

# Mastering Workplace Writing



Teacher's Guide

## INTRODUCTION

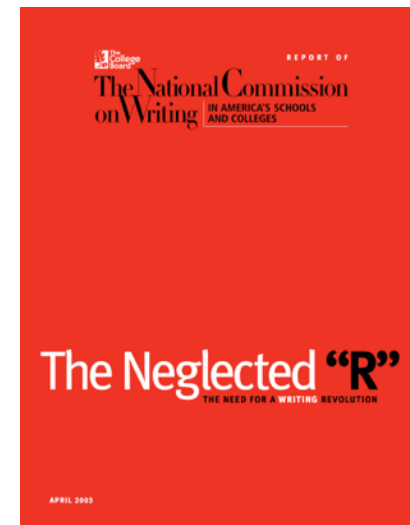
🕒 Reading time for intro approx. 9 minutes

We hope our textbook helps you teach more useful, specific writing and thinking techniques to your students, techniques they'll be able to use for a lifetime, whether you follow a syllabus like the one we provide at the end of this guide or bring the techniques in our book to your own syllabus.

### *The issue*

According to the National Commission on Writing (NCW),

**American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge....Both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years....Of the three “Rs,” writing is clearly the most neglected. (The Neglected “R” *The Need for a Writing Revolution* )**



[Click here to read the report at CollegeBoard.com](#)

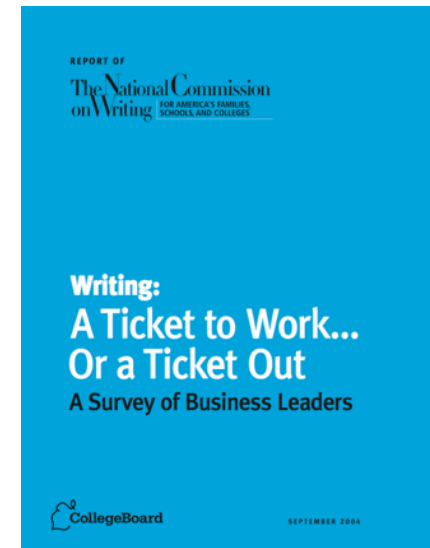
In a large study of businesses, the NCW found that “**a significant proportion of responding firms...report that one-third or fewer of their employees, both current and new, possess the writing skills companies value.**” (Writing: A Ticket to Work... Or a Ticket Out *A Survey of Business Leaders*)

In our 30+ years of writing consulting in the profit and non-profit sectors—including such places as NASA, the GAO, KPMG, the Army Research Lab, Catholic Charities, the U.S. Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, and Labor, JMT Engineering, and many others—we find that recent college graduates do not have the workplace writing skills they need to excel at work.

The NCW reports that, “**Based on our survey responses, it appears that remedying deficiencies in writing may cost American firms as much as \$3.1 billion annually.**” (Ibid)

The simple truth is that **the writing instruction students receive in college is not adequately preparing them for the workplace.**

Why not?



 [Click here to read the report at CollegeBoard.com](#)

We believe college students learn a set of writing skills that help them write for teachers, skills that do not translate very well into effective workplace writing for a variety of reasons. Courses in business/technical writing emphasize what we call **the genre approach**—having students write email, letters, reports, as well as blogs, and posts on various social media to no real reader who actually needs the information. This practice is not helpful.

At work, **students are never able to plug-and-play using these generic formats**, which they practiced once or twice in class. They need critical thinking and writing tools they can apply to any workplace situation.

Furthermore, students spend less than 40 hours in class in a given semester-long writing class. A quick look at the contents of the best-selling business-writing textbooks reveals a diverse range of subject matter, including team-building skills, interpersonal communication, how to run a business meeting, intercultural writing, writing for electronic and social media, the standard good-news messages, bad-news messages, the proposal, the analytical report, the résumé, etc. Wedged between these chapters is usually a brief discussion of the writing process in which students are told to PLAN/DRAFT/REVISE.





The traditional business-writing course goes an inch deep and a mile wide trying to expose students to the kinds of writing that are done in today's workplace. One of the biggest problems with this approach is that students usually don't write to real people who actually need the information. Instead they write to imaginary people in imaginary situations as part of a case study. The teacher is rarely the true audience—the one who truly needs the information for practical reasons. **We believe strongly that students must write to real readers who need the information.**

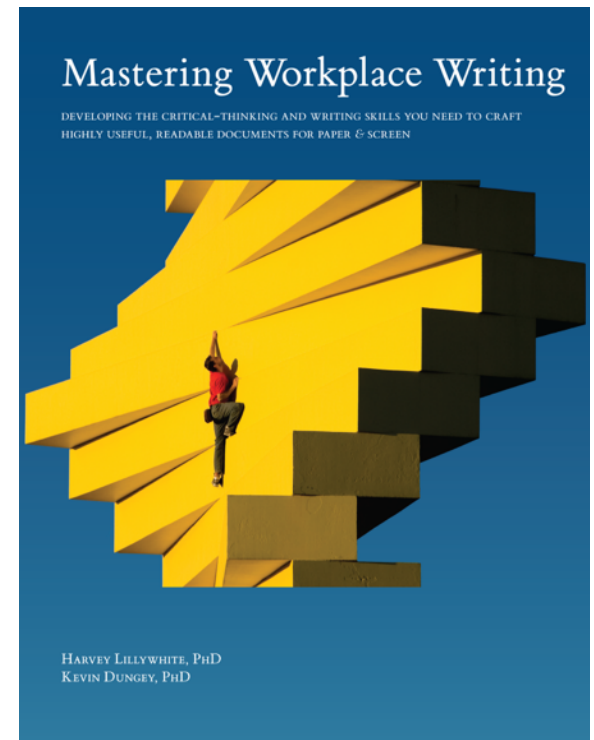


Our consulting experience has proven to us that this traditional approach to business writing does not equip students with the critical-thinking and writing tools they must master so they can apply them in any workplace situation. To write well in the digital age, students need the basics. Not the old basics, but **the new basics** for communicating in what Seth Godin calls today's "connection economy."

## Our Solution

*Mastering Workplace Writing* (MWW) acknowledges the brief time we teachers get to work with students in a semester. It focuses on actual critical-thinking and writing skills and insists that students write to real readers who are truly interested in the information. We have found it's more successful to teach a few foundational content-generating and message-presentation skills that will work for students no matter what they need to write, print or electronic documents. We think of workplace writing as a few simple principles relentlessly applied.

**What a marvelous opportunity we have to work on “writing” with this first generation of college-age DIGITAL NATIVES.** Let's admit that our students are way ahead of most of us (non-digital-native teachers) when it comes to communicating in words digitally. Instead of getting in their way by insisting on 20<sup>th</sup>-century writing concepts, which were great in their day, let's adapt those old basics to show students how to harness their digital communication skills to meet the demands of any workplace in the new connection economy.



Before we explain the layout of MWW and give you some ideas for using the material with your students in your writing class, we want to comment on our outlook and approach.

### **How can we equip students to write well in the digital age?**

That question, in part, led to this book, which is our answer.

As we've said, students spend about one work week (40 hours) sitting in any semester-long writing class. Instead of exposing them just a little to various workplace-writing situations, it's more productive to focus on a few indispensable critical-thinking and writing principles. We call these "the new basics."

We think it's best to teach writing the way golf professionals teach golf...isolate each of its fundamental parts and teach students the skills to manage each of them. Thus we developed our systems approach to writing.



Wherever they work after college, students who learn specific

- content-development,
- document-design, and
- presentation skills

will be better prepared to do well than students who simply mimic workplace writing by doing generic business-writing forms for an imaginary reader.

**We hope you're inspired by what you'll discover in this book** and excited about giving your students the new basic workplace writing skill set...what Edward Tufte calls “forever knowledge.”



Edward Tufte

“The idea of trying to create things that last — forever knowledge— has guided my work for a long time now.”



## OUR PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH IS READER-FOCUSED & REQUIRES REAL READERS

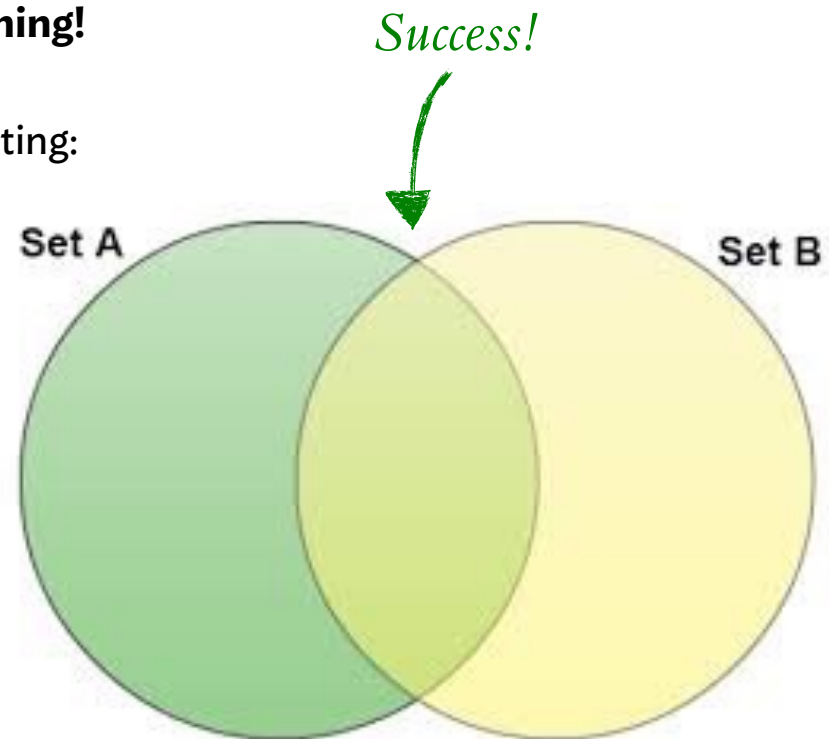
**The space between the writer and reader is everything!**

This Venn diagram illustrates success in workplace writing:

Set A is all the informational content a writer can give a reader about a particular issue. Set B is all the informational content the reader needs. The intersection of A and B defines success.

Obviously the goal is to have the two circles overlap...which would be total success.

**MWW emphasizes teaching students 1) to generate CONTENT that is truly successful, useful for the real reader who actually needs the information in a workplace document, and 2) to present that useful CONTENT well.**

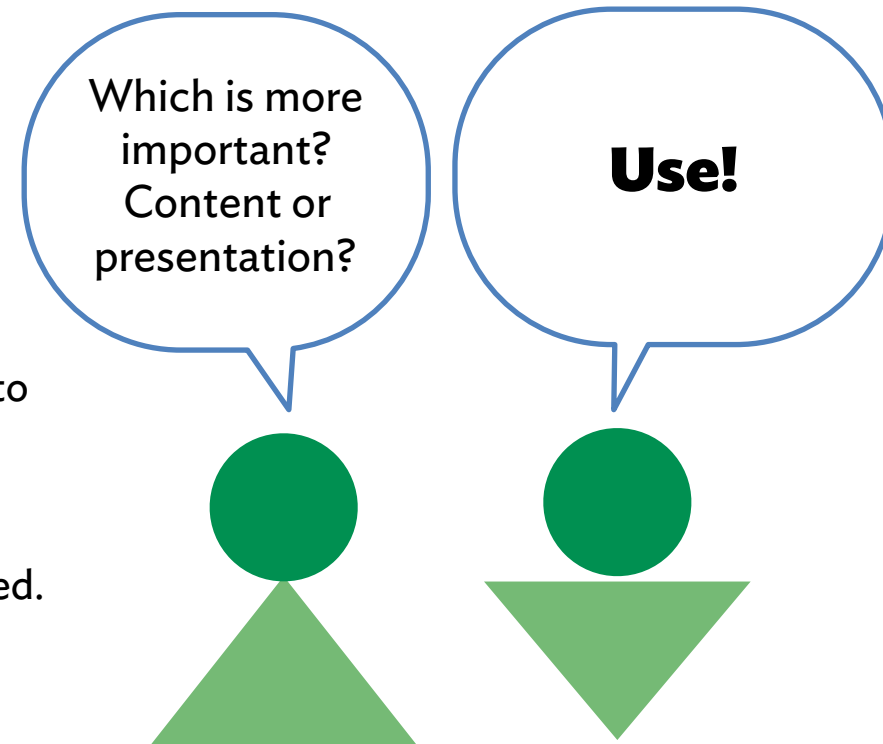


We might describe our pedagogy this way: MWW promotes a modular, radically reader-focused, interrogative, criteria-based rhetorical approach to workplace writing that helps students acquire the competency to **generate useful content for real readers** in any workplace situation, as well as presentation skills that **make that content highly readable** no matter what workplace genre or mode is used to convey the information.

Simply put, we need students to understand what makes workplace writing successful and then teach them to succeed.

The goal of any workplace writer is always to **design a reading experience** that keeps the reader's *level of interest* as high as possible and the *level of effort* as low as possible.

Whatever writing process students feel most comfortable using, **our approach teaches writers to isolate each of the main aspects of any document**, whether it's print or electronic, and to learn specific techniques for managing each aspect.



In learning **the new basics**, your students will learn to isolate

- **Content:** to make sure they know how to develop truly successful information that keeps the real reader's *level of interest* as high as possible—remember the Venn diagram;
- **Organization:** to provide a logical, message-first structure;
- **Document Design:** to make information easy to visualize and grasp; and
- **The Fundamentals of Style:** (paragraphing, sentences, word choices, and mechanics) to develop message presentation that keeps the reader's *level of effort* as low as possible.



## Here's a snapshot of our approach.

### *Mastering Workplace Writing (MWW)*

**MWW's skill-building is summarized in five steps that connect a writer's need to write to a reader's need to know, allowing writers to create and present truly useful, readable content that's creative, strategic, and focused.**



01	02	03	04	05
<b>CONNECT</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>	<b>SUPPORT</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>
KNOW THE ISSUE	FIND READER-QUESTIONS	ANSWER READER-QUESTIONS	SUPPORT BIG ANSWERS	DESIGN THE DOCUMENT
Understand the specific reasons why your reader needs you to write: this situation, positive or negative, is the <b>ISSUE</b> —the area of shared interest that connects your reader with you.	Factor this issue into all the pertinent <b>QUESTIONS</b> your reader should have about it and make a quick reader-question outline.	Use your expertise and experience or do research to find answers to every reader-question. These answers will generate the <b>CONTENT</b> of your document.	Consider what follow-up questions your reader will have about the main answers and address them as required to offer <b>SUPPORT</b> .	<b>PRESENT</b> information on screen or page in a manner that keeps your reader's level of effort as low as possible and the level of interest as high as possible.



MWW presents these critical-thinking and writing concepts and skills by focusing on the Higher and Lower Order Concerns from top to bottom.

**HOCs** are Higher Order Concerns and **LOCs** are Lower Order Concerns. Our formulation of HOCs and LOCs is original. *It predates and differs from other approaches that mention higher and lower order concerns as they apply to tutorial practice in university writing labs, practices that derive from the incomparable Muriel Harris' early work with college writing labs—you can see this version published on such helpful sites as Purdue's On-line Writing Lab—OWL. (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/690/01/>).*

We invented our HOCs and LOCs approach to teaching writing in the mid 80s working both for the GAO (Government Accountability Office) and developing an award-winning watershed plain English course for 8,000 adjudicators in 1995 at the Veteran's Benefits Administration, called *Reader-Focused Writing Skills*. (Read about the history of our course, especially page 10: <http://education.illinois.edu/CIRCE/RFW/2history.pdf>) We've been refining this approach successfully since then in our writing consulting practice and in undergrad and grad classes at Johns Hopkins University and Towson University, in-person and on-line.

