

5

Structuring Information for Your Readers



CHAPTER OUTLINE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

- ▶ Use a standard or varied introduction/body/conclusion structure
- ▶ Create a brief or formal outline
- ▶ Chunk information into discrete units
- ▶ Determine the best sequence for your material
- ▶ Shape each paragraph for effectiveness
- ▶ Create clear headings
- ▶ Provide overviews of longer documents

o use a familiar architectural metaphor, Part I of this book has focused on the *foundations* of technical communication—the underlying supports upon which the technical communication “building” stands. To review, these foundations include: 1) a definition of technical communication; 2) teamwork, ethics, persuasion, and global issues as cornerstones; 3) research as a vital part of the technical communication process; and 4) usability as a key feature of technical communication.

Before producing specific technical documents, you need a set of *blueprints*. This section, Part II, discusses the four components of technical communication blueprints: an understandable *structure* (Chapter 5), a readable *style* (Chapter 6), audience-centered *visuals* (Chapter 7), and a user-friendly *design* (Chapter 8).

This chapter focuses on the first of these blueprint components, structure.

Structure, style, visuals, and design as technical communication blueprints

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN UNDERSTANDABLE STRUCTURE

Structure your information in a way that readers can easily grasp. To follow your thinking, readers need a clear path from point *a* to point *b*. This path needs to be obvious as readers scan through your document, looking for its overall structure.

Your audience comes first

Unfortunately, information rarely materializes—and thinking rarely occurs—in neat, predictable sequences. As you look over your collected information and begin to think about how you will structure it for your readers, you will face questions such as these:

- What relationships do the collected data suggest?
- What should I emphasize?
- In which sequence will readers approach this material?
- What belongs where?
- What do I say first? Why?
- What comes next?
- How do I end?

Getting started: questions to ask yourself when structuring for readers

Although a great deal of thinking goes into the process of answering these types of questions, the result will be worth the effort, as Figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate.

The end result: two examples of well-organized writing

Figure 5.1 depicts the standard structure of a technical document, one that readers will instantly recognize: introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction attracts the reader’s attention, announces the writer’s viewpoint, and previews what will follow. The body delivers on the promise implied in the introduction. The body explains and supports the writer’s viewpoint, achieving *unity* by remaining focused on that viewpoint and *coherence* by carrying a line of thought from sentence to sentence in a logical order. Finally, the conclusion has

Standard introduction/body/conclusion structure

various purposes: it might reemphasize key points, take a position, predict an outcome, offer a solution, or suggest further study. Good conclusions give readers a clear perspective on what they have just read.

FIGURE 5.1
Document with
a standard
introduction/
body/conclusion
structure

Introduction
announces the topic
and provides an
overview of what is
to follow

Body provides
the evidence and
data to support the
claims made in the
introduction

Conclusion
summarizes by
taking a position
and making
recommendations



Powell Rabkin

MEMORANDUM

To: Department Managers
From: Jill McCreary, General Manager *J.M.*
Date: December 8, 20XX
Subject: *Diversity training initiative*

As part of our ongoing efforts to highlight the company's commitment to diversity, we recently conducted two surveys—one directed to company employees and one to our retail buyers. We have just received the survey results from our outside analysts. The employee survey indicates that the members of all departments appreciate our efforts to create a diverse and comfortable work environment. The customer survey indicates that our company is well regarded for marketing products in ways that appeal to diverse buyers. However, both surveys also illuminate areas in which we could do even better. As a result, we will be initiating a new series of diversity training workshops early next year. Let me explain the survey findings that have led to this initiative.

First, the employee survey indicates that our workforce is rated “highly diverse” in terms of gender, with nearly equal representation of male and female employees in both managerial and nonmanagerial positions; however, we could do better in terms of minority representation at the managerial level. Meanwhile, the customer survey demonstrates that our customers are “very satisfied” with the diversity of our marketing materials, but that we fail to provide enough materials for our native Spanish-speaking buyers.

