

6

Writing with a Readable Style



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

- Recognize that style places your audience's needs first
- Appreciate the importance of style in any document
- Use various strategies to write clearly, concisely, fluently, and personably

Definition of style

While *structure* has to do with the reader's ability to understand the document as a whole, including paragraphs, *style* has to do with readability at the sentence and word level.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A READABLE STYLE

Style emphasizes the audience's needs first

No matter how technical your document, your audience won't understand the content unless your sentences are easy to understand and your words are chosen precisely. Your style is a blend of these elements:

What determines your style

- the way in which you construct each sentence
- the length of your sentences
- the way in which you connect sentences
- the words and phrases you choose
- the tone you convey

Whether you are using email, a PDF attachment, or a print document, these elements are always important in creating professional, usable workplace communication. Too often, tone and style in digital communication, email in particular, become sloppy and casual. See Chapter 18 for more on email tone and style.

Style is more than correct grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling

Readable style, of course, also requires correct grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling. But correctness alone is no guarantee of readability. For example, the following response to a job application follows the rules of grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling, but it is hard to read:

Inefficient style

We are in receipt of your recent correspondence indicating your interest in securing the advertised position. Your correspondence has been duly forwarded for consideration by the personnel office, which has employment candidate selection responsibility. You may expect to hear from us relative to your application as the selection process progresses. Your interest in the position is appreciated.

Notice as a reader how hard you have to work to extract information from the previous paragraph. This information could be expressed clearly and concisely, as in the following paragraph:

Readable style

Your application for the advertised position has been forwarded to our personnel office. As the selection process moves forward, we will be in touch. Thank you for your interest.

Inefficient style makes readers work harder than they should. Style can be inefficient for many reasons but especially when it does the following:

Ways in which style goes wrong

- makes the writing impossible to interpret
- takes too long to make the point

- reads like a story from primary school
- sounds stuffy and impersonal

Regardless of the cause, inefficient style results in writing that is less informative and less persuasive than it should be. Also, inefficient style can be unethical when it confuses or misleads the audience, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, take the time to write with a readable style, using the strategies described in the following sections: writing clearly, writing concisely, writing fluently, and writing personably. For advice regarding correct grammar, usage, and mechanics, see Appendix B.

Inefficient style can be uninformative, unpersuasive, and even unethical

WRITING CLEARLY

Clear writing enables people to read each sentence only once in order to fully grasp its meaning. Strategies for writing clearly include avoiding ambiguous pronoun references, avoiding ambiguous modifiers, using active voice whenever possible, using passive voice selectively, avoiding nominalizations, unstacking nouns, and avoiding unnecessary jargon.

Why writing clearly is important

Avoiding Ambiguous Pronoun References

ref

Pronouns (*he, she, it, their*, and so on) must clearly refer to the nouns they replace; otherwise, the sentence will be ambiguous and readers will puzzle over your intended meaning. For example, consider the following sentence, in which the reader is unable to discern whether Jack *or* his assistant is competitive:

| Jack resents his assistant because he is competitive.

Unclear referent

Depending on whether the referent for “he” is Jack or his assistant, the sentence can be clarified:

| Because his assistant is competitive, Jack resents him.

Clear referent

or

| Because Jack is competitive, he resents his assistant.



EXERCISE 1

Edit each sentence below to eliminate ambiguities in pronoun reference.

- Bill told Darius that he was working too hard.
- Janice dislikes working with Magdalena because she's impatient.
- Our patients enjoy the warm days while they last.

- d. They couldn't start their cars because they were too cold.
- e. Celia can't talk to Betsy because she's still too angry.

Avoiding Ambiguous Modifiers

mod

A *modifier* is a word (usually an adjective or adverb) or a group of words (usually a phrase or clause) that provides information about other words or groups of words. If a modifier is too far from the words it modifies, the message can be ambiguous. For instance, in the following sentence, the reader cannot discern whether “only” modifies “press” or “emergency”:

Ambiguous modifier

| Only press the red button in an emergency.

If, however, the writer repositions the modifier, the sentence becomes clear:

Clear modifier

| Press only the red button in an emergency.

| or

| Press the red button in an emergency only.

Position modifiers to reflect your meaning.



EXERCISE 2

Edit each sentence below to clarify ambiguous modifiers.

- a. Just place the dishes back in the cabinets after 8 P.M.
- b. He purchased a ticket for his wife from Carnegie Hall.
- c. I almost sat there waiting for Gino for 45 minutes.
- d. Before she passed away, Philippa told her mother she admired her.
- e. Only use this phone in a red alert.