## 7 Systems that Affect Usefulness & Readability

### HIGHER ORDER CONCERNS

1. CONTENT
2. ORGANIZATION
3. DOCUMENT DESIGN

### LOWER ORDER CONCERNS

4. PARAGRAPHS
5. SENTENCES
6. WORD CHOICES
7. MECHANICS



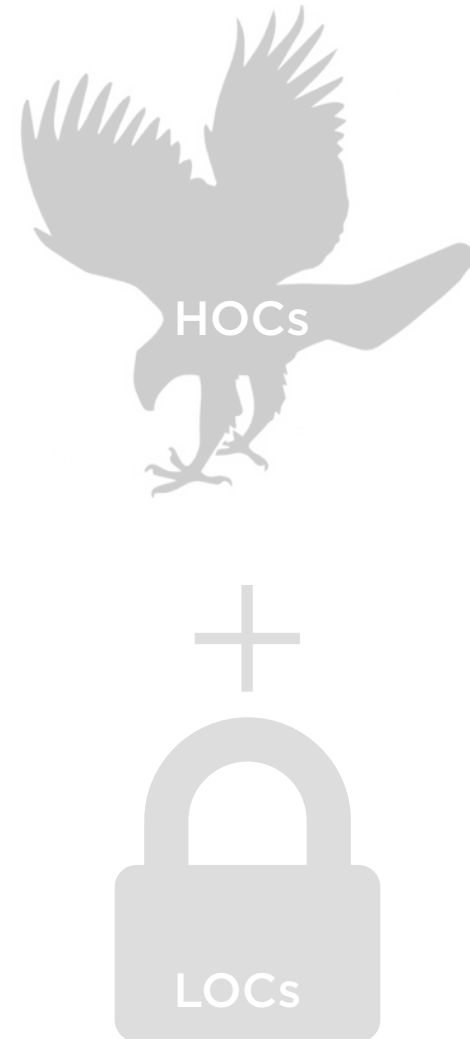
**Our HOCs and LOCs formulation is a “systems approach” to writing.** We identify 7 systems within any text that affect usefulness and readability.

**The HOCs (Higher Order Concerns) include**

1. CONTENT
2. ORGANIZATION
3. DOCUMENT DESIGN

**The LOCs (Lower Order Concerns) include** the elements we usually think of when we consider style:

4. PARAGRAPHS
5. SENTENCES
6. WORD CHOICES
7. MECHANICS



**MWW conveys these 7 systems as a complementary set of concepts/skills—the new basics—so students can isolate, understand, and control all aspects of their writing.**

For instance, here's a glimpse of one system, CONTENT:

Most of us think CONTENT = information—the facts and particulars we put in our documents; however, we recognize that the system we call **CONTENT** actually has 4 parts that need to be isolated and understood:

1. The **CONTENT** in a workplace doc (print or electronic, textual or multi-modal) emanates from an **ISSUE** (an area of shared interest that couples the writer and reader—the reason the writer writes and the reader reads), which is the origin of content.
2. When the writer grasps the **ISSUE**, she can generate a set of reader-questions about that **ISSUE** that will accord with the reader's needs. The set of **READER QUESTIONS**, the second part of content, serves as the catalyst for discovering useful information for the reader.

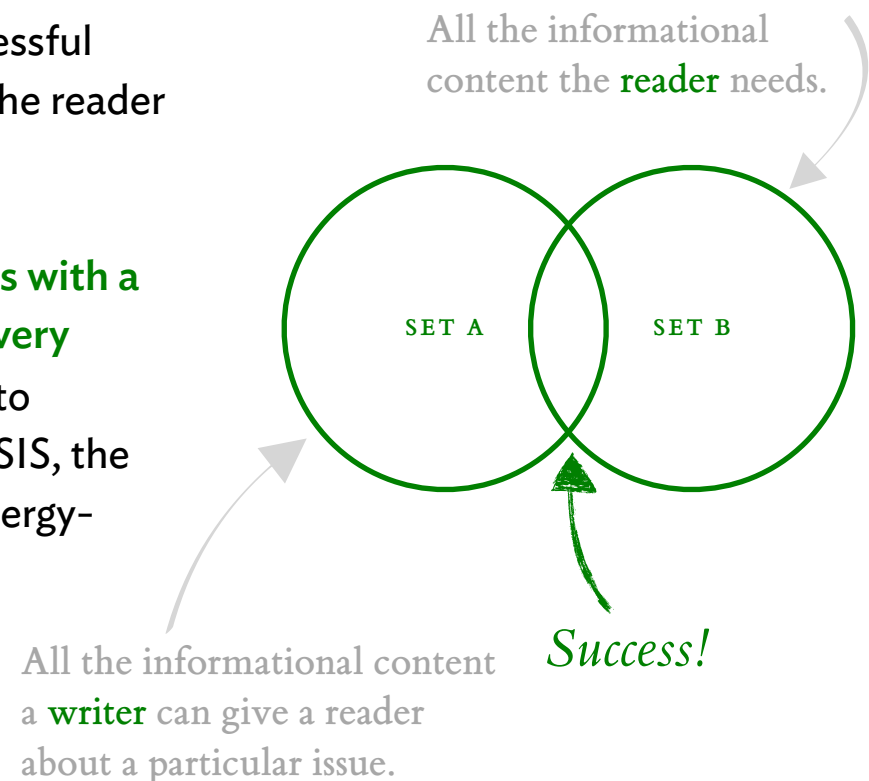


3. The writer can then do whatever research is needed to provide **ANSWERS** for each of the questions, the third part of content. The answers are the information the writer must render to meet the reader's needs.
4. Finally, the writer can develop **SUPPORT** for each answer as required, the fourth part of content. The support turns out to be smaller related reader-questions and their answers.



The earliest rhetoricians (Aristotle, Hermagoras, Quintilian...) called this dynamic invention strategy **STASIS** (στάσις). Communication, written or spoken, is complete and successful only when the information going out meets the needs of the reader coming in...success! (Recall the Venn diagram.)

**In our view, every client or customer comes to a business with a question, which can be stated as, “Can you help me?” Every business must be a fulfillment center.** The same applies to workplace communication—written and oral. This is STASIS, the heart of the HOCs and LOCs approach. (Dynamic and energy-filled, STASIS originally referred to a boxer's stance, his “standing.”)





**We know it's crucial to have students write to a real person about a real issue for every assignment (not just to a teacher or phantom reader).** This person should, ideally, have some say in the grading process (did the writing meet his/her needs?).

You, the teacher, **can be** that real person **if** you assign students to research and write about **a real issue for you**. (Which is the best laptop for your needs? Should you buy an all-electric car? What hotel should you stay in when you visit Kansas City? Who makes the best fitness tracker? What can you get with 10 books of Green Stamps? To be healthy, do you need to exercise 30 minutes straight every day or will three 10-minute workouts be as beneficial? Or any other **real** issue you actually need to know about.)

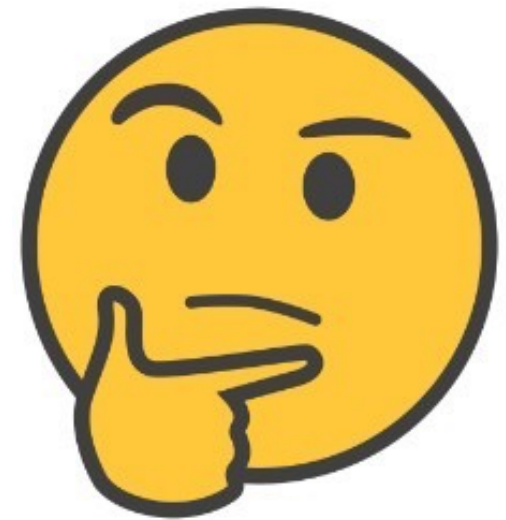
Students **can** write to other students in the class (as long as the issue is **real**—not something fabricated for class but truly an issue for the reader). Students can do “service learning” projects for someone outside the college.



**We dislike faked “case studies.”** Sometimes they’re all we can muster, but there’s no replacement for having students write to a real-live soul about a real-live issue. **Having students write from their true areas of interest/experience/expertise to a reader with a real issue is the best possible situation.** After all, that’s what will happen at work!

### **TEACHING WORKPLACE WRITING THIS WAY ENHANCES CRITICAL THINKING AND ALLOWS STUDENTS TO BETTER CONTROL THEIR WRITING**

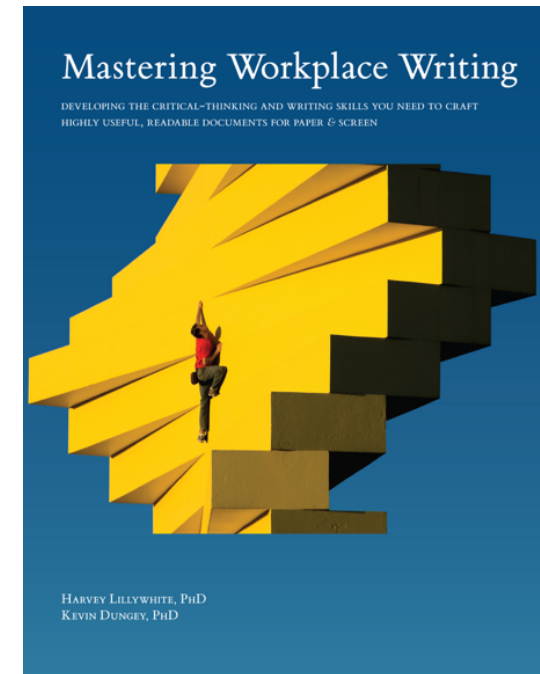
As we mentioned, in 30+ years of successful writing training in the public and private sectors we’ve seen employers frustrated by college grads who can’t write well. The crisis is usually mischaracterized as shaky command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. But that’s the lowest of the low-hanging fruit. **The main problem is their difficulty generating useful content, engaging real readers who have real needs.** This is a skill that’s hard to practice in college where students usually write in an artificial situation, **writing for teachers** who don’t truly need the information to make concrete decisions or accomplish a necessary task (beyond grading).



**Most students don't have a strong skill set to discover, organize, design, and present the information the workplace reader needs.**

Clearly these issues transcend a vague familiarity with generic workplace formats whether they are simple email, memos, letters, reports, or tweets, posts on blogs or social media, or infographics. **Students must write for real readers with real needs, anything else is shadowboxing, at best.** While we teachers might be excited to have students practice writing the newest e-forms of writing, **writing is always just writing** and critical thinking is just critical thinking.

In MWW, we aim to put the “writing” back in business and technical writing. We use the term “workplace” writing because the writing skills apply as much to so-called *technical writers* as they do to their counterparts, so-called *business writers*. We've taught these skills to engineers and clerks, secretaries and audit supervisors, to IT workers and budget analysts, marketing specialists, social workers, law enforcement professionals, legislative aids, students in many majors and grad programs, among others. They apply universally. They are a matter of common sense, and they work...a few simple principles relentlessly applied. These are the “new basics.”



THE  
NEW  
BASICS

## MWW IS EASY TO USE...HERE'S AN OVERVIEW

MWW's brief introduction (p11) reminds students that writing is still important in the workplace, an essential, gateway skill they need to develop. (You might have them read the reports from the NCW cited above.) The Introduction lists **seven learning outcomes for developing message soundness and another seven learning outcomes for learning message presentation**—the skills workplace writers need to learn (p13). You might ask students at this point to write 300 words explaining to you what critical-thinking and writing strengths and weaknesses they think they have. (We use this quick assignment as an ungraded writing sample to identify any students who may need to spend time in the Writing Lab gaining remedial skills.) Discuss the results with the class.

**The HOCs and LOCs paradigm is discussed in chapter one. In subsequent chapters, each of the HOCs and LOCs systems is discussed separately** so you can isolate a specific skill at any time in the class and have students read any of the HOCs and LOCs chapters in any order. However, we begin with CONTENT, the highest order concern for good reasons. If students lack the ability to discover useful content, other writing skills are unimportant.

### Learning Outcomes

The instruction and assignments in this book are intended to teach you a set of useful workplace writing skills. First you need to learn the ideas/concepts/skills, and then you need to practice them to write effective documents. Your fluency as a workplace writer depends on demonstrating your mastery of the following learning outcomes for a REAL READER (defined as a person or group for whom the *content* of the document is actually important, for whom the information will serve as instrumental knowledge to help them act—not a teacher):

#### Message Soundness (develop sound content)

1. Identify an *ISSUE* (an area of *SHARED INTEREST* between a *real reader/user* and writer);
2. Generate appropriate researchable questions to successfully assess the *ISSUE* (question factoring);
3. Develop an appropriate methodology for generating useful information;
4. Develop appropriate criteria to use as standards for analysis;
5. Research the questions to get the information (compile information);
6. Answer questions;
7. Support the answers with appropriate information and compelling evidence;

#### Message Presentation (present information clearly, concisely, and correctly)

8. Organize a document deductively (message first, then the supporting details);
9. Apply document design principles to increase readability;
10. Use format conventions for memos, email, letters, and reports, and other e-docs;
11. Develop unified and coherent deductive paragraphs;
12. Craft sentences that have a strong sentence core and appropriate diction;
13. Follow *APA*, *MLA*, *CHICAGO*, *AP*, or other required style;
14. Adhere to appropriate conventions for grammar, punctuation, and spelling.



Once a student grasps the idea of **understanding an issue so he can determine the reader's questions and answer them** through research, expertise, or experience, the student can develop successful content that keeps the reader's level of interest as high as possible and can then move on to matters of presentation: how that information can be organized to benefit the reader, how a print or e-doc can be designed, and how to manage the various aspects of style to keep the reader's level of effort as low as possible.

- Each chapter begins with an **OVERVIEW** of its content, ending with **BULLET POINTS** that become the **MAJOR HEADINGS** throughout the rest of the chapter.
- Chapters conclude with a **RECAP** of the main ideas.
- At the end of each chapter we've provided **APPLICATIONS** that can serve as thinking and writing assignments. We also include a **COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY** for most chapters.



We provide brief APPENDICES to cover the more standard business or technical writing genres. These are meant to begin a discussion of such genres and not to be definitive. **The appendices include the following:**

- A. Writer's Guide to Punctuation and Grammar
- B. Writing Memos, Texts, and Email
- C. Writing Business Letters
- D. Writing Reports
- E. Writing Résumés and Job Letters
- F. Giving Oral Presentations

(We have not discussed skills needed to create graphics of all kinds. We recognize how critical this aspect of communication is and suggest existing books and online sources that cover this area better than we could. These titles can be found in our list of suggested reading at the end of the book.)

We provide a sample syllabus with a list of weekly activities and assignments at the end of this guide, as well as a grading rubric...we encourage you to use your own.

We offer our website, **QCGwrite.com**, as a developing forum to discuss the teaching of workplace writing. We look forward to addressing any questions, comments, or concerns you may have while using MWW. If you have an idea for a guest-blog post, let us know...we'd love to consider posting it. We hope we never stop learning how to improve our students' workplace writing skills.

**The rest of this Teacher's Guide traces main concepts for each chapter and suggests approaches to covering the material.**

**Note** that in **MWW** each chapter begins with an overview of that subject matter, ending in bullet points, which become the main topics throughout the rest of that chapter. In the **Teacher's Guide**, we begin the discussion of each chapter with that same overview, ending in bullet points. The Guide then discusses each of those topics.



## Chapter One

# THE HOCs AND LOCs PARADIGM

The reader is everything. That is the simplest truth about business writing. Writers must serve the needs of their readers. Workplace writers should work hard so their readers don't have to. Documents must be, above all, **useful** to the reader and **highly readable**.

