Planning Written and Spoken Messages

Writing—A Ticket to Work

In a report entitled “Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . or a Ticket Out,” the National Commission on Writing reported that two thirds of salaried employees in large companies have some writing responsibilities, and getting hired and promoted in many industries demands this skill. Writing is important; however, the commission also concluded that one third of employees in corporate America writes poorly. Knowing that effective communication is tied to the corporate bottom line and many employees can’t write well, businesses are investing $3.1 billion annually to train employees to write. Remedies are needed to prevent confusion, waste, errors, lost productivity, and damaged corporate image—all caused by employees, customers, and clients muddling their way through unreadable messages.

As a capable communicator, you can immediately add value to your organization and set yourself apart from your peers who are struggling to articulate ideas in writing and presentations. Communication that commands attention and can be understood easily is essential for survival in today’s information explosion. As an effective communicator, you will be expected to process volumes of available information and shape useful messages that respond to the needs of customers or clients, coworkers and supervisors, and other key business partners. Additionally, increased use of electronic communication will require you to be technologically savvy and capable of adapting the rules of good communication to the demands of emerging technology.

How can you learn to plan and prepare powerful business messages? The systematic analysis pro-

1. Identify the purpose and type of message.
2. Develop clear perceptions of the audience to enhance the impact of the communication and human relations.
3. Consider the context of the message and any environmental influences that may affect its delivery.
4. Determine the appropriate channel and media for communicating the message.
5. Apply techniques for adapting messages to the audience.
6. Recognize the importance of organizing a message before writing the first draft and select the appropriate message outline (deductive or inductive) for developing messages to achieve the desired response.
7. Prepare the first draft.
cess outlined in Figure 4-1 on the following page will help you develop messages that save you and your organization valuable time and money and portray you as a capable, energetic professional. A thorough analysis of the audience and your specific communication assignment will empower you to write a first draft efficiently and to revise and proofread your message for accuracy, conciseness, and appropriate tone. You will focus on the planning process in this chapter, and then learn to prepare various types of messages in Chapters 5 through 8. Revising written messages is covered in Chapter 9.
Step 1: Determining the Purpose and Type of Message

If you are to speak or write effectively, you first must think through what you are trying to say and understand it thoroughly before you begin.

Hundreds of years ago, the Greek philosopher and writer Aristotle identified three purposes of communication: to inform, to persuade, and to entertain. Although entertainment is the purpose of much of the communication that occurs in the culture of the United States today, particularly mediated forms, it is not highly emphasized in communication for business purposes. In fact, communication that is intended to entertain can have a negative effect on the relationship you have with others or can damage your credibility. For example, if you use humor in oral presentations or email messages at work, you take the risk of offending others who might not share your sense of humor or creating an image of yourself as unprofessional. Some attempts at humor may even violate the law if they are considered racist, sexist, ageist, or otherwise discriminatory.

For these reasons, entertainment will not be considered one of the foundational purposes of communication in organizational settings. However, four purposes of communication still exist in the professional workplace. These are:

- To inform
- To persuade
- To convey goodwill
- To establish credibility

Many textbook writers group credibility and goodwill into a single category, but those purposes have been separated here to emphasize the importance of both aspects in achieving your purposes of communication in organizational settings and to help you better understand their nuances.

After determining the broader purposes for communicating, you can determine even more specific purposes for a particular message. For example, informative messages can be categorized as good news, neutral, or bad news messages. Good news messages include those that deliver positive news and messages of appreciation or thank-you notes; neutral messages include a variety of routine messages, such as requests and claims, and those dealing with customer orders and credit as well as procedures. Bad news messages include refusals of requests and claims, denials of credit, and those that handle problems with customer orders. Persuasive messages include sales messages and persuasive requests, such as those for a favor or for information.

Communicating to Inform

A major purpose of many business messages is to deliver routine types of information needed to complete daily tasks. Informative messages are used to explain instructions to employees, announce meetings and procedures, acknowledge orders, accept contracts for services, and so forth. Another informative type of message delivers bad news, and these, because of the potential for damaging your relationship with your audience, deserve special attention.

Communicating to Persuade

Most messages also have a persuasive element—to influence or change the attitudes or actions of the receiver in some way. These messages include promoting a product or service and seeking support for ideas and worthy causes presented to supervisors, employees, stockholders, customers/clients, and other stakeholders of an organization.

Although we may believe that most of our communication is intended to inform others, in the business
world almost all communication is persuasive. In other words, you are trying to get another person to do or believe something. In business, you are almost always selling: selling your ideas, yourself, your products, or your services. Selling and persuading are nearly synonymous in the business world. You may be trying to persuade your supervisor to give you a raise, you may be attempting to persuade a colleague to change a portion of a project on which you are both working, or you may be trying to sell a customer your company’s service or product. All of these are examples of persuasion at work. (Persuasion, in an interpersonal context, is referred to as influence as was discussed in Chapter 2.)

In order to succeed at persuasion, you must generally give good reasons for the person you are communicating with to do or believe what you intend. That is one reason why it is generally important to identify your purposes for communicating in the workplace before you communicate. If you believe you are only informing, you may fail to provide the good reasons or evidence necessary to persuade, if that is indeed your primary purpose. Evidence consists of a variety of types of information, such as facts, anecdotes, examples, and statistics. (We will explore evidence in more detail in Chapter 8.)

Unless you are making a simple request, successful persuasion usually involves more than writing or delivering a single message. In fact, persuasion is often a difficult and time-consuming activity. But it is a skill that is necessary in today’s business environment where the old “command-and-control” managerial model now often generates poor or unwanted outcomes. AlliedSignal’s CEO Lawrence Bossidy once put it this way, “The day when you could yell and scream and beat people into good performance is over. Today you have to appeal to them by helping them to see how they can get from here to there by establishing some credibility and by giving them some reasons and help to get there. Do all those things, and they’ll knock down doors.”

Effective persuasion involves four essential steps. First, you must establish credibility through building expertise and cultivating relationships. Second, you need to thoroughly understand your audience and its needs and concerns. This will help strengthen the appeal of your proposal. Third, effective persuaders make their positions come alive by providing evidence—numerical data, examples, stories, metaphors, and analogies. Finally, because emotions are always involved to some extent in every decision we make, effective persuaders will connect emotionally with the audience and adjust their arguments to their audience’s emotional state.