Using Active Voice Whenever Possible

av

In general, readers understand the meaning more quickly and clearly when the writer uses active voice (“I did it”) rather than the passive voice (“It was done by me”). In active voice sentences, a clear agent performs a clear action on a recipient, as in the following example:

Active voice

| Felix lost your report.

Passive voice, by contrast, reverses this pattern, placing the recipient of the action (i.e., *report*, in the previous example) in the subject slot, as in the following sentence:

I Your report was lost by Felix.

Passive voice

Note that passive voice adds a form of the verb “be” (“was”) next to the actual verb.

Some writers mistakenly rely on passive voice because they think it sounds more objective and important. But passive voice makes sentences wordier and harder to understand.

In addition, passive voice sometimes obscures the subject of the sentence, as in the following example:

I Your report was lost.

Inappropriate use
of passive voice (no
subject identified)

Passive voice is unethical if it obscures the person or other agent who performed the action when the person or agent responsible should be identified. In the above example, “Your report was lost” leaves out the responsible party. (Who lost the report?) For these reasons, favor the active voice in most writing situations.



EXERCISE 3

Convert these passive voice sentences to concise, forceful, and direct expressions in the active voice.

- a. The evaluation was performed by us.
- b. Unless you pay me within three days, my lawyer will be contacted.
- c. Hard hats should be worn at all times.
- d. The due date was delayed.
- e. Our test results will be sent to you as soon as verification is completed.

Using Passive Voice Selectively

pv

There are times when the passive voice is appropriate: for instance, when the subject is not known or when the object is more important than the subject. For example, if a group of scientists performed an experiment and wanted to explain the results, they might write the following:

I The data were analyzed, and the findings were discussed.

Appropriate use of
passive voice

Even here, active voice (“We analyzed the data...”) would be preferable. But if it is clear who analyzed the data or truly not important who did the work, passive voice might be acceptable.

Passive voice can also ease the blow a direct sentence might deliver:

Blunt use of active voice

I You have not paid your bill.

To be indirect and less offensive, the writer may choose passive voice instead:

Appropriate (indirect) use of passive voice

I Your bill has not been paid.

Consider this technique when you want to avoid a blunt or hostile tone. But in general, to convey clear, readable technical information, use active voice.



EXERCISE 4

The sentences below represent blunt uses of active voice. Convert each to passive voice.

- a. Joe's company fired him.
- b. Cecelia's coworkers accused her of being lazy.
- c. You are paying inadequate attention to worker safety.
- d. You are checking temperatures too infrequently.
- e. You did a poor job editing this report.

Avoiding Nominalizations

nom

A nominalization is a noun that would be easier to understand as a verb. Verbs are generally easier to read because they signal action that can be visualized. You can usually spot a nominalization in two ways. First, look for words with *-tion* endings. Second, look for sentences in which the “[noun] of [noun]” formula appears. Following is an example of each type of nominalization:

Unclear (*-tion* ending)

My recommendation is for a larger budget.

Unclear (“[noun] of [noun]”)

The managing of this project is up to me.

To fix the *-tion* problem, strike the ending to find the root verb (“recommend”) and rewrite the sentence in a more direct form. To fix the “[noun] of [noun]” problem, identify the root verb form (“manage”) and create a more accessible sentence. Following are improved versions of the above sentences:

Clear verb form (*-tion* removed)

I recommend a larger budget.

Clear verb form (“[noun] of [noun]” removed)

I manage this project.

**EXERCISE 5**

Make these sentences clearer by eliminating nominalizations.

- a. Our acceptance of the offer is a necessity.
- b. Your assertion is that we spend too much time in meetings.
- c. We ask for the cooperation of all employees.
- d. My validation of the report is required.
- e. Please provide a description of the problem.

Unstack Modifying Nouns

st mod

Too many nouns in a row can create confusion for readers. One noun can modify another (as in “software development”). But when two or more nouns modify a noun, the string of words becomes “stacked”—in other words, hard to read and ambiguous. For example:

Be sure to leave enough time for today’s training session participant evaluation.

Ambiguous use
of stacked nouns

In the previous sentence, the reader is left unsure whether evaluation is of the session or of the participants. With no articles, prepositions, or verbs to unstack the nouns, readers cannot sort out the relationships among the nouns. To fix the problem, separate the stacked nouns by changing some nouns into verb forms where appropriate, as in the following example:

Be sure to leave enough time for participants to evaluate today’s training session.

or

Be sure to leave enough time to evaluate the participants in today’s training session.

