



# Business Letter Punch™ Manual

Skill Levels 6-10  
Complete program: 4 units

PERSUASION (Unit 1),  
REQUEST (Unit 2),  
COMPLAINT/RESPONSE (Unit 3),  
SOCIAL BUSINESS (Unit 4)

Evaluation version: Letter of REQUEST (Unit 2)  
Tracks work for two students.

Internet Explorer 6.0+ on Windows  
Firefox 0.8+ on Windows and Linux  
Safari 1.2.4+ on Mac  
Best viewed at 1024 x 768 screen resolution.

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## Why Use Business Letter Punch?

### *Benefits of Using Business Letter Punch*

1. Effective, research-proven computer-assisted instruction: embedded cognitive strategies, e.g., repetition; rehearsal of content; paraphrasing; drawing inferences; use of illustrative examples
2. Student control over amount and sequence of work performed and extent of review needed, leading to increased mastery and improved attitude towards learning
3. Improvement of writing skills
  - a. Recognition of points of difficulty and confusion
  - b. Advancement at student's own pace
  - c. Scaffolding and enhancing comprehension
4. Generalization of skills to other contexts and situations, i.e., transferring these skills to other academic areas
5. Appropriate for students of all skill levels
  - a. Effectiveness seen notably in low-achieving students
  - b. Improvement in proficiency among students in middle quartiles
  - c. Enrichment for students in upper quartile
6. Detailed class management via Merit Software record keeper
  - a. Teacher can track and check students' progress
  - b. Teacher can track and intervene at points of difficulty
  - c. Student records may be exported into spread-sheets

## What Does Business Letter Punch Do?

### *The Business Letter Punch Method*

1. Engages cognitive thinking and metacognitive strategies step by step
2. Supports constructivist learning by providing students with choices; decisions; multiple-completion paths for writing tasks
3. Strengthens students' abilities to interpret language-based concepts
  - a. Focuses instruction at sentence and paragraph level
  - b. Fosters analysis and discrimination among response options
4. Provides a structure that students of all levels can use again and again to improve their skills
5. Improves comprehension of students struggling with language arts skills and produces gains across the curriculum in social studies, science and mathematics
6. Effectively provides a multi-sensory approach
7. Teaches different ways to write a paragraph
8. Shapes further learning responses through interactive feedback

## Scope of the Program: Skills

1. Contains 4 units
2. Provides writing topics
3. Guides students step by step through paragraph development
4. Focuses on a different kind of paragraph for each unit
5. Provides a computer-assisted approach to teaching writing through specific skills as well as brainstorming, organizing, expanding ideas and revising

## Implementation

### *Plan of Action for Using the Program Integrated with the Curriculum*

1. Suggested allocation of time for using the program
  - a. 2 sessions per week
  - b. 35-40 minutes per session
  - c. 2-3 sessions to complete each writing topic
2. Suggested overview of student sessions
  - a. **First session:** Choosing a topic, brainstorming, pre-writing, writing and organizing
  - b. **Second and third sessions:** Revising, editing, proofreading and publishing
3. Tracking students' work
  - a. checking progress – using the record keeper
  - b. intervening with individual students or the whole class as dictated by work in progress
  - c. using completed work to assess both individual and overall class progress

## Class Time – Preparing Your Students to Use the Punch Program

1. Skills students need to be able to use the program
  - a. write basic sentences
  - b. read and follow directions
  - c. use a computer, type and use a mouse
2. Classroom instruction on writing a paragraph using the Punch process
  - a. pre-writing – brainstorming (spelling not important in this step)
  - b. topic sentence
  - c. body
  - d. organizing
  - e. transition
  - f. concluding sentence
  - g. revising
  - h. proofreading (spellchecker will be available in this step)
  - i. publishing
3. Classroom instruction on the use of the software program – how the program works
  - a. progress bar (shows how far along the student is in the program)
  - b. choosing a topic (13 topics in the series)

