

# *Design of Business Communications*

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*The Process and the Product*



ELIZABETH TEBEAUX



***Design Of  
Business Communications  
The Process  
and the Product***

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# Preface

## ***Design of Business Communications — A New Approach***

A quick survey of the table of contents shows that *Design of Business Communications* offers a new approach to the study of business communication. It includes topics not usually covered:

- Instructions, policies, and procedures
- Proposals and business plans
- Trade articles for publications
- Study and practice in revision and editing

In addition, it offers extensive coverage of business reports, letters, and memoranda, as well as extensive writing problems that often require several kinds of documents. In discussing these kinds of business communications, *Design of Business Communications* presents a method by which a writer can plan and write any business document with the confidence that it will achieve its purpose. This method, as explained throughout the book, can be used in composing on a computer or in longhand.

## ***Goal of This Book***

*Design of Business Communications* attempts to show how effective written communications are developed. By understanding these methods, students should be able to develop any written communication required of them throughout their professional careers. The approach is sophisticated enough to appeal to advanced undergraduate business or MBA students but basic enough to help younger undergraduates realize that writing at work is challenging and often difficult, but extremely important to the success of the employee and the business organization.

Thus, *Design of Business Communications* has not been written as an entry-level skills book that emphasizes basic models of standard types of letters. It attempts, instead, to present guide-

lines for designing various types of written business communications. In explaining the process involved, the book recognizes two points: (1) to the reader, the product is all that matters; but (2) to a writer, who wants to achieve a specific purpose, an effective product requires an effective and efficient design process. Effective communication is not simply a matter of following a model, but rather of understanding design guidelines and applying them. Too many business communication textbooks emphasize communication theory without demonstrating how a writer can approach a writing task with the confidence that the product will achieve its goal.

While the book emphasizes written business communications, it also includes a discussion of the relationship between written and oral communications, as well as guidelines for presenting written documents orally.

## ***Rationale for the Approach Used***

The approach used in *Design of Business Communications* has evolved from two sources:

1. Composition research, which shows that the effective writer cannot "just write" by following a model. Using strategies for development, the writer must plan the message, write it, revise it, and then edit it — efficiently.
2. Communication research, which determines the kinds of writing employees do most often. A growing issue concerns present as well as future communication needs of employees as American business continues to be transformed by the Information Age.

Research findings from both sources suggest that current textbooks do not provide the edu-

cation in communication that students will need in the technological society of the future.

### ***What Research Tells Us About Writing at Work***

Surveys show that employees do various types of writing throughout their careers and that the kinds of writing they do change with the job and with the employee's level in the organization. Studies from the U.S. Department of Labor also suggest that the kinds of jobs today's students will hold in 5, 10, and 15 years are far from certain. Technology continues to change the way work is performed. Many traditional jobs are becoming obsolete. Many jobs that students will hold by the turn of the century do not now exist. To remain a viable program of study that prepares students for writing in future, undefined, nonacademic settings, business communication instruction must respond to these changes.

First, business communication studies must prepare students for a work situation characterized by change and technology. Students can be expected to change careers several times throughout their lives. While writing will continue to be an important skill for the successful employee, we as teachers cannot be sure what specific kinds of writing our students will need in the workplace. We cannot be sure what kinds of jobs they will have. Business communication studies, like courses in accounting, finance, economics, and management, must equip students with knowledge that will be applicable in a changing work environment. Yet, students must know how to compose messages in an environment where computer technology and word processing have transformed the methods by which employees "write" and transmit documents.

Second, surveys indicate that although employees continue to write many letters and memoranda, they also write instructions, procedures, policies, proposals, and a variety of reports. They must understand communication principles and be prepared to write these documents for a wide range of readers in a variety of business problem contexts.

Third, surveys and forecasts emphasize the importance of writing clearly, concisely, readably, and correctly to enable employees to select,

shape, and then communicate the growing quantity of information that computer technology makes possible.

Fourth, research shows that employees often fail as writers because their academic writing instruction has not taught them (1) how to present information effectively to readers in non-academic contexts and (2) how to plan, write, revise, and edit documents in a work environment.

Thus, *Design of Business Communications* does not emphasize models for specific documents. Instead, the book first presents development guidelines based on a general structure that can be applied to any document. The remaining chapters allow students to study and then apply these guidelines in the composing, revising, and editing of common business communications.

### ***Features of the Book***

By examining the topics addressed in this book, you will notice five unique features:

***Emphasis on Communication Design*** First, the theme of the book—how to *design* communications—controls its structure. Part I presents the governing principles of the book: The effective message must be *designed* with the needs of readers and the writer's purpose as *the* principles governing the selection of content (Chapter 2). With the readers and purpose established, the writer—working with a basic superstructure that controls the design of all documents—then decides how to organize the message (Chapter 3), how to make the message visually appealing (Chapter 4), and how to choose the most effective style for the reader and the purpose (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 illustrates how the design process works for two writers who must write to solve business problems and complete routine business tasks.

