FIFTH EDITION

WRITING THAT WORKS

Keep On

How to Write Effectively on the Job

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Chapter 8

Principles of Business Correspondence

Business letters are an essential means of communication among organizations, businesses, and their customers; memorandums (or memos) are an essential means of communication within organizations. Because of their importance, letters and memos should be well written: Those that are not waste considerable time and money. For example, the following poorly written letter was actually sent to a law firm. The staff at the law firm could not understand it, even though a number of attorneys, paralegal assistants, and secretaries were familiar with the case.

Mr. Stewart R. Cassidy
Smith and Jones, Attorneys at Law
1212 Broadway
Hartford, CT 06119

Dear Mr. Cassidy:

In regard to claim on Account #5–861 see enclosed copy of letter received and copy of delivery receipt regarding same. There had been a claim which was disallowed and debtor withheld payment on the bill, and the one we referred to your office for collection, as no pro was mentioned but the one the claim was on was referred to the bill is still open and they still owe Universal, please review and advise.

Sincerely,

Ralph Madison

Ralph Madison

Staff members wrote to Ralph Madison and others at his company without success, and finally the law firm had to send someone to the company to find out what the letter was about.

This letter wasted the time of a highly paid staff—and may well have caused a delay in legal services to Ralph Madison's company. Further, carelessly written letters, because they project such a poor image of the writer, can result in loss of

another kind. A reader's negative reaction to an unclear or messy letter can cost a firm an important contract or an employee his or her job.

If so much hinges on the preparation of an acceptable letter, why do business people write letters at all? Why don't they rely on the telephone, usually a quicker and easier means of communication? (A letter may be even more expensive than a call when you consider the word processing, stationery, and postage costs for each letter.) A good deal of the time, of course, a telephone call is more appropriate than a letter—when, for instance, an immediate response is needed, or when a person-to-person exchange might smooth over a touchy situation. But there are times when a telephone call cannot replace a letter.

1. Letters provide a permanent, written record of a business transaction.
2. Letters represent a commitment on the part of the writer, as the expression "Put it in writing" indicates. A written promise, conveyed above the signature of an employee who has the authority to act, carries weight that a recollection of a telephone call cannot.
3. Letters provide traveling salespeople, busy executives, and others with a convenient way to receive information and respond (they may be out of the office, or not at their desks, when the phone rings). They can usually set aside time to answer their mail.
4. Letters that are carefully planned can create goodwill—and sometimes stimulate business—even in situations in which customers or clients are dissatisfied with a product or service.
5. Letters provide a clear statement of a writer's position, reducing the possibility of a misunderstanding. Similarly, in many cases a recipient of a message needs time to study it. A phone call cannot accommodate careful reflection: if a complicated question is raised on the phone, the answer is often "I'll get back to you on that one."

Writing Letters

The process of writing letters involves basically the same steps that go into most other on-the-job writing. *First,* establish your purpose, your reader's needs, and your scope (see Chapter 1). *Second,* prepare an outline. (For a letter, an outline may involve little more than jotting down, on a notepad, the points you wish to make and the order in which you wish to make them.) *Third,* write a rough draft from the outline. *Fourth,* set the draft aside for a "cooling" period (see Chapter 4). The cooling period is especially important when a letter has been written in response to a problem. A business letter is not the place to vent emotions. A cooling period, even if it is only a lunch hour, gives the writer a chance to remove any hasty and inappropriate statements made in the heat of the situation. One chief executive of a large company always allows the rough draft of a crucial letter to "cool" overnight before revising and mailing it—regardless of the pressure to send it out right away. This executive believes that a slightly delayed—but

appropriate—response is preferable to an immediate reply that may cause misunderstanding later.