This chapter discusses how writing works, how the reader processes writing, and how you can deliver messages clearly and efficiently. It defines what makes writing useful and readable. Finally, it introduces what we call the HOCs & LOCs paradigm for workplace writing (HOCs stands for *Higher Order Concerns* and LOCs stands for *Lower Order Concerns*). This model acknowledges that writing is a process from message-seeking drafts to message-driven final documents. It allows writers first to concentrate on formulating the HOCs—message, organization, and document design—before polishing the LOCs—paragraphs, sentences, grammar, and mechanics.

### *The HOCs & LOCs Paradigm*

17

#### Helping Readers Read—A Model for Success

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In this chapter you will learn to

- think first of the reader's needs,
- define and ensure usefulness and readability,
- understand the HOCs & LOCs paradigm of writing, and
- distinguish between message-soundness and message-presentation.

*Workplace writers should work hard so their readers don't have to.*

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### THINK FIRST OF THE READER'S NEEDS (P17)

When teaching this chapter, emphasize that developing **useful content** is the North Star of workplace writing. Show them how content starts with an **ISSUE** and is generated from the reader's necessary questions about that issue. Be sure to show them the Venn diagram of success.

**Here's one (perhaps extreme) example of how I've demonstrated that content arises from issues and the ensuing questions.** I stand before the class on the first day without saying anything. Soon the silence becomes awkward. So I ask the students why they've come to this room. (To take a class.) I ask them if they have any questions they'd like to ask me. (The questions come... reluctantly at first—are you the teacher? Yes I am.) I ask them if there are any other questions. Then the more important questions



come: Is this business writing? Is there a syllabus?

(I say there is but that I'd rather wait until the end of class to hand it out because I want to answer their questions about the course first.) Is there a text? What assignments do we have to do? How are we graded? Is attendance required? I respond. If there's a lull, I ask if that's all the questions. I remind them that I'm not there to tell them what to do and they're not there just to follow directions. More questions come. Within 30 minutes, I've written key points about the class and how it will run on the whiteboard. It starts to look like a syllabus. Then I pass out the syllabus. I give them a few minutes to read it. Any other questions?



At the end of this process, I make them aware that the **CONTENT** for that first day's class was completely generated by an issue (we have a class to take and need to know what we have to do and what we'll be held responsible for) and the ensuing questions about that issue (all the content on the syllabus). I explain that the number one thing they have to learn is that **CONTENT** in any kind of communication is about an issue and is generated by the questions that need to be asked about that issue. The answers to those questions and further answers to follow-up questions create the **CONTENT** that a workplace document—whether it's printed or electronic, no matter what genre—must deliver to the reader, who, I explain, is better thought of as a **USER** (of the information).



By the way, the syllabus itself is a great example of a workplace document. Finally, I ask the class if they agree with this idea? Can they imagine any exceptions? They may offer some possibilities (a short tweet or text: “I’m at Starbucks.”). But we see how even a short text telling buddies where you are for the next 15 minutes comes from an issue and the questions that derive from that issue: ISSUE: I need to know where X is at all times. QUESTION: Where will you be for the next 15 minutes? If nobody cares about the issue or the issue-question(s), there’s no communication—just more factoids launched into the textosphere.

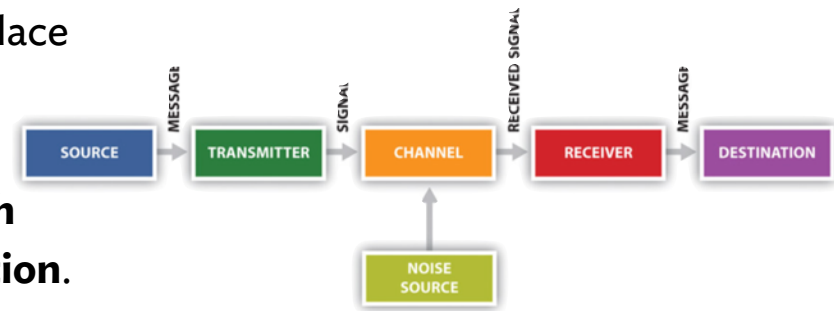
Concoct your own demonstration. Application #6 (p.31) is a good way to demonstrate this foundational concept. **Until students grasp the idea that CONTENT is NOT just a matter of following directions, of learning stuff and spewing it back, they won’t be sensitive workplace writers who know how to give the reader what he or she needs.**

Chapter one shows how this question/answer activity is the essence of any conversation and what a workplace writer does is simulate a conversation with the reader. **The key point here is that writing is a dialog, not a monolog.**



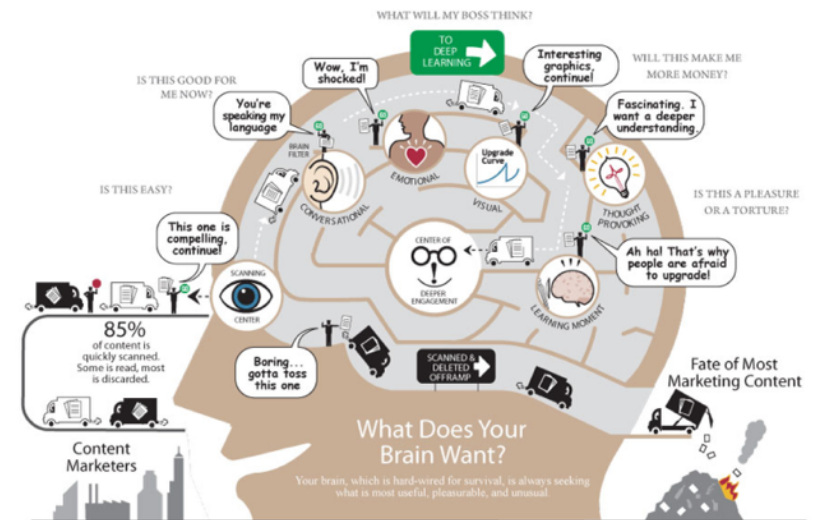
## DEFINE AND ENSURE USEFULNESS AND READABILITY (P22)

This section discusses the question of readability. It mentions the traditional Transmission Model of Communication, which most students already have seen and believe it defines communication. We take issue with this model. (The following site is a good place to start with problems in this model: <http://www.sltinfo.com/problems-with-the-encode-decode-model/>.) Chapter one, however, tells students that **a simple conversation is a much richer and more productive model of human communication**. Talk to the class. See if they agree.



## UNDERSTAND THE HOCs & LOCs PARADIGM OF WRITING (P25)

This section pivots to how people actually read. This discussion leads to the HOCs and LOCs systems model. Readers who confront any document are met by all seven systems simultaneously as they read. They read for content, but are influenced by the questions that are actually answered, how the information is organized and physically presented on the page or screen, and by the style in all its aspects (paragraphing, sentence structure, diction, and even mechanics).



**Establishing the HOCs and LOCs systems model for any document allows students to SEE what they must control as they write** to keep the reader's level of interest as high as possible and her level of effort as low as possible. It also sets up the chapters in the rest of the textbook.

### **DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MESSAGE-SOUNDNESS AND MESSAGE-PRESENTATION (P28)**

Finally, this section ends the chapter by quickly differentiating between **message soundness** and **message presentation**. Students tend to think “writing” is all about presentation skills. But generating sound messages (we call it “useful content”) is a HUGE part of writing. We hope students are at least mildly excited at the prospect of learning how to develop content.

So many students say one of their biggest writing challenges is writer's block, not knowing “what to say” or “where to start.” Identifying an issue and generating the necessary list of issue-questions is the best way to deal with writer's block.



**CONTENT IS KING**

Students assume that *business writing* means learning prescribed formats and an elevated, “professional” writing style. Quash those mistaken assumptions. Tell them workplace writing is 90% about content. (The way a cargo ship is 90% about the cargo.) That’s what readers care about. But the other 10%, the presentation of the message, which should be as transparent as possible, can ruin the whole document if it’s flawed.



We provide 6 applications at the end of the chapter. I don’t expect students to do them all in my classes, but they could. I pick the one or a couple that I have students do. Application number 2 (p30) opens a lot of students’ eyes about how important writing actually will be for them in the field they hope to enter. That’s an assignment I recommend highly. Some of the applications can be done in class in groups or as class discussions.

## Chapter two

# CONTENT

Effective workplace writing focuses on and serves the reader by presenting information the reader will find truly useful. To say it plainly, if the reader doesn't find the information you present useful, then it's . . . useless!

For this to happen, you must present an issue, which we define simply as an area of shared interest between you and your reader(s). Above all, effective workplace writing must be issue-driven writing. You need to know all you can about this issue so you can be helpful to the reader. Your workplace document, long or short, must let the reader know first what you're writing about (the issue) and why your reader should care. This will allow your reader, who may wish to be dismissive of workplace documents that ask for her attention, to understand what's in it for her and thus to be interested. You then generate the content for your document by anticipating and answering her questions about this issue. The answers to the reader's questions (about the issue that prompted the workplace document) are the primary elements that generate useful content.

### Content

33

#### Generating Content for Workplace Documents by Anticipating and Answering Your Reader's Questions about the Issue

EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE WRITING FOCUSES on and serves the reader by presenting information the reader will find truly useful. To say it plainly, if the reader doesn't find the information you present useful, then it's . . . useless!

For this to happen, you must present an issue, which we define simply as an area of shared interest between you and your reader(s). Above all, effective workplace writing must be issue-driven writing. You need to know all you can about this issue so you can be helpful to the reader. Your workplace document, long or short, must let the reader know first what you're writing about (the issue) and why your reader should care. This will allow your reader, who may wish to be dismissive of workplace documents that ask for her attention, to understand what's in it for her and thus to be interested. You then generate the content for your document by anticipating and answering her questions about this issue. The answers to the reader's questions (about the issue that prompted the workplace document) are the primary elements that generate useful content.

In this chapter, you'll learn to

- show that CONTENT originates in an ISSUE.
- explain content as the answer to the reader's questions, and
- develop supporting information for all of the main answers.

*Effective workplace writing must be issue-driven.*

In this chapter, you'll learn to

- show that content originates in an issue,
- explain content as the answer to the reader's questions, and
- develop supporting information for all of the main answers.

### SHOW THAT CONTENT ORIGINATES IN AN ISSUE (P33)

This chapter discusses the first system in the HOCs/LOCs paradigm: content. It details **the four-part operation that generates useful content: issue, questions, answers, support**. Students are NOT used to coming up with questions on their own. In their experience, teachers have asked the questions, which they've endeavored to answer. (Students want to get away with just following the teacher's directions. PLEASE don't let them get away with this. Make them problem-solvers.)

### EXPLAIN CONTENT AS THE ANSWER TO THE READER'S QUESTIONS (P35)

They see content only as the clutter of facts and details they get from their research. But when they get to the workplace, they need to know what the reader-issue is and figure out what questions a



# ISSUE



reader needs to have answered about that issue. Then, of course, they need to do the research to answer the questions.

Here's an exercise that often becomes the first graded written assignment. (BTW, not all assignments require a letter grade with full-blown teacher comments. You can give them “class participation” points for doing writing that's not formally “graded.” Contact us to find ways to reduce your grading time and increase the students' learning.)

**I ALWAYS want students to write for a real person who really needs to know something**—has an issue. Often I'm that person, but I try to involve other real people (could be other students or SERVICE LEARNING projects). For this exercise, I'm the real person. My issue is that I really want to buy an all-electric car, but I'm not sure if it will meet my driving needs, which I describe for them in some detail.

**STEP 1:** Given my issue, I have students generate a list of questions I'd need to have answered. They send me their lists. (I do this on BLACKBOARD as a “discussion board” posting.) In class, I give them a chance to discuss the questions with me. I give them a sense of what's really important for me—not



so much the available colors or the look of the interior; more interested in issues with charging, with how it drives (power, acceleration), with reliability, etc.

**STEP 2:** Send me a question-outline of your document. I give them points for the questions included, noting what I am and am not interested in, and for the order of the questions, what comes first, second, etc. I note what I'd like to see first and last.

The next steps in this exercise involve the next chapter and will be discussed there.

At this point, I discuss the rest of the chapter with the class. It covers how **all readers read anything by asking three macro-questions** (p36), in order:

1. What is this and why should I care?
2. What's the "story"?
3. What, if anything, will or must be done next (by writer or reader)?



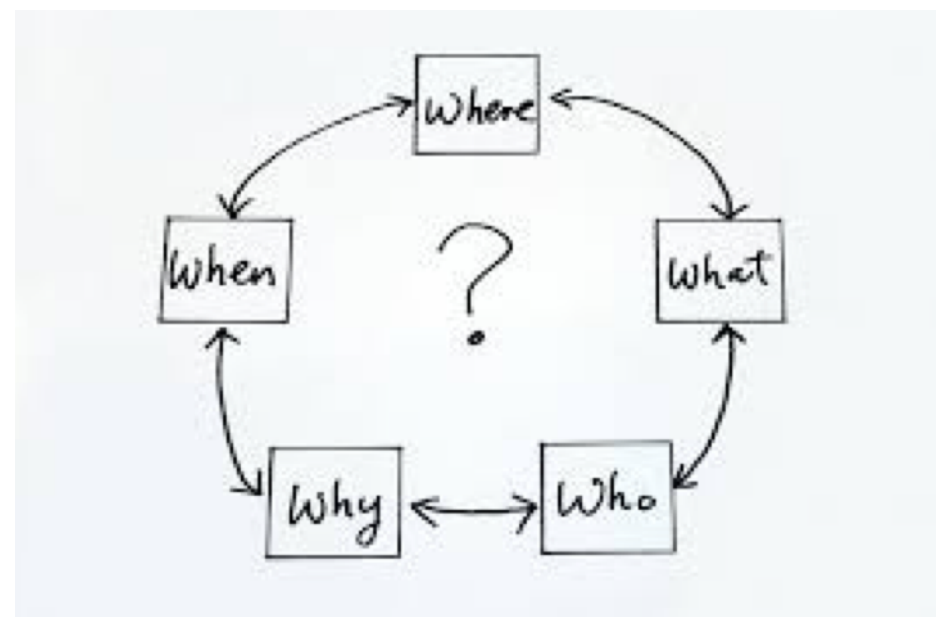
In the next chapter, we show how these three macro-questions set up the three-part structure of most documents:

1. Introduction: briefly explains the issue (reason for bothering the reader) and previews the main points.
2. Discussion: answers each main question and gives support.
3. Ending: explains what the writer or reader should do next or thanks the reader for her attention.

### DEVELOP SUPPORTING INFORMATION FOR ALL OF THE MAIN ANSWERS (P40)

We show students that supporting information is actually a matter of answering follow-up questions that come from hearing the main answers. We also show and discuss two sets of questions that can help support main answers: the familiar 5 W's from journalism (p42) and the more useful and much less familiar 5 C's from auditing (p42-43).

Make sure students know that considering *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* can help generate useful information about a past or future event—something that has taken or will take place.



**Spending time on the 5 C's is especially valuable.** If the issue involves evaluation of any kind, especially evaluation leading to a recommendation, these questions are extremely useful and powerful.

To evaluate ANYTHING, you must establish a standard (**CRITERIA**) that will be the yardstick. This could be the way something **MUST** be (a law, policy, required procedure, etc.) or how it **SHOULD** be (a best practice, industry standard, or some other benchmark that's not required by law). It's valuable to spend time asking students where they get their criteria (standards) for common things in their lives: phones, tablets, web pages, movies, food, relationships, politics. Are criteria scientific (rational) or are they more emotional? How can the political far right and the far left disagree so completely when they're considering the same facts? (They have vastly different criteria!) What do you do in the workplace when you deal with a reader (internal or external) who disagrees with your criteria? That's a great discussion with the class.

Once you have a standard (criteria) for measurement, you measure it against the way the situation actually is (the actual **CONDITION**). Does the performance or the item being evaluated meet, exceed, or fall short of the criteria? Talk about this in class.

