

Study Unit

Improving Your Writing

Writing a strong letter to apply for a job or putting together a convincing argument for a business report requires more than a collection of nouns, verbs, and punctuation. Good communication skills include the basics, of course, but proper planning, a pleasant style, and close attention to detail also count. This study unit is designed to help you make the best use of the writing tools you already have by making them work for you as you plan, develop, revise, and present your work.

When you complete this study unit, you'll be able to

- Identify your audience, medium, and purpose
- Focus your ideas
- Organize your material
- Plan both informal and formal writing projects
- Use words, punctuation, and sentences to achieve the effect you want
- Revise, edit, and proofread to make your final copy accurate, professional, and attractive

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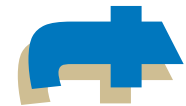
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Improving Your Writing

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Just as there are many ways to write, there are many ways to describe the process of writing. In this study unit, we'll break down the process into these stages:

- Prewriting
- Planning
- Writing the first draft
- Revising and editing
- Proofreading
- Presenting

The writing process isn't always linear. That is, writers don't always include every step or follow each step in order. They may begin writing a first draft without really knowing what they wish to say, for instance, and then go back and plan the revision using an outline. They may proofread as they go along and not make a special effort to do so as a separate step. Or, once they've gone through the entire process, they may decide to discard what they have and start again. This may happen in business, for instance, when a proposal is rejected but the company wishes to pursue the project from another angle.

Prewriting

The first stage in the writing process is actually *prewriting*. This is what you do before you put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). Prewriting comes even before planning because you don't even have anything specific to plan yet. During prewriting, the first thing to do is to determine your *purpose*, *medium*, and *audience*.

Why are you writing? What do you hope to achieve? The answer is your *purpose*.

What form will you use—a letter, a memo, a report, a proposal, an essay, a poem, a story, or something else? The answer is your *medium*.

Who will read the final piece of writing? What are their needs and expectations? That's your *audience*.

It's important to understand your purpose, medium, and audience from the very beginning. Doing so will help you to work through the writing process efficiently and effectively. Without understanding these three elements, you'll have trouble focusing your ideas and writing with confidence. Or, you may write with ease, yet unintentionally focus on the wrong points and fail to achieve the results you intend.

Once you know your purpose, medium, and audience, it's time to find out what your thoughts are about your topic so that you can decide how to approach your writing project. Suppose, for instance, you're asked to write a paragraph about cars. What would you say? Maybe it's not even a topic that interests you. However, you have to come up with something interesting to say.

Who asked you to write the paragraph, and why? Let's say, since this course resembles a classroom, that a writing teacher has given you this assignment. Your purpose is to demonstrate that you've mastered the basics of written English expression. Your medium is given—a paragraph. Your audience is the teacher and (let's pretend) the rest of the class. So, what will you say in this paragraph to demonstrate your English skills to your teacher and classmates?

There are many ways you could get ideas. All it really takes to get you started on a writing project is one good idea that excites you. Finding that idea is the goal of any prewriting exercise.

You can take five steps as you prewrite: *brainstorming*, *webbing*, *freewriting*, *researching*, and *journal keeping*. We'll examine each here, beginning with brainstorming.

Brainstorming

What does the topic of “cars” bring to mind? To find out, try *brainstorming*. Make a list of every idea that comes to mind. Don't exclude anything. Don't worry about putting these thoughts in order. Right now you're just writing down everything you think might be a possible focus for your paragraph. You may end up not using most of these ideas.

You might even wish to brainstorm with one or more other people. Ask questions. What do you think of cars? What cars do you like? What would you like to read about cars? Other people may come up with ideas that will trigger even better ideas of your own.

A list on the subject of cars might look something like the list in [Figure 1](#). These are just a few suggestions, of course—you could come up with many more ideas.

Cars	
Big cars	Henry Ford
Little cars	Model T's
Are RVs cars?	TR7s
My first car	Used car lots
Car accidents	Drive-in movies
Speeding limits	Driveways
Speeding tickets	Garage door openers
Drunk driving	Car seats
Leather seats	Seat belts

FIGURE 1—A Brainstormed List

Webbing

A similar exercise, called *webbing*, is perhaps even more useful than brainstorming. It shows relationships between some of the ideas you have. To begin, write your topic (*cars*, for example) in the middle of a piece of paper ([Figure 2](#)). Circle it. Draw a line out from the circle and write another word—the first word that comes to mind about the topic, for example, *wheels*. Circle that word, too. Draw a line out from there and write another word that comes to mind about the second circled word, for example, *hubcaps*. Circle the new word and keep going, for example, *flat tire*, *my first flat*, *learned to change tires in driver's ed.*, and *nobody stopped to help*. Then you can go back and start a new chain from the key word, cars. You can start many chains. Often, you'll come up with something interesting.

FIGURE 2—Webbing



Freewriting

To freewrite, you fill a piece of paper with any idea that comes to mind about your topic. Don't stop to think. Don't lift your pen. Just write! Don't worry about grammar or sentence structure or anything else except your topic. Your goal is to come up with that one good idea, and the best way to do that is to set your creative mind free (Figure 3). Your mind can't be creative if it's worried about spelling and semicolons.

Here's an example of freewriting on the topic of cars.

My car got so hot today. The sun was shining in the windows all afternoon and heated the steering wheel into a fiery circle. My car's a Geo just a little thing saves me money on gas gets me where I want. My first car was a gigantic Plymouth Fury. We called her Megacar. Mega was used. Geo was new when I bought it but sure looks used now! Mega better in snow. Big cars are probably safer. But it cost a mint to fill Mega's tank. And that was during the energy crisis. Cars and the energy crisis. Whatever happened to the energy crisis? Aren't cars still using up resources? And polluting? How come we don't hear that any more? I need to look into this.



FIGURE 3—Freewriting on any topic, such as cars, can reveal the many ideas that constantly pass through your mind.

Researching

Many people like to look to outside sources for ideas for writing. For the assignment on cars, you might go to the library and look for information on cars. Or, if you've already decided you're interested in one of the narrower topics you've come up with while brainstorming, clustering, or freewriting, you could look up more information on that idea. Read a biography on Henry Ford, for instance, or do some research on the energy crisis, the history of speed limits, or the pros and cons of small versus big cars.

Journal Keeping

Some people write their most interesting thoughts and experiences in a journal, which is a record of events, ideas, or reflections, kept for private use. If you write in your journal regularly, it can be a good source of ideas to write about for other purposes. For instance, perusing the journal entries near the time you bought your last car, you might recall issues that were important to you and come up with a topic like “What to Look for When Buying a Car.”

Organizing Your Material

Any time you sit down to write something—an e-mail message, a letter, a report, a proposal—you must organize the material you’re going to present (Figure 4). Of course, short documents, such as e-mails and memos, don’t require the same degree of organization as long reports, but the quality of any written document improves when you think through what you want to say and, sometimes, write an outline.

FIGURE 4—No matter how short or how long your document will be, always take time to organize your material. Sometimes, just jotting down your thoughts and ideas is a good beginning for organizing your topics.

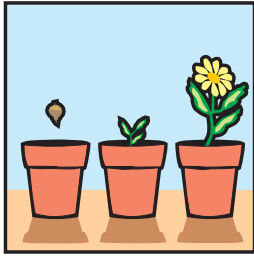


Patterns of Organization

Sometimes the nature of the information you collect determines how you should organize it. Other times, the decision may not be so clear. In this section you’re going to examine the following types of organization:

- Chronological order
- Spatial order
- Classification/division
- Comparison/contrast
- Cause and effect

Chronological Order



Chronological order has to do with time and sequence. A document written in chronological order presents the material in the order in which it happened or should happen. For example, suppose you must write a report on the steps necessary to perform a particular production task.

You would start with the first step and proceed in the order in which the steps should occur. Such information fits naturally into the chronological order pattern.

Material written in chronological order uses words like *first*, *second*, *third*, *next*, *then*, *after*, and *finally*. These terms help the reader establish the order in which things occur.

Spatial Order

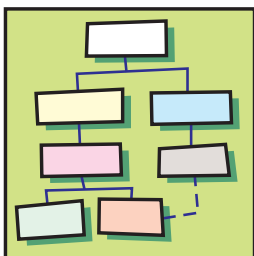


Spatial order involves physical space. A document written in spatial order presents the material in the order in which it is physically arranged. For example, suppose you want to describe the arrangement of furniture in a room. You might begin with one corner and work your way around

the walls. Or maybe you've been given the responsibility to develop the layout of your production area or office space or the arrangement of products in a showroom. Such material would lend itself to organization in spatial order.

Material written in spatial order uses words and phrases like *at the extreme left*, *next*, *above*, *over*, *under*, *beneath*, *to the right*, and *at the end*.

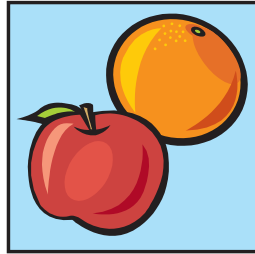
Classification/Division



To use the *classification/division* pattern to develop a document, you begin with a collection of items of any kind and then group, or classify, them according to some similar property or properties. Or you may begin with one whole item and divide it into various parts.

Suppose your boss wants a report on all the clients your department worked with last year and the types of jobs you did for each one. You start out with a list of all the jobs you completed last year. Then you could group them according to client or according to the type of job. This type of information lends itself well to the classification/division pattern of organization.

Comparison/Contrast



When you *compare* two or more items, you show how they're similar; when you *contrast* two or more items, you show how they're different. When preparing a document, you may use only comparison or only contrast, or you may encounter a subject that should show both.

Suppose the department you work in uses batteries that are produced by Company A. Your supervisor has discovered that Company B produces the same kind of battery but charges approximately 25 percent less. Your supervisor wants you to look into this issue and write up your findings.

This situation is a perfect one for the comparison/contrast pattern. Once you gather all the information on both types of batteries, you can show the similarities and differences between the two types.

In setting up the material for a comparison/contrast document, you can present all of the information on one item first followed by all of the information on the other item. Or you may decide to discuss the similarities and/or differences one by one, going back and forth from one item to the other.

Cause and Effect



Cause and effect organization involves examining certain elements (causes) to determine what will occur (effects). For example, you may work in a department that produces parts for automobile radios. You want to know how production would

be affected if you added one more machine to your department. The adding of the machine is the cause, and the change in production is the effect.

Although most reports written in the cause-and-effect organization begin with the cause and proceed to the effect, you can also begin with the effect and work backward to the cause. For example, you may have noticed that the quality control employees in your department have recently been discovering a high percent of defective parts, and you want to know why. In this case, you begin with the effect (a high number of defective parts) and work toward the cause of this problem.

Outline Options

Preparing an outline is an important part of any writing. Don't be tempted to skip over this task. First of all, with an outline you can see at a glance what you're going to include in your document. An outline can also reveal to you that you've left something out. If so, you can easily add it to your outline. If you decide to revise or reorganize the information, you can do it much more easily with material in outline form than you can with written paragraphs.

The two types of outlines are sentence outlines and topic outlines.

Sentence Outline

A *sentence outline* consists of complete sentences for each item in the outline. This type of outline has one main advantage—it provides the topic sentences for your main paragraphs. [Figure 5](#) presents part of a sentence outline developed for a market report.

Topic Outline

A *topic outline* consists of grammatically similar words or phrases, organized according to the way in which they'll be covered in a written document. Topic outlines are more commonly used than sentence outlines and are often based on your brainstorming or initial note taking.



When you're preparing a topic outline, make sure to write your words or phrases in parallel structure.

There are three advantages of topic outlines:

1. They're easier to prepare than sentence outlines.
2. They become the basis of a table of contents for the document.
3. They supply the internal headings for your document.

Figure 5 illustrates a sentence outline, while Figure 6 depicts a topic outline of the same information.

Sentence Outline

- I. Our appraisal of the retail market for HomeGym in the Roanoke Valley area of Virginia has reached a satisfactory conclusion.
 - A. Basic research supplied by the Association of Sporting Goods Manufacturers (ASGM) has provided the following information:
 1. The Roanoke Valley area of Virginia is an appropriate market for HomeGym.
 2. Competing products should not impinge on a satisfactory market share.
 - B. In light of the unserved market for HomeGym in the Roanoke Valley, our purpose in this report is to suggest preferred retail outlets in Roanoke and surrounding communities.
 1. A research summary provided by the ASGM provides factual summaries on 14 qualified retail outlets in the Roanoke Valley.
 2. The report from ASGM also includes a recommended schedule for product insertions into the qualified outlets.
- II. Research provided by the ASGM explores our target market region through demographic profiles of three market segments.