Persuasion is more than the act of convincing and selling: It is a process of learning and negotiating that relies heavily on dialogue. Dialogue must happen before and during the persuasive process. “A persuader should make a concerted effort to meet one-on-one with all the key people he or she plans to persuade.” In some cases, through this dialogue, effective persuaders may find that they need to adjust their positions in order to better achieve their goals.

Communicating to Establish Credibility

To persuade effectively, you should also put some energy forth establishing or maintaining your credibility. Credible people demonstrate that they have strong emotional character and integrity; they are known to be honest, steady, and reliable. On organizational and individual levels, reputation is increasingly important to the success of a firm and the personal success of the employees that work there. (Public relations has developed as a functional area to manage the reputations of companies.) Savvy employees are aware of the applicability of these concepts in their own careers. One study indicates that 92 percent of more than 2,300 executives said that if a person loses credibility with them, it would be very difficult to gain it back.
Most managers overestimate their own credibility considerably. In the worst-case scenario, they may revert to the old “command-and-control” style of leadership that studies have shown damage productivity and morale in skilled, well-educated workers and create frustrated, silenced employees who steal all the pencils and sabotage the company’s computer system. Credibility no longer comes from authority, but from having expertise and competence, being trustworthy (strong integrity), controlling emotions, and developing and maintaining a professional image.

**Expertise and Competence**

Clearly, your knowledge about your job and ability to perform your job well affect your credibility. Likewise, your communication competence reflects on your credibility. Speaking correctly and articulately generally enhances our credibility by indicating to others that we are well educated and intelligent. The same goes for our written communication. If our written messages are full of errors, we may be perceived as undereducated, lazy, or not detail oriented. All of these negative judgments can affect our credibility. In one case, a resume or letter with a grammatical error eliminated an applicant from consideration and in another, the same company asked an applicant with a doctoral degree to provide samples of reports and other documents he had written.8

One way you can positively distinguish yourself from others in today’s competitive business environment is by demonstrating excellent communication skills. Employees who can write clearly can create a better impression of a firm with customers, suppliers, and outsiders than any public relations program ever devised. “If you send out a sales letter that is filled with errors, you’re losing credibility. You send the image that your company is careless,” says Dawn Josephson, president of Cameo Publications, an editorial and publishing services firm based in Hilton Head, S.C.9

Effective business writing skills have become crucial for both personal performance and organizational productivity. With the proliferation of personal computing, more and more employees at all levels in the company are producing documents that represent an organization, and the quality of this written material can have a significant impact on both perceptions and performance. For that reason, focusing on improving the quality of your communication is critical. There is no quick fix for grammar and mechanical problems, however. Achieving correct grammar usage takes time and some effort; it also takes practice. By exerting some time and energy toward the goal of achieving correctness, greater confidence, competence, and credibility will be your reward.

### To Improve the Correctness of Your Writing

1. **Read**—often and about diverse topics. Reading helps us to subconsciously recognize and internalize correct grammar usage in writing.
2. **Solve word games and puzzles.** These activities can help you build your vocabulary and learn the meanings of words.
3. **Become aware of the common mistakes you make in your writing.** This knowledge will streamline the process of proofreading if you can more quickly identify the areas that you need to double-check for correctness.
4. **Edit other’s writing.** This activity can improve your analytical skills, which are necessary to proofread your own writing.
5. **Learn how to properly use and then use the spell-checking and grammar-checking tools available in most word-processing programs.** It is important to recognize that these computer tools do not recognize all writing errors. You will also need to proofread your written messages carefully, so it is essential to keep a good writing handbook and dictionary on hand.
6. **For very important messages, it is often a good idea to ask a literate friend or colleague to review and provide feedback as to their correctness.**

### Personal Ethics and Integrity

Ethics is involved whenever people interact with one another because communication by nature involves some degree of manipulation of the audience and the message.10 Therefore, not upholding a high standard of personal integrity can compromise or greatly reduce your credibility. Table 4-1 gives some examples of unethical messages that can occur in organizations.

**Table 4-1: Examples of Unethical Messages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>unethical message</th>
<th>1. misrepresentation of oneself</th>
<th>2. Omission of important information</th>
<th>3. Exaggeration of claims</th>
<th>4. Falsehoods about events or people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Inaccurate or misleading self-presentation</td>
<td>Withholding critical information</td>
<td>Overstating or misrepresenting claims</td>
<td>Lying about factual matters or about the motives of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To keep unethical communication practices in check, both senders and receivers of messages need to act responsibly. That is, they should carefully analyze claims, assess probable consequences, and weigh relevant values.11 In addition, responsible communicators should respond to the needs and communication of others in sensitive, thoughtful, fitting ways.12 Finally, both parties in an interaction bear mutual responsibility to participate actively in the process.
Emotional Control

Our ability to control our emotions greatly affects our credibility. According to a study done by the University of Missouri-Columbia, “many employees do not want their coworkers to express any type of strong emotion—positive or negative.” Employees in the study were asked to describe situations where they believed coworkers acted appropriately and inappropriately. The consensus of the employees was negative emotion should never be expressed, and positive emotion should be shown in moderation.

Anger is one of the more common negative emotions that cloud communication; when you allow anger to control your communication, the results are generally unproductive. Outbursts of anger tend to make people uncomfortable, especially when the person exhibits irrational forms of anger. If construed as harassment in the workplace, excessive displays of anger can lead to disciplinary measures.

Anger also comes through in written communication. We should never write a message when we are feeling a negative emotion but should wait until we have calmed down to express ourselves. Although it can feel good to vent negative feelings, we should immediately delete or erase messages written in anger. Such negative emotions can affect the tone of the message, which may have a negative impact on our relationship with the receiver, or our ability to convey goodwill. Unfortunately, with the popularity and proliferation of email, it is easy

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Table 4-1  Typology of Unethical Messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coercive</td>
<td>An employee criticizes the boss’s “pet” development program in a meeting and is fired on the spot for her remarks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destructive</td>
<td>A supervisor makes a sexist joke at the expense of an employee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceptive</td>
<td>Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees falsify employee work records to justify the firing of air traffic controllers during their 1981 strike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive</td>
<td>Electronic surveillance of employees is conducted through hidden video cameras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretive</td>
<td>The asbestos industry suppressed information that left little doubt about the health hazards posed by its product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulative/Exploitative</td>
<td>Management threatens union members with a plant closing if they don’t ratify a contract.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

relationships with others and maintain positive, productive goodwill in any given situation. Kristin Anderson, president of Say What? Consulting, recommends that you maintain a neutral body and voice. Keeping your body loose and your voice tone neutral will help to maintain a calm demeanor. A second tactic is to listen without trying to judge if the situation is good or bad.

