



'We cut the iterations on our strategy documents from 56 to just 4!'

Sector

Financial

Area of training

Board communications, plus broader business-writing skills

Delivery

In-person training and virtual one-to-one coaching

Delegates

11 senior leaders and members of the executive team, with organisation-wide rollout

The challenge

Too many rounds of edits and a lack of confident, consistent writing in critical strategic documents

The solution

Practical training workshops plus one-to-one coaching sessions

The results

Faster writing time, fewer edits and a team with the confidence and skills to express strategy succinctly

A senior management team grew their confidence to define strategy and cut their writing process down from weeks to hours. Now they're rolling out the training to all employees, including the C-suite.

The Mortgage Lender prides itself on offering accessible 'real-life lending', providing mortgages for the self-employed, entrepreneurs and help-to-buyers. However, after being bought by Shawbrook Bank in 2020, they had experienced rapid growth and wanted to ensure consistency in the language of their strategic documents.

The senior management team is responsible for positioning the company strategically, which includes collectively preparing the annual business plan. Their proposal had to communicate the team's strategic pillars and deliverables for the year ahead and beyond to the executive team and to the bank's board.

But with multiple senior managers and time-critical turnaround times, it had become a challenge to establish a cohesive collective response – especially one pitched in the right voice and at the right level for its audience.

This had led to too many rounds of time-intensive iterations – over 50 by the time the first course ran. And it was delaying the strategy getting official sign-off.

'Trying to coordinate that amount of resource is difficult when you don't all agree on an approach,' says Mel Hume, Executive Business Management – CEO Office. 'Especially when you're not all clear on the exact brief and parameters – and when you don't know what "good" looks like.'

'It wasn't only about the tools from the course – it was the confidence we now had to get the point across. That was so powerful for us.'

Mel Hume, Executive Business Management
– CEO Office, The Mortgage Lender



‘It’s had a huge ripple effect on the amount of time that people are having to set aside. That has an impact: you’ve only got so many hours in your day.’

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Speaking the same language

‘We were trying to get to the point where we were speaking the same language, strategically,’ says Mel. ‘Our response had to articulate “This is what the business needs and this is our focus for the year,” rather than “I need six heads for my team.” And, really, we did know what we wanted to say – there just wasn’t a clear approach on how to say it.’

Then the company’s Chief Risk Officer, Neil Hornsby, recommended that Mel talk to Emphasis, as he had previously attended our training.

We worked with the team to plan a high-level approach focusing on their key needs. The training centred on establishing the audience and the right tone of voice, while digging into best practice and demonstrating targeted techniques to get there. The content also looked at the science of how we read and write, and included a face-to-face workshop and follow-up coaching.

During the pilot course that Mel attended, trainer Doug Nel led the group in workshopping version 56 of their strategy report deck.

‘It’s really helpful that we had a document as a reference point – you weren’t just being taught theory,’ says Mel. ‘It also helped that the document meant something to all of us. There was a personal investment in it because we were all keen to deliver it.’

A noticeable difference

Mel personally experienced a before-and-after effect from the training that she hadn’t expected.

‘As with any course, you go thinking, “I’ve got a million emails. I could really do without this,”’ says Mel. ‘But then you’re immersed. And I came out saying, “I’ve got comms to write – I’m going to go and write those now.” And afterwards I thought they looked brilliant. I was so proud of that.’

She wasn’t the only one to notice a change. ‘After I wrote one new piece, Neil messaged me and said “You’ve done the course,”’ says Mel. ‘As someone who has been copywriting for some time, I was mortified he could tell the difference! But I took it as such a good thing – that it was noticeable.’

The individual impact was palpable, but could the team see the same effect on a strategy document that had taken over 50 iterations to complete?

The confidence to get the point across

‘When we came out of the session, we said, “Right, we’re going to approach this again.” We were on a roll,’ says Mel. ‘And suddenly we were all approaching it in the same way, saying, “Take that – move that there. Tell a story. Shift that. Bullet point that.”’

‘We revised the deck in about an hour afterwards. When you’ve spent four to five weeks full-time doing 56 iterations, and then you do that in an hour, there’s a sense of serotonin in your veins,’ Mel explains.

‘And it wasn’t only using the tools from the course. It was the confidence we now had to get the point across without talking more. It was so powerful for us.’

The rewritten version took just four iterations.



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'We nailed it. The report was met with "Thank you, yes – it looks good," says Mel. 'And it's had a huge ripple effect on the amount of time that people are having to set aside. That has an impact, because you've only got so many hours in your day.'

That regained time in turn allows the team to focus on what matters most during their working day. 'You're not going to get your best brain work at seven o'clock at night,' notes Mel. 'That's even more evident when you're writing strategy.'

Training staff in a single way of communication

The course helped the team see what needs to be in place even before any writing happens. 'Part of our early challenge with the report was in making sure we had clarified the brief first,' says Mel. 'And now we have the training and skills to articulate something that we need before we will even start writing. It's a toolkit that helped us take our own knowledge and ability and cohesively put forward a trained response.'

The Mortgage Lender has committed to training all staff, including business development managers and the C-suite themselves.

'I mean, you're not going to get anyone that's a bigger fan than us. We all said to Peter, the CEO, "We all need to do it: the whole company,"' says Mel. 'And it starts with the top. That way, they'll understand why we've done it – because that's often the barrier.'

Creating writing champions

Mel believes that the training is not just about the here and now but about developing skills people can use in future roles, or in other jobs in financial services and beyond.

'We can train all our staff to communicate internally and externally in a single way – and create champions. That's powerful for our service standards,' says Mel.

'And if you are going to train someone, train them in something they can use outside of their role. Then you are giving them the stepping stone to progress,' says Mel. 'These are tools that will help you in your career. And we're doing it the right way.'

5 reasons to choose Emphasis

1. Over 25 years' experience

We've helped improve writing and communications skills for over 80,000 delegates and we've worked with over 1,000 companies – including many just like yours.

4. Post-course support

All delegates have access to our dedicated helpdesk for a year after their course, and we'll send them free tips and resources by email.

2. Unique pre-course analysis

Using our unique method, we analyse the writing of every attendee before training, so our trainers have a solid understanding of each person's writing issues from the start.

5. Our expert trainers

We only recruit trainers who have a strong background in professional writing and communications – and who are able to unfailingly deliver exceptional courses.

3. Full course customisation

Our specialist course developers work hard to create a programme that's customised exactly to the problems your team are facing.

Get in touch with our team: call +44 (0)1273 732 888 or email info@writing-skills.com