The principles presented in Part I control Part II, which discusses how to design letters and memoranda (Chapter 7); letters of application and resumés (Chapter 8); informal reports (Chapter 9); formal reports (Chapter 10); proposals and business plans (Chapter 10); instructions, procedures, and policies (Chapter 11); and short trade articles (Chapter 12). Evaluation and revi-

sion exercises allow students to practice applying the principles presented in Chapters 2 to 5.

Part III introduces editing techniques and supports these techniques with exercises to help the student recognize and correct major editing problems.

Appendix A discusses the relationship between writing and speaking and provides guidelines for oral presentations. Appendix B presents additional suggested readings on topics presented in the chapters.

**Presentation of Unique Topics** Second, you will see many topics not usually covered in business communication texts. For example, the discussions of letters and memoranda (Chapter 7) are combined. The chapter presents a common approach to the design of both because these are documents that, during a routine workday, must be developed efficiently and effectively. Employees cannot be expected to remember a different model for five different kinds of letters or memoranda.

In addition, reports are extensively treated. The chapter on informal reports (Chapter 9) discusses the design of information reports, analytical reports, progress reports, feasibility studies, evaluation/recommendation reports, trip reports, and reports that are combinations of these types. Case problems, located at the end of the chapter, require letters in addition to various reports and supporting graphics.

Few books discuss proposals and business plans (Chapter 11) or instructions, procedures, and policies (Chapter 12), even though these major kinds of documents are crucial in American business and industry.

Chapter 13—on writing trade articles—was developed because business professionals and experienced managers are often invited to write for trade journals, business sections of newspapers, company newsletters, and popular publications. As they develop expertise in their field, many business professionals wish to share their ideas with others. Currently, few books exist on strategies for developing business articles, even though many articles in trade journals are written by business professionals.

**Emphasis on Visual Appeal** Third, because of the increasing quantities of business writing that

employees have to read, *Design of Business Communications* stresses methods of making all writing visually appealing and readable. These methods derive from current research on readability and document design. Exercises encourage students to experiment with word processing to generate the most visually appealing document possible.

#### **Dictating and Composing on Computers**

Fourth, the book recognizes that, as employees, most students will generate their reports and letters by dictation or by computer. Thus, the design approach presented—planning, organizing, formatting, writing, and revising—is designed to help the student learn to write effectively and efficiently on a computer and by dictation.

#### **Writing as a Response to Specific Situations**

Fifth, every letter, memorandum, report, policy, procedure, and article discussed is presented as a response to a specific situation. Each chapter discusses general guidelines for developing the kind of document discussed in that chapter. These guidelines follow the principles discussed in Chapters 2 to 5, but each example situation shows how the writer molds these guidelines to respond to specific readers in specific business contexts and cultures. Each chapter gives several examples of each kind of document, but each response is related to the situation for which it was written.

**Practice in Revising and Editing** Because many students have some difficulty using language, *Design of Business Communications* gives instruction and practice in matters of correctness. Exercises provide practice in revising and editing to eliminate errors in content and then in clarity, readability, and correctness.

**Emphasis on Research-Based Design** Throughout the book, important, accessible, and interesting research studies are cited for the benefit of students and teachers who wish to examine these concepts in greater depth.

#### **Design of Business Communications— Strategies for Writing for People**

Ultimately, *Design of Business Communications* argues almost continuously that the writer can

never forget that effective messages are created when the writer has anticipated the reader's needs and has created a presentation of information that fits the demands of the reader, the business context, and the writer's purpose. The business situations presented throughout the book have been designed to help sensitize students to this crucial concept: The written message is prepared for other human beings in business settings; its effectiveness is determined by those who read and use it. Correct writing is worthless if the writer has "said all the right things" in the wrong way.

Thus, if *Design of Business Communications* achieves its goal, students should understand and then be able to apply five concepts that are applicable to any business writing context:

1. Effective writers design each message. These writers use guidelines, but they adapt them to respond to the characteristics of the reader, the context, and the purpose of the document.
2. All documents develop from a basic superstructure. Writers shape the organization, content, and style within that superstructure, based on the reader, the context, and the document's purpose.
3. Computer technology and word processing, combined with a document design strategy, enable the employee to write quickly and confidently.
4. The effectiveness of style and tone can be determined only by an understanding of the reader, the context, and the purpose of the document.
5. Practice in reader analysis, organization, visual presentation, and style will enable any writer to develop business communications and transmit them with the confidence that they will achieve the writer's purpose.

Elizabeth Tebeaux

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