If confronted by anger, you may feel like retreating or become defensive. However, being defensive and yelling back may cause more harm. Instead, empathize with the person. Doing so, will help you maintain your credibility by showing that you act reasonably, rationally, and respectfully in stressful situations.

More Tips on Anger Management

1. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. See if you can imagine how he or she feels.
2. Exercise to get rid of the tension. Ride your bike, play soccer, or, if you are at work, go for a long walk.
3. Do not jump to conclusions. Listen carefully to what the other person says.
4. Take a time out. Give yourself time and space to calm down so you can think clearly and communicate rationally.

Following these simple techniques can help any aggressive situation turn positive.

Developing a Professional Image

Expertise and competence, emotional control, and integrity are all components of your professional image. Likewise, our communication skills, both written and oral, can enhance our image as a professional. Personality traits can also contribute to a more credible and professional image. If we show ourselves to be dependable, reliable, careful, thorough, able to plan, organized, hardworking, persistent, and achievement oriented, we are more likely to be perceived as professional and competent.

Our appearance through dress and posture also communicates to others. Every time you walk into a room, you communicate who you are before you speak, through your appearance. For example, it would not be expected for your company president to walk into a business meeting wearing Bermuda shorts. On the other hand, a fishing guide would not show up for work in a three-piece suit. Dressing appropriately for a particular situation can affect whether others perceive you as professional and credible. It also sends the message that you are a part of the group, that you belong. This message can help you in the relationship or goodwill area of communication.

Some people are better able to consciously cultivate a professional image. Recall from Chapter 2 that impression management is the control (or lack of control) of communicating information through a performance. In impression management, people try to present an "idealized" version of themselves in order to reach desired ends.

All of us attempt to manage our impression to varying degrees in various situations. The key to successful impression management is to accurately assess the social expectations for particular contexts and to do our best to match those expectations through our appearance, body language, emotional control, and use of language.

Communicating to Convey Goodwill

According to Webster’s College Dictionary, goodwill has three definitions: “1. friendly disposition; kindly regard; benevolence. 2. cheerful acquiescence or consent. 3. an intangible, salable asset arising from the reputation of its business and its relations with its customers.” For those of you who have taken accounting courses, you are probably familiar with the third definition of goodwill; in business contexts goodwill is considered an asset. As a purpose of business communication, goodwill is the ability to create and maintain positive, productive relationships with others.

Many of you who have work experience probably would agree with this statement: The ability to establish and maintain relationships is indeed what makes the business world go around. Establishing and maintaining relationships with others, or networking, is the heart of much of business. One of the key elements of positive relationships is trust and vice versa. You are more likely to trust someone with whom you have a positive relationship and to have a positive relationship with someone you trust.

From an organizational perspective, relationships can play an important role in producing effective supervision, promoting social support among employees, building personal influence, and ensuring productivity through smooth work flow. The need for good interpersonal relationships in organizations is particularly
important from both the standpoint of the individual, who requires social support in an increasingly turbulent world, and the organization, which must maintain high levels of cooperation among employees to meet customer demands and remain competitive. Most decision makers rely heavily on verbal information from people they trust. Trust can be understood as the confidence that our peers’ intentions are good. In other words, we must believe that those with whom we work will not act opportunistically or take advantage of us and others to narrowly pursue their own self-interest.

**Step 2: Envision the Audience**

Perception is the part of the communication process that involves how we look at others and the world around us. It’s a natural tendency to perceive situations from our own limited viewpoint. We use the context of the situation and our five senses to absorb and interpret the information bombarding us in unique ways.

Individual differences in perception account for the varied and sometimes conflicting reports given by eyewitnesses to the same accident. A popular television series focuses on Monk, the “defective” detective who can see things that scores of trained police workers cannot see, although they’ve all been looking at the same crime scene.

Perception of reality is also limited by previous experiences and our attitudes toward the sender of the message. We filter messages through our own frames of reference and tend to only see things that we want to see. Our frames of reference are affected by our backgrounds, experiences, and cultural values. If we come from different backgrounds or cultures or have had different life experiences than our audience or the receiver of our message, then our perceptions are likely different from theirs. To make this situation more challenging, we tend support ideas that are in line with our own thinking. We may simply refuse to hear a message that doesn’t fit into our view of the world.

Much of the confusion in communication is caused by these differences in the sender’s and receiver’s perceptions. For example, team members may clash when some members perceive the task to be of greater importance than do other people involved in the work.

Overcoming perceptual barriers is difficult but essential if you are to craft messages that meet the needs and concerns of your audience. To help you envision the audience, first focus on relevant information you know about the receiver. The more familiar you are with the receiver, the easier this task will be. When communicating with an individual, you immediately recall a clear picture of the receiver—his or her physical appearance, background (education, occupation, religion, culture), values, opinions, preferences, and so on. Most importantly, your knowledge of the receiver’s reaction in similar, previous experiences allows you to anticipate how this receiver is likely to react in the current situation. Consider the following audience characteristics:

- **Economic level.** A banker’s collection letter to a customer who pays promptly is not likely to be the same form letter sent to clients who have fallen behind on their payments for small loans.
- **Educational/occupational background.** The technical jargon and acronyms used in a financial proposal sent to bank loan officers may be inappropriate in a proposal sent to a group of private investors.
- **Needs and concerns of the receiver.** Just as successful sales personnel begin by identifying the needs of the prospective buyer, an effective manager attempts to understand the receiver’s frame of reference as a basis for organizing the message and developing the content.
- **Culture.** As was discussed in Chapter 1, the vast cultural differences between people (language, expressions, customs, values, religions) increase the complexity of the communication process. An email containing typical American expressions (e.g., “The proposal was shot down,” “projections are on par,” and “the competition is backed to the wall”) would likely confuse a manager from a different culture.

Differences in values also influence communication styles and message patterns. For example, Japanese readers value the beauty and flow of words and prefer an indirect writing approach, unlike Americans who prefer clarity and conciseness.

