Writing Effectively for the ILO

**Module 2a - Printable
Office Correspondence and Records**

Introduction

This module is about those general office correspondence writing tasks that make up part of every working day: memos, letters, faxes and, probably the most common of all, email. You will find a separate section devoted to the writing of records of meeting, since this subject is so important at the ILO.

Throughout Module 2a, you will find reflections on the effective communication principles and strategies raised in Module 1. We will keep coming back to the importance of being clear about your purpose and meeting your readers' needs. We will continue to focus on the reasons for selecting different channels of communication or media.

The first section of this module, Correspondence: Conveying a Message, focuses on general principles that are common to all types of message writing at the ILO regardless of their format. In the second section, Types of Messages, you will focus more closely on specific types of correspondence—namely memos, letters, and emails—and consider special characteristics of each of these.

The third section of the module then turns your attention to the writing of Meeting Records for the Organization, primarily minutes, notes for the file, reports and summary records that record an event or meeting. These types of reports are distinct from the reports discussed in Module 2B and they involve a special set of skills. They depend largely on your ability to summarize information and produce a record that is both faithful to the event and a respectful and diplomatic representation of the participants whose words are being summarized and recorded.

As you work through this module, you will prepare a portfolio of model office correspondence. By the time you have finished the module you will be ready to submit your completed portfolio as an assignment to your tutor for feedback and assessment. Most, but not all, activities in this module are directly related to your assignment.

Module objectives

On completion of this module, you should be able to apply the strategies and principles explored in Module 1 to the writing of work-related:

- memos
- minute sheets
- circulars
- letters
- emails
- minutes of meetings
- meeting reports
- notes for the file

Assignment

Please have a look at the assignment requirements for this module by viewing the assignment page.

Communicating with your tutor

As you work through the activities in the module, do keep in touch with your tutor. Your tutor is glad to help you find the answers to content-related questions, and to discuss your work.

As you read about the assignment requirements for this module, you may also wish to share with your tutor your

intentions for this assignment. At any point in the module, especially as you begin to put together your portfolio, don't hesitate to send an email asking for clarification about the assignment. This will save you time on your assignment and will serve as a good opportunity to stay in touch.

SECTION 1: CORRESPONDENCE, CONVEYING A MESSAGE

At the ILO, the process of creating correspondence is gradually undergoing change as a result of the multi-skilling of the workforce and the common use of word-processing software.
Not so long ago, the rules of page layout and format were the exclusive domain of secretarial staff. No one else needed to know about their intricacies. Today, with a few exceptions, staff who write documents also do their own formatting. You simply need to know more than before about layout and formatting of various types of office correspondence. It can be very time-consuming and troublesome if you don't.

Blurring of formats

The distinction between memos, faxes, letters, and emails is becoming increasingly blurred. Faxes and email are fundamentally only ways of transmitting documents from the sender to the receiver. Just because a document is being transmitted electronically should have no bearing on the format or style of the actual document. Rather than the document in its traditional letter, memo or report format being attached to a transmittal covering page, the actual document has become both the document in its own right and the transmission mechanism. This only increases the importance in applying general principles of good writing no matter what format your message takes.

Therefore, in this section of the module you will spend time reviewing some of the more important considerations for writing effectively independent of the form your message will take. Our focus is on function and the writing process rather than the format. In the second section of the module, we will look at the specifics of various formats.

Planning your message

Time is precious at the ILO. You probably signed up for this course partly to discover ways to save time in writing. That is a laudable goal and one that this course hopes to help you achieve. The first step may seem counter-intuitive; one of the best ways to save time for you as a writer and for your readers is to pause before you write.

Pause? But you are in a hurry!

Before you decide this is impossible, consider the time cost in dashing off that email or drafting a letter without giving your document proper consideration. A hastily written message can create more work than was ever intended. Even basic proofreading errors can create misunderstanding or confusion about your message, causing your reader to reply for more information or worse, get the wrong idea about your objective. Before you know it the haste you made in writing the message is now costing you more time than you saved by not planning.

Planning saves you time by:

- achieving your statement of purpose
- removing and avoiding barriers for your reader
- increasing efficiency by saving your reader's time

Following are some strategies for meeting these goals.

Determining the form of your message

In Module 1, you considered different channels of communication to deliver your message using the example of providing directions to someone whose first language was not English. In that example, the choice was between a written document like a fax versus instructions communicated orally over the telephone. Have a look at the table below to review a broader set of communication forms that you are faced with at work.

As you consider how to transmit your message, you will realize you may not need to write anything at all but instead may decide to telephone or call a meeting to achieve your purpose. Of course, there may be other considerations, such as the need for a record. Determining the form of your message is really about knowing your audience and what will work most effectively for them.

Is the delivery method well suited to:	Interoffice or regular mail	Phone	Voice mail	Fax	Email	Face-to-face

	(printed documents)					meeting
delivering a long message?	X					X
delivering a short message?	X	X	X	X	X	
delivering a formal message?	X				X	X
delivering an informal message?		X	X	X	X	
reaching an internal audience		X	X		X	X
reaching an external audience?	X	X		X	X	
providing a permanent record for the sender?	X			X	X	
providing a permanent record for the receiver?	X			X	X	
reaching widely dispersed receivers?	X	X	X	X	X	
reaching narrowly dispersed receivers?		X	X	X	X	X
reaching many receivers simultaneously?						X
reaching one receiver at a time?	X	X	X	X	X	
delivering attachments or support materials?	X				X	X
delivering information immediately?		X	X	X		
maintaining confidentiality?	X					X
avoiding confusion caused by language and cultural differences?	X					X
keeping proprietary or other information secure?	X					X
allowing parties to address human concerns, such as emotions and relationships?		X				X

Email is rapidly becoming the medium of choice for most writing tasks. However, a quick look at this table will reveal why it is not always suitable.

Hartman, D.B. and Nantz, K.S. Send the right messages about e-mail. Training & development, May 1995. (Reference provided by Mary Stewart Burgher, Publications, WHO Regional Office for Europe.)

Assignment preparation task 1: Selecting messages

For this module's assignment, you are asked to put together a portfolio of writing samples to send to your tutor. The assignment is meant to be flexible so that you can focus on the kind of writing that you do most frequently or that you would most like practice with. In the portfolio, you have been asked to include four of the following items:

- a memo, circular or minute sheet
- a letter
- an email
- a meeting record - which includes minutes, a note for the file, report or summary note/record

You can choose to submit two of a single type of writing for your portfolio. For example, two emails, one letter, and a set of minutes would be an appropriate combination as would two letters, one email, and one memo.

As you work through this module, it is a good idea to select some writing samples for your assignment. It is best if you can select something that you are working on in your job.

Establishing your purpose

An effective message, like any piece of writing, starts off with two main ideas:

- Know your reader as best as you can.
- Know what you as the writer wish to achieve by your message. That is, know your purpose.

Being aware of the purpose of your message will give your writing focus and help you to organize your ideas into coherent sentences and paragraphs. A well written message will work to make sure that your reader's response is the right one.

All other choices about your message should flow from your purpose. They include:

- determining your main idea;
- setting the scope of your message;
- choosing and approach;
- writing in a particular style.

Subject lines

Subject lines are very important in office correspondence. They are as critical to memos, letters, and emails as executive summaries are to long and complex reports. They are the means by which your readers decide when and if they will read your message. A good subject line should let them know what to look for in the message.

People who give little thought to planning their messages rarely consider the value that subject lines can give to a piece of writing. Here are some examples:

Subject: INFORMATION NOTE

Subject: RESTRUCTURING ETC.

Subject: TRAVEL

Subject: URGENT — MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Subject: PRE-REGISTRATION DEADLINE

Subject:

The blank space for the final example is not a mistake; at least, it isn't a mistake in the course. Some writers don't take the time or care to include a subject line.

Here are some examples of better subject lines:

Subject: 2002-2003 IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Subject: POLISH DONATION TO UBW FOR 2002

Subject: DRUGS FOR TREATMENT OF AIDS — REQUEST FROM THE ISRAEL AIDS TASK FORCE

Subject lines that are brief are not necessarily better. Most email programs can display subject lines of 8-10 words, so you do not need to feel very restricted.

Activity 1: Subject lines

Improve the subject lines from the following emails:

1. Subject: Minutes

   Ms xxxxxxxxxxx

   As requested, I am attaching a copy of the minutes of the meeting you attended while in Geneva.

   Best regards,
   zzzzzzzz

Type your subject	
[Suggested subject](#)	

2. Subject: Teleconference

   Thanks for your quick response.

   Is there a possibility for you to take the conference call in New York on Thursday (8th), early in the morning at your hotel, around 8:00 or 8:30, before you go to the Office?

