.gov.</p> <p data-bbox="850 1598 1511 1629">Please select the forward button to continue</p>

Slides

Instructor Script

Why is this important?

Duty to Assist

[M22-4 Part 3, Subchapter III 3.21d](#)
explains communication with beneficiaries
and requirements for capture



You may be wondering how this lesson applies to you. Most letters are automated and there are specific scripts available to obtain or explain additional information.

Keep in mind we have a Duty to Assist and there may be times when we need to keep beneficiaries informed of any excessive delay in the processing of their claims. For more information, click the hyperlink on the screen which will open a separate page for the M22-4 Part 3 where this information can be found.

Whether our communication is through a letter or email, a copy of the correspondence must be placed in the TIMS folder. Please select the forward button to continue.

Common Correspondence Errors

Misspellings

Misinformation

Confusing

Clear and concise communication is key to great customer service. But have you ever received a letter or perhaps an email with spelling errors, misinformation, or simply did not make sense to you as the reader? Now, think about our Veterans and how they would feel if they received a letter like this.

Common Correspondence Errors

Select each button to learn more



Grammar/Spelling

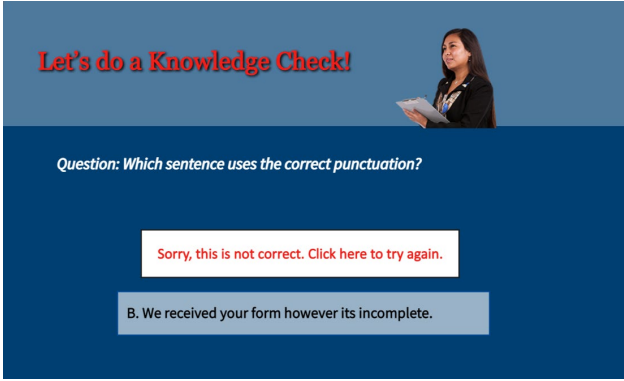
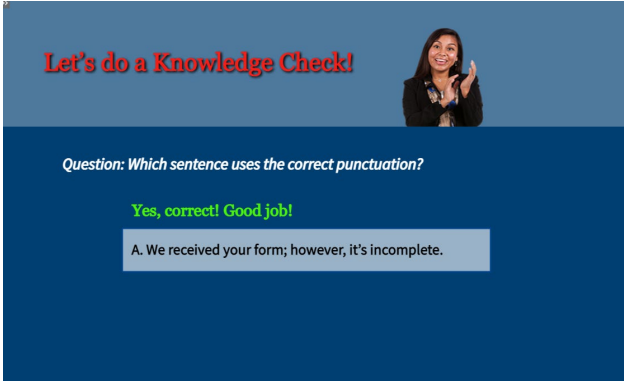
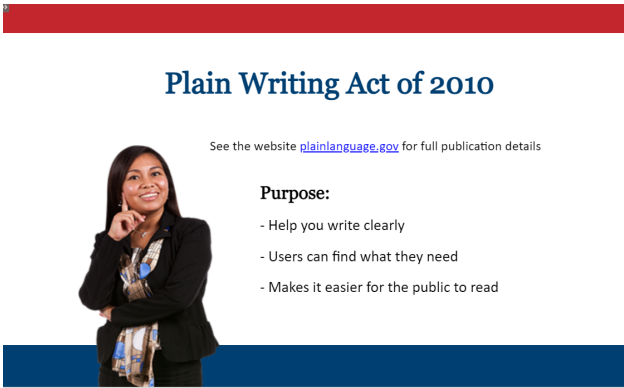
Punctuation