- **Rapport.** A sensitive message written to a long-time client may differ significantly from a message written to a newly acquired client. The rapport created by previous dealings with the client aids understanding in a current situation.
- **Expectations.** Because accountants, lawyers, and other professionals are expected to meet high standards, a message from one of them containing errors in grammar or spelling would likely cause a receiver to question the credibility of the source.
You may find that envisioning an audience you know well is often such an unconscious action that you may not even recognize that you are doing it. On the other hand, envisioning those you do not know well requires additional effort. In these cases, simply assume an empathetic attitude toward the receiver to assist you in identifying his or her frame of reference (knowledge, feelings, emotions). In other words, project mentally how you believe you would feel or react in a similar situation and use that information to communicate understanding back to the person.

Consider the use (or lack) of empathy in the following workplace examples:

**Sample Message**

**Example 1:** A U.S. manager’s instructions to a new employee from an Asian culture:

“Please get to work right away inputting the financial data for the Collier proposal. Oh, I need you to get this work out ASAP. Because this proposal is just a draft, just plan to give me a quick-and-dirty job. You can clean it up after we massage the stats and get final blessings from the top dog. Do you have any questions?”

**Example 2:** An excerpt from a letter sent to Mr. Sandy Everett:

Dear Ms. Everett:

The wireless iPod kit that you expressed an interest in is now available in at your local car dealer. This innovative Bluetooth technology can be demonstrated at your convenience. Please call your local sales representative to schedule an appointment. I remain

Respectfully yours,

Dana Merrill
Dana Merrill, Manager

**Problem Analysis**

- The use of acronyms and expressions peculiar to the U.S. environment confuse and intimidate.
- Final open-ended question indicates the writer does not understand the importance of saving face to a person from an Asian culture. Deep cultural influences may prevent this employee from asking questions that might indicate lack of understanding.

- Misspelling the receiver’s name (and misinterpreting the gender) and overlooking mechanical errors imply incompetence or carelessness and disrespect for the receiver.
- The outdated closing and omission of contact information reduce the writer’s credibility and show lack of genuine concern for meeting the sender’s needs.

Taking the time and effort to obtain a strong mental picture of your audience through firsthand knowledge or your empathetic attitude before you write will enhance your message in the following ways:

1. Establishes rapport and credibility needed to build long-lasting personal and business relationships. Your receivers will appreciate your attempt to connect and understand their feelings. A likely outcome is mutual trust, which can greatly improve communication and people’s feelings about you, your ideas, and themselves.

2. Permits you to address the receiver’s needs and concerns. This knowledge allows you to select relevant content and to communicate in a suitable style.

3. Simplifies the task of organizing your message. From your knowledge of yourself and from your experiences with others, you can predict (with reasonable accuracy) receivers’ reactions to various types of messages. To illustrate, ask yourself these questions:

   - Would I react favorably to a message saying my request is being granted or that a new client is genuinely pleased with a job I’d just completed?
   - Would I experience a feeling of disappointment when I learn that my request has been refused or that my promised pay raise is being postponed?
   - Would I need compelling arguments to convince me to purchase a new product or support a new company policy or an employer’s latest suggestion for improvement?

Your commitment to identifying the needs and concerns of your audience before you communicate is invaluable in today’s workplace. Organizations must focus on providing quality customer service and developing work environments supportive of talented, diverse workers. Alienating valuable customers and talented employees as a result of poor audience analysis is not an option in today’s competitive environment.

However, audience analysis is often not given the attention it deserves, and when it is performed, it is not done well. This problem arises because of the difficulty of getting outside of our own perceptual world. In other words, it is very difficult to get outside of our
own skins and to look at the world as others do because of the limits created by our own experiences, beliefs, and worldviews. We tend to be attracted to those who are like us and to spend our time with people like ourselves, which limits our ability to understand those who may be different. This phenomenon was shown in the 2008 primary presidential campaigns when people under 29 years of age tended to prefer Barack Obama, the youngest candidate in the race; older women tended to prefer Hillary Clinton; and those describing themselves as fundamentalists or born-again Christians preferred Michael Huckabee, a former Baptist minister. Overcoming these constraints can thus take significant effort and time.

Because of these challenges, it is helpful to have additional mechanisms for understanding audiences. These include their position within an organization or relation to it, which can affect their communication needs, and generational and personality differences.

**Position in or Relation to the Organization**

Business audiences are often quite different from those you may be familiar with in your academic experience. For example, most of your writing in school is probably intended for a teacher, who knows a great deal about the subject and who is required to read or listen to your message. However, this situation may not be true in the workplace. You may communicate with audiences who have little understanding of your topic, and it is very likely that you will write or speak to people who are not obligated to spend time reading or listening to your messages.

Another difference between communication in an academic setting and that in the workplace is that you may be communicating with a variety of people rather than a single person, i.e., your instructor. If you are communicating with a number of people, they may have varying knowledge and needs. They may also differ in the strategies they use and skills they have for listening, reading, and processing information.

In the workplace, you will generally be communicating with five types of audiences: managerial, non-expert, expert, international/multicultural, and mixed. Managers will often be your most important audiences because they have decision-making ability and power over your future. According to Henry Mintzberg, managers fulfill three types of roles that affect the way they communicate: interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles. The demands of these various roles force managers to deal with enormous time pressures. They have little time to listen or read carefully. Mintzberg's study found that 50 percent of the activities that executives engaged in lasted less than nine minutes. Many also treat message processing as a burden to be dispensed with as quickly as possible.

To ensure that your messages are received by managers, you can use a few strategies. For example, you can put key information up front where it is easily accessible. One study looked at how managers read reports and found that all of them read the executive summary while most read the introduction, background, and conclusions sections. Only 15 percent read the body of the report. In general, managers look for the "big picture" and tend to ignore details.

Non-expert audiences may be the most difficult to address, since they know little about a subject and will need more details. (Managers are also non-experts but they ignore details.) If you are communicating with a customer or client or perhaps a fellow employee from another department, you are probably communicating with a non-expert audience.

The problem with communicating with a non-expert audience is that you probably think like a specialist. That is, you may think about your topic differently than a non-expert and use different terminology than they might to discuss that topic. In addition, you may have difficulty identifying exactly what it is that a non-expert audience doesn't know, since you are so familiar with the topic.

