

SEVENTH EDITION

The BUSINESS WRITER'S HANDBOOK



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Preface

The seventh edition of *The Business Writer's Handbook*, like previous editions, is a comprehensive resource for both academic and professional audiences. The *Handbook's* nearly 500 entries cover effective print, oral, and electronic communication in the business world, as well as grammar, style, and usage. This edition has up-to-date coverage of workplace technologies, library and Internet research, and documenting sources, as well as improved treatment of promotional writing, formal reports, job searches, presentations, and visuals.

This edition of the *Handbook* remains an accessible and easy-to-use guide with entries that have been consolidated and made more concise. In addition, the new companion Web site expands this already thorough reference. Resources available on <www.bedfordstmartins.com/alred> make *The Business Writer's Handbook* a more effective classroom text and teaching tool while allowing the book to remain the quick reference faithful users have come to appreciate.

How to Use This Book

The New Five-Way Access System. The new five-way access system of *The Business Writer's Handbook* provides readers with even more ways of retrieving information.

1. ***Alphabetically Organized Entries.*** The alphabetically organized entries with color tabs enable readers to find information quickly. Within the entries, terms shown as links (underlined and set in an alternate typeface) refer to other entries that contain key definitions of concepts, further information on topics, and additional entries on related subjects.
2. ***Topical Key to the Alphabetical Entries.*** The Topical Key, on the inside back cover, groups the entries into categories and serves as a table of contents to all subjects covered in the book. The key can help a writer focusing on a specific task or problem locate helpful entries; it is also useful for instructors who want to correlate the *Handbook* with standard textbooks or their own course materials.
3. ***Checklist of the Writing Process.*** The checklist, on pages xxiii–xxiv, helps readers to reference all writing-related entries.

4. *Comprehensive Index.* The Index lists all the topics covered in the book, including those topics that are not main entries in the alphabetical arrangement.
5. *Topical List of Figures and Model Documents.* A new Topical List of Figures and Model Documents, on the inside front cover, makes it easier to find the abundant real-world examples and sample documents throughout the text that provide models for effective business communication.

Entries Helpful to ESL Writers. The Topical Key to the Alphabetical Entries includes a list of entries—ESL Trouble Spots—that may be of particular help to ESL writers. This list includes entries that cover persistent problems for ESL writers from a diverse group of languages. For problems not included on that list, ESL writers should check other entries in the *Handbook*, refer to an ESL grammar or reference text, or consult a native speaker of English.

New to This Edition

Those familiar with the *Handbook* will notice the new convention to signal cross-referenced entries—the use of underlined text set in a different typeface—as in, for example, a reference to audience. This change as well as many of those listed below reflect new technology and the prevalence of the Web.

- *More concise treatment for a streamlined and comprehensive reference* makes the information even more accessible.
- *A new companion Web site* <www.bedfordstmartins.com/alred> expands this already thorough reference by providing links to online resources, exercises, research and documentation advice, and model documents for business writing. Web Link boxes throughout the text direct writers to these additional resources available on the companion Web site and beyond.

Making *The Business Writer's Handbook* easier to teach with than ever, the companion Web site also provides resources for instructors—from teaching tips and sample syllabi to handouts, projects, and in-class activities.

- *Comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of workplace technology*—in entries such as e-mail, Internet research, writing for the Web, and Web design—focuses on considerations of audience and purpose, the presentation of long documents, and the use of keywords and hyperlinks. The seventh edition offers students expert advice for meeting the demands of online writing.
- *Digital Tip boxes* throughout the text provide practical, concise advice for using software tools for a wide variety of tasks, including

creating indexes and outlines, tracking changes, and using collaborative software. The Digital Tips are expanded on the companion Web site, offering more in-depth practical advice for using current workplace technology.

- *Fully revised and expanded coverage of library and Internet research and documenting sources* provides thoroughly updated Internet and library research information, current MLA and APA documentation models, and guidelines for evaluating online sources. The documenting sources entry now includes *Chicago (CMS)* style and is redesigned to make the reasons and rules for documenting sources easier to understand.
- *Improved coverage of formal reports* includes a complete example of a formal report that integrates text and visuals.
- *New and revised entries on brochures, newsletters, proposals, sales letters, and promotional writing* focus on audience and purpose and reflect the increasing prominence of promotional writing in the workplace.
- *Improved coverage for finding a job* includes new entries on negotiating salaries and writing follow-up letters, as well as updated information on using Web resources and creating electronic résumés.
- *New and revised entries on presentations and visuals* provide more advice on using presentation software and creating and integrating graphics.