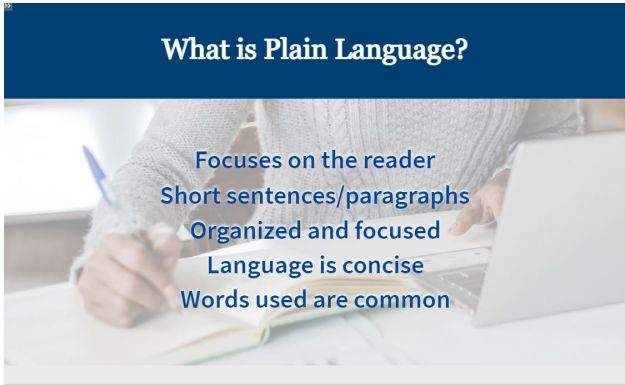

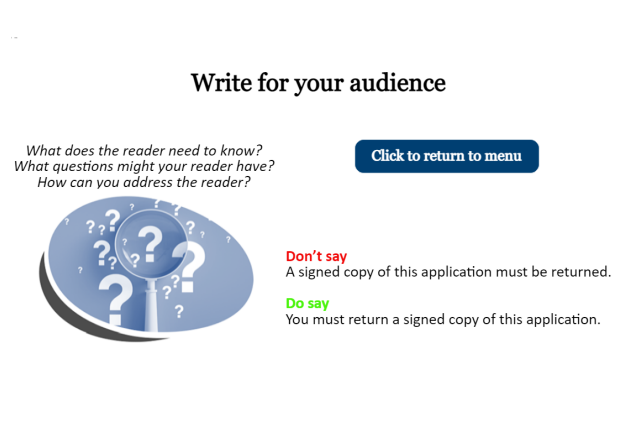
Run-on Sentence



On this screen you will note some common correspondence errors. You must select all three topics in order to advance the presentation.


Slides	Instructor Script
<p data-bbox="237 321 444 352">Grammar/Spelling</p> <p data-bbox="237 384 347 405">Your and You're</p> <p data-bbox="383 367 597 388">Incorrect: I received <u>you're</u> letter.</p> <p data-bbox="383 399 574 420">Correct: I received <u>your</u> letter.</p> <p data-bbox="237 466 347 487">Two, Too or To</p> <p data-bbox="383 447 776 468">Incorrect: Please remember <u>two</u> sign on the <u>too</u> dotted lines.</p> <p data-bbox="383 478 756 499">Correct: Please remember <u>to</u> sign on the <u>two</u> dotted lines</p> <p data-bbox="237 554 347 575">Accept or Except</p> <p data-bbox="383 535 659 556">Incorrect: We <u>except</u> your address change.</p> <p data-bbox="383 567 649 588">Correct: We <u>accept</u> your address change.</p>	<p data-bbox="854 285 1511 443">There are many words with the same sound but have different meanings, in fact this topic could be a lesson all of its own! Let's discuss a few examples.</p> <p data-bbox="854 499 1511 779">Take a look at the difference between Y-O-U-R and YOU-apostrophe-RE. In the second sentence, the correct use of the word indicates a possession, 'I received YOUR letter', whereas in the first sentence, YOU-apostrophe-RE is actually short for the words "You are" which does not work in this sentence.</p> <p data-bbox="854 816 1511 1062">How about the word "to" ... as you can see there are three options with a similar pronunciation. T-W-O is a number, T-O-O is the word to imply "also" and "To" is a preposition, meaning a word in relation to another, used before a noun to show direction, time, place etc.</p> <p data-bbox="854 1100 1511 1524">Knowing when to use words like accept or except can be tricky as well. Even though their pronunciation is similar, these two words have entirely different meanings. Except with an E is most often used as a preposition or conjunction for an exclusion or to say not including, while accept with an A is a verb indicating agreement or receiving something. In this case, the proper sentence is "We accept (spelled a-c-c-e-p-t) your address change" meaning "We agree to your address change."</p>
	<p data-bbox="854 1545 1479 1661">Recognizing when and how to use punctuation is an important factor in good business writing.</p> <p data-bbox="854 1717 1520 1883">Take a look at the sentence corresponding with the category titled apostrophe "It's important to respond" and notice the correct use of It's includes an apostrophe after the word It, which makes it mean "It is." The</p>