   I just received David's response (thanks, David) suggesting Saturday morning as well, and I have checked quickly with Raj and Brian. It seems that Brian may have a problem with this time slot. If what I suggest above is not possible, we may have to fix the call on Saturday without Brian.

   I will call you tomorrow around 9:00 to get your views and finalize arrangements.

Type your subject	
[Suggested subject](#)	

Assignment preparation task 2: Subject lines

Some of the writing pieces for this assignment will include subject lines: for example, memos, emails, and some letters. If you have chosen any of these for your assignment, take them out now and review your subject lines. Do they give a clear indication of your purpose? If they look like some of the bad examples on the previous page, you may need to reconsider.

Patterns of organization

Now that you've considered different types of messages, let's consider how these types affect your pattern of organization. The type of message you wish to convey (information, request, problem-solving, and persuasion) will help determine the approach you wish to take in your writing, which in turn affects your pattern of organization.

The direct approach

This is the best approach for the situation when you predict your reader is:

- likely to agree with your conclusions
- likely to be very interested
- very busy

The direct approach has many advantages. It saves your reader time, it is reader centred, and it is easy to comprehend. This is the best approach for most work-related writing.

The indirect approach

However, sometimes the direct approach can be regarded as too abrupt, even impolite. And in some cases, you do not

wish to begin with your main point right away. You may wish to give your reader some background information or build up an argument that gradually leads to a more persuasive conclusion. In such cases, you can adopt the indirect approach.

You can use this approach in different circumstances, such as when you:

- think your reader would prefer some analysis of an issue first before a conclusion or recommendation;
- determine that your reader needs some background information or context before dealing with the issue at hand;
- anticipate that your reader is likely to disagree with you;
- wish to win your reader over to your way of thinking;
- are not that familiar with your reader(s) and are unsure of their response.

One message, two approaches

Let's say you are interested in introducing a new practice in your department: putting up whiteboards outside all offices for everyone to indicate their presence or absence. This is bound to be acceptable to some but not to others. For example, you might think this is a good way to let people know where you are when you've stepped out of the office. However, others might see the whiteboards as a way of keeping track of people's movements or instituting an unwelcome level of control over staff members.

Now suppose you suggest this idea to your supervisor in an email. If you knew your supervisor was already interested in this idea or had complained about not knowing where people were when they were out of the office, then you have some context to guide the organization of your ideas. You could begin simply by stating your main point.

The following diagram indicates a direct approach to this type of email:

Now consider that you were writing the same email to someone who might be more hostile to the idea. This diagram reveals a more indirect approach to conveying your message.

Choosing an approach in your writing

Written messages can be very broadly classified into three styles. The nature of your job will usually dictate the type of message that you write most often.

The types are:

- information or request
- problem-solving
- persuasion

You will examine each of these styles with an example. Notice how each style works with either the direct or indirect approach in determining a pattern of organization.

Information or request messages

These are the most common type of message for memos or emails. This example generally follows a direct organizational pattern:

- main idea
- expand on details
- action required

These messages often carry attachments, for example:

- requests for information with a questionnaire attached
- reclassification of positions with a diagram attached
- notification of reporting requirements with detailed instructions attached
- notification of new guidelines with instructions attached

Example

Following is a minute sheet that involves a statement of information followed by a request. Both the organizational pattern and the style of the minute suggest that the writer did not expect any opposition from the primary reader.

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="2">

MINUTE SHEET

CC: Ms. A. Kimbar (HR/OPS)
Ms. M. Tremblay

Ms. F. Lacroix (HR/OPS)
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>

Language training costs for Marie Tremblay
</td>
<td>The subject line gives a clear indication of the subject matter of the minute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>

1. Integration supports Ms. Marie Tremblay's application to follow English language training and therefore requests that payment be covered by both Integration and HRD.

2. The training is to take place in Manchester with the International House School for a period of three weeks. Suitable dates are from 9 to 29 October 2005.

3. The school's on-line assessment has been completed and the course recommended is "Intensive English plus 1 to 1". I have attached the original invoice from International House indicating total costs of £1,918 (or US$ 3,383) for expenses including training, accommodation and registration fee. Ms. Tremblay agrees to pay for her own travel expenses.

4. Integration therefore agrees to pay US$783 of this amount and requests HRD's financial support for the remaining US$2,600.

5. Many thanks for your assistance in this matter.
</td>
<td>

The opening sentence makes the purpose for writing the memo clear.

Each paragraph is reasonably well constructed.
The flow of the memo is good; each paragraph flows out of the one before it.

The action required is clear, specific and reinforced in the end of the message.
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>

03.10.05

<div align="center">Martha Sisley
INTEGRATION</div>
</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</table>

Problem-solving messages

This type of message requires a different organizational pattern. Here is an example that, although brief, shows the essence of this type of message:

Subject: Delays in processing correspondence for the executive director's signature	
Recently some delays have been experienced in processing correspondence for the Executive Director's signature because the correct procedure was not followed.	State the problem
The problem would be solved if staff follow the attached procedure and format.	Analyse it
I should be grateful if you could encourage your staff to follow these procedures.	Make a recommendation

Persuasion messages

The persuasion memo aims to get your reader to undertake an action that he or she is not obliged to take. You will not have to write this kind of message often at work; however, it is very useful to have an approach if the need arises, because it is quite difficult to write. Messages written to protest decisions, or suggest a change in an established course of action, are usually in this pattern. The message pattern often follows the indirect approach as you read about earlier.

Persuasion message pattern — indirect or inductive

- Start with a neutral statement.
- Spell out your support, and lead up to your conclusions.
- State your least controversial points first.
- Present your views last.
- Use your best evidence last.
- Present rejected recommendations before your own.

Consider the memo below and notice how it differs from the previous examples:

Subject: Request to attend conference This conference, The 15th Annual National E-Learning Conference (E-Learn) will be held 30 March - 2 April 2003, in Miami, Florida. The conference program will include tracks in the areas of learning communities, distance education, the internationalization of education, and innovative practices in professional development.	Neutral statement
The conference will bring together leading authorities and will include representatives from other UN-based organizations who have similar interests in expanding their current training programmes in a cost effective manner without compromising their educational value.	Building support General benefits
One particular benefit from ILO participation in this conference is the opportunity it would provide to learn about how other organizations have been matching training to their technological infrastructures. This information may assist us with current projects. It would also give the ILO an opportunity to share with organizations working on similar projects our findings on the subject.	Building support Specific benefits (impact on ILO)
I realize that the dates of the conference coincide with a very busy work period but I can assure you that my contributions to the various reports due at that time will be completed by the end of February.	Assurances against anticipated

| The deadline for applications is 1 September. | opposition. |

Putting ideas into words

Although we are less likely to use features like a table of contents, a summary, headings, and subheadings in a brief communication like a letter or email, we still need to organize the document into sections that focus on specific ideas. Brief messages are very much like longer reports in that they require a considerable amount of organizing to make them readable and acceptable to your readers. Brief does not mean unorganized.

Instead of chapters and sections for your letter, email, or memo, you will be working with sentences and paragraphs to organize your message.

Activity 2: Organizing a brief message

Review the following unformatted letter. Although the message is quite simple and not very long, there is still value in using formatting like bulleted lists and paragraphs to make the document more readable.

Use the following indicators to organize this letter into effective paragraphs:

- neutral statement/introduction
- request
- itemized list
- statement of thanks

<table>
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Hotel Crowne Plaza
Fax: 01- 7XXXX
Beirut, Lebanon

07 July 2004

Dear Ms. Dajani,

The Regional Office for Arab States of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is organizing a Meeting for the Tripartite workshop for Labour Inspectors on HIV/AIDS & the World of Work in Lebanon, which will be held in Beirut from 28 to 29 July 2004. I would appreciate if you could provide us with an offer to host this event, including the following items: conference room to host 25 participants, secretarial room next to the conference room, one coffee break per day from 28 to 29 July 2004 for 25 participants, a light lunch on 28 & 29 July 2004 for 25 participants. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your early reply.

Best regards

Sxxx Syyyyyy,
Senior Personnel Administrative and Finance Officer

484 SS/bd
RBTC

</td>
<td>

Type your revisions in the space below, and then click on **Suggested Answer** to compare your paragraph.

</td>
</tr>
</table>

Suggested Answer

Summary of best practices

To sum up this section on writing messages, here are some key ideas to keep in mind:

- Decide on your purpose and key message.
- Think about your readers and do a quick analysis of their needs.
- Decide which form your message is going to take: email, letter, memo, etc.
- Turn your key message into a subject on the subject line.
- Begin the text of the message with an elaboration of the subject line.
- Follow a pattern of organization appropriate to the task and your purpose.
- Use headings, sub-headings, and topic sentences to organize your ideas.
- Make sentences and paragraphs flow more easily with linking phrases and sentences.
- Follow the format and stylistic requirements for the type of message you have chosen.
- Proofread carefully.

