

How one UK bank
is using software
to improve the way
it writes to customers.

Making Words Work

MIKE CROWTHER — Manager Service Excellence, HBOS

AT HBOS we're changing the way we write. We're encouraging everyone to write in clear, plain English. We want colleagues to write to customers in a natural style that reflects our open and approachable philosophy. The success of our **Make Words Work** campaign depends crucially on using **Editor Software's** customised editing and training programs.

Every few months managers complained at the standard of customer correspondence and internal documents. We were no different from any other company or government agency—we did not write well. All organisations, especially large ones, suffer from a business style that gets in the way of clear communication.

We tried solving this problem in the traditional way—we ran internal courses teaching colleagues how to write clearly. Unfortunately, although colleagues enthusiastically embraced the ideas, they soon fell back into their old writing habits when they returned to their desks.

StyleWriter—The Plain English Editor

We turned to Editor Software to find a practical solution to our problem. We had previously asked Editor Software to edit over 800 of our standard letters. Once edited, the new letters met with universal approval from our customers. We had also introduced Editor Software's **StyleWriter** software into a few areas of the business. This software, popular with colleagues, checked letters for thousands of plain

English style and usage problems, gave valuable editing advice and encouraged a clear and natural style. Could **StyleWriter** be the answer we were looking for?

The Software Solution

When discussing our needs with Editor Software, the company's director, Nick Wright, helped us by offering software solutions. He suggested designing an **Electronic Writing Course** based on our customer-service letters to teach colleagues everything they needed to know to write in a clear and effective style. Our site licence to the Course lets us train all colleagues quickly and efficiently at their desks.

Once trained, we issue staff with **StyleWriter**. Each time a colleague drafts a letter, **StyleWriter** checks, analyses and rates the document. The program highlights the poor business style—long sentences, wordy phrases, clichés, passive verbs and so on. With a few simple mouse clicks and keystrokes, the writer produces a better letter. **StyleWriter** is as simple as running a spell-check but the results are far more impressive.

Editor Software also helped us to design an **Electronic House Style**. This gave us control over what **StyleWriter** checked. We added editing advice to check the correct capitalisation of product names, dates, time, telephone numbers and so on. As a financial company, we also had to tackle proscribed wording set by the industry's regulator, the Financial Services Authority. As part of our

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Software for Better Writing Skills

StyleWriter — Editing Software

StyleWriter will change the writing style in your organization. Recommended by the Plain Language Commission, **StyleWriter** checks each document for thousands of writing faults. Simple editing using **StyleWriter** cuts 25 per cent of the wordy style, resulting in a clear, concise and readable document.

The Electronic Writing Course

Conventional training in effective writing skills has always been time-consuming and costly. The **Electronic Writing Course** gives an affordable solution to training staff, quickly and thoroughly.

The Electronic House Style

Does your house style recommend 23 June, June 23, 23rd June or June 23rd? Do you want to discourage people from using industry jargon? Do you spend time proofreading for product names? **StyleWriter** can check thousands of your house-style rules to help everyone write consistently and accurately.

The Tutor

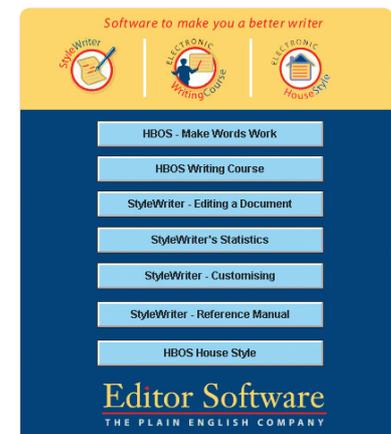
The **Tutor** is a customised, interactive guide to these software tools. Viewing the demonstrations and tutorials on the **Tutor** explains your communications project and how to use **StyleWriter**, the **Course** and the **House Style** software tools.