- c. prompts (questions to guide student to enter appropriate information; 780 prompts)
- d. input boxes (places for the student to enter his or her own words, phrases or sentences)
- e. tips
  - i) for the student who is not sure of the directions
  - ii) for the student who wants suggestions about what to enter in input boxes
- f. notepads – pre-writing, writing, paragraph (places where student inputs are recorded)
- g. topic sentence and concluding sentences (examples are provided)
- h. revising tools (how to change text, add, remove, move text)

## **Classroom Curriculum Integration**

1. Preparation: Classroom instruction on writing a good paragraph via modeling
  - a. webbing, outlining
  - b. topic sentence
  - c. body
  - d. concluding sentence
2. While using the program: practice and solidification of skills via classroom review
  - a. topic and concluding sentences
  - b. body
  - c. revision
  - d. vocabulary
  - e. connectives (transitional words)
  - f. editing - proper punctuation/usage/capitalization
3. While using the program: classroom follow-up
  - a. Sharing in small groups or with whole class
    - i) editing
    - ii) revision—small group or class suggestions may encourage students to go back to program to use revising tools
    - iii) modeling
      - (1) small group
      - (2) whole class
  - b. Mini-lessons for small groups or whole class
    - i) grammar/usage
    - ii) sentence structure
    - iii) spelling
    - iv) vocabulary/language
    - v) revision
    - vi) topic/supporting/concluding sentences
4. Publishing
  - i) Use completed writing topics to create individual writing portfolios
  - ii) Share portfolios with other students

## Beyond the Program

1. Have students continue with their Merit writing program until they reach *Revising*. Ask them to work in pairs, helping each other as they edit.
2. Have students break into small groups and share their printed writing, telling what they like about each other's writing, and giving any suggestions.
3. Put together a class publication of work done with this program.
4. Trade letters with a partner and edit each other's work.
5. Use the Merit Software Punch process to practice independent writing.
  - a. Have students use the Independent Follow-up Worksheet to work step by step.
  - b. Have students check off steps on the Independent Follow-up Worksheet as they complete them.
6. Use the Merit Writing Assessment to evaluate student skills.
  - a. Meet with students for independent writing conferences whenever possible.
  - b. Point out strengths in their writing.
  - c. Point out how they have improved over time.
  - d. Explain which ideas continue to need improvement.
  - e. Intervene with individual students or with the whole class as needed.
7. Create a bridge from language arts to other real life situations.
  - a. Explain how students may use the Merit Software Punch steps for other written communication.
    - i) Have students work together in small groups.
    - ii) Give group members a writing topic.
    - iii) Have group members work together filling out the Brainstorming Worksheet.
    - iv) Have students return to the Independent Follow-up Worksheet while completing their writing assignment.

## Teacher Orientation to Program Structure or “Anatomy of the Program” *Logging on, Class Management and Course Administration*

All users log on to [www.meritonlinelearning.com](http://www.meritonlinelearning.com) with their user name and password. The system displays each user’s personalized Homepage. Students see their individualized coursework and click on a program unit to start the lesson.

The parent/tutors’ Homepages include tools for adding students. School administrators’ Homepages include tools for creating courses and adding both teachers and students.

### *Business Letter Punch Step by Step*

**INTRODUCTION:** Each unit introduces a specific type of letter -- one that presents reasons (letter of persuasion), details (request letter), facts (letter of complaint or response to a complaint), feelings (social business letter).

**TOPIC:** Students are given several themes and are asked to choose one as the focus of their letter. The program then prompts them to enter the name of their own specific subject, which will become the topic of their letter. For several topics, additional information (for example, a classified ad) appears after the student chooses the topic. When needed later, this additional text may be accessed by pressing the Info button.