Those are the survey highlights—see the attached analysis for a more detailed picture. Again, we are doing well, but could do better. We feel that the best solution to address our weaker areas is to conduct a second series of diversity training workshops in the upcoming 12 months. We hope that these workshops—which are often illuminating to both new employees and those who have attended diversity trainings earlier—will help keep the word “diversity” at the forefront of everyone's thoughts when hiring and mentoring employees and creating marketing materials. More information will follow, but for now, please emphasize to your department employees the importance and value of these workshops.

A nonstandard
structure that also
clarifies data for
readers

There are, however, many ways of adapting this standard structure: For example, Figure 5.2 provides visual features (columns, colors), headings, and an engaging layout. Although organized differently from the previous document, Figure 5.2 does provide an introduction, a body, and a conclusion: The heading “What is arsenic?” represents a form of introduction. The next several headings answer the question posed in the introduction, forming in essence the body of the document. The final heading, asking about EPA standards, represents a form of conclusion, moving beyond data and description to the topic of policy and use.



FIGURE 5.2
Document with a nonstandard but well-organized structure

Use of visuals, color, and columns makes the organization clear

"What is arsenic?" paragraph is placed above subsequent sections, indicating that it is the introduction

Three lengthier sections—all of equal importance—are balanced in the middle of the page to indicate the body

"What is EPA's standard" section is placed at the bottom of the page, indicating that it is the conclusion

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency <www.epa.gov>

Additional ways
of structuring
information

Beyond the introduction/body/conclusion structure and its variations, there are other ways to structure information, as discussed below.

OUTLINING

Outlining is essential

Even basic documents require at least an introduction-body-conclusion outline done in your head and/or a few ideas jotted down in list form. Longer documents require a more detailed outline so that you can visualize your document overall and ensure that ideas flow logically from point to point.

Start by searching through the information you have gathered and creating a random list of key topics your document should include. For instance, in preparing the arsenic document in Figure 5.2, you might start by simply listing all the information you think readers need or expect:

Start by creating
a list of essential
information

- explain what the EPA is doing about arsenic in drinking water
- define what arsenic is
- explain how arsenic gets into drinking water
- list some of the effects of arsenic (stomach, heart, cancer)
- include specific data
- mention/explain the Safe Water Drinking Act
- refer to/define MCLGs

Now you can reorganize this list.

A simple list like the one above usually suffices for organizing a short document like the memo in Figure 5.1. However, for a more complex document, transform your list into a deliberate map that will guide readers from point to point. Create an introduction, body, and conclusion and then decide how you will divide each of these parts into subtopics. An outline for Figure 5.2 might look like this:

Then organize the
information into an
outline

- I. INTRODUCTION—Define arsenic.
- II. BODY
 - A. Explain how arsenic gets into drinking water.
 - B. Explain how it is regulated (1974 Safe Drinking Water Act/MCLGs; Maximum Contaminant Levels).
 - C. List some of the health effects of arsenic (visible effects; diseases, cancers).
- III. CONCLUSION—Describe the EPA's standards.

For a long document,
create a formal
outline

For a long, complex document, you will want a formal outline to keep you organized as you write (Figure 5.3).

Converting ABCD's Office Building from Oil to Gas Heating: A Feasibility Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Background
- B. Purpose of the Report
- C. Intended Audience (usually for in-school reports only)
- D. Information Sources
- E. Limitations of the Report
- F. Scope (list of major topics)

II. DATA (BODY)

- A. Description of Our Present Heating System
 - 1. Physical condition
 - 2. Required yearly maintenance
 - 3. Fuel supply problems
 - a. Overworked distributor
 - b. Varying local supply
 - 4. Cost of operation
- B. Removal of the Oil Burner and Tank
 - 1. Data from the oil company
 - 2. Data from the salvage company
 - a. Procedure
 - b. Cost
 - 3. Possibility of private sale
- C. Installation of a Gas Pipe from the Street to the Building
 - 1. Procedure
 - 2. Cost of installation
 - 3. Cost of landscaping

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Summary of Findings
- B. Comprehensive Interpretation of Findings
- C. Recommendations

FIGURE 5.3
A formal
outline using
alphanumeric
notation

Notice a few key characteristics of formal outlines:

- Roman numerals indicate the three main sections (introduction/body/conclusion).
- The first level of subtopics under each main section is indented and preceded by capital letters; the next level is further indented and preceded by Arabic numerals; and the third level is again indented three spaces and preceded by lowercase letters. This is known as *alphanumeric notation*.