*Software for Clearer Communication
from*

EDITOR SOFTWARE

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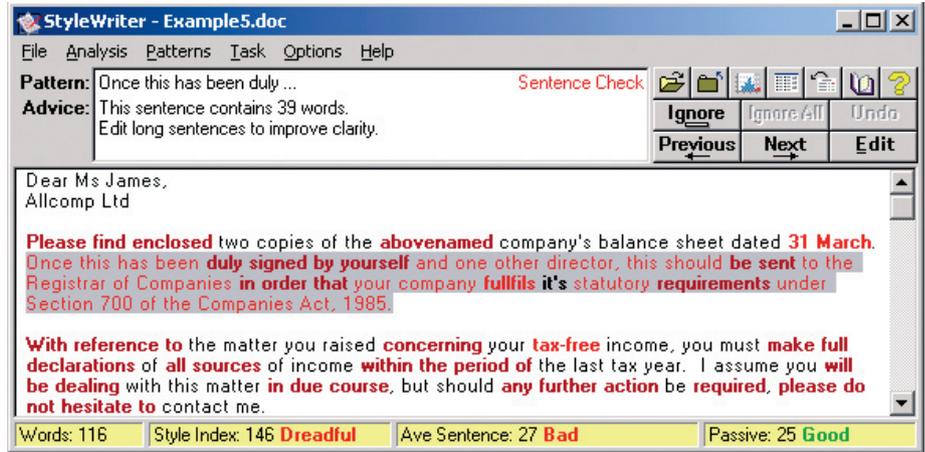
www.editorsoftware.com



The HBOS Tutor

house style rules, Editor Software adapted StyleWriter so the program highlighted FSA banned wording and stopped employees editing required, regulatory paragraphs.

To make sure colleagues understood our Make Words Work project, we ran internal promotions, newsletter articles and specialist training workshops. Nick Wright trained our 70 plain English champions who would go back to their departments as experts in plain English and the StyleWriter software. To make sure the whole project ran smoothly, Editor Software also designed an electronic Tutor to teach colleagues how to use the software.

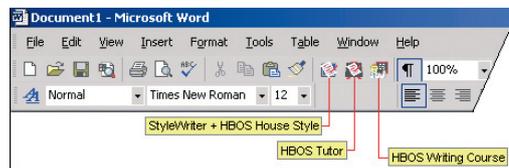


StyleWriter analyses rates and edits documents

Checking Every Letter with StyleWriter

Each time we opened Microsoft Word to draft a letter, there are three new icons available.

- ▶ The **Tutor icon** explained the project and shows colleagues how to use the new software tools.
- ▶ The **Electronic Writing Course icon** to learn how to write in plain English.
- ▶ The **StyleWriter icon** sits there ready to check for thousands of writing problems, including our customised house-style rules.



Measuring the Success of our Project

StyleWriter lets us measure the standard of our writing. The program automatically collects a before (the original draft) and after (the redraft) scores for every letter checked. For the first time, management will have quantitative data to see how our writing standards improve. We have already seen a marked improvement in every letter that StyleWriter checks. We expect the program to continue to help raise our standards.

The software solution we use to improve our writing standards is always there—in the user’s word-processing program.

Conclusion

This year, 1,500 HBOS employees will use these software tools. If the project meets our expectations, we’ll issue the software solution to around 10,000 employees. Eventually, we expect to use StyleWriter to check, monitor and improve the seven million non-standard letters we send to customers every year.

Working with Editor Software has been a pleasure. The company designed software and workshops to meet our specific needs. They offered a workable and effective solution that saved us money and delivered better results than our traditional training courses. If more organisations followed our example and used Editor Software’s StyleWriter program, clear writing, rather than business-speak, could become industry-standard — surely a worthwhile goal.

StyleWriter — Auditing Corporate Writing Standards

Rating	Style Index	Passive Index	Average Sentence
Good Writing	Under 40	Under 30	Under 20
Excellent Writing	Under 20	Under 10	15–18 words

StyleWriter sets high corporate standards for documents

Date and Time	Document Name	Original Redraft	Style Index	Passive Index	Average Sentence	Total Words	Author
11.01-2/2/03	LetterRJ1	Original	78	45	22	2,332	R.James
11.07-2/2/03	LetterRJ1	Redraft	33	10	17	1,998	R.James

StyleWriter records the writing style of every document