

Customer Service E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam

by Marilynne Rudick and Leslie O'Flahavan, E-WRITE

Information for the Exam-Taker

Your current or prospective employer has asked you to take this exam to assess your skills for writing customer service e-mail.

What Skills Does the Exam Assess?

This *Competency Exam* is designed to test the essential writing skills that agents need to write customer service e-mail. The exam tests your ability to

- Write clear strong sentences
- Write with a polite, positive and personal tone
- Select the correct word and spell it right
- Punctuate correctly
- Write for global readers (non-native English speakers)

The exam has 10 Sections. In the following table, you can see how many points each Section of the exam is worth. Most exam Administrators set 80% as the passing mark for this exam; that means you would need to earn 96 points or more to pass. However, your exam Administrator may set a different passing mark for this exam.

	Section	Points
	1. Passive Voice or Active Voice?	5
	2. Revise to Remove Confusion Caused by Misplaced Modifiers	5
	3. Fragments or Full Sentences?	5
	4. Run-Ons or Full Sentences?	5
	5. Replace Weak Verbs with Strong Verbs	10
	6. Improve the Bureaucratic and Angry Tone of This E-Mail	20
	7. Select the Correct Word and Spell It Right	20
	8. Punctuate Correctly	15
	9. Write for Global Readers	10
	10. Write Your Own Reply to a Customer's E-Mail	25
	Total	120 points

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Section 1—Passive Voice or Active Voice?

Identify whether the sentence is written in active voice or passive voice. Write A for active voice and P for passive voice. When a sentence is written in active voice, the subject of the sentence is doing the action of the verb.

Scoring: 1 point per item. **Total: 5 points.**

	1. This credit card receipt should be sent to someone other than the person named on the card.
	2. The technician should change the air purifier's filter after approximately 50 hours of use.
	3. The first available specialist will contact you via e-mail or by telephone within one business day to quickly provide a solution to your request.
	4. Your billing address has been corrected by our Records Administration staff.
	5. I apologize for the frustrations you recently experienced with WorldWide Online Member Services.

Section 2—Revise to Remove Confusion Caused by Misplaced Modifiers

All the sentences in this section have problems caused by misplaced or dangling modifiers. Misplaced modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that are not placed near the words they modify. Dangling modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that modify words that have been left out of the sentence. Circle the misplaced or dangling modifiers (words or phrases) in each sentence.

Scoring: 1 point per item. **Total: 5 points.**

	1. Some collectors nearly spend all their money purchasing stamps at conventions and shows.
	2. The manufacturer announced that the new, wind-powered generator would be ready soon at the trade show last week.
	3. While participating in our reward program for high-achieving students, the university will give you first choice of tickets to concerts and sporting events.
	4. The U.S. Geological Survey nearly publishes 1,000 maps used by many American businesses.
	5. Too small, too expensive, or too far from your job, we can help you find a new apartment and a reasonable rent.

Section 3—Fragments or Full Sentences?

Identify whether each of the following is a fragment or a full sentence. Write F next to the fragments. Write S next to the full sentences. A fragment is a part of a sentence that has been punctuated as though it were a full sentence.

Scoring: 1 point per item. **Total: 5 points.**

	1. In regard to your e-mail about obtaining a updated version of the Handbook for Community Leaders so you may begin your own neighborhood watch patrol.
	2. Type in your return message then click SEND to automatically include all previous e-mail messages for the next representative who will assist you.
	3. Recently, you requested personal assistance from our online support center.
	4. Because we can offer substantial discounts on the monthly fee.
	5. If your daughter receives a subsidized loan, based on financial need, one that the federal government pays the interest upon while she is in school.

Section 4—Run-Ons or Full Sentences?

Identify whether each of the following is a run-on or a full sentence. Write R next to the run-ons. Write S next to the full sentences. A run-on is more than one sentence punctuated as if it were one sentence.

Scoring: 1 point per item. **Total: 5 points.**

	1. Though we would prefer to do an exchange, we are willing to refund the full price of the product provided that the item is returned with the original packing list.
	2. If you have any further questions please contact us again, thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.
	3. The following pages will allow you to specify the airline, enter frequent traveler programs, and identify corporate plans and other rate options.
	4. The problem you described comes from a glitch in our membership database, I'm trying to find out what can be done about it.
	5. Please feel free to write to us thank you for shopping at Enthusiast.com.