For the *fifth* step, revising the rough draft, go over your work carefully, checking for sense as well as for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Since *format* (the arrangement of the parts of a letter on the page) is a basic element in letter writing, it's a good idea, if you can, to print out a preliminary copy of the letter on paper that is the same size as the stationery you will be using. Set the margins you will use and, as you type, insert the correct spacing between parts of the letter (see pages 209–217). If a secretary or an assistant does your typing, be sure to check his or her work; you will sign the letter, and therefore you are responsible for its appearance and accuracy.

Tone: Goodwill and the "You" Attitude

A business letter differs in one important way from other kinds of job-related writing: it usually represents a direct communication between one person and another. As a letter writer addressing yourself directly to your reader, you have an opportunity that the writer of, say, a report doesn't have: you are in a very good position to take your reader's needs into account. If you ask yourself, "How might I feel if I were the recipient of such a letter?" you can gain some insight into the likely needs and feelings of your reader—and then tailor your message to fit those needs and feelings. Furthermore, you have a chance to build goodwill for your business or organization. Many companies spend millions of dollars to create a favorable public image. A letter to a customer that sounds impersonal and unfriendly can quickly tarnish that image, but a thoughtful letter that communicates sincerity can greatly enhance it.

Suppose, for example, you are a store manager who receives a request for a refund from a customer who forgot to enclose the receipt with the request. In a letter to the customer, you might write, "The sales receipt must be enclosed with the merchandise before we can process the refund." However, if you consider how you might keep the goodwill of the customer, you might word the request this way: "Please enclose the sales receipt with the merchandise, so that we can send your refund promptly." Notice that the second version uses the word *please* and the active voice ("Please enclose the sales receipt"), while the first version uses only the passive voice ("The sales receipt must be enclosed"). In general, the active voice creates a friendlier, more courteous tone than the passive, which tends to sound impersonal and unfriendly. (For a discussion of the active and passive voices, see Chapter 5). And polite wording, such as the use of *please,* also helps to create goodwill.

However, as a business-letter writer, you can go one step further. You can put the reader's needs and interests first by writing from the reader's point of view. Often, but not always, doing so means using the words *you* and *your* rather than the words *we, our, I,* and *mine.* That is why the technique has been referred to as using the "you" attitude or "you" viewpoint. For example, consider the point of view of the original sentence in the example just given:

> The sales receipt must be enclosed with the merchandise before we can process the refund.

The underlined words suggest that the writer is centering on his or her need to process the refund. Even the second version, although its tone is more polite and friendly, emphasizes the writer's need to get the receipt "so that we can send your refund promptly." (The writer, of course, may want to get rid of the problem quickly.)

But what is the reader's interest? The reader is not interested in helping the business to process its paperwork. He or she simply wants the refund—and by emphasizing that need, the writer encourages the reader to act quickly. Consider the following revision, which is written from the "you" viewpoint:

> So you can receive your refund promptly, please enclose the sales receipt with the merchandise.

This sentence stresses that it is to the reader's benefit to act on this matter. Consider another example:

> So that we can complete our file records, please send your Form 1040-A by March 10.

Even though the recipient has little incentive to send the form, the "you" viewpoint can suggest that the recipient's interests are at stake:

> So that your file is complete, please send your Form 1040-A by March 10.

Be aware, however, that *both goodwill and the "you" viewpoint can be overdone.* Used thoughtlessly, both techniques can produce a fawning, insincere tone—what might be called "plastic goodwill." Consider the following:

> Thank you so very much for ordering the Trend-Setter Personalized Labels. Obviously, you're a person of extraordinary judgment and good taste. You are to be congratulated on your fine selection of the one-by-three-inch size. You are the kind of wonderful person who makes working a joy. Please work with us again.

Obviously, the language is full of false praise and sickeningly sweet phrases. Any attempt at goodwill that is transparently insincere will be counterproductive.

The following additional tips will help you to achieve a tone that builds goodwill with the reader:

1. *Be respectful, not demanding.*

CHANGE Submit your answer in one week.

TO I would appreciate receiving your answer within one week.

