keywords, using the operators *and*, *or*, or *not*. For example, to search for Web sites pertaining to "Mexican oil" you might search for:

Mexic	To allow selection of Mexico and Mexican
not New	To avoid selection of New Mexico
and (oil **or** petroleum)	To select both Mexic and oil, place the "and" between them; to allow selection of petroleum as well as oil, use the "or." Note that the parentheses are necessary to group the last **or** statement together

When using Boolean logic in your searches, syntax may differ from search engine to search engine. Every search engine will have a search help page that can be found next to the search text box. Each search engine has an increasing amount of logic tools that can help you refine your search. Use these help pages as a tool to become a skilled Internet researcher.

Still other search features that may help narrow down a query. If you want to find Web pages that contain a specific phrase, the use of quotes would limit the search to only those sites that matched the entire phrase. Thus, typing "give me liberty or give me death" as your search criteria will yield dozens of pages on Patrick Henry. As you can see, quotation marks can be useful when you need to cross-reference information such as direct quotes.

Many search engines offer the user advanced search options such as limiting the search to only specific parts of the Web document. For example, within Yahoo! it is possible to search only the Web title or the actual URL by typing in "t:" or "u:" respectively before the keyword. Sometimes you will want to search only within a specific company's Web site. In this case typing "u:cnn" followed by another optional keyword would search only within CNN's Web site. Many search engines offer these features, but be sure to check each site's help pages to determine the correct syntax (Infoseek uses "title:" and "site:" to limit the search to a document's title or URL) as well as additional search options.

Search engines are key starting points to finding items in different media such as an audio clip, an image, or a short video clip. Some engines, such as AltaVista, have a special search page exclusively for audio, image, or video files. Thus, by selecting the image type, the searcher can type a keyword or two to find a particular picture. If the item searched is well known, such as the Grand Canyon, the engine may return hundreds of images to your liking. AltaVista is a particularly good site to find clip art and miscellaneous pictures, since your search will return pages of thumbnail images rather than just text descriptions. This gives the user quicker access to thousands of useful images. Thumbnail clips are also given when searching for video files, while audio searches will return a brief but useful description. Other search engines are adding such "visual" utilities, giving the user access to even more media files.

A final strategy when searching the Web is to seek useful niche sites whose main purpose is to provide the general population with useful information. Many of these sites can be found from major Web directories such as Yahoo! For example, a site that lists company information and stock quotes can easily be found by clicking on the Stock Quotes link on Yahoo! By surfing within subject directories, you will be able to find a number of informative sites. The next section describes just a handful of very useful sites on the Web.

Useful Web Sites. In addition to search engines, there are a number of large information portals on the Web worth mentioning. Getting to know the information on the following sites may speed up the research process:

- **http://www.ipl.org**—The Internet Public Library is dedicated to organizing the information on the Web, thus making it more useful to researchers. The site helps direct the researcher to relevant online magazines and newspapers while providing several helpful research tutorials.
- **http://lcweb.loc.gov**—The Library of Congress site offers online catalogs, journal collections, and numerous research services.
- **http://www.census.gov**—The Census Bureau is an excellent reference site in terms of specific statistical and demographic information.
- **http://www.ed.gov**—The U.S. Department of Education's Web page offers useful statistics and news related to education.

When you encounter a useful site such as those above, bookmark it for future reference. It may be helpful when researching a topic later.

Newsgroups. Depending on the research topic, newsgroups can be an excellent source of information. There are thousands of newsgroups covering every topic imaginable. These newsgroups hold ongoing discussions that relate to topics ranging from the C programming language to teaching. Most of the information provided in newsgroups is unstructured and usually based on opinion. Thus, newsgroups do not make good references when writing purely academic papers. However, many times, newsgroup moderators can help steer the researcher to other useful and relevant sources. Liszt (**http://www.izwa.co.za/demo/lisztnews.html**) contains an exhaustive directory of all known newsgroups. By employing Liszt's search utility, a researcher will be able to locate several newsgroups related to a certain topic.

As you gather information it is important to retain source citations for later attribution—but especially from electronic sources. Be sure to note the URL or address and make note of the date you retrieved the information. You are likely to need this information later as a footnote or bibliographical entry if you use the original data. What style to use to attribute electronic information still is evolving and you find little agreement among the major style manuals.[2] However, most manuals require the address and date as part of the attribution.

Step 3—Using Other Electronic Sources

Many commercial products, often produced on CD-ROM, are available to enhance your research without connecting to a library database or using the Internet. Encyclopedias, such as the Encarta 2003 Encyclopedia, are rich with statistics, pictures, text, and sounds.

Consider Your Layout, Format, and Elements

Letters differ from memoranda in appearance. Procedure statements look different than justification reports do. A research paper has different elements than a case analysis. As you think out your writing project, consider which elements, such as salutations, copy distribution notes, tables of contents, abstracts, or appendices will

appear in your final presentation. These considerations affect the content and organization of your message.

Layout

Layout considerations recently have become especially important with the power contained in our word-processing software. Here are some layout considerations that can affect the final appearance of your product:

- Color of ink and paper
- Size and length of finished package
- Quality of appearance, including such printing techniques as color ink jet versus black-and-white laser printer output
- Use of illustrations and graphics
- Image to project
- Established corporate guidelines
- Longevity of message
- Interaction with other messages, such as periodic reports or brochures
- Treatment of headings and subheadings
- Decision on if and where footnotes should appear

Format

Closely related to layout is format, which relates more to the consistently delivered, computer-prepared items, such as headings, bulleted points, or bibliographical citations. With the power of today's word-processing software, templates can enhance the appearance of documents and provide efficiency to the writer as well. See step 5 of the electronic writing process later in this chapter for more information.

Part of layout and format is the appropriate use of headings, bulleted lists, and numbered lists. Headings can dramatically affect a person's ability to know the location within a document, the relationship to other headings or parts of the manuscript, and to "signpost" progress. Bulleted lists should be used to deliver a group of items in no particular order, such as "Here are the main characteristics of an effective manager." Numbered lists, on the other hand, should deliver stepped or staged information that has an inherent order or sequence, such as "Here is the process to get to my cubicle in Building 83."

The logic of the order of the parts also comes into play as your determine the flow of your headings and subpoints. Use the concept of classification to determine the best order. For example, in a lengthy report that starts with an introduction and ends with conclusions and recommendations, there might be five major headings. How do you determine the order of the five headings? They may be organized by chronology, importance, size, value, or even just alphabetized. You should also put careful thought into the order of the subpoints under a heading. You should have a defense for whatever order you select, and that logic should be obvious to your reader as well. If you include language such as "When we first contacted Smith Electronics about partnering with us on this project," the concept of chronology comes through. In other cases, you may want to inject such an explanatory comment as "Here are our four options, in decreasing financial attractiveness to us."

Readers will assume you are using logic in presenting items. You help them by making the logic obvious or injecting a phrase of explanation. Further, if you can't create a logical order, at a minimum inform the reader: "In no particular order, here are our five competitors."

This concept of classification is especially useful for messages that are lengthy, complex, or important. It works equally well for written documents, such as reports and proposals, or for oral presentations, such as business meetings, sales presentations, or oral reports to the board.

Elements

Just as decisions about layout and format are part of the overall writing process, so are decisions about which elements you will include in the finished package. As the length and formality of what you are writing increase, so will the number of elements you add. While a simple letter may have few elements beyond the body, a formal report will have many elements. Here, for example, are the required and optional elements that one university lists for the MBA professional report, a project often required in lieu of a thesis. Many proposals and government reports will require even more elements.

- Bound cover with author's name and report title on spine
- Fly page, blank
- Approval sheet, with original signatures
- Dedication
- Title page
- Preface or acknowledgments
- Abstract
- Table of contents
- List of tables
- List of figures
- Body of the report, with chapters and sections
- Appendices
- Bibliography
- Vita
- Fly page, blank

While these elements surround and package the main content of the report—the body—they also influence writing decisions on such things as tone and formality. For example, adding a list of figures or a bibliography may increase the formality, while inclusion of dedication, acknowledgments, and a vita may affect the tone because of the personal nature of the content. Anticipate, then, which elements to include in your writing project.

Draft Your Project

For most people, effective writing takes more than one attempt. When the message you wish to transmit is simple, your familiarity with the situation high, the consequences unimportant, and the length short, you may be able to draft a finished let-

ter or memorandum on the first try. However, as complexity, familiarity, consequences, and length change, you are more likely to draft and revise.

People approach drafting in different ways. For some, drafting is writing down main ideas, no matter how rough they may be, then adding lesser thoughts. Finally, these writers work on smoothness. Others place initial emphasis on careful word selection and sentence development, simply adding transitions by the completion of the finished draft. Few writers expect perfection after just one draft. There is no best approach. Stick with what works for you. Just keep in mind the main value of drafting: to start the writing process.

An initial and important decision has to do with organization of the information. Organization has various meanings. At one level, a message is organized if its main thoughts flow together well and it reaches its goal. (In Chapters 5 and 6 we will discuss this type of organization, in depth, from the viewpoint of direct and indirect message approaches. Because of this attention later, we discuss overall organization only superficially here.) Your first decision may well be whether to use

- Direct organization, when you expect little resistance from the reader; or
- Indirect organization, when the reader is not disposed to do as you suggest or does not want to read what you write.

As you select an organization or format, plan to outline your message. (Sample outlines appear in the Business Presentation chapter.) Many effective writers work from an outline of important topics because they know an outline saves time and is more likely to produce a smooth, flowing final product. As you draft an outline, try to include as many main thoughts as possible. Add lower-level ideas as they occur to you, but do not let them get in the way of your planning. As you revise and edit your outline, you can add such outlining principles as parallelism (such as starting each item with a similar part of speech) and having at least two subdivisions under each heading.

While outlining works well for many writers, it may stifle creativity or lock the writer into a set format. Some writers, therefore, benefit from looser drafting techniques aimed more at idea generation than organization. Among these techniques are listing random ideas and using free writing, brainstorming, creativity matrixes, or idea trees.

Hints for overcoming writer's block appear later in this chapter.

Revise, Edit, and Proof

Having prepared a draft, your next step is to polish it. Realize that many writers spend almost as much time editing as they apply to the drafting process. Often, allowing some time to elapse between drafting and revising permits fresh thoughts and a different perspective to emerge. This may be the stage where you send your draft to an immediate supervisor, colleagues, or a content specialist to seek suggestions. The approach to having more than one pair of eyes look at the draft is especially valued here. Check to ensure that the manuscript still solves your definition of the problem.

Check for good transitions from thought to thought. Lead thoughts, such as quantifying the points to follow (four main criteria affect the decision) facilitate numbering the points as they occur (second, next, then, or last). Help your reader

by supplying phrases that connect thoughts, such as when you show addition (furthermore, additionally), contrast (but, however, nevertheless, on the other hand), concession (as you've stated, I agree, admittedly), or conclusion (in summary, to conclude). You may also assist your reader by clarifying causation (because, therefore), comparison (likewise, similarly), explanation (in other words, to state differently), or example (such as, for example).

Additionally, worthwhile revision steps include seeking out clumsy words, typos, misspellings, and overly long sentences. Many computer software packages can assist with the tedious chore of finding these elusive errors. For example, you can use software to scrutinize for spelling errors, grammar, punctuation, style problems, and readability level. The grammar, punctuation, and style checkers help you spot many of the writing and typing errors that work against clarity, coherence, tone, and other attributes of effective writing. It is also helpful to use a computerized thesaurus. While these various packages cannot guarantee perfect spelling or word usage, they can help you identify common problems. Personally proofread to catch the correctly spelled but out-of-context errors (*there* for *their*). In the absence of software, elicit the help of people whose writing ability you respect.

Next, work on the organization of sentences, paragraphs, and the message as a whole. Is there an inherent logic to the entire manuscript? Does it flow smoothly within paragraphs and from section to section?

Depending on the goal of the message and the medium selected, such as an annual report, letter to all employees, procedure statement, or sales brochure, extensive review by others may be needed. Legal experts, technical content specialists, and editorial reviewers may be part of the revision cycle, as will your immediate supervisor, who reviews the work.

Because editing and revising your own work and the work of others is so important, you may wish to examine the edited paragraphs in Figure 4.1. The shaded text is new; the strikeouts show what would be omitted. While it maintains the integrity of the original message, the revision is briefer, clearer, and more active.

Many people who edit someone else's writing prefer to do so in a pencil-and-hard-copy mode and use widely accepted notation. Figure 4.2 shows some of this notation.

Produce the Finished Package

Final production may be the word processing of your manuscript or the sending of copy to a printer for design, layout, typesetting, and printing. Now may also be the time for you to confirm final layout and element decisions you made earlier. Perhaps you will use your computer to boldface text, switch among different typefaces or sizes, switch to multiple columns, or add bullets in front of items in a list.