Section 5—Replace Weak Verbs with Strong Verbs

Circle the weak verb in each of the following sentences. Then revise the sentences, replacing the weak verb with a strong verb. Weak verbs include forms of the verb *to be* (including *am, is, are, was, were, be, being, and been*).

Scoring: 2 points per item; 1 point for circling the weak verb and 1 point for revising the sentence using a strong verb. **Total: 10 points.**

Original Sentence 1. You can do a thorough review of your payment history if you access your records online.

Your Revision

Original Sentence 2. It is very easy to contact our customer service team by e-mail or by telephone.

Your Revision

Original Sentence 3. There are several treatment alternatives for health club members who want to receive therapeutic massage.

Your Revision

Original Sentence 4. It is possible to receive hourly news digests if you purchase our subscription service.

Your Revision

Original Sentence 5. We make an analysis of your financial status, then suggest an investment fund

Your Revision

Section 6—Improve the Bureaucratic and Angry Tone of This E-Mail

A customer, Constance Didier, has written to the Motor Vehicle Bureau to ask how to renew her handicapped driver's placard. She wrote: "My placard expires next March. How do I renew it? The placard number is 947225. Thanks." Eliot, a customer service agent at the Motor Vehicle Bureau, replied to Constance Didier's e-mail, but the tone of his reply is rude, bureaucratic, and angry.

Circle 10 words or phrases that give this e-mail an unfriendly tone. Then, on the blank lines to the left, substitute a word, phrase, or sentence that contributes to a polite, positive, and personal tone.

Scoring: 2 points per item; 1 point for circling the words or phrases with an unfriendly tone and 1 point for replacing the unfriendly tone with polite language. **Total: 20 points.**

_____	To: Constance Didier
_____	From: Eliot Streeter
_____	Subject: Re: Request for updated placard

_____	We acknowledge receipt of yet another e-mail from you about
_____	obtaining a current, updated placard. Did you even read the
_____	instructions about downloading the forms at our website? Is it
_____	too hard for you to go to http://www.Citysite.gov/forms/download
_____	to get the form VR-254? It is imperative that your doctor
_____	complete the VR-254. Then, you must bring the completed
_____	form to any full service MVA office.

_____	If you can't be bothered to download the form, please be
_____	advised that you can request a form by calling our office at
_____	800-555-9921. If there's another reason you can't give the
_____	VR-254 form to your doctor, regulations mandate that you
_____	apply for a temporary placard (expires in 6 months)

_____	These instructions should resolve your problems.

_____	Eliot Streeter
_____	<i>Parking Division</i>

Section 8—Punctuate Correctly: Period, Comma, Apostrophe, Semicolon, Colon

Write C next to sentences that are punctuated correctly. Write I next to sentences that are punctuated incorrectly.

Scoring: 1 point for each item. **Total: 15 points.**

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1. Please note that the manufacturers restrictions say that this product should not be used in commercial kitchens.

 2. I do not know the whole situation but I just tested your e-mail account and it is fine.

 3. We also, still have the needlepoint pillow cases that are available in scarlet and spruce.

 4. If you're on Eastern Standard Time, you can chat online with a support professional between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

 5. If you are not entirely satisfied with an item, return it to us at any time for an exchange or refund of it's purchase price.

 6. Unfortunately, I am unable to answer your question about your laser printer; however, I will forward your e-mail to the person who can help you.

 7. If you wish to start a new account, please send an e-mail to accounts@cellphonebill.com and include your name, current account number, and the name of your business.

 8. We'll give you all the travel information you requested: maps, restaurant reviews, lodging rates, and a summer theater schedule.

 9. We appreciate you taking the time to share your feedback, because it is the best way for us to know what we are doing right.

 10. Undergraduate students who want to apply for off-campus housing should complete Off-Campus Housing Request Form 210 (which can be downloaded at www.stateuniv.edu/offcampus).

 11. To apply for a job with our company, please contact Carole Sonnenstein, Project Director; Scott Florsheim, Human Resources Manager; and Ginny Olstand, Administrator.