An alternate system, *decimal notation*, appears in Figure 5.4. The decimal outline makes it easier to refer readers to various sections in your final document. But both systems achieve the same organizing objective.

- Each level of division must yield at least two subtopics—if you cannot divide a larger topic into at least two subtopics, retain only your larger topic.
- A formal outline typically undergoes changes as you write. Expect to adjust it as needed. When the document is complete you can use the formal outline to create a table of contents for the document.

See also the Strategies (below) for more advice.

FIGURE 5.4
Part of a formal
outline using
decimal notation

- ```

2.0 Data (Body)
 2.1 Description of Our Present Heating System
 2.1.1 Physical condition
 2.1.2 Required yearly maintenance
 2.1.3 Fuel supply problems
 2.1.3.1 Overworked distributor
 2.1.3.2 Varying local supply
 2.1.4 Cost of operation
 2.2 Removal of the Oil Burner and Tank
 2.2.1 Data from the oil company
 2.2.2 (and so on)

```



## STRATEGIES for Outlining

- ▶ **List key topics and subtopics to be included in your document.** Gather your information, determine what information is important to include, decide what information is superfluous, and make a list of the topics to be included.
- ▶ **Set up a standard outline.** Start with a typical introduction, body, and conclusion structure, even if you plan to vary the structure later.
- ▶ **Place key topics and subtopics where they fit within your standard outline.** Keep your introduction brief, using it to set the stage for the rest of your document. Include your specific data in the body section to back up what you promised in your introduction. Do not introduce new data in the conclusion.
- ▶ **Use alphanumeric or decimal notation consistently throughout the outline.**
- ▶ **Avoid excessive subtopics.** If you find that your outline is getting into multiple levels of detail too often, think of ways to combine information. Do not go to another level unless there are at least two distinct subtopics at that level.
- ▶ **Refine your outline as you write your document.** Continue revising your outline until you complete your document.

## CHUNKING

Outlining helps to illustrate the importance of *chunking*: breaking information down into discrete, digestible units, based on the readers' needs and the document's purpose. When you chunk information into smaller portions, you help readers to see which pieces of information belong together and how the various pieces are connected.

Chunking requires careful decisions about exactly how much information is enough for each portion and what constitutes sensible proportions among the parts. For example, note how in the outline in Figure 5.3 the writer plans to break up the information for readers in a variety of ways. First, the planned report is divided into three general sections, or chunks: introduction, data section (body), and conclusion. Then each of those sections is broken into as many smaller chunks as appropriate to help the reader see how this discussion breaks into parts and yet each of these parts fits together to form a whole.

Chunking information is handled differently on the Web than on the printed page. On Web sites, readers expect information in very short chunks because they don't like reading large portions of text on a computer screen and they want the option of zeroing in on various parts of the page and moving from link to link. In printed documents, however, readers expect longer passages of text because the printed page is easier on the eyes and because the expectation of reading a printed page is to read sequentially rather than jump from section to section.

Breaking information down into smaller units

Chunking on the Web versus chunking on a printed page

## SEQUENCING

In addition to chunking information, you also need to show readers the logical progression of information. The specific information sequence will depend on the type of document. For instance, a mechanism description usually follows a *spatial sequence* (What are the parts and how do they fit together?); a progress report or set of instructions usually follows a *chronological sequence* (In what order have things happened/should things happen?); a feasibility, recommendation, or justification report would follow a *problem-solution sequence* (What was the problem or goal and how was it/can it be fixed or achieved?); and an analytical report describing an incident and the reasons for the incident would follow a *cause and effect sequence* (What caused something to happen or what were the effects of something?). Examples later in this book illustrate these four sequential approaches:

Sequencing: ordering information to follow a logical progression

- Figure 12.2 (page 226) uses a spatial sequence to describe a stethoscope.
- Figure 15.2 (page 286) uses a chronological sequence to provide a progress report on a student's term project.