Assignment preparation task 3: Message writing checklist

For each of the correspondence documents that you submit for your assignment, you will include a checklist similar to this one. The checklist is essentially a way of ensuring that you have considered the principles of effective writing for messages and correspondence.

Part of your assignment for each piece of writing includes some analysis of the message you have chosen. By knowing the answers to the questions in this checklist, you should be able to complete your analysis as well. For example, along with your memo and letter, you are asked to state the purpose of your document and describe what you hope your reader will do as a result of reading it. The checklist will prompt you to consider these points.

What type of message have you written?	Memo, letter, email, or meeting record
Have you determined why this form is the best choice for your message?	
Have you analysed your readers and worked out their needs?	
Have you followed an appropriate organizational pattern for your message?	
Does the subject line (if included) give a clear indication of your purpose?	
Does the opening paragraph make the document's purpose clear?	
Is it clear what the reader has to DO?	
Are all paragraphs unified and well constructed?	
Do paragraphs flow easily from one to the next?	
Is the level of formality/informality appropriate for the reader and context?	
Has all unnecessary information been eliminated?	
Have you been as brief as possible without leaving out any important information?	
Have you created any problems for your readers by your word usage (jargon, abbreviations, unfamiliar words)?	
Have you followed formatting requirements for this type of correspondence?	

SECTION 2: TYPES OF MESSAGES

Now that you've had a chance to consider the basic principles of effective writing for messages, you will now be able to consider specific types of writing with these principles in mind. Along with each type of writing there is some analytical work to be done that will accompany the document in your assignment.

Memos, minute sheets, circulars

Memoranda (memos) are documents used for communication within ILO, and sometimes externally with other United Nations agencies. Their purpose has an impact on the format: because you are sending memos to co-workers and colleagues, you do not have to include a formal salutation (greeting) or closure (yours sincerely etc.).

Memos go by different names at the ILO depending on their function:

- Memoranda refer to correspondence between headquarters and offices in the field, and between offices in the field. A Memorandum Form is available for the drafting of these messages.
- Circulars are formal memos that go out to all staff in order to provide information about regulations and policies at the Organization. A template is used to provide the structure of a circular and departments must prepare circulars according to an established policy for drafting.
- Minute Sheets are used for more specific information on events and refers specifically to internal correspondence.

For the purposes of this course, the term memo is used broadly to refer to written communications within the Organization.

Most jobs at the ILO will require memo writing at some time or other; in some jobs, writing memos takes up a large portion of work time. Whether you write memos frequently or seldom, it is important to tackle the job of memo writing as efficiently as possible and with a focus on getting the response you want from your readers.

Assignment preparation task 4: Preparing memos

This is one of the possible submissions for your assignment. If you have any questions or uncertainties at this time, do contact your tutor.

For your assignment portfolio, you can choose to submit up to two memos: either two of the same type or two different types of memos. As you work through this part of the module, keep your early drafts of the memo that you are planning to submit. When you are ready to do your final edit on the memo, make notes on what you perceive as the strengths and weaknesses in your writing. This will help you make the revisions that you may need to make in your final version that you submit. These notes will form part of the analysis that is included in this assignment.

For your comparison, you can use the following table. For each of the categories, add a description or observation in the first column and then write how you revised this in the second column.

	First draft	Final version
Purpose		
Target reader(s)		
Structure		
Paragraphs		
Sentences		
Spelling, punctuation, grammar		
Formatting		

Activity 3: Assess the effectiveness of a minute sheet

Many of the examples in the previous section demonstrated elements of good writing for memos. In the following example, read through the memo and answer the questions that follow.

MINUTE SHEET

cc: Ms. L. Gxxxxx (HR/OPS)
Mr. D. Fxxxxx (HR/OPS)
Mr. C. Dxxxxx (HRD)
Ms. J. Pxxxx (HRD)

Ms. M. Yyyyy (CABINET)

Request for permission to hold two Leadership Training workshops off-site

1. As you are aware a second Leadership Training programme is about to begin. The participants have been selected and the materials for phase 1 are now being sent to them. The pre-workshop phase lasts 3 months and the workshops will take place at the end of October.

2. For previous sessions in this programme we held the workshops (with CABINET agreement) at the Best Western Hotel Chavannes. We are very satisfied with that venue and propose to hold the forthcoming workshops, of which there will be two, also at the same venue.

3. The workshops have been held off-site for the following reasons:
   - We require a large open space with the ability to move furniture into various configurations quickly and easily. The ability to move the tables and work in open clusters or plenary circles is critical for the learning and team development processes. Suitable rooms are not available at the ILO premises.
   - The programme requires the full attendance of the participants. There is a tendency for staff to be called away or come late to sessions if the training takes place at the ILO premises.
   - Team development and interaction is important and we expect participants to share coffee breaks and lunch time. This informal interaction is as important to the learning as the formal sessions. An external environment is required to facilitate this informal interaction.

4. We have looked at external venues from both the cost and the environment. We chose to remain in the Geneva area for cost and convenience reasons. The ITC in Turin was considered but it is not cost effective, since 65% of the participants are Geneva based and the cost of travel would certainly exceed the budget we had set aside for this activity.

5. In the Geneva area we looked at two venues: Ecogia, the ICRC training centre in Versoix and the Best Western Hotel in Chavannes-de-Bogis. Both are excellent training venues, satisfying all our requirements. We have opted for the Chavannes venue as it was available for all workshop dates and it is actually cheaper than the Ecogia option.

6. It would be appreciated if you would agree to the three leadership training workshops taking place at the Chavannes-de-Bogis Hotel.

15 July 2005

M. Gxxxxx HR/OPS

Ask yourself the following questions based on the message-writing checklist that you saw earlier in this module:

Question	Response
What type of message has the author written?	
Compare	
What organizational pattern has the author adopted for his or her message?	
Compare	
Does the subject line (if included) give a clear indication of the purpose?	
Compare	
What does the author expect the reader to do as a result of reading the document?	
Compare	
Are all paragraphs unified and well constructed?	
Compare	
Do paragraphs flow easily from one to the next?	
Compare	
Is the level of formality/informality appropriate for the reader and context?	
Compare	
Has all unnecessary information been eliminated?	
Compare	
What are the formatting requirements for this type of correspondence?	

Assignment preparation task 5: Memos

> This is also a good time to get in contact with your tutor. You might like to have your tutor take a preliminary look at one of your drafts. If you have any questions or uncertainties at this time, do contact your tutor.

For your assignment portfolio, you may submit up to two memos, which can be of any kind produced at the ILO (circular, memorandum, minute sheet).

Your memo should be related to the work you do. No set length is required, although your memo should contain a number of paragraphs, not just single lines. It should be no more than two pages.

For your memo(s), here is a hyperlinked checklist of all the components needed for this part of the assignment:

Memo Assignment Submission

Item #	Item	Notes
1	The memo	The first draft (template not required) and the final draft using any ILO templates as required.
2	Statement of purpose	You should word this "As a result of my memo, my reader (s) will…"
3	Type of memo	State the type of memo that you have chosen to write: circular, memo or minute sheet. Be sure to follow the style and formatting conventions for each of these types. Justify why you are sending the message by memo or minute sheet rather than other forms of written correspondence like emails or letters.
4	Pattern of organization	Go back to Section 1 of this module to review the different patterns of organization.
5	Reader Analysis Form	Do not consider your tutor as one of your readers for this memo. Think of the actual people at work or beyond the ILO who will be reading this piece of writing.
6	Message writing checklist	This checklist will help you review your work before submitting it. If you have any outstanding issues after working through the checklist, then you would need to do some more editing of your work.
7	Draft analysis	After you have worked through the checklist, include a brief statement on the differences between your first draft and your final version of this memo. Point out what you needed to revise on both the macro and micro levels of editing. Use the table provided in Assignment preparation task 4 for this purpose.

Complete this part of your assignment now before moving on to the next section on letters. However, you should not send your memo to your tutor yet. All parts of the portfolio should be completed before submission.

Letters

The letter format is used at the ILO for communication with the outside world. One of the main differences between letters and memos is that letters are often addressed and directed at specific individuals. Memos are more likely to address multiple readers or organizational representatives (for example, a head of a department).

Letters require careful drafting, editing and proofreading to ensure the ILO's reputation is assured and that goodwill is built and maintained between the ILO and external bodies.

To write effective letters, you should keep in mind exactly the same principles as for all other office correspondence:

- Know your statement of purpose.
- Analyse your readers and meet their needs.
- Organize your material to suit your readers and your purpose.
- Use a level of language that makes it as easy as possible for your readers to understand your message.
- Be as brief as possible, but make sure you have included all essential information.
- Don't lose credibility through spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors and sloppy presentation.

