

The **BUSINESS** Writer's Companion

SECOND EDITION



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The Business Writer's Companion

Second Edition

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DIRECTORY

1. THE BUSINESS WRITING PROCESS

General writing advice for planning, organizing, drafting, and revising documents

6. FORMAT AND VISUALS

Basics of document design, with guidelines for choosing, planning, and creating effective illustrations and graphics

2. WORKPLACE TECHNOLOGY

Guidelines for using recently developed technology, including advice on composing email, using Internet search engines, and designing Web pages

7. STYLE AND CLARITY

Advice on writing clear, concise, and jargon-free sentences appropriate for an effective business writing style

3. BUSINESS WRITING FORMS AND ELEMENTS

Explanations of specific projects (with models) including proposals and various formal and informal reports, along with elements such as abstracts and executive summaries and guidelines for documenting sources using MLA or APA style

8. USAGE

Glossary listing troublesome words, including *a lot/alot*, *former/latter*, *its/it's*, *there/their/they're*, *to/too/two*

4. CORRESPONDENCE AND JOB APPLICATION

Guidelines (with models) for writing various letters and memos, résumés, and international correspondence

9. GRAMMAR

Help with finding and correcting grammatical errors such as sentence fragments and dangling modifiers, and explanations of grammatical concepts and elements such as agreement and clauses

5. ORAL COMMUNICATION

Advice for making effective oral presentations, conducting productive meetings, and building listening skills

10. PUNCTUATION AND MECHANICS

Explanations of all the punctuation marks plus rules for using abbreviations, contractions, and numbers

Preface

The Business Writer's Companion is a concise reference for business writing students at all levels and for professional business writers. It has been adapted from the comprehensive *Business Writer's Handbook*, 5th edition, also published by Bedford/St. Martin's. The entries in each of its ten sections are alphabetized, making *The Business Writer's Companion* a flexible and handy supplement in the classroom or a quick reference on the job. In addition, the spiral binding, tabbed format, and thorough coverage of *The Business Writer's Companion* make it an easy-to-use source of information for students writing on their own, as well as a useful aid for professional writers and teachers of business writing.

For this second edition, a new tab on workplace technology has been added. In addition, the book as a whole has been updated to include more coverage of technology in the workplace.

Easy-to-Use Handbook Format

The Business Writer's Companion offers a concise yet thorough guide to the forms and elements of business communication in an easy-to-use format. Users can find information quickly through its unique five-way access system:


- Ten tabbed sections
- A directory at the front of the book
- Alphabetical entries within each section
- A common-sense index at the back of the book
- An extensive cross-referencing system

In addition, *The Business Writer's Companion* is an abundant source of information on all aspects of business writing.

- Tab 3, “Business Writing Forms and Elements,” and Tab 4, “Correspondence and Job Application,” include **real-world models** for letters, memos, reports, and other business documents.
- The handbook provides **indispensable suggestions for career-related tasks**, such as carrying out a successful job search, writing an effective résumé, making convincing oral presentations, conducting informative interviews, and leading efficient meetings.
- Tabs 7 through 10 provide **help with matters of style, usage, grammar, and punctuation and mechanics**.
- **Handy revision and proofreading checklists**, a list of proofreaders’ marks, and a separate tab on commonly misused words help students revise and proofread their business documents.

New to This Edition

- **A new tab on workplace technology** covers email, faxes, the Internet, search engines, Web page design, and word processing.
- Tab 1 on the business writing process includes **new information on using technology effectively**, including a discussion on how to select the right medium for your business messages.
- **More information on conducting research** is provided, including a new entry on Internet search engines, material on electronic databases, guidelines for evaluating the quality of Internet sources, updated coverage of MLA style, and new coverage of APA style.
- The entry on résumés includes **improved guidelines for preparing a résumé**, with useful models, advice for preparing an electronic résumé, and help for students who are returning to the workplace.
- **A new discussion of email** includes coverage of writing style, etiquette, the need to review messages carefully, and confidentiality implications.
- The discussion of document design in Tab 6 has been revised to **reflect current design technologies**.
- The section on oral presentations in Tab 5 has been updated and revised to include a discussion of the most **up-to-date presentation graphics**.
- **A new entry on how to avoid biased language** has been added to Tab 7, “Style and Clarity.”
- A new entry on **global communication** in Tab 5 offers advice to business writers who must speak or write to international audiences.