# Criteria

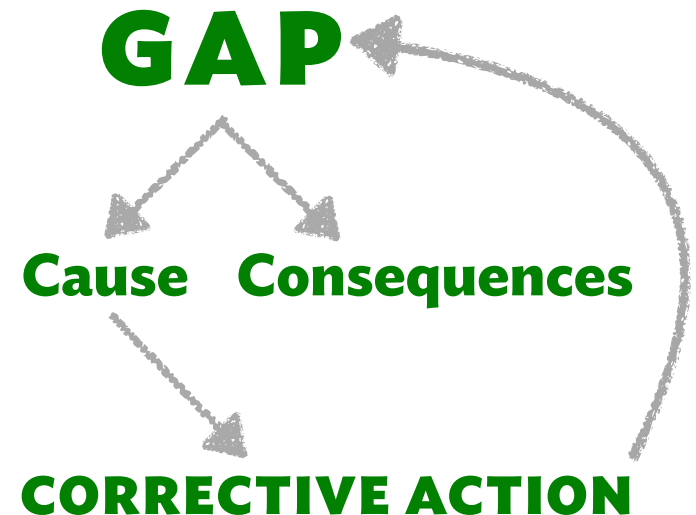
## - Condition

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**GAP**

**Cause Consequences**

**CORRECTIVE ACTION**



**This step is the essence of reviewing anything.** Did the restaurant meet your criteria? Did the movie live up to your standards? Does a specific relationship meet criteria—for both parties involved? Have students read a short current movie review or music review. Do they agree or disagree. Is the source of the agreement or disagreement really the criteria? Talk with the class about dealing with situations where people measure differently (is this different criteria or different condition?) and come up with different findings. (A finding is essentially the difference between criteria and condition.)

If you find a GAP between criteria and condition, you must determine whether the GAP is important enough to worry about—to do something about. If it is, then you've identified what we call a PROBLEM. Students should be able to describe the **CONSEQUENCES** of this gap. What's the impact? Where's the hurt? What's the significance of the gap? (This is the “**persuasive step**” in the process. If there are no important consequences, nobody will ever care.)

Again, discuss this with the class. Use everyday examples. What happens when a movie doesn't meet your criteria, when food falls short? How about a relationship? How about politics?

If a customer thinks something's a big deal and you don't, what do you do? How would you talk (write) to that customer? This can lead to a discussion of rhetorical strategies, if you're so inclined. What is persuasion? Is it whoever yells loudest? Is it logic? Discuss logos, ethos, and pathos.

If the consequences are severe enough that the GAP must be fixed, you must determine the **CAUSE** of the gap so it can be fixed. Knowing the cause of a gap can lead to recommendations for **CORRECTIVE ACTION(S)**. (This is the “**diagnostic step**” in the process.)

Time spent on the 5C's is incredibly valuable to help students clarify their own critical thinking when they analyze anything. If a writer can help a reader move through these five critical-thinking steps to a recommendation for improvement, that reader is hugely appreciative.

The 5 C's are truly remarkable. Every student should have this powerful evaluative approach in her arsenal of critical-thinking tools. Later in the semester, I have students use this process to identify an issue on campus, to develop a set of researchable questions about that issue, to develop a methodology for gathering



information, to scope the issue down to a manageable size, to answer the questions and then support those answers with good evidence. They do this as a final report. It's due at the end of classes. But the process, as you'll see from the sample syllabus, begins early with planning documents, outlines, summaries, drafts, and revisions.

The section also touches on the importance of creating a good methodology so your research will be sound and useful (p43). Do spend time talking to your class about how methodology buttresses the findings in any report.

Page 45 presents a 10-step pre-writing checklist. I use it to a greater or lesser extent for many of the writing projects throughout the class. It's the essence of the evaluative report mentioned above. Become familiar with it. Tweak it. Make it your own. Discuss it with the class in some detail.

This chapter provides 5 applications (p47), the last of which is a collaborative activity.

#### 10-Step Pre-Writing Checklist

This process emphasizes critical thinking and prepares you to compose a complex report/essay. It allows instructors or workplace stakeholders to question the content and organization **before** you commit to "writing."

1. What is the **ISSUE** and who is the exact reader who cares? Why is this reader interested?
2. What are the **MAIN QUESTIONS** your reader needs you to answer about this **ISSUE**?
3. What kinds of information will you need to answer these questions?
4. How will you get/develop this information? Sources?
5. If you will be making recommendations, what evaluative criteria will you use to determine what's needed? Rate the strength of your criteria (is it required or desired?).
6. What is your single-sentence **ANSWER** to each of your reader's main questions?
7. For each main answer, what, if any, questions arise that the reader will need you to answer? If there are sub-questions, follow steps 3, 4, and 6 for each.
8. Make a sentence outline that reveals the logical order of your topics, using first- and second-degree headings. For each major section (first-degree heading), write a brief paragraph that summarizes that section.
9. Write a one-page executive summary with the following four sections:
  - Provide a one-sentence **TITLE** that captures the overall main idea.
  - Provide an **INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH** that very briefly explains the **ISSUE** and list the main questions that will be addressed that will probe this **ISSUE** for the reader. Provide a one- or two-sentence description of your methodology.
  - For each main question, provide a brief paragraph **DISCUSSION** that summarizes the full answer, beginning with the answer.
  - Provide a brief **ENDING** that gives a set of recommendations or action steps for your reader, if any, or tells the reader what needs to happen next in dealing with this **ISSUE**.
10. Decide what medium, paper or screen, you'll use to convey your information. Briefly describe/illustrate how you will design this presentation.

## Chapter three

# ORGANIZATION

In the previous chapter we learned that it's important to answer all the reader's questions concerning the issue (what you're writing about). Doing so helps you create useful content and a productive "conversation" with the reader that will keep her level of interest high throughout. The reader's questions can also help you create a useful structure for organizing information in a way that lowers the reader's level of effort. Readers have three macro-questions when they read anything, questions that should be answered in three corresponding sections of the document: the introduction, discussion, and ending.

You can make your documents most readable by featuring the answers to your reader's questions up front and then explaining as needed. We call this direct, or *deductive*, organization (main point first, then the details). If your document has several sections, they should be chunked and clearly labeled with informative headings.

### Organization

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#### Structuring Documents To Lower the Reader's Level of Effort

**I**N THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, we learned that it's important to answer all the reader's questions concerning the **ISSUE** (what you're writing about). We learned that doing so helps you create useful content and a productive "conversation" with the reader as she reads the document that will keep her level of interest high throughout. The reader's questions can also help you create a useful structure for organizing information in a way that lowers the reader's level of effort.

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You can make your documents most readable by featuring the answers to your reader's questions up front and then explaining as needed. We call this direct, or *deductive*, organization (main point first, then the details).

If your document has several sections, they should be chunked and clearly labeled with informative headings. Headings help to create a strong visible structure that will allow your reader to navigate the information more easily.

In this chapter, you will learn ideas and techniques to help you manage the second level of the **HOCs & LOCs** paradigm: organization. You will be better able to

- use the reader's three macro-questions to create the three main parts of your document: **INTRODUCTION**, **DISCUSSION**, and **ENDING**;
- put the **ISSUE** first in your document, so your reader will care, then preview your main topics;
- in the discussion section, place the main message first then the supporting details;
- organize content by breaking documents into logical units: chunking and labeling;
- use bulleted lists correctly; and
- use the ending of the documents to explain what will or should happen next or provide a polite closing.

*Featuring the answers to your reader's questions up front and then explaining makes your documents more readable.*

Headings help to create a strong visible structure that will allow your reader to navigate the information more easily. In this chapter, you will learn ideas and techniques to help you manage the second level of the **HOCs & LOCs** paradigm: organization. You will be better able to

- use the reader's three macro-questions to create the three main parts of your document: **introduction**, **discussion**, and **ending**;
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- organize content by breaking documents into logical units: chunking and labeling;
- use bulleted lists correctly; and
- use the ending of the documents to explain what will or should happen next or provide a polite closing.

## USE THE READER'S THREE MACRO-QUESTIONS TO CREATE THE THREE MAIN PARTS OF YOUR DOCUMENT: INTRODUCTION, DISCUSSION, AND ENDING (P49)

Students have anxiety about and need to know what information goes where in a document. Explain to them the logic of organizing in a way that addresses the reader's three macro-questions, which set up the three MAIN SECTIONS of a text.

1. What is this and why should I care? (INTRODUCTION: issue/hook and preview)
2. What's the "story"? (DISCUSSION: answers to reader's questions and support)
3. What, if anything, is next? (ENDING: description of action writer or reader must take, or simple thank-you)

Whatever you read, you begin by identifying what the thing is and why you should care. If you don't care, you ignore or delete.

Workplace documents interrupt the reader's life and must earn their right to be read. They do this by starting with what we reluctantly call the *introduction*. It's NOT the back-story. It's NOT a history report. **It's two things:** 1) a quick **statement of the issue** (which explains why the writer is writing and why the reader should



care—what's in it for them?—and 2) a quick **preview of the main points** (questions about the issue) the document will address if it will address more than one thing.

This need for an intro is true of conventional documents that are accessed in a linear way: email, memos, letters, reports. But it's also true of multi-modal electronic genres. A web page must identify what it is and why the reader should care. Social media have their own ways of introducing the reader to that particular venue.

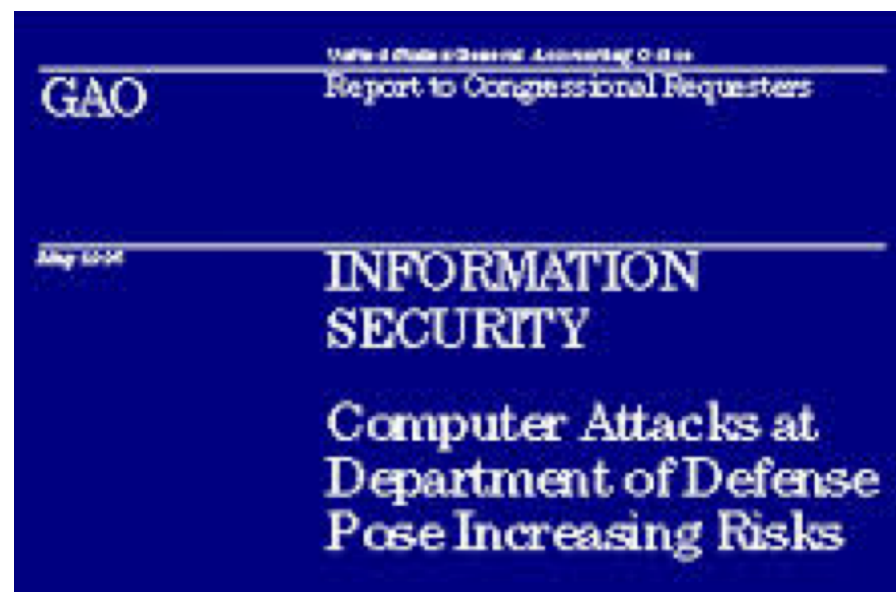
Discuss introductions with the class. Show examples. Discuss why introductions fail or succeed. What gets the reader/viewer interested? It always comes back to an issue—something the reader/viewer is interested in and agrees to invest time in. Discuss how documents/e-venues preview their contents. Check out the forecast page for the National Weather Service. See how it's oriented. (Such a discussion can also be useful for discussing chunking and labeling later on.)

Reinforce for the students **how the issue “hooks” the reader**, through a statement of the topic and why the reader should care, and the preview sets up the reader's key questions about the issue.



**The discussion addresses all the questions in the order they're previewed.** Take a look at a report. See if it follows this procedure. If it does, track through it with the class. If it fails to do this, ask the class if failing to follow this procedure weakens the presentation. (Reports from the GAO are useful for this exercise: (<http://www.gao.gov/docsearch/repandtest.html>))

I move to STEP 3 in my “electric car” assignment, begun in the previous chapter. In STEP 3, students move from the question outline from step 2 to a draft report for me. They draft an introduction, discussion, and ending that makes recommendations for me (following the format on page 164) and submit it to me. I ask them to create an e-mail report of no more than 1000 words. I explain that the so-called “subject line” is very valuable real estate in an email or memo. I ask them to use it to make an overall recommendation. I grade the draft only in terms of content and organization. I suggest where they might improve these two systems. I also make a general comment about style. I use this early assignment as a writing sample to see which students might need to set up tutoring sessions with the department's writing lab to improve deficiencies in making sentences.

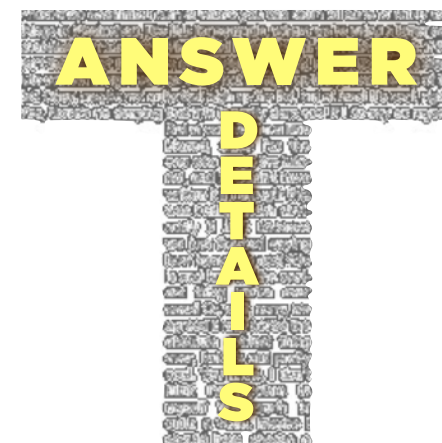




STEP 4, the final step, requires students to make a final report draft and submit it for a final grade. I let them know that I will grade content, organization, and style. At this point I don't expect graphic support, but they can add graphics if they feel comfortable. In fact, this is a great assignment for small groups to create a PechaKucha (<http://www.pechakucha.org/>) or an infographic (<http://www.mastermindblogger.com/17-resources-to-help-you-create-killer-infographics/>). I published my own grading rubric (COS 3-Pillar Rubric) at the end of this guide. It takes some time to figure out. Maybe you have your own rubric. We hope this text leads you to a rubric: objective criteria for writing and reviewing workplace documents.

### **PUT THE ISSUE FIRST IN YOUR DOCUMENT, SO YOUR READER WILL CARE, THEN PREVIEW YOUR MAIN TOPICS (P51)**

Make sure you impress on your students how totally valuable it is to put the main point first, before giving the relevant supporting information. We call this direct (deductive) structure. A fully deductively structured document is a highly evolved piece of writing. Check out GAO reports for examples (some are better than others). Documents don't come out of the chute with a message-first order. It takes a lot of thought, planning, and attention to detail.



Interestingly, **we converse deductively**. Our conversations are full of questions and answers. When asked a question, we usually lead with a quick answer, then more details to explain if the other person cares. To us, this is a pretty important observation. The way we speak is built to be economical. When we have time to talk on and on at leisure with friends, maybe the economy erodes a little, but when we talk with co-workers, clients, and customers about business, we tend to ask and answer questions, and we begin with the answer, then explain.

We think this practice should apply to most written workplace documents. However, we writers like to tell stories that start at the beginning and move step by step to the end. Deductive structure doesn't seem to come naturally when we write. But readers of workplace documents love it.

There are some useful examples of before/after documents in this section, so be sure to go over them with the class. Have them say what's changed in the "after" versions and why those changes are better.

On page 57, we touch on situations where the message-first style might not be the better choice. These situations are worth talking about with the class.

## ORGANIZE CONTENT BY BREAKING DOCUMENTS INTO LOGICAL UNITS: CHUNKING AND LABELING (P62)

The discussion leads to the technique of chunking and labeling. Students aren't used to using headings to group related sections. When they do use them, they're usually just a word or very short phrase. We discuss short topic headings, longer informative headings, and question headings. You might show a newspaper or magazine and **ask students how chunking and labeling reduces the reader's level of effort**. I do ask students to use headings to chunk and label the “electric car” report.

The chapter provides 5 applications; the last is a collaborative activity. Use them as you will.

### No headings



### Headings



## Chapter four

# DOCUMENT DESIGN

Most writers believe their job is over when they've created a complete message and organized that message so readers can easily find and understand the main point. But the workplace-writing job includes designing the layout of the document to enhance readability on the page or screen. We call this creating a "visible structure." The way the words take up space on the page or screen is extremely important. Poor format choices can obscure or destroy even the best writing.