Slides	Instructor Script
<p>Punctuation</p> <p>Apostrophe Incorrect: Its important to respond. Correct: It's important to respond.</p> <p>Comma Incorrect: Your signature, is required, in blue or black ink. Correct: Your signature is required in blue or black ink.</p> <p>Semicolon Incorrect: We received your form however it is incomplete. Correct: We received your form; however, it is incomplete.</p>	<p>incorrect sentence in our example is the one using its without an apostrophe, which implies ownership of the following word, and is the possessive form of the pronoun it.</p> <p>Likewise, the use of the comma and semicolon have specific grammar rules.</p> <p>You should use a comma to separate two or more related thoughts which are not independent sentences by themselves. Also use a comma between items in a series and after an introductory phrase.</p> <p>A semicolon is used to connect and separate two related or similar sentences.</p>
<p>Run-on Sentence</p> <p>Before We received your application, the signature page is missing.</p> <p>After We received your application, but the signature page is missing.</p>	<p>A run-on sentence occurs when two or more complete sentences, also known as independent clauses, are not connected properly.</p> <p>You can connect these using a semicolon or by using a comma and a coordinating conjunction such as but, and, nor, or yet.</p> <p>In the example on screen the run-on sentence "We received your application, the signature page is missing" is corrected by adding a comma and coordinating conjunction "but" after the word application.</p>
<p>Let's do a Knowledge Check!</p>  <p><i>Question: Which sentence uses the correct punctuation?</i></p> <p>A. We received your form; however, it's incomplete.</p> <p>B. We received your form however its incomplete.</p>	<p>Let's do a Knowledge Check! Which sentence uses the correct punctuation? Please review the two answers and select the answer with the correct punctuation.</p> <p>(Correct Answer is A)</p>

Slides	Instructor Script
 <p>Let's do a Knowledge Check!</p> <p>Question: Which sentence uses the correct punctuation?</p> <p>Sorry, this is not correct. Click here to try again.</p> <p>B. We received your form however its incomplete.</p>	<p>(Select answer B) Sorry, this is not correct.</p>
 <p>Let's do a Knowledge Check!</p> <p>Question: Which sentence uses the correct punctuation?</p> <p>Yes, correct! Good job!</p> <p>A. We received your form; however, it's incomplete.</p>	<p>(Select answer A) Good job! This is correct! Please select the forward button to continue.</p>
 <p>Plain Writing Act of 2010</p> <p>See the website plainlanguage.gov for full publication details</p> <p>Purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help you write clearly - Users can find what they need - Makes it easier for the public to read 	<p>We've discussed some common errors found in written correspondence, but did you know there are guidelines which were created specifically for government communications?</p> <p>These guidelines are called Plain Language and they are the official guidelines for the Plain Writing Act of 2010. Federal plain language guidelines can be found on the website plainlanguage.gov and were created with the purpose to help users write in a way which makes it easier for the public to read, understand, and use government communications.</p> <p>Clicking the hyperlink on screen will open a separate page to allow you to save this reference for future use. Please select the forward button to continue.</p>

Slides	Instructor Script
 <p>What is Plain Language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on the reader Short sentences/paragraphs Organized and focused Language is concise Words used are common 	<p>So, what is Plain Language and why is it important?</p> <p>As previously mentioned, plainlanguage.gov provides guidelines for the agency to write clearly so readers can find and understand what they read. The focus is on the reader and is delivered using short sentences and paragraphs. It is communication which is written so the audience can understand the first time they read it.</p> <p>When writing for your audience, it is important to keep the information organized, focused, and concise. Also, we should always choose our words carefully and use common words. Please select the forward button to continue.</p>
 <p>Plain Language Guidelines</p> <p>Select each button to learn more</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on your audience Choose words carefully Be concise Write conversationally 	<p>Let's take a few minutes to learn about some of the plain language guidelines! You must select all four topics in order to advance the presentation.</p>
 <p>Write for your audience</p> <p>What does the reader need to know? What questions might your reader have? How can you address the reader?</p> <p>Click to return to menu</p> <p>Don't say A signed copy of this application must be returned.</p> <p>Do say You must return a signed copy of this application.</p>	<p>When composing written correspondence, keep your audience in mind and write at their level of understanding. Consider what you need the reader to know and make sure to explain how it applies to them. Ask yourself what the reader may already know and consider any questions the reader may have. While a situation or issue may apply to multiple people, address the reader directly in your writing. You can do this by using pronouns such as you. On this screen</p>