FIGURE 5—Partial Sentence Outline for a Market Report

Topic Outline

- I. Results of appraisal
 - A. Research from Association of Sporting Goods Manufacturers (ASGM)
 - 1. Appropriateness of Roanoke Valley as market for HomeGym
 - 2. Competing products
 - B. Preferred retail outlets in Roanoke and surrounding communities
 - 1. Research summary from ASGM
 - 2. Schedule for product insertions
- II. Demographic profiles of three market segments

FIGURE 6—Partial Topic Outline for a Market Report

Developing an Outline

Brainstorming is an excellent way to help you develop an outline for a report—or for anything you write, for that matter. Suppose you have the responsibility to put together a report on how to evaluate the quality of a used automobile. To get an idea of what you want to include in your report, you conduct a brainstorming session. After the session, you have a pile of index cards. Each card contains an item that a person should inspect before purchasing a used car.

Next, you study the items on the cards and eliminate those that you feel are unnecessary or irrelevant. After you've done this, you're left with a stack of cards that contain topics you want to cover in your report. Suppose the topics you have are those listed in [Figure 7](#).

Once you have the topics you want to cover, you can begin to categorize them. To do this, you must arrange the items in some logical sequence or order. As you study the list of topics in [Figure 7](#), you notice that the items fall into three main categories: exterior inspection items, interior inspection items, and engine inspection items. You arrange the cards into three separate piles, grouping them according to these three categories. Once you've done that, you have the start of a good outline.

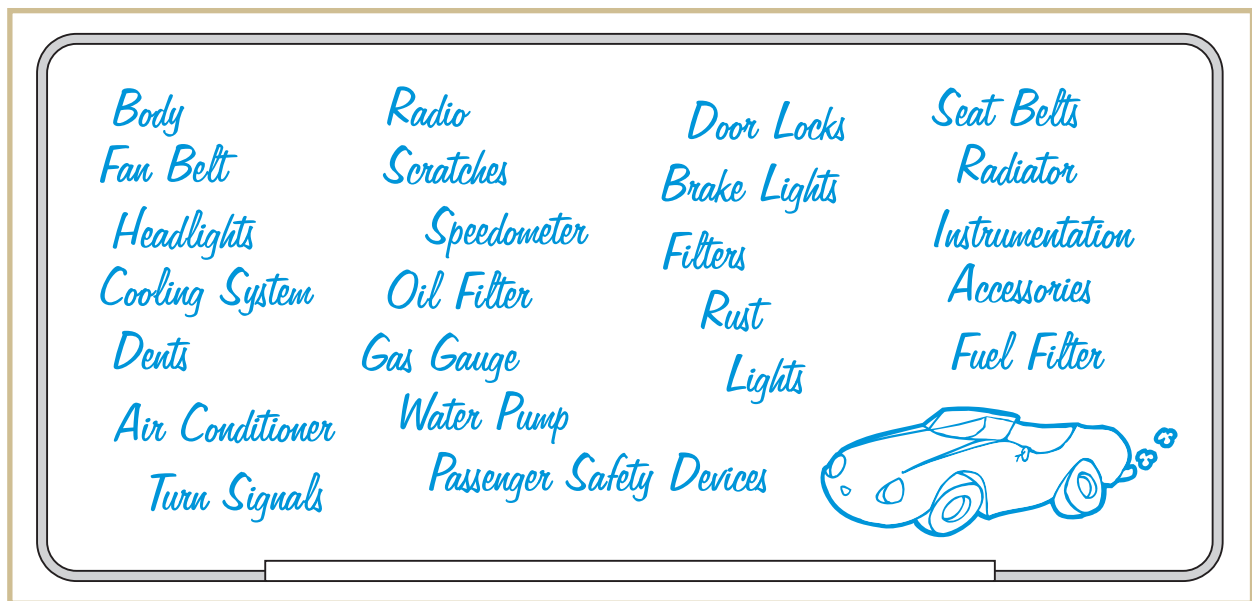


FIGURE 7—Here are the ideas you generated during your brainstorming session.

Here's what you have now:

I. Exterior inspection items

- Body
- Headlights
- Dents
- Turn signals
- Scratches
- Brake lights
- Rust
- Lights

II. Interior inspection items

- Air conditioner
- Radio
- Speedometer
- Gas gauge
- Passenger safety devices
- Door locks
- Seat belts
- Instrumentation
- Accessories

III. Engine inspection items

- Fan belt
- Cooling system
- Air filter
- Oil filter
- Water pump
- Filters
- Radiator
- Fuel filter

Now that you have this initial outline, examine the items in each of the three major topics again. Try to determine if you can divide these main sections even further.

As you examine your beginning outline, you discover that each of the sections can be divided into two or three subdivisions. Once you make adjustments for these subdivisions, you're outline looks like this:

I. Exterior inspection items

- A. Body
 - 1. Dents
 - 2. Scratches
 - 3. Rust
- B. Lights
 - 1. Turn signals
 - 2. Headlights
 - 3. Brake lights

II. Interior inspection items

- A. Instrumentation
 - 1. Gas gauge
 - 2. Speedometer
- B. Accessories
 - 1. Radio
 - 2. Air conditioner
- C. Passenger safety devices
 - 1. Door locks
 - 2. Seat belts

III. Engine inspection items

- A. Filters
 - 1. Air filter
 - 2. Oil filter
 - 3. Fuel filter



Including headings in a report helps your readers understand the order of your material. Headings also help readers find the information they need.

B. Cooling system

1. Radiator
2. Fan belt
3. Water pump

Now you have something you can work with as you begin your writing. The outline gives you direction. Notice, too, that you can use this outline as your table of contents.

Then, as you prepare your report, you can also use these topics as headings for the body of the document. Including them gives your readers some direction and focus as they read your information.

Practice Exercise 1

To practice sorting ideas, rearrange the following groups of ideas as instructed. Write your arrangements on a separate piece of paper.

Example A: Listen to bird-call records; Preparing for bird watching; Study bird guide; Clean and focus binoculars

Example format:

Preparing for bird watching

- A. Study bird guide
- B. Listen to bird-call records
- C. Clean and focus binoculars

1–6: Each of the following groups contains one main idea and several other ideas that are merely examples, illustrations, or explanations of the main idea. Write the main idea and then list under it the ideas that explain or develop it more fully. Use the format in Example A for your answers.

1. Remember the Maine; Make the world safe for democracy; War slogans; Remember Pearl Harbor
2. Open Door Policy; Truman Doctrine; American foreign policy; Monroe Doctrine
3. Dirty living conditions; Causes of poor health; Absence of medical care; Poor diet
4. Overemphasis on athletics; Too much emphasis on winning; Evils of college sports; Failure to provide for the poor or average athlete
5. The actual writing; Gathering ideas; Steps in writing; Making a plan
6. The interview; Studying the help-wanted ads; How I got the job; Sending a letter of application

(Continued)

Practice Exercise 1

Example B: Assembling the required utensils; Following the recipe; Decorating techniques; Baking a cake; Making the frosting; Icing the cake; Assembling the ingredients; Decorating the cake

Example format:

- I. Baking a cake
 - A. Assembling the ingredients
 - B. Assembling the required utensils
 - C. Following the recipe
- II. Decorating the cake
 - A. Making the frosting
 - B. Icing the cake
 - C. Decorating techniques

7–10: Each of the following groups of words and statements contains two main ideas and several other ideas that are merely examples, illustrations, or explanations of the main ideas. Find the two main ideas, and then, under each, list the ideas that explain or develop the main ones more fully as shown in Example B.

- 7. Eagles; Ducks; Quail; Game birds; Owls; Birds of prey; Pheasants; Hawks
- 8. Ice skating; Swimming; Baseball; Winter sports; Tennis; Skiing; Summer sports
- 9. Foul shooting; Batting; Fielding; Floor play; Set shooting; Pitching; Basketball; Guarding; Baseball
- 10. Sarcastic talk; Attractive appearance; Skill in conversation; Reasons for unpopularity; Pleasing personality; Selfishness; Consideration for others; Sense of humor; Reasons for popularity

Check your answers with those on page 67.

The Formal Outline

While a formal outline may vary in structure according to the nature of a report, most outlines have three sections, which correspond to the three main sections of any written document:

1. Introduction (A, or abstract)
2. Body (B)
3. Summary (C, or conclusion)

The following paragraphs briefly review these three sections.

Introduction (Abstract)

The introduction establishes the purpose of your report. To make that purpose clear or to put it in context, you may also include background information that explains the history of the problem and the reasons it demands attention. Perhaps the most important part of the introduction is a list of the major topics discussed in the body of the report. Needless to say, the topics should be listed in the order in which they'll be covered in the body of the report.

Body

The body of your report should contain the information needed to fulfill the purpose of your report. It will elaborate on each of the major topics given in the introduction. Your outline of the body of your report should be logically ordered in terms of major headings, secondary headings, and possibly detailed headings under the secondary headings.

Summary (Conclusion)

The summary of most reports briefly repeats the main topics and draws conclusions that lead to recommendations. A purely technical report, however, may simply come to a conclusion that's the basis of the report. For example, a discussion of the utility of a particular kind of circuit board may simply end with a concluding statement that declares the thing useful in a certain context.

A formal outline generally follows a particular pattern, as shown in [Figure 8](#).

The Structure of a Formal Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Background
 - B. Statement of purpose
 - C. Sources of researched information
 - D. Explanation of why some data is unavailable
 - E. Definitions of terms or concepts
 - F. Sequence of major topics discussed in report:
 - 1. Major topic #1
 - 2. Major topic #2
 - 3. Major topic #3
- II. Major topic #1
 - A. First subtopic
 - 1. Detail of first subtopic
 - 2. Detail of first subtopic
 - B. Second subtopic
 - 1. Detail of second subtopic
 - 2. Detail of second subtopic
 - a. Subdetail of second subtopic
 - b. Subdetail of second subtopic
- III. Major topic #2

(This topic follows the same developmental structure as major topic #1.)
- IV. Major topic #3

(This topic follows the same developmental structure as major topic #1.)
- V. Summary
 - A. Restatement of main theme or concept
 - B. Conclusion(s)
 - C. Recommendation(s)

FIGURE 8—A formal outline generally follows the structure shown here.

In a formal outline, you may have only two major topics, or you may have many more. Some major topics will have subtopics and details of those subtopics; other major topics may have no subtopics at all.

Finally, if you divide a topic into subtopics, you must include at least two subtopics. Never list only one item under a topic.

Incorrect:

- I. Introduction**
 - A. Topic 1**
 - 1. Subtopic**
 - B. Topic 2**

Correct:

- I. Introduction**
 - A. Topic 1**
 - 1. Subtopic 1**
 - 2. Subtopic 2**
 - B. Topic 2**

In the incorrect example, “Topic 1” has only one subtopic. This is an incorrect construction. The correct outline lists two subtopics under “Topic 1.” Think of it this way: You can’t divide something and end up with only one part. When you divide a topic, you must list at least two subtopics.

Remember that your outline, whether informal or formal, is a working document that can be changed if necessary. If you discover that a topic requires further breakdown or that one of your subtopics is worthy of more attention, by all means, revise your plan. After all, the outline is meant to help you organize your work, not discourage curiosity or hinder inspiration.

Now take some time to practice what you’ve learned. Complete *Practice Exercise 2*, then go on to *Self-Check 1*.

Practice Exercise 2

Now that you've learned the basics of outlining, try developing your own formal outline. You may have to research your subject if you need general information or details to complete your outline. Choose a topic that interests you and decide on the pattern of organization you'll use, because we'll be building on this outline for future writing assignments.

Prepare a formal topic outline for a composition on one of the following subjects. Use words or phrases for your outline.

How to Work with a Business Partner

Florence Nightingale: A Woman with a Vision

Getting Ahead through Education

My Plan for Professional Advancement

The Advantages of Online Education

Professional Journals: Something for Everyone

The Best Boss I Ever Had

Three Things I Learned on My First Job

Check your outline against the suggestions on page 69. This exercise is for your own benefit. *Do not* send your outline to the school.



Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *Improving Your Writing*, you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "self-check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

1. a. Five types of prewriting are

- b. During prewriting, the three things you must determine are

- c. The goal of prewriting exercises is to find

2. Looking to outside sources for ideas or information is called _____.

3. What pattern of organization would be *most* appropriate for the following subjects?

- Why production is down in Department A
- Whether you should purchase your supplies from Company A or Company B
- The steps in the process of producing your product
- The physical rearrangement of a manufacturing plant
- The reason for poor morale
- Items to be included on a routine safety inspection

4. Explain the advantages of sentence and topic outlines.

Check your answers with those on page 73.

