EMPOWERING WOMEN
FOR DIGITAL & REMOTE HR CAREERS

MODULE 2 · COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION · LESSON 2.3

Written and asynchronous communication

Writing for someone who cannot ask you a follow-up question — which is most of the people you write to.



1.25 training hours · Building the basics · RemoteHeR

WHAT THIS LESSON COVERS

Five things, in order

- Writing for a reader who cannot ask a follow-up question
- Structure that works: the ask, the context, the action, the deadline
- Tone and register in HR writing — warmth without ambiguity
- Sensitive messages: what must never be delivered asynchronously, and why
- Plain language and inclusive wording, including for non-native readers



Your reader will act on what they think you wrote.

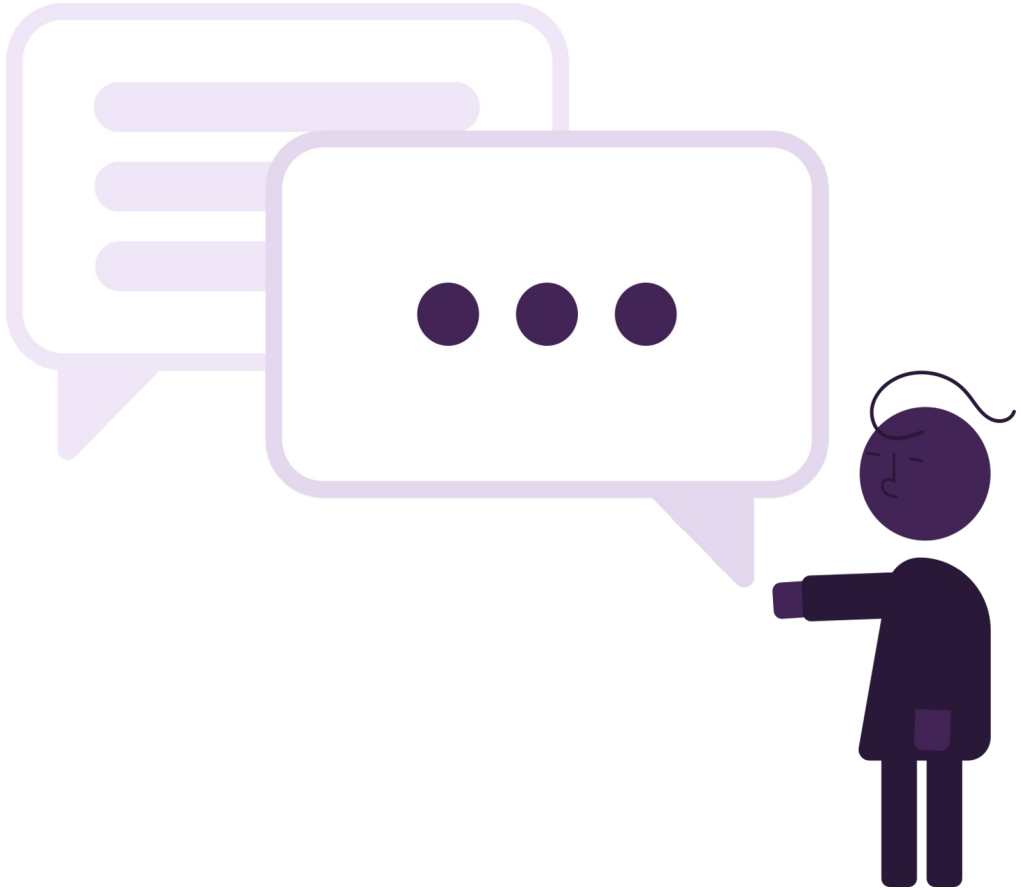
Not on what you meant. In a distributed team you rarely find out about the gap between the two — you only see the consequence, weeks later, and it looks like someone else's mistake.

THE SHAPE

Four parts, in this order

Almost every useful work message has the same four parts, in this order.

- The ask — what you need, first.
- The context — only what is needed.
- The action — who does what.
- The deadline — a date, not “soon”.





Most readers decide after one line whether to keep reading.

That is why the ask goes first. Everything you were taught about building up to a conclusion works in an essay and fails in an inbox.

It is also why the subject line matters more than the closing paragraph — most people will never reach the closing paragraph.

THE SAME MESSAGE

Two ways to ask for the same thing

⚠ Needs a reply first

- Subject: "Quick question"
- Three paragraphs of background before the ask
- "Could you possibly have a look at this when you get a chance?"
- "Let me know your thoughts"
- No date, no named owner

Can be acted on

- Subject: "Approval needed: new starter equipment, by Thursday"
- The ask in the first line, context underneath
- "Please confirm the budget line by Thursday 5pm."
- "If I do not hear back I will proceed with option B."
- One name, one action, one date

SUBJECT LINES

The line most people waste

Say what it is about

"Parental leave policy — one change from 1 March" beats "Update". The subject line is what someone searches for in eight months.

Say what is needed

Start with Action needed, For information, or Decision by [date]. Your reader triages a full inbox in seconds; help them.

Put the date in it

A deadline in the subject line survives being skim-read on a phone between two meetings. One buried in paragraph four does not.

Never write "urgent" unless it is

The word stops working the second time you use it loosely, and then you have no way to say that something genuinely cannot wait.

BEFORE YOU SEND

A thirty-second check

1. **Read the first line on its own**
   Does it say what you want and by when? If the answer is in paragraph three, move it.

2. **Look for anything a reader could misread**
   Any sentence with two possible meanings will be read the wrong way by someone. Rewrite it rather than hoping.

3. **Ask who is not covered**
   Part-time staff, shift workers, people on leave, people in another country. If the message works differently for them, say so here.