Slides	Instructor Script
	<p>is an example of how to speak directly to the reader using the pronoun “you”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Choose words carefully</p> <p><i>Monitor word choice and tone Use simple words and phrases Avoid jargon Define abbreviations/acronyms Use consistent terminology</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Click to return to menu</p>  <p>Don't say We can't help you with your NOD unless you forward a signed VAF 10182 to us.</p> <p>Do say Please send us a signed copy of your Notice of Disagreement on VA Form 10182.</p>	<p>Word choice and tone is important in your writing. Using simple words and phrases improves readability. It's good practice to avoid jargon and undefined abbreviations and acronyms, as doing so can cause confusion for the reader. Also, using the same terms consistently for the same concept or object helps keep your writing on track.</p> <p>As an example, review the two sentences on this screen. The first sentence has a negative tone with the words “we can't help you.” Additionally, it includes acronyms which might require further research by the reader if they don't understand the meanings. You will notice in the second sentence the acronyms are spelled out and the language used has a neutral tone.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Be concise</p> <p><i>Write short sentences Remove excess words and redundancies Watch for double negatives Avoid exceptions to exceptions</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Click to return to menu</p>  <p>Don't say I am looking at your application, and I noticed there is not a signature which is not valid.</p> <p>Do say You must sign the application, or it is not valid.</p>	<p>Long, complex wordy sentences can be confusing for the audience. In order to send a clear message to your reader, critique your own writing, considering whether you need every word. Look for ways to cut out excess words and redundant language. Compose short sentences and paragraphs. Watch for words which could negate the meaning, such as double negatives and also avoid exceptions to exceptions.</p> <p>The following sentence “I am looking at your application, and I noticed there is not a signature which is not valid” is dense, using</p>

Slides	Instructor Script
	<p>more words than are needed to send the message, and contains double use of “not”- thereby negating the meaning.</p> <p>Instead, saying “You must sign the application, or it is not valid.” is a concise way of saying we need a signed application.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Write conversationally</p> <p><i>Use active voice not passive voice Watch for legal obligation Avoid using slashes</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Click to return to menu</p>  <p>Don't say The following information should be included and/or returned within 30 days.</p> <p>Do say You must include the following information and return within 30 days.</p>	<p>You need to tell your audience what to do and what is needed. You can do this through the use of verbs and active voice. When using active voice, the person is the subject of the sentence and performs the action. Whereas in the passive voice, the object is the subject, is being acted upon, and it does not identify who is performing the action.</p> <p>Watch for legal obligation as there are words which might convey the reader has to do something. For instance, “must” is for an obligation and “should” is for a recommendation.</p> <p>Finally, avoid using slashes, such as “and/or” because even though a writer’s implied meaning is either one, it is ambiguous and puts the interpretation at the reader’s discretion.</p>
<p>Let's do a Knowledge Check!</p>  <p><i>Question: Which sentence is directed to the reader?</i></p> <p>A. Anyone wishing to apply must file an application.</p> <p>B. You must file an application.</p>	<p>It's time for another knowledge Check! Which sentence is directed to the reader? Please review the two answers and select the correct answer.</p> <p>(Correct Answer B)</p>

Slides

Instructor Script

Let's do a Knowledge Check!




Question: Which sentence is directed to the reader?

A. Anyone wishing to apply must file an application.

Sorry, this is not correct. [Click here to try again.](#)

(Select Answer A) Sorry, this is not correct.

Let's do a Knowledge Check!



Question: Which sentence is directed to the reader?

Yes, correct! Good job!

B. You must file an application.

(Select Answer B) Good job! This is correct! Please select the forward button to continue.



From: <JPEMLOYEE>
Sent: Friday 9:26 AM
To: VeteranJoe100@emailservice.com
Subject: claim

Joe Veteran,

I have you're claim for benefits and I need more info from you so I can work you're claim because its missing some info. I put some notes in the file explaining the problem please contact 888-GIBILL-1 and the call center will explain what is wrong with it.

Thank you,

John P. Employee
Veterans Claims Examiner
Veterans Benefits Administration

* This is a fictitious e-mail and was composed for training purposes only

On this slide is a copy of a mock email which was composed for training purposes. Let's take a look at this fictitious email and evaluate the content. At first glance you may think this email is fine. There is a subject, greeting, short paragraph and it is signed by the sender. But as you take a closer look you will notice there are some issues with the tone and composition.

First, "I have you're claim for benefits" has the incorrect spelling of your. The subject line of the email is vague and could be construed as junk email by the receiver. Also notice the negative tone conveyed by the words "problem" and "wrong with it." Additionally, the sentences are wordy and could be revised to be more concise.