WRITING YOUR DOCUMENT

Types of Writing

No matter what type of writing assignment you're planning to do, each one requires the same basic approach. Whether you're jotting an informal note to a friend or composing an important business report, you can rely on the same process you've been practicing. Generally, in the prewriting and planning stages, you'll be making decisions about your topic, your audience, and your purpose. You'll organize your ideas and determine whether you have the information you need to complete the assignment. You may even have to do some research to fill in the details of your outline.

For very informal writing, some of these steps may take place inside your head—after all, if you're only writing a thank-you note to Aunt Ethel, you already know the audience, the purpose, and the topic. But you still might scribble a quick list before you begin, so you don't forget anything you wanted to say.

Once you've organized your material, the next stage is writing the first draft. Using your outline or map diagram, you should try to write straight through without doing any revising along the way. Then you'll get all your ideas down, and if there's missing information or facts you need to check, you can take care of them during the first revision. As you revise and rewrite, follow along on your outline to make sure all your facts and details are in the right places and you've developed your topic logically. Also check for run-on sentences and fragments.

Once you've completed and edited the assignment to your satisfaction, it's best to set it aside for a few hours, or even a day or two, if you have the time, so you can look at it with fresh eyes when you proofread. That way you're less likely to overlook simple mistakes, such as missing or misspelled words, awkward phrases, or punctuation errors.

The final step in the writing process is presenting your writing—that is, allowing your audience to read it. Whether you're e-mailing a memo to coworkers or sending your company's advertising flier to the printer, your finished document is a reflection of your professionalism and the care you put into your work.

Now let's take a closer look at two kinds of writing: informal and formal.

Informal Writing

Planning what you want to write can often be done in your mind, but you might also make a list. For example, if you want to leave instructions for your babysitter, you might quickly write the following list:

- Snack at 8:30
- Bedtime at 9:00
- Read story
- Turn on nightlight
- Number to reach me

From this list, you can write your note (Figure 9).

Notice that the note in Figure 9 includes one bit of information that wasn't on the list—the time the couple will return home. People often think of things to add when they work from a writing plan.

Judy,

If you need me, call the Grady residence at 555-2343. Please give Jason a snack of two cookies and milk at 8:30. His bedtime is 9:00. Get him started to bed by 8:45. When he's in bed, read him a story. He likes *Goodnight Moon*. Be sure to turn on his bedroom nightlight before turning off his bedstand light.

We should be back by 12:00 at the latest.

FIGURE 9—Here's one possible note you might write from the list.

This is a short, simple note, so what you've written may be your final draft. However, you should always reread what you've written. Correct spelling errors, and make sure you've given complete instructions.

Suppose you want to write a personal letter to an old friend (Figure 10). You haven't written to her in a while, but you've just learned that she has a new job. You're curious about how that's going. You would also like to get back in touch with your friend.

In writing a personal letter, you'll almost surely want to plan what you have to say. You may do that in your mind or by making a note or two on scratch paper.

Next, you write a first draft and then edit that draft. As you edit, you may decide to add a sentence or two. You may decide to cross out a sentence or two. You may want to reword something. And, of course, you'll correct any errors you find.

After writing your final draft, you would be wise to go over it again.



FIGURE 10—Personal letters, once a common means of communication, have gone out of style with the advent of e-mail. However, most people appreciate a handwritten personal note or letter.

Formal Writing

Formal and impersonal writing generally refers to business letters and reports that are not of a personal nature.

Letters. Suppose you decide to apply for a sales position at the local Mazda dealership. You would write and then send a formal application letter with your resume. You definitely want to plan and research the information for this letter. You'll make sure you know how to spell the name of the dealership manager. You'll make sure you understand what the job requires. Talking to someone who already has a job at the dealership may be a good idea. Finally, you should refer to your strongest qualifications, including appropriate job experience, education, and references, as listed in your resume.

How do you write the first draft of your application letter? Very carefully. An application letter is a sales letter. You're selling yourself. You want to make a positive impression, because first impressions really do matter.

As you edit your first draft, ask yourself these questions: If you were getting this letter from someone you didn't know, how would you like it? Would you be impressed? Would you want to hire this person?

The final draft of your letter should be stronger than your first draft. Even so, you'll be wise to let it rest overnight before you reread it. If more editing is necessary, edit away.

Reports and records. Reports and business or medical records are other kinds of formal writing you may need to do. While memos and business e-mails are somewhat less formal, they're still in the realm of professional writing that requires proper organization, accuracy, and a businesslike tone. While each office generally has its own style and requirements, in which you'll be trained, your knowledge of the basics of standard writing should apply to all of them.

Using a Style Guide

The company you work for may use a standard *style guide*, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, to standardize language use in its documents. Your company may have a style sheet to standardize formatting, as well. By using established styles, company documents—from business letters to client files to reports to major publications—remain consistent. Consistency makes documents look professional and helps ensure accuracy, as well as readability, as they pass from employee to employee, department to department, or out into the business world. A standard style also saves time, since once you're familiar with it, you won't have to make decisions for each project, rely on reference books, or ask questions about format or other details.

A company style sheet may include a variety of formatting guidelines, including which paper to use and when and how you may abbreviate the company name. In some cases, these items won't be written into a formal handbook, but will be

used as standards throughout the company. If that's the case, you may find it useful to make your own reference list as you learn your company's style.

Style sheets often include standards such as the following:

- Proper use of company name and logo
- Use of letterhead
- Preferred abbreviations
- Preferred spellings
- Standard typefaces
- Heading styles
- Standard document sizes
- Standard margins
- Stationery choices
- Cover or binding options

Key Considerations

As mentioned earlier, when you develop any piece of writing, you must remember these three factors:

1. *The purpose of your message.* Some messages are meant to give instructions. Some messages are e-mails or personal letters. Other things you may write might explain what you've learned, whether it be about a new medical procedure or redesigning a kitchen. Or you may want to convince your employer to purchase a different software version. Always think about the purpose of your message.
2. *Your audience.* What you write should always be aimed at your audience—that is, the people who will read the message. A note to your babysitter will be written in simple language. A report to your employer will be written in more formal language.

3. *The medium, or how best to send your message.* The way you send your message goes along with its purpose and its audience. For example, a short, informative message to a friend may be sent by e-mail, and the language can be casual. A letter to your state representative, on the other hand, should be formal and carefully edited. It should be sent on proper letter stationery. A report for your history class may have to be in a special format. For example, your instructor may want your paper to be double-spaced and have a cover page.

Because what you write must be based on your purpose and audience, we'll now look at some examples of how to put those elements together. The best way to understand how to accomplish that is to consider how the same topic would be treated for different audiences. For instance, suppose a nurse at the hospital where you work has developed a program

to encourage female students to study science and math in high school and to promote interest in nursing as a profession (Figure 11). Here are examples of three different approaches that might be used to write about this topic, guided by purpose and audience.

Introduction to an article for the hospital newsletter; general audience; less formal

Helen Bloom, MSN, an education specialist in the Birth and Family Education program, loves her job. She loves it so much that she wants young women to know how varied, challenging, and satisfying a career in nursing can be. That's why Helen spends two mornings a week traveling to middle schools and high schools around the state, sharing her story with the students and helping math and science faculty set up a program to encourage girls to prepare for a career in nursing. She calls her program Chem Girls Rock.



FIGURE 11—Three different approaches to writing about the same topic, such as nursing, will produce very different results.

Recommendation to hospital board of trustees; executive audience; more formal

I am pleased to recommend Helen R. Bloom, MSN, education specialist, for this year's Volunteer Hero award. Ms. Bloom has shown generosity, enthusiasm, and consistent dedication to her field by developing an educational program to encourage female students to prepare for a career in nursing. Her program, Chem Girls Rock, which includes working with high school faculty and guidance departments to promote girls' study of math and science, organizing Chem Girls clubs, and individually counseling girls, has resulted in an average 36 percent increase in girls' participation in advanced science classes in the seven counties where she has introduced her program. Ms. Bloom's efforts have also been acknowledged as a key influence in nearly tripling the number of applications for the nursing programs at Community College, State University, and Fairdale College.

Personal letter; private audience; informal

Dear Jess,

Guess what? I can't believe it, but I've won the Volunteer Hero award at the hospital! I'm so excited—I really didn't expect it at all. But I'm also proud of what we've accomplished with Chem Girls, and the numbers look really good, at least on paper. How many girls actually graduate with their RNs or BSNs may be another story. But this award includes a pretty hefty grant, so maybe now I can expand into a support program at the colleges to make sure we get those graduates.

Here's another situation that could require several different approaches for different audiences. Suppose there have been three accidents in Martell's department in the past two months and people are nervous about what might happen next if the situation doesn't improve. As the department safety officer, Martell needs to write to his division manager asking for maintenance expenditures to make repairs that may prevent further accidents. He'd also like funds for a workshop on safety for the staff (even though there's a budget freeze). Then he needs to write a memo to the staff

to let them know he's working on the problem. Finally, he has to write a brief, factual report on what has happened and why, which will go to the assistant manager and the general manager of the company. Each requires a different level of formality and a different tone.

For the division manager; executive audience; more formal

As you know, our department has experienced several accidents recently, two of which were directly related to this year's spending cap for maintenance. While I understand the need for some cutbacks, our department is literally falling apart, with a ceiling vent falling on one of the clerks and a piece of broken moulding tripping a technician. I strongly advise that the repairs be taken care of immediately, regardless of cost, to prevent further injuries and potential lawsuits. In addition, I would like to bring in a speaker from Safety Tech, Inc. to address other safety issues, such as hotplates in offices, two-way swinging doors, and proper lifting techniques. The cost would be approximately \$250 for a two-hour workshop for our 14 staff members. I hope you will find these expenses to be in the best interest of the company and its employees.

For the staff; general audience; less formal

Memo

To: Commercial Planning Staff

From: Martell Williams

Date: May 22, 2006

Re: Safety Issues

We're all aware of the recent accidents and injuries in our department. I want you to know that I've addressed the issue with Joe Perez and he assures me that repairs will be made as soon as he can arrange them. In the meantime, please e-mail me regarding any problems you notice and I'll add them to the list of areas for the maintenance survey. Also, I've arranged a safety workshop to be held on June 4, which will help us prevent further problems. If you have any other concerns, please let me know.

For the report; executive audience; more formal

Deferred Maintenance Issues

In the past two months, the Commercial Planning Department has experienced several accidents, all of which were preventable had normal maintenance procedures and safety routines been followed. The incidents occurred as follows:

- April 4, 3:15 PM: Maike Schott was hit when an overhead vent fell on her, resulting in bruises and a small abrasion to her shoulder.
- April 19, 11:45 AM: Richard Sabbatini burned his left hand while using an unauthorized electric hotplate.
- May 17, 9:25 AM: Julian O'Reilly fractured his right wrist after tripping on fallen moulding in the pathway.

Specifics

Ms. Schott had reported on March 29 that the vent was hanging and seemed to be in imminent danger of falling, so I immediately called maintenance. Cal Stephens told me there was a freeze on “optional repairs,” but he would assess the situation and do what he could. The next day the vent appeared to be fastened up with duct tape. No further effort at repair was made.

Regarding the second incident, while heat-producing appliances are clearly against safety regulations, I was not aware the hotplate was in Mr. Sabbatini's office. Evidently, I need to be more vigilant in my monthly safety inspections.

The last incident occurred after a piece of moulding fell to the floor; Mr. O'Reilly was carrying a bulky piece of equipment and was unable to regain his balance after tripping over the moulding. I have removed the moulding and stored it in a closet until repairs can be made.

Recommendation

Our department has several additional areas in need of repair; they should be addressed immediately if we are to prevent further injuries and potential lawsuits. As safety officer, I recommend a complete maintenance survey of the department and prompt repair, replacement, or removal of equipment and systems found to be damaged or deteriorating.

As you keep your reader's perspective in mind, you may find that in certain instances, the passive voice is more useful than the active voice. This is particularly true when you want to emphasize what's being done, rather than who's doing it. For instance, if you're writing a letter or e-mail to answer a client's question, it's best if sentences don't begin with *I* or *We*. Rather than saying, "I consulted the technician to see how we might resolve your problem as soon as possible," you may say, "Your problem is being addressed by the technician and should be resolved within two days." In this case, the passive sounds more direct to the reader, because he or she is more concerned about the problem than who is addressing it.

The passive voice is also useful for delivering a negative message. It helps by focusing attention on the action, not the person performing it, while maintaining a professional tone. For instance, suppose employees received this memo regarding the company dress code.