- Figure 17.4 (pages 337–346) uses a problem-solution sequence to propose a solution to budgetary issues with a college campus newspaper.
- Figure 16.4 (pages 314–323) uses a cause-effect sequence to show a correlation between periodontal disease in mothers and low birth weight babies.

## PARAGRAPHING

Paragraphing: the process of shaping information within paragraphs

Why paragraphing is important

The preceding three strategies for structuring information (outlining, chunking, and sequencing) enable you and your readers to see the “big picture” of the document. Once you have thought through the document’s larger structure you need to consider how smaller-scale but no less important strategies will help readers follow your message. The first of these strategies, *paragraphing*, is the process of shaping your information within paragraphs.

In most documents, different types of paragraphs have different shapes and purposes. For example, introductory paragraphs set the stage for the discussion that follows; transitional paragraphs (usually brief) help hold the discussion together; concluding paragraphs wrap up the discussion. But the focus here is on standard *support paragraphs*, typically found in the document’s body section. Each support paragraph advances one aspect of the main point made in the document’s introduction, and each usually can stand alone in meaning.

Readers look for structures they can recognize both in the document as a whole and within individual paragraphs. Just as the document as a whole needs to have an introduction-body-conclusion structure, so must each paragraph. Most of the standard support paragraphs in a technical document begin with a clear *topic sentence*, stating a generalization. Details in the body section support that generalization. These paragraphs also display *unity* (each sentence in the paragraph’s body section must relate to and expand upon the topic sentence). Finally, these paragraphs display *coherence* (all sentences form a connected line of thought, leading from the topic sentence to the conclusion).

ts

### The Topic Sentence

Readers look to a paragraph’s opening sentences for the main idea. Unless you have good reason to place it elsewhere, the topic sentence should appear first (or at least early) in the paragraph; it should focus and forecast what will come in the remainder of the paragraph. In some instances the main idea may require a “topic statement” consisting of two or more sentences, but usually a single sentence will do, as in the following example:

An effective topic sentence

Solar power offers the most efficient, economical, and safe solution to the Northeast’s energy problems.

Note that key words in the topic sentence signal that the paragraph’s next sentences (the body section) will describe how solar energy is *efficient*, *economical*, and *safe*.

## Paragraph Unity

**un**

The body of the paragraph must deliver on the topic sentence's promise. A paragraph is unified when all its material belongs there—when each and every sentence directly expands on the topic sentence. Here, for example, is the complete version of the solar energy paragraph, fully unified:

*Solar power offers an efficient, economical, and safe solution to the Northeast's energy problems.* To begin with, solar power is highly efficient. Solar collectors installed on fewer than 30 percent of roofs in the Northeast would provide for more than 70 percent of the area's heating and air-conditioning needs. Moreover, solar heat collectors are economical, operating for up to 20 years with little or no maintenance. These savings recoup the initial cost of installation within only ten years. Most important, solar power is safe. It can be transformed into electricity through photovoltaic cells (a type of storage battery) in a noiseless process that produces no air pollution—unlike coal, oil, and wood combustion. In contrast to its nuclear counterpart, solar power produces no toxic waste and poses no catastrophic danger of meltdown. Thus, massive conversion to solar power would ensure abundant energy and a safe, clean environment for future generations.

A unified paragraph

Note how the body of the previous paragraph tackles each of the benefits of solar energy introduced in the topic sentence, sometimes devoting two or more sentences to each benefit, but nonetheless staying on track. One way to damage unity in the paragraph above would be to veer from the focus on the key words *efficient*, *economical*, and *safe* into a discussion about the differences between active and passive solar heating or the advantages of solar power over wind power, neither of which was introduced in the topic sentence.