Even today's low-cost word processors can deliver some features of desktop publishing, and the top-end word processors and desktop publishing programs have powerful control over the appearance of printed words. In addition to needing artistic understanding of style, balance, and unity, effective design and layout require knowledge of such elements as grid layout, headings, borders, columns, typography, white space, and graphics. Most desktop publishing and design guides stress the need to keep layouts simple, clean, and attractive while you are gaining

Figure 4.1 **Sample Editing**

Information Gathering

The ~~most important~~ **key** issues to ~~be addressed~~ **address** in negotiations should be ~~those sections of~~ the contract **sections** that surfaced most often ~~under the past contract~~ during ~~the contract~~ term. Typically, the negotiating teams ~~in the traditional environment~~ will ~~try to patch~~ **focus on** these areas ~~as a priority. What is critical is to gain~~ **Gaining** feedback from ~~the~~ management, ~~and~~ especially ~~the~~ first-line supervisors, ~~as to what~~ **concerning** areas they wish to modify **is critical**. Any issues ~~that are brought forward by~~ the ~~bargaining unit~~ employees ~~raised is~~ **are** also key to understanding ~~what is really expected~~ ~~of~~ the union negotiators' **role**.

The ~~single~~ most powerful resource ~~you can possess~~ in any negotiation is superior information. This ~~information~~ should be ~~then~~ blended with ~~similar input from~~ the union leadership's ~~relative to their~~ desires. Through parallel, **small group** sessions ~~of small group sensing~~ with management and union leadership, many key issues will surface (see Appendix A). ~~Additionally, those areas that are of common importance~~ **Common** concerns will also ~~become obvious~~ **emerge** and should ~~therefore gain a high~~ **command** **top** priority ~~for resolution. One should not rely on instincts when~~ **When** the long-term stakes are high, ~~for in the long run,~~ instincts are no match for accurate and accessible information.

Determining Causes and Effects

~~Once the assemblage~~ **After** a list of ~~contraeual~~ **contractual** problem areas ~~has been accomplished, it now requires an analysis for the causes of the undesirable effects~~ **has been compiled, analyzing why they created problems is the next task**. This process will help to ~~bring out~~ **emphasize** the issues that are ~~key to making significant gains in~~ **fundamental to** productive negotiation. ~~It is advantageous to facilitate a~~ **A** joint review ~~of~~ **by** human resources and line management **personnel will help** to ~~clarify and delineate what~~ **define the** action ~~are really~~ needed ~~for problem resolution~~ **to resolve problems**. If ~~it is a common issue with~~ the union **has similar concerns**, then ~~they should also be requested to clarify~~ their ~~understanding of the causal factors~~ **input** is also vital.

During this ~~activity it may become apparent that~~ **process** some ~~of the~~ earlier issues ~~brought about by the initial feedback is less important than was expressed~~ **may appear less significant**. These data should be set aside in a follow-up file for **last minute** review ~~prior to the beginning of~~ **before** negotiations **begin** ~~for any last minute concerns~~. They may be ~~of use~~ **useful later** ~~during negotiations if it arises during that time frame. Again, it noteworthy to remember that historical information gained must be accessible at all times. It is at this stage where~~ **Now** information sharing should ~~be initiated~~ **begin**. By distributing the information gained in the ~~sensing~~ **parallel, group** sessions, ~~the beginnings of collaboration and a trusting relationship~~ **mutual collaboration and trust** can ~~progress~~ **develop**. Openness and sharing also ~~facilitates the lowering of~~ **help to lower** barriers to communication that will benefit both parties ~~during the negotiation process~~ **in negotiations**.

Figure 4.2   **Common Correction and Proofreading Symbols**

Abv	faulty abbreviation	DM	dangling modifier	jar	avoid jargon
Awk	awkward	frag.	sentence fragment	SP	spelling error
cap	capitalize	⋀	insert	PV	passive voice
close up		MM	misplaced modifier	W	wordy
delete				WC	word choice

experience. Novices all too often clutter their layouts with the many variables under their control and end up damaging the appearance of their documents rather than enhancing them.

Conduct a Post-writing Evaluation

Now that you have transmitted the message, how would you change it? What mistakes did you make and what did you learn that will guide you in the future? Too many of us complete a major project only to shelve it in relief. However, before separating yourself from the project completely, review it to help guide you in the future. The time to conduct your evaluation is now, while the rationale for your decisions is fresh in your mind. Ask questions such as these: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript? Are there any unusual or unique aspects of the finished product that might be used again? How did others perceive the manuscript, and what suggestions did they make?

While you may proceed through all eight steps in the writing sequence, doing so does not guarantee effective writing. Effective writing has other characteristics.

Specific Writing Features

Effective writing is achieved when it has certain features. Your writing will be effective if it is organized, has appropriate tone, and is readable.

Organization

As we briefly discussed in the section above on drafting, organization can mean direct versus indirect order. A second form of organization has to do with the flow of words within and between sentences. Of particular interest are coherence and emphatic sentences.

Coherence

Coherence grows when sender and receiver perceive the transmitted thought in the same way. Unfortunately, often what we think we are sending does not resemble the interpretation by the receiver. Standard grammar often overcomes incoherences.

Using words such as *it, that,* or *this* at the beginning of sentences frequently leads to confusion about the word's referent. For example:

The value of the stock rose nine points and made over $2,000 for us. It was great! (Revision: The stock rise was great!)

A second grammatical contributor to incoherence is misplaced modifiers, such as in this sentence:

The subordinate had a phone call talking to his boss. (Revision: While talking to his boss, the subordinate had a phone call.)

A third incoherency grows from lack of clarity between multiple subjects followed by a singular pronoun, such as:

Seldom had Kristi experienced the friendship of a co-worker like Stephanie. She was delighted. (Revision: Kristi was delighted.)

Standard grammar often overcomes problems with indefinite meaning. Here is an example of such a problem:

His mother had worked the dough into a thin pizza crust with her own hands. Have you ever seen such smooth texture?

(Clarify: Did the crust or the mother's hands have the smooth texture?)

Emphatic Sentences

Your writing style can increase the emphasis of your messages. When you seek to add emphasis to specific sentences, consider these techniques:

- Put the action at the beginning of the sentence rather than bury it. "Dierdre proposed . . ." gets things moving; " . . . as proposed by Dierdre" does not.
- Build to a crescendo. "The three regions report improvements in sales of 12, 21, and 37 percent" accomplishes this goal.
- Place emphasis on important words and create memorable statements, such as "We try harder" or "Just point and click to shop our online catalog."
- Show causation. "Because of her timely investment, she quadrupled her profit" is more emphatic than reversing the two thoughts.

A growing practice related to emphatic writing is the use of visual emphasis in business messages, such as through boldface to make key words stand out. Direct mail advertisers and others have used this technique, usually with a sales orientation. Now authors of e-mail, letters, memos, and résumés are using the technique to add other forms of emphasis. In a résumé, for example, power verbs describing abilities, such as "reorganized and improved the department" or "cited for outstanding performance," might be boldfaced.

In addition to writing coherent and emphatic sentences, you will improve your sentences and paragraphs by having effective transitions, as described earlier in the discussion of revising, editing, and proofing.

Appropriate Tone

The second major characteristic of effective writing is appropriate tone. Three main ways of affecting tone are (1) writing with the *you* attitude, (2) using positive phrasing, and (3) avoiding tactless wording. Readers are egocentric. They like to read about themselves and to see references to themselves. Conversely, readers lose interest and attention when the topic turns to others. Business writing shares with direct-mail advertising the technique of personalizing messages to audiences to obtain a desired response. When you employ words such as *you*, *yourself*, or the person's name, you are using the *you* attitude. On the other hand, words such as *I, me, myself, our, we, us*, or the company's name illustrate the *I* attitude.

To view how detrimental the *I*-ish orientation can be, read Figure 4.3, which delivers the body of a cold contact letter from someone seeking tax work.

Consider how easy it is to remove most *I* references and to either replace them with, or to inject, *you* references; it is surprising that more writers do not follow the *you* attitude. Effective writers learn quickly the positive response that the *you* technique elicits.

Next read Figure 4.4 to see how the body of Figure 4.3 could be improved through *you*-ish tone alone. Although other improvements can still be made, the change in focus from author to reader helps this message.

Another level of the *you* attitude is more elusive but perhaps even more important. Beyond just the inclusion or exclusion of key pronouns is the goal of applying

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Figure 4.3   **Example of an *I*-Attitude Letter**

Dear Taxpayer:

We all are willing to pay our fair share of taxes, but we don't want to pay more than is necessary. I can help avoid taxes through my expert planning and preparation.

I have the experience, knowledge, and background to do your taxes. I also have a Ph.D. in accounting. My fees are competitive while my service is excellent.

I invite you to enjoy the personal and professional service that I'm known for. I will be sending you more information soon. Call me at 555-2121 to make an appointment with me. Do so before March 1 and receive a 10-percent discount.

Sincerely,

Figure 4.4   **Example of a *You*-Attitude Letter**

Dear Taxpayer:

You, no doubt, are willing to pay your fair share of taxes, but you don't want to pay more than is necessary. You can benefit by not paying unnecessary taxes by using my expertise in tax planning and preparation.

You will find I have the experience, knowledge, and background needed to best serve your individual needs. You'll also benefit from my Ph.D. in accounting when tricky accounting questions arise. These abilities are available to you at competitive fees that include excellent service.

Please call 555-2121 to make an appointment. You'll experience my personal and professional service that will help you avoid unnecessary taxes. And if you make an appointment by March 1, you'll receive a 10-percent discount.

Cordially,

the *you* attitude to make the message sound as if it is written to the reader, not sent by the author. A message prepared for the reader conveys sincerity, personalization, warmth, and involvement on the part of the author. It is these and other attributes that can bring about a positive reaction.[3] Positive versus negative phrasing also affects tone. If you regularly communicate negatively phrased thoughts, you project a negative and undesirable image of yourself. Most of us prefer to associate with winners and with those who hold an optimistic outlook. While the Pollyanna principle can be overdone, you are usually better off to transmit a message that the glass is half-full, not half-empty. Politicians, of course, are well known for seeing the bright side of things. Top-level managers, too, seldom associate themselves with losing ideas, projects, products, or people unless they must do so. Such associations can taint careers. Apply this philosophy—avoid the negative, seek the positive, phrase the negative from the positive viewpoint—to your business writing.

While you may think that negative situations call for negative phrasing, just the opposite is true. Unpleasant messages are only exaggerated by negative tone. A more desirable approach is to state the bad news as positively as possible. For example, compare these two sentences:

Your bid for the project was rejected.

We selected another firm for the project.

Both transfer negative information, but the second does so in a more appealing fashion.

A third way to affect tone is through tactful wording. Tactless writing offends the reader, perhaps by stereotyping, challenging intelligence, inappropriately referring to

religion or ethnic background, or using humor in poor taste. Tactful writers appreciate the delicacy of a situation and say the fitting thing.

Even though most businesspeople have learned to identify and avoid inappropriate ethnic references, many still need to have their awareness raised in regard to sexist language. For example, as the percentage of women in business and in executive positions increases, there are more women who dislike receiving letters addressed "Dear Sir" or being referred to as one of the girls. If you are using gender-specific language that is offensive to the reader, that language may work against you. The trend in U.S. business is away from sexist and other forms of discriminatory language.

Readability

A third major component in the writing process is making the writing readable. Readable writing builds on some of the concepts discussed above but adds additional dimensions: clarity, conciseness, parallel structure, and activity.

Clarity
Clear writing is coherent and avoids muddy, incorrect, overly complex phrases and jargon. Muddy phrases are those that cloud the issue or idea by using too many words or skirting the issue. Here are some examples of muddy phrases:

a number of	(use *many*)
at your earliest possible convenience	(use *soon*)
fullest possible extent	(use *fully* or *completely*)
it has come to my attention that	(omit)
it would be reasonable to assume	(use *I assume*)

Many nonstandard phrases are current in our language. Clear writing, however, shuns errors. Here are some examples of frequently used but nonstandard words and phrases. Although a dictionary may list them, they are not good usage.

irregardless	(use *regardless*)
enthused	(use *enthusiastic*)
impacted	(avoid; *impact* is a noun, not a verb)
interfaced	(avoid; *interface* is a noun, not a verb)
between (three items)	(use *between* when comparing two items)
among (two items)	(use *among* when comparing three or more items)
can't hardly	(avoid; double negative)
virtually	(means "essentially the same" and is not necessary)

Occasionally, people try to make their writing sound more impressive by adding to its complexity. Usually they fail in this attempt and detract from readability at the same time. Anyone who has taken a simple, direct sentence and looked up long, abstract substitutes knows the approach. Instead, try to use simple, familiar words. Here are a few examples:

as per this date	(use *today*)
attached hereto	(use *attached is*)
contact the undersigned	(use *write me*)
considerable magnitude	(use *large*)
inasmuch as	(use *because*)

utilize	(use *use*)
necessitates	(use *needs* or *requires*)
at the present time	(use *now*)
prioritize	(use *rank*)
it is worth remembering that	(use *remember*)

Jargon, too, can detract from readability. Within any organization there will be many buzzwords and acronyms. Sometimes using this jargon will simplify and shorten complex or lengthy terms; other times it will confuse or obscure meaning. For example, FIFO immediately means "first in, first out" to an accountant, but it may be meaningless to nonaccountants. Try to avoid jargon; if the receiver is not familiar with the jargon, it makes the reader feel like an outsider or as if he or she is being used to make the author sound intelligent. Ask yourself, "Am I using jargon that is appropriate to my audience?" If in doubt, avoid the jargon.