Preston Casey, General Manager, has announced a new dress code that bans any article of clothing that is decorated with political statements, lewd or suggestive pictures or language, fringe, chains, or similar decorations, as well as overly loose or tight clothing. Mr. Casey said that safety and morale issues are behind the new rules.

People would probably be angry and resentful of the manager, even if they understood the reason for the rule. But by considering the audience's perspective and using the passive voice, you might soften the blow by writing a memo more like this:

Due to safety considerations, clothing decorated with fringe, chains, or other long or loose materials may no longer be worn to work. Clothing should fit the wearer

in a way that minimizes the risk of its catching in machinery or causing tripping. Also, to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect among employees, clothing, posters, and stickers conveying political statements and lewd or suggestive pictures and language are also excluded.

While the message is basically the same, the second example offers reasons first and doesn't feel as much like a direct order from the general manager. It also stresses benefits to the reader (avoiding accidents, mutual respect), which may not always be possible to emphasize in a negative message.

Practice Exercise 3

Now use this opportunity to practice what you've learned. In this exercise, you'll write three messages, each with a different purpose and audience, based on the situation given. Use the pattern of organization indicated for each message.

A friend of yours recently was struck and injured by a driver who was talking on a cell phone. In response, write the following:

1. A letter to a state representative urging a law banning cell phone use while driving (cause-and-effect order)
2. An e-mail to another friend telling her what happened (chronological order)
3. The first paragraph of a research paper on the effects of using a cell phone while driving (compare/contrast with other dangerous driving behavior)

(Continued)

Practice Exercise 3

The following are writing examples that are badly in need of rewriting. Based on the ideas presented, use what you've learned so far to identify the errors. Then revise each example and make it more appropriate to its purpose and audience.

4. Business letter requesting a speaker

Dear George,

How are you? I am new at MDI and was told to write and see if I could get a trainer for our workshop this spring. I guess you're on the cutting edge of all the new equipment, and we need to bring everyone up to speed, so that will be good. Just let me know if you can come and what the bottom line is.

Thanks for your help.

Simon Smith

5. Memo inviting employees to company picnic

Interoffice Memorandum

To: MY ESTEEMED SUBORDINATES
From: HARRISON Q. SPLENDID, CEO
Subject: INTRACORPORATIONAL GALA
Date: 10 JUNE 2006

Mr. Harrison Q. Splendid, CEO
requests the honour of your presence
at the gala of the millennium
celebrating another lucrative year
for Splendid Products, Inc.
Friday, the twenty-first of July
Two thousand and six
at eleven o'clock in the morning
Church Street Park
West Orange, Florida

Weather-appropriate garb

Luncheon and diversions to follow

Check your messages against the suggestions on page 69. This exercise is for your own benefit. Do *not* send your writing to the school.

Writing the First Draft

Once you've ordered the main points you wish to make, you're ready to write the first draft. Some writers work laboriously, trying to get every word and every comma perfect in the first draft. However, the typical human mind simply isn't set up to work that way. You shouldn't put that sort of "perfection pressure" on yourself. You'll find that your thoughts and your language flow much more smoothly if you write without stopping.

Don't try to do too many things at one time when writing. Don't attempt to write, edit, and rewrite each sentence and paragraph as you proceed. You'll only get bogged down in the process and lose track of what you're trying to communicate. You can avoid this problem by doing what many professional writers do—write straight through, letting your thoughts come out in writing as best they can. Follow your outline or map, but don't stop to edit or rewrite.

If you veer away from the planned topic for a little while, don't worry about it—your creative mind may be leading you to even better material (Figure 12). Any irrelevant digressions can be deleted later. (If you don't know the meaning of *digressions*, look up the verb form *digress* in your dictionary.) Just let the writing flow. You'll get the tough part behind you, and often the writing will be less stilted because you're more apt to write the way you speak.

Whether you hand-write or work on a typewriter or word processor, it's wise to double-space your work. Doing so will give you the space you'll need for revisions.

FIGURE 12—Don't worry if you wander off your topic a bit in your first draft—detours sometimes lead to wonderful discoveries.



Practice Exercise 4

Using the outline you wrote for Practice Exercise 2, write a first draft of your introduction, major topics, and conclusion. Follow your outline as you write, writing straight through without stopping to revise or edit your work, but keep in mind your audience, purpose, and pattern of organization. Keep this draft, because you'll be working with it again later.

Check your draft against the suggestions given on page 71. This exercise is for your own benefit. Do *not* send your first draft to the school.



Self-Check 2

1. You're more likely to _____ in your writing if you let it rest for a day or two.
2. A brief report to your supervisor on client complaints is an example of _____ writing.
3. The purpose of a _____ is to maintain consistency throughout a company's documents.
4. When you write your _____, it's best to write without stopping.
5. _____ in your first draft sometimes lead to better material for your topic.
6. Your _____ serves as a map, guiding you to your conclusion.
7. A letter to an old friend is an example of _____ writing
8. The language you choose for your message should match its _____.
9. If you _____ your work, it will be easier to insert revisions later.
10. Your approach to any piece of writing is determined by its _____.

Check your answers with those on page 73.

STRENGTHENING YOUR STYLE

How to Give Your Writing Punch

This section is called “How to Give Your Writing Punch.” Do you think it would have been better to call it “How Added Punch Can Be Given to Your Writing?” No; you can easily see that it wouldn’t. But just why is “How to Give Your Writing Punch” better than “How Added Punch Can Be Given to Your Writing?”

Let’s look a little more closely at the two titles. First of all, “How to Give Your Writing Punch” is shorter. It has six words, and the other title has nine. Second, the verb is in the active voice (give) in one title and in the passive voice (be given) in the other. Third, “How to Give Your Writing Punch” has the main word, *punch*, at the end, whereas the other title buries it in the middle. So our title is better than “How Added Punch Can Be Given to Your Writing” because it follows these four rules:

1. Be brief.
2. Use active verbs.
3. Wind up with a bang.
4. Arrange your words and sentences effectively.

We’ve already discussed being brief, and you learned about active and passive voice in an earlier study unit. The active voice, you remember, makes for stronger sentences because they’re generally shorter, lead with the subject, and use an active verb.

Alfredo disarmed the robber.

The passive voice begins with the object and depends on some form of the verb *to be*.

The robber was disarmed by Alfredo.

The passive voice is useful when it’s important to emphasize the object, rather than the subject. For instance, in business, you’re likely to say “Results of the survey will be released by the company at a later date” (passive voice), because the

emphasis is on the results, not the company. But when you're making direct statements or, especially, writing persuasively, use the active voice.

Now let's go on to the third point, winding up with a bang. How does that contribute to good writing? Actually, it's the most important guideline for giving your writing punch. If you're like most people and save the best bite of your sandwich or the frosting on your cake until last, then you won't have much trouble with this rule. Another way of seeing this idea is to picture the grand finale of a fireworks display. The principle is exactly the same: You save the most important or most effective word or idea to use at the end of the sentence. If you always start with the choice bits, you won't have any icing left to top off your sentences. If you pay a little attention, however, you'll learn to build all your sentences to a rousing conclusion.

There's no general rule for ending with a bang. You must know which word or idea in each sentence you want to lead up to. You must make up your mind what word to put at the end, where it will stick in the reader's mind.

Suppose Richard is your best friend. He owns his own business, and he has a beautiful daughter, Becky. You want to write something about Richard and include all these things about him. But the question is, in what order? The choice depends on you—on the thing you consider most important and most remarkable about Richard, the thing you really want to tell your reader about him. Whatever it is, the trick is to put it last (Figure 13).

This is how you write about Richard, father of Becky:

My best friend Richard, a business owner, has a beautiful daughter named Becky.

FIGURE 13—Richard is a business owner, a father, and your best friend. Which fact is most important about your subject? Put that fact at the end of your sentence.



This is how you write about Richard, the business owner:

My best friend Richard (Becky's father) owns his own business.

And this is how you write about Richard, your best friend:

Becky's father Richard, a business owner, is my best friend.

Adding Punch with Punctuation

The dash (—) is an attention getter. Sometimes a phrase set off with dashes can add meaning and emphasis to your writing. Compare the following two sentences:

For Christmas, I got a sweater, a couple of books, and an accordion.

For Christmas, I got a sweater, a couple of books, and—what I wanted most—an accordion.

The first sentence is merely a list of gifts that the writer received. No single gift is given more importance than the others. But in the second sentence, one gift, an accordion, is singled out from the others through the use of the phrase *what I wanted most*, which is set off with dashes.

When printed in a book or article, a dash is a single line that's longer than a hyphen. In your typing, you may indicate a dash by using two hyphens in a row--like this. Some word processing programs automatically change the two hyphens into a dash.

A word of caution: Don't overuse dashes. If you use dashes repeatedly in the same piece of writing, they soon lose their punch. Dashes can easily become a distraction when used over and over.

Exclamation points, too, should be used with care. Don't try to use them to dress up a sentence that isn't exciting in the first place. The punch must come from the inside—that is, from the words. If you haven't built up to an idea, then you can't expect it to make an impression just because it's followed by an exclamation point. In this sentence, for instance, the exclamation point doesn't help at all:

There were blooming magnolia trees, I noticed, when I was walking along Elm Street last Wednesday!

But if you build up your idea properly, you can stress the important point without using an exclamation point:

Walking along Elm Street last Wednesday, I had an unforgettable experience: I saw the street lined with 100 magnolia trees in full bloom.

Word and Sentence Patterns

Dashes and exclamation points are handy tools to use once in a while. But you can add more punch by other means. You can build up to your final word by preparing the reader's mind for what's going to come. You can form your words and sentences into patterns so that the idea you want to play up comes at a natural high point. You can arrange your words in such a way that they build in power (Figure 14).

There's no single rule for doing this. You can build word patterns in many different ways. You can form a pattern by repeating a word or phrase; by following three or four long sentences with a short one; by putting a few short sentences before a long one; by writing your words in a rhythmical pattern; or by doing several of these things together. In other words, you can play with your language and make it do tricks. Of course, you wouldn't want to do this always, but it's useful to know how to make your words more effective when you need them to be.

Suppose you're writing about the first time you flew in an airplane. There wouldn't be much punch in it if you wrote it this way:



FIGURE 14—If you're writing about an exciting experience, you want your reader to feel the same thrill you felt during the event.

Then the plane turned and left the ground, and I thought that this was the first time I was flying and looked out of the window. I had to be strapped to my seat with a belt.

But here's how you can build the idea up by repeating the word *flying*:

The plane turned and left the ground. We were in the air. All my life I had been thinking about flying. I had been reading about flying. I had been dreaming about flying. The moment was here. It was 7:35 A.M., Sunday, July 26. I was flying.

Another way to add drama is to put your idea into a short sentence that follows three long ones. That's called a crack-of-a-whip ending:

Strapped to my seat with a belt, I sat tense and excited and looked out the window. Now the plane made a sharp turn and, with the engines roaring, gathered speed and finally left the ground. The moment that I had been thinking and dreaming about ever since I could remember had come. I was flying.

And now show your excitement by the rhythm of the words:

Gathering speed, the plane rolled on. It left the ground and rose into the air. The moment had come: I was flying.

Finally, here are a few tricks in combination: word rhythm, a repeated phrase, and a crack-of-a-whip ending:

The plane turned, the engines started roaring again, and up we went. The airport buildings sank away. "This is it," I said to myself. "This is it at last. I'm flying."

If you're reading for revision and find a sentence that just doesn't sound right, try reviewing these points to see if your sentence needs rearrangement or rewriting to give it more weight. By cutting unnecessary words, using the active voice, and saving the best for last, you may find your sentences are more effective in expressing your ideas clearly and with just enough punch.

Choosing the Right Words

Finding the right words can be challenging. However, some tools that apply to business writing are available to help you in this task:

- Use concrete and specific words.
- Avoid jargon.
- Be cautious about choosing informality over formality.
- Avoid pomposity.
- Eliminate sexist language.
- Use words properly.

Let's examine each one of these principles individually.

Concrete and Specific Words

People who write novels and short stories use concrete words to place their reader in a specific setting, to make that person *feel* the situation. For example, in fiction, a novelist might write, “The asphalt smelled of rain and diesel fuel,” instead of “The asphalt was wet.” In business writing, however, your main goal is to help your reader know, not feel. In both literature and business writing, concreteness is about getting your reader's undivided attention. Consider and compare the general and specific approaches in the following sentences.

General: Our report covered the entire problem at the Bluefield plant.

Specific: Our January 18 report analyzed, located, and solved the parts-supply problems that have been reducing output at the Bluefield assembly plant.