Expert audiences are those who know as much about the topic as you do. Generally, expert audiences, who may be your peers, speak the same language as you do, i.e., they understand the jargon associated with your profession. They also understand the same concepts, so you don't need to provide as much explanation and examples. In other words, they can fill in the gaps by making inferences about material that is common knowledge to both of you.

The global economy and the growing diversity of the workplace means that we will likely communicate with international or multicultural audiences. Members of these audiences may not speak English as a first language and may have differing cultural interpretations of symbols and behaviors.

The most challenging audiences are those composed of a variety of people, or mixed audiences: managers, non-experts, experts, and nonnative speakers or some combination of these. For example, you may be writing marketing literature that will be read by experts, non-experts, and nonnative speakers or speaking to a
group composed of the same individuals. To overcome the challenges presented by a mixed audience, you can use a \textit{layered approach}, which entails targeting parts of the communication to different members of the mixed audience. An example of the layered approach is a formal report. Such a report might include an executive summary, background information, and recommendation sections aimed at managers, while the body and appendixes contain the details needed by specialists who are charged with implementing the report.

Alternatively, you can use the \textit{democratic strategy}. In this case, you primarily aim your message at the most important audience, but you add information in appropriate places that is needed for understanding by the other audiences. Although this approach is similar to the “layered” one, it differs in that you add in examples, definitions, and explanations throughout the message that are needed for understanding by all audiences.

**Generational Differences**

Age diversity is a reality in the United States workforce today, and the span of age continues to increase. Older workers are working longer or re-entering the job market after retirement even as increasing numbers of younger workers enter the workplace. In fact, there are four generations spanning 60 years working side by side in today’s workplace:

- **Matures or seniors.** Americans over 60 years of age whose survival of hard times caused them to value hard work, sacrifice, and a strong sense of right and wrong. They like the idea of re-entering the job...
market after retirement or remaining there for the long haul.

- **Baby boomers.** Set squarely in middle age, they are referred to as the “Me” generation because they grew up in boom times and were indulged and encouraged by their parents to believe their opportunities were limitless. They will work longer than their parents because of greater financial strain and a limited retirement budget.

- **Generation Xers.** Members of the “latchkey” generation were born between 1965 and 1976 and are fiercely independent, self-directed, and resourceful. They also tend to be skeptical of authority and institutions because they entered the workforce in a time of downsizing and cutbacks. Gen-Xers expect immediate and ongoing feedback and are equally comfortable giving feedback to others. They are pragmatic and desire some fun in the workplace. They do not see progression in their careers as a ladder but as a career “lattice.” Their careers are more fluid, since they are comfortable moving laterally, and stopping and starting.

- **Millennials (also called Generation Yers).** The children and grandchildren of the boomers’ children, born between 1977 and 1998, are technologically savvy, active, and visually oriented due to their lifetime experience in a high-tech world. Because they grew up in structured parenting situations, they prefer structured situations at work. They also are demanding and have high expectations. They work well in groups, preferring this to individual endeavors.

Recognizing generational differences provides insights into the expectations and concerns of others and enables us to shape our messages to be more effective. When properly managed, companies with a strong mix of older and younger workers have a distinct competitive edge. Each generation has something to offer; younger workers bring new ideas; older workers bring experience.

### Personality Differences

More and more companies are using personality tests in their hiring and promotion decisions. According to the Association of Test Publishers, a nonprofit association for providers of tests and assessment tools, those participating in employment testing reported 10 to 15 percent growth over the last three years. These tests are used to try to identify potential employees who will be a good fit for the organization and the position.

Personality tests are not only useful for corporations; they also can be used by individuals to identify their best fit with a particular occupation. Knowing one’s own personality type as well as being able to use a schema to obtain insights about others’ preferences can help us shape our communication to meet them. As you might expect, different personality types have different communication preferences. A failure to recognize and manage those differences can lead to communication difficulties, resulting in a drop in productivity and a growth in general workplace tension. By contrast, appreciating the complementary nature of these different approaches can lead to better decisions and complementary work relationships. Having a schema that we can use to better understand others

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Even though personality is individual, the following guidelines can help you deal with different personality types more generally:

- **Act.** Communication is often based on assumptions. To break the assumption trap, find out what you don’t know by asking questions. An example is the question, “How much detail do you prefer in these reports or what form should data take—anecdotal or facts only?”

- **Collaborate.** Divide up projects to take advantage of other people’s strengths. An example is the statement, “I’m a detail-oriented person. I would be happy to handle the number-crunching for this project.”

- **Appreciate.** Be proactive in thanking people for contributing different perspectives. An example is the statement, “I hadn’t really thought of how that software change would affect others. Thanks for helping me see it from their angle.”

- **Speak the Right Language for Your Audience.** For example, when communicating with a sensor, provide the details and a step-by-step breakdown. In contrast, when communicating with intuitors, emphasize each step (the bigger picture by comparison).

and their preferences can also help us to create messages that better meet their needs.

**Step 3: Consider the Context**

The next step in planning a message is to consider the context of the situation and whether that will affect how and what is communicated. The context of the message refers to the environmental influences that affect its content and, in some cases, the decision as to whether to even send a message. As we discussed in Chapter 1, some important environmental factors influence business communication: legal and ethical constraints, considerations regarding technology, intercultural or diversity issues, and the team environment. Additionally, financial or economic considerations may affect the decision to send a message. For example, if the company’s financial picture is weak and layoffs are being discussed, it might not be the appropriate time to ask your supervisor for a raise or to ask for financial support to go to a professional conference or training program.

Multiple issues within an organization might affect the content of a message, how it is delivered, and more importantly, whether it is even appropriate to send a message. Organizational considerations include the corporate culture and the flow of communication within the company. A company’s policies, programs, and structures can support or interfere with good communication. The context within which communication occurs can also affect how, what, when, and whether we should communicate. In short, the corporate culture of an organization can affect the quality of communication that occurs within it. The flow of communication can affect choices about how communication should best occur.

**organizational culture**
*a system of shared meanings and practices held by members that distinguish the organization from other organizations*

There are several dimensions to context, including physical, social, chronological, and cultural. The physical context or setting can influence the content and quality of interaction. For example, if you were to ask your boss for a raise, the effect of the setting might dramatically affect your chances for success. How might the following settings affect such an interaction: In the boss’s office? At a company picnic? Over lunch at a restaurant? In your work area, with others’ observing?