2. *Be modest, not arrogant.*

CHANGE My report is thorough, and I'm sure that you won't be able to continue efficiently without it.

TO I have tried to be as thorough as possible in my report, and I hope you find it useful.

3. *Be polite, not sarcastic.*

CHANGE I just received the shipment we ordered *six months ago*. I'm sending it back—we can't use it now. Thanks!

TO I am returning the shipment we ordered on March 12, 1995. Unfortunately, it arrived too late for us to use it.

4. *Be positive and tactful, not negative and condescending.*

CHANGE Your complaint about our prices is way off target. Our prices are definitely not any higher than those of our competitors.

TO Thank you for your suggestion concerning our prices. We believe, however, that our prices are competitive with, and in some cases below, those of our competitors.

Negative Messages and the Indirect Pattern

In a speech to the Japan Business English Association in 1976, Professor Francis W. Weeks identified one of the most difficult problems in business correspondence and illustrated it with an anecdote:

> The number one problem, in my opinion, will always be the manner and style of our approach to people through the medium of written communication. One aspect of this problem can be expressed this way: "How direct or indirect should our communications be?"
>
> To be completely direct and forthright, striking to the heart of the matter immediately, is also to be blunt and perhaps offensive. To be indirect is to be polite and considerate to the reader. "Oh, no" say some writers. "To be direct is to be efficient, to save time, effort, words, and money. To be indirect is to waste time and be wordy."
>
> Nearly ten years ago when I had a sabbatical leave of absence from the University of Illinois, I was at the Douglas Aircraft Company in California studying the communications of their Marketing Department. I remember one day reading a letter from Japan—two pages long—written in very good English, but I could not determine what the writer was talking about. He seemed to go round and round his subject matter without ever coming to the point. I put the letter aside intending to go back to it later; then several hours

afterwards, "the light dawned." He was saying "No." And he was saying it as politely and tactfully and indirectly as he knew how.

I know an American executive who would have handled the situation far differently. He would have written "No" in big letters across the face of the letter he was answering and sent it back to the writer.

Even direct, efficient American writers would characterize that as brutal treatment of a correspondent.[1]

Today, of course, we must all be aware of the different notions of courtesy and protocol across international boundaries, as discussed later in this chapter. Nevertheless, research has shown that it is generally more effective to present bad news (or refusals) indirectly.

This principle is true because people form their impressions and attitudes very early when reading letters. Here is an example. A college student who had applied for a scholarship received a letter explaining that he had not won it. The letter began: "I'm sorry, but you were not awarded the Smith Scholarship." In disappointment, the student threw the letter on his desk and left his apartment. Three days later he picked up the letter and read further. It went on to say that the committee thought his record was so strong that he should call immediately if he were interested in another, but lesser-known, scholarship. The student called but was told that the other scholarship had been awarded to someone else. Since the student had not called immediately, everyone had assumed he was not interested.

Many readers do finish a letter when bad news is presented at the outset, but they generally continue to read with a predetermined opinion concerning what follows. They may be very skeptical about an explanation, or they may reject a reasonable alternative presented by the writer. Furthermore, even when you refuse a request or say no one time, you may wish to work with the reader in the future. An abruptly phrased rejection early in the letter may prevent you from reestablishing an amicable relationship.

Consider the thoughtlessness of the rejection letter shown in Figure 8–1. Although the letter is direct and uses the pronouns *you* and *your,* the writer has apparently not considered how the recipient will feel as she reads the letter. There is no expression of regret that Ms. Mauer is being rejected for the position, nor any appreciation of her efforts in applying for the job: "Sincerely" at the close almost seems hostile. The letter is, in short, rude. The pattern for this letter is Bad news/Explanation/Close. A better general pattern for "bad news" letters is as follows:

1. Buffer
2. Explanation
3. Bad news
4. Goodwill

[1] Francis W. Weeks, "Current Issues in the Practice of Business Communication in the USA," *Journal of Business Communication* 13 (Spring 1976): 62–63.