**PRE-WRITING:** A Pre-Writing Notepad appears on the screen. Using words or phrases, not sentences, students put their ideas about their chosen theme into the Pre-Writing Notepad. The program provides a series of prompts, to help stimulate the student’s thoughts. Depending on the topic, the student is given three to six pre-writing prompts. The student responds by typing words or phrases in separate input boxes. Then the computer puts the student’s ideas into a list. Tips are available if the student gets stuck.

**WRITING - STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:** The program provides a sample statement of purpose, plus an incomplete statement for students to finish as an exercise. Students then write an original statement of purpose to begin their letter. Next, they look at their statement of purpose together with their pre-writing items and review the items for relevance to the topic sentence.

**WRITING - BODY:** The Pre-Writing Notepad reappears at the beginning of this section. Students choose a word or phrase from the Pre-Writing Notepad and use it in a sentence. They must continue to choose words or phrases to write at least as many sentences as there are pre-writing prompts. The sentences are entered into the Writing Notepad. Students are encouraged to write complete sentences. The sentence must begin with a capital letter, have appropriate end punctuation, and include at least two words.

**ORGANIZING:** In the first step of this section, the Writing Notepad with the student’s sentences appears on the left half of the screen. A Letter Notepad with the student’s statement of purpose occupies the right half of the screen. Students transfer sentences from the Writing Notepad and arrange them in the Letter Notepad, deciding which sentences to use and in which order. All the sentences do not have to be used, but at least three must be chosen for the program to proceed.

In the second step of the Organizing section, students see their work for the first time in paragraph form in the Letter Draft box. From this point on, students may print their work. The printout will show the section of the program from which the work was printed. After seeing their work, students are encouraged to add transitional words here to help the sentences flow smoothly from one thought to the next.

**WRITING - CONCLUSION:** The program provides a sample conclusion, plus an incomplete concluding sentence for students to finish as an exercise. Students then write an original conclusion to their letter.

**REVISING - OVERVIEW:** In Revising - Overview, the Letter Draft appears for review as a whole unit for the first time. The program asks students to check their work and provides prompts to guide them in the use of Add, Edit, Remove, or Move buttons. Paragraph markers separate the

opening from the body, and the body from the conclusion. A prompt will suggest when the student may consider dividing the body into paragraphs, using the final paragraph marker.

**OPTIONS MENU:** The Options Menu contains four subsections: STYLE, SENTENCE STRUCTURE, LANGUAGE AND PROOFREADING. Each subsection contains lessons designed to help students improve their writing. (The record-keeping program notifies the teacher which subsections the student has looked at.)

--**STYLE:** Students are encouraged to review their choice of nouns, verbs and sentence variety. Examples show how changes can make the letter more interesting to read.

--**SENTENCE STRUCTURE:** The program reminds students about common sentence structure problems, such as incomplete sentences, comma faults and parallel structure.

--**LANGUAGE:** Students are encouraged to make sure their sentences are free from overused expressions and repetitions.

--**PROOFREADING:** This is the students' last chance to revisit what they have written and check their spelling. Spell checking is available here as review tool. Students are reminded to reread their work after doing a spell check to make sure it makes sense.

**PUBLISHING:** When students arrive at the Publishing section they are given three choices:

*Review:* Review the revising section again.

*Spell checking:* This is an opportunity to review spelling.

*Save:* This creates a document with the name of the student, program unit, and a unique code so the file will not overwrite existing documents.

After the students' paragraphs are saved, students are presented with these options:

*Print:* Name and date appear at the beginning of the printout.

*Word Processor:* Moves the paragraph to the word processor that was selected in the Teacher Program Manager (TPM).

*New Topic:* Allows students to start a new topic without exiting the program.

**POST PUBLISHED EDITS:** Students can edit their published work from the Post Published Edits tab in the Online Portfolio. From there, in addition to editing their work, students can review previous versions and print their newly updated paragraphs. The paragraph as it was originally published will be preserved both on the Post Published Edits page under the title "Original" and on the Published Paragraph screen.