The **social** context refers to the nature of the relationship between the communicators, as well as who is present. In the same situation mentioned above, imagine how the relationship between your manager and yourself might affect your request for a raise if

- You and the manager have been friends for several years as opposed to a situation in which you and your manager have no personal relationship.
- You are the same age as your manager or she or he is 15 years older (or younger) that you.
- You and the manager have gotten along well in the past compared to a situation in which you and the manager have been involved in an ongoing personal conflict.

The **chronological** context refers to the ways time influences interactions. For example, how might the time of day affect the quality of an interaction? How might the communicator’s personal preferences regarding time affect an interaction? Is it a busy time of year for employees and managers? Has there just been a major layoff, downsizing, or profit loss? In this last case, you might want to put off your request for a raise until conditions improve.

The **cultural** context includes both the organizational culture as well as the cultural backgrounds of the people with whom you may be communicating. **Organizational culture** refers to a system of shared meanings and practices held by members that distinguish the organization from other organizations. Organizational culture can affect the means and style of communication that takes place in an organization.

For example, if a company is resistant to innovation and risk-taking, you may be taking a risk in putting forth proposals that support such goals. In this case, you might consider whether such a message would be received well and its effect on your credibility and support within the organization. If a corporate culture expects precision and attention to detail, then all of your messages should reflect these values in terms of their quality and correctness. Knowing whether an organization is outcome, people, or team oriented may help select evidence that would improve the potential for success of persuasive messages.
Step 4: Choose a Channel and Medium

Channels of communication were discussed in Chapter 1. These channels were two-way, face-to-face; two-way, not face-to-face; and one-way, not face-to-face. Each channel also has various media associated with it that can be used to conduct the actual communication. For example, the media most often used in the workplace for two-way, face-to-face communication consist of in-person or interpersonal communication, meetings, and video- and teleconferencing. When choosing the appropriate channel and media for communication, the following should be considered:

- Richness vs. leanness
- Need for interpretation (ambiguity)
- Speed of establishing contact
- Time required for feedback
- Cost
- Amount of information conveyed
- Permanent record
- Control over the message

Be sure to consider culture when communicating.

Richness vs. Leanness

Some channels of communication provide more information than others. The richest channels of communication provide nonverbal information in addition to that provided in written or oral form. For this reason, the richest channel of communication is two-way, face-to-face or what is often called interpersonal communication.

Two-way, face-to-face communication provides participants a rich source of information, including vocal cues, facial expressions, bodily movement, bodily appearance, the use of space, the use of time, touching, and clothing and other artifacts. In addition, two-way, face-to-face communication provides opportunities to facilitate feedback and to establish a personal focus. These aspects also contribute to the richness of interpersonal communication as a channel of communication.

One-way, not face-to-face communication or written communication may provide less access to nonverbal forms of communication. However, tone can be communicated in writing and can be an indicator of the writer’s attitude. For this reason, you should never write messages when you are experiencing negative emotions that may adversely affect your relationship with your audience. If you are experiencing negative emotions in response to a workplace situation, you should wait until you have calmed down before you respond in writing.
Part 1: Communication Foundations and Analysis

Perhaps one of the leanest media of communication is a printed form. Most forms ask for information that is very specific and limited in scope. Furthermore, forms oftentimes provide a limited amount of space in which to provide information. Because of the specificity and space limitations, forms often provide little opportunity to gather information other than the least amount needed to fulfill a particular task.

Need for Interpretation

Some channels and media of communication are more ambiguous or leave more room for interpretation of the message being sent than others. Nonverbal communication may be the most ambiguous channel of communication, since it requires the audience to interpret almost the entirety of the message. Nonverbal communication is difficult to interpret for a variety of reasons. First of all, one nonverbal code may communicate a variety of meanings. For example, you may stand close to someone because you are in a crowded room, you are having difficulty hearing him or her, or you are attracted to the person.

Similarly, nonverbal communication can be difficult to interpret because a variety of codes may communicate the same meaning. This problem is particularly apparent when cultural differences come into play in a communication situation. In a public-speaking situation, for example, you might show respect for the speaker by looking directly at the speaker, while in some cultures respect is shown by the listeners when they avert their eyes from the speaker.

A third issue that may affect a person’s ability to interpret nonverbal codes accurately is intentionality. Some nonverbal codes are sent intentionally while others are unintentional. If you smile at a friend, you are intentionally showing him or her that you are glad to see that person. However, the same nonverbal cue may be sent unintentionally yet interpreted as intentional. You might be thinking about a pleasant experience you had the night before and unintentionally smile. But if this occurs while you are walking down the street, the stranger approaching you may interpret this unintentional signal as an intentional cue of interest in him or her. For this reason, two-way, face-to-face communication may be more ambiguous than other channels of communication. Furthermore, depending on our sensitivity to nonverbal communication codes, we may overreact to certain nonverbal messages or we may be somewhat or completely unaware of such information.

In contrast, written communication has the potential for being the least ambiguous channel of communication, particularly if it is prepared by a highly skilled writer who is able to precisely encode such a message. In other words, such a writer has an excellent command of the language and its correct usage. For this reason, many official or legal messages are delivered in the form of a written document. Similarly, instructions are often provided in written form.

Speed of Establishing Contact

Another important consideration, particularly in the business world, is the time it will take for a message to be delivered. As the old saying goes, time is often money. That’s why electronic forms of communication have become so popular. Using the telephone, writing an email message, and sending a fax are almost instantaneous media for communication. In contrast, sending a written message or package by mail may take days. If you wish to communicate with someone who lives or works in another state or nation, it may also take days to arrange a face-to-face meeting. For these reasons, electronic channels of communication have become extremely useful in the modern workplace.

Time Required for Feedback

Even though the most rapid forms of communication are generally electronic, they may not produce the most prompt feedback. If you need a response immediately and your audience is in the cubicle next to yours, face-to-face communication may be the fastest means of receiving the information you need. Regardless, response time depends on the person with whom you are communicating, his or her personality, and your relationship. In other words, people generally have communication channel and media preferences and differing communication practices. Some people may prefer face-to-face communication and thus may be more responsive to messages delivered using this channel. Others may prefer the telephone, while still others may prefer to be contacted by email. Just because you prefer email does not mean that the person you are communicating with has a similar preference and will respond to your message immediately.

For these reasons, you should take into consideration your audience’s preferences when selecting a communication channel and medium.