- **Writer's Tips** boxes provide quick-reference checklists throughout the book.
- An FAQ page—a **list of frequently consulted entries**—now appears on the inside front cover.
- A new icon,  **ESL**, designates topics that are particularly useful to **nonnative speakers of English**.

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The Business Writing Process

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OVERVIEW

Businesspeople often do not realize that they can approach writing with the disciplined and systematic approach they bring to their own professional specialties. Many people find writing difficult because they approach the task haphazardly. They do not realize that writing, like the on-the-job tasks in which they are proficient, requires a systematic and professional approach. The best way to complete a writing task successfully—whether it is a letter, a proposal, or a formal report—is to divide the writing process into five steps: preparation, research, organization, writing the draft, and revision. Of course, the time required for each step depends on the writing task. For example, for a short and informal email message, the first four steps merge as you compose your message. (See **collaborative writing**, page 5, and **selecting the medium**, page 37.)

Step 1. Preparation

Writing, like most business tasks, requires solid preparation. In fact, adequate preparation is as important as writing the draft. Preparation for writing consists of (1) establishing your purpose, (2) identifying your audience, and (3) determining the appropriate scope of coverage. (See **preparation**, page 32.)

Step 2. Research

The purpose of much business writing is to explain something—something that is often complex. To explain a complex subject, you must understand it, and the only way to be sure that you can deal adequately with a complex subject is to compile a complete set of notes during your research and then create a working outline from the notes. (See **note taking**, page 120, and **library research**, page 111.)

Step 3. Organization

Without organization, the material gathered during your research would be incomprehensible to your readers. Outlining makes large or complex subjects easier for you to organize by breaking them into manageable parts. Further, it ensures that your finished writing will move logically from one idea to the next without omitting anything important. In addition, by forcing you to structure your thinking at an early stage, a good outline helps you concentrate exclusively

on writing when you begin the rough draft. (See **organization**, page 21.)

Step 4. Writing the Draft

When you have established your purpose, your readers' needs, and your scope of coverage, and when you have completed your research and your outline, you will be well prepared to write your first draft. To do so, simply expand your outline notes into paragraphs without worrying about grammar, refinements of language, or such mechanical aspects of writing as spelling. Refinements will come with revision. The entry on **writing a draft** in this section describes tactics used by experienced writers to get started and keep moving. Discover which tactics are most helpful and appropriate for you. Collaborative writing, which is increasingly common on the job, is writing performed by a team of peers rather than by one person. This type of writing requires special considerations that are covered in the **collaborative writing** entry in this section.

Step 5. Revision

Revision, the final step in the business writing process, requires a different frame of mind than writing a draft. Read and evaluate the draft from your readers' point of view. Read the draft with a critical eye to find and correct faults.

Do not try to do all of your revising at one time. Read your rough draft several times, each time looking to correct a different set of problems. Check your draft for accuracy and completeness. Your draft should give readers exactly what they need but should not burden them with unnecessary or loosely related information. Check your draft for unity, transition, and the elements covered in Tab 7, **STYLE AND CLARITY**. Check your entire draft for appropriate word choice, referring as needed to the entries listed in Tab 8, **USAGE**. Finally, check methodically for the problems covered in Tab 9, **GRAMMAR**, and Tab 10, **PUNCTUATION AND MECHANICS**. (See **revision**, page 35.)

audience/readers

As a business writer, you must usually assume that your readers are less familiar with the subject than you are. You have to be careful, for example, when writing on a topic that is unique to your area of specialization for

executives whose training is in other areas; such readers need definitions of specialized terms and explanations of principles that you, as a specialist, take for granted. Even if you write a journal article for others in your field, you must remember to explain new or special uses of standard terms and principles.

When you write for many readers with similar backgrounds, try to visualize a typical member of that group and write for that reader. You might also make a list of that reader's characteristics (experience, training, and work habits, for example) to help you write at the appropriate level. This technique, used widely by professional writers, enables you to decide what should or should not be explained, according to the typical reader's needs.