## **Administrative Tools**

### *Tracking Students' Work*

In addition to student printouts of their work in progress, administrators and teachers may view students' work and print reports from their Homepage.

### *Course Management*

All Merit online applications utilize a centralized student record-keeping/management system. To learn about these advanced functions, see the Merit Online Administration Manager manual.

## Content of Business Letter Punch

Each unit concentrates on a specific type of letter. Here are the topics within each unit:

### Unit 1: PERSUASION

**Topic:** Response to a classified ad - A classified advertisement offers a job that interests you. On the next screen you will see the ad. Read it carefully and write a letter to persuade the company to interview you. (This type of letter usually accompanies a resume but doesn't replace it or provide as much detail.)

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of application telling why you are the right person for the job.

**Topic:** A letter of application - You have heard positive things about a particular company. Although you do not know of a job opening there, you would like to be considered when a suitable position becomes available. Write a letter to the human resources director expressing your interest in working for the company. (This letter would accompany a resume, which provides greater detail.)

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write an unsolicited (unasked for) letter of application to a company telling why you would like to work there.

**Topic:** Inviting former customers to return - You are a customer relations representative for Smart Shoppers, a local department store. A recent review of the store's charge accounts shows that many of them have not been active for more than a year. Write a letter to the holders of these accounts reminding them of the advantages of being a Smart Shoppers charge customer.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter to inactive charge customers reminding them of the benefits of using their accounts.

### Unit 2: REQUEST

**Topic:** Requesting information - Your company is planning to replace some of its office chairs. Write a letter to Corporate Seating, Inc., manufacturers of office furniture, explaining your needs and requesting any information that would help your company make a choice.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of request.

**Topic:** An invitation - As part of a business course or company seminar that you are taking, write a letter to a successful person in the business community asking him/her to visit your group.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of request. Here are some examples of people you could choose: top sales representative, CEO, retail store owner, company vice president, systems analyst, human resources manager.

**Topic:** Requesting permission - Your company, Chandler Corp., is planning a staff softball game and picnic. Write a letter to the Community Parks Department requesting permission to hold this event at a local park.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of request.

### Unit 3: COMPLAINT AND RESPONSE

**Topic:** Complaint to a supplier - Your company has regularly purchased storage boxes for its computer software products from one supplier. Recently orders have not been filled promptly, and deliveries have arrived with an unusual number of broken boxes. Your company is very concerned about this situation. Write a letter to the supplier presenting your company's complaints.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of complaint.

**Topic:** Complaint from an advertiser - Your company recently placed an advertisement in a local paper. The ad included a color photograph of the company's best-selling and most colorful product. The photo was reproduced very poorly. A phone call to the paper has not brought any



satisfaction. Write a letter to the advertising manager of the newspaper presenting your company's complaints.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of complaint.

**Topic:** Supplier's response to a complaint - Assume you are the delivery manager of the company that supplies storage boxes for computer software products. You have received a letter from a regular customer complaining that orders have been late and deliveries have arrived with broken storage boxes. Write a letter in response. The program will provide the explanation(s) you need for your letter.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to reply to a letter of complaint.

**Topic:** Response to an advertiser's letter of complaint - Supplier's response to a complaint - Assume you are the advertising manager of a local newspaper. You have received a letter from a new advertiser complaining about the poor quality of a photograph in her company's recent ad. The photo showed their best-selling and most colorful product. The customer further complained that a phone call she made to the paper had brought no satisfaction. Write a letter in response. The program will provide the explanation(s) you need for your letter.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to reply to a letter of complaint.

#### **Unit 4: SOCIAL BUSINESS**

**Topic:** Congratulations - A co-worker has been promoted to assistant credit manager. Although you were hoping to get this position, write a letter congratulating her/him on the promotion.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of congratulations.