Cost

Many communication media are relatively inexpensive for business users. Mail, email, telephones, and faxes are generally considered inexpensive forms of com-
munication. Face-to-face communication, although the richest channel, can be quite expensive if those you wish to communicate with are located at a distance from yourself in another city, state, or country. If you wish to communicate with a large number of people who are not in close proximity, the costs of communicating interpersonally can be quite high. This is because such meetings involve the costs of travel, accommodations, and lost productivity. In these situations, many businesses use teleconferencing, and larger companies have even begun investing in videoconferencing systems.

Amount of Information Conveyed

The best channel for conveying large amounts of information is generally a written one. That’s because most of us are generally poor listeners. Studies indicate that we retain only about 10 percent of what we hear. Therefore, if you want people to have the opportunity to process and remember the information you have to deliver, particularly if the message is long or complex, it is best delivered using the written channel. Typically, less information is delivered by electronic, oral media like television newscasts or radio programs, because they appeal to people who do not have much time to invest in such information or do not wish to invest much time, have short attention spans, or do not like to read. Bottom line, these channels generally deliver less information about the topics they address.

For these reasons, if you have a fairly large quantity of complex or detailed information to deliver, the written communication channel is the best, because it provides readers the opportunity to take the time necessary to process that information, oftentimes at their own convenience.

Need for a Permanent Record

A related consideration is the need to keep a permanent record. Business people are often involved in situations where they must keep records of what occurred during various work activities throughout the day or week. These situations include the need to record what occurred at a department meeting, an employee’s work history, the findings of an audit of a client’s financial records, and an employee’s travel expenses. Most legal documents, including contracts, use the written channel of communication for this reason: the need to maintain a record. Email messages if stored and backed up properly can also serve as a record.

Control over the Message

The written channel of communication, or one-way, not face-to-face, also is the best choice when you wish to maintain greater control of the message that you send. The reason: if information is presented orally and interpersonally, you have a greater chance of people who disagree with you or who wish to discredit you speaking out. These displays of disagreement or displeasure can interfere with the clarity of the message and the assurance that it is delivered as intended. That is why many negative messages are sent using the written channel of communication.
For example, if you must tell a job applicant that he was not selected for the position for which he recently interviewed, you can maintain control over the act of delivering that information by doing so in the form of a letter. Although calling the person to deliver the message might exhibit greater goodwill on your part because you have taken the time to interact using a channel and medium that enables you to utilize some nonverbal cues, you also risk a situation that might spin out of control if the person does not take the news well or wishes to take more of your time to find out why he was not selected. In this case, you also may be put in a position to explain the decision more fully. However, by sending a polite letter, you are able to convey the same basic message without the risk of losing control of the situation.

Similarly, in crisis situations, some companies refuse to speak to the media for fear of losing control of the message or releasing information that may be damaging. These situations may be handled by using the written communication channel to send a press release to the media. The press release delivers information but does not provide an opportunity for the receiver to question the communicator and potentially lose control of the message that the company intends to convey. Oral channels of communication are often riskier, because they expose the speaker to differences of opinion, conflict, and personalities that may be difficult to control.

Step 5: Adapt the Message to the Audience

After you have envisioned your audience, considered the context of the communication, and chosen the most effective channel and medium with which to communicate, you are ready to adapt your message to fit the specific needs of your audience. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, adaptations should take into consideration the receiver’s point of view and attempt to choose content and language that will promote goodwill or help you to maintain or establish a lasting, positive relationship with him or her.

Ideas are more interesting and appealing to the receiver if they are expressed from his or her viewpoint. Developing a “you attitude” rather than a “me attitude” involves thinking in terms of the other person’s interests and trying to see a problem from the other’s point of view. A letter, memo, email, or phone call reflecting a “you attitude” sends a direct signal of sincere concern for the receiver’s needs and interests.

The use of the word you (appropriately used) conveys to receivers a feeling that messages are specifically for them. If the first-person pronoun I is used frequently, especially as the subject, the sender may impress others as being self-centered—always talking about self. Compare the following examples of sender-centered and receiver-centered statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I- or Sender-Centered</th>
<th>Receiver-Centered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to take this opportunity to offer my congratulations on your recent promotion to regional manager.</td>
<td>Congratulations on your recent promotion to regional manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We allow a 2 percent discount to customers who pay their total invoice within 10 days.</td>
<td>Customers who pay within 10 days may deduct 2 percent from their total invoice. (You could be the subject in a message to a customer.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in ordering . . . (You is the understood subject.)</td>
<td>Please send me . . . (You is the understood subject.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concentrating on cultivating a “you attitude” will boost the receiver’s confidence in the sender’s competence and will communicate nonverbally that the receiver is valued enough to merit your best effort. For people who practice courtesy and consideration, the “you attitude” is easy to incorporate into written and spoken messages.

Compliments (words of deserved praise) are another effective way of increasing a receiver’s receptiveness to ideas that follow. Give sincere compliments judiciously as they can do more harm than good if paid at the wrong time, in the wrong setting, in the presence of the wrong people, or for the wrong reasons. Likewise, avoid flattery (words of undeserved praise). Although the recipient may accept your flattery as a sincere compliment, chances are the recipient will interpret your undeserved praise as an attempt to seek to gain favor or special attention. Suspicion of your motive makes effective communication less likely.
Step 6: Organize the Message

After you have identified the specific ways you must adapt the message to your specific audience, you are ready to organize your message. In a discussion of communication, the word organize means dividing a topic into parts and arranging them in an appropriate sequence. Before undertaking this process, you must be convinced that the message is the right message—that it is complete, accurate, fair, reasonable, ethical, and logical. If it doesn’t meet these standards, it should not be sent. Good organization and good writing or speaking cannot be expected to compensate for a bad decision.

If you organize and write simultaneously, the task seems hopelessly complicated. Writing is much easier if questions about the organization of the message are answered first: What is the purpose of the message, what is the receiver’s likely reaction, and should the message begin with the main point? Once these decisions have been made, you can concentrate on expressing ideas effectively.

Outline to Benefit the Sender and the Receiver

When a topic is divided into parts, some parts will be recognized as central ideas and the others as minor ideas (details). Another way to think about this type of organization is from general to specific. The process of identifying these ideas and arranging them in the right sequence is known as outlining. Outlining before communicating provides numerous benefits:

• Encourages accuracy and brevity. Outlining reduces the chance of leaving out an essential idea or including an unessential idea.

