Writing: C1
The changing workplace

Learn how to write about changes in the business workplace.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and tips and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. ...... clerical work
2. ...... mundane
3. ...... volatile
4. ...... menial jobs
5. ...... to entrust to someone
6. ...... critical thinking skills
7. ...... to take the initiative
8. ...... agile

Definitions

a. to assign to someone the responsibility for doing something
b. day-to-day office work like answering phones, typing, filing and entering data into a computer
c. dull; lacking interest or excitement
d. low-status work that does not require much skill to do
e. the ability to analyse facts, assess a situation, apply knowledge and form a judgement
f. able to move quickly and easily
g. likely to change quickly and unpredictably
h. to take action independently, without waiting to be told what to do

What skills will the workforce of the future need?

As technological innovations continue to change the workplace, we are seeing more industries entrust their operations to new gadgets, software and programs that can transform the workplace. One such technology that has the potential to revolutionise workplaces in the coming years is RPA (Robotic Process Automation). With more industries starting to embrace RPA software, RPA robots would be able to handle mundane, repetitive tasks like some of the clerical work normally dealt with by administrative staff, thereby lowering running costs and increasing productivity.

There is a common concern that companies employing technology like RPA are only interested in increasing their profit margins through cost reduction, and that this trend would eventually leave most of the workforce jobless. However, while it is true that the menial tasks of administrative and clerical jobs are likely to be taken over by automation, the demands on the average office worker will evolve to include more creative work, managerial duties and communication with clients and suppliers.

With this shift in focus, the skills required of future workers are also bound to change. Moving away from basic data entry skills, the worker of the future will be expected to have transferable problem-solving and critical thinking skills that will enable them to tackle any difficult situation and work independently to find solutions.

The ability to adapt and be agile would also be essential in a world that is likely to become increasingly volatile, uncertain and complex. Having such flexibility, coupled with the desire to keep learning and the initiative to step forward, the successful worker of the future is one who will be able to use their skills to seek out opportunities, make improvements and take on new challenges wherever they'll be working.

By equipping our future generation of workers with such business skills, we can ensure that when automation fully takes over, our workers will have the survival skills to become better employees and leaders of the future.

....

Tips

1. It is helpful to start with a more general statement before narrowing it down to talking about a specific example, e.g. *technological advancements will continue to change the workplace → one such technology is RPA.*

2. Use clauses to show if a change is going to happen:
   - over a period of time, e.g. *As technological innovations continue to change the workplace, … / With more industries starting to embrace RPA software, …*
   - at some point in the future, e.g. *when automation fully takes over, …*

3. Connect new paragraphs to what was previously written in order to achieve better cohesion, e.g. *With this shift in focus, … / The ability to adapt and be agile would also be essential … / By equipping our future generation of workers with such business skills, …*

4. When talking about future trends, use a variety of phrases to show the different levels of probability of things happening, e.g. *to be likely to, to have the potential to, to be expected to, to be bound to.*

5. Conclude with a summary of the main points of your article.

Tasks

Task 1
Are the sentences true or false?

		Answer	
1.	RPA technology has not been developed yet.	True	False
2.	Some people fear that RPA will lead to unemployment.	True	False
3.	The article argues that RPA will change the nature of the work that workers do.	True	False
4.	Workers of the future will need to be equally competent at both basic clerical duties and higher-level problem-solving and critical thinking.	True	False
5.	Flexibility is another skill that will be in demand.	True	False
6.	If workers can develop these skills, companies won't need to implement RPA in the future.	True	False

Task 2
Choose the correct answer.

1. Following this general sentence, which sentence then narrows it down to a more specific example? 'The successful worker of the future is one who has a range of business skills that they can apply to any job they undertake.'
   a. They are workers who are not afraid of technological advances.
   b. And they will be successful, regardless of the job they choose.
   c. One such skill is the ability to solve problems and think critically.
   d. But the future is unpredictable and does not guarantee success.
2. Following this general sentence, which sentence then narrows it down to a more specific example? 'RPA could bring numerous benefits to industries that embrace it.'
   a. On the other hand, its drawbacks should also be borne in mind.
   b. Indeed, many industries have already begun to implement RPA.
   c. Perhaps the greatest of these is the cost saving from automating repetitive jobs.
   d. As a result, it will be almost indispensable for the companies of the future.
3. Which sentence mentions the time that an action will occur?
   a. RPA robots would be able to handle mundane, repetitive tasks, thereby lowering costs and increasing productivity.
   b. There is a common concern that companies employing RPA technology are only interested in cost reduction.
   c. We should ensure that when automation fully takes over, our workers will have the skills to become better employees and leaders of the future.
   d. Menial tasks are likely to be taken over by automation.

4. Which sentence does NOT mention the time that an action will occur?
    a. When robots take over our work, we will have to step up into more managerial jobs.
    b. Because of RPA, clerical jobs might become obsolete.
    c. While some industries are still debating the pros and cons of RPA, we should start developing business skills that will make us better leaders.
    d. As more and more companies turn to robots to do menial tasks, people without desirable business skills will lose their jobs.

5. 'There is concern that RPA could replace all of our jobs. Focusing on such concerns could potentially stop us from exploring the advantages of RPA.' Which word in the second sentence connects it to the first?
    a. focusing
    b. such
    c. potentially
    d. advantages

6. 'Workers of the future will be expected to have problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Those will enable them to tackle any difficult situation and work independently to find solutions.' Which word or words in the second sentence connect it to the first?
    a. those and them
    b. any
    c. work independently
    d. find solutions

7. Which of the following phrases suggests the highest probability that something will happen?
    a. It is expected to happen.
    b. It is likely to happen.
    c. It has the potential to happen.
    d. It is bound to happen.

8. Which of the following phrases suggests the lowest probability that something will happen?
    a. It is expected to happen.
    b. It is likely to happen.
    c. It has the potential to happen.
    d. It is bound to happen.

Task 3

Put the words in the correct order to make sentences.

1. RPA   has the potential   reduce costs and   increase productivity.   to help   us

2. to include   will evolve   more creative work.   The responsibilities   of   the average office worker

3. robots will   It is   take over   that   likely   the more menial tasks.

4. the future   The workplace   is bound   to change.   of

5. will be done.   are   the way work   Robots   to revolutionise   expected

6. their creativity and   want to succeed   who   critical thinking skills.   will be developing   Those

Discussion

How do you think the workplace of the future might change? What business skills do you think will be necessary for the worker of the future to be successful?

Answers

Preparation task
1. b
2. c
3. g
4. d
5. a
6. e
7. h
8. f

Task 1
1. False
2. True
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. False

Task 2
1. c
2. c
3. c
4. b
5. b
6. a
7. d
8. c

Task 3
1. RPA has the potential to help us reduce costs and increase productivity.
2. The responsibilities of the average office worker will evolve to include more creative work.
3. It is likely that robots will take over the more menial tasks
4. The workplace of the future is bound to change
5. Robots are expected to revolutionise the way work will be done.
6. Those who want to succeed will be developing their creativity and critical thinking skills.