

# Student Competition 2020

## Writing Prompt

### Association for Business Communication

#### On-Call Work Stress

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In response to the following scenario, you must write a persuasive email to your supervisor. Persuasion is the key feature of this email since your supervisor will have to take your message up the chain to an administration that believes they have already solved the problem that you are confronting. Convincing your supervisor to make your case, therefore, means arming them not only with facts but a safe and professional approach.

Pipeline Maintenance (PM) is a 24-hour plumbing business of more than 20 employees serving seven counties in Lower Michigan. Plumbing staff includes nine licensed plumbers—you are one of them—working in three shifts from three sites: 8 AM to 8 PM, 11 AM to 11 PM, and 10:30 PM to 8:30 AM. Seven plumbers are scheduled for two-day shifts; their full-time schedules vary every two weeks. The two nighttime plumbers work staggered shifts: One set works from Monday through Thursday; the second works from Tuesday through Friday. These night pairs have the only set, consistent, and unchangeable schedules.

This arrangement leaves weekend nights unstaffed. PM contracts with other independent plumbers to cover these periods, but those contracts pay per call (\$80.00). Therefore, the contracted plumbers rarely agree to staff the weekend nights. PM's solution is to require the seven daytime plumbers to rotate on-call hours for weekend nights. Every third weekend, a daytime plumber must cover all nighttime calls in their area; the pay is per call (\$80.00). In addition, daytime plumbers must pick up night shifts for the two-night workers during their off times (sickness, vacation, etc.). This is, again, per call pay.

Here's the rub: plumbing team members are worn out and resentful of the on-call requirement. There is a staffing shortage and your team is exhausted from having to pick up the slack. Managers heard the griping and, when one team member left after an emotional scene over her revoked vacation (canceled when her night worker colleague went to the hospital), the problem took on some urgency. The proudly announced solution was to raise the pay grade of the entire plumbing team, which amounted to annual increases of almost seven thousand dollars.

Management implied that their solution was meant to show the plumbers that they were valued ("Your team is the core of our business..."). However, most of the plumbing team saw the increase as failing to address the real problem. Management was obviously tone-deaf, they thought. The long and unpredictable schedules continued, and further, the team was told that backed up sinks were to be added to the list of on-call emergencies.

Which brings this scenario to its objective: As one of the very exhausted, frustrated, and flummoxed plumbers, you would like there to be more salaried plumbing team members so that you could work a finite and reasonable schedule. Your goal with the email message to your supervisor is to present your thoughts and opinions to her in such a way that she will carry them to management.

Compose an email message to your supervisor. Remember your audience and be sure to follow email conventions.