Assignment preparation task 6: Preparing letters

This is also a good time to get in contact with your tutor. You might like to have your tutor take a preliminary look at one of your drafts. If you have any questions or uncertainties at this time, do contact your tutor.

For your assignment portfolio, you can choose to submit up to two letters. As you work through this part of the module, keep your early drafts of the letter that you are planning to submit. When you are ready to do your final edit on the letter, make notes on the strengths and weaknesses in your writing. This will help you make the revisions that you may need to make to the final version that you submit. These notes will form part of the analysis that is included in this assignment.

For your comparison, you can use the following table. For each of the categories, add a description or observation in the first column and then write how you revised this in the second column.

	First draft	Final version
Purpose		
Target reader(s)		
Structure		
Paragraphs		
Sentences		
Spelling, punctuation, grammar		
Formatting		

Types of ILO letters

The majority of ILO letters fall into the category of **inquiry, request, and information letters**.

Their organizational pattern is the same as for a memo. In these kinds of letters you can assume that your reader will comply once he or she understands your purpose. There is a need for politeness, but little need for persuasion.

Inquiry/Request/Information

- State the request or main idea.
- Give the necessary details.
- Close with a cordial request for specific action.

Response to an information or request letter

- State the inquiry you are responding to.
- Address all queries raised in the incoming letter.
- Give the information required.
- Close with an offer for further assistance, if necessary.

Activity 4: Structuring a response letter

Rearrange the sentences below into a logically developed response letter. Be mindful of putting not only the sentences in proper order but also in creating coherent paragraphs.

Your answer	I wish you every success with the EDGI-WIDER Conference and look forward to hearing about the outcome of the debate. On behalf of the Director-General of the ILO, I wish to thank you for your joint letter of 16 March 2003, inviting Mr. Somavia to be a keynote speaker at the academic conference entitled "Unlocking Human Potential - Linking the Informal and Formal Sectors", in Helsinki, 17-18 September 2004. I am however very pleased to inform you that Ms. Anne Trebilcock, Deputy-Director, Policy Integration Department, has been proposed to represent the ILO on this occasion. Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, Mr. Somavia will not be able to accept your kind invitation. This event would provide a most suitable platform at which to present the results of the International Labour Conference discussion on decent work and the informal economy, as well as the links with globalization highlighted in the ILO's recent Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization.
[Compare](#)	

Bad news letters

Bad news letters are most commonly a type of response letter. They are always difficult to write. Without being too forced about it, they should follow an indirect pattern of organization. The example in the previous activity demonstrates a recommended pattern for writing a response letter that does not necessarily give the news the reader was hoping for.

Click further to see some analysis of why this is a well written response letter.

On behalf of the Director-General of the ILO, I wish to thank you for your letter of 16 March 2003, inviting Mr. Somavia to be a keynote speaker at the academic conference entitled "Unlocking Human Potential – Linking the Informal and Formal Sectors", in Helsinki, 17-18 September 2004. [Analysis](#)	Statement of information or background to the response. The reference to previous letter is stated. A personal tone is struck through the use of the first person "I".
Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, Mr. Somavia will not be able to accept your kind invitation. I am however very pleased to inform you that Ms. Anne Trebilcock, Deputy-Director, Policy Integration Department, has been proposed to represent the ILO on this occasion. [Analysis](#)	Statement of negative response. However, the tone is kept positive through the suggestion of an alternative solution. This is a good strategy if you can make an alternative suggestion. Otherwise, you will need to move on to the conclusion.
This event would provide a most suitable platform at which to present the results of the International Labour Conference discussion on decent work and the informal economy, as well as the links with globalization highlighted in the ILO's recent Report of the World	Reaffirmation of support for the original invitation to the ILO.

Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. Analysis	
I wish you every success with the EDGI-WIDER Conference and look forward to hearing about the outcome of the debate. Analysis	Encouraging conclusion.
With kind regards, Analysis	This closure retains a warm tone.

Openings and endings

Writers often find that the most difficult aspect of writing letters is starting and finishing. The way to begin and end a letter should depend to a large degree on your purpose in writing the letter.

Following is a comparison of different styles of writing for inquiry and response letters.

Beginnings	Unlike memos or emails, letters at the ILO do not usually have subject lines, so you need to explain very early why you are writing the letter and its relevance to the reader. You may need to refer to earlier correspondence or discussions, but this reference should be subordinate to focusing on the reason you are writing. Try to avoid hackneyed, impersonal openings like: *In reference to your letter of 4 April…* *Enclosed please find…* *Per your request…*	
	Inquiry or request letters	**Response letters**
	I would like to inquire about… I would appreciate receiving some information about… Could you send me some information about… I am writing to seek your help in …	I can understand your concern about… described in your letter of 4 April. I am writing in reply to your letter of 4 April, in which you… We are sending the information you asked about in your 4 April letter.
Endings	Endings should be action oriented, specific and clearly state a request for your desired response from the reader. The ending should fill one of these functions: • tell the reader what to do next • tell the reader what you will do next • build goodwill	
	Inquiry or request letters	**Response letters**
	We would appreciate any information (help, assistance) you can provide. I would appreciate receiving an answer from you by 4 April. Could you please call me on 123 456 to discuss. I am usually at my desk between 9:00 and 12:00. Thank you for taking time for this request.	Thank you for your interest in the ILO (our programme, this project, this area…) I would like to thank you for your assistance (cooperation, invitation…) If you have further questions, please contact me. I hope this information will be of assistance. (This implies a conclusion to the exchange of correspondence.) I look forward to hearing from you again. (This

		encourages further communication.)

Although these sentences are all rather standard, they at least let you get started easily and enable you to concentrate on the main part of your message.

Letter format

The format differences between (internal) memos and letters reflect their different purposes.

	ILO MINUTE SHEET	ILO INFORMAL LETTER
Subject lines	Yes	No
Numbering	Yes	No
Paragraph indenting	Indent first line by five spaces	Must use consistent approach throughout
Salutations and closures	No	Yes
Street addresses	No	Yes In block form (that is, no indentations) in single line spacing and with no punctuation or underlining.
Date	4 April 2004 (not 4th April, 2004)	4 April 2004 (not 4th April, 2004)

Let's have a brief look at the two significant differences: salutations and closures.

Salutations and closures

Letters begin and end in set ways:

SALUTATIONS	CLOSURES
Dear Mr …, OR Dear Ms …, (Note no full stop after Mr, Ms or Dr)	Yours sincerely,

- It is best to use the name of the person being written to, rather than Sir or Madam, if possible.
- Note that the second word in Yours sincerely and Yours faithfully does not have a capital letter.

Assignment preparation task 7: Letters

This is also a good time to get in contact with your tutor. By this time, if you've been thinking about submitting a letter as part of your portfolio, you may have some questions about the kind of letter you are writing. Or you might like to have your tutor take a preliminary look at one of your drafts. If you have any questions or uncertainties at this time, do contact your tutor.

For your assignment portfolio, you may submit up to two letters, which can be of any kind as produced at the ILO.

Your letter should be related to the work you do. No set length is required, although your letter should contain a number of paragraphs, not just single lines. It should be no more than two pages.

For your letter(s), here is a hyperlinked checklist of all the components needed for this part of the assignment:

Letter Assignment Submission

Item #	Item	Notes

1	The letter	The first draft (template not required) and the final draft using any ILO templates as required.
2	Statement of purpose	You should word this "As a result of my letter, my reader(s) will…"
3	Type of letter	State the type of letter that you have chosen to write: inquiry, response, or information. Be sure to follow the style and formatting conventions for each of these types. Justification for sending the message by letter rather than other forms of written correspondence like emails or memos.
4	Pattern of organization	Go back to Section 1 of this module to review the different patterns of organization.
5	Reader Analysis Form	Do not consider your tutor as one of your readers for this letter. Think of the actual people at work or beyond the ILO who will be reading this piece of writing.
6	Message writing checklist	This checklist will help you review your work before submitting it. If you have any outstanding issues after working through the checklist, then you would need to do some more editing of your work.
7	Draft analysis	After you have worked through the checklist, include a brief statement on the differences between your first draft and your final version of this letter. Point out what you needed to revise on both the macro and micro levels of editing. Use the table provided in Assignment preparation task 6 to help you with your analysis.

Complete this part of your assignment now before moving on to the next section on letters. However, you should not send your letter(s) to your tutor yet. All parts of the portfolio should be completed before submission.

Emails

Email has become the communication life-blood of organizations. It has displaced traditional communication systems including postal services, couriers, faxes, and to a lesser extent, telephones and has become an integral part of daily operations. While most of us will acknowledge the facility that email has created for sending messages, we can also see how email has a way of creating its own work-related problems.