## Paragraph Coherence

**coh**

The body of the paragraph must deliver on the promise of the topic sentence through paragraph unity and also lead to a conclusion via a connected line of thought, like links in a chain. This feature is called paragraph coherence. Paragraph coherence can be damaged by 1) sentences in the wrong order; 2) insufficient transitions and connectors for linking related ideas; or 3) an inaccessible line of reasoning and lack of conclusion. Here is how the solar energy paragraph might become incoherent:

Solar power offers an efficient, economical, and safe solution to the Northeast's energy problems. Unlike nuclear power, solar power produces no toxic waste and poses no danger of meltdown. Solar power is efficient. Solar collectors could be installed on fewer than 30 percent of roofs in the Northeast. These collectors would provide for more than

An incoherent paragraph

70 percent of the area's heating and air-conditioning needs. Solar power is safe. It can be transformed into electricity. This transformation is made possible by photovoltaic cells (a type of storage battery). Solar heat collectors are economical. The photovoltaic process produces no air pollution.

In the above paragraph, the second sentence, about safety, belongs near the end because it was introduced as the third of the three benefits of solar energy. Also, because of insufficient links between ideas, the paragraph reads more like a list than like a flowing discussion. Finally, a concluding sentence is needed to complete the chain of reasoning and to give readers a clear perspective on what they've just read.

Here, in contrast, is the original, coherent paragraph with sentences numbered for later discussion and with transitions and connectors shown in boldface. Notice how this version reveals a clear line of thought:

A coherent paragraph

<sup>1</sup>Solar power offers an efficient, economical, and safe solution to the Northeast's energy problems. <sup>2</sup>**To begin with**, solar power is highly efficient. <sup>3</sup>Solar collectors installed on fewer than 30 percent of roofs in the Northeast would provide for more than 70 percent of the area's heating and air-conditioning needs. <sup>4</sup>**Moreover**, solar heat collectors are economical, operating for up to 20 years with little or no maintenance. <sup>5</sup>**These savings** recoup the initial cost of installation within only ten years. <sup>6</sup>**Most important**, solar power is safe. <sup>7</sup>It can be transformed into electricity through photovoltaic cells (a type of storage battery) in a noiseless process that produces no air pollution—unlike coal, oil, and wood combustion. <sup>8</sup>**In contrast** to its nuclear counterpart, solar power produces no toxic waste and poses no danger of catastrophic meltdown. <sup>9</sup>**Thus**, massive conversion to solar power would ensure abundant energy and a safe, clean environment for future generations.

We can easily trace the sequence of thoughts in the previous paragraph:

|                |                                                    |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Sentence 1.    | The topic sentence establishes a clear direction.  |
| Sentences 2–3. | The first reason is given and then explained.      |
| Sentences 4–5. | The second reason is given and explained.          |
| Sentences 6–8. | The third and major reason is given and explained. |
| Sentence 9.    | The conclusion reemphasizes the main point.        |

To reinforce the logical sequence, related ideas are combined in individual sentences, and transitions and connectors signal clear relationships between ideas. The whole paragraph sticks together.

## CLARIFYING HEADINGS

Create headings as one of the final steps in the structuring process

One of the final steps in structuring information is to make sure you have used clear headings. Use your outline as a guide. Headings may not be appropriate for all documents, such as short documents (e.g., the memo in

Figure 5.1), but most technical material relies on some use of headings as a way to break up long passages of text and give readers guideposts throughout the document.

Headings often follow standard formats, such as “Introduction,” “Methods,” “Findings,” “Conclusion,” and so forth. In certain cases, the type of document (a scientific paper, a report for a company that always follows the same format) will dictate the headings you need to use.

Heading format and purpose

You may use single words, phrases, brief statements, or questions as headings, as long as the headings signal to readers exactly what to expect in the section that falls under the heading’s umbrella.