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12. You will recognize Mistry authorized dealers on the Internet: when you see the “Mistry Authorized Internet Dealer” logo they proudly display at their sites.
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13. The luggage rack can be placed on the roof of the car, the tie-downs will secure it there.
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14. We will issue a full refund for items returned within 30 days; items returned after 30 days will be charged a re-stocking fee.
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15. The safety of our passengers and crew will always be our priority, and we have been working with the aviation and transport authorities to ensure the highest level of security at the airports from which we operate.

Section 9—Write for Global Readers

This is an e-mail response to Raoul from James Underhill, an instructor at Pharmacy Learning, a company that provides online courses. Raoul wrote an e-mail asking about enrolling in an online pharmacy course. James Underhill uses idioms, gender-biased words, and other words or phrases that could confuse global readers, also known as non-native English speakers. (Raoul's e-mail indicates that he is writing from Mexico.)

Circle 10 words or phrases that a global reader might not understand.

To: Raoul@webmexico.com
From: underhillj@pharmacylearning.com
Subject: Basic Skills for Pharmacy Assistants

Dear Raoul,

Thanks for getting in touch with me about our online course, *Basic Skills for Pharmacy Assistants*. To enroll, please complete the online registration form at www.pharmacylearning.com. We will review your application quickly and get back to you.

If you enroll, I'm sure you will find this a rich learning experience with many hand-on activities. Our faculty bends over backwards to assure that each student successfully completes the course. As a rule, our students are very motivated and qualified. We weed out poor students before they enroll.

It will take you about three months to complete the course. You'll be a practicing Pharmacy Assistant before you know it. It goes without saying that we would be pleased to consider your application.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
James Underhill
Instructor
Pharmacy Learning

Section 10—Write Your Own Reply to a Customer’s E-Mail

This e-mail is from customer Regina Costello to the Galleon Glass Company. In this section, you take the role of a Galleon customer service agent and write a reply to Regina Costello.

We’ve provided a Fact Sheet for you to use to answer this e-mail. Use some or all of the information in the Fact Sheet to write your response. You may also invent any information you need to answer Regina Costello’s question completely.

Scoring: In writing your reply, use this **E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam Checklist** to guide you. Your e-mail will be scored on how well you demonstrate these six writing skills. **Total: 25 points.**

E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam Checklist

- _____ 1. Completely answers the customer’s questions
 - _____ 2. Writes clear strong sentences
 - _____ 3. Writes with a polite, positive, and personal tone
 - _____ 4. Selects the correct word and spells it right
 - _____ 5. Punctuates correctly
 - _____ 6. Writes for global readers
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Customer E-Mail

To: customerservice@galleonglass.com
From: Rcostello@quest.net
Subject: Broken Christmas ornaments

I ordered the glass Christmas Ornament Collection from your web site. It arrived today. All of the ornaments were completely smashed. How do I get a refund? The catalog item number was CC4028. Price \$49.95.

Do I have to send you all of the pieces of broken glass to prove that it arrived completely broken? Or will you take my word for it?

I'd like to receive the refund as soon as possible as a credit to my Visa card. I would also like you to refund the money I paid for shipping. I paid an extra \$15 to have the ornaments delivered by overnight delivery since I need these ornaments to decorate the Christmas tree at my church tomorrow.

I am irate that I paid EXTRA for BROKEN GLASS! Please credit my Visa card for this purchase ASAP.

Regina Costello
Galleon Glass

Section 10—Fact Sheet for Answering Regina Costello’s E-Mail to Galleon Glass

Company Background

- Galleon Glass Company has been in business since 1995.
- Galleon Glass Company uses special foam packaging to protect glass items.
- Galleon Glass Company’s online catalog contains 100 items.
- Galleon Glass Company shipped over 1000 Christmas ornament packages this year and received very few complaints about shipping or breakage.

To get a refund

- Complete the Request for Refund form on the back of the packing slip.
- Mail the packing slip/refund form to
Galleon Glass Company
Refund Department
6204 Ocean Drive
West Hyattsville, MD 20782
- Don’t return damaged object.

Refund Options

- Galleon Glass Company will provide a full refund of the purchase price of the ornaments and the cost of overnight delivery.
- Credit card refund takes 30 days.
- Customer may request Galleon Glass Company credit instead of credit card refund. It takes 4 business days to issue credit via e-mail. Credit can be used for online or catalog purchase.

Your E-Mail Response