General: The cost of the new forklift is justified by its need.

Specific: The \$30,000 spent on the new forklift is justified by the 25% increase in business over the last year and by the \$500,000 in additional stock we now have in our warehouse.



The art of word choice is referred to as *diction*. Selecting the correct word and using it effectively is known as *rhetoric*.

The general statements in the preceding examples are accurate and factual, but they lack important information. They lack facts and figures. Notice how much more the reader learns from the specific statements. Rather than making mere assertions (our report covered the entire problem) and generalizations (the cost of the new forklift), present your information in a clear, specific, and logical way. A reader is more likely to pay attention to specific sentences than to general ones, because they present information the reader needs.

Jargon

Jargon refers to the specialized vocabulary of a specific activity or group. Generally, there are two kinds of jargon:

1. It may be the specialized technical language peculiar to some academic or industrial environment. For example, electrical engineers, mathematicians, and accountants each have a vocabulary that relates specifically to their area of expertise. This type of jargon is intelligible and useful to specialists in the field, but it can be very confusing to outsiders.
2. It may be a special language that has developed within a corporation. In this case, jargon is a kind of insider language that separates “us” from “them.” This type of jargon is also confusing to outsiders.

As an example of a specialized technical language, consider two archeologists working at an excavation. You overhear one of them ask, “Did you notice the supraorbital torus on that skull fragment from S-14?” His companion’s reply might be, “I did. Definitely distinctive.” You may read that conversation over and over and never understand its meaning, unless you’re familiar with the jargon of archeologists. To the two specialists, however, the exchange is crystal clear: The skull fragment from the S-14 location designated by the site coordinate map has a pronounced or unusual brow ridge. You can see that specialized language, which is unintelligible to nonspecialists, is useful shorthand for the archeologists.

As an example of insider language, suppose you overhear yourself referred to as the “person in green” at “meat processing.” It may take you a while to understand that you’ve simply been referred to as a new employee in the human resources department.

This type of insider jargon isn’t likely to show up in a memo or letter. However, some kinds of jargon—typically the technical kind—are often used inappropriately. For example, a stockbroker may write a follow-up letter to a potential investor. In the letter, the broker says, “You’ll be pleased to know how well our firm stays on top of P/E ratios.” This investor may know that a P/E ratio refers to a price-earnings ratio, but she may not be certain just what that means. When you write, be alert to the jargon you use. Unless you’re writing to someone familiar with your field, make sure you use terms that nonspecialists can understand.

The use of personal computers and electronic communication has created a whole new world of computer jargon. Today, almost everyone who engages in business or personal writing uses a computer. However, that doesn’t mean that everyone who uses a computer understands terms like *http*, *ISP*, *ICQ*, *URL*, and *ftp*. Even if people know what the letters stand for, they may not understand what these letters really mean. Be judicious in your use of high-tech terms, even if you’re knowledgeable about those expressions (Figure 15). When you must use technical terms to an audience that may be unfamiliar with them, always include an explanation.

In business writing, the problem with jargon is always the same: It obscures information. And obscured information is seldom useful. If you’re tempted to use insider or technical jargon in an effort to impress your reader, think again. Confusing people to impress



FIGURE 15—The leader of this seminar may be familiar with jargon like *disable*, *antivirus*, *right-click*, *icon*, *system tray*, and *uncheck*, but the beginners in his class are probably thoroughly confused.



Know your audience. That's the key to whether you use technical jargon or common language, to whether you use a formal or an informal tone.

them is poor communication. If you feel the need to use a specialized term, ask yourself if your audience will clearly understand it. If they won't, you're offering jargon. When in doubt, explain, revise, or delete.

Informality and Formality

How do you determine whether to develop a specific piece of writing in a formal or an informal tone? The answer is the same as that for determining the jargon you should use—know your audience. As e-mails increasingly dominate communication between businesses, the temptation to engage in sloppy informality seems to have increased as well. That's why it's so important to know your audience. An informal, sketchy e-mail to your friend in the shipping department may be fine. However, a document prepared for a supervisor or an executive should be framed somewhat more formally, at least in terms of emphasizing a courteous, professional tone.

The key to most effective business communication is the use of professional, yet conversational, language. In general, memos, letters, reports, and even brief e-mails should exhibit a positive, warm, friendly, conversational, and professional tone. Use plain language that you're comfortable and familiar with. Use familiar pronouns such as *I*, *we*, and *you*; avoid third-person expressions such as the *undersigned* or the *affected party*.

Although you want to be friendly and conversational, don't be tempted to use slang or colloquial expressions like *bummed out*, *lousy*, *get my act together*, and *sacked*. These phrases may be permissible in everyday conversations, but they're out of place in business writing.

Examine the three sentences in [Figure 16](#). In business and technical writing, your goal is to be friendly and polite, without being too casual or too formal. As you can see from this illustration, the stiff language in the formal version is more difficult to read than that in the informal version. Also, the formal version may actually seem offensive to many who read it. On the other hand, the casual colloquial version is out of place in business writing.

Casual (Colloquial and Slang Usage)	Informal (Polite, but Conversational Tone)	Formal (Wordy and Stiff Language)
I was totally bummed out when my boss nixed my vacation.	I was disappointed when my supervisor did not approve my vacation.	It was with sincere disappointment that I learned my request for vacation did not meet with my supervisor's approbation.

FIGURE 16—Here are three ways to say the same thing—from the extreme casual to the formal. In your business writing, strive for the middle ground of polite, but conversational. Above all, however, always keep your audience in mind.

Pomposity

Pomposity is formality carried to extremes. Your writing is likely to be considered pompous if you use words like *aforementioned* instead of *previous*, *ubiquitous* instead of *widespread*, *superfluous* instead of *extra*, or *deleterious* instead of *harmful*. Consider these two paragraphs:

Pompous: It has become evident through complaints proffered to management that the resistance of employees to standards of conformity with linguistic cafeteria decorum has become ubiquitous and, thereby, has placed a deleterious burden on the cafeteria staff.

Conversational: Some of us in the front office have been receiving complaints about the frequent use of careless language in the company cafeteria. Remember to be courteous to your fellow employees, including the hard-working cafeteria staff.

In general, to avoid seeming pompous in your writing, use clear, plain language and a conversational tone (Figure 17). Above all, remember that your objective is to convey clear, logical, and accurate information.



FIGURE 17—If you speak or write in a pompous manner, your audience may lose interest because your information is so difficult to follow. If you want to communicate effectively, use conversational language that’s familiar to your audience.

Sexist Language

The sensitive and wise business writer should remember to use inclusive language. Doing so can be something of a problem in English, since not that long ago, writers referred to *mankind* instead of *humankind*, and the pronoun *he* served for both men and women. Study the following example.

Exclusive: When a worker completes his task, he should return tools to the tool crib.

Inclusive: When workers complete their tasks, they should return tools to the tool crib.

Simply changing the necessary nouns and pronouns to their plural forms eliminated the exclusiveness in the first sentence. When the people you're addressing include both men and women, always use inclusive language to refer to members of the audience. In general, use gender-neutral pronouns and alternative constructions, as shown in the following examples.

Sexist: During our Friday meeting, each supervisor will have ten minutes to read his report.

Alternative: During our Friday meeting, supervisors will have ten minutes to read their reports. (plural pronoun and plural noun)

Alternative: During our Friday meeting, supervisors will have ten minutes to read reports. (plural noun and omitted pronoun)

Alternative: During our Friday meeting, each supervisor will have ten minutes to read a report. (an article in place of the pronoun)

Alternative: During our Friday meeting, each supervisor will have ten minutes to read his or her report. (a masculine and a feminine pronoun)

Although the final alternative is acceptable, it's a bit awkward. Whenever possible, use the other alternatives.

You should also be sensitive about sexist job titles like mailman, fireman, policeman, chairman, and salesman. Replace them with gender neutral terms like postal carrier, firefighter, police officer, committee chair, and salesperson.

Using Words Properly

Words convey specific meanings. In your writing, you must make sure to use words that say exactly what you mean. You learn how to write by actually sitting down and writing. In the same way, you learn how to use words correctly by being diligent in finding their precise meanings. Remember, business writing should be practical, efficient, and logical. To make your work as clear and as accurate as it can be, you must avoid using words incorrectly. On the contrary, you should strive to use the best word for each situation.



Inclusive language is that which doesn't discriminate against an individual's gender, race, age, and so on.

The following list includes words that are commonly misused. Study these words and then make it a practice to use your dictionary often. Even if you think you know the meaning of a word and how to use it correctly, look it up. Regular use of a dictionary is a good habit to form.

ability/capacity You may have the *ability* to perform well, but not the *capacity* to perform well hour after hour. *Ability* refers to competence; *capacity* refers to an amount of something, given a specified space or time. (She has the *ability* to become a professional pianist. He didn't have the *capacity* to complete the marathon.)

advise/tell To *advise* someone is to counsel, caution, or warn; to *tell* is merely to relate information. You might *advise* someone to avoid Jake in the accounting department, while you might simply tell someone you're going to play golf on Sunday. (She asked me to *advise* her on which car to buy. I like to listen to him *tell* stories about his travels.)

affect/effect To *affect* means to influence the outcome; an *effect* is the result of an influence of some sort. *Affect* is almost always a verb; *effect* is usually a noun. (Will the high price of raw materials *affect* the manufacturer's profit? The high winds had a devastating *effect* on small structures like mobile homes.)

among/between *Among* suggests distribution to three or more; *between* limits distribution to two. (You must choose the winner from *among* three contestants. The prize for the contest must be shared *between* the two people with the highest scores.)

anticipate/expect To *anticipate* is to prepare for something in advance, even if you're uncertain it will take place; to *expect* an event is to be assured that it will take place. (He *anticipates* my needs and is always there to help me. I *expect* my children to behave at other people's homes.)

apparent/evident If something is *apparent*, it only seems to be; if something is *evident*, it almost assuredly is. (The afternoon weather is *apparently* going to be wet and rainy. His anger made it *evident* that he didn't agree with her.)

appreciate/understand To *appreciate* something is to recognize its value; to *understand* something is to know how it works. (The civil engineer *appreciated* the complexity of the structure because he *understood* what went into building it.)

assume/presume To *assume* something is to take it on, such as a mortgage or employment; to *presume* is to conclude without clear justification. (She will *assume* her new position at the bank on Monday. You must *presume* the innocence of suspects until they're proven guilty.)

balance/remainder A *balance* is that which is currently available; a *remainder* is that which is left after subtraction. You may have a *balance* in your account regardless of whether or not you've recently withdrawn money. Your account *remainder* is what's left after you've subtracted your last expenditure. (The *balance* in her savings account showed that she had saved enough to purchase a new sound system. The students who wanted to see the movie went to the gymnasium; the *remainder* stayed in their room to play games.)

bimonthly/semimonthly *Bimonthly* means every two months (six times a year); *semimonthly* means twice a month (24 times a year). (The magazine is published *bimonthly* [six times a year]. Elaine does her *semimonthly* grocery shopping on Saturday.)

conclude/decide To *conclude* is to reach a decision based on evidence; to *decide* is to consider any number of alternatives before choosing one. (Based on your knowledge of a particular orchestra, you *concluded* that its concert will be worth attending. Now, you must *decide* among alternative ways of getting to the concert.)

continual/continuous *Continual* means ongoing or in rapid succession, such as the periodic chiming of a clock; *continuous* means uninterrupted, as in the sustained sound of a milling machine. (The country had a history of *continual* invasions by their neighbors to the north. The cheering from the crowd was *continuous*.)

cooperate/collaborate To *cooperate* means to work together, but it may also mean to comply or conform; to *collaborate* also means to work together, but usually on a project

that involves mental rather than physical effort. (She's always willing to *cooperate* with the preparation of dinner. If you don't *cooperate* [comply], we'll have to change our plans. I plan to *collaborate* with Marie in writing a paper on the history of our university.)

deteriorate/degenerate If something *deteriorates*, it sinks to a lower quality; if something *degenerates*, it returns to an earlier or lower state of being. (The quality of service at this bank has *deteriorated*. Leaves that fall during the autumn gradually *degenerate* into mulch.)

encounter/experience To *encounter* is to meet, especially by chance; to *experience* is to have a direct observation of or participation in events. (Carol *encountered* Jake in the new downtown restaurant. I *experienced* a feeling of great pride as I watched my daughter graduate from college.)

essential/basic If something is *essential*, it's necessary; if something is *basic*, it's fundamental, that is, it serves as a starting point. (She was allowed to take only the bare *essentials* on her backpacking trip. Students must learn the *basics* of mathematics before they can expect to solve complex equations.)