Conciseness

A second major determinant of readability is conciseness. Avoid wordy phrases and long, complex words; opt instead for short, familiar words. You can also improve conciseness by eliminating redundancies, such as:

the consensus of opinion	(use *the consensus* or *the opinion*)
the first and foremost	(use *the first* or *the foremost*)
over and over and over again	(use *over*)
near future	(use *future* or *soon*)
desirable benefits	(use *desirable* or *benefits*)
all in all	(omit)
in the week/month/year of	(omit)

You can also improve conciseness (and coherency) by avoiding oxymorons, combinations of two words with opposite or contradictory meanings. Here are some examples:

found missing
almost perfect
intense apathy
silent scream
old news
working vacation

Parallel Structure

Your reader or listener probably will be able to understand the point of your message when you do not employ parallelism—but when you do, your message will be more polished, readable, and professional. There are four main applications of parallelism: in lists, word pairings, series, and headings.

In lists—be they found on a transparency, computerized slide, or in a written report—items should be presented in grammatically parallel structure. Consider this brief list.

- Consider your audience
- Prepare your message
- In delivering your talk, think about nonverbal communication

The third item doesn't "match" the first two, which start with a verb. Perhaps the third item would start with "Think about. . . ."

In English, there are pairings of words that are usually delivered together, such as either/or, neither/nor, and not only/but also. When you use one part of a pairing, use the other as well. Further, place each part of the pairing at the beginning of its portion of the sentence. Here is a violation:

You are either the best employee in the department, or I am mistaken.

Here is the rewrite:

Either you are the best employee in the department, or I am mistaken.

Parallelism in a sentence that contains a series is important as well. Consider this sentence, which is not parallel:

At the grocery store I need to buy some potatoes, bread, and I'll get some milk.

To make this sentence parallel, remove the extraneous "I'll get some" so it reads:

At the grocery story I need to buy some potatoes, bread, and milk.

Here is another example:

The main duties of a supervisor are generating enthusiasm, providing guidance, and to ensure that workers come to work on time.

One rewrite among several parallel alternatives could be:

The main duties of a supervisor are generating enthusiasm, providing guidance, and ensuring that workers come to work on time.

Notice that the sentence could also be rewritten to employ infinitives: to generate, to provide, and to ensure.

Finally, use parallelism in delivering your headings and subheadings in reports and proposals. Much as with the items shown above in "Lists," use grammatically similar wording across headings and within headings.

Activity

You can make your writing more readable by using the active instead of the passive voice. The passive voice discourages the reader from becoming involved with your message. You can identify passive voice by finding a form of the verb *be* plus a past participle that often ends in *-n, -en, -t, -d*, or *-ed*. In your efforts to avoid passive voice, also try to use present tense; both aid readability. Here are some examples of passive and active voice:

Passive	*Active*
has been sent	I sent
it was discussed	we discussed
were brought by	someone brought
you were mailed a	I mailed you a
were studied by	someone studied

Sometimes passive voice is desirable, such as when you do not know who did the action (The electricity was installed in the plant about 1911), when you want

to bury the identity of the doer (The funds have been misappropriated), or when the action is more important than who did it (Corporate profits were increased 72 percent).

Readability Formulas

You may find the concept of readability—and even effective writing—to be elusive. Many scholars have tried to quantify readability; the outcome has been the creation of many readability formulas. Since the 1950s, when many such formulas were created, only a half-dozen or so viable formulas remain. The survivors are similar in that most attempt to measure prose through a ratio of difficult words or syllables to total words or sentence length. Some computer word processors include a readability tool that will calculate the approximate reading level of a piece of writing.

If you wish to use a readability formula to guide your writing, you should write at a level appropriate for your audience, or lower. Most of us prefer to read easy writing if it still conveys what we need to know and does not sound like the author is writing down to us. Readability formulas deserve a word of caution: While they can effectively guide you in matching your writing to the level of your audience, they can be imprecise, or overly mechanical, and may overlook important aspects of style and content. Use them to help catch problems, but take personal responsibility for the final output.

As you approach your writing and revising, seek a balance among the three main writing process considerations just presented: organization (including ways of organizing the entire message, coherence, and writing emphatically), tone (including *I* versus *you* attitude, positive and negative phrasing, and tactful writing), and readability (including clarity, conciseness, active voice, and reading ease).

Getting Writing Started

The assumption so far has been that once you know what you need to write, you can write it. Unfortunately, some people have very real problems getting started, and others start but have difficulty finishing. Here are some suggestions for increasing your writing output.[4]

1. Schedule a regular writing time and place. Then, when in that place, you will fall into the writing mood. Some people find the habit of writing at a certain time—but not necessarily a place—is all they need to enhance the process. Little changes from your regular routine will emphasize that here and now is the time and place to write. Change to a different desk. Alter the lighting. Select different music. Focus more on the periodic aspects of writing rather than on setting aside large blocks of time. Efficient use of 30 minutes a day may generate better results than setting aside a single three-hour period during which you tire or your mind wanders.

2. Set a writing goal. Pick a realistic goal, such as writing five double-spaced pages of draft in two hours. Modify your goal if you find you easily exceed it or have trouble achieving it. Try not to fall below your goal. If you are experiencing a good session, do not stop. If you must stop, jot down the ideas still in your mind to help to pick up in the same place. Review your progress periodically. You will be surprised how productive you can be.

3. Use a buddy system. Identify good writers and involve them in your writing. Find peers in your study group or people at your level in your organization who will be willing to assist you in the writing process. Be willing to help them. As you share ideas about each other's writing, all will benefit.

4. Overcome your writing blocks. Break large writing projects into small chunks. In writing your professional report, thesis, or other major academic writing project, work on and complete one chapter at a time. Then start on another chapter. Avoid writing several chapters at once. If you have trouble getting started, consider freewheeling. This process stresses writing something, no matter what, for a period of time. Then go back and revise and expand what you have created. If this approach does not work, try talking to a tape recorder to capture your thoughts. Conversations with others may help you, too.

5. Employ time-management concepts. Spend your time writing, not getting ready to write. Some people must first clean the desk, get out a favorite eraser, sharpen all pencils, and make other preparations. Instead, use this time to get ideas on paper or diskette. Rank your writing and work on the most important project first. Lay out a list each day of what you need to accomplish and start working on the first item.

Thus far this chapter has focused on when and how to write; we now turn to computer techniques that can enhance the writing process.

Electronic Writing Processes

Writing has two components: composition and transcription. Historically, in U.S. businesses, managers composed and secretaries transcribed. Managers may have started the process with dictation and asked for a typed rough draft. The revision process may have gone through several iterations and involved the editing of others before achieving a finished product. The personal computer (PC) has changed this process in several ways. First, those doing the keyboarding save time by inserting changes into an electronic file, which avoids retyping copy that is correct. They also quickly and easily make changes in appearance, such as adjusting margins or spacing.

Second, PCs have facilitated the transcription of many messages by their authors rather than by secretaries or administrative assistants. For an author who drafts on a PC, it may also be easier to make revisions and to print the finished product than to explain the desired changes to someone else. Research suggests that more employees at increasingly higher levels of management are keyboarding their drafts themselves. They also are increasingly manipulating text and data in spreadsheets, databases, and financial and accounting packages before they start a draft. Not long ago, these duties were assigned to the people in charge of the computers.

Computers can help you identify, search, record, organize, and modify relevant text. Computers can then help you write, edit, and revise your document. They can sharpen the skills discussed so far in this chapter—but they can never replace poor writing skills.

This next section shows you how computers can help you improve your writing output. The steps apply especially to longer writing assignments, such as a thesis,

grant proposal, feasibility study, or case study, but they also relate to short writing situations.

Writing Using a Computer

Your use of the electronic writing process will be dictated by the facilities, hardware, and software available. The following steps incorporate computer equipment available at most universities and at most businesses. The order of the steps is not absolute, and steps may be skipped. (Refer also to the section earlier in this chapter on using the computer and the Internet to do research.)

Step 1—Note-taking. Skeletonize your notes as you take them in the library (ideally on a laptop computer or personal digital assistant (PDA)). Use abbreviations, such as J. for *Journal.* Then, on your desktop computer, record the notes to a file. Next, use the word-processing feature called search and replace to search for each occurrence of *J.* and replace it with *Journal.* Do the same with your other abbreviations.

Step 2—Searching. Especially if you are writing a lengthy research paper or working on a long-term project at work, place your research data in a database. Put similar topics under one heading. Later, when you are writing, seek out that heading to see your sources. Careful entry of bibliographic information will almost eliminate typing a bibliography later.

A variation on using the computer to help with your research is the recent introduction of report-writing software. These packages help authors of especially complex reports, which may be periodic but whose data change, to generate reports without instructions on how to organize the report or what to include. The packages typically can search many database files, join the data into one file, and paste it in appropriate locations. Many users of these report writers note increased productivity.[5]

Step 3—Word-polishing. If your word processor doesn't have a built-in dictionary, load separate packages now. *The American Heritage Dictionary for Computers* has a "wordhunter" feature that helps you find the right word when you are stumped. What's the right side of a ship called? Type in *right, side,* and *ship* and get *starboard.* What is the name of the boat used on the canals of Venice? *Boat, canals,* and *Venice* yield *gondola.* Pronunciation question? Have the computer say the word to you.

Now also is the time to load stand-alone grammar- and style-checkers if your word processor doesn't have them. Be careful, however, of too much reliance on these checkers. Spell-checkers typically are unable to interpret context and therefore would not catch a misspelling such as "I have two left feat." Grammar-, style-, and punctuation-checkers have different capabilities; they seldom catch the same errors. You need to know the rules and then use checkers to help you uncover the problems. You, however, are the final editor.

Step 4—Outlining. Another valuable feature is an outliner, which may be a separate program or part of a word-processing package. Outliners allow you not only to outline your thoughts quickly but also to rearrange sections rapidly, change levels, and so on. Usually you can import text from other files to the outliner, and you can send the outline to other files.

Step 5—Changing defaults. Open your word-processing software. Do some setting up as you create your new file. This setup will enhance document appearance on your screen and layout later. These commands can alter the appearance on the screen and/or affect the printed output. Some word-processing software packages allow definition of a template or master page that automatically carries such information as margin widths, typeface, and size requirements for body and heading text, headers and footers, and page numbers to each page of the document. If your word processor can automatically correct typing errors, such as TWo INitial CApital letters, noncapitalized days of the week, or *don;t* for *don't* and *teh* for *the*, turn *♦* it on. Also, if available, turn on controls for widows (the first line of a paragraph that falls on the last line of a page) or orphans (the last line of a paragraph that appears at the top of a page). Decide whether your finished manuscript needs a table of contents or index, because it is best to start your writing with special instructions to prepare these elements.

For a professional look with little effort for long documents, make the right headers list the chapter number with the page number, such as *Page 4-19*, and format the left header to carry the title of the chapter, such as *Data Analysis*. Depending on the length, complexity, and formality of your document, you may also want to establish a template for your document. With a template, you can assign style treatments of titles, headings, subheadings, footnotes, and bibliographical entries in terms of centering, indentation, font family, size, and treatment (boldface, italic, and so on). Then, as you work within your document, if you need a subhead, you merely click on that style in your menu and the treatment is automatic. In addition to the time saved, you also now can automatically generate a table of contents of all levels of headings, and page numbers will show as well. Finally, you can save and name your template for future use. You might create alternative templates for reports, proposals, letters, and memos and they will always look consistent.

Step 6—Using multiscreens. If your word processor supports division of the screen into two or more parts (called windows), split your screen and place your outline in one window. Then start writing your draft in the other window. Split windows also work well for entering superscript numbers for citations with the text in one window and entering the footnote or endnote in the other window.

Consider creating a "fast draft." Research indicates that some writers are held back by watching the monitor as they draft. Turn down the brightness on your monitor so you cannot see any display, check that your fingers are on the right keys, and start typing. For some, this approach helps to get them started. Any errors can be cleaned up later.

Remember that when you draft, you do not have to start at the beginning of your manuscript. If you have outlined your report, you know where you are and where you are going. Often, starting some place other than the beginning is easier, more logical, or more desirable. Start anywhere you wish. Your computer will help you assemble the parts later and you can then add transitions.

Step 7—Searching and replacing. As you edit or revise, take advantage of the search-and-replace function of your word processor. Find a word you now realize you misspelled, such as *convence*, and replace it with *convince*. Most search-and-replace functions allow you to choose between individual decisions on each occurrence or an entire text search-and-replace.

Step 8—Linking. Data in your database can be transferred to another program—say a spreadsheet—for statistical analysis and graphical presentation. While these statistical-analysis and graphical-presentation steps should occur before you start writing, the results of the steps find their way into the manuscript initially as you draft and later as you revise. You can ask some "smart" word-processing software to realize you are updating data in a spreadsheet and to automatically bring that new data to the manuscript as you work on it over time. Some software will isolate the graphical presentation from the text portion.