4. **Check you would be content if it were forwarded**
   It probably will be. HR messages travel further than any other kind.

Warm and vague are not the same thing.

Softening language is meant to protect the relationship. Used on the substance, it destroys the message — and the reader is left guessing at what you actually decided.



REGISTER

Soften the delivery, not the decision

⚠ Vague

- "We're hoping to look at this soon"
- "There may be some changes to the shift pattern"
- "It might be worth considering the deadline"
- "Your request is being reviewed"
- "Some feedback has been raised"

Warm and clear

- "I will have an answer for you by Friday"
- "The shift pattern changes on 1 March. Here is what changes for you."
- "The deadline is Thursday and I cannot move it — tell me if that is a problem."
- "Your request is approved. It starts on the 12th."
- "Two people have raised the same concern. I would like to talk it through."

PLAIN LANGUAGE

Writing for everyone who will read it

Assume a second language

Across four countries, many of your readers work in English as a second or third language. Short sentences and common words are not condescending; they are accurate.

Cut the HR jargon

Onboarding, offboarding, upskilling, cascade, socialise the change. Say joining, leaving, training, share. Jargon is a wall, not a signal of competence.

One idea per paragraph

Three short paragraphs beat one long one every time, and they survive being read on a phone screen.

Read it aloud before sending

If you run out of breath, the sentence is too long. It takes twenty seconds and catches more problems than any checker.

INCLUSIVE WORDING

Four habits worth building now

Write to the reader

"You will need to" rather than "employees will need to". Direct address is clearer and it lands as respect rather than administration.

Avoid gendered defaults

"The manager will confirm their decision" rather than his. It costs nothing and it is noticed by exactly the people you least want to alienate.

Watch the cultural idioms

Touch base, ballpark, circle back, hit the ground running. They do not travel, and a reader who has to guess will guess wrong.

Do not bury the exception

If a policy works differently for part-time or shift staff, that goes in the same message, not a footnote. Otherwise they read it and assume it excludes them.



Some messages must not be sent in writing at all.

A dismissal. A grievance outcome. A redundancy. News of a death. Anything where the person may need to react, ask a question, or simply not be alone while they hear it.

SENSITIVE NEWS

The order that respects people

1. **Speak first, in real time**

   By video if you can, by phone if you cannot. The person hears it from a human being who can answer the immediate question.

2. **Confirm in writing the same day**

   Short and factual. It exists so they can reread it once the shock has passed and so the record is accurate.

3. **Say what happens next, and when**

   In the written follow-up. The most distressing part of bad news is usually not knowing what happens tomorrow.

4. **Offer a second conversation**

   Name a time. People rarely take up an open offer, and almost always take up a specific one.

IN PRACTICE

The message you should not send

A manager asks you to email six people to tell them their roles are at risk of redundancy. "It's cleaner in writing, and I'd rather they had it in front of them." The consultation starts Monday.

What good looks like

- Do not send it. Redundancy news reaches people in a conversation — the written notice follows it, it does not replace it.
- Name the real reason gently: writing is easier for the sender, not for the six people receiving it.
- Propose the workable version: six short individual calls on the same morning, with the written notice sent immediately after each.
- Check the legal position for the country involved. Collective consultation has rules, and Module 6 covers them.

IN PRACTICE

Nobody replied

You asked eleven managers to confirm their team's training dates by Friday. It is Tuesday. Four have replied. Two of the seven are on leave and one works Mondays and Tuesdays only.

What good looks like

- Do not send "gentle reminder" to all eleven. The four who replied will read it as criticism and the rest will ignore it as they did the first one.
- Chase the four who are actually available, individually and by name.
- Ask yourself whether the original message named a person, an action and a date. Usually it did not.
- Say what you will do without their answer: "If I have not heard by Thursday I will book the default dates."

ASYNCHRONOUS BY DESIGN

Three things that save hours

Templates for what repeats

Offer letters, absence acknowledgements, interview invitations. Write it well once, then spend your attention on the parts that are actually different.

Short video for anything complex

A three-minute recording walking through a new form beats a thousand-word email, and people can watch it when they are ready.

The decision, not the debate

Nobody needs the history of how you got there. They need what was decided, who owns it, and by when.

WHERE IT LANDS

The message and its medium

Well-written and in the wrong place is still lost.

- Team-wide and lasting? A channel.
- About one person? Direct, or not written.
- Needs a record? Email, and file it.



Tools you will see used

Mail templates

Saved replies for the messages you send every week.

Loom

Short screen recordings. The free tier is plenty.

Readability checkers

Hemingway or the built-in editor — they catch long sentences you have stopped seeing.

Free tiers are enough for everything in this lesson.

NOW IT IS YOUR TURN

Rewrite the announcement

Mark up a real HR announcement that went wrong

You are given a genuine internal announcement — vague, badly structured, and quietly excluding the part-time staff it affects. Rewrite it with tracked changes and note why you made each change.

It feeds into

Your written communication pack: the habit of writing every piece so it can be acted on without a follow-up question.

No mark

Your tutor reads it and replies in writing. Activities carry no mark: only the module test and the artefact have a result.

RECAP

Before you move on

- Your reader acts on what they think you wrote. Close that gap before you send, not afterwards.
- The ask, the context, the action, the deadline — in that order, with the ask in the first line.
- Say what you will do if nobody replies. It removes an entire round trip.
- Soften the delivery, never the decision. Vagueness is not kindness.
- Dismissals, grievance outcomes, redundancies and bad news are spoken first and confirmed in writing after.

Next: take the knowledge check. It is never graded, you have unlimited attempts, and every option comes with feedback.

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Lesson 2.3 complete

Do the rewrite activity and the knowledge check.
Lesson 2.4 is documents and shared workspaces.

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