Luckily, the criteria for designing business documents are not arbitrary. When looking at art, we may say, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!" But document design is a fairly well-established science that researchers have been studying for decades now. Different ways of presenting written information have been tested to determine which design/format choices are actually most readable and helpful to readers.

### *Document Design*

75

#### Using Document Design Principles To Enhance Readability by Creating a Clear Visible Structure

**M**OST WRITERS BELIEVE THEIR job is over when they've created a complete message and organized that message so readers can easily find and understand the main point. But the workplace-writing job includes designing the layout of the document to enhance readability on the page or screen. We call this creating a "visible structure." The way the words take up space on the page or screen is extremely important. Poor format choices can obscure or destroy even the best writing.

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This chapter deals with the third step in the HOCs & LOCs model: document design. Document design is the selection, organization, and arrangement of typographic and graphic elements to create a written document. In this chapter you will learn research-tested document design principles that will allow you to

- design a layout that emphasizes your document's message;
- use typography to improve readability; and
- use line length, spacing, and margin choices to improve readability.

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- use line length, spacing, and margin choices to improve readability.

### **DESIGN A LAYOUT THAT EMPHASIZES YOUR DOCUMENT'S MESSAGE (P75)**

This chapter is one of the students' favorites. Have fun with it. This brief section explains what document design is. The key principle is that the mind can grasp only what the eye can see. The purpose of document design is to make sure the most important information receives proper emphasis and to keep the reader's level of effort as low as possible.

You might talk to students about how aware they are of document design on the page and on the screen. Look at some websites and discuss the design. We recommend looking at Jakob Nielsen's website, which discusses many aspects of web design and effective user interface, including a discussion of how the eye tracks through whatever it reads (<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/>). I have them check the document design of the email they receive. That's also an eye-opening conversation that can improve their design awareness.

## USE TYPOGRAPHY TO IMPROVE READABILITY (P77)

This section details information on type fonts and size, highlighting techniques, line justification, leading, and length—all issues that affect readability. Pages 87–89 provide a before/after example that's worth discussing with the class. All five applications on page 91 are useful for class discussion and group activities. This is fascinating stuff, right?





## Chapter five

# PARAGRAPHS

The Lower Order Concerns (LOCs) begin with paragraphing. Because well-conceived paragraphs can dramatically increase emphasis and readability, you should understand the tools for skillfully managing paragraphs.

Paragraphs should consist of related sentences that develop a central point. They should accentuate important information, not bury it. In practice, however, paragraphs often become information dumps. Key information is greatly de-emphasized when it's stuck in the middle of a lengthy paragraph. And readers can lose interest in or become confused by loosely related sentences grouped together as a paragraph. This chapter offers tools to help you manage your paragraphs for greater emphasis and readability. You will learn to

- describe the purpose of paragraphs,
- determine paragraph shape,
- write useful topic sentences,
- use inductive paragraphs appropriately,
- diagnose paragraph efficiency using the paragraph x-ray technique, and
- control paragraph length.

### *Paragraphs*

#### Managing Paragraphs for Emphasis and Readability

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- diagnose paragraph efficiency using the paragraph x-ray technique, and
- control paragraph length.

## DESCRIBE THE PURPOSE OF PARAGRAPHS (P93)

Students don't pay as much attention to paragraphing as they did in the past. When writing email or posting, they often just type until they finish their message, resulting in long blocks of type that are tough to decipher. So it's worth the time to explain how important paragraphing is to keep the reader's level of interest high and the level of effort low.

## DETERMINE PARAGRAPH SHAPE (P94)

Begin by getting students to appreciate “paragraph shape,” which is determined essentially by where the topic sentence comes. If it comes at the beginning, the paragraph has a deductive (direct) shape. If it comes at the end, the paragraph is inductive (indirect). We describe the paragraph between these two shapes, where the topic sentence comes somewhere in the middle, as a “hybrid” shape. Most often, these hybrid shapes are closer to deductive than inductive. They begin with background information that leads to the main point (topic sentence), which is then discussed.

Explain to students that readers expect the very first sentence of any paragraph to reveal what they should expect the rest of the paragraph to be about. When the first sentence doesn't fulfill this



expectation, the reader's level of effort starts to rise....It's useful to have students look back at some of their own writing to see what kinds of paragraphs they tend to write. Again, it's useful to note that deductive paragraphs usually don't show up in first drafts. They are usually the results of more conscious construction.

### **WRITE USEFUL TOPIC SENTENCES (P97)**

Showing students the anatomy of a topic sentence is helpful. Get them to see that topic sentences begin with a "subject" and end with a "controlling idea"—usually the predicate. On page 99, there's a key concept that shows how topic sentences in a deductive paragraph answer three key questions for the reader:

1. What? (What is the noun being discussed?)
2. What about it?
3. What's next? (Indicates to the reader how the discussion will proceed.)

### **USE INDUCTIVE PARAGRAPHS APPROPRIATELY (P100)**

This section discusses situations when inductive paragraphs are useful. It's worth taking time to discuss this with students. If you have students make more than one draft on an assignment before they show it to you for a grade, it's very worthwhile to have them

check their paragraphing carefully to make sure they rely on deductive structures and use inductive structure only when appropriate.

### **DIAGNOSE PARAGRAPH EFFICIENCY USING THE PARAGRAPH X-RAY TECHNIQUE (P103)**

At this point emphasize that paragraphs should be adequately developed, usually deductive, unified, and coherent. **The paragraph x-ray technique is a useful way for students to make sure their paragraphs are appropriately shaped, unified, and coherent.**

The paragraph x-ray technique doesn't diagnose adequate paragraph development, an aspect of paragraphs difficult to be prescriptive about. Development depends so much on the kind of document and the particular paragraph involved. However, you can tell students that the topic sentence usually raises one or more questions in the reader's mind. These questions, as always, should be addressed as fully as necessary. Being aware of this concept can help students ascertain whether their paragraphs are adequately developed.

Take time with the paragraph x-ray technique. It can be a powerful tool for students. Spend a good deal of time on the coherence technique we call “the old/new contract” (p105). This will be a new idea for most students. It’s an excellent technique for making paragraphs more coherent. You can Google this term for more examples. It also goes by the name of “the known/new contract” and “the given/new contract.” Here’s a useful review: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1088&context=rtd>.

## CONTROL PARAGRAPH LENGTH (P107)

This short, concluding section helps students understand the problems with long paragraphs.

Be sure to look closely at the applications, which are helpful to students. Application “C” (p110) is great for a classroom exercise. The two paragraphs in that section offer a lot to discuss with the class.

### Long Paragraphs

Culture is a patterned behavioral response that develops over time as a result of imposing the mind through social and religious constraints and intellectual and artistic manifestations. Culture is also the result of acquired mechanisms that may have innate influences but are primarily affected by internal and external environmental stimuli. Culture is shaped by values, beliefs, norms, and practices that are shared by members of the same cultural group. Culture guides our thinking, doing, and being and becomes patterned expressions of who we are. These patterned expressions are passed down from one generation to the next. Other definitions of culture have been offered by LeVine (1983a, 1985b, 1991), LeVine and McFarland (2002), Spence (1996, 2000), and Anderson and Boyle (1996). According to LeVine (1983a, 1985b, 1991) and LeVine & McFarland (2002), culture is the values, beliefs, norms, and practices of a particular group that are learned and shared and that guide thinking, decisions, and actions in a patterned way. Spence (1996) contends that culture is a metacommunication system based on nonphysical traits such as values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, language, and behaviors that are shared by a group of people and are passed down from one generation to the next. According to Anderson and Boyle (1996, 2002), culture represents a unique way of perceiving, behaving, and evaluating the external environment and as such provides a blueprint for determining values, beliefs, and practices. Regardless of the definition chosen, the term culture implies a dynamic, ever-changing, social, or passive process.

Cultural values are unique expressions of a particular culture that have been accepted as appropriate over time. They guide actions and decisions making that facilitate self-worth and self-esteem. LeVine (1983a) postulates that cultural values develop as a

### Shorter Paragraphs

Outbreaks of herpes zoster, also called shingles, are caused by a reactivation of the varicella zoster. After an initial outbreak of varicella (chickenpox), the varicella zoster virus (VZV) remains in the nerve cells and lies dormant after patients recover from the initial infection until it is reactivated years later. Between 400,000 and 1 million people develop shingles each year. About 50% of people who live to age 80 will have an outbreak at some time in their life. Factors at increased risk are those taking immunosuppressive medications and those with residual immune systems, including elderly patients and those with AIDS, Hodgkin disease, or diabetes.

Symptoms of herpes zoster include unilateral distribution of herpetic vesicles along the affected dermatome (sensory pathway) of a few segments of spinal or cranial peripheral nerves. (See Figure 21-7.) These vesicles usually develop on the trunk or, sometimes, the face or head. Lesions are described as severely painful and may burn or itch as well. Other symptoms may include fever, chills, headache, and malaise. Depending on the dermatome involved.

Diagnosis is based on characteristic appearance. Diagnosis may be confirmed by a culture of vesicles or, more rarely, by the presence of antibodies in the blood.

Treatment for herpes zoster includes antiviral drugs, such as acyclovir, which reduce viral shedding and the severity and duration of the outbreak if administered within 5 days of onset. Other medications may include corticosteroids, analgesics, and antidepressants.

The duration of outbreaks may last from 10 days to 3 weeks. A potential complication of herpes zoster is postherpetic neuralgia, which is persistent nerve pain that lasts for months after lesions disappear. Fortunately, repeated outbreaks of shingles are uncommon.

## Chapter six

# SENTENCES

Readers are busy. They need documents that get right to the point. Sentences must also get to and stay on a main point. Sentences in business documents should be clear, concise, and appropriately emphatic. Clear means more than simply free of grammatical errors. It means sentences are easily intelligible, free of any flaws that impede the flow of ideas. Concise means ideas are expressed in the least number of words without omitting important information. Emphatic means that the most important information stands out. As always, the writer should work hard so the reader doesn't have to!

This chapter provides six writing tools that will help you write clear, concise, emphatic sentences:

- maintain a logical sentence core;
- keep length and concept load manageable;
- edit out five common sentence pitfalls: redundancy, weak verbs, nominalizations, vague agents, and too many prepositional phrases;

### *Sentences*

#### Composing Clear Sentences

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This chapter provides six writing tools that will help you write clear, concise, emphatic sentences:

- maintain a logical sentence core;
- keep length and concept load manageable;
- edit out five common sentence pitfalls: redundancy, weak verbs, nominalizations, vague agents, and too many prepositional phrases;
- use active and passive voice appropriately;
- subordinate and coordinate related ideas; and
- identify and avoid your personal bad writing habits.



- use active and passive voice appropriately;
- subordinate and coordinate related ideas; and
- identify and avoid your personal bad writing habits.

### MAINTAIN A LOGICAL SENTENCE CORE (P123)

Students should learn a little grammar. Just as any activity at all has its own special set of terms that help those who do the activity discuss it and do it better (tennis, knitting, ballet, auto mechanics, piano playing, etc.), **grammar is the terminology that allows us to talk about the activity of writing.**

Students need to understand at least the following grammatical terms:

- Clause (both dependent and independent)
- Phrase
- Noun, verb, subject, predicate
- Direct object, indirect object, object of a preposition
- Prepositional phrase
- Adjective, adverb
- Transitive verb, linking verb
- Complement

Knowing that list is a fairly good start. These are the words we need to use when we talk about writing sentences. Give students a test to see what they already know. Make them responsible for learning these terms. Test them and retest them.

This first section presents one of the most important concepts in this book, the sentence core. **The human mind is physically wired to comprehend a sentence through the sentence core.** Not just S-V-O or S-V-C!

It's not enough to have a sentence constructed with Subject-Verb-Object. The core must state **who** (what noun) **is doing what** (main action) **to whom** (receiver of the action, if any). The **who** must be the **grammatical subject**; the **action** must be the **main verb**; the **receiver** (if there is one) must be the **direct object** for optimal comprehension. So here's the sentence core:

### **The Sentence Core** *(for sentences that describe action)*

**ACTOR**

**Grammatical subject**

You

**TRUE ACTION**

**Main verb**

drove

**RECEIVER (if any)**

**Direct object**

the nail

Students need to know that the ACTOR, the noun responsible for the action, must appear in the grammatical subject. The TRUE ACTION must appear in the main verb. And, if there's a RECEIVER of the action, it must appear in the direct object. Have them check their own work.

When this sentence core is broken, comprehension drops. Consider the two following sentences, which are grammatically correct and punctuated correctly.

- The potential for inconsistent penalty administration within a decentralized management structure is exacerbated by the complexity of the penalty process within the IRS
- Our lack of pertinent data prevented determination of committee action effectiveness in fund targeting to areas of greatest assistance need.

These might seem to be hard to understand because they use big words. But most students know the dictionary definition of all of these words. The first sentence is in the passive voice, but its active voice version is just as hard to understand. The second sentence follows the S-V-O pattern. But the sentence core is broken: the actor is not the grammatical subject. The true action is not in the main verb. And the receiver of the action is not the direct object.

Notice what happens when these sentences are rewritten so the sentence core is strong:

- The IRS is potentially administering penalties inconsistently because it has a decentralized management structure and a complex penalty process.
- Because we lacked pertinent data, we could not determine whether the committee had targeted funds to areas that needed assistance the most.

**The sentence core is a powerful concept that helps students clarify their thinking and express themselves more clearly and concisely.**

Students may believe that so-called “business writing” and “technical writing” are special ways of writing, somehow more official-sounding, like English on sTiLTs. But the whole purpose of this class is to show students that all workplace writing is about knowing the reader’s pertinent questions about an issue and answering them appropriately, clearly, and correctly. That’s what makes writing impressive and professional.



## KEEP LENGTH AND CONCEPT LOAD MANAGEABLE (P119)

This section simply shows students the problems introduced when sentences go much beyond 30 words. We call this idea “concept load.” Actually, a long sentence can be fine. It’s not so much how long you make it; it’s how you make it long. But students are well advised to keep the 30-word limit in mind to avoid problems they may not be equipped to handle.

## EDIT OUT FIVE COMMON SENTENCE PITFALLS: REDUNDANCY, WEAK VERBS, NOMINALIZATIONS, VAGUE AGENTS, AND TOO MANY PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES (P121)

This section is about structural causes of wordiness—sentences that take too many words to say what they have to say. We do isolate five causes (pitfalls), but the second through the fifth are very closely connected—***the wordiness virus***. The following sentence illustrates all five pitfalls:

- There is an immediate need for a thorough review of this department by our trained staff as soon as possible.

Although this sentence is easy enough to understand, it's clearly wordy.

The first cause is actual and implied redundancy. The actual redundancy comes when a similar idea is stated twice: “immediate” and “as soon as possible.” Ask students which they would cut and why. The implied redundancy, the more common type, comes when words are used that are unnecessary because they're implied by the context: “thorough” and “trained.”

The other causes are related; one follows from another—***the wordiness virus***. This little avalanche of problems is set in motion when the writer chooses a weak verb (fails to state the true action). Here it's the verb “is.” (Note: a “to be” verb or other linking verb is not necessarily weak, as in the sentence *The sky is blue.*)

The weak verb causes the other three pitfalls: nominalization, vague agency, and too many prepositions. Discuss these with the class. Pay particular attention to nominalizations. Next to using the concept of the sentence core, the ability to spot and convert nominalizations is the most important skill in this chapter. There are nominalization exercises in the applications (p133-34). These are worth spending serious time on in class.





**USE ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE APPROPRIATELY (P124)**

Here it's worth pointing out to students that passive voice is not BAD. It has its legitimate uses. Explain what active and passive voice are. Some students mistakenly believe that the past tense and passive voice are the same thing. Explain when it's an appropriate choice.