Step 9—Adding attribution. Most word-processing software facilitates adding footnotes or endnotes. For example, a superscript number is inserted into the text and then the footnote or endnote is filled in for insertion at the correct location. Users can later add a new citation within the text and the other citations will renumber and reposition. Other software allows the user to switch among major citation styles, such as MLA or APA, in a single keystroke.

Step 10—Using e-mail. E-mail has moved from being a convenience for a few people to a necessity for most people. According to Hamilton, e-mail ranks with the printing press, telephone, and television in mass impact.[6] Just a decade ago hard-copy letters and memos were the primary written medium for most businesspeople. Today, receiving 25, 50, or even 100 e-mail messages a day is not uncommon. Growing out of the three-billion-plus e-mail messages a day is the ten-year prediction of 1,000 e-mail messages per person.[7]

E-mail is much quicker to deliver, cheaper to send, and more formal in perception than hard-copy messages such as letters and memos. Unfortunately, the widespread use of e-mail has allowed many to become lazy. Business letters and memos in hard copy were expected to be letter perfect; e-mail messages, however, often contain spelling and grammar errors. Even worse, we seem to be growing complacent about these errors.

For all the many benefits of using e-mail, authors still must judge when an alternative medium would be more appropriate. Where, for example, would you "draw the line" and not use e-mail exclusively in the examples below?

1. Announce that part of the parking lot will be out of use for the next three days.
2. Congratulate a subordinate for a success and share the message with the department.
3. Ask a group of subordinates, peers, and superiors to let you know their availability for a meeting next Thursday or Friday.
4. Send a message of inquiry to a company to see if they have job openings.
5. Apply for a job and include your résumé as part of the message.
6. Send a formal thank-you message to a person who had publicly bestowed an honor upon you.

E-mail messages can also overlap with ethical and legal considerations. While we may think that we discard or erase our e-mail messages, many businesspeople are learning to their dismay that presumably deleted messages can have a long life. Retrieved messages have been used to show company harassment against employees, for example. Microsoft chairman Bill Gates's e-mail containing the sentence, "Do we have a clear plan on what we want Apple to do to undermine Sun?" stands

as an example of how high up in an organization a retrieved message can be found.[8]

Apply these ten steps to your writing projects and you will see, with a little experience, substantial improvements in the speed with which you write, the quality of that writing, the quantity of output, and the appearance of the finished product.

Because good etiquette in business and social settings enhances the communication exchange, and because rules for electronic etiquette are still emerging, you may wish to review the suggestions found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2	Suggestions for Electronic Etiquette*

e-mail	Avoid words all in capital letters; in e-mail it is the equivalent of shouting.
	Do, though, use appropriate initial capitalization, such as proper names and start of sentences. To disregard capitals appears lazy.
	Avoid writing things you may regret if seen by other than those anticipated. Most e-mail is not confidential.
	Proofread your message before sending it, because few e-mail messages are printed first and then proofread, spell-checked, or grammar-checked.
	Avoid sarcasm and satire: They don't translate well over e-mail.
	Use urgent, priority, or receipt-requested judiciously—only when necessary.
	Don't overload or intrude by "dumping" long articles or questionnaires that haven't been asked for.
	If a message is unusually long, warn your reader early so he or she can decide how to handle it.
	Respond quickly, but after you have had time to consider your response.
	Use valuable, descriptive subject lines, because recipients may decide whether to read your message based on them.
	Ensure the message is relevant to your audience. Because it is so easy to send a message to multiple receivers, people often send messages that are of no interest or value to some on the distribution list.
	Be watchful of your tone. People tend to be harsher with e-mail messages than when face-to-face.
	Don't write in anger. Put your response aside for a day or two and then send it if you still feel the same way.
	If sending a message to a large number of people, put that list in the blind-carbon-copy (bcc) line and send the message to yourself. Then they see the message only, not the list.
	Be judicious in keeping preceding message as part of new messages.
	Use abbreviations such as "LOL" for "laughing out loud," or emoticons, such as 0-: or the ubiquitous "smiley face" only with close friends or family.
	Don't forward chain letters or the joke-of-the-day to a list of friends.
	Keep signature lines brief; four lines is the upper limit for most people.
	Be careful when you forward messages. The new recipient(s) may not know the context of the original message, you may unintentionally embarrass someone, or you may be creating an undesired paper trail.

Desktop Publishing

Desktop publishing, which uses computers to design and prepare camera-ready copy, facilitates this gathering of text and nontext (such as graphics) and then shows the page on a screen as it would appear when printed. The finished product can look quite professional and be relatively inexpensive. See Figure 4.5 for an example of how desktop publishing software can manipulate graphic images. Figure 4.6 illustrates how text can flow around a graphic image through the power of desktop publishing.

voice mail	State your name clearly at the beginning of your message. Spelling it out is valuable for anyone who speaks quickly, doesn't enunciate, or has a name spelled in an unexpected way.
	Share the main point of the message early. This gives the listener a framework upon which to "hang" your comments.
	Give your phone number(s) next, clearly and slowly. Include when you are available.
	Next, give details, if necessary, regarding the message.
	Keep your message as brief as possible.
	Be sure to give the time of day and date of your call.
	Answer your voice-mail message quickly. Some experts recommend writing down your response before returning the call to ensure you know what you want to say before you say it.
fax	Do not tie up the receiving fax machine for long periods of time.
	Do not send junk faxes (of potentially little interest) to lengthy distribution lists.
	Do not send private messages over organization fax lines.
	Call first before sending a long fax or send it after hours.
	Don't use faxes for personal notes of thanks, congratulations, or condolence.
	Unless specifically requested to do so, don't bother sending your resume by fax unless you don't want the job.
cellular phones and pagers	Unless absolutely necessary, don't use them in public places.
	Don't use phones in restaurants, theaters, concerts, or church.
speaker phone	Use only for conference calls; ask permission of the other person before turning on the speaker phone.

* For additional information about cell-phone etiquette, see http://www.csuchico.edu/plc/e-etiquette.html, http://www.cellmanners.com/index2.htm, http://www.bizforum.org/etiquette.htm, http://www.10meters.com/manners_tips.html, or "A Sharper Image: Young Workers Get Back to the Basics of Business Etiquette," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 17, 2002, p. E-8. See also A. Sabath, *Business Etiquette, 2d ed.* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2002).

A: The original

B: Pulled horizontally

for
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for
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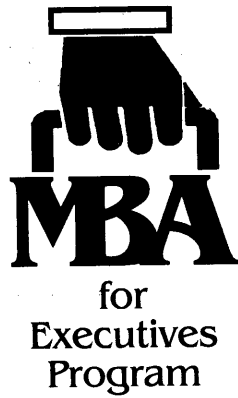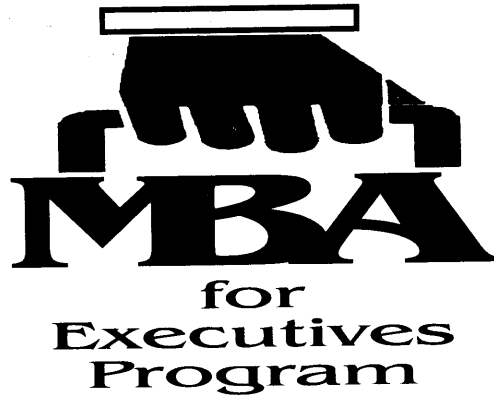
C: Pulled vertically

D: Selecting part of the original

for
Executives
Program

Source: Logotype courtesy of MBA for Executives Program, San Diego State University.

To customize the shape of an existing graphic boundary:

❶ Select the graphic to display the graphic boundary.

Graphic handle

Graphic boundary

Graphic boundary handle

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud lamcorper sus— ut aliquip ex consequat. eum iriure do- in 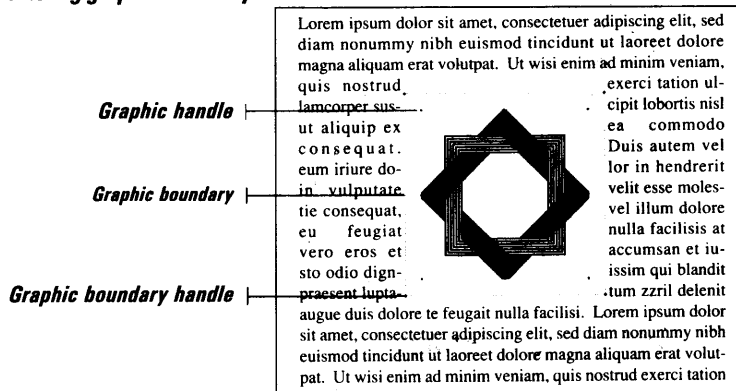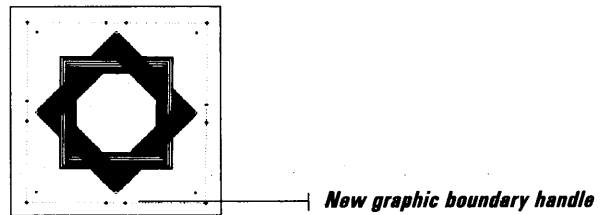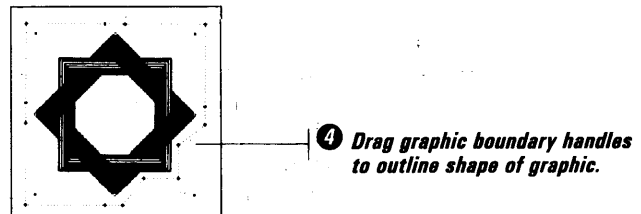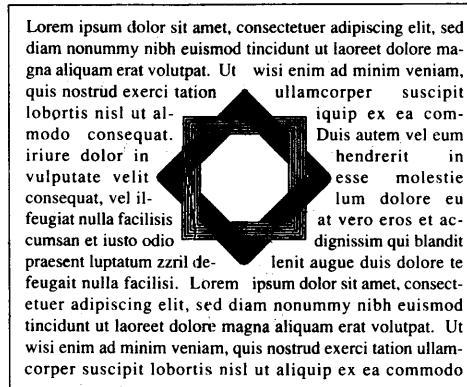vulputate tie consequat, eu feugiat vero eros et sto odio dign- praesent lupta- exerci tation ul- cipit lobortis nisl ea commodo Duis autem vel lor in hendrerit velit esse moles- vel illum dolore nulla facilisis at accumsan et iu- issim qui blandit .tum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volut- pat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation

❷ Create new graphic boundary handles as necessary by clicking boundary.

New graphic boundary handle

❸ Drag the handles to change the shape of the boundary. To keep PageMaker from reflowing text until you have finished reshaping a graphic, hold down the spacebar while you drag the graphic handles. The text will reflow when you release the spacebar.

❹ Drag graphic boundary handles to outline shape of graphic.

❺ The text flows around the customized graphic boundary.

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Multimedia Presentations

A final computer technology that involves communication and is becoming a major application area is multimedia presentations. These computer programs can combine graphics, text, colors, animation, picture blends and dissolves, high-resolution photos, and sound to generate dazzling sales pitches and brilliant proposals. They can appear as a slide show on a computer, include video clips with motion, and incorporate interactive features for the viewer to respond to. They often use CD-ROM and stereo sound. Multimedia has uses in education, training, advertising, retail merchandising, and public access in addition to its obvious business presentation uses.

Two more important writing concepts are emerging with ever-changing technology: collaborative writing and international communication.

Collaborative Writing

For years some businesspeople have co-authored text, edited each other's writing, and worked on the same projects concurrently. As they did so, they learned that there are as many different ways of writing as there are facets to interpersonal behavior. Within a writing team there may be different approaches to writing (each person does a part versus all work together on all), hierarchical influences, ability and knowledge differences, time or job pressures, and various political effects. Sometimes the output of collaborative writing is a beautifully crafted message that is the result of team synergy, balanced abilities, a common goal, and plenty of effort. Often, however, the result pits writers against each other, takes too much effort, lacks seamless writing, and is at the level of the lowest contributor, not the group average or the highest contributor. Writing collaboratively can be challenging.

However, computers and computer networks can enhance this process. Because using computers for collaborative writing can increase quality and quantity and improve decision making, writing with others is becoming commonplace.

Collaborative writing goes well beyond trading diskettes containing text files. Today, group-oriented software tracks changes to files and records who made the changes. Queries to others can be implemented, and reactions to proposed alterations can be shared. Some software will allow any number of writers, all writing on one document at the same time if they wish, to generate a group document. They can include text and voice-based instant messaging, text chat, and threaded discussion, and can share files, pictures, and other documents.[9] Using e-mail to transmit attached documents is a common way of sharing manuscripts. Other hardware and software will permit many participants at one time, at multiple locations, at individual PCs, to brainstorm a topic, share reactions, statistically chart members' deviations from the group, and make a record of all comments.

Collaborative writing is enhanced when most of these conditions are true:

- All authors are equally competent with the hardware and software.
- Each author's contribution can be tracked.
- Each revision is shown along with the original, and the author making the change is identified.