Southtown Dental Center
3221 Ryan Road San Diego, CA 92217
(714) 321-1579

November 11, 19--

Ms. Barbara L. Mauer
157 Beach Drive
San Diego, CA 92113

Dear Ms. Mauer:

Your application for the position of dental receptionist at Southtown Dental Center has been rejected. We have found someone more qualified than you.

Sincerely,

Mary Hernandez

Mary Hernandez
Office Manager

MH/bt

Figure 8–1. A poor "bad news" letter.

The buffer opening contains information that establishes a positive tone ("Thank you for your time and effort"). The explanation that follows develops the logic or reviews the facts in a way that makes the bad news *understandable*. Bad news is never pleasant; however, information that either puts the bad news in perspective or makes the bad news seem reasonable maintains respect between the writer and the reader. The goodwill close is intended to reestablish an amicable business relationship.

Consider the revision of the rejection letter, shown in Figure 8–2. This letter carries the same disappointing news as the first, but the writer is careful to thank the reader for her time and effort, to explain why she was not accepted for the job, and to offer her encouragement in finding a position in another office. For more information on bad-news messages, see pages 238–257 in Chapter 9.

Presenting good news is, of course, easier. It is important to remember that good news should be presented early—at the outset, if at all possible. The pattern for "good news" letters should be as follows:

1. Good news
2. Explanation of facts
3. Goodwill

By presenting the good news first, you increase the likelihood that the reader will pay careful attention to details, and you achieve goodwill from the start. Figure 8–3 shows an example of a "good news" letter.

Letter Openings and Closings

Most other letters should follow the patterns for openings and closings discussed in Chapter 3, pages 54–60. That is, they must identify the subject and catch the interest of your reader.

> Our annual inventory revealed some interesting surprises that should help your order department.

Certainly, if the recipient of a letter is involved with ordering for an organization, this opening would both identify the subject and catch his or her attention.

Since a letter is one of the most personal forms of business communication, an opening must also establish a tone that is appropriate and achieves the letter's purpose.

> I'm seeking advice about organizational communication, and several people have suggested that you are an authority on the subject.

The tone of respect in this opening is not only appropriate but also effective, since it appeals to the reader's pride. Other letter openings might appeal to the reader's curiosity or personal interests.

Southtown Dental Center
3221 Ryan Road San Diego, CA 92217
(714) 321-1579

November 11, 19--

Ms. Barbara L. Mauer
157 Beach Drive
San Diego, CA 92113

Dear Ms. Mauer:

Buffer — Thank you for your time and effort in applying for the position of dental receptionist at Southtown Dental Center.

Explanation leading to bad news — Since we needed someone who can assume the duties here with a minimum of training, we have selected an applicant with over ten years of experience.

Goodwill — I am sure that with your excellent college record you will find a position in another office.

Sincerely,

Mary Hernandez

Mary Hernandez
Office Manager

MH/bt

Figure 8–2. A courteous "bad news" letter.

Southtown Dental Center
3221 Ryan Road San Diego, CA 92217
(714) 321-1579

November 11, 19--

Ms. Barbara L. Mauer
157 Beach Drive
San Diego, CA 92113

Dear Ms. Mauer:

news

Please accept our offer of the position of dental receptionist at Southtown Dental Center.

ation

If the terms we discussed in the interview are acceptable to you, please come in at 9:30 a.m. on November 15. At that time we will ask you to complete our personnel form, in addition to. . . .

odwill

I, as well as the others in the office, look forward to working with you. Everyone was very favorably impressed with you during your interviews.

Sincerely,

Mary Hernandez

Mary Hernandez
Office Manager

MH/bt

Figure 8–3. A "good news" letter.

I have a problem you may be willing to help solve.

Mr. Walter Jenkens has given us your name as a personal reference. I hope you'll be willing to help him by answering some specific questions about him.