The ILO has specific guidelines on the use and protocol related to email. According to Circular No. 41 Series 9, email can be classified into three types:

- official communications: like minutes, memoranda, facsimiles or letters on ILO paper, they refer to written communications made in an official capacity.
- informal communications: they may be considered as having the same status as a telephone conversation, routing slips(2) or notes which are of an informal nature and do not have the status of an official communication; they are used as a working tool in routine office activities and do not formally commit the ILO or the unit concerned.
- personal communications: they are understood to be messages unrelated to the performance of official duties; they are permitted as a convenience to staff, subject to certain conditions.

Please refer to this circular or any updates for detailed guidelines on the appropriate use of email as a form of communication at the ILO. This part of the module is intended to support these guidelines but at the same time focuses more broadly on acquiring good writing skills that will result in effective and purpose-driven messages.

Types of emails

Email is fundamentally different from traditional paper-based correspondence because it enables fast, although not necessarily immediate, feedback. It is more like a conversation and consequently tends to be more casual than paper-based correspondence. For most messages sent by email this casualness is not a problem. There is no point spending time perfecting spelling, grammar, and style for a quick enquiry about someone's availability to meet with you for lunch. However, ILO staff use email for a wide range of purposes, many of which are far from casual.

It is useful to consider the various work-related uses of email:

- as a covering note/letter for attachments of reports, guidelines, directives or briefing notes
- correspondence in its own right (that is, as a replacement for memos and faxes)
- informal notes

Let's look at these various uses.

Email as a covering note for an attachment

Sometimes email is used as a transmission mechanism rather than a medium in itself. This method enables the attached document to be presented in a standard format according to its type: for example, the attachment could be a memo, letter or report. It also enables normal filing codes to be included in the attached document.

The covering email is usually short, simply indicating the purpose of the attachment and highlighting any action required.

Points to note:

- Make sure the subject line clearly indicates your purpose: for example, "Questionnaire on Data Collection Application."
- Emails need to be easily and quickly understood by their readers. Take the same care in using simple and straightforward language that you would for a letter or memo.
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation errors reduce your credibility in the eyes of your reader.

Don't forget to attach the document. It is a good idea to attach it before you write the email, or at least before you type in the email address.

Activity 5: Covering note email

Here is an example that typifies common problems related to emails. Identify the problems in this covering email:

To	All staff	
From	Rxxx	
Date	20 January 2006	
Subject:	GUIDELINES	

Dear All,

Further previous message on above subject, kindly replace guidelines with attached updated version.

Many thanks.

Type the problems you found	
Show Answer	

Email as a document in its own right

If the email is a document in its own right rather than a covering note, it is really a memo sent by email and should be treated in the same way as any other memo. It has the status of an official communication. It should take the same form including a file reference and be filed for easy retrieval.

Points to note:

- Ensure that your subject line is informative and covers the main thrust of the email.
- Keep your reader in mind. Do not use 'telexese'; write in complete sentences and use ILO jargon only if you know it will be understood by your reader.
- Use a pattern of organization that is suitable for the type and purpose of the email (the same as for memos and letters).
- Use headings and sub-headings if the email is long or complex.

Subject lines

Many officers receive dozens (or more!) emails every day. As the writer, your subject line is the best opportunity you get to make sure your communication is read.

Email recipients need good subject lines to help them decide on priorities for reading and in order to relocate specific emails if required. The subject line should be fairly brief, as there is limited space for it to appear at the recipient's end. Subject lines that are too long can easily become shortened and incomprehensible. Email programs and settings differ, but lines of approximately eight words are usually all visible.

As the writer, you also need to be aware of the dangers of "spam" - unwanted, unsolicited bulk emails that have become a huge problem for many email users. Of course you are not sending spam to those you communicate with! The challenge is in choosing a subject line that will make that obvious. Often "spammers" use lines like "as per your request" or "something you should see." Many email users delete such message unread, or set the filters on their emails to exclude them. The same exclusion can happen if you skip a subject line. Aim for substantive subject lines that clearly indicate message content.

If your email is urgent, you should incorporate the word **urgent** in the heading and use the high priority flag. Other useful words to incorporate into headings are FYI (for your information only, a signal that the recipient does not have to DO anything). The ILO guidelines recommend that you include OFFICIAL, INFORMAL, or PRIVATE in the subject line depending on what type of email you are writing.

Email replies

It is seductively easy to click the reply icon for emails. You can reply to your correspondent in just a few seconds. This can be dangerous. Keep these guidelines in mind when replying to emails.

- Don't reply to a message hastily, particularly if you felt angry when you read the email. You may have misunderstood the incoming message. Even if you have not, waiting a while will let you respond in a more appropriate tone.
- When you copy (CC) or blind copy (BCC) your reply, make sure you remember the earlier messages that may still be included in the message. Some of these earlier messages may not be appropriate for the eyes of the person being copied the latest message. This trap has caused many problems for the unwary emailer. This applies to forwarding messages as well. You need to check whether the information that you are forwarding will not upset the original sender of the email. Remember, their target reader was you, not the person you are forwarding the message to.
- Consider whether you need to reply to everyone in the case of multiple recipients of an original email or only to the sender. This can create havoc if you intended to reply just to the sender but inadvertently sent your message to a group of people.
- Before replying, always consider if you really need to have all of the original message and prior messages in your reply. You may find it more effective to keep only a part of the original message as a way of indicating more clearly what it is you are responding to.

  A message like:

  > **Yes, did I miss one!: (**

  can be quite confusing!

  Whereas,

Do you want to be on our mailing list for the agendas of our weekly meetings...

Yes! Did I miss one?

will be much more meaningful.

- You may consider revising the subject line completely if a conversation has resulted from the original email. For example, if a colleague has sent you a message on a particular issue, this may lead to further discussion on another topic. In such a case, it is helpful to change the subject line so that a discussion like an upcoming conference is not part of an email string under the subject line of "progress report from January on worksafe programme".

Avoiding email 'flames'

Emailing has great potential for causing trouble. As indicated earlier, the ease of replying without due thought and in the heat of anger is very seductive. In a face-to-face context, body language and immediate feedback from the receiver of the message allow you to moderate an overly hasty response on the spot. With emailing, the message is in print and hence more prone to misinterpretation and to causing offence.

Tone is always a difficult area in organizations like the ILO with a multi-cultural workforce often working in a language which is not their mother tongue. For example, what may be intended as an inoffensive and straightforward message from an English-as-a-second-language speaker can come across as quite offensive to a reader whose mother tongue is English.

Vocabulary with strong pejorative connotations should be avoided in emails. They have the potential to inflict long-term and unnecessary damage to both sender and receiver.

Activity 6: Replying with emotion

Read through the following exchange to see how easy it is for misunderstandings to occur when emails are written in haste. When you have finished reading the exchange, click on the links in the left column to see the words and phrases that contribute to the unprofessional tone.

Original email	Subject: YOUR PLACE IN THE NEXT TRAINING SESSION
	Dear Colleague,
	You will recall that the Director-General's announcement regarding the placement of staff in training programmes states that places will be available only for those staff with a good record of both progress and attendance.
	Following a review of your attendance and progress so far for the current session, and on the advice of the Director of Training, I need to draw your attention to the fact that you are at risk of losing your place in the next session if your attendance and/or progress do not improve markedly.
	I suggest that you discuss this with your instructor as soon as possible with a view to seeing how you might make up the work you have missed, or alternatively you may wish to consider withdrawing from the programme and re-enrolling at some time in the future when your work demands are not so great. If you wish to withdraw, please advise Aaaa Bbbbbb before 20 November.
Reply 1 from Offended	Subject: Re: YOUR PLACE IN THE NEXT TRAINING SESSION
	I found your email offensive and inappropriate. Apart from anything else it went to another person of the same name who was amused at the thought that I had not attended sufficient lessons or had not performed adequately.
	This is of course a matter for me and the teacher which we had already discussed. Please do not presume to pry into my personal affairs in future and please do not make them public.
Reply 1 from Conciliator	Subject: Re: Re: YOUR PLACE IN THE NEXT TRAINING SESSION
	I would like to apologize for the mistake I made in sending a message to the wrong person who happened to have the same name as you. It is very difficult for me to handle email

	messages to two persons with the exact same name and know who is who from an email address. Obviously, this error must be very frequent. I am sorry that the person who received the email was amused and you are right, he should never have received this message. However, I would like to point out that your training at the ILO is not your personal affair. It is my duty to administer this programme and make sure that the instructions given by our top management as to who gets a place for free in our training programme are followed strictly. This is why the matter is not only between you and your instructor. I would like to make it very clear that following our policy, if you do not succeed in the end-of-year progress test, you will not be given a place in the February session. The purpose of the message below was only to give you advance warning so that you could make an effort in order to progress satisfactorily. Thank you for your understanding.
Reply 2 from Offended	Subject: Re: Re: Re: YOUR INAPPROPRIATE PRACTICES Perhaps in that case you could tell me why information concerning my progress was sent to all of the other students as well. Or is it their business as well as yours?
Reply 2 from Conciliator	Subject: TRAINING SESSION INFORMATION PROCEDURES (Was: your inappropriate practices) All the students to whom I wrote were all in the same case as you, this is why I did not think that it would be a problem to write to all in one message. However, it seems that some students did not like it. I will therefore proceed on an individual basis next time.
Reply 3 from Offended	Subject:YOUR MISTAKE NOT MINE There are about eight students in my class. Most of those you wrote to were not in my class. A simple apology would be appreciated.
Reply 3 from Conciliator (now also becoming offended)	Subject: Re: YOUR MISTAKE NOT MINE It seems that you are so furious that you are not able to read any more. I did not write "All the students to whom I wrote were all in the same CLASS as you", but I wrote "All the students to whom I wrote were all in the same CASE as you".
Reply 4 from Offended	Subject: Re: Re: YOUR!! MISTAKE NOT MINE I think you really do not understand your problem. We are all adults. Most of us are senior professionals. We object to being treated like children. And by the way: 'All the students to whom I wrote were all in the same CASE as you' is incorrect English. I gave you the benefit of the doubt and assumed that you had made a typing error.