Clear sentence with
nouns unstacked

**EXERCISE 6**

Make these sentences clearer by unstacking the nouns.

- a. They developed online editing system documentation.
- b. I recommend these management performance improvement incentives.
- c. Sarah’s job involves fault analysis systems troubleshooting handbook preparation.
- d. Constantine read through the strategic implementation status guidelines.
- e. You should think about providing employees with memory recall stimulus devices.

Avoiding Unnecessary Jargon

jarg

Every profession has its own shorthand and accepted phrases and terms. Among specialists, these terms are an economical way to communicate. For example, “stat” (from the Latin *statim*, “immediately”) is medical jargon for “drop everything and deal with this emergency.” Jargon can be useful in communications among specialists. However, to avoid confusion, use jargon only when you know your audience will understand it and not simply to sound important or pretentious. Consider the following sentence:

Needless jargon

I We will bilaterally optimize our efforts on this project.

Clearly that writer meant to sound important, but to most readers, the sentence is simultaneously meaningless and pretentious.

Following is a clear and simple version:

Jargon-free version

I We will cooperate on this project.



EXERCISE 7

Edit these sentences to eliminate useless jargon.

- a. To optimize your financial return, prioritize your investment goals.
- b. The use of this product engenders a 50 percent repeat consumer encounter.
- c. Unless all parties interface synchronously within given parameters, the project will fail.
- d. Acoustically attenuate our company’s food consumption area.
- e. We need to formulate a workable paradigm for this project.

WRITING CONCISELY

Why writing
concisely is
important

Concise writing provides readers with all of the information they need but without any needless filler. Strategies for writing concisely include avoiding wordiness as well as eliminating redundancy and repetition.

Avoiding Wordiness

w

Wordiness is often unavoidable in a first draft, when a writer is simply trying to get thoughts down on the page. For your readers, however, wordiness is distracting and detracts from a writer’s credibility. When you edit your document, go through each sentence and work to eliminate excess words.

Wordiness has multiple causes: First, some writers habitually use needless phrases that can be reduced to one word:

- | at a rapid rate = rapidly
- | due to the fact that = because
- | aware of the fact that = know
- | in close proximity to = near
- | the majority of = most

Wordy phrases
and their one-word
substitutes

Second, many writers tend to start sentences with “there is,” “there are,” and “it is,” which can often be eliminated:

- | There is a danger of explosion in Number 2 mineshaft. = Number 2 mineshaft is in danger of exploding.
- | It is necessary to complete both sides of the form. = Please complete both sides of the form.

Needless “there is,”
“there are,” and “it
is” sentence openers
and their corrections

Third, writers often gravitate to weak verbs, such as all forms of the verb “to be” (“am,” “are,” “is,” etc.), “give,” “make,” “come,” and “take.” These verbs need to be combined with other words to express fuller meaning, but they can easily be replaced with stronger verbs that can stand on their own:

- | has the ability to = can
- | make an assumption = assume
- | come to the conclusion that = conclude
- | give a summary of = summarize
- | take action = act

Weak verbs and their
replacements

Fourth, writers often overuse prepositional phrases, which can easily be reduced to one or two words:

- | with the exception of = except for
- | in the near future = soon
- | at the present time = now
- | in the course of = during
- | in the process of = during (or in)

Prepositional
phrases and their
replacements

Finally, many writers pad their writing by using clutter words (such as “very,” “quite,” “somewhat,” “really,” “actually”), needless qualifiers (“I think,” “in my opinion,” “it seems”), and unnecessary prefaces (“As far as I am concerned,” “the purpose of this is”) that add no meaning to a sentence. Of course, if you are

expressing a tentative position on a complex issue, do use a qualifier (“I think,” “it seems”) as appropriate.



EXERCISE 8

Eliminate wordiness from the following sentences.

- a. Our lateness was due to the fact that we ran into traffic.
- b. I have come to the realization that I was mistaken.
- c. It seems as if I have just wrecked the company car.
- d. It is essential that we act immediately.
- e. A malfunction occurred during the process of rebooting.

red

Eliminating Redundancy and Repetition

rep

A redundant expression says the same thing twice, in different words, whereas a repetition says the same thing twice or more in the same words. Following are examples of each, which can be fixed simply through cutting out the bracketed words.