However, do not ignore your other reading audiences. Meet their needs to the best of your ability, but do not sacrifice the needs of your primary audience to those of the other audiences. Recommendations and executive summaries can target executives who will be reading to understand the general implications of projects or technical systems. Appendixes containing tables, graphs, and raw data can be targeted to specialists who wish to examine or use such supporting data. The body of a report or proposal should be written for those readers with the most serious interest or who need to make decisions based on the details.

When you have multiple audiences with varying backgrounds but cannot segment your document, determine your primary reading audience and address its needs.

Routine letters, memos, and short reports written for an individual reader do not require such elaborate segmentation. Be sure to remember that person's exact needs as you write.

Always consider whether illustrations will help convey your message to your readers more effectively than words. If so, see Tab 6, **FORMAT AND VISUALS**.

collaborative writing

Collaborative writing occurs when two or more writers work together to produce a single document for which they share responsibility and decision-making authority. The collaborating writers make approximately equal contributions, and they communicate as equals, with no one in a superior or subordinate role.

Collaborative writing teams are formed when (1) the size of the project or the time constraints imposed on it require collaboration, (2) the project needs multiple areas of expertise, or (3) the project requires the melding of divergent views into a single perspective that is acceptable to the whole team or another group.

Although the collaborative writing team is composed of peers, its members recognize and use the expertise of each person to their collec-

6 collaborative writing

tive advantage. Team members must respect one another's professional capabilities and must strive to achieve a compatible working relationship, although some conflict is a natural part of any group interaction.

The team should designate one person as its leader. That person does not have decision-making authority; he or she merely assumes the extra responsibility of coordinating the team members' activities and organizing the final project. Team leadership can be determined by mutual agreement of the team members or assigned on a rotating basis if the team works together to produce multiple documents.

TASKS OF THE COLLABORATIVE WRITING TEAM

The collaborative writing team normally has four tasks: planning the document, researching and writing the draft, reviewing the drafts of other team members, and revising the drafts on the basis of those reviews.

Planning. The team collectively identifies the audience, purpose, and scope of the project, as well as its goals and the most effective organization for the whole document. The team analyzes the overall project, conceptualizes the document to be produced, creates a broad outline of the document, divides the document into segments, and assigns each segment to an individual team member (often on the basis of expertise).

In the planning stage, the team projects a schedule and sets any writing style standards that team members are expected to meet. The schedule includes due dates for drafts, for reviews of drafts by other team members, for revisions, and for the final document. It is important that these deadlines be met, even if the drafts are not quite as polished as an individual writer would like, because one team member's missed deadline can hold up the work of the entire team.

Research and Writing. Planning is followed by research and writing, a period of intense independent activity by the individual members of the team. Each member researches his or her assignment, fleshes out the broad outline in greater detail, and produces a draft from the detailed outline. Then, by the deadline established for drafts, the individual writers submit copies of their drafts to their teammates for review.

Reviewing. During the review stage, team members assume the role of the reading audience to address any problems that might arise for the readers. Each team member critically yet diplomatically reviews the work of the other team members. The reviewers evaluate their colleagues' drafts, from the organization of each segment to the clarity of each paragraph and sentence. They offer advice to help the writer improve his or her segment of the document. Team members can solicit feedback from their colleagues by sharing files on a networked system, by emailing documents back and forth, or by exchanging disks.

Revising. The individual writers evaluate their colleagues' reviews and accept or reject their suggestions. This is often a touchy part of the collaborative writing process; writers must be careful not to let their egos impede their good judgment. They must evaluate each suggestion objectively—on the basis of merit—without reacting emotionally. The ability to accept criticism and use it productively is one of the critical differences between an effective team member and an ineffective one. All drafts and revisions are then consolidated into a final master copy maintained by the team leader.

CONFLICT

Team members may not see eye-to-eye on every subject, and differing perspectives can easily lead to conflict. A team that tolerates some disharmony and works through conflicting opinions to reach consensus usually produces better results than one with no conflict. Although mutual respect among team members is necessary, too much deference can inhibit challenges—which actually reduces the team's creativity. Writers must be willing to challenge one another but must do so tactfully and diplomatically.