- Authors realize that not all authors need to work on the document at once.
- Authors can add comments and questions to other authors.
- Authors work well together and are willing to give and receive constructive criticism.
- Authors meet agreed-upon deadlines.
- All authors agree upon the goal of the writing assignment from the outset.

Both academic writing experts and business practitioners see collaborative writing as a technique that will increase in value. Today's advanced business writer needs to be aware of the move toward this writing process.

International Communication

We discussed briefly in Chapter 1 that communication across cultural boundaries is becoming increasingly important. Indeed, Victor states that "the ability to compete in the world economy is arguably the single greatest challenge facing business at the end of the twentieth century."[10] Tung adds, "With the globalization of the world economy, it is imperative that managers, both present and future, be sensitive to differences in intercultural business communication."[11] To this Victor adds, "Few things, in turn, are more important in conducting business on a global scale than skill in communication."[12] Victor sees seven main variables in international communication: language, social organization, contexting, authority conception, nonverbal behavior, temporal conception, and environment and technology. Of these factors, the last is changing most quickly and making the greatest impact.[13]

Communicating internationally has always been a slow or expensive proposition. Letters were slow, long-distance phone rates were exorbitant, and time-zone differences were inconvenient. Today's technological innovations are fixing these constraints. E-mail delivers inexpensive messages quickly throughout the world.

When you employ international e-mail, be aware that people of other countries and cultures are likely to have differing views from yours on such items as formality, length, format, and tone of an e-mail message.

These e-mail messages are often limited to text, though attachments to e-mail contain color, files, or pictures. Facsimile (fax) machines, on the other hand, send and receive any black-and-white image, including drawings, handwriting, and graphics. Even the price of color fax machines is decreasing rapidly. Part of the reason for the heavy use of fax machines at the international level is that the price of a long-distance phone call, which carries the fax message, is decreasing. Such relatively new technologies as fiber optics and satellite transmissions help bring the price of a five-minute morning phone call from California to Japan to $5.40.

As U.S. businesses continue to seek out international markets, international branches, and foreign business partners, and as technology continues to make communication less expensive, quicker, and easier, one can see why international communication is such an important topic. Most business schools are readjusting their curriculum to include global trade, and international communication is a major element of that interaction.

Summary

Advanced writing calls on many skills. At the composition level, you will need awareness of the writing sequence, from defining the problem through performing a post-writing evaluation. You will also employ techniques that relate directly to writing. For example, organized writing follows some logical approach to the goal of the message, is coherent, and uses emphatic style efficiently. Another skill involves applying appropriate tone through such techniques as the *I* versus *you* attitude, positive phrasing, and tactful wording. Skill is also needed to write readable text; attention to writing with clarity, conciseness, and activity influences readability.

To make the most of your time, follow the suggestions for efficient writing, which include some time-management principles. Conducting research electronically is both time-efficient and powerful; knowledge of this skill can produce thorough research results with ease. Further, the electronic writing process can dramatically influence the quality and quantity of your output. By using shortcut techniques, selected software, and the power of the computer, you can enhance the transcription level of advanced writing.

In addition to the process of writing, the advanced business writer needs to be aware of how technology is affecting communication and business through collaborative writing and international communication, as well as the potential dangers of violating electronic etiquette.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the most commonly used electronic research tools? When you enter the same words into several search engines, do you get the same results? What is the relationship between an engine and the number of hits it generates?
2. What is the sequence of writing from beginning to end of a long, complex message? Do you start "small," such as with word choice, and move toward "large," such as overall organization, or vice versa? Does it depend on the person, the topic, or some other factor?
3. What are the different ways a computer and software can facilitate collaborative writing? Are some methods better than others?
4. How far does editing go? When is it easier to just rewrite someone else's message? At what point do her or his feelings become an issue when you are doing extensive editing?

Communication in Action

1. In society, having good manners is desirable, and violating social norms should be avoided. The same is true in business. Form a student group and assign the following items to group members. Have them conduct this mini-research assignment and then report back to the group. Discuss the results.
   a. Walk around campus or work and observe cell-phone use. Where and under what conditions are people using cell phones?

    b. Examine some of your recent e-mail messages. What violations of business etiquette do you see?

    c. Listen carefully to voice-mail messages on your phone. How well do the people follow the suggestions for phone voice-mail etiquette?

    d. Of a typical group of e-mail messages that accumulate when you have not logged on for a while, determine how many are "spam" that have little to do with you or your job. How did the senders get your address? What do the messages seek? How to resolve the danger of opening messages from unknown sources?

2. Using as many of the six electronic databases discussed on page 100 as your institution has available, search for articles by the well-known management professor Peter Drucker. How did the results compare for the various databases? What do you conclude from this?

3. Divide a writing project, such as a group report, among group members so that each person writes a section using the same word-processing program. Give each team member a hard copy of each section for editing. Unite the sections into one document. Working together on the same computer, edit and smooth out the flow so the document has consistent tone and coherency. Evaluate the document against the writing skills described in the chapter.

4. Discuss with your classmates how you would go about searching for information for the following items:

    a. A map of your state taken from space

    b. Quotes relative to the value of information by Thomas Jefferson

    c. An audio clip of Richard Nixon relative to criminal activity

    d. Information on how to put together a crisis management plan

    e. Three years of financial performance by company number 23 out of this year's Fortune 500

    f. The highest and lowest elevations for the 42nd state to join the Union

    g. The latest scholarly article on communication apprehension

    h. The ethnic breakdown of the freshman class at your university for last fall

5. Use whichever electronic or other sources you wish to track down a word that means "every fourth year." How long did it take you to find the answer? Where did you find it?

@ Internet

6. Using an Internet search engine, see what information you can find on collaborative writing software. Then, research the capabilities of the software. What are the similarities and differences of the software?

7. You are considering opening a motorcycle business in some location north of Denver, Colorado, and south of Laramie, Wyoming. Those cities have motorcycle shops that carry the same brand of motorcycle you are thinking of selling. As part of the research you are conducting that will become an element of your written business plan, determine the population size and

annual income of residents found between the two cities and in those two states.

8. Some companies develop a style manual for their employees to answer usage questions, help with frequent questions, and enhance achieving a common appearance to company documents. Search the web for such manuals. Compare them on length and topics.

InfoTrac

9. Search for scholarly journal articles for the topics *I* tone, *you* tone, *I* attitude, and *you* attitude. Compile the articles, read them, and prepare a synthesis of this literature regarding the topic.

10. Your job includes working on the corporate newsletter for employees. You have been given the assignments of preparing articles on the following topics:
    a. writing process. Using InfoTrac, find articles on this topic and see how much they agree. What are the major steps in the process?
    b.   specific articles on SEC policy. What can you find?
    c. the plain-English movement. What is it, and where is it going?

11. As an employee of a global organization, you have been asked to prepare a handbook for American employees who travel to some of the international locations of the company. You plan to include a section on cultural differences and expectations for Japan, Spain, and Turkey. Use InfoTrac as your research method.

12. To add visual effect to your writing, you want some fresh suggestions and examples of it. Search for that type of emphasis along with writing emphatic sentences. What does the current literature have to say about the practice?

13. You often listen to KPBS (89.5) radio's "A Way With Words" program on Sundays. You have noticed the two hosts, who are experts on words and their usage, seem to know answers to every question readers ask them. They often discuss types of words, spellings, confusions, misuses, and origins. It occurs to you there are many ways of looking at words, but you would like some overarching resource of the study of words, such as a taxonomy. Search the InfoTrac articles to see if you can find a taxonomy of word usage.

Notes

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5. DelRossi, A. (1993, September 27) SQL report writers collect information from your database and make it presentable. *Infoworld*, pp. 83–95.

6. Hamilton, J. O. (1999, October 4) Like it or not, you've got mail. *Business Week*, pp. 178–184.

7. Hamilton, Like it or not, p. 184.

8. Hamilton, Like it or not, p. 184.

9. Groove Workspace software. Retrieved May 30, 2002, from http://www.groove.net/ products/all/workspace/comparison.html.

10. Victor, D. A. (1992). *International business communication*. New York: Harper-Collins, p. xiii.

11. Tung, R. L. in Chaney, L. H., & Martin, J. S. (2000). *Intercultural business communication* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, p. ix.

12. Victor, *International business communication*, p. xiii.

13. Victor, *International business communication*, p. 14.

Writing Direct Messages

Written business messages vary in directness. For instance, most congratulatory messages should be direct. In terms of directness alone, you may wish to start with your main idea (such as congratulations). In other cases, such as in most persuasive messages, you may work up to your primary thought carefully by preceding it with other information; this is an indirect organization. You should consider your message's goal and your audience, among other things, as you select between the two organizations or pick a different approach altogether.

While many messages clearly fall into either the direct or indirect categories, others do not. Examples of those messages that do not fit the direct or indirect organizations are messages that combine aspects of both, such as those that place the main point at both the opening and closing, and messages that are neither, such as those that have more than one main thought. This book uses the term *situational message* for those messages that do not overtly apply the direct or indirect approaches.

The purpose of Chapters 5, 6, and 7 is to discuss the writing of direct messages (Chapter 5), indirect messages (Chapter 6), and situational messages (Chapter 7). Of the three, Chapter 7 is probably the most important for advanced writers for three reasons: because many messages are situational; because complex audience analysis and message skills are involved; and because the higher the writer is in the organizational hierarchy, the more likely this category of message will be required. But because the logic behind preparing many situational messages grows from concepts associated with direct and indirect organizations, we will explore those approaches first. In this chapter, we will examine message formats briefly and then turn to writing direct messages.

Message Formats

Once you delete the inside addresses, attention lines, or dates, the bodies of letters, memoranda, and e-mails are organized in much the same manner. Further, as electronic message systems such as e-mail continue to pervade the business environment, content receives more emphasis than does appearance. For these reasons, this book does not differentiate between direct organization letters, direct organization memoranda, or direct organization e-mail messages. Most companies will dictate the desired format for their letters and memoranda. However, if you are in

letter and Figure 5.3 for a memorandum.

While the preparation of the bodies of mem... differences between the three do exist. Mem... more quickly than letters. Their ... important information for the reader and creates a ... visual impact. A Recommendation section may lead off a memorandum to quickly clarify its goal.

Another approach to writing direct memoranda is the simplified format, which delivers three main sections: *Facts, Discussion,* and *Recommendations.* As an internal, brief, and focused message for the busy executive, this order of information presents background, interprets it, and draws a logical recommendation for action. Although building to the recommendation suggests an indirect orientation, the straightforward delivery and short length, coupled with no intention to hide or manipulate the recommendation, identify this message as plainly direct. Do not confuse direct and indirect message organizations with deductive and inductive logic, which involve working from the general to specific concepts or from aiming at the general by examining the particulars, respectively. See Figure 5.1.

E-mail and memoranda tend to be rather informal, internal messages that use a format different from that of a letter; they also vary in length and distribution. While letters are usually only one page, memoranda and e-mail range in length from one or two sentences to many pages. Memoranda often are distributed to entire departments or groups, while letters typically go only to certain individuals. E-mail messages carry the additional distinction of being able to have attachments, such as electronic letters, scanned images, pictures, or audio or video clips.

One aspect of a message's format is its length. Hard-copy business letters are typically short; one page is the norm. Memoranda may be quite short—a single paragraph is acceptable—or many pages in length. E-mail messages should be brief, ideally about one screen total. However, they may be multiple screens, they may have attachments that extend the message, and as they get tossed back and forth among multiple viewers who keep prior messages, they can become quite long.

Of the three media, letters are perceived as most formal; thus, certain messages should always be delivered by letter. Before you can prepare effective written messages you must be aware of the available approaches, the reasons for their organization, and the appropriate occasion for each.

The Direct Approach

In the direct approach, the sender's primary goal agrees with the receiver's primary goal: What is foremost in the mind of the recipient is what the author most wishes to transmit. The direct approach immediately and clearly presents your main or most important thought. Additional thoughts follow by order of importance.

Substantial research exists to support the logic of the direct approach. For example, decades ago McGuire found that presenting desirable information first, followed by less desirable information, produces more change than would presenting information in the reverse order.[1] Janis and Feierbend also have found that when a message has both positive and negative content, the positive content should appear first.[2]

Figure 5.1 | **Simplified-Format Sample Memorandum**

To: Senior Management
From: Jonah Iverson, CFO
Date: September 1, 200X
Subject: Illegal access of employees' records

Facts
On August 14, the payroll software database maintained by Ace Consultants for our employees was accessed illegally. We learned of the "hacking" of the system yesterday when Ace conducted their normal system analysis.

Discussion
The employees' records include social security records, addresses, and payroll information, such as various deductions. A review of the database shows no damage to or modification of the data, and we believe there was no malicious intent to destroy the data. Individual bank account information for employees is not part of the file. Names may have been copied, but no other data were copied.

The computers holding the database were immediately taken offline, and were thoroughly examined for corruption. New, more-extensive firewalls have been added to the security protection system.

Recommendations
A letter from me to all employees, as well as the same message on the company Intranet, will go out this afternoon. Please do what you can to minimize concern among employees and ensure them that their personal data have not been harvested, and that we have taken appropriate steps to avoid future hacking.