Here is the original reply from Offended, which incited the tone of the exchange. Beside it is an alternative version which may have prevented the heightened emotion that followed in the original exchange. Note that the second version, in contrast to the first, actually deals with the problem as expressed in the original email about the poor standing the employee has had so far.

Offended reply (flame)	More thoughtful reply
I found your email **offensive** and **inappropriate**. Apart from anything else it went to another person of the same name who was amused at the thought that I had not attended sufficient lessons or had not performed adequately. This is of course a matter for me and the	I would like to ask you to be more careful in future about the messages you send concerning participant's progress and attendance. Unfortunately, the email you thought you were sending me went to another officer of the same name. It has been embarrassing for me to have the

teacher which we had already discussed. **Please do not presume to pry into my personal affairs** in future and please do not make them public.	information you sent made public in this way. The person who received the email has expressed his amusement and this has caused me considerable distress.
	Please note that I have already discussed the situation with my instructor and the matter is in hand.
	Could you please ensure that you have my correct email address for future correspondence and that you are more careful about protecting my privacy.

Greetings, closures and signatures

There are no established protocols for beginning and ending emails. Although many emailers use no greetings at all, others perceive this as rude. "Hi" is common for very informal emails to people you know, or simply the person's first name. For a work-related email, you should follow the rules for memos.

Formal closures are generally unnecessary, but it is preferable to include your name and an informal closing. You may close with "Thank you," for example, if you have requested feedback or information. You can use the signature block if you like, including your telephone number.

Assignment preparation task 8: Emails

The email submission for this assignment is slightly different from that of the letter and the memo. Select an email that you have received as a reader, not one that you have written. Choose an email that you have received as a reader, not one that you have written. For this email, you are asked to answer some questions about its effectiveness and then provide a revised version.

Email Assignment Submission

Use this question sheet to analyse the email you select.

What type of email is this? (official, informal, private)
Do you know why this message was sent as an email and not some other form?
What was the writer's intended purpose?
How did the email fail in meeting your needs as a reader?
Identify any other weaknesses

After you have rewritten the email to make it more effective, use the following checklist to review your work and include it with your assignment. This rewritten email should be at least three paragraphs long.

Have you followed an appropriate organizational pattern for your message?	
Does the subject line (if included) give a clear indication of your purpose?	
Does the opening paragraph make the letter's purpose clear?	

Is it clear what the reader has to DO?	
Are all paragraphs unified and well constructed?	
Do paragraphs flow easily from one to the next?	
Is the level of formality/informality appropriate for the reader and context?	
Has all unnecessary information been eliminated?	
Have you been as brief as possible without leaving out any important information?	
Have you created any problems for your readers by your word usage (jargon, abbreviations, unfamiliar words)?	
Is the email free of any errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation?	
Have you followed formatting requirements for this type of correspondence?	

SECTION 3: MEETING RECORDS

ILO employees, like employees of most organizations, attend many meetings. At the ILO dialogue is a foundational activity for setting the agenda for future action. It is extremely important, therefore, that the essence of these meetings be captured accurately and transmitted to a readable format.

The human and financial costs of holding meetings are very high and effort is often wasted. To gain an idea of their financial cost, just calculate the per-hour salary of each participant at your next meeting. Next consider the costs involved with translating a record into several other languages. Yet, people can come away from meetings wondering what has been achieved during the meeting and frustrated about the time they have spent there. Often they are also unsure about what should happen next and if they must take any action.

This section focuses on one way of making meetings more productive producing effective records that focus on the decisions made - and the follow-up actions required.

For most departmental and team meetings at the ILO, detailed minutes are usually not required. Rather than traditional detailed minutes, the trend is for meeting summaries that focus on decisions taken and follow-up action required.

At the other extreme, however, are the minutes or, rather the reports, of major meetings such as sectoral meetings to discuss background papers on a particular subject. These are highly specialized, complex and formal documents. This section will focus on the fundamental skills required to become an effective writer of minutes and those reports that serve as a record of an event or meeting.

Assignment preparation task 9: Preparing for a meeting

You may wish to submit a record of a meeting that you have recently attended as well. This is fine but it is good to let your tutor know your intentions. Also, if you have any trouble with the chairperson's confirmation form, then don't hesitate to explain the situation to your tutor.

Before you begin work on this section, you will need to take the time to:

- identify a meeting you can attend;
- arrange to gain access;
- gain the agreement of the meeting chairperson to let you take minutes of the meeting;
- have the chairperson, convenor or a meeting participant agree to look at your completed minutes and be prepared to confirm that they are an accurate record, using the Chairperson's confirmation form.

You should make these arrangements now.

Minute-taking phobia

People are often reluctant to take minutes because they do not understand the purpose of the task or what to include in the record. Many think that it is necessary to capture everything that is said and that the most useful skill needed is shorthand. Meeting records should never be verbatim (word-for-word) reports. (There are some exceptions for highly formal meetings.) They are about recording **what happened** at a meeting, not **what was said** at the meeting. Listening, analysing and summarizing skills are required rather than speedy writing. It is also useful to keep in mind the two basic functions of meetings:

1. to present information
2. to solve problems

These functions should dictate what appears in the meeting record.

What are minutes?

At the ILO, meetings and discussions are everyday occurrences. Not all meetings require or need minutes to be taken. For most meetings, however, it is important that an accurate record of the events and decisions be recorded.
The length and complexity of minutes or meeting reports depends on the meeting and its importance. They can range from less than a page to up to 30 to 50 page documents for long, complex and important meetings.

The vocabulary of formal meetings

Some useful meeting related words are:

Agenda	The list of items to be covered at a meeting.
Chair Chairperson	The chairperson runs the meeting; often but not always he or she has called the meeting in the first place. The chairperson attempts to keep the discussion focused on the agenda items and makes sure those who wish to speak have a chance to participant in an orderly fashion.
Minutes	The formal written records of a meeting. They provide a permanent record of decisions that have been made, follow-up actions that are required and in some cases, a record of the actions leading up to the decisions. Minutes are made up of a collection of single minutes. A minute (singular), strictly defined, is the formal record of the discussion of ONE particular agenda item.
Motion	A formally worded proposal that puts forward a recommended course of action. One person moves the motion, which should be supported by someone else who seconds the motion.
Amendment	An amendment alters a motion in some way without being in direct opposition to the motion.
Resolution	A motion which is passed; the meeting has resolved to carry out an action.
Attendee	A person present at the meeting and with the authority to actively participate in all aspects of the meeting.
Observer	A person present at the meeting who can take no active role in the discussion or meeting activities.

Although the terms motion, amendment, and resolution may not be used in describing what happens at ILO meetings, in fact, when decisions are agreed upon, the sort of process these terms describe has been worked through.

Types of meeting records

There are several distinct types of meeting reports in use at the ILO. As you encounter each of these types, you will notice considerable overlap in style and presentation.

Agenda-based minutes

These are the minutes taken at scheduled meetings for which there is an agenda either distributed before the meeting or announced by the chairperson at the beginning of the meeting. The minutes should follow the framework set up by the agenda. These are most common for internal meetings such as departments or units within the Organization.

Notes for the file

These are used to record the discussions and conversations at meetings between ILO officials and usually key people outside the Organization. They are usually issue-based.

Mission reports

Mission reports can be described as a description of events and discussions that have occurred over the course of a travel duty to another country, like a field office or in response to a special event. Sometimes they are more specifically focused on a meeting or series of meetings that have occurred during the mission. In this latter case, the reports are structured very much like records of meetings. These records function like meeting reports, with lists of attendees and a focus on who said what rather than the style of agenda-based meetings.