Please select the forward button to continue.

Slides



From: <JPEMPLYEE>
Sent: Friday 9:26 AM
To: VeteranJoe100@emailservice.com
Subject: your VA Education Benefits claim

Joe Veteran,

I received your claim for benefits, and I need more information from you. In order to expedite the processing of your claim, please contact the Call Center at 888-GIBILL-1.

Thank you,

John P. Employee
Veterans Claims Examiner
Veterans Benefits Administration



** This is a fictitious e-mail and was composed for training purposes only*

Instructor Script

We identified the issues in the previous email message, so let's take a look at good business writing in an edited version.

First, you will notice the subject is more specific while still maintaining privacy. Next, the spelling is correct with the use of your and info has been spelled out to be more formal, using the proper word "information." Also notice the independent sentences are connected with a comma and coordinating word "and"

The redundant language and words which carried a negative tone are removed and this email is now more concise and easier to understand. The receiver of this message knows the action they need to take next. Clear and focused, this message helps the reader find and understand the most important information, which is the goal of plain language. Please select the forward button to continue.



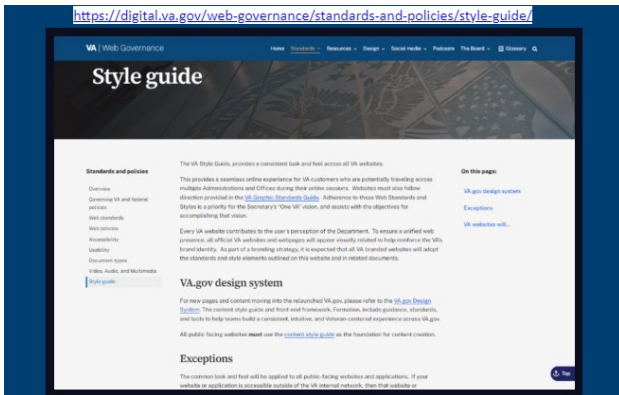
VA Style Guide

Found on VA Web Governance website housing 6102 Directives and Handbooks

<https://digital.va.gov/web-governance/standards-and-policies/style-guide/>

Ok, we've discussed good business practices for written correspondence and the plain language guidelines. Our final topic is the VA Style guide and where you can find this resource. The hyperlink on your screen will take you directly to the website. Once you click this hyperlink, please select the forward button to continue.

Slides



Instructor Script

The VA Web Governance website provides information and resources. This website address is shown at the top of this screen in case you didn't select the hyperlink on the previous slide.

When you click the link "VA Graphics Standards Guide," which is embedded in the paragraph text on this page, you will be able to open or save the Tier 1 Graphic Standards where you can find information on proper use of VA brand identity as well as graphics standards including general design information such as approved color, typography and font families.

Also located on this page is a link to VA.gov Design System which provides content on the use of abbreviations, capitalization, and punctuation, to name a few. It also provides a word list for terms used by VA.

Please select the forward button to continue

Today's lesson was designed to give you the tools to compose and improve your written correspondence. We discussed common errors and looked at examples of written correspondence. We also reviewed Plain Language guidelines, which are found on the website plainlanguage.gov and are the official guidelines for the Plain Writing Act of 2010. We also learned where to locate the VA Style guide.

Lesson Conclusion

- Discussed common errors found
- Examined examples of correspondence
- Identified elements of good business writing
- Reviewed plainlanguage.gov guidelines and VA style guide



Slides

Post Training Requirements

An assessment and survey have been assigned to you in TMS.

The questions are based on the information you learned today.

You should be able to complete the course, assessment and survey within 1 hour.

Be sure to complete both the assessment and the survey in TMS to receive credit for this training.



Instructor Script

An assessment and survey have been assigned to you. Once you complete this training, please complete the assessment and survey as soon as possible to receive credit for this training. You should be able to complete the training, assessment, and survey within 1 hour.

Supplemental
★ Tips
Advice
Refresher

Thank you for your time and attention!

Exit this course by clicking the "x" in the lower right corner



Thank you for your time and attention, you may exit this module by clicking the "x" in the lower right corner. Remember to complete both the assessment and survey. Have a good day!