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G. J. A.

C. T. B.

W. E. O.

Five Steps to Successful Writing

Successful writing on the job is not the product of inspiration, nor is it merely the spoken word converted to print; it is the result of knowing how to structure information using both text and design to achieve an intended purpose for a clearly defined audience. The best way to ensure that your writing will succeed—whether it is in the form of a memo, a résumé, a proposal, or a Web page—is to approach writing using the following steps:

1. Preparation
2. Research
3. Organization
4. Writing
5. Revision

You will very likely need to follow those steps consciously—even self-consciously—at first. The same is true the first time you use new software, interview a candidate for a job, or chair a committee meeting. With practice, the steps become nearly automatic. That is not to suggest that writing becomes easy. It does not. However, the easiest and most efficient way to write effectively is to do it systematically.

As you master the five steps, keep in mind that they are interrelated and often overlap. For example, your readers' needs and your purpose, which you determine in step 1, will affect decisions you make in subsequent steps. You may also need to retrace steps. When you conduct research, for example, you may realize that you need to revise your initial impression of the document's purpose and audience. Similarly, when you begin to organize, you may discover the need to return to the research step to gather more information.

The time required for each step varies with different writing tasks. When writing an informal memo, for example, you might follow the first three steps (preparation, research, and organization) by simply listing the points in the order you want to cover them. In such situations, you gather and organize information mentally as you consider your purpose and audience. For a formal report, the first three steps require well-organized research, careful note-taking, and detailed outlining. For a routine e-mail message to a coworker, the first four steps merge as you type the information on the screen. In short, the five steps expand,

contract, and at times must be repeated to fit the complexity or context of the writing task.

Dividing the writing process into steps is especially useful for collaborative writing, in which you typically divide work among team members, keep track of a project, and save time by not duplicating effort. When you collaborate, you can use e-mail to share text and other files, suggest improvements to each other's work, and generally keep everyone informed of your progress as you follow the steps in the writing process.

Preparation

Writing, like most professional tasks, requires solid preparation.* In fact, adequate preparation is as important as writing the draft. In preparation for writing, your goal is to accomplish the following four major tasks:

- Establish your primary purpose.
- Assess your audience (or readers).
- Determine the scope of your coverage.
- Select the appropriate medium.

Establishing Your Purpose. To establish your primary purpose simply ask yourself what you want your readers to know, believe, or be able to do after they have finished reading what you have written. Be precise. Often a writer states a purpose so broadly that it is almost useless. A purpose such as “to report on possible locations for a new facility” is too general. However, “to compare the relative advantages of Paris, Singapore, and San Francisco as possible locations for a new engineering facility so top management can choose the best location” is a purpose statement that can guide you throughout the writing process. In addition to your primary purpose, consider possible secondary purposes for your document. For example, a secondary purpose of the engineering facilities report might be to make corporate executive readers aware of the staffing needs of the new facility so they can ensure its smooth operation in whatever location is selected.

Assessing Your Audience. The next task is to assess your audience. Again, be precise and ask key questions. Who exactly is your reader? Do you have multiple readers? Who needs to see or use the document? What are your readers' needs in relation to your subject?

*In this discussion, as elsewhere throughout this book, words and phrases shown as links—underlined and set in an alternate typeface—refer to specific alphabetical entries.

What are your readers' attitudes about the subject? (Skeptical? Supportive? Anxious? Bored?) What do your readers already know about the subject? Should you define basic terminology or will such definitions merely bore, or even impede, your readers? Are you communicating with international readers and therefore dealing with issues inherent in writing international correspondence?

For the engineering facilities report, the readers are described as "top management." But *who* is included in that category? Will one of the people evaluating the report be the Human Resources Manager? If so, that person likely would be interested in the availability of qualified professionals as well as in the presence of training, housing, and perhaps even recreational facilities available to potential employees in each city. The Purchasing Manager would be concerned about available sources for materials needed by the facility. The Marketing Manager would give priority to the facility's proximity to the primary markets for its products and services and the transportation options that are available. The Chief Financial Officer would want to know about land and building costs and about each country's tax structure. The Chief Executive Officer would be interested in all this information and perhaps more.