When used consistently, questions are often the most helpful way to construct headings. In effect, the question in the heading is answered by the material that falls under that heading. The author of Figure 5.2 has taken this user-friendly approach, anticipating reader questions (“What is arsenic?” “How does arsenic get into my drinking water?” “How is arsenic in drinking water regulated?” “Why should I be concerned about arsenic in my drinking water?” and “What is the EPA’s standard for arsenic in drinking water?”) and answering each in turn.

Figure 5.5 is an example of a short report that uses clear, concise, and accurate headings to break up the material into logical sections. Because it is a progress report, the introductory heading gets right to the point of progress and the concluding heading gets directly to the topic of work remaining. Meanwhile, the headings in the middle section directly signal the key topics the reader needs to know about.

For more on the use of headings, see pages 140–141 and 144

## PROVIDING AN OVERVIEW

The last step in structuring information for your readers is providing an overview. An overview may not be necessary for all technical documents, particularly short documents and reports. However, if you are writing a longer, more complex document, help your readers by providing a brief (usually paragraph-length) preview of what they can expect. This will help readers get the most out of the document by answering several key questions at the outset:

Provide an overview as the last step in the structuring process

- What is the purpose of this document?
- Why should I read it?
- What information can I expect to find here?

Think about it this way: If you were taking a long trip, you would probably use Google Maps or a GPS system to get the big picture of your journey and to know exactly where you were headed. Overviews provide a similar type of road map.

An overview should be placed at the beginning of a document, but you may also want to provide section overviews at the beginning of each section in a long

Four headings divide the report into distinct, logical sections

Information in each headed section is brief and does not stray from the heading topic

### **Progress Report: Equipment for New Operations Building**

#### **Work Completed**

Our training group has met twice since our May 12 report. In our first meeting, we identified the types of training we anticipate.

#### **Types of Training Anticipated**

- Loan Officer Work Experience
- Divisional Systems Training
- Divisional Clerical Training (Continuing)
- Divisional Clerical Training (New Employees)
- Divisional Management Training (Seminars)
- Special/New Equipment Training

In our second meeting, we considered various areas for the training room.

#### **Training Room Assignment and Equipment**

The frequency of training requires us to have a training room available daily. The large training room in the Corporate Education area (10th floor) would be ideal. Before submitting our next report, we need your confirmation that this room can be assigned to us.

To support the training programs, we purchased this equipment:

- Audioviewer
- Large flat screen monitor
- Digital video camera and tripod
- Software for computer-assisted instruction

This equipment will allow us to administer training in a variety of modes, ranging from programmed and learner-controlled instruction to group seminars and workshops.

**FIGURE 5.5** A short report with clear headings

**Work Remaining**

To support the training, we need to furnish the room appropriately. Because the types of training will vary, the furniture should provide a flexible environment. Outlined here are our anticipated furnishing needs.

- Tables and chairs that can be set up in many configurations. These would allow for individual or group training and large seminars.
- Portable room dividers. These would provide study space for training with programmed instruction and allow for simultaneous training.
- Built-in storage space for audiovisual equipment and training supplies. Ideally, this storage space should be multipurpose, providing work or display surfaces.
- A flexible lighting system for audiovisual presentations and individualized study.

The project is on schedule. As soon as we receive your approval of these specifications, we will send out bids for room dividers and have plans drawn for the built-in storage.

cc. R. S. Pike, SVP

← Final heading clearly signals that this section is the conclusion

document. The following is an example of an overview paragraph that comes at the beginning of a long report on groundwater contamination.

A report overview

#### About This Report

This report contains five sections. The first section describes the scope and scale of groundwater contamination in Jackson County. The second section offers background on previous legislation related to groundwater. Section Three shows the most recent data from the Jackson County Groundwater Project, and Section Four compares those data to national averages. Section Five offers recommendations and ideas for next steps.