Redundant phrases

[completely] eliminate	[mental] awareness
[end] result	[utter] devastation
enter [into]	[mutual] cooperation
consensus [of opinion]	[fellow] colleagues

Needlessly
repetitious sentence

Techniques of artificial respiration include mouth-to-mouth [respiration] and mouth-to-nose [respiration].



EXERCISE 9

Make these sentences more concise by eliminating redundancy and repetition.

- a. Igor's fellow colleagues are ambitious.
- b. We ask for everyone's mutual cooperation during this busy time.
- c. This report is the most informative report on the project.
- d. The consensus of opinion is that we agree with Tanisha's idea.
- e. Sam agrees, Tanya agrees, and Soon-ye agrees too.

WRITING FLUENTLY

Why writing fluently
is important

When you write fluently, you will hold your readers' interest and attention by making clear connections between ideas and by reducing monotony. Strategies for writing fluently include combining related ideas, varying sentence construction and length, and using parallel structure.

Combining Related Ideas

comb

Readers who are forced to trudge through a series of short, choppy sentences will not only lose interest but will also fail to see how ideas are meant to be related or which ideas should receive emphasis. For example, the following string of five short sentences makes for dull reading. In addition, it forces readers to invent transitions between ideas and decide which points are most important:

Jogging can be healthful. You need the right equipment. Well-fitting shoes are important. You take the chance of injuring your legs. Your knees are especially prone to injury.

Disconnected series
of ideas

In contrast, the following two-sentence revision reads more smoothly and places a stronger emphasis on the importance of having the right jogging shoes:

Jogging can be healthful if you have the right equipment. Shoes that fit well are particularly important because they prevent injury to your legs, especially your knees.

Fluent combination
of ideas



EXERCISE 10

Combine the following sentences three times, each time creating one fluent sentence that places emphasis in a different place. For the first combination, emphasize the negative aspects of the job. For the second combination, emphasize the positive aspects. For the third combination, emphasize the salary.

The job offers an attractive salary. It demands long work hours. It can be stressful. Promotions are rapid.

Varying Sentence Construction and Length

var

While you should combine short, choppy sentences into longer, more fluid versions, you don't want to create a string of unvaried longer sentences. Readers will find these just as monotonous, and they will also have a hard time determining which points are meant to receive emphasis. For example, the following two longer sentences are unvaried and dull, and at the same time the reader is forced to decide which of the five points made is the most important:

Two drawbacks of diesel engines are that they are difficult to start in cold weather and cause sulfur dioxide pollution. In addition, they give off noise, emit an unpleasant odor, and cause vibrations.

In contrast, the following two-sentence revision reads less monotonously and incorporates one short sentence to place special emphasis on sulfur dioxide pollution:

Diesel engines have a number of drawbacks, including cold weather starting difficulties, noisiness, odor, and vibrations. More seriously, they also cause sulfur dioxide pollution.



EXERCISE 11

Add variety to the following string of similar sentences.

Because people are busy these days, television DVRs are unsurprisingly popular. Because you can record while you are at work, you don't have to worry about missing your favorite programs. In addition, because you can record programs that show late at night, you don't have to stay up late to catch your favorite programs. Finally, in case you are on vacation, you can set the DVR to record your favorite shows automatically every week.

Using Parallel Structure

par

Parallel structure is a fancy way of saying that similar items should be expressed in similar grammatical form. Without parallelism, readers will lose attention, being mentally forced to “fix” the grammatical fluency of your sentence. For example, the structure of the following sentence is not parallel:

Not parallel

She likes many outdoor activities, including running, kayaking, and to design new hiking trails.

This sentence is essentially a list of items. The first two items, “running” and “kayaking,” are expressed as gerunds (verbs converted into nouns by using *-ing* endings). The third item, “to design,” is not a gerund but a verb followed by an object. To make this sentence parallel and increase its fluency you would revise as follows:

Parallel

She likes many outdoor activities, including running, kayaking, and designing new hiking trails.



EXERCISE 12

Make these sentences clearer by eliminating faulty parallelism.

- a. The weather today is going to be cold, rainy, and without much sun.
- b. My television picture is cloudy and I can see pixellation.

- c. My car needs a tune-up, an oil change, and the tires should be replaced.
- d. The new tutor is enthusiastic, skilled, and you can depend on her.
- e. In his new job, Ramon felt lonely and without a friend.

WRITING PERSONABLY

When you write in a personable manner, you connect directly with your readers and avoid inadvertently offending them. Strategies for writing personably include adjusting your tone and avoiding sexist and biased language.