In addition to knowing the needs and interests of your readers, learn as much as you can about their background knowledge. Have they visited all three cities? Have they already seen other reports on the three cities? Is this the company's first new facility, or has the company chosen locations for new facilities before? As with this example, many workplace documents have audiences composed of multiple readers. You can accommodate their needs through one of a number of approaches described in the entry readers.

ESL TIPS FOR CONSIDERING AUDIENCES

In the United States, conciseness, coherence, and clarity characterize good writing. Be brief, make sure readers can follow your writing, be clear, and say only what is necessary to communicate your message. Of course, no writing style is inherently better than another, but to be a successful writer in any language, you must understand the cultural values that underlie the language in which you are writing. See also awkwardness, copyright, global communication, plagiarism, and English as a second language.

Throughout this book we have included ESL Tips boxes like this one with information that may be particularly helpful to nonnative speakers of English. The Topical Key on the inside back cover includes a listing of entries that may be of particular help to ESL writers.

Determining the Scope. Determining your purpose and assessing your readers will help you decide what to include and what not to include in your writing. Those decisions establish the scope of your writing project. If you do not clearly define the scope, you will spend needless hours on research because you will not be sure what kind of information you need or even how much. Given the purpose and readers established for the report on facility locations, the scope would include such information as land and building costs, available labor force, cultural issues, transportation options, and proximity to suppliers. However, it probably would not include the early history of the cities being considered or their climate and geological features, unless those aspects were directly related to your particular business.

Selecting the Medium. Finally, you need to determine the most appropriate medium for communicating your message. Professionals on the job face a wide array of options—from e-mail, fax, voice mail, videoconferencing, and Web sites to more traditional means like letters, memos, reports, telephone calls, and face-to-face meetings. See also correspondence.

The most important considerations in selecting the appropriate medium are the audience and the purpose of the communication. For example, if you need to collaborate with someone to solve a problem or if you need to establish rapport with someone, written exchanges, even by e-mail, could be far less efficient than a phone call or a face-to-face meeting. However, if you need precise wording or you need to provide a record of a complex message, communicate in writing. If you need to make information that is frequently revised accessible to employees at a large company, the best choice might be to place the information on the company's Web site. (See Web design.) If reviewers need to make handwritten comments on a proposal, you may need to provide paper copies that can be faxed. The comparative advantages and primary characteristics of the most typical means of communication are discussed in selecting the medium.

Research

The only way to be sure that you can write about a complex subject is to thoroughly understand it. To do that, you must conduct adequate research, whether that means conducting an extensive investigation for a major proposal—through interviewing, library and Internet research, and careful note-taking—or simply checking a company Web site and jotting down points before you send an e-mail to a colleague.

Methods of Research. Researchers frequently distinguish between primary and secondary research, depending on the types of sources

consulted and the method of gathering information. *Primary research* refers to the gathering of raw data compiled from interviews, direct observation, surveys, experiments, questionnaires, and audio and video recordings, for example. In fact, direct observation and hands-on experience are the only ways to obtain certain kinds of information, such as the behavior of people and animals, certain natural phenomena, mechanical processes, and the operation of systems and equipment. *Secondary research* refers to gathering information that has been analyzed, assessed, evaluated, compiled, or otherwise organized into accessible form. Such forms or sources include books, articles, reports, Web documents, e-mail discussions, business letters, minutes of meetings, operating manuals, and brochures. Use the methods most appropriate to your needs, recognizing that some projects will require several types of research.

Sources of Information. As you conduct research, numerous sources of information are available to you.

- Your own knowledge and that of your colleagues
- The knowledge of people outside of your workplace, gathered through interviewing for information
- Internet sources, as discussed in Internet research
- Library resources, including databases, as described in library research
- Printed and electronic sources in the workplace, such as brochures, memos and e-mail, and Web documents

Consider all sources of information when you begin your research and use those that are appropriate and useful. The amount of research you will need to do depends on the scope of your project.

Organization

Without organization, the material gathered during your research will be incoherent to your readers. To organize information effectively, you need to determine the best way to structure your ideas; that is, you must choose a primary method of development.

Methods of Development. An appropriate method of development is the writer's tool for keeping information under control and the readers' means of following the writer's presentation. As you analyze the information you have gathered, choose the method that best suits your subject, your readers' needs, and your purpose. For example, if you were writing instructions for assembling office equipment, you would naturally present the steps of the process in the order readers

should perform them: the sequential method of development. If you were writing about the history of an organization, your account would most naturally go from the beginning to the present: the chronological method of development. If your subject naturally lends itself to a certain method of development, use it—do not attempt to impose another method on it.