In addition to helping readers negotiate longer reports, overviews are also extremely helpful in longer instruction and user manuals so that readers will know immediately what to expect in the longer document.

Figure 5.6 is an example of an overview page from a user guide designed to help people find and apply for federal grants. This overview (titled “Introduction” in this document) provides a short, simple introductory paragraph explaining the context for this user guide. Additional paragraphs describe what is contained in the guide, and a bulleted list provides a streamlined, easy-to-read visual overview of what is contained in the rest of this 60-page document.



### CHECKLIST for Structuring Information

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- ☐ Am I structuring my document with readers in mind?
- ☐ Does my document employ a standard or varied introduction/body/conclusion structure?
- ☐ Have I created an outline that will allow me to include all the necessary data for my document?
- ☐ Have I organized my outline using alphanumeric or decimal notation?
- ☐ Have I chunked my information into discrete, digestible units and for the proper medium (print or Web)?
- ☐ Am I using the right sequence?
- ☐ Does each of my paragraphs include these features?
  - Topic sentence (introduction)
  - Unity (body that supports the topic sentence)
  - Coherence (connected line of thought leading to a conclusion)
- ☐ Have I used headings that are clear and address the sections or questions readers expect?
- ☐ If appropriate, does my document include an overview, helping readers understand what will follow?

## Introduction

Grants.gov has been designed to make it easier for organizations to find and apply for more than \$500 billion in federal grants. With electronic access to more than 1,000 grant programs offered by all federal grant-making agencies, Grants.gov leverages the power of the Web to streamline your grant acquisition process.

This user guide has been developed to help you navigate the Grants.gov environment more easily. In it, you'll find detailed instructions for every step of the process – whether you're an applicant or grant-making agency.

From getting started and registration to viewing and tracking completed applications, this user guide offers clarification throughout the entire process.

Provided information in this user guide:

- How To Register Your Organization
- How To Register As An Authorized Organization Representative
- How To Register As An Individual
- Find and Search Grant Opportunities
- Download Application Packages
- Apply For Grants
- Track Your Application
- And How To Stay Connected

← Heading lets readers know that this page will give them an overview of the user guide

← Introductory paragraph provides background information in brief format

← Second paragraph explains the purpose of the user guide

← Bulleted list outlines the major sections in the user guide

**FIGURE 5.6** Overview page from a user guide summarizes the contents of the full document



## APPLICATIONS

### GENERAL APPLICATION

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Locate a set of instructions for something you have purchased. Identify specific features of how this material is organized and written. Are the paragraphs chunked into discrete units? Are headings used, and if so are they in question format? Is the material sequenced in a standard way? Do all of the paragraphs include topic sentences, and are they unified and coherent? Write a brief memo explaining why you think the technical writers who wrote the instructions made the decisions they did.

### TEAM APPLICATION

With a team of two to three other students, consider the following documents and discuss the most logical sequence. (For instance, a description of a proposed podcasting computer lab would follow a spatial sequence.)

- a set of instructions for operating a power tool
- a campaign report describing your progress in political fund-raising
- a report analyzing the desirability of a proposed oil refinery in your area
- a detailed breakdown of your monthly budget to trim excess spending
- a report investigating the reasons for student apathy on your campus
- a proposal for a no-grade policy at your college

### GLOBAL APPLICATION

MyWritingLab™

Find a document that presents the same information in several languages (assembly instructions, for example). Even without being able to understand all of the languages used, see if you can spot any changes made in the use of headings, the length of paragraphs, or the extent to which information is chunked. Interview a language professor on campus to find out why these choices may have been made.

### DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION

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Locate a Web page and a print document (brochure, booklet, user guide) about the same product. Compare these, looking for the different ways in which material is written and chunked on the Web versus in print. Compare the use of headings, looking for any differences. In class, give a short presentation on these differences.

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Visit Chapter 5, *Structuring Information for Your Readers*, in MyWritingLab to complete this chapter's applications, to explore this chapter's overview, checklist, and flashcards, and to test your understanding of the chapter objectives.