fewer/less *Fewer* means not as many in number; *less* means a smaller amount of something. As a general rule, use *fewer* to refer to things you can count and *less* with things you can't count. (Carla hit *fewer* home runs than Sharon. James had *less* paint than he thought he did.)

further/farther *Farther* has to do with physical distance; *further* has to do with nonphysical things. (We traveled *farther* that day than any other day of our trip. I must consider your request *further* before I make a decision.)

imply/infer To *imply* is to suggest something to someone indirectly; to *infer* is to form a conclusion based on facts or apparent evidence. (The speaker seemed to *imply* that jobs will be cut in the next quarter. As I read his memo, I *inferred* that he had already made his decision.)

learn/teach To *learn* is to gain knowledge; to *teach* is to educate, that is, to give information to someone so he or she may *learn*. (My latest challenge is to *learn* how to knit. She can *teach* even the most difficult student.)

liable/likely *Liabile* has to do with obligation and responsibility; *likely* has to do with probability. (You may be *liable* for damages if your car door damages another car in a parking lot. You're *likely* to damage another car if you park improperly.)

maximum/optimum *Maximum* has to do with a limit; *optimum* has to do with the most desirable level of quality or performance. (The *maximum* speed limit may be 65 miles an hour, but the *optimum* performance of your new sports car permits a speed of 120 miles per hour.)

predicament/situation *Predicament* suggests an undesirable state; a *situation* can be any set of circumstances you find yourself in. (Our *predicament* was to find a way to get our car out of the snow bank. We were in the envious *situation* of having front seats for the performance.)

principle/principal A *principle* is a fundamental law or guideline; a *principal* is an authority figure, such as a school *principal*. As an adjective, the word *principal* means most important. (The business was based on sound accounting *principles*. The school *principal* decided to close the school two hours early. The *principal* speaker at the banquet was my brother's high school football coach.)

reaction/opinion A *reaction* is a response to something definite; an *opinion* is an idea, a belief, or a conviction. (My immediate *reaction* was to ignore his embarrassing question. In my *opinion*, the play accurately depicted the assassination of President Lincoln.)

theory/idea A *theory* is a suggested explanation for some action, happening, or set of phenomena; an *idea* is a concept or thought. (I have a *theory* about why people have stopped buying our product, but I have no *idea* how to improve sales.)

use/utilize Both *use* and *utilize* mean to employ something. However, the word *utilize* also means to put into practical *use*. (I can *use* the money I received for my birthday to buy a new dress. The committee was unable to *utilize* the new software in their old computers.)

Practice Exercise 5

Rewrite the following sentences on a separate sheet of paper. Arrange the ideas in each sentence so that the idea you want to emphasize comes last. Completely rewrite the sentences if that's what it takes to give them punch.

1. We found the little girl in the attic, sleeping peacefully, after we had searched for hours and had notified the police.
2. The tornado left ruin and death in its wake and tore down every building in the village.
3. The mysterious visitor had stolen the ruby, rifled my desk, and broken open the safe.

Check your answers with the suggestions on page 72. *Do not* send your practice writing to the school.



Self-Check 3

1. All of the following sentences contain weaknesses in diction. Rewrite each sentence using the tools you learned in this section. For example, replace general terms with concrete ones and informal words with more appropriate formal ones.

a. The survey evaluated the attitudes of each guy in our department.

b. A lot of my buddies from our gang were sacked because of their lousy production records.

c. My boss was too cheap to fork over the dough for the new lab equipment.

d. A girl came by to check out the inventory records.

e. The new drill presses have done a great job.

2. Some of the sentences below include misused words. Carefully read each sentence. Cross out the errors and write the correct word above the mistakes. If all of the words are used correctly, write "Correct" in the space provided. If necessary, consult the list of misused words in this study unit.

_____ a. The increased work load had surprisingly positive affects on the employees' morale.

_____ b. The supervisor divided the project between Joe, Dave, and me.

_____ c. Our company's president and the president of Abbott Electronic collaborated on the report for the merger committee.

_____ d. From the description George gave at the meeting, we have decided that the new computer software will make our jobs easier.

_____ e. We found a way to utilize the equipment donated to our small business.

_____ f. If you replace mica wafers with beryllium oxide wafers, you're liable to get the same results.

(Continued)



Self-Check 3

- _____ g. In her speech at the department meeting, our supervisor inferred that if production didn't increase, a few workers may be dismissed.
- _____ h. Susan's theory was that all thermal conductors work equally well when used in identical situations.
- _____ i. When Stan Crawford went on vacation, I assumed his role as assistant production coordinator.
- _____ j. The transistor degenerated when the thermal joint compound failed to conduct the heat rapidly to the heat sink.
3. Substitute the active for the passive voice to make the following sentences more forceful.
- In my neighborhood, many new apartment houses are being built by developers.
 - Our plans were changed abruptly when her message was received by us.
 - After the soup was served, the turkey was served by them.
 - Mistakes were made by several companies involved in building the bridge.
 - The wrong medication was given to Mrs. Brown by her grandson, who was visiting.
4. In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the following statements is True or False.
- _____ a. You can make your words build in power by writing your words in a rhythmical pattern.
- _____ b. A dash—used wisely and sparingly—can add meaning and emphasis to your writing.
- _____ c. An exclamation point will add punch to an otherwise boring sentence.

Check your answers with those on page 74.

REVISING, EDITING, AND PROOFREADING

Revising Your Writing

The word *revise* means “see again.” To see again suggests more than cleaning up minor errors. To see again suggests a new way of looking at what you’ve done. Revision requires you to look at your work as if you were the target audience, seeing the document for the first time. You still shouldn’t be worried about little mistakes at this point. Your concern at this point is the big picture. Looking for little mistakes can bog you down and make it difficult to see bigger, more important problems in organization. Why spend time fiddling with little details that might end up getting cut or rewritten entirely? The best way is to get the whole piece of writing the way you want it, and then go through to fix mistakes line by line, word by word.

When you’re revising, these are the sorts of questions to ask yourself about the piece of writing as a whole:

- Is it clear in purpose and in meaning? If not, rethink your organization and your approach. You may need to start over with different ideas and a different outline.
- Are there parts that should be cut? Cross them out or delete them, if you’re working on the computer.
- Are there parts that should be developed further? Add parts by writing between the lines and in the margins.
- Are there parts that should be moved elsewhere? Move parts by cutting and pasting or, if you’re writing by hand, circling them and drawing arrows to wherever you wish to insert the words (Figure 18).
- Are there parts that should be condensed or combined with other parts within the document? Cross out those parts and rewrite between the lines and in the margins. Then rewrite the corrected copy (Figure 19).

FIGURE 18—Sample Revision

When I think of cars, I inevitably think
of my first flat tire. ^{It happened} ~~which came~~ the
same day I got my first car. Luckily,
~~I had driver's ed. and~~ I knew how to
change tires. ~~because~~ nobody stopped to
help me. ^{but} ~~Oh, yeah?~~ --and
it was raining.
~~on top of it!~~ ~~So~~ I was late getting
to my friend's house, where I was going
to pick her up, ^{my friend} for a joy ride in, ~~you~~
~~guessed it,~~ my new car, and I was
all wet, and muddy, and miserable. ^{It} ~~As~~
^{seemed only fitting when} ~~Murphy's Law would have it,~~ on the way
home. my hubcap fell off.

When I think of cars, I inevitably think of my first flat tire. It happened the same day I got my first car—and it was raining. Luckily, I knew how to change tires. Nobody stopped to help me. I was late to pick up my friend for a joy ride in my new car, and I was wet, muddy, and miserable. It seemed only fitting when my hubcap fell off on the way home.

FIGURE 19—Corrected Copy of Sample Revision

Use the symbols in **Figure 20**, called *proofreaders' marks*, to indicate corrections in your work. You'll find that they help you to streamline the process. Using these symbols will be easier and clearer than writing out directions to yourself.

Mark	Meaning	How It's Used
	Delete	
	Insert	
	Insert a space	
	Close up, delete space	
	Insert an apostrophe	
	Insert a comma	
	Insert a period	
	Change a comma to a period	
	Lowercase letter	
	Uppercase letter	
	Transpose	
	Start a new line	
	Start a new paragraph	
	Let it stand	

FIGURE 20—Frequently Used Proofreaders' Marks

Practice Exercise 6

Using proofreaders' marks, revise the first draft of your writing from Practice Exercise 4. If you've typed it on a computer, double space it and print it out, so you can view it as your readers will see it. Keep your outline handy, so you can make sure you haven't drifted too far from your original intention or your pattern of organization. Mark changes with proofreaders' marks and write in the changes between the lines or in the margins. If you need to make extensive revisions, you may want to type the new material into a separate file and copy and paste it into your document once you're sure of the changes.

This exercise is for your own benefit. *Do not* send your writing to the school.

Editing Your Work

Once you have your major changes in place, it's time to put to use what you've learned about grammar, sentence structure, word usage, punctuation, and spelling (Figure 21). Strive for a clear, concise style. To help you with your editing, here are some tips, many of which will sound familiar to you:



FIGURE 21—When you edit your work, check for choppy sentences, clichés, and negative messages, as well as grammar and punctuation errors.

- *Vary sentence lengths.* Mix it up. Don't have all short, choppy sentences, but don't have all long ones, either. Strive for sentence lengths of 10–20 words. A few sentences may be shorter, but seldom should one be much longer.
- *Look for and delete unnecessary words.* Try to concentrate wordy ideas into a single word. Make shapeless sentences clear, and cut out any dead or repetitious words.
- *Eliminate irrelevant information.* Don't tell your audience every little detail about a subject. Stick to what adds to the information or to your argument.
- *Get rid of dry, stilted, or cliché-laden language.* The technical term for worn-out expressions is cliché (Figure 22).

Like all languages, English has in it a body of expressions that are overused. Here are some expressions that are currently overused:

in a perfect world, interface, the big picture, leverage resources, be proactive, it's a no-brainer, core competency, paradigm shift, value-added, push the envelope, cutting edge, all things considered, as a matter of fact, call on the carpet, circumstances beyond control, finishing touch, foregone conclusion, in the final analysis, in this day and age, it stands to reason, overall picture, point of no return, read between the lines, second to none, sell like hotcakes, behind the eight ball, face the music . . .

The following phrases were, at one time, used in everyday conversation. Constant repetition, however, has robbed them of the fresh imagery they once conveyed.

at the drop of a hat, break the ice, clean bill of health, close to the soil, come apart at the seams, handle with kid gloves, lead a dog's life, mention in the same breath, raise one's sights, rub the wrong way . . .

Some clichés, like the following, have been around for centuries.

bring home the bacon, speak of the devil, you can't have your cake and eat it too, busy as a bee, thin as a rail, quiet as a mouse, white as a sheet, sharp as a tack, slippery as an eel, slow as molasses in January, bury the hatchet, split hairs, put your shoulder to the wheel, let the cat out of the bag, put the cart before the horse, cook one's goose, kill two birds with one stone, bite off more than one can chew, get up on the wrong side of the bed . . .

And these:

down in the dumps, face the facts, lap of luxury, live and learn, point with pride, slow but sure, spic and span, sure as shooting, through thick and thin, by hook or by crook, fair and square, haste makes waste, high and dry, wear and tear, wine and dine, blow hot and cold, by means fair or foul, feast or famine, kill or cure, move heaven and earth, neither here nor there, open and shut, rain or shine, sink or swim, the long and short of it . . .

The list goes on:

bag and baggage, fits and starts, hale and hearty, house and home, kith and kin, lord and master, part and parcel, pure and simple, toss and turn, well and good, boon to mankind, bow in defeat, brave the elements, by the same token, deem it a privilege, explore every avenue, irony of fate, paragon of virtue, picture of health . . .

How much better and more persuasive it sounds to say "It is my privilege to work with all of you in this department" than to say "I *deem it a privilege* to work with all of you."

Should clichés ever be used? The answer is yes, when they're employed consciously, effectively, and with purpose. Consider the person who offered a violin for sale "with no strings attached" and the writer who described amateur parachutists as "jumping for joy." Both were using clichés consciously, and they achieved delightful, original expressions. It's reliance upon clichés—not the clichés themselves—that *rusts the wrong way*.

FIGURE 22—Clichés can weaken your writing. Try to invent your own ways of saying what you want to say.

- *Substitute specific strong verbs for weak or overused ones.* Remember to use active voice, rather than passive, for a clear, direct style.
- *Replace generalities with specifics.* It's better to mention that 200 samples were distributed during a convention than to say that a “substantial number” were given out.