Final reports on symposia, meetings, ILC sessions, etc.

These reports are very common at the ILO and serve as a written record of what was said at a meeting. This type of record is really focused on capturing the substance of the discussions that are so important to the ILO's practice of inclusion and dialogue.

Other types of records

Other names of records you may come across include Summary Record and Summary Note. Please check with your department for any required or standardized formats before you begin recording and writing.

What should minutes contain?

Regardless of the format adopted, meeting records should contain the following information, and usually in the following order:

1. name of the group holding the meeting;
2. kind of meeting (weekly, monthly, special, etc.);
3. date (and possibly place if this is not always the same);
4. names of persons attending (often participants are divided according to the tripartite nature of the discussion into government members, employer, members and worker members);
5. minute taker;
6. for each agenda item or issue discussed:
   - a summary of the views expressed, attributed either to the speakers by name (or initial) or to the offices they represent;
   - a clear statement about how each issue was resolved (agreement, no agreement, deferred for further consideration, etc.);
   - follow-up action required and the person responsible for the follow-up.

In an effort to keep meetings productive and to have minutes that are brief and useful, some chairpersons require that records only contain decisions and follow-up action and nothing else. If no decisions are recorded, everyone knows that the meeting has been a waste of time or that issues are still outstanding and need to be considered for the next time. However, in many other cases, it is just as important to record the discussion as it occurred during the meeting in a summarized format.

Organizing a summary record

Following is an extract of a well organized summary record. This record was produced after a meeting regarding the ILO's response to the Tsunami that devastated Southern Asia in December 2004. As you can see, the formatting and organization makes the record easy to follow. It contains the relevant information for a meeting record and is focused around the agenda items.

Indian Ocean Tsunami – ILO Response	Informative title
Meeting of the HQ Crisis Response Core Group	Name of the group holding the meeting
(14 January 2005)	date

Participants: Stephen P--- (CABINET), Riswanul I--- (EMP/STRAT), Jane S--- (ED/EMP), Moucharaf P---, Tita P---, Iqbal A---, and Casper E--- (CODEV), Alfredo L--, Donato K--- and Federico N--- (IFP/CRISIS), Tom N---, (DCOMM) and Angela B--- (EXREL).	Names and departments of participants
Agenda • Funding • People • Paper • Meetings	A clearly laid out agenda. This agenda forms the structure of the rest of the record.
Summary of discussions **1. Funding** S--- P--- (SP) informed the meeting that the Director-General had agreed to make available US$456,000 from the Cash Surplus allocated to the Asian Region for Tsunami-related activities... ...	Each agenda item begins as a heading so that it is clear what the discussions were all about. The recorder begins with the person's full name followed by the initials in parenthesis for easy reference later on in the record.

Preparing to write a meeting record

What to do before the meeting

Before the meeting begins it is essential that you know the following:

- the purpose of the record or report (Is it for file or circulation, or both?)
- how much detail is expected
- the names and positions of the participants
- the agenda items

You should be able to find out these things from the chairperson or the convenor of the meeting.

What to do during the meeting

- Make sure you sit near the chairperson. This will enable you to hear better.
- If an agenda exists, have a copy and some coding device to link your notes to the agenda items.
- Do not try to record everything that is said. Try to focus on the essence of what was said rather than the details.
- Take notes on decisions made about agenda items.
- If any participant asks for something to be placed on record, you will need to ensure that you write down the statement accurately (it is best to check wording with the speaker immediately after the meeting).
- Gather up copies of any reports, etc. tabled at the meeting (these may become attachments to your record).
- Note in particular any agreement on follow-up action and make sure you note who has the responsibility for the follow-up.

Writing the record or report after the meeting

The most useful action you can take in writing the meeting report is to ensure that you do the job immediately after the meeting. Your chairperson will also appreciate a prompt draft of the report while the meeting is still fresh in his or her mind.

You will probably have taken more notes than you need. Your task is now to turn those notes into a document that is a useful record for those at the meeting; information for those who were not at the meeting; a file record for future reference; and a starting point for further work on items that may come up again in future meetings.

Tips for taking notes

If you find yourself suddenly in the position of being responsible for producing a record of the meeting, the first thing you will need to consider is how you will take notes at the meeting.

- Prepare a list of expected attendees and check off the names as people enter the room.
- Make sure that you note at the time all the essential elements, such as type of meeting, names of those participating, their positions and organizations, date and time, and main topics.
- Prepare an outline based on the expected issues ahead of time, and leave plenty of white space for notes. By having the topics already written down, you can jump right on to a new topic without pause.

Meeting details:			
Purpose of Meeting:			
Date/Time:			
Participants:			
Topic	**Discussion**	**Action**	**Person Responsible**
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

- Make a map of the seating arrangement, if possible, to be sure about who said what.
- Don't record every single comment, but concentrate on getting the gist of the discussion and taking enough notes to summarize it later.
- Be prepared! Study the issues to be discussed and ask a lot of questions ahead of time. If you have to fumble for understanding while you are making your notes, they won't make any sense to you later.
- Don't wait too long to prepare the record, and be sure to have it approved while memory is fresh with key participants.
- Don't be intimidated. The ability to produce concise, coherent records is widely admired and valued.

Activity 7: Improving minutes

Identify weaknesses in the extracts below and then rewrite them to improve their effectiveness.

1. **Extract:**	
The first part of the agenda focused on a comprehensive presentation of the development of an ILO Working Strategy. John Ssssss introduced the activity's background to the members, stressing that the activity is housed within UNICEF. He then introduced George Vvvvvv, UNICEF Senior Human Resources Officer, Organizational Learning and Development, who will be working full time on this activity, beginning 15 April 2006. George proceeded to describe in detail...	
What is the weakness?	
Compare	

Type in a revision.	
Compare	

2. **Extract:**

Two papers (Proposal for an InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction) were reviewed by the group and should be revised and submitted to the meeting on Thursday, 10 December. The first one pertaining to.

What is the weakness?	
Compare	
Type in a revision.	
Compare	

3. **Extract:**

Reference was made to the AA conference which Dr T attended where 40 countries were represented. She mentioned that it had been a rather low profile event since only few ministers had attended as some sent representatives.

What is the weakness?	
Compare	
Type in a revision.	
Compare	

4. **Extract:**

The suggestion of an international advisory committee to be explored further.	
What is the weakness?	
Compare	
Type in a revision.	
Compare	

The language of meeting records

Writing a record of a meeting can be more art than science. That is, you have to be able to write in an impartial style even if the discussion itself was heated and emotionally charged. These records include the names of speakers and it is important to remain respectful and deferential to the meeting participants. Consider that many of the readers of this record will be the very participants in the discussion. Also, it is standard practice at the ILO that these records are respectful to the participants and the spirit of dialogue.

The skill in writing this type of record is in getting the essence of the discussion rather than capturing all the fine (and sometimes irrelevant) details. Your diplomacy and tact are required for this type of writing. Your summary of someone's input to the meeting will not reveal that the individual in question blathered on unnecessarily for 45 minutes after making his or her key point. Nor will you be able to divulge the qualitative differences between the contributions of the participants. While you yourself may have had a difficult time simply trying to understand a speaker's point, your reader should not have to suffer the same trials and tribulations. At the same time, your writing cannot hope to capture the rhetorical effect of a particularly gifted speaker. Ultimately, you have to make the entire discussion readable and comprehensible. This is one of the great differences between reading a report and merely listening to or viewing a recording of it.

Your contribution, therefore, is crucial to creating an effective document. You have the job of not only making some individuals more easily understood but also of giving some unity to a document that is the product of many voices.

In writing minutes, you should avoid:

- using emotive words (for example, **vicious, frivolous, over-reacted**);
- interpreting other people's states of mind (for example, **He seemed very disturbed by the question**);
- discriminatory and gender-specific language (See Module 1: **Discriminatory writing**);
- falling into the pattern of writing: **A stated...; B replied...; C argued**, etc.

Activity 8: Avoiding emotional language

Rewrite these statements so that they are more suitable for meeting records.

When you have finished, click on the compare button to see some possible alternatives to recording these statements accurately and faithfully. Of course, there are many possibilities for each example.

1. The Seafarers spokesperson slammed his fist on the table and burst out "This meeting is overdue by 11 years!"	
Type your revised statement	

2. The Committee turned into a shouting match and eventually everyone left without any further discussion on the tender.

Type your revised statement	

3. Nobody could agree how the money should be spent.

Type your revised statement	

4. Ambassador Shibata groaned that the debate over what to do was just another example of a bunch of bureaucrats, including the committee members, arguing in a bubble without any connection to real problems.

Type your revised statement	

5. Pavlos S. and Anna S. argued violently about the proposal. They were the only ones who didn't agree with the decision.