**SUBORDINATE AND COORDINATE RELATED IDEAS (P125)**

It's worthwhile to spend time on the different kinds of emphasis created through coordination and subordination. Students tend to use coordination as their default setting. Show them how getting emphasis right helps the reader better understand the content.

The idea of “branching” is concrete and helpful for students (p126). Show them when to use left-branching constructions, to introduce context before the main point, and how to manage mid-branching sentences when necessary. Most students write right-branching sentences as their default, which is okay—they tend to be the easiest for readers to understand.



## **IDENTIFY AND AVOID YOUR PERSONAL BAD WRITING HABITS (P128)**

Students often write at the last minute and don't take time for any kind of proofreading, let alone true revision. This section ends by looking at some common student writing habits that can lead to tortured sentences. This is a good time to have students analyze their own writing processes and their own habits, as well as gaps in their writing arsenal. Share some of your own with the class....The purpose of this book is to make students more aware of every aspect of their writing so they can become more intentional writers. Remind them that good workplace writing takes practice, a desire to improve, some vigilance, and a healthy dose of good humor.

Be sure to spend some time with the applications. There's good practice and even a little fun to be had there.

## Chapter seven

# WORD CHOICE

Words are the most fundamental tool in workplace writing. Because the words you use greatly affect how readers react to your writing, you should choose words with care. Your word choice, or *diction* (*diction* simply means **word choice**), can deliver or drive away customers, can save or squander money for your company, and can bolster or blow your chances for advancement. Ineffective diction creates misunderstandings, errors, complaints, and unnecessary enquiries. Poorly worded documents are often responsible for staff time lost to problem solving. To produce effective, professional workplace writing, you must use words skillfully. In this chapter you will learn to

- distinguish Plain Language from “the official style”;
- select accurate, efficient words;
- adjust the tone of your documents through word choice;
- avoid wordiness created by empty words and phrases; and
- remove biased language.

### *Word Choice*

#### Choosing the Right Words

WORDS ARE THE MOST fundamental tool in workplace writing. Because the words you use greatly affect how readers react to your writing, you should choose words with care. Your word choice, or *diction* (*diction* simply means **word choice**), can deliver or drive away customers, can save or squander money for your company, and can bolster or blow your chances for advancement. Ineffective diction creates misunderstandings, errors, complaints, and unnecessary enquiries. Poorly worded documents are often responsible for staff time lost to problem solving. To produce effective, professional workplace writing, you must use words skillfully. In this chapter you will learn to

- distinguish Plain Language from “the official style”;
- select accurate, efficient words;
- adjust the tone of your documents through word choice;
- avoid wordiness created by empty words and phrases; and
- remove biased language.

## DISTINGUISH PLAIN LANGUAGE FROM “THE OFFICIAL STYLE” (P135)

**The concept of plain English or plain language is at the heart of this whole textbook.** It is the true *sine qua non* of presenting useful information to readers clearly and keeping the reader's level of effort as low as possible. Be sure to take time in class to cover this area. Here are some useful websites to look at with the class:

- <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html>
- <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>
- <http://centerforplainlanguage.org/>

I have students do a semester-long research report, and I usually pick plain English (**PE**) as a topic. I'm curious to know what's being done in this country and around the world to require/promote what we call plain English—the broader term is plain Language (our work with writers around the world assures us that there's plain Chinese, plain French, plain Arabic, plain Swahili, etc.). If you are curious about various aspects of this topic, have your students inform you. If you know someone else who may like information on **PE**, make that person the real reader for the report.



## SELECT ACCURATE, EFFICIENT WORDS (P138)

This section deals with levels of diction and other issues involved in selecting words. Again, students think they need to elevate their diction when they create workplace documents to seem more “professional.” Students believe that business writing must be English on stilts. And there is a natural tendency for us all to be a bit more formal when we write for others in a workplace setting. So discuss this tendency. Look at some email and snail mail with the class and discuss the level of diction. Explain that answering reader’s pertinent questions as clearly as possible is always the most important thing. But ask them if there are times when elevated diction is called for—speeches or other appeals to emotion, for instance. Have a look at some famous presidential speeches and analyze the diction (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/Ao878601.html>). It’s time well spent and fun, too.



## ADJUST THE TONE OF YOUR DOCUMENTS THROUGH WORD CHOICE (P144)

This section continues to discuss word choice looking specifically at how tone is changed by diction. You can have fun with this section. Ask students to write several phrases in several different tonal registers. My students love that exercise.

## AVOID WORDINESS CREATED BY EMPTY WORDS AND PHRASES (P148)

This section makes students aware of some other causes of wordiness that come from word choices.

I spend time on business writing clichés. Some students have already picked up buzz phrases they think are “official-sounding.” I try to make them stop using those phrases. Instead, I tell them to write what they’d say to a co-worker, customer, or client face-to-face. Would you ever really say to someone, “I regret any inconvenience” or “I regret to inform you”? Those are laughable phrases. They never ring true to a reader. Be honest. Be sincere.

Be plain spoken. **Maybe now is a good time to discuss ethics as they pertain to communicating in the workplace?** Is honesty the best policy?

## REMOVE BIASED LANGUAGE (P151)

This chapter ends with lists of common biased words and phrases. I hope they’re going out of style. But I’m often shocked at what students write. I like to talk to the class about microaggression, a phrase coined in 1970. Microaggressions are the everyday verbal,

	A	B	C	D
1	Centrally	Motivated	Grassroots	Involvement
2	Rationally	Positive	Sectoral	Incentive
3	Systematically	Structured	Institutional	Participation
4	Formally	Controlled	Urban	Attack
5	Totally	Integrated	Organisational	Process
6	Strategically	Balanced	Rural	Package
7	Dynamically	Functional	Growth	Dialogue
8	Democratically	Programmed	Development	Initiative
9	Situationally	Mobilised	Cooperative	Scheme
10	Moderately	Limited	On-going	Approach
11	Intensively	Phased	Technical	Project
12	Comprehensively	Delegated	Leadership	Action
13	Radically	Maximised	Agrarian	Collaboration
14	Optimally	Consistent	Planning	Objective



nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their. (Watch episode 1, Season 19 of *South Park* to see the “PC Principle.” It’s a hoot and germane to this issue.)

Check some sites to discuss this phenomenon. Have students speak honestly about this...if not in college, where? ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microaggression\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microaggression_theory)) (<http://www.microaggressions.com/>) (<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/readers-defend-the-rise-of-the-microaggressions-framework/405772/>)



## APPENDICES

All the appendices are provided to begin conversations about whatever topic they cover and certainly not to be exhaustive. Read through each. All are brief. Use what seems useful. You may wish to supplement with other online resources.

- A. Writer's guide to punctuation and grammar
- B. Writing Memos, Texts, and Email
- C. Writing Business Letters
- D. Writing Reports
- E. Writing Résumés and Job Letters
- F. Giving Oral Presentations

# IMAGINING A SYLLABUS

*Business Writing | Based on a 15-week semester*

## Course Description

This course will introduce you to and allow you to practice key writing and critical-thinking skills that are important for anyone in the workplace—we call these concepts and skills “the new basics,” which you need to master in order to write successfully in the digital, global age. Although these writing skills will sometimes conflict with writing skills taught in many college-level general writing classes, they are designed to help you write effectively for real readers in the workplace. **These skills are focused on developing useful, responsive documents with appropriate messages for readers presented so the reader’s level of interest remains as high as possible and her level of effort stays as low as possible.** *(This is not a remedial course. You are assumed to have mastery of generally accepted grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence-making conventions. If you have challenges in these areas, you may be given the opportunity of meeting with a tutor in the writing lab to improve those skills.)*

## Learning Outcomes

The instruction and assignments in this class are intended to teach you a set of useful workplace writing skills—the “new basics.” First you need to learn the ideas/concepts/skills, and then you need to use them to write effective digital and print documents. Your grade depends on demonstrating your mastery of the following learning outcomes:

To be able to write successfully, you must demonstrate the ability to accomplish the following in documents for a **real** reader (defined as a person or group for whom the *content* of the document is actually important, for whom the information will serve as instrumental knowledge to help them act—not a teacher):

- I. **Message Soundness** (develop sound content)
  1. Identify an **issue** (an area of **shared interest** between the real reader/user and a writer—the reason a writer is writing and the reader is reading);
  2. Generate appropriate researchable questions to successfully assess the issue (**question factoring**);
  3. Develop an appropriate **methodology** for generating useful information;
  4. Develop appropriate **criteria** to use as standards for analysis;

5. **Research** the questions to get the information (compile information);
  6. **Answer** questions;
  7. **Support** the answers with appropriate information and compelling evidence;
- II. Message Presentation** (present information clearly, concisely, and correctly)
8. Organize a document **deductively** (message first, then the supporting details);
  9. Apply **document design** principles to increase readability;
  10. Use **format conventions** for memos, email, letters, and reports, and other edocs;
  11. Develop unified and coherent deductive **paragraphs**;
  12. Craft **sentences** that have a strong sentence core and appropriate diction;
  13. Follow APA, MLA, or Chicago **style**;
  14. Adhere to appropriate **conventions** for grammar, punctuation, and spelling;
  15. **While keeping the reader's level of interest high and her level of effort low.**

## Textbooks

*Mastering Workplace Writing (MWW)*, Lillywhite & Dungey

(available on Amazon:

( <http://www.amazon.com/Mastering-Workplace-Writing-Harvey-Lillywhite/dp/0692520082>)

**Also Recommended:** *access to a college dictionary and any grammar/usage guide*

## Suggested Deliverables

Individual **graded assignments** will receive my brief comments, **mainly on content and organization**, and a grade. You are required to complete

- a writing sample (counts toward class participation);
- three short memo reports (#1 = 500 words/5% of final grade; #2 = 750 words/10% of final grade; #3 = 1,000 words/15% of final grade);
- two letters (2.5% each of final grade/5% total);
- sentence revision exercise (class participation);
- Plain English final report, 1,200 words maximum (25% of total grade);
- on-line reading quizzes (10% of total grade);



- ❑ class participation—including writing sample, sentence exercise, weekly discussion board postings, workshop responses (20% of total grade);
- ❑ a final exam (10% of total grade).

### General Grade Descriptions

An "A" grade denotes "high honors." Only work that is **clearly** well above average receives an "A." Such work must be **error-free and on time**; it must fully reflect the concepts presented in our class, and it must provide **dynamic, "real-world" solutions** to the writing problems presented in assignments, and it is usually the result of multiple drafts and **goes beyond merely following directions**. I usually give approximately 15% of the class an "A/A-" for the final grade.

A "B" grade denotes "**high pass**" and is **truly above average**. I award a "B" to work that is on time, nearly error-free and on time; it reflects the concepts presented in the class; it demonstrates careful and accurate writing throughout, and it is usually the result of multiple drafts. I usually give approximately 55% of the class a "B +/B/B-" for the final grade.

A "C" grade denotes "pass" and is an acceptable grade for this class. I give a "C" to work that is on time but weak in some way that would clearly diminish the effectiveness of the document in the workplace--incomplete content, faulty organization or format, error-prone style with punctuation or grammatical errors. I usually give approximately 25% of the class a "C+/C" for the final grade. A "D" grade denotes "no pass." I give a "D" to work that is deficient in two or more ways--incomplete content, faulty organization or format, error-prone style with several mechanical errors, or late. I give an "F" if work is not submitted on time or not submitted, or if the work is completely deficient in content, organization, and style, or is plagiarized to any extent at all.

### **Plagiarism Warning**

You must read the college's policy on academic integrity at <http://inside.towson.edu/generalcampus/tupolicies/documents/03-01.00%20Student%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy.pdf>, which includes the following statement: "All acts of academic dishonesty violate standards essential to the existence of an academic community. Most offenses are properly handled and remedied by the faculty member teaching the course in which they occur ... violations will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs for sanctions listed in the Code of Student Conduct. The penalties

that may be assessed by a faculty member for a course-related violation may include... reduced grade (including “F”) for the entire course.”

**If you plagiarize intentionally or unintentionally on any part of an assignment for this class, you will automatically receive an “F” for the entire course.** If you are ever unclear what constitutes plagiarism, ask me. You should also consult the first three links on WEBSITES in our Bb course-site, which discuss plagiarism in detail.

### **Class Participation**

You begin with an “A” in class participation. This portion of your overall grade is reduced by one full grade for each Discussion Board posting (or other Bb activity) deadline that you miss and by half a grade for late postings.

### **Revision Policy**

In the workplace, when you are asked to submit a final draft, that draft should be the best you can make it. This course follows that same process. You will not be permitted to revise a document once you've submitted it for a grade. You are encouraged, however, to make several drafts as you work to get to the final draft that you will submit for a grade. Departmental policy prohibits me from

commenting on rough drafts. I can, however, answer questions about any assignment, and I'll gladly comment briefly on outlines.

### **Extra Credit**

Your only opportunities for earning grade points are by submitting the required assignments.

### **Deadlines**

**All assignments must be sent directly to me as an attachment in an email as a .doc or .docx Word file.** [note: I encourage you to use Google Docs when possible.] Assignments are due on the due date by 11:59PM and must adhere to the assignment requirements in order to be accepted. I will post deadlines and guidelines for all assignments. Work turned in late will be reduced by one full grade for each day it is late—including weekends. For example, an assignment turned in two days late that would have earned an “A” will receive a “C.” If an unavoidable problem arises, contact me in writing before the deadline.

### **Required Software and Materials**

Adapt to your course as necessary.

**Required Technology Access, Knowledge, and Responsibilities**

We will be using email and Blackboard. To succeed in this course, you must have routine, ready access to computer technology and the requisite knowledge enabling you, at a minimum, to perform all of the following tasks efficiently:

- Send and receive Towson email. You must check your Towson email account daily to see if there are messages relating to the course.
- Create a folder for this course so that you may archive all messages you receive and send. You must keep copies of all class-related emails from me or classmates. Saving emails ensures you have proof of sending emails, submitting work, etc. It's a good practice to develop.
- Download, open, and print PDF, Word, and PowerPoint files
- Familiarize yourself with and utilize new technologies.
- Use Microsoft *Word* to produce well-formatted, easy-to-read documents fulfilling the requirements of written assignments.
- Read or print out comments and tracked edits on *Word* documents.
- Use Blackboard to read, download, and print pages and document and complete any assigned Blackboard quizzes online.

## Required Time Commitment

Over the 15 weeks of this session, you should assume that you will need about 5 hours a week on average to complete the assigned work. The workload is steady throughout the session, and you will be completing readings, taking quizzes, or preparing assignments for every class. The final exam will be available online during the final exam period.

## Course Email Policy

All emails you send must conform to the following checklist of guidelines:

- Appropriate subject heading that includes your last name and class section number, e.g., “**SMITH 317.023**” and a brief phrase describing the email’s contents, e.g., “**SMITH 317.023 Wire Transfer**”.
- Clear language, appropriate paragraphing (no SLABS OF TYPE), and no glaring grammatical/spelling problems.
- If an attachment is included, clearly refer to or indicate the attachment’s relationship to the email message

The aim of this email policy is not to punish you for certain writing behaviors; rather, it is intended to help you develop professional writing practices that you will employ in a professional workplace.



### **My Responsibilities as Instructor**

Throughout the course, I will do the following: • Prepare students as best I can to write in business/workplace contexts in a professional, ethical, and responsible manner; • Establish and explain course objectives, assignments, evaluation criteria, and schedule; • Reply to emails within 24 hours Monday through Friday (I do not as regularly check email Saturday and Sunday. Please plan accordingly.); • Return graded evaluations of assignments within a week of the assignment due date and, in all cases, before the evaluative feedback would be needed to improve performance on a subsequent assignment.