Making comparisons is an effective way to replace generalities with specifics. Comparisons put the information into a recognizable and understandable context (Figure 23).

General: That building is huge and ornate.

Specific comparison: That building looks like a castle.

FIGURE 23—*Watch for generalities that could be made more effective with specific information or a comparison to something familiar to the reader.*



- *When possible, change negative messages to positive.* Rather than saying “We can’t meet until this project is finished in three weeks,” say “We can meet anytime after this project finishes in three weeks.” The positive approach shows that you really do want to meet with the person.
- *Use lists judiciously to break up copy and to make reading quick and easy.* Remember to keep the list entries parallel in grammatical structure.
- *Check and correct the grammar.* Be especially alert to subject/pronoun agreement, subject/verb agreement, and proper pronoun form.

Practice Exercise 7

Edit your revised draft from Practice Exercise 6. Print out your revision (double spaced) and, using standard proofreaders' marks, correct any errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Also delete unnecessary words, irrelevant information, sexist language or ineffective expressions, such as clichés. While you shouldn't need extensive revisions at this stage, if you notice that you've drifted from your topic or that your points aren't in logical order, make the changes now. This should give you a clean draft that reflects what you've learned in this study unit.

This exercise is for your own benefit. *Do not* send your edited draft to the school.

Proofreading the Final Draft

They're not spellnig errors; they'r ejust typls.

How did you react to the previous sentence? The mistakes are typographical errors. The sentence should read

They're not spelling errors; they're just typos.

Typographical and spelling errors interfere with the clarity of ideas. They cast doubt on the accuracy of the entire document. If the attention to little details is careless, the reader wonders, might not the big details be carelessly handled, too?

Everybody makes mistakes. Even the best typists make typos, even the best spellers misspell, even the best English teachers confuse *who* and *whom*, and even the best writers sometimes find that they've quickly scribbled *their* for *they're*, or *to* for *too*. Most of the mistakes that make it into final documents don't result from stupidity or even carelessness, though careless mistakes do happen too often. Most mistakes are simply overlooked because of our inability to see what's really on the page. Instead, we see what we thought we put there.

Familiarity with material makes it difficult to pick out errors that practically leap off the page to someone else.

How can you avoid making simple proofreading mistakes that make you look careless when really you're a perfectionist? Well, you won't be able to catch all the mistakes, but you'll come close if you apply all the skills you've acquired and you understand why the majority of mistakes occur. Here are some suggestions:

- Be consistent in the way that you handle paragraph indentation. Either indent the first sentence of each paragraph or, if you don't indent the first sentence, skip a line between each paragraph.
- Check for correct punctuation, including capitalization.
- Watch for grammatical errors. Keep an alert eye out for errors such as fragments, run-ons, faulty agreement, and incorrect comparisons.
- Make sure you haven't mistaken commonly confused pairs of words, such as *there*, *their*, and *they're*.
- Read backwards (from the end to the beginning of the document) to concentrate on small details of usage. If you tend to read fast, you might also cover the page with a plain-colored bookmark or piece of paper to slow yourself down and keep your eyes focused on one line of text at a time.
- Be on the lookout for mistakes that may happen when you rewrite or type a new copy of a revision. These mistakes include repeated words, sentences, or lines; and skipped lines, sentences, or paragraphs.
- Learn to spell the words you use. Learn the spelling rules and the exceptions to those rules.
- Become familiar with the look of words in print. The next time you're tempted to turn on the TV, pick up a book instead. Or, write a letter to a friend. While you're reading or writing, keep a dictionary at your side and look up unfamiliar words. In fact, look up familiar words, too, if they're the least bit tricky. You can make mistakes by assuming you know something and not checking to make sure you're right.

- Say the word aloud when you look it up in a dictionary. See the word. Copy the word correctly. Try to spell it with your eyes closed.
- Spell by syllables. Make sure that you pronounce the word correctly and that you hear all the syllables. Many people spell words wrong because they pronounce them wrong. *Probably*, for instance, is commonly misspelled as *probly*. Take the time to look at what you've written and pronounce it correctly.
- Pay special attention to words that aren't spelled the way they're pronounced. Many people misspell words containing silent letters (*debt*, *sign*, *exhaust*, *knife*, *night*, *pneumonia*). Others have trouble with two-letter combinations that sound like one letter (*phone*, *rough*, *school*).
- Watch for *homonyms*, words that sound alike but have different meanings. *Two/too/to*, *there/their/they're*, *your/you're*, *hear/here*, *no/know*, and *weather/whether* are just a few examples.
- Keep a list of words you've misspelled and looked up. Use your list as a reference when you write, edit, and proofread your work.

When typing, people tend to make the same sorts of mistakes. If you type your work on a typewriter or word processor, study it and see if you notice any patterns in your spelling typing errors. Pay attention to the details shown in **Figure 24**. It may be helpful to add frequently misspelled or mistyped words into your word processing program's dictionary or autocorrect feature.

COMMON TYPOS	
Common Mistake	Typing Error
Dropped letters	Ther car is red.
Added letters	Theirr car is red.
Transposed letters	Thier car is red.
Wrong letters	Rheir car is red.
Substituted letters	Yjrot vst od trf/
Spacing errors	Thei rcar is red.
Wrong word	There car is red.
Corrected sentence: Their car is red.	

FIGURE 24—Common Typos



FIGURE 25—The final step in a writing project is presenting it for someone to read.

Presenting Your Work

The final stage of the writing process is *presenting*—giving the final copy to the intended audience (Figure 25). Professional writers, and some classroom teachers, call this stage publishing. We’re calling it presenting.

Every time you pick up a magazine, newspaper, print advertisement, flyer, brochure, report, or anything else in print, you’re reading what some other writer has presented.

You present your writing when you send notes and letters to friends and relatives. In your working life, you’re likely to present writing in various forms, from resumes to business letters to reports on projects.

Once you’ve reached the presenting stage, most of the hard work has already taken place. Now, before sending your work out into the world, make sure it’s as polished as you can make it. Carefully proofread it. Be sure that it’s formatted according to the conventions of the medium you’re using, and that it’s presented as cleanly and neatly as possible.

Practice Exercise 8

After letting your clean, edited draft “rest” for a day or two, carefully proofread your work. Read it backwards. Double-check all the details you checked when editing, and watch for additional typos, repeated words, and inconsistencies in style. When you’re sure you’ve made it as perfect as it can be, print out your final draft. Now you’ve learned to make your writing ready for presentation.

This exercise is for your own benefit. Do *not* send your final draft to the school.



Self-Check 4

Questions 1–5: Answer the following questions.

1. List the stages of the writing process as discussed in this study unit.

2. During the first stage of the writing process, you must define your _____, _____, and _____.

3. Name and briefly describe five prewriting activities that can help you decide what to write about.

4. What is the difference between outlining and webbing?

5. What does *revision* mean? How is revising different from editing?

Questions 6–12: Read each sentence and draw a line through the cliché. Write a fresh phrase in place of each cliché.

6. I thought that Robertson had won the game fair and square. _____
7. This medicine will either kill you or cure you. _____
8. Shirley believes in this policy heart and soul. _____
9. I've been leading a dog's life since Mona went to Cincinnati. _____
10. Benton decided to surrender and face the music. _____
11. I know where you're coming from, Alan, but we still have to work within company policy. _____
12. If we aren't careful, this contract is going to come apart at the seams. _____

Check your answers with those on page 75.

NOTES

PRACTICE EXERCISES

Practice Exercise 1

1. War slogans
 - A. Remember the Maine
 - B. Remember Pearl Harbor
 - C. Make the world safe for democracy
2. American foreign policy
 - A. Monroe Doctrine
 - B. Open Door Policy
 - C. Truman Doctrine
3. Causes of poor health
 - A. Dirty living conditions
 - B. Absence of medical care
 - C. Poor diet
4. Evils of college sports
 - A. Overemphasis on athletics
 - B. Too much emphasis on winning
 - C. Failure to provide for the poor or average athlete
5. Steps in writing
 - A. Gathering ideas
 - B. Making a plan
 - C. Writing the first draft
6. How I got the job
 - A. Studying the help-wanted ads
 - B. Sending a letter of application
 - C. Interviewing

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- 7. I. Game birds
 - A. Ducks
 - B. Quail
 - C. Pheasants
- II. Birds of prey
 - A. Eagles
 - B. Owls
 - C. Hawks
- 8. I. Winter sports
 - A. Ice skating
 - B. Skiing
- II. Summer sports
 - A. Swimming
 - B. Baseball
 - C. Tennis
- 9. I. Baseball
 - A. Batting
 - B. Fielding
 - C. Pitching
- II. Basketball
 - A. Foul shooting
 - B. Set shooting
 - C. Floor play
 - D. Guarding
- 10. I. Reasons for popularity
 - A. Consideration for others
 - B. Pleasing personality
 - C. Sense of humor
 - D. Skill in conversation
 - E. Attractive appearance
- II. Reasons for unpopularity
 - A. Sarcastic talk
 - B. Selfishness

Practice Exercise 2

Your formal outline should

- Begin with an introduction to your topic
- Follow your pattern of organization
- List at least two major topics
- Include at least two subtopics within each major topic
- List two or more details for each subtopic
- Add specific facts as necessary
- Follow a logical order
- Fully develop your topic
- End with a summary or conclusion

Practice Exercise 3

1. This letter should be formal, with extra care given to ensure there are no errors. Also, it should use persuasive language and facts, where possible, to make a strong argument.
2. E-mail to friends may be very informal and casual; the writing generally reflects the way a person speaks. However, errors should be corrected before the message is sent.
3. Research papers are written in formal language. Your introductory paragraph should establish your purpose and put it into context. It should also include the major topics you'll be discussing in the order in which they'll appear in the paper.

4. *Letter requesting a speaker*

This letter is too informal, uses clichés and jargon, and doesn't include sufficient details for the request. Your revision might look something like this:

Dear Mr. Jeffers:

Our small medical laboratory is planning a spring workshop to train our interns in the use of some new, updated laboratory equipment we have ordered. Since you have been recommended as both an excellent instructor and an expert technician, we would very much like to have you supervise the training.

The workshop will be held on May 23 at Mayfield Diagnostics, Inc., located at 168 Front Street in Mayfield. We'll need two, two-hour sessions, which can be scheduled for morning or afternoon, at your convenience. If you are able to participate, I will inform you of the exact models of the equipment we'll be using. Please let me know the details of your fees and any set-up materials you'll need for your presentation.

We would appreciate your response by April 1. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

Simon Smith

Simon Smith
Administrative Assistant

5. *Memo inviting employees to company picnic*

This memo is clearly much too formal for the occasion or the audience, and is also pompous and condescending. Your memo might look something like this:

**** Splendid Products, Inc. ****

Memo

To: All Employees
From: Harrison Splendid, CEO
Date: June 10, 2006
Re: Company Picnic

In appreciation of your reliable effort and excellent productivity, our company will celebrate another successful year with a picnic at Church Street Park in West Orange on July 21 at 11 AM. Lunch will begin at 11:30 and there will be games and entertainment all afternoon. Please plan to join us. Dress comfortably.

Practice Exercise 4

Check your draft against your outline to make sure you followed your original intention and pattern of organization. If you've made changes in your major topics or their order, make sure you adjust the outline to accommodate the changes. If there are any gaps in information or logical sequence, make a note of what's missing.

Practice Exercise 5

Your sentences may differ from these suggestions:

1. After we had searched for hours and had notified the police, we found the little girl in the attic, sleeping peacefully.
2. The tornado tore down every building in the village, leaving in its wake ruin and death.
3. The mysterious visitor had rifled my desk, broken open the safe, and stolen the ruby.

Practice Exercises 6–8

After you complete each step in revising, editing, and proofreading your work, review the relevant material in the study unit to be sure you've made the corrections according to what you've learned.

SELF-CHECKS

Self-Check 1

1. a. brainstorming, webbing, freewriting, researching, and journal keeping.
b. purpose, medium, and audience.
c. one good idea that excites you.
2. researching
3. a. Cause and effect
b. Comparison/contrast
c. Chronological order
d. Spatial order
e. Cause and effect
f. Classification/division
4. The main advantage of sentence outlines is that they provide the topic sentences for your main paragraphs. The main advantages of topic outlines are that they're easier to prepare, they become the basis for your table of contents, and they supply the internal headings for your document.