Why writing personably is important

Adjusting Your Tone

tone

Your tone is your personal stamp—the personality that takes shape between the lines. The tone you create depends on 1) the distance you impose between yourself and the reader, and 2) the attitude you show toward the subject. To increase the likelihood of bringing readers over to your side, see the Strategies that follow.



STRATEGIES for Deciding about Tone

- ▶ **Determine if you want a formal, semiformal, or informal tone.** You may prefer a formal tone when writing to superiors, professionals, or academics (depending on what you think they expect), a semiformal tone for colleagues and subordinates (depending on how close you feel to your readers), or a slightly informal tone when you want your writing to be conversational.
- ▶ **Remain consistent.** Once you've determined the appropriate overall tone of the document, stay with it throughout.
- ▶ **Address readers directly.** Prefer the personal pronouns “you” and “your” to connect with readers.
- ▶ **Use “I” and “we” when appropriate.** Instead of disappearing behind your writing, use “I” and “we” to connect with your readers.
- ▶ **Prefer the active voice.** Show confidence and directness by using active rather than passive voice.
- ▶ **Emphasize the positive.** Avoid a negative tone when conveying unpleasant information.
- ▶ **Always avoid an overly informal tone.** Achieving a conversational tone does not mean relying on substandard usage (“He ain’t got none”), profanity (“This idea sucks”), and colloquialisms (“OK,” “a lot,” “snooze”). Pay special attention to tone when using email (see Chapter 18 for more on email tone and style).



EXERCISE 13

Adjust the tone of the following sentences to improve the connection between the writer and the reader.

- a. The writer of this letter would like a refund.
- b. The requested report will be sent next week.
- c. Students at this college will find the faculty always willing to help.
- d. No way am I going to approve this dog of a proposal.
- e. Because of your division's lagging productivity, a management review may be needed.

sexist

Avoiding Sexist and Biased Language

bias

Language that is offensive or makes unwarranted assumptions will alienate readers. Women, for example, who receive a letter addressed to “Dear Sir” will probably discard the letter without ever reading it. Also, our communication should respect all people regardless of cultural, racial, or national background, sexual or religious orientation, age, or physical condition. See the following Strategies.

STRATEGIES
for Nonsexist Usage

- ▶ **Use gender-neutral expressions.** Use “chair” or “chairperson” rather than “chairman” and “postal worker” rather than “postman.”
- ▶ **Don’t mention gender if it is not relevant.** Don’t use “the female police officer” unless you are talking about police officers in the context of gender.
- ▶ **Avoid sexist pronouns.** You can avoid using a sexist pronoun by revising the sentence (“A writer who revises will succeed” rather than “A writer will succeed if he revises”), by using a plural form (“Writers will succeed if they revise”), or by occasionally using paired pronouns (“A writer will succeed if he or she revises”).
- ▶ **Drop condescending diminutive endings.** Avoid words such as “poetess” and “majorette” and simply use “poet” and “major” instead.
- ▶ **Use “Ms.”** Unless you know that a person prefers a traditional title, avoid “Mrs.” and “Miss.” Males are not identified by marital status, nor should females have to be.



STRATEGIES for Unbiased Usage

- ▶ **Be specific when referring to a person's cultural/national identity.** Instead of "Asian" or "Hispanic," for example, prefer "Korean" or "Cuban American." Use the cultural/national designation preferred by people in that group (e.g., "Native American" rather than "Indian" or "Senegalese" rather than "African").
- ▶ **Avoid potentially judgmental expressions.** Instead of "Third World" or "underdeveloped" use "newly industrialized" or "developing," and instead of "non-white" use "people of color."
- ▶ **Never use demeaning expressions.** Avoid expressions such as "lame excuse," "the blind leading the blind," or "that's queer."
- ▶ **Use person-first language for people with disabilities or medical conditions.** Avoid terms that place the disability over the person or that suggest pity. Use "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person" and "person with AIDS" rather than "AIDS victim."
- ▶ **Use age-appropriate designations.** A "girl" or a "boy" is age 14 or under; a "young person," "young adult," "young woman," or "young man" is of high school age; and a "man" or a "woman" is college-aged or older. Avoid "old" or "elderly" and use "older person" or "senior" instead, if age is relevant.



EXERCISE 14

The sentences below suffer from sexist or biased expressions. Adjust the tone.

- a. The group's spokesman demanded salary increases.
- b. The explosion left me blind as a bat for nearly two hours.
- c. While the girls played football, the men waved pom-poms to cheer them on.
- d. The Latino mechanic fixed the problem in under an hour.
- e. Lame excuses for late papers will not be tolerated.