Some writers enjoy building up to the delivery of the most important information. However, while this indirect approach may be rewarding to the author, it is frustrating to the reader and does not evoke as beneficial a reaction as the direct approach. Three main categories of information that can be delivered with the direct organization are:

1. Positive information, which pleases the reader.
2. Neutral information, which may not elicit either a positive or negative reaction but which may have strong information value.
3. Negative information, which the reader will not want to read.

Assumptions about your audience and your tone are likely to vary with these three categories. Therefore, we shall review each category individually.

Delivering Positive Information

When you have only positive information to present, rank your information with the most positive first, followed by the next most positive, and so on. Work your way down to the least positive details.

When reading the most positive information first, the reader encounters the next thought in a more receptive mood. Assuming the second thought is the second most positive comment, these thoughts combine to place the reader in an even more favorable frame of mind for the third thought, and so on. This cumulative effect helps the reader receive the message with a better overall reaction than would be derived from an indirectly organized message.

Because substantial positive feelings can reflect well on the sender, you should make optimal use of this message category. You can achieve even more benefit by using direct statements that follow a subject/verb–first organization, selecting active voice, picking present tense, using strong verbs, organizing sentences for emphasis, and involving the reader through the use of the *you* tone. One example of such a message:

> Congratulations! Your proposal for the restructuring of the R&D team is right on target. You saw the heated personality conflicts sooner and more clearly than anyone else. We're adopting your proposal effective immediately.

The positive messages you deliver will vary greatly from extremely positive (You're hired!) to only slightly positive (Here's our regular quarterly parts order for the usual items). The more positive your information is, the more positive and strong your language should be, and vice versa.

With positive-content messages, the most difficult writing steps are (a) correctly ranking the importance of the various items from the reader's viewpoint; (b) omitting extraneous information; and (c) writing transitions from thought to thought.

Business messages that typically provide positive information include those granting requests, announcing favorable information, extending credit, showing gratitude, and accepting or sending invitations. See Figures 5.2 and 5.3 for additional examples.

Delivering Neutral Information

Neutral messages can carry information of equal or even higher importance than positive messages, but their emotional content and involvement are usually lower. Order acknowledgments, inquiries, requests for credit information, personnel evaluations, and compliance with requests can be neutral messages. The distinction between neutral and positive messages is open to interpretation: One person may see the information as positive while another perceives it as having so little positive information as to place it in the neutral camp. The perception by the receiver, not the sender, is crucial.

Use the direct approach with neutral messages. Instead of placing the most positive information at the top, however, report the most important information first. Smooth transitions from thought to thought will be necessary for coherence. Occasionally, you will need to place the less-important information earlier in the message to avoid illogical or awkward construction. For example, you may need to

Figure 5.2   **Example of an Effective Positive Information Letter**

The Computer Source
278 Electronics Avenue
La Costa CA 93008
February 12, 200X

Jorge Hernandez, President
Chips and Stuff, Inc.
1093 Upper Knob Drive
San Francisco CA 96060

Dear Mr. Hernandez:

Thank you for your recent bid to supply us with 100 GB Ultra DMA/100
hard drives; we have decided to accept it. Yours was the lowest bid we
received, and we very much want you to sign the enclosed contract
pertaining to supply of these drives.

You may be interested to know that you are being awarded this contract
not only because of your competitive pricing, but even more because of
the availability of these 100 gigabyte units. These drives are crucial to us,
and your competition would not guarantee delivery within 30 days on
orders of 1,000 units, as you do.

This new business venture should be rewarding for both of us. We look
forward to developing a close working relationship with you and to
many mutually beneficial contracts. Please sign and return the contract
by March 1.

Cordially,

Hans Sturgeon

Hans Sturgeon
President

HS/gw
Enc.: contract

discuss your firm's recent name change before you request an extension of credit.
Figure 5.4 illustrates an effort to organize the most important facts first while still
incorporating the needed yet unimportant facts as transitions.

You are likely to write many neutral internal messages to accompany other writ-
ten information. These messages often are transmittal messages. Letters and memo-
randa transmit reports, illustrations, internal proposals, and other data from sender
to receiver. They briefly explain the content of and reason for transferring the data.

INTEROFFICE MEMO

To: All Employees
From: Quentin Harris, Senior Vice President
Subject: Appreciation
Date: November 23, 200X

Yesterday, Francine Smith, management consultant with Long Beach Management Consultants, won the coveted Consultant of the Year award from her national association. Please join us in extending our appreciation and congratulations by signing the 2' x 3' congratulations card that we will send her on Tuesday. The card is in the reception area.

Francine has spent the last 11 months, as most of you know, reviewing our structure, financial position, and movement toward our goals. Her recommendations have been insightful. The restructuring has improved production and accountability, our profits are on the rise, and we're now moving aggressively toward our corporate goals.

Sh-sh-sh-sh! Please keep this quiet. She doesn't know we are sending her the card.

In some cases, they summarize the conclusions or recommendations of the report. These messages usually end with an offer of availability for questions. Chapter 9 discusses transmittals. As mentioned above, e-mail messages can carry attachments, such as reports or proposals. While it might be inappropriate to send an e-mail message with a formal proposal attached in response to a Request for Proposal, this process might be quite efficient and desirable for circulating the draft of the proposal internally among co-authors.
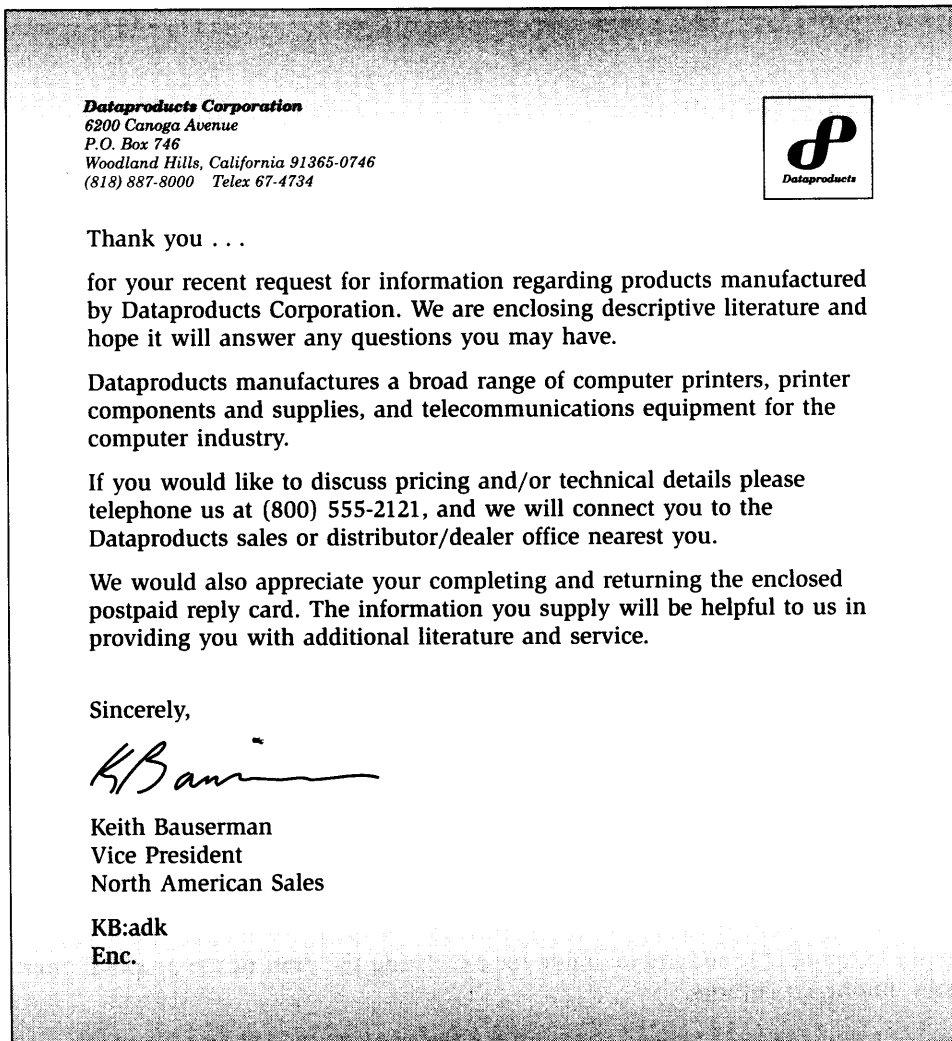
Delivering Negative Information

A decision that is often difficult is whether to use a direct or indirect organization to carry information with negative content. Do you agree with these views?

1. "I'll bet I've received 20 job rejection letters this semester. At first I appreciated the gentle letdown, but now I just wish they'd tell me the bad news up front."

2. "Sure, I want the contract. I also know from the return address who the letter is from and, therefore, the general topic. So just tell me: Did I get the contract?"

3. "Don't try to placate me. I'm a grown person. I don't need a wishy-washy indirect opening. Get to the subject. That's the way I like to be handled."

| Figure 5.4 | Example of a Direct Neutral Message |

Dataproducts Corporation
6200 Canoga Avenue
P.O. Box 746
Woodland Hills, California 91365-0746
(818) 887-8000   Telex 67-4734

dP
Dataproducts

Thank you . . .

for your recent request for information regarding products manufactured by Dataproducts Corporation. We are enclosing descriptive literature and hope it will answer any questions you may have.

Dataproducts manufactures a broad range of computer printers, printer components and supplies, and telecommunications equipment for the computer industry.

If you would like to discuss pricing and/or technical details please telephone us at (800) 555-2121, and we will connect you to the Dataproducts sales or distributor/dealer office nearest you.

We would also appreciate your completing and returning the enclosed postpaid reply card. The information you supply will be helpful to us in providing you with additional literature and service.

Sincerely,

Keith Bauserman
Vice President
North American Sales

KB:adk
Enc.

Source: Reproduced with permission from Dataproducts Corporation.

You probably can see some logic in these views. The problem for the writer is that most people do not feel these ways all the time. Many people prefer all job rejection letters, contract denials, and negative information to follow an indirect order. Your challenge, then, is to decide:

1. Does this information or occasion justify a direct approach?
2. Does this person prefer a direct approach?
3. Is this a routine message, one that is "business as usual"?

If your answer to all three questions is yes, use the direct approach. If the answer to any one of these three questions is no, pick the indirect approach. If you are unsure of the answers, you are probably safest with the indirect approach because inappropriately using the direct organization can create strong antagonism toward the author and the author's business.

Inappropriate use of the indirect organization, on the other hand, may cause the reader some frustration but is unlikely to bring about extreme negative reactions. (More discussion of the indirect approach appears in Chapter 6.)

Prepare your negative messages that follow the direct organization with these thoughts in mind:

- Place the negative information first because you assume it is the most important information to the reader. Do not try to gloss over the bad news.
- Deliver the negative information gently. The passive voice may be appropriate. Use some finesse. Be tactful. Do not dwell on the bad news.
- Give reasons that support the decision, if possible. Avoid saying that you are sorry; instead, let the rationale of the decision work for you. Give selected details but do not pass the buck or blame company policy.
- Try to include some positive information, particularly at the end.
- Sound sincere. Insincere-sounding messages, especially carrying the negative information, can be destructive.
- Work for continued goodwill.

Accomplishment of this last objective may take the form of describing what you have done to avoid similar problems in the future, offering personal attention to the customer, or providing some free service or replacement. See Figure 5.5 for an example of an effective negative message that uses direct organization.

Additional Direct Negative Message Considerations

Sometimes you will want to use the direct negative approach, such as when writing to friends who might be offended by an indirect approach. Here is an example:

You're a good friend, but I still need payment for the money I loaned you last month so you could take advantage of your company's stock investment program. Please send me the $500 right away.

You may also wish to use the direct negative approach when trying to avoid a patronizing tone, which most of us dislike. When we are clearly at fault for something, sometimes we would rather just hear the bad news instead of being toyed with. Here is an example:

The Yellow River Project report was due yesterday. We both know how important the completion of the report is to the overall strategic plan. Submit the report to me no later than 5 P.M. tomorrow.

Figure 5.5   **Negative Message Using Direct Organization**

From:server@net.com
Date:Tue, O8Nov 200X 011:51:06 -4000
Organization:@net.com.net
X-Mailer: BX 98.7 [cba] V-atnet.com.net 0773 (Win2000; U)
X-Accept-Language: cba.774
FROM: Samantha Chen <samchen@net.com>
TO:ExecMgmtTeam.list@net.com
SUBJECT: This weekend's Executive Management Team retreat

This past weekend's retreat at the Big Pines Resort was,
in my mind, a big flop. We had hoped to emerge from the
two days of meetings and discussions with a firm business
strategy for the coming year in place, a decision on
whether to move ahead on production of the X-14 or Z-19
audio chips, and a clearer understanding of the role
electronic commerce should play in our future. We did not
achieve the first two and made only slight progress on the
last goal.

In retrospect, I think there are several reasons why the
outcomes were not better. First, rather than functioning
as a committee-of-the-whole and seeking consensus on every
decision, we needed more structure. Second, inviting our
partners, while most enjoyable for us, seemed to interfere
with our getting to sessions on time and staying focused.
Finally, the afternoon of golf on Sunday afternoon cut into
our total time together, and occurred just as we were close
to accomplishing our goals.