Self-Check 2

1. notice errors
2. formal
3. style sheet
4. first draft
5. Digressions
6. outline
7. informal
8. purpose
9. double-space
10. audience

Self-Check 3

1. *Note:* These are just sample answers. Your responses will be different from those given here.
 - a. The employee morale survey administered on November 16 evaluated the job satisfaction of each member of our department. (*Note:* Be careful not to replace *guy* with *man*, since women probably also work in the department.)
 - b. Seven of my fellow production workers were dismissed because their unexcused absenteeism resulted in a 38 percent decline in production.
 - c. My production supervisor refused to appropriate funds for the new lab equipment.
 - d. An inventory control specialist from the central office in Madison was sent to evaluate our inventory records.
 - e. The 124T Addison drill presses installed in March of 2001 have increased production 82 percent, decreased downtime 90 percent, and initiated an overall expansion of the production division.
2.
 - a. The increased workload had surprisingly positive *effects* on the employee morale.
 - b. The supervisor divided the project *among* Joe, Dave, and me.
 - c. Correct
 - d. From the description George gave at the meeting, we have *concluded* that the new computer software will make our jobs easier.
 - e. Correct
 - f. If you replace mica wafers with beryllium oxide wafers, you're *likely* to get the same results.
 - g. In her speech at the department meeting, our supervisor *implied* that if production didn't increase, a few workers may be dismissed.
 - h. Correct
 - i. Correct

- j. The transistor *deteriorated* when the thermal joint compound failed to conduct the heat rapidly to the heat sink.
- 3.
- a. In my neighborhood, developers are building many new apartment houses.
 - b. We changed our plans abruptly when we received her message.
 - c. After serving the soup, they served the turkey.
 - d. Several companies involved in building the bridge made mistakes.
 - e. Mrs. Brown's grandson, who was visiting, gave her the wrong medication.
- 4.
- a. True
 - b. True
 - c. False

Self-Check 4

1. Prewriting, Planning, Writing the First Draft, Revising and Editing, Proofreading, Presenting
2. purpose, medium, audience
3. Brainstorming: Make a list of any ideas that come to mind about your general topic.

Clustering/webbing: This is a branching exercise. In the middle of a piece of paper, write your topic and circle it. Write and circle other ideas as they come to mind, connecting them with lines.

Freewriting: Without stopping, write sentence after sentence about your topic—whatever comes to mind.

Researching: Collect information from outside sources.

Journal keeping: Write in a journal every day, and turn to it when you're looking for topic ideas.

4. A formal outline is strictly organized and follows a set format:

I.

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

Webbing is a branching activity that shows the relationship between ideas. The format is more flexible than outlining.

5. To revise is “to see again.” You read as if you were seeing the work for the first time and make changes to the overall organization of the piece. To edit is to make changes sentence by sentence and word by word to improve the flow of language and correct errors.
6. fair and square—honorably (or without cheating)
7. kill you or cure you—This medicine should cure you, but it may have negative side effects.
8. heart and soul—completely; utterly
9. leading a dog’s life—I’ve been lonely
10. face the music—accept the consequences.
11. I know where you’re coming from—I understand your concerns
12. come apart at the seams—this contract isn’t going to satisfy the client (or stand up in court)

Improving Your Writing

EXAMINATION NUMBER

02800502

Whichever method you use in submitting your exam answers to the school, you must use the number above.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Read and complete the requirements for this examination only after you've completed the previous study units.

1. Refer to your previous study units, the practice exercises, the Writing Process Review, and the self-checks as you write your exam paragraphs.
2. Refer to the Evaluation Criteria to ensure your exam paragraphs meet the criteria to the best of your ability.
3. Include the following information at the top of each page.

Name Student Number (eight digits) Exam number Page X
Mailing Address
Email Address

Example:

Jane Smith 12345678 02800502 Page 1
111 Education Drive, Any Town, PA 18515
jlsmith@pfpfpf.com

To insert a header on each page that includes page numbers,

- a. Double-click in the top margin of your Word document; this will open the **Insert** tool bar and **Header and Footer** tools.
- b. Click on the **Page Number** button. Choose the **Plain Number 1** option to insert the page number at the top left corner of your page.

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- c. Place your cursor in front of the number to type your name and other identifying information as you see it in your study guide. Do not change the page number; it will adjust automatically to each new page of your document.

Note: You can type and format text in the header as you would in the body of your paper.

- d. When you're finished, click the **Close Header and Footer** button or double-click in the body of your document.

Note: If you don't include this information at the top of *each* page, you'll lose points in the format section. If you fail to include your name and student number, your exam may not be processed for grading.

4. Double-space your work and use Times New Roman font, size 12. After preparing a rough draft, read the evaluation criteria and revise your work carefully, correcting any errors you find. Make sure to spell-check and grammar-check your work, too. Submit only your final drafts. *Do not* include your prewriting, drafting, or revising work.
5. Save your document as a Rich Text Format (RTF) file using your name, student number, and exam number (Example: Jane Doe 12345678 028005).
6. Submit your examination in one of these two ways:
 - Submit the exam online. To do so, go to your My Courses page and click on the **Take Exam** button for Exam 028005. On the next page, click **Browse** and locate your saved file on your computer, then upload.
 - Mail the exam in the envelope provided or your own business-size envelope. From your computer, type or print the exam on 8½-by-11-inch white paper. Send your exam to the following address:

**Penn Foster
Student Service Center
925 Oak Street
Scranton, PA 18515**

ASSIGNMENT

Purpose

You demonstrate that you're able to work through all stages of the writing process to produce persuasive writing. To accomplish this assignment, you apply skills and rules taught in the first five study units.

Background

Ten years ago, you started working as a clerk for DMD Medical Supplies. Six months ago, Liz Jakowski, the human resources director, promoted you to office manager. You manage two employees: Jack Snyder and Ruth Disselkoen. Your office provides secretarial support for the four members of the executive team. Two years ago, Liz had assigned Jack to support Ralph Alane and Jessica Hilo. Ruth was assigned to Samuel Daley and Frank Daley. The work flow was equally balanced.

You've noticed that in the last three months Ruth has cut her breaks short to complete her work, complains of being tired, and at least twice a month requires overtime hours costing the company an additional \$200 a month. In the last three weeks, Frank Daley has complained to you a few times about the poor quality of Ruth's work.

On the other hand, over the last three months, Jack frequently seems to have little to do. He has begun coming in late a

couple times a week and taking more than the allotted break times. What work he does have, however, is always professionally completed.

Clearly, you must investigate to determine what is causing this change and how to improve the situation. Since nothing has changed in the personal lives of either Jack or Ruth, you conclude you must focus on the in-office work situation. You learn the following facts:

- Samuel and Frank Daley share a part-time administrative assistant who works only 15 hours a week.
- Ralph Alane and Jessica Hilo share a full-time administrative assistant.
- Jessica Hilo has been on medical leave for the last four months, and Liz Jakowski isn't sure whether Jessica will be able to return to work.

- Jessica’s duties have been temporarily reassigned to Ralph and Frank.

Although you don’t have the authority to change who Jack and Ruth are assigned to work for, you clearly need to change the work the two do so that both Jack and Ruth work regularly without requiring overtime.

Process

Adhere to the following outlined process when writing your exam.

Planning

1. The background explains the primary cause of the workflow problem and the negative effects resulting from it. Your task is to make up a realistic plan which solves the uneven productivity between Jack and Ruth. Use prewriting tools like brainstorming, cluster or webbing diagrams, and freewriting to outline the cause-effect situation and to develop a specific solution that best solves the problem. Also ask yourself the following questions to expand your prewriting.
 - How long has this situation been going on?
 - Why did the problems begin when they did?
 - Am I able to solve the problem at its root cause or am I only able to manage the impact of the problem?
 - Is this a temporary or permanent problem?
 - How has the company been affected?
 - How have the employees been affected?
 - What’s in my power to change? What must stay the same?
 - What are two or three ways to improve the efficiency of my office?
 - How much work, time, and money would be required to implement each solution?
 - Does each solution stop all the negative effects?
 - Are there any benefits to the change beyond stopping what is occurring?

- How exactly would each change affect Jack, Ruth, and the executive team?
 - What would I have to do to make sure each change goes through as planned and to monitor the situation once the solution is in place?
2. From your prewriting, develop the single best solution to the situation described in the background. Obviously, you won't be able to use everything you've prewritten, so your first step is to choose what's most important for the purpose and audience. As you outline a solution, you may need to make up more specific details that define the steps of the plan and describe particular benefits of the plan.

Drafting

3. Next, sort your details and information about the problem and the plan into one of the two sections given below. Don't worry about complete sentences for this sorting stage; merely list the information under the appropriate section. Use information from both the background and your prewriting.

Section 1

- Facts and figures that define the problem (the cause)
- Details that show the impact of the problem (effects) on Jack, Ruth, and the company

Section 2

- The steps needed to change the situation
 - Reason to implement each step, including the benefits to your employees, your supervisor, and the company
 - Information about your role in the change
4. After sorting the information, draft a first-try, rough paragraph for Section 1 and another paragraph for Section 2. Your goal is to place the listed information in the most logical order using sentence and paragraph format. Leave all spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other mistakes exactly as they are. Don't do any editing as you write this first draft. The worse it looks at this stage, the better your final product will appear in contrast.

5. Set your rough draft aside and don't work any further on this assignment for at least 24 hours.
6. After your break, reread the background information and the questions guiding your prewriting in Step 1. Then reread the rough paragraphs you drafted for Section 1 and 2 to refresh your memory. If you came up with new ideas since you wrote the draft, add your thoughts before you go further.

Revising

7. Focus on the rough draft of Section 2, which you wrote in Step 4. Divide the paragraph into two main ideas and reorganize your information accordingly to develop two separate paragraphs based on Section 2. The paragraphs must first describe your solution and then persuade your supervisor to implement that solution. Each paragraph must have one main idea related to this purpose and audience.

Note: Don't revise Section 1. Revise only the rough draft you wrote for Section 2, expanding the single paragraph into two paragraphs.

8. Prewrite further if needed to develop more details and explanation to flesh out the two paragraphs based on Section 2. Next, apply the drafting and revising strategies taught in this and previous study units to produce two properly developed paragraphs. Together these two paragraphs must total between 200 to 300 words.
9. Once again, set your work aside for at least 24 hours.
10. Read the evaluation criteria given on the next page, which will be used to score your work. Continue to revise, edit, and proofread the two paragraphs from Section 2 to meet each of the criteria.
11. Once you have a final, polished version of the two paragraphs based on Section 2, open a new document on your computer's word-processing program and type your work. Format the document to double space, using a standard font, size 12, left justification (also called align left and ragged right). Set 1-inch or 1.25-inch margins for both left and right sides of the page. Indent the first line of each paragraph by 0.5-inch tab. Hit Enter only once after the first paragraph to begin the second paragraph. Don't use any other type of format, such as a letter or memo. Merely type the two paragraphs.

12. After typing your work, make sure you edit and proofread at least one more time. Use the computer's grammar and spell checks cautiously. Not everything the computer suggests is correct, particularly for the purpose and audience.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The school will use the following criteria to evaluate your two paragraphs. Be sure you've revised and edited your work after reviewing these guidelines.

- **Ideas and content (development and unity)** (20 points)

You've thoughtfully divided the Section 2 information into two balanced paragraphs. In each paragraph, you present one clear main idea. Each of the two main ideas directly relates to the assigned purpose and audience: persuading Liz Jakowski to implement your solution. You effectively combine applicable information from the Background with insightful details of your own to develop a step-by-step plan. Those details are knitted together with reasonable explanation that includes the benefits from implementing your plan. (20 points)

- **Organization (coherence and paragraph structure)** (20 points)

You develop the main idea of each paragraph in a logical direction. The first paragraph flows naturally into the second paragraph without blurring the two main ideas. Your details fit naturally where placed. You effectively use connective wording to weave information and explanation into a cohesive whole.

- **Voice** (10 points)

Each paragraph maintains a single point of view using appropriate pronouns and verbs in active voice. In an informal business fashion, you connect with your supervisor. Your tone and voice give an engaging flavor to the message; they are appropriate for both the audience and purpose.

- **Word choice** (15 points)

Each word works smoothly with the other words to convey the intended message in a precise, appealing, and original way. The words you choose are specific, accurate, and energetic. You don't use slang, clichés, or jargon.

- **Sentence fluency** (15 points)

Your sentences are well built, with varied length, type, and structure to give each paragraph a sense of controlled yet graceful movement. When read aloud, the two paragraphs have a natural, pleasant rhythm.

- **Conventions** (20 points)

You demonstrate a skillful grasp of the standard writing conventions for American English, using correct grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Your choices guide the reader through the text with ease.

- **The two paragraphs together total 200 to 300 words. (20 points)**

- **Follow the submission guidelines in the general instructions to format and upload your exam for grading.**