Closings for letters, in addition to following the principles illustrated in Chapter 3, can also provide incentive for the reader to act, as in the following:

Please sign the forms today, mark the changes you want made, and return the material to me in the preaddressed envelope. If you can approve everything for me within two days, I should have the amended contract in your hands by next Tuesday.

For more examples of openings and closings in specific circumstances, review the examples in Chapter 9.

Writing Style in Business Letters

Letter-writing style may legitimately vary from informal, in a letter to a close business associate, to formal, or restrained, in a letter to someone you do not know. (Even if you are writing a business letter to a close associate, of course, you should always follow the rules of standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation.)

INFORMAL	It worked! The new process is better than we had dreamed.
RESTRAINED	You will be pleased to know that the new process is more effective than we had expected.

You will probably find yourself relying on the restrained style more frequently than on the informal, since an obvious attempt to sound casual, like overdone goodwill, may strike the reader as insincere. Do not adopt such a formal style, however, that your letters read like legal contracts. Using legalistic-sounding words in an effort to impress your reader will make your writing seem stuffy and pompous—and may well irritate your reader.

Consider the letter shown in Figure 8–4. The excessively formal writing style is full of largely out-of-date business jargon; expressions such as *query* (for *request* or *question*), *I wish to state, be advised that,* and *herewith* are both old-fashioned and pretentious. Good business letters today have a more personal, down-to-earth style, as the revision of the letter in Figure 8–5 illustrates.

The revised version is not only less stuffy but more concise. Being concise in writing is important, but don't be so concise that you become blunt. If you respond to a written request that you cannot understand with "Your request was unclear" or "I don't understand your question," you will probably offend your reader. Instead of attacking the writer's ability to phrase a request, consider that what you are really doing is asking for more information. Say so. "I will need

Amex Laboratories
327 Wilson Avenue Birmingham, AL 35211
(205) 743-6218

September 7, 19--

Mr. Roland E. Forbes
772 South Wilton Street
Birmingham, AL 35207

Dear Mr. Forbes:

In response to your query, I wish to state that we no longer have an original copy of the brochure requested. Be advised that a photographic reproduction is enclosed herewith.

Address further correspondence to this office for assistance as required.

Sincerely yours,

E. T. Hillman

E. T. Hillman

ETH:knt
Enclosure

Figure 8–4. Overly formal letter-writing style.

Amex Laboratories

327 Wilson Avenue Birmingham, AL 35211
(205) 743-6218

September 7, 19--

Mr. Roland E. Forbes
772 South Wilton Street
Birmingham, AL 35207

Dear Mr. Forbes:

Because we are currently out of original copies of our brochure, I am sending you a photocopy of it.

If I can be of further help, please let me know.

Sincerely,

E. T. Hillman

E. T. Hillman

ETH:knt
Enclosure

Figure 8–5. Up-to-date, concise letter-writing style.

more information before I can answer your request. Specifically, can you give me the title and the date of the report you are looking for?" The second version is a little longer than the first, but it is both more polite and more helpful.

Accuracy in Business Letters

Since a letter is a written record, it must be accurate. Facts, figures, dates, and explanations that are incorrect or misleading may cost time, money, and goodwill. Remember that when you sign a letter, you are responsible for what it says. Always allow yourself time to review a letter before mailing it. Whenever possible, ask someone who is familiar with the situation to review an important letter. Listen with an open mind to any criticisms of what you have said. Make whatever changes you believe are necessary. Again—remember that if you sign the letter, you are responsible for its contents.

A second kind of accuracy to check for is in the mechanics of writing—punctuation, grammar, and spelling. In business as elsewhere, accuracy and attention to detail are equated with carefulness and reliability. The kindest conclusion a reader can come to about a letter containing mechanical errors is that the writer was careless. Do not give your reader cause to form such a conclusion.