Therefore, I'm calling a day-long work session for Saturday,
the 23rd of this month, in our executive conference room,
starting at 8 a.m. to complete our work. I've arranged for
Bill Finegar to serve as facilitator.

You know the issues, so be thinking about them. The sooner
we meet our objectives for the meeting, the sooner we can
join our partners for the balance of the weekend or get out
to the golf course.

Additional Direct Information Messages

In addition to the positive, neutral, and negative information types of messages that use the direct organization, there are two others. Routine messages and directives may carry any of the three information types, but they have some unique characteristics as well.

Routine Messages

Routine messages occur at periodic intervals, such as quarterly reports, or regularly, such as in-progress reports. See Figure 5.6 for an example of a routine form letter. Here are two provisos exclusive to routine messages:
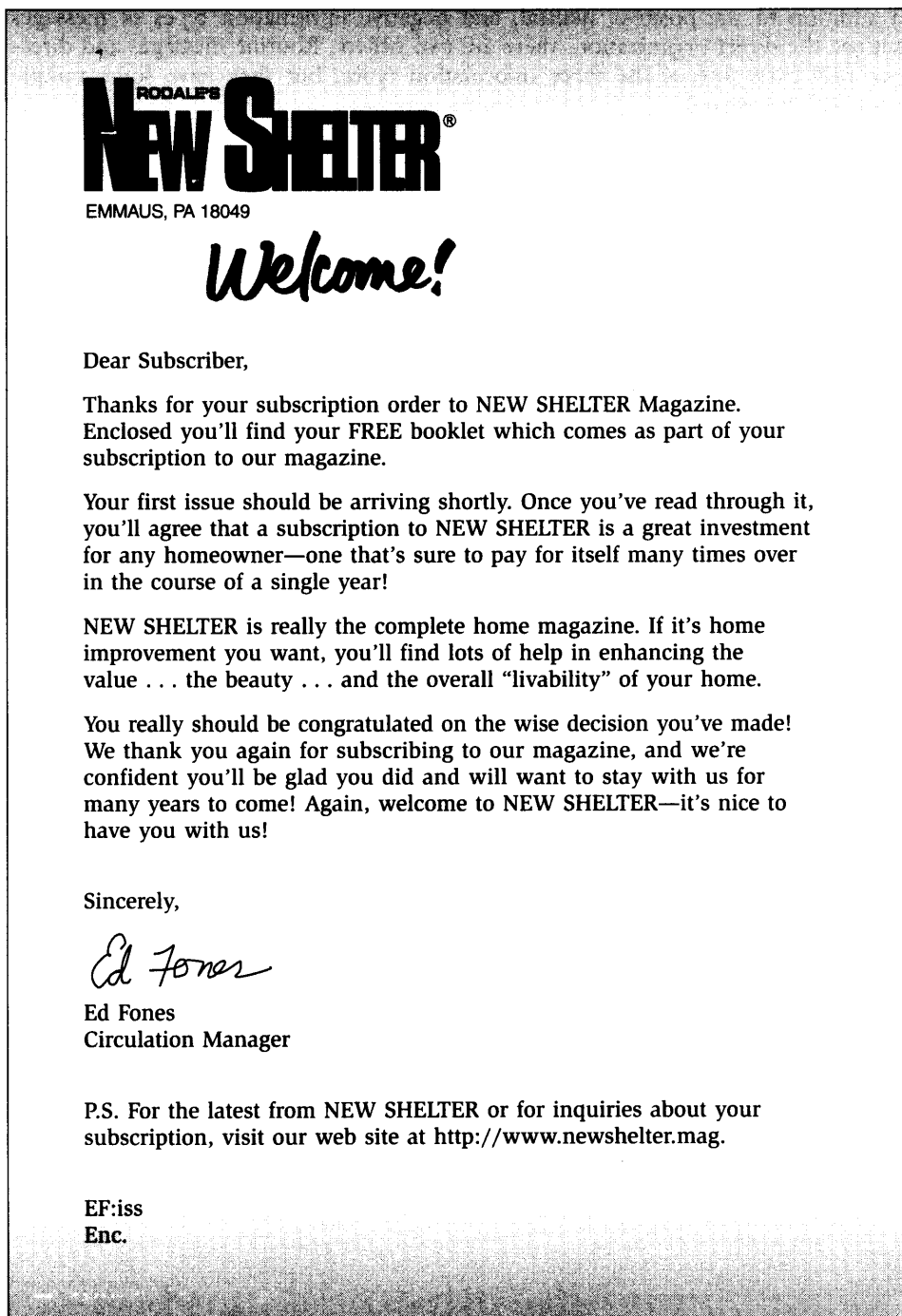
- First, if the routine message has negative content, it is often wise to emphasize the routine aspect of the message. For example, you might emphasize that this is your regular semiannual product order, that you plan to pay for it within 30 days after billing as usual, that you want it sent to your St. Louis plant as before, and that you appreciate the excellent service you have come to associate with the supplier. An example of routine negative information in such a message might be that your orders vary in size dramatically during the year, and this happens to be an order much smaller than the last two orders.
- Second, you might undercut your objective to inform the reader of your periodic sending of this type of message. "This invitation goes out to all persons whose names appear in the weekly listing of 'Marriage Certificates Approved' for a special 10-percent discount" misses the opportunity to focus on an event that is for the reader infrequent and individually exciting.

Routine messages may appear as form letters or may be individually prepared as the occasion requires. Form letters, of course, often are impersonal and mass produced. Nevertheless, time and cost considerations frequently dictate the form message.
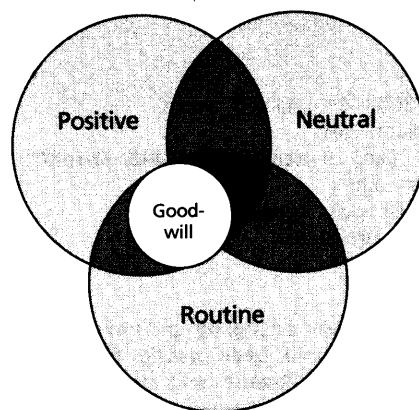
The messages discussed so far—especially the similar positive, neutral, and routine messages—and goodwill messages, to be discussed in Chapter 7, have an interesting, complex relationship, as can be seen in Figure 5.7. Some of the information in a positive message (most likely the portions further down in the message) may be neutral; some early portions of a neutral message might be perceived as positive by some people. When you, as an insurance agent, send out holiday cards to your policyholders, you are sending a routine goodwill message that is also positive. When a person automatically places orders for parts with you every three months, it is a routine neutral message. Envisioning the relationship of these four message categories will help you to prepare any one of them.

Figure 5.6 | **Example of a Routine Form Message**

NEW SHELTER®

EMMAUS, PA 18049

Welcome!

Dear Subscriber,

Thanks for your subscription order to NEW SHELTER Magazine. Enclosed you'll find your FREE booklet which comes as part of your subscription to our magazine.

Your first issue should be arriving shortly. Once you've read through it, you'll agree that a subscription to NEW SHELTER is a great investment for any homeowner—one that's sure to pay for itself many times over in the course of a single year!

NEW SHELTER is really the complete home magazine. If it's home improvement you want, you'll find lots of help in enhancing the value . . . the beauty . . . and the overall "livability" of your home.

You really should be congratulated on the wise decision you've made! We thank you again for subscribing to our magazine, and we're confident you'll be glad you did and will want to stay with us for many years to come! Again, welcome to NEW SHELTER—it's nice to have you with us!

Sincerely,

Ed Fones

Ed Fones
Circulation Manager

P.S. For the latest from NEW SHELTER or for inquiries about your subscription, visit our web site at http://www.newshelter.mag.

EF:iss
Enc.

Source: Reproduced with permission from Rodale's *New Shelter* magazine.

Figure 5.7   Relationship of Some Messages Using Direct Organization

Directives

Directives are internal messages issued to employees to identify desired or undesired behavior. As a manager, you will write directives not only for the obvious reason of giving direction but also to provide a written record to which employees can be held accountable and to which they can refer over time for details. You may also use directives to establish or reinforce your authority or to build a framework of policies and procedures.

Many directives follow the direct approach. Your main purpose is to direct behavior; identify that behavior clearly and firmly at the beginning of the message. Effective directives do more than just direct; they also present the rationale behind the directive. Therefore, your second step is an explanation for the desired behavior. Support your explanation with reasons when appropriate. Your explanation and reasons are your second-most-important information.

Finally, you may wish to include a motivational thought, such as "Let's follow safety rules for our own protection and for the good of the company." Be careful, however, not to undermine your authority, lose your tone of firmness, or appear too warm or friendly. Warmth and friendliness are valuable commodities to share with employees, but not in every communiqué; omit them from your directives. You seek compliance without emotional involvement. To avoid involving your readers too much in the message or even offending them, use an impersonal tone with relatively few adjectives, adverbs, similes, metaphors, or other colorful language.[3] See Figure 5.8 for an example of an effective directive.

Another direct message type is the direct persuasive message. This message is so unique that it receives special attention in Chapters 6 and 7.

| Figure 5.8 | Example of an Effective Directive |

```
From:server@comcom
Date:Wed, 08Dec 200X 011:41:06 -8000
Organization:@comcom.net
X-Mailer: MX 4.7 {xn} B-atcom.net 0443 (WinXP; U)
X-Accept-Language: xn
FROM: William C. Griggs <wcg@comcom>
TO:employeeslist_all@comcom

DATE: December 8, 200X.

Many employees have been bringing privately owned laptop
computers to work and have been using these computers on the
job. While employee involvement and dedication are valuable
assets, please do not demonstrate them by bringing computers
to work, effective immediately.

The presence of noncompany-owned computers has created
problems of control of confidential company data, has wasted
work time while employees demonstrated the machines to
colleagues, and has caused compatibility problems in the
production department, where the word-processing specialists
are familiar only with Microsoft Word and WordPerfect on
Windows PCs.

To involve computers more in your tasks and to assist those
of you familiar with computers, we are exploring a bulk
purchase of compatible computers for use by salaried
employees. Your suggestions regarding which equipment best
meets your needs, and assignment of these machines, if
purchased, would be appreciated.
```

Summary

In business writing, you can choose between direct and indirect approaches. Go directly to the main message (a direct organization) if your information is positive or neutral in nature. Consider a direct organization for negative information only if the information or occasion calls for it, if you think the reader prefers it, or if the message is routine.

The direct approach assumes there will be little or no resistance from the reader and that what is most positive or most important to the sender is also most positive or important to the reader. Thus, the direct approach orders thoughts from most positive to least positive (or, for the neutral message, from most important to least important). For the transmission of negative information in a direct order, be

gentle in your language and use logic to your benefit. The direct organization also can be used effectively with two other types of messages: routine messages and directives. Sometimes it is advisable to indicate the routineness of the message and other times it is not. With the directive, information is firm and clear about desired behavior on the part of employees.

Because a variety of message types appear in this chapter, Table 5.1 summarizes the three major message types (positive, neutral, and negative) and shows subcategories and additional categories.

Memoranda, letters, and e-mail messages using the direct organization are relatively easy to organize and write. But despite their ease in preparation, these messages—especially the positive and neutral ones—sometimes go unwritten because they are often not a response to a request. These messages, therefore, are not missed if not received. Because of their perceived expendability, they are among the first messages neglected by the overworked writer. This neglect is unfortunate because these messages reassure, reconfirm, and give attention to existing clients, employees, and customers.

As a portion of the total writing effort, direct messages are a mainstay—one often skipped by less-concerned communicators and weaker managers. These messages can help distinguish you as a person who makes the extra effort to send such often-ignored communications as congratulations or acknowledgments. Enhance your image with these messages.

Table 5.1	**Summary of Direct Message Approaches**	
Major Message Type/Subcategory	**Goal**	**Example**
Positive	Reception of positive information by receiver	Extension of long-term financing for a major project
Letter of Recommendation	Help someone obtain a job	Recommendation of employee or friend for employment
Goodwill	Elicit positive reaction back to sender	Appreciation for continuing business
Neutral	Reception of neutral information by receiver	Acknowledgment of receipt of order
Transmittal	Transport other written media	Transmittal letter in a report
Negative	Clear, immediate delivery of negative information	Rejection of a bid
Additional Types		
Routine	Transmission of frequently recurring information	Sending clients a reminder that you need their tax information by February 1
Directives	Internal messages to direct behavior	Changing the deadline for outgoing mail

This chapter introduces aspects of another major organization: the indirect approach, which is the subject of Chapter 6. Chapter 7 goes on to examine situational writing, which brings together many of the underlying concepts supporting direct and indirect organizations.

Discussion Questions

1. Your boss has to write a letter to the Board of Directors explaining to them that the company's last investment has resulted in a $1-million loss. She is really concerned about the Board's reaction and is seeking your help in preparing the letter. What organization would you use?

2. You need to ask your supervisor for an increase in your advertising budget. You know he is a straightforward person so you don't want to be indirect in your message. On the other hand, you definitely want a positive response. How would you approach the message?