**Topic:** Appreciation - Your manager, Mrs. Gray, has recommended you for a small, select training program. Write a letter to Mrs. Gray expressing your appreciation for this opportunity.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of appreciation.

**Topic:** Praise - You recently helped a co-worker who was assigned to organize your department's monthly report for the first time. You provided copies of previous reports, explained how to find the necessary data, and offered encouragement. Now write a letter complimenting your co-worker on an excellent job.

**Tip:** This topic will give you a chance to write a letter of praise.

## Merit Writing Assessment

Scores from 5 to 1 reflect the range of skills demonstrated in response to each writing assignment.

### SCORE OF 5

A 5 writing assignment is **EXCELLENT**. It demonstrates proficiency in response to the assignment. It contains only a few minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 5:

- is very well organized and developed
- explains a key idea very clearly
- displays variation in types of sentences used
- displays outstanding facility in the use of language, including vocabulary
- is nearly free of errors in mechanics, usage and sentence structure

### SCORE OF 4

A 4 writing assignment is **GOOD**. It demonstrates proficiency in response to the assignment. It may contain a number of minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 4:

- is well organized and developed
- explains a key idea clearly
- provides some variation in types of sentences used
- displays good facility in the use of language and vocabulary
- is generally free of errors in mechanics, usage and sentence structure

### SCORE OF 3

A 3 writing assignment is **COMPETENT**. While it demonstrates some proficiency in response to the assignment, it also needs some improvement. It contains a number of minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 3:

- is adequately organized and developed
- explains a key idea
- displays little variation and some errors in sentences
- displays adequate facility in the use of language
- displays a number of minor errors in mechanics, usage and sentence structure

### SCORE OF 2

A 2 writing assignment is **LIMITED**. It demonstrates minimal proficiency in response to the assignment. It needs much improvement. It contains both major and minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 2:

- is weakly organized and poorly developed
- does not adequately explain a key idea
- shows limited understanding of sentence variety and structure
- displays limited or inappropriate use of language, including limited vocabulary
- displays major and minor errors in mechanics and usage

### SCORE OF 1

A 1 writing assignment is **UNSATISFACTORY**. It demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in response to the assignment. It indicates that the student is struggling to write. It contains major errors that need to be dealt with before the minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 1:

- is not organized and developed
- does not explain a key idea, or goes off-topic
- provides little or no relevant detail
- shows little understanding of sentence structure
- displays inappropriate use of language
- displays many major and minor errors in mechanics, usage and sentence structure

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Group members \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Brainstorming**

Use words or phrases.

Ideas

Supporting Details



**Independent Follow-up Worksheet**  
***Business Letter Punch***

**Circle One: Reasons      Details      Example      Cause and Effects      Sequence**

Use this checklist to guide you through the paragraph writing process. As you begin each writing step, think about what you did in the Business Letter Punch program. You should do your pre-writing and paragraph writing on a word processor or in your writer's notebook.

WRITING TOPIC \ QUESTION (fill in):

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Check the box when you have finished a step.

**PRE-WRITING**

Brainstorm by writing ideas related to your topic. Write only words or phrases.

**WRITING—OPENING SENTENCE**

Write your opening sentence to introduce the subject of your paragraph.

**WRITING—BODY**

Use your pre-writing ideas to write complete sentences.

**ORGANIZING**

Arrange your sentences into a paragraph. Use connecting words (first, also, finally) to help your sentences flow from one to the next.

**WRITING—CLOSING SENTENCE**

Write your closing sentence to summarize the main idea of your paragraph.

**REVISING**

**STYLE**

Check your word choice. Make sure you use specific nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

**SENTENCE STRUCTURE**

Check that you use complete sentences. Make sure to avoid run-on sentences.

**GRAMMAR**

Check that you use commas correctly. Check your punctuation.

**PROOFREADING**

Listen to the flow of your paragraph as you read it out loud. Is there something that doesn't sound right?

Correct capitalization and spelling errors.

**PUBLISHING**