Type your revised statement	

6. Mr P. was vehement in his questioning about the requested number of participants required for the mission. He implied that the proposed number was ridiculous and wants an immediate re-evaluation of the situation.

Type your revised statement	

7. The Spanish Government representative went on and on about the amount of time managers spent on their computers compared to workers.

Type your revised statement	

8. The German Government representative: I just want to add one final point, if I may do so, and that is to lend my wholehearted support to the statement made by Ms. Ramirez, our colleague from Brazil, whose eloquent argument about our role as human beings and the centrality of such to all developments concerned with the great influences of technology and all technological developments was indeed compelling. So much so I put forth the recommendation that her words be included in the conclusion, ideally in a preamble so that we might not forget them as we deliberate on the direction of our future actions.

Type your revised statement	

Activity 9: Using diplomacy in records

The following activity aims to give you practice in writing "between the lines" in a slightly broader context than the previous activity. This activity shows the effective writing for a note for the file.

The example below reflects the situation where the person being visited is clearly not doing his job well.

You accompany Cccc Dddd (CD), a senior ILO officer, to a meeting with an opposite number in another UN agency. You are responsible for producing a note on the meeting.

Dr X, of UNabc, is well known for his academic interests and for his lack of action on practical matters. He has proved an impediment to the ILO's move forward on its work.

In the left-hand column of the table provided in the activity template is an account of the discussion as it actually took place at this meeting. In the right-hand column, is a 'translation' that is suitable for a note for the file. The first two are done for you. Try completing the remaining points yourself.

Account	Note points	Suggested Answer
Dr X seems to have no idea of what his job is about. He doesn't know how much money he has in his budget or how many people he has working for him. CD suggested that the time had come to get across the resources at his disposal because his lack of		At the time of the meeting, Dr X was unclear as to the level of financial or human resources that are currently available to him or of those that will be available in the next funding cycle. He undertook to clarify in the coming weeks the extent of his

action was impacting on other agencies like the ILO trying to work in the same field. Dr X considered this criticism and commented that he might try to find out about these matters in the next few weeks.		resources.
He said that when he did find out about the resources at his disposal, he would decide on his priorities. One of these could be about HIV/AIDS issues in the Health Services Sector, he supposed. CD suggested at this point that training programmes at country level, similar to those produced in the Joint ILO/WHO Guidelines on Health Services and HIV/AIDS would be a good focus for his funding. After some debate and persuasion Dr X agreed to make that one of his priorities.		After considerable discussion, Dr X said he was prepared to make training programmes at country level (similar to those prepared for the Joint ILO/WHO Guidelines on Health Services and HIV/AIDS) one of his priorities.
Dr X said he was really only interested in the economic problems connected to health issues and would prefer to spend the resources at his disposal on the production of comprehensive research suitable for publication. He added that he was not a "political animal" and wanted to stay out of anything controversial.	Show Improved Version	
CD quickly and firmly focused on Dr X's statement about making HIV/AIDS in the Health Services industry one of his priorities. He tried to firm this up by saying that the ILO welcomed the effort.	Show Improved Version	
CD suggested to Dr X that it was not always possible to divorce the economic from the political. He also suggested that practical on-the-ground help was what was needed at the moment rather than more academic papers that no-one read.		

Assignment preparation task 10: Meeting records

If you have any questions about this part of the assignment, just send your tutor a note. You may also wish to send a preliminary draft or inform your tutor of the scope of your record.

For your assignment portfolio, you may submit up to two meeting records, which can be of any type produced at the ILO (minutes, a note for the file, report, or summary note/record).

Click here for the meeting record certification form.

- Open a new Word document, and save it into the assignment folder that you have created.
- Prepare a record for a meeting you have recently attended. The record can be a set of minutes, a note for the file, a summary note, or any other type of record produced at the ILO.
- Ask the chairperson of the meeting to complete the meeting record certification form.
- Do not submit the record and certification form yet. Instead, keep a copy of each in your assignment folder so that you can submit them when you have completed each part of the Assignment.
- Submit the following checklist with your record.

What type of record have you written?	Minutes, summary note, note for the file, mission report, etc.
Who will be your primary readers for this record?	
What is the main purpose in writing up this record?	
Are all paragraphs unified and well constructed?	
Is the level of formality/informality appropriate for the reader and context?	
Has all unnecessary information been eliminated?	
Have you been as brief as possible without leaving out any important information?	
Have you created any problems for your readers by your word usage (jargon, abbreviations, unfamiliar words)?	
Have you maintained a neutral tone without being unfaithful to the discussions of meeting?	
Have you followed	

formatting requirements for this type of record?	

Assignment 2a description

You will produce a portfolio of model correspondence. The portfolio must include a minimum of four items, chosen from the following:

- a memo, circular or minute sheet
- a letter
- a critique and redraft of a poorly written email
- a meeting record which includes minutes, a note for the file, report or summary note/record

As well, you must complete a number of accompanying analytical tasks. You will find details of these as you work through the module. Your choice of which four to submit should depend on your work writing needs. You can choose two of one type of writing to complete your portfolio.

This module will help you focus on the craft of writing for general office correspondence. Help is also provided on formatting and style. However, for details on these matters you should consult any guidelines or specifications provided by the ILO.

Performance criteria

All items in your portfolio should:

- show a clear statement of purpose;
- be appropriate for their intended readers;
- contain well constructed paragraphs;
- show appropriate organization;
- be written in clear and concise language that is appropriate to its purpose and reader;
- be proofread and be free of spelling, grammatical or other errors;
- be well presented in accordance with ILO format requirements.

The detailed meeting records option you select should at a minimum:

- identify the participants;
- record decisions of the meeting in clear, concise and appropriate language;
- note any follow-up action required.

Editing and resubmissions

Your tutor will give you feedback on your documents, and may ask you to edit some or all of them for re-submission. You can then rework the assignment in the light of the feedback and resubmit up to two times.

Assignment 2a preparation tasks

These are located throughout the module. They are designed for you to work on them as you come to them during the course of your studying through the module.

- Selecting messages
- Subject lines
- Message writing checklist
- Preparing memos
- Memos
- Preparing letters
- Letters
- Emails
- Preparing for a meeting
- Records of meetings

Assignment 2a checklist

You need to include work on four components from the options given below. You can submit one of each or a combination involving up to two submissions of a single type of writing. Choose whatever is the most relevant to your work situation. If you wish to submit work on all four components, you may.

Memo	See assignment preparation task 5 for a full listing of all that's required for this part of the assignment.
Letter	See assignment preparation task 7 for a full listing of all that's required for this part of the assignment.
Email	See assignment preparation task 8 for a full listing of all that's required for this part of the assignment.
Meeting Record	See assignment preparation task 10 for a full listing of all that's required for this part of the assignment.

Module 2a Activity Map

Activity 1: Subject lines
Activity 2: Organizing a brief message
Activity 3: Assess the effectiveness of a minute sheet
Activity 4: Structuring a response letter
Activity 5: Covering note email
Activity 6: Replying with emotion
Activity 7: Improving minutes
Activity 8: Avoiding emotional language
Activity 9: Using diplomacy in records

Course resources

PUBL Guide for Authors
This guide is produced by the Editorial Unit of the Bureau of Publications. It provides a concise set of guidelines for preparing a document for publication within ILO. By following these guidelines, authors can contribute to a more efficient editing process for their work.

ILO House Style Guide
This document provides considerable guidance on the style and mechanics of English-language writing, including spelling, punctuation, formatting, citations, copyright, and much more.

The Deluxe OFFDOC Guide for Report Writers
This is a temporary document for use until the new version of the ILO House Style Guide becomes available. It provides a very useful checklist for authors to review before submitting their manuscript for editing. The checklist contains a list of editorial points to consider as well as some practical advice on the process of writing and editing at ILO. Probably most useful for writers is the concise list of tips to keep in mind when writing and editing a report.

Web resources

The Internet English Grammar
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/
This site is both a self-study course and a comprehensive resource of information on English grammar, designed primarily for university undergraduates. It covers the basic functions and forms of words and moves on to more complex units such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. The site includes a large glossary and several interactive exercises.

Guide to Grammar and Writing
http: //cctc2.commnet.edu/grammar/

Excellent site especially for sentence and paragraphing help.

Guide to Grammar and Style
http: //andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/s.html
Alphabetical arrangement — good quick resource.

The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation
http: //www.grammarbook.com/
A comprehensive on-line book covering many common problem areas, including punctuation. (Skip the promotional first page.)

The University of Calgary: The Basic Elements of English Grammar Guide
http: //www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/grammar/
Comprehensive site for grammar and punctuation help. Includes self-marking exercises.

William Strunk Jr: The Elements of Style
http: //www.bartleby.com/141/index.html
One of the oldest and best style guides around.