• Permits concentration on one phase at a time. Having focused separately on (a) the ideas that need to be included, (b) the distinction between major and minor ideas, and (c) the sequence of ideas, total concentration can now be focused on the next challenge—expressing.

• Saves time in structuring ideas. With questions about which ideas to include and their proper sequence already answered, little time is lost in moving from one point to the next.

• Provides a psychological lift. The feeling of success gained in preparing the outline increases confidence that the next step—writing or speaking—will be successful, too.

• Facilitates emphasis and de-emphasis. Although each sentence makes its contribution to the message, some sentences need to stand out more vividly in the receiver’s mind than others. An effective outline ensures that important points will appear in emphatic positions.

The preceding benefits derived from outlining are sender oriented. Because a message has been well outlined, receivers benefit, too:

How to Cultivate a “You Attitude”

To cultivate a “you attitude,” concentrate on the following questions:

- Does the message address the receiver’s major needs and concerns?
- Would the receiver feel this message is receiver-centered? Is the receiver kept clearly in the picture?
- Will the receiver perceive the ideas to be fair, logical, and ethical?
- Are ideas expressed clearly and concisely (to avoid lost time, money, and possible embarrassment caused when messages are misunderstood)?
- Does the message promote positive business relationships—even when the message is negative? For example, are please, thank you, and other courtesies used when appropriate? Are ideas stated tactfully and positively and in a manner that preserves the receiver’s self-worth and cultivates future business?
- Is the message sent promptly to indicate courtesy?
- Does the message reflect the high standards of a business professional: quality paper, accurate formatting, quality printing, and absence of misspellings and grammatical errors?
- The message is more concise and accurate.
- Relationships between ideas are easier to distinguish and remember.
- Reaction to the message and its sender is more likely to be positive.

A receiver’s reaction to a message is strongly influenced by the sequence in which ideas are presented. A beginning sentence or an ending sentence is in an emphatic position. (Other emphasis techniques are explained in Chapter 8.) Throughout this text, you will see that outlining (organizing) is important.

**Sequence Ideas to Achieve Desired Goals**

When planning your communication, you should strive for an outline that will serve you in much the same way a blueprint serves a builder or an itinerary serves a traveler. Organizing your message first will ensure that your ideas are presented clearly and logically and all vital components are included. To facilitate your determining an appropriate sequence for a business document or presentation, follow the three-step process illustrated in Figure 4-2. This process involves answering the following questions in this order:

1. **What is the central idea of the message?** Think about the reason you are writing or speaking—the first step in the communication process. What is your purpose—to extend a job offer, decline an invitation, or seek support for an innovative project? The purpose is the central idea of your message. You might think of it as a message condensed into a one-sentence telegram.

2. **What is the most likely receiver reaction to the message?** Ask, “If I were the one receiving the message I am preparing to send, what would my reaction be?” Because you would react with pleasure to good news and displeasure to bad news, you can reasonably assume a receiver’s reaction would be similar. Recall the dual goals of a communicator: clarity and effective human relations. By considering anticipated receiver reaction, you build goodwill with the receiver. Almost every message will fit into one of four categories of anticipated receiver reaction: (1) pleasure, (2) displeasure, (3) interest but neither pleasure nor displeasure, or (4) no interest, as shown in Figure 4-2.

3. **In view of the predicted receiver reaction, should the central idea be listed first in the outline or should it be listed as one of the last items?** When a message begins with the major idea, the sequence of ideas is called **deductive**. When a message withholds the major idea until accompanying details and explanations have been presented, the sequence is called **inductive**.

Consider the receiver to determine whether to use the inductive or deductive sequence. If a receiver might be antagonized by the main idea in a deductive message, lead up to the main idea by making the message
inductive. If a sender wants to encourage receiver involvement (to generate a little concern about where the details are leading), the inductive approach is recommended. Inductive organization can be especially effective if the main idea confirms the conclusion the receiver has drawn from the preceding details—a cause is worthy of support, an applicant should be interviewed for a job, a product/service should be selected, and so on. As you learn in later chapters about writing letters, memos, and email messages and about planning spoken communications, you will comprehend the benefits of using the appropriate outline for each receiver reaction:

### Sequencing Minor Ideas

Here are some common ways for determining the sequence of minor ideas that accompany the major idea:

- **Time.** When writing a memo or email about a series of events or a process, paragraphs proceed from the first step through the last step.
- **Space.** If a report is about geographic areas, ideas can proceed from one area to the next until all areas have been discussed.
- **Familiarity.** If a topic is complicated, the presentation can begin with a known or easy-to-understand point and proceed to progressively more difficult points.
- **Importance.** In analytical reports in which major decision-making factors are presented, the factors can be presented in order of most important to least important, or vice versa.
- **Value.** If a presentation involves major factors with monetary values, paragraphs can proceed from those with greatest values to those with least values, or vice versa.

These organizational patterns work for both written and spoken communication and are applicable in email messages, letters, memos, and reports.

### Step 7: Prepare the First Draft

Once you have determined the purpose and type of message, considered the audience’s needs and perspectives, chosen the proper channel and medium for communication, determined whether the message should be presented deductively (main idea first) or inductively (explanation and details first), and planned the logical sequence of points, you are ready to begin composing the message. Before doing so, however, you should read Chapters 5 through 8 for specific guidelines for the preparation of electronic communication, neutral and good news messages, bad news messages, and persuasive messages.

As for the process of drafting itself, once you are confident about the organization and approach to the draft, you are ready to write. Normally, writing rapidly (with intent to rewrite certain portions, if necessary) is better than slow, deliberate writing (with intent to avoid any need for rewriting portions). The latter approach can be frustrating and can reduce the quality of the finished work. Time is wasted on details that are better addressed in the revising and proofreading stage of writing, such as thinking of a particular way to express an idea, discarding it either before or after it is written, waiting for new inspiration, and rereading preceding sentences.

Concentrating on getting your ideas down as quickly as you can is an efficient approach to writing. During this process, remember that you are preparing a draft and not the final copy. If you are composing at the computer, you can quickly and easily revise your draft throughout the composition process. This seamless approach to writing allows you to continue to improve your “working draft” until the moment you are ready to submit the final copy. Numerous electronic writing tools are available to help with this process, and technology will continue to unfold to enhance it.