CHECKLIST for Style

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CLARITY

- ☐ Have I ensured that each pronoun clearly refers to the noun it replaces?
- ☐ Have I placed each modifier close enough to the word(s) it explains?



CHECKLIST *continued*

- ☐ Have I used active rather than passive voice (unless the agent is immaterial)?
- ☐ Have I restored nominalizations to their verb forms?
- ☐ Have I unstacked modifying nouns?
- ☐ Have I avoided needless jargon?

CONCISENESS

- ☐ Have I avoided needless sentence openers?
- ☐ Have I traded weak verbs for verbs that express a definite action?
- ☐ Have I avoided needless prepositional phrases?
- ☐ Have I avoided clutter words and needless qualifiers?
- ☐ Have I eliminated redundancy and needless repetition?

FLUENCY

- ☐ Have I combined related ideas appropriately?
- ☐ Have I varied sentence construction and length?
- ☐ Have I used parallel structure?
- ☐ Have I used short sentences for special emphasis?

TONE

- ☐ Is my tone appropriate and consistent for the situation and audience?
- ☐ Is the level of formality what the intended audience would expect?
- ☐ Is my writing free of implied bias or offensive language?
- ☐ Does the piece display sensitivity to cultural differences?
- ☐ If using email, is my tone professional and polite?

**APPLICATIONS****GENERAL APPLICATION**

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Using the Checklist for Style, revise the following selections. (Hint: Use the example on page 94 as a model for revision.) If available, use the “track changes” or “comments” function in your word processing software to record your suggested revisions and to identify the specific style problems in the original selection.

a. Letter to a local newspaper

In the absence of definitive studies regarding the optimum length of the school day, I can only state my personal opinion based upon observations made by me and upon teacher observations that have been conveyed to me. Considering the length of the present school day, it is my opinion that the day is excessive length-wise for most elementary pupils, certainly for almost all of the primary children.

To find the answer to the problem requires consideration of two ways in which the problem may be viewed. One way focuses upon the needs of the children, while the other focuses upon logistics, transportation, scheduling, and other limits imposed by the educational system. If it is necessary to prioritize these two ideas, it would seem most reasonable to give the first consideration to the primary reason for the very existence of the system, i.e., to meet the educational needs of the children the system is trying to serve.

b. Memo to employees

We are presently awaiting an on-site inspection of the designated professional library location by corporate representatives relative to electrical adaptations necessary for the computer installation. Meanwhile, all staff members are asked to respect the off-limits designation of the aforementioned location, as requested, due to the liability insurance provisions in regard to the computer.

TEAM APPLICATION

Locate a poorly written document. In groups of four, look for problems of style and readability. Each person in the group should be assigned to improve a different stylistic area in the document: The first person should improve clarity; the second, conciseness; the third fluency; and the fourth should make the document more personable. Keep track of the improvements each team member makes, and present your edits and final version to the class. Note how each group will have revised the document differently.

GLOBAL APPLICATION

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The style guidelines in this chapter apply specifically to Standard English in North America, but technical communication is a global process. Practices and preferences differ widely. For example, some cultures prefer long sentences and elaborate language to convey an idea's full complexity. Others expect lengthy introductions and expressions of politeness and praise rather than clarity or directness. Certain documents may originate in English but then be translated into other languages or read by audiences for whom English is a second language. In such cases, writers

must be careful to use language that is easy to translate. Idioms (“cutthroat competition,” “over the top,” etc.), cultural references (“the Bronx Bomber,” “the Deep South”), and humor (“heads I win; tails you lose”) are often difficult to translate. Some words may carry insulting connotations, as in cultures in which the terms “male” and “female” refer only to animals.

Your assignment is to search online using the keywords “international business culture” to learn about the style preferences of one particular culture. Then, in a one-page memo to your instructor and classmates, describe the style preferences of that culture, and give examples of how these preferences differ from the style guidelines (i.e., for North American English) in this chapter.

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION

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Do an online search for the phrase “writing for social media.” Look for Web sites from professional organizations such as major news media, colleges and universities, government agencies, and corporations. Compare the advice given on these Web sites with the strategies offered in this chapter, particularly about audience, tone, and formality. Make a list of items that are important regardless of the delivery medium (print or digital) and another list of style and tone considerations specific to social media. Discuss your findings with two or three other students, then share your findings in a brief in-class presentation.

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Visit Chapter 6, *Writing with a Readable Style*, 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.