### **Your Responsibilities as a Student**

To earn a satisfactory grade in this course, you are expected to do the following: • Respect your peers and me at all times; • Abide by the course policies outlined in the syllabus; • Participate actively and cooperatively in discussions and group work; • Ask (appropriate) questions you have regarding assignments, deadlines, concepts, directions, etc.; • Follow directions and ask questions if directions are unclear (**However, assignments will require you to do more than simply follow directions. You will be asked to use the skills taught to solve various communication problems originally, effectively, and creatively.**); • Submit complete,

carefully written and edited assignments on or before the deadlines for them; • Demonstrate professional standards for proactive problem solving and critical analysis on projects.

### **Students with Disabilities Policy**

"This course is in compliance with Towson University policies for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Disability Support Services (DSS), 7720 York Road, Suite 232, 410 704-2638 (Voice) or 410-704-4423 (TDD).

Students who expect that they have a disability but do not have documentation are encouraged to contact DSS for advice on how to obtain appropriate evaluation. A memo from DSS authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made."

When I teach this class, I think of the learning in three phases:

### **PHASE I (Weeks 1-5): HOCs**

I seek to increase the student's awareness of general criteria for successful workplace writing. In this phase they must learn a new way of looking at the workplace documents they receive.

I introduce them to the HOCs and LOCs method, teaching them techniques for identifying an ISSUE, generating reader-questions about this ISSUE, answering those questions, and presenting the information to keep the reader's level of interest high and the level of effort low.

Each of the first 5 weeks, I have students find real workplace documents and analyze them for one specific aspect of these objective criteria and post their responses on our Discussion Board (these assignments are listed in the weekly schedule). These student responses become part of the student's class participation grade. I may comment on their responses very briefly to give a pat-on-the-back where deserved or to correct faulty observations.

I also use these early postings to assess a student's skills. If I find a student truly deficient in basic writing skills, I set them up with a

tutor in our college writing lab to remediate these issues. These lab activities then become part of the student's class participation grade. (I do not see it as my responsibility to line-edit/proofread student writing, pointing out every error. This approach wastes a huge amount of time for teacher and student. Research shows that little or no learning takes place from these intricate comments. When I find significant errors in mechanics/diction/syntax, I make a general comment. These are often the result of hurrying and failure to proofread/revise. Only when they are systemic do I require a student to seek remediation.)

### **PHASE II (Weeks 6-10): LOCs**

I introduce techniques for managing paragraphs, sentences, and word choice (plain English) during this phase. Their weekly Discussion Board posting continues, concentrating on real workplace documents and focusing on one “style issue” for each post (these assignments are listed in the weekly schedule).

I spend a week (or more, depending on the class) on paragraphs, another on sentences, and another on plain English. While the issue of mechanics is crucial, I usually don't spend time with the class drilling in these areas. I have, on occasion, “lectured” on comma practices—since commas are truly an endangered species.

In these discussions, students usually want to know a bit about semi-colons, bulleted lists, when to use “which” and “that.” However, such considerations tend to arise organically from the class at some point during the term. So I often do these in-class exercises when the students seem curious about them. I do require a formal exercise devoted to spotting and converting nominalizations to reduce wordiness—this is part of the class participation grade.

Our text does not cover graphics, partly because it's more interesting looking at graphics online. Clearly using graphics is vital in today's workplace writing. I usually spend a week in Phase III discussing graphics. Links on the web abound on these topics; here are just a few. For general guidelines for graphics: [https://www.washington.edu/accessit/webdesign/student/unit4/module1/Guidelines\\_for\\_web\\_graphics.htm](https://www.washington.edu/accessit/webdesign/student/unit4/module1/Guidelines_for_web_graphics.htm)

For infographics: [http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/teaching-with-infographics-places-to-start/?\\_r=0](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/teaching-with-infographics-places-to-start/?_r=0).

Robin Williams' *Non-Design's Design Book* is useful: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Non-Designers-Design-Book-Edition/dp/0133966151>

**PHASE III (Weeks 6-15) Graded Assignments:**

I believe it's absolutely critical to have students write to a REAL reader/user who really needs the information to make real decisions. I am usually that real reader. I have students write about ISSUES I'm actually interested in and would like information on. I usually give them a list of ISSUES I'm truly interested in. They get to choose which one to research and report on. Sometimes I find another real person who truly needs some research done, and use that reader as the real reader. In those cases, the reader must be part of the evaluation process (To what extent did the "report" meet the reader's/user's real needs?). Colleagues have successfully done so-called "service learning" projects, in which students work with organizations to provide useful information on real issues. I support all these.

I'm opposed to the genre approach," where business writing classes devolve into having students mimic generic print and e-formats, writing for an imaginary reader!

However they must embody their information in some way. So I rely on what I call the email/memo report. I call it this because it uses the convention of  
TO:



FROM:

DATE:

SUBJECT:

---

INFO.....

I like this format because it forces students to put “the bottom-line” in the subject (message) line.

I encourage them to use a three-part structure, as discussed fully in Chapter 3 and in appendix B, pages 163-164, which includes

- an intro that begins with the issue and a preview of main topics (reader-questions addressed);
- a discussion with headings to announce each major section (no matter how brief); and
- an ending that states future required action, if any, or a polite close.

I find that this three-part structure is applicable to most email, memos, letters, and reports that students may have to write when they're on the job. It's my business-writing boot camp.

I have them begin with a 500-word “email report,” move to a 750-word report, and finally a 1,000-word report. I find that students

struggle, not to reach the word count but to say all they have to say within the assigned word limit. I never want students to pad their content or their style. Once a student has answered the real reader's questions fully, the report is over. If a student can't reach the word limit, probably the student hasn't realized the full set of reader questions. (In fact, I find students have a difficult time imagining all the reader's pertinent questions—something they haven't really done when writing just for teachers and imaginary readers. I spend a fair amount of time harping on this activity—question factoring!)

I have students do a longer research report on plain English. Appendix F discusses reports.

I have students do the obligatory good news/bad news letter. I do this because I believe students still need to know what a letter looks like. I don't believe in the inductive approach to writing as a general rule; however, I know there are rare instances where it's a viable option. Appendix E discusses how to write letters of all kinds. What's most interesting during the letter-writing portions of the course is talking to students about rhetorical choices. What are the means of persuasion available in a given circumstance? Beyond answering the reader's questions on a given issue, when is it

necessary to be strategic about where the main points occurs. For instance, when asking reader's to do something they would probably resist doing (give money, etc.), it's usually better not to start with that request. Some say it's best to be inductive when giving bad news. I don't always agree with this. But I acquaint students with this option and have them practice it once.

I usually spend a week on the résumé and job letter. This is covered in Appendix C. I sometimes have them produce a résumé for some real job they desire. But I find that students usually have ready-made résumés. Therefore, requiring this document is a matter of their submitting what they already have done. Instead, I prefer to have them greatly increase their awareness about résumés and job letters from the reader's perspective. See appendix C. I also like to have them read Seth Godin and others on "why the résumé s dead." I usually have them read three articles on résumés and have them post a response. I do go over in class what an effective job letter would look like. In this regard, I have also worked with students on their personal *elevator speech* for an interview or job fair. Lots of options on this topic.

Given that we have only about 40 hours with students in a typical semester, I'm careful to reduce information overload. I find that stressing the specific concepts and techniques that make up the "new basics" is plenty. Then they need to practice, practice, and practice. There's just so much we could cover in such a class—see any \$250 business-writing textbook for evidence. We shouldn't try to be all things to all teachers/students. We should focus on the new basics.

I also want teachers to reduce the amount of time they spend grading. Google this problem. Here are 6 articles that will get you started re-imagining how you can spend less time grading while teaching students more skills:

1. <http://www.edutopia.org/grading-dilemma-strategies-tactics>
2. <https://modelsbydesign.wordpress.com/2014/02/17/5-ways-to-reduce-your-grading-time/>
3. <http://www.teachhub.com/grading-overload-12-time-saving-assessment-strategies>
4. <http://www.weareteachers.com/blogs/post/2014/08/08/6-ways-to-save-time-on-grading-essays>
5. <https://inside.mines.edu/UserFiles/File/LAIS/WAC/ReducingStress.pdf>
6. <http://www.weareteachers.com/blogs/post/2015/01/20/teacher-helpline-the-essay-free-weekend>

# Schedule of Activities

WEEK	ACTIVITY
1 / 8.27-9.7	Read Intro & Ch 1 MWW ( <i>THE HOCs AND LOCs PARADIGM</i> ); <b>quiz</b> ; Post your INTRO; Assign graded writing sample; Graded Writing Sample due 9/3
2 / 9.8-14	Read Ch 2 MWW ( <i>CONTENT</i> ); <b>quiz</b> ; Post Content Analysis
3 / 9.15-21	Read Ch 3 MWW ( <i>ORGANIZATION</i> ); <b>quiz</b> ; Post Level-of-Effort Analysis; Assign 1 <sup>st</sup> short memo report: smart pigs;
4 / 9.22-28	Read Ch 4 MWW ( <i>FORMAT</i> ); <b>quiz</b> ; Post Document-Design Analysis; Work on 1 <sup>st</sup> Report

5 / 9.29-10.5	Assign 2 <sup>nd</sup> short memo report: Electric Cars; Submit 1 <sup>st</sup> short memo report: smart pigs;
6 / 10.6-12	Read Ch 5 MWW (PARAGRAPHS); <b>quiz</b> ; Post Paragraph Analysis
7 / 10.13-19	Read Ch 6 MWW (SENTENCES); <b>quiz</b> ; Assign sentences exercise; Assign final Plain English report; Submit 2 <sup>nd</sup> short memo report: Electric Cars
8 / 10.20-26	Assign 1 <sup>st</sup> letter; Assign 3 <sup>rd</sup> short memo report: job search; Post Sentence Analysis; Submit sentences exercise
9 / 10.27-11.2	Read Ch 7 MWW (WORD CHOICE); <b>quiz</b> ; Assign 2 <sup>nd</sup> letter; Post Tone Analysis; Submit 1 <sup>st</sup> letter



10 / 11.3-9	Submit 2 <sup>nd</sup> letter; Submit Plain English report outline (optional); Post Résumé/Job Letter analysis.
11 / 11.10-16	Discuss plain English report; Submit 3 <sup>rd</sup> short memo report: job search;
12 / 11.17-23	Post Report Analysis
13 / 11.24-30	Submit final assessment short memo
14 / 12.1-7	Review for final exam
15 / 12.8-17	Submit final plain English report; Take Final Exam by 5PM 12/17

QUIZZES: I want to give students credit for reading. I design quizzes that combine true/false and multiple choice questions based on the reading. Blackboard automatically and instantly grades these quizzes.

FINAL EXAM: I give students a more challenging, in-depth exam based on our reading and class discussions. It's usually 25 true/false or multiple choice questions that can be graded by Blackboard.

If you want to see my prompts for any of the Discussion Board posting assignments or any of my report/letter assignments, I'll be glad to share with you. Just contact me either at [Harvey@QCGwrite.com](mailto:Harvey@QCGwrite.com) or at [hlillywhite@towson.edu](mailto:hlillywhite@towson.edu). I'm glad to talk to you and serve as a resource for you in any way I reasonably can. I've even been known to visit campuses for a 1- to 2-hour presentation on the HOCs and LOCs method—throwing down the NEW BASICS in workplace writing. Ask me if you're interested.

GOOD LUCK. HAVE FUN. SHARE YOUR COMMENTS.

Come to our website at [QCGwrite.com](http://QCGwrite.com) and

- read our workplace writing blog
- propose a guest blog post
- join our **Johnny Appleseed Campaign for REAL writing!**

Below is my own rubric. It's intricate, I know. Have a look. I'm trying to combine holistic and analytic rubric styles. Above all, I resist rubrics with wobble-words—those adjectives and adverbs that are vague and never defined. All blue words are defined. See what you think.

Here's how I make comments on student assignments:

Sally,

CONTENT: I found this report useful. You gave some key selling points on the Leaf. I do wonder how it compares with other electric cars in terms of price, range, dependability, and drivability. I also wondered how long it takes to recharge a battery and how long a charge will last me. (3)

ORG/DESIGN: Logically organized and wonderfully designed. My level of effort was extremely low. (4)

STYLE: Flawless (4)

GRADE = A-

The little numbers at the end of each area of evaluation rate that area on a scale of 0-4, where 4 is an "A," 3 is a "B," etc. The final grade is NOT the average of the three but rather the lowest of the three (although I reserve the right to go a tad higher or lower to reflect my overall assessment of the assignment). I almost always give a whole number for any area (a 3, not a 3.3 or 3.7). My reasoning for this draconian procedure is that **any document, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest link**. You might earn a 4 for content and a 4 for ORG/DESIGN but a 2 for STYLE. Thus your grade for the assignment is a 2. You might earn a 4 for ORG/DESIGN and a 4 for STYLE but a 1 for CONTENT. Thus your grade would be a 1. So pay attention to all levels.

## My Grading Rubric The COS 3-Pillar Rubric for Holistic Grading

	Outstanding-4	Proficient-2	Substandard-0
<b>Content</b>	Achieves all tasks required for <i>complete/reliable</i> content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engages an <i>ISSUE</i> of interest to the user</li> <li>Generates <i>key</i> reader questions to arrive at topics for treating the <i>ISSUE</i></li> <li>Answers the reader questions directly</li> <li>Supports the answers with <i>appropriate</i> evidence/detail</li> <li>Uses a <i>valid</i> methodology to gather information</li> <li>Resolves the <i>ISSUE</i> <i>appropriately</i></li> </ul>	Fails to achieve any one of the tasks required for <i>complete/reliable</i> content
<b>Organization</b>	Achieves tasks 1 and 2 and <i>excels</i> at task 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arranges/orders topics <i>logically</i> and <i>appropriately</i></li> <li>Structures information <i>deductively</i> throughout (unless <i>ISSUE</i> requires inductive treatment)</li> <li>Designs the document to <i>enhance</i> readability/usability</li> </ul>	Fails to achieve tasks 1 or 2 or document design is <i>notably poor</i>
<b>Style</b>	Completes all tasks <i>successfully</i> 100%-90% of the time.	<b>PARAGRAPHS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Topic sentences accurately state <i>What? What about it?</i> (And prepare user for <i>What will follow</i>, if deductive)</li> <li>Supporting sentences answer key questions raised by the topic sentence (<i>adequate</i> development)</li> <li>Supporting sentences <i>unified</i> given topic sentence (unity)</li> <li>Sentences observe <i>known/new sequence</i> and use <i>logic markers</i> <i>appropriately</i> (coherence)</li> </ul>	Performs tasks at level where user's comprehension is <i>significantly</i> impaired.
	Completes 1 <sup>st</sup> task all the time and all other tasks <i>successfully</i> 100%-90% of the time.	<b>SENTENCES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expresses thoughts <i>so they can be understood</i></li> <li>Creates a <i>predominantly verb-centered style</i></li> <li>Uses active/passive voice <i>appropriately</i></li> <li>Controls coordination/subordination to <i>enhance</i> emphasis</li> <li>Manages left-, mid-, and right-branching sentences <i>effectively</i></li> </ul>	Performs tasks at level where user's comprehension is <i>significantly</i> impaired.
	Completes all tasks <i>successfully</i> 100%-95% of the time.	<b>WORD CHOICES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selects <i>accurate</i> word to express the thought</li> <li>Maintains <i>plain-English</i>-compliant lexis</li> <li>Adopts <i>appropriate</i> level of diction to achieve <i>appropriate</i> tone</li> <li><i>Manages</i> technical language and jargon so user comprehends idea</li> </ul>	Performs tasks at level where user's comprehension is <i>significantly</i> impaired.
	Completes all tasks <i>successfully</i> 100%-99% of the time.	<b>MECHANICS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observes conventions for grammar</li> <li>Observes conventions for spelling</li> <li>Observes conventions for punctuation</li> <li>Observes conventions for house style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.)</li> </ul>	Performs tasks at level where user's <b>confidence</b> is <i>significantly</i> impaired.