Considering all viewpoints produces a higher-quality document. Doing so, however, means that conflicts will occur, ranging from relatively mild differences to major showdowns. Regardless of how severe the conflict is, it must be worked through to a conclusion or a compromise that all team members can accept, even if all might not entirely agree.

concluding

Concluding a document not only ties all the main ideas together, but can do so emphatically by making a final significant point. This final point may be a recommendation of a course of action, a prediction, a judgment, or merely a summary of your main points.

The way you conclude depends on both the purpose of your writing and your readers' needs. For example, a committee report about possible locations for a new manufacturing facility might end with a recommendation. A report on a company's annual sales figures might conclude with a judgment about why sales are up or down. A letter about consumer trends might end by predicting the outcome of those trends. A particularly lengthy document often concludes with a summary of its main points. Study the following examples.

RECOMMENDATION These results indicate that you need to alter your testing procedure to eliminate the impurities we found in specimens A through E.

concluding

JUDGMENT Although our estimate calls for a substantially higher budget than in the three previous years, we believe that it is reasonable given our planned expansion.

PREDICTION Although my original estimate on equipment (\$60,000) has been exceeded by \$6,900, my original labor estimate (\$180,000) has been reduced by \$10,500; therefore, I will easily stay within the limits of my original bid. In addition, I see no difficulty in having the arena finished for the December 23 holiday program.

SUMMARY As this letter has indicated, we would attract more recent graduates by the following:

1. Establishing a Web site where students can register and submit online résumés
2. Increasing our advertising in local student newspapers
3. Expanding our co-op program locally
4. Sending a representative to career day programs at local colleges
5. Inviting local college instructors to teach in-house courses here at the facility.

The concluding statement may merely present ideas for consideration, or it may call for action or deliberately provoke thought.

IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION The new prices become effective the first of the year. Price adjustments are routine for the company, but some of your customers will not consider them so. Please bear in mind the needs of both your customers and the company as you implement these new prices.

CALL FOR ACTION Send us a check for \$250 now if you wish to keep your account active. If you have not responded to our previous letters because of some special hardship, I will be glad to work out a solution with you personally.

THOUGHT-PROVOKING STATEMENT Can we continue to accept the losses incurred by shoddy workmanship? Must we accept shoddy workmanship as inevitable, or should we consider steps to control it now?

Be especially careful not to introduce a new topic when you conclude. A concluding thought should always relate to and reinforce the ideas presented earlier in your writing.

conclusions

The conclusion section of a document pulls together the results or findings and interprets them in the light of the study's purpose and the methods by which it was conducted. The evidence for these findings is discussed in the body of the document, and the conclusion must grow out of the information discussed there. Moreover, the conclusion must be consistent with what the introduction promised the report would examine (its purpose) and how it would do so (its method). If the introduction states that the report will determine the economic costs of relocating a warehouse from one city to another, the conclusion should not discuss the social or aesthetic impact that the warehouse could have on the new location.

The conclusion in the example below comes from a proposal to increase employee fitness and reduce health-care costs; it makes recommendations as a part of pulling the proposal together.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that Acme, Inc., participate in the corporate membership program at AeroFitness Clubs by subsidizing employee memberships. By subsidizing memberships, Acme shows its commitment to the importance of a fit workforce. Club membership allows employees at all five Acme warehouses to participate in the program. The more employees who participate, the greater the long-term savings in Acme's health-care costs.

Building and equipping fitness centers at all five warehouse sites would require an initial investment of nearly \$2 million. These facilities would also occupy valuable floor space—on average four thousand square feet at each warehouse. Therefore, this option would be very costly.

Enrolling employees in the corporate program at AeroFitness would allow them to attend on a trial basis. Those interested in continuing could then join the club and pay half of the membership cost, less a 30-percent discount on \$400 a year. The other half of the membership (\$140) would be paid for by Acme. If an employee leaves the company, he or she would have the option of purchasing Acme's share of the membership.

Implementing this program will help Acme, Inc., reduce its health-care costs while building stronger employee relations by offering employees a desirable benefit. If this proposal is adopted, I have some additional thoughts about publicizing the program to encourage employee participation. I look forward to discussing the details of this proposal with you and answering any questions you may have.