Sometimes you may need to use combinations of methods of development. For example, a persuasive brochure for a charitable organization might combine a general and specific method of development with a cause-and-effect method of development. That is, you could begin with persuasive case histories of individual people in need and then move to general information about the positive effects of donations on recipients.

Outlining. Once you have chosen a method of development, you are ready to prepare an outline. Outlining breaks large or complex subjects into manageable parts. It also enables you to emphasize key points by placing them in the positions of greatest importance. Finally, by structuring your thinking at an early stage, a well-developed outline ensures that your document will be complete and logically organized, allowing you to focus exclusively on writing when you begin the rough draft. Even a short letter or memo needs the logic and structure that an outline provides, whether the outline exists in your mind or on-screen or on paper.

At this point, you must begin to consider layout and design elements that will be helpful to your readers and appropriate to your subject and purpose. For example, if visuals, photographs, or tables will be useful, this is a good time to think about where they may be deployed and what kinds of visual elements will be effective, especially if they need to be prepared by someone else while you are writing and revising the draft. The outline can also suggest where headings, lists, and other special design features may be useful.

Writing

When you have established your purpose, your readers' needs, and your scope and have completed your research and your outline, you will be well prepared to write a first draft. Expand your outline into paragraphs, without worrying about grammar, refinements of language usage, or punctuation. Writing and revising are different activities; refinements come with revision.

Write the rough draft, concentrating entirely on converting your outline into sentences and paragraphs. You might try writing as though you were explaining your subject to a reader sitting across from you. Do not worry about a good opening. Just start. There is no need in the

rough draft to be concerned about exact word choice unless it comes quickly and easily—concentrate instead on ideas.

Even with good preparation, writing the draft remains a chore for many writers. The most effective way to get started and keep going is to use your outline as a map for your first draft. Do not wait for inspiration—you need to treat writing a draft as you would any on-the-job task. The entry writing a draft describes tactics used by experienced writers—discover which ones are best suited to you and your task.

Consider writing an introduction last because then you will know more precisely what is in the body of the draft. Your opening should announce the subject and give readers essential background information, such as the document's primary purpose. For longer documents, an introduction should serve as a frame into which readers can fit the detailed information that follows.

Finally, you will need to write a conclusion that ties the main ideas together and emphatically makes a final significant point. The final point may be to recommend a course of action, make a prediction or a judgment, or merely summarize your main points—the way you conclude depends on the purpose of your writing and your readers' needs.

Revision

The clearer a finished piece of writing seems to the reader, the more effort the writer has likely put into its revision. If you have followed the steps of the writing process to this point, you will have a rough draft that needs to be revised. Revising, however, requires a different frame of mind than does writing the draft. During revision, be eager to find and correct faults and be honest. Be hard on yourself for the benefit of your readers. Read and evaluate the draft as if you were a reader seeing it for the first time.

Check your draft for accuracy, completeness, and effectiveness in achieving your purpose and meeting your readers' needs and expectations. Trim extraneous information: Your writing should give readers exactly what they need, but it should not burden them with unnecessary information or sidetrack them into loosely related subjects.

Do not try to revise for everything at once. Read your rough draft several times, each time looking for and correcting a different set of problems or errors. Concentrate first on larger issues, such as unity and coherence; save mechanical corrections, like spelling and punctuation, for later reviews. See also ethics in writing.

Finally, for important documents, consider having others review your writing and make suggestions for improvement. Use the Checklist of the Writing Process on page xxiii to guide you not only as you revise but also throughout the writing process. The checklist refers you to specific entries grouped according to the Five Steps to Successful Writing and can help you diagnose and solve writing problems.

Checklist of the Writing Process

This checklist arranges key entries of the *The Business Writer's Handbook* according to the sequence presented in "Five Steps to Successful Writing," which begins on page xv. This checklist is useful both for following the steps and for diagnosing writing problems. The exact titles of the entries are shown as links for quick reference, followed by the page numbers. When you turn to the entries themselves, you will find links to other entries that may be helpful.

You may also wish to refer to the Topical Key to the Alphabetical Entries on the inside back cover as well as to the Index, which begins on page 597.

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