3. What types of people are more likely to prefer a direct organization message no matter what the topic?

4. Which categories of messages are always prepared in direct format, and which may be either direct or indirect? How does one decide which to use for the latter?

Communication in Action

1. Conduct a survey of business e-mail users. What percentage of their messages are formal versus informal, internal versus external, one screen in length verses longer, have attachments, and are sent to a distribution list of five or more people?

2. Find some examples of positive messages. First, evaluate them by how well the authors followed the guidelines for ordering the information. Next, how successful were the authors at avoiding extraneous information? Finally, evaluate the quality of the transitions from thought to thought.

3. Think about the body of a message, such as praising a subordinate for a job well done on a medium-size project. How would you modify the message depending on whether you used e-mail, memorandum, or letter medium?

4. What types of goodwill messages have you received, and how did you feel about those messages and the sender of them?

@ Internet

5. Select some companies and use the Internet to locate their annual reports. Read the letters of introduction. What types of organization do these letters employ? Is there a relationship between the type of organization of the letters and how well the companies performed financially?

InfoTrac

6. The literature that formed the logic for the direct approach to message organization is about 50 years old. Use InfoTrac to locate current literature that discusses the approach. Be sure to review the following journals: *Journal of Business Communication, Journal of Business and Technical Communication,* and *Management Communication Quarterly.* Does current literature support the classic approach?

Notes

1. McGuire, W. J. (1969). The nature of attitude and attitude change. *Handbook of social psychology* (2nd ed.), 3. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, p. 212; and McGuire, M. J. Order of presentation as a factor in 'conditioning' persuasiveness, in Hovland, C. I. (ed.) (1957). *The order of presentation in persuasion.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pp. 98–114.
2. Janis, I. L., & Feierbend, R. L. (1957). Effects of alternate ways of ordering pro and con arguments in persuasive communications, in Hovland, C. I. (ed.) *The order of presentation in persuasion.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 23.
3. Dulek, R. E., & Fielden, J. S. (1990). *Principles of business communication.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., pp. 283–284.

CHAPTER - 6

Writing Indirect Messages

In Chapter 5, we explained that when the writer expects the reader to agree with the contents of a message, it is best to present the message directly. In business, you may also select the direct approach because you think the occasion dictates it or the reader prefers it—because the information is routine or because it is easy to write (direct messages usually take relatively little planning). There is no resistance to overcome in direct messages. Resistance means that the reader may be opposed to what you are proposing (or to you or your company), may be disinterested, or may not be able to comply. You will encounter many other occasions when resistance is likely—for instance, when transmitting strong negative information or when persuading someone to act. This chapter presents writing approaches for these two message categories, both of which usually use an indirect organization. Chapter 7 discusses those messages for which there are no clear-cut formulas.

If positive messages with direct organization are among the easiest to write, then those with negative information or persuasive content are among the most difficult. The difficulty of writing a negative message stems from its bipolar objectives: (1) to transmit the bad news clearly and (2) to maintain the reader's goodwill. Picture, for example, writing a supplier to reject a bid but trying to maintain interest so that the company will continue to bid in the future. To accomplish either objective by itself is fairly easy; to accomplish both takes skill. Persuasive messages by nature are usually indirect messages because they try to overcome a reader's resistance. Using the approach that we outline below for a negative or persuasive message often makes the writer's job less burdensome.

Writing effective indirect messages entails understanding the rationale behind the indirect approach. The rationale emphasizes the steps in the formula.

Negative Messages

The formula for negative messages grows from the dual objectives of transmitting bad news and maintaining goodwill. Occasionally, maintaining goodwill is not of primary concern and is even subordinate to the message delivery. Such an occasion might be the fifth in a series of progressively more-stern letters seeking payment for goods or services. For most of us there is a point at which positive perception of us or our business is no longer a primary goal. Occasions such as these either use direct organization or are handled in a situational approach.

The pattern for transmitting negative messages has four steps: (1) a delaying opening; (2) the reasons for the upcoming bad news; (3) the bad news itself; and (4) a positive ending. These steps follow an indirect organization, which means that the primary reason for the message—the bad news—receives a location of low emphasis. Opening sentences and paragraphs carry high impact (that is why in positive messages the most positive thought is placed there), and so does the ending of a message. Using the principle of place emphasis, bad news most often appears in the middle of the message to diminish its impact.

The underlying logic supporting the indirect approach is that preparing the reader for the message can determine the reader's perception of the message. While the reader will not be happy hearing the bad news, the reader may at least understand the writer's position if the information appears in such a way that the recipient reads all the message and if the reasons are believable, realistic, and logical.

Understanding the rationale behind the order and preparation of the four steps is useful not only in preparing negative messages but also in writing more complicated messages, such as situational messages.

The Delaying Opening

The purpose of delaying the opening is to present the general topic without hinting about the upcoming negative news. Writing a delaying opening that does not sound as if it is delaying the bad news can be difficult. If you have ever read an opening that you recognized as a delaying tactic, then you have read an ineffective opening. For example, this opening is weak because it leaks the upcoming bad news: "Over the last year you've met most of the essential deadlines." Other characteristics of weak openings are those that start too far from the general subject and those that have too positive a tone.

Because many negative messages are in response to earlier messages or inquiries, the readers of those messages often eagerly anticipate the answers. This anticipation puts pressure on the delaying opening. For example, how would you react to this opening?

> Thank you for your recent letter of application for our position of management consultant. You were correct in your observation that our consulting division is one of the largest and best of the major public accounting firms. Because of this size and quality we always carefully review the education, experience, and other characteristics of job applicants.

If you are especially eager for this job, you might find the delay of the important news, whatever it may be, frustrating. On the other hand, you might find the personal references a positive way to get in the mood of the topic. At least the opening does not give away the upcoming bad news or start too far from the subject.

The astute reader may well argue that any response that does not immediately state the good news must be delaying the bad news. If all messages were prepared following either the direct or indirect organizations and were written effectively, this observation would be correct. However, there are many writers who inappropriately apply the indirect organization to positive messages and still others who use a direct organization for strong negative content. In other words, there are

enough writers who are poor at organizing messages that most readers will not see through your intentions when you write an effective delaying opening.

Writing an effective delaying opening is often the most difficult of the four steps in the negative message formula. For many writers, starting with a more positive opening than is necessary is easier than the neutral-to-slightly-positive delaying opening. However, an opening that is too positive forces awkward transitions to the rapidly approaching bad news. For example, "You have consistently prepared better marketing analysis than others in your department" makes difficult the switch to negative information.

Another reason—a major one—that delaying openings are so difficult to write is that they often appear manipulative. As soon as your reader thinks he or she is being tricked or coerced or is receiving biased or one-sided information, he or she will reject your message. (Indeed, this reaction applies to indirect messages as a whole!) On the whole you are manipulating the reader as you make such decisions as word selection and order, message organization, format, and delivery timing. However, if the reader does not recognize your manipulation, you probably will achieve your goal.

The Reasons

Probably the most crucial step in the negative message formula is the second, which establishes the reasons for the upcoming bad news. The goal of the step is to seek reader acknowledgment of the reasons; acknowledgment at this point establishes a relationship with the yet-to-be-announced decision. Returning to the example of a response to a job application, does this example accomplish the step's goal?

> Because of the fine reputation of the Management Consulting Division, our well-known training program, and the firm's solid national standing, many dozens of applicants—a large percentage with MBAs—are seeking positions. Both the large number and the high quality of the applications make our job of selecting the top interviewees difficult. Our strong appreciation for experience in consulting guides us in our selections.

The example presents three reasons: the number of applications, the quality of the applications, and the focus on applicants with experience.

In preparing your reasons, empathize with your reader—the reasons should be logical to the reader and not just to you. Avoid reliance on such weak reasons as company policy. Instead, explain the reasons for the company policy. Do not pass the buck, blaming someone else for the decision. As the author of a letter being sent to someone outside the company, you represent the company; it is poor form to transfer the decision elsewhere. If possible and appropriate, each reason should build on preceding reasons.

If the reasons step appears logical, the upcoming bad news will emerge naturally. Further, this second step also should not leak bad news, even though that news is the next step.

The Bad News

Step three in the indirect organization of a bad-news message delivers the negative information. While the delaying opening and the development of the reasons may

take from several sentences to a paragraph each, this third step can be quite short, sometimes taking only a part of a sentence. The bad news often follows from and can be appended to the reasons step. Avoid putting bad news in a separate paragraph. A stand-alone paragraph, such as "For the reasons stated above, we must sever our contract," is undesirable because it receives too much emphasis.

In appending the bad-news step to earlier steps of the sample message, the goal is the reader's agreement with your decision.

> Applicants other than you, ones with equally solid educational background but extensive consulting background, have been selected to be interviewed.

Despite its relatively short length, this third step is still important and requires careful wording. Too blunt a negative message can destroy effectively prepared earlier steps. To maintain the goodwill of the reader, it is necessary to present the negative news as positively as possible. Sometimes you can leave the interpretation of the bad news to the reader by establishing what you are doing as opposed to not doing. For example, stating that you are awarding a bid to another firm tells the reader that he or she did not receive it.

Most often the active voice is best for business writing to add interest, clarity, and movement. In the third step of a negative message, however, the active voice may be too forceful; the passive voice may be softer. For example, the passive "Your firm's services are no longer required" is softer than the active "We no longer want to employ your firm."

The negative step can also be too personal. Seek an impersonal style by avoiding people's names and personal pronouns. Be especially cautious of first names, *I*, and *you*. Some writers, in an attempt to show personal involvement with the decision, declare their sympathy or extend an apology. Such statements weaken the strength of the earlier logic and usually add little to soften the bad news. An "I'm sorry" is likely to elicit a "me, too" or a bitter "I'll bet you are." Further, the unnecessary sympathy or apology only underscores the bad news, thus emphasizing it.

Once you deliver the negative message, leave it. Do not dwell on it. Change the subject to something more positive, such as the topic of the positive ending.

The Positive Ending

The last step seeks to change the tone from negative to positive. The reason for this step is to maintain goodwill. Positive information at the end allows the writer to end on a nice note, avoids closing on bad news, and uses the location—at the end of the message, which provides emphasis—to push a positive overall tone.

At a minimum, the ending can extend thanks for the offer, the bid, the suggestion, the application, the idea, the message, or whatever you have decided to reject. Make sure that this thanks sounds sincere; even heartfelt appreciation stated as, "Thanks again, and don't hesitate to write," will make little impact on the reader. The phrase sounds insincere and overused. The same idea, rephrased to sound sincere and individualized, might be, "Perhaps your next idea will be the award-winner, so don't hold back on sharing other suggestions with us in the future."

Look for stronger endings than just "thank you." Perhaps you can alter the declined inquiry so that you can give an affirmative answer. For example, if asked for reprints of an article, respond by saying, "If photocopies of the report rather than reprints are acceptable, we can mail them immediately." You may also be able

to suggest an alternate source for something you could not provide: "We no longer manufacture the pressed glassware you seek; Art Products bought the molds; they may be able to help you. Their address is. . . ."

A third technique for stronger positive endings is suggesting that in the future you might be able to extend a *yes*. To exemplify this approach, we again turn to the response to a job application:

> As our Management Consulting Division continues to grow, we expect to have new openings. As you acquire additional accounting experience elsewhere, please keep us in mind as a possible employer.

Resist the desire to toss in a final reference to the bad news such as, "Again, know that we're as sorry about this as you are." Once you deliver the negative in the third step, do not resurrect it. End on a positive thought.

The four steps in the negative message should flow from idea to idea. Let's look again at that letter responding to a job application with its parts consolidated.

> Thank you for your recent letter of application for our position of management consultant. You were correct in your observation that our consulting division is one of the largest and best of the biggest public accounting firms. Because of this size and quality we always carefully review the education, experience, and other characteristics of job applicants.
>
> Because of the fine reputation of the Management Consulting Division, our well-known training program, and the firm's solid national standing, many dozens of applicants—a large percentage with MBAs—are seeking this position. Both the large number and the high quality of the applications make our job of selecting the top interviewees difficult. Our strong appreciation for experience in consulting guides us in our selections. Applicants other than you, ones with equally solid educational background but extensive consulting background, have been selected to be interviewed.
>
> As our Management Consulting Division continues to grow, we expect to have new openings. As you acquire additional accounting experience elsewhere, please keep us in mind as a possible employer.

Transitions are important in all writing. Negative messages are no exception. A smooth transition is especially crucial between steps one and two. Look for a phrase that links thoughts occurring at the end of step one to the first thoughts in step two. (A discussion of writing transitions appears in Chapter 4.)

Avoiding such reversal words or phrases as *on the other hand, however,* or *unfortunately* will smooth the transition from step one to step two, as well as avoid alerting the reader to the upcoming bad news.

As discussed, the transition from step two to step three is usually an easy one. Although there is a major tone change from step three to step four, the transition is not as important because the tone is now positive. The author may even wish to accentuate the change by starting step four with a reversal word or phrase, such as "In the next few months, however, . . ." This technique serves to tell the reader, "The bad news is over; now we're changing to more pleasant topics." See Figure 6.1 for an effective indirect negative message.