COS Pyramid Score	
Final Holistic Score	2
3-Pillar Assessment Scores	3/4/2
Style Assessment Scores	3-3-3-2

Words in **blue** are **value-words** that will be defined.

This rubric combines the idea of a holistic rubric with the detail of an analytical rubric. I have a strong sense of the grade a particular assignment has earned. This is my holistic sense of the grade. But I move through all the levels of the rubric and give a score—as explained below. I then compare the analytical score to my initial holistic impression. If the two match, the grade remains. If they don't, I need to think more carefully about the discrepancy before I give a final grade. I think it's important to be able to explain to a student in some detail why she/he earned a particular grade. I want my grading criteria to be as objective and explainable as possible.

### Procedure for Generating the Final Holistic Score (FHS)

1. Read the document and give it an overall holistic score from 4 (A) to 0 (F) (first impression).
2. Read again checking for content and give content an overall score from 4 to 0.
3. Read again for organization and give organization an overall score from 4 to 0.
4. Read again for style. Give individual scores for paragraphs, sentences, word choices, and mechanics from 4 to 0.
5. The style score will be the lowest number among the 4 aspects of style because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.(**ACIOASAIWL**)
6. Consider all the scores for steps 2-4. The final holistic score (FHS) will be the lowest number among the 3 scores. For instance, if content is a 4 and organization is a 3 and style is a 2, the FHS is a 2 (ACIOASAIWL).
7. Compare the holistic score from step 1 to the FHS. If there's a discrepancy, figure out the cause based on the COS 3-Pillar Rubric analysis.
8. Adjust as necessary given the type of document and the stage of the draft (beginning draft, middle drafts, final draft)\* so you can justify to the writer the FHS, which will be the final grade.

Having the full three-level **COS Pyramid Score** (see the bottom of page 1) shows the writer strengths and weaknesses in the document at all levels. It also drives home the point that a document is only as good as its weakest aspect—most of the time (ACIOASAIWL).

### Example

I read a document and thought it was a **3** for step 1 (essentially a grade of “B.”)

I gave the following scores for content and organization: 3 / 4

I gave the following scores for paragraphs, sentences, word choices, and mechanics: 3 / 3 / 4 / **2**

Therefore, I gave the style a score of **2** (ACIOASAIWL).

The 3 scores were 3 / 4 / 2 for content, organization, and style.

The FHS was then **2** (ACIOASAIWL).

Because this was a lower score than the original score for step 1 (a **3**), I reconsidered my scoring—steps 7 and 8. In this case, I thought that the problems at the level of mechanics were not enough to give the document just a 2\*\*. But now I saw that it really wasn't a 3 overall. So I gave it a **2.5** as a final FHS. **[NOTE: In some cases the adjustment at step 8 verifies the lower score, but it may not. In**



***fact, the first holistic score from step 1 may be the correct overall score. Often, as in the example, there is some adjustment and a score between the lowest score and the step 1 score is right. However, if any level is a 0, then the FHS must be a 0.]***

\*To acknowledge the differences in impact of the COS elements among various types of documents and different communication dynamics between writer and reader, the adjustment stage at step 8 can over-ride the score at step 6. This allows the reader to weight the significance of the COS elements for any given document. In a beginning draft, for instance, the style points may be low but might not have such a big impact on the overall score. But, for a final draft, style points might be very important.

\*\*This adjustment to the assessment was based on the type of document under review, which was a less formal email going to a coworker. Had the document been the final draft of a formal report being sent to a customer, for instance, the problems with mechanics might have kept the overall score as a 2.

## Explanations of **VALUE** Words

### CONTENT

- “Achieves all tasks required for *complete/reliable* content”: To be *complete and reliable* means the content discusses the answers to all the key reader questions summoned by the ISSUE (the area of interest/concern shared between the writer and the reader (USER) who will use the information in some way). If the information does not address these key reader questions so that the user of the information still has important questions that have gone unanswered, the content cannot said to be complete. Reliability concerns methodology and sources for obtaining the information. Information should be timely, objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, non-ideological, fair, and balanced. The reliability of sources must be determined on a case by case basis.
- “Engages an *ISSUE* of interest to the user”: By **ISSUE** we mean an area of shared interest/concern between the writer and the user of the information. It is a topic that the user is or should be interested in and wants or needs information about.

- “Generates *key* questions to arrive at topics for treating the ISSUE”: Because content should be generated by the reader’s questions about the ISSUE, the writer should generate those questions. *Key* questions are the most important ones the reader needs to know about to understand or deal effectively with the ISSUE. Usually it’s the reader herself who can tell if all the key questions have been addressed. However, sometimes the writer is more expert and knows more about the information and thus more about what the important questions are. A physician, for instance, would presumably know the right questions to ask about a patient’s symptoms, whereas the patient might not. The writer should address all the key questions the reader has and should have—we refer to this set of questions also as “appropriate” questions given the ISSUE. To prove proficiency (a **2**), a document must include the important questions that serve the reader’s needs. A document that receives a **4** will have no extraneous questions; whereas, a document that has the key questions but also includes questions that may not serve the reader will earn a **2**.
- “Supports the answers with *appropriate* evidence/detail”: Answers to key questions need to be answered directly. These answers usually bring up other subordinate questions

that lead to information needed to explain or support the answer to the key question. For instance, if the writer says that reductions in force are necessary within a particular department, many questions will arise: how many reductions? Who gets cut? Why? When? etc. Evidence and supporting details are **appropriate** when they answer these subordinate questions to the satisfaction of the reader.

- “Uses a **valid** methodology to gather information”:  
Methodology is simply how you gather and arrive at your information. A methodology is **valid** when it allows the writer to gather true propositions about the ISSUE and the associated key questions. *True*, in this case, means reliable in the sense that the information accurately predicts actions in the world. Different kinds of documents require different levels of methodology. If a writer sends an email saying that the French Bistro is his favorite place to get food in Wichita, the methodology is probably only the writer’s own thoughts and feelings on the subject. However, should that writer claim that the French Bistro is the favorite place for most people to eat in Wichita, the methodology would need to be much more robust, including copious and well-planned surveys, etc.

- “Resolves the ISSUE *appropriately*”: Resolving an issue means answering and explaining all of the reader’s key questions and setting out any resulting course of action that will or should be taken. An ISSUE is *appropriately* resolved when the reader is satisfied that she understands the ISSUE, given the questions addressed and what, if anything, will or needs to happen next.
- “*Fails* to achieve any one of the tasks required for *complete/reliable* content”: See first bulleted explanation for a discussion of *complete/reliable*. *Fails* does not mean that the writer has totally failed to create complete/reliable content. *Fails* means that the document doesn’t give the reader/user all the information he needs because key questions were not identified or addressed, and the information is in some way unreliable so that the reader cannot use the information as needed.

## ORGANIZATION

- “Achieves tasks 1 and 2 and *excels* at task 3”: Task 1 involves arranging the information in an appropriately logical way (discussed in bullet 2 below), and task 2 involves structuring the information deductively throughout (discussed in bullet 3 below). To be truly “outstanding”—a **4**— a document must achieve these first two tasks. The idea of a sliding scale for logic and deductive structure is troublesome. Can a document be somewhat logically arranged? Either it is or it isn't. Perhaps there is a sliding scale for deductive structure. But if two sections are deductively structured but a third is not, then the writer has not been proficient in this skill. If a large section is deductive overall but the sub-parts are not deductive, again, the writer has not been proficient in this skill. Task 3 is more variable because it deals with presenting the information visually. There are, of course, many possible ways and means of visually presenting information. But a writer could be proficient in this skill while another writer might *excel* and be “outstanding”—a **4**. However, both a proficient and an outstanding visual presentation would be acceptable to the reader who must navigate the document. Proficiency for this task is discussed in bullet 4 below.

- “Arranges/orders topics *logically* and *appropriately*”: *Logical/appropriate* arrangement, of course, depends on the type of document. Most often, topics are arranged from most important to least important. But sometimes they can be arranged chronologically or in a way that allows the writer to compare and contrast information for the reader. The particular ISSUE and the topics generated to meet the reader’s needs will determine this logical and appropriate order.
- “Structures information *deductively* throughout (unless ISSUE requires inductive treatment)”: Readers who need useful information are usually quite busy and appreciate getting the main points first and then the details—just as newspapers have been organizing news stories for centuries. *Deductive* means the main point at any level comes before the explanation/supporting details. In a longer document, such as a report with many sections and subsections, an executive summary may make the whole document deductive. Each major section and sub-section would also begin with the main point. Sometimes, matters of persuasion, or other factors, might require a more inductive structure, a structure that gives details and reasoning before the main point. In such cases, the reader can follow the logic before



being confronted by the conclusion, a strategy that might help persuade a reader who would be upset in some way if the conclusion came before a useful explanation of the logic behind it.

- “Designs the document to *enhance* readability/usability”: By now, the discipline of document design is the subject of some doctoral programs. There are, however, certain fundamental document design principles that writers can use to make the logical structure and key information easily visible to the user of that document. These principles would include chunking key sections and clearly labeling them with informative headings (or other types of headings). Formatting the page to increase usability. Selecting appropriate fonts, styles, and sizes to best serve the reader’s needs. In short, a write can enhance usability/readability by creating a strong visible structure that allows readers to easily navigate the document and find important information quickly and easily.

## STYLE

Style includes four measures: paragraphs, sentences, word choices, and mechanics. Each yields its own proficiency score based on the following criteria.

### PARAGRAPHS

- **“Topic sentences accurately state *What? What about it?* (And prepare user for *What will follow*, if deductive)”**: As the sentence that states the main point of the paragraph, the topic sentence must tell the reader *what* (the main noun or noun phrase) the paragraph is discussing and make some assertion about it (*what about it*). In a completely deductive paragraph this sentence comes first. Because it tells the reader what the main topic is and what about it, this deductively placed sentence also prepares the reader for *what* kind of discussion/information *will follow* in the rest of that paragraph. If the topic sentence does not accurately indicate where the rest of the paragraph goes, it is not a useful topic sentence for a deductive paragraph.
- **“Supporting sentences answer key questions raised by the topic sentence (*adequate* development) ”**: *Adequate* development is impossible to quantify

exactly; thus, it's a holistic judgment. But every topic sentence, by making an assertion, raises other questions or needs further explanation so the reader gets all the information she needs given what the topic sentence asserts. In judging adequacy of development, the assessor (or better yet, the actual user of the information) should look for information that's obviously lacking given the topic as well as for information that isn't necessary but that has been provided.

- **“Supporting sentences *unified* given topic sentence (unity)”**: **Unity** within a paragraph means that all supporting sentences are necessary and refer back to the topic of the paragraph.
- **“Sentences observe *known/new sequence* and use *logic markers appropriately* (coherence)”**: The ***known/new sequence*** means that the grammatical subjects of main clauses refer to words/phrases/ideas that the reader has seen or expects given the context of the information. The new information should generally come in the predicate. Logic markers include transitional words/phrases, which can be further divided into logically continuous and discontinuous markers.

## SENTENCES

- **“Expresses thoughts *so they can be understood*”:**  
Expressing thoughts *so they can be understood* is impossible to quantify exactly; thus, it’s a holistic judgment. If the reader can understand the thought being expressed, the writing meets proficiency in this regard.
- **“Creates a *predominantly verb-centered style*”:** A *predominantly verb-centered style* expresses true actions in verbs and not nouns. Thus it uses nominalizations when necessary but not consistently to express true actions (a true action is the action that is actually taking place: The following sentence is not verb-centered because it states the true action as a noun instead of a verb, “*They conducted an investigation.*”—vs. “*They investigated.*”)
- **“Uses active/passive voice *appropriately*”:** A verb-centered style usually prefers active voice, but passive voice has a useful part to play in a clear style. For instance, passive voice may be used appropriately to avoid pointing an accusing finger (*The milk was spilled*), to emphasize a word/phrase that would otherwise be a direct object (*Five million newsletters were published last*

*year in the U.S.*), or to help maintain the known/new sequence, among other helpful uses. The reader should see a clear intention behind any passive-voice constructions.

- **“Controls coordination/subordination to *enhance* emphasis”**: To *enhance* emphasis, the main clause should carry the more important information when subordinate clauses are used. If clauses are coordinated, each clause should provide information that is equally important.
- **“Manages left-, mid-, and right-branching sentences *effectively*”**: When phrases or subordinate clauses come before the main sentence core [**S**(naming actor)-**V**(naming true action)-**O**(if any, naming receiver of the action)], the sentence is left-branching. When the link between **S and V** or **V and O** is interrupted, the sentence is mid-branching. When the sentence core ends with phrases or subordinate clauses, the sentence is right-branching. Research indicates that right-branching sentences are easier for readers to understand, and mid-branching sentences are the most difficult to understand. However, there's a place for all three in an effective style. Using “branching” techniques

*effectively* is impossible to quantify exactly; thus, it's a holistic judgment. The reader should see a clear intention behind any “branching” constructions.

## WORD CHOICES

- **“Selects *accurate* word to express the thought”**: Even given *word sense disambiguation (WSD)* tests, selecting the *accurate* word is impossible to quantify exactly; thus, assessing whether a text uses the conceptually accurate word is a holistic judgment. If the reader can understand the information being expressed by the word, and the word is appropriate given the meaning of the sentence, the writing meets proficiency in this regard.
- **“Maintains *plain-English-compliant* lexis”**: In 1954, Sir Ernest Arthur Gowers wrote that *“writing is an instrument for conveying ideas from one mind to another; the writer’s job is to make his reader apprehend his meaning readily and precisely.”* *Plain English* (sometimes referred to more broadly as *plain language*) is a generic term for communication in English that emphasizes clarity and brevity and avoids unnecessary technical language. No one element of a document defines plain language. It is defined by results: writing that is easy to read,

understand, and use. However, word choices have an important effect on plain English. If word choices throughout a text can be understood by the reader and any technical terms are clearly defined, the writing meets proficiency in this regard.

- **“Adopts *appropriate* level of diction to achieve *appropriate* tone”**: There are four generally accepted levels of diction—formal, informal, colloquial, or slang. Any level may be *appropriate* in a particular context but inappropriate in another or when mixed unintentionally. Most ideas can be expressed with a number of alternate words—children, *kids*, *youngsters*, *youths*, *brats*, *etc.*; all have different evocative values. Diction affects tone, which can be defined as the attitude a writer takes toward both his reader and topic. Expressing thoughts at an *appropriate level of* diction to create an *appropriate tone* is impossible to quantify exactly; thus, it's a holistic judgment. If the reader can understand the thought being expressed, the writing meets proficiency in this regard.
- **“*Manages* technical language and jargon so user comprehends idea”**: Sometimes a writer must use a technical term, a term of art, or a term that may be



considered jargon. If the document *manages* this potentially difficult language so the reader understands the term, the word choice is fine. If the reader does not understand it, then it must be immediately defined clearly enough so the reader will understand it.

## MECHANICS

- **“Completes all tasks *successfully* 100%-99% of the time”**:The mechanics within any document refer to the conventions for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and acceptable house style (if any). Readers often define “good writing” as writing that is error-free at this level. While it could easily be argued that such small mistakes hardly lower comprehension in most cases, writers must pay particularly close attention at this level to ensure an error-free document. Such mistakes certainly reduce the level of confidence the reader will have in the document. While small errors in mechanics are perhaps inevitable in any document, successfully managing mechanics, requires a high rate of correctness, certainly north of 99%.