Appearance in Business Letters

Just as the clothes you wear to job interviews play a part in the first impression potential employers have of you, so the appearance of a business letter may be crucial in influencing a recipient who has never seen you. The rules for preparing a neat, attractive letter are not difficult to master, and they are important—particularly if you type your own letters. If you are using a word processor, print with the "letter quality" setting. (For advice on using a word processor, see Section A in the Writer's Guide.) Type on unruled, white bond paper of standard size and use envelopes of the same quality. Center the letter on the page so that the top margin is about equal to the bottom margin. The white space surrounding the typing serves as a frame, a function referred to as the "picture frame" effect. When you use company letterhead, consider the bottom of the letterhead as the top edge of the frame.

A neat appearance alone will not improve a poorly written letter, but a sloppy appearance will detract from a well-written one.

Parts of the Letter

Almost all business letters have at least five major parts. According to variations in the alignment of the parts on the page, letters may be in one of several formats. If your employer recommends or requires a particular format and typing style, use it. Otherwise, follow the guidelines provided here. See Figures 8–6 and 8–7.

Letterhead	EVANS & ASSOCIATES 520 Niagara St. Lexington, KY 40502 (512) 787-1175 Fax (512) 787-1213
Date	May 15, 19--
Inside address	Mr. George W. Nagel Director of Operations Boston Transit Authority 57 West City Avenue Boston, MA 02210
Salutation	Dear Mr. Nagel:
Body	Enclosed is our final report evaluating the safety measures for the Boston Intercity Transit System. We believe that the report covers the issues you raised and that it is self-explanatory. However, if you have any further questions, we would be happy to meet with you at your convenience. We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. L. K. Sullivan of your committee for his generous help during our trips to Boston.
Complimentary close	Sincerely,
Signature	*Carolyn Brown*
Typed name Title	Carolyn Brown, Ph.D. Director of Research
Additional information	CB/ls Enclosure: Final Safety Report copy: ITS Safety Committee Members

Figure 8–6. Full block letter style (with letterhead).

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3814 Oak Lane
Lexington, KY 40514
December 8, 19--

side
dress

Dr. Carolyn Brown
Director of Research
Evans & Associates
520 Niagara Street
Lexington, KY 40502

ation

Dear Dr. Brown:

Body

Thank you very much for allowing me to tour your testing facilities. The information I gained from the tour will be of great help to me in preparing the report for my class at Marshall Institute. The tour has also given me some insight into the work I may eventually do as a laboratory technician.

I especially appreciated the time and effort Steven Dement spent in showing me your facilities. His comments and advice were most helpful.

Again, thank you.

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Sincerely,

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Leslie Warden

ame

Leslie Warden

Figure 8–7. Modified block letter style (without letterhead).

Heading

The *heading* is the writer's full address (street, city and state, Zip code) and the date. The writer's name is not included in the heading because it appears at the end of the letter. In giving your address, do not use abbreviations for words such as *Street, Avenue, First,* or *West* (as part of a street or city name). You may either spell out the name of the state in full or use the standard Postal Service abbreviations. The date usually goes directly beneath the last line of the address. Do not abbreviate the name of the month.

EXAMPLE

1638 Parkhill Drive East
Great Falls, MT 59407
April 8, 19--

If you are writing on company letterhead, omit the heading. Type in only the date, placing it two double spaces above the inside address.

Inside Address

The *inside address* is the recipient's full name and address. You can begin the inside address a double space below the date if the letter is long, or on the fifth line below the date if the letter is quite short. The inside address should be flush with (or aligned with) the left margin—and the left margin should be at least one inch wide. Include the reader's full name and title (if you know them) and his or her full address, including Zip code.

EXAMPLE

Ms. Gail Silver
Production Manager
Quicksilver Printing Company
14 President Street
Sarasota, FL 33546

Salutation

Place the *salutation* (or "greeting") two spaces below the inside address, also flush with the left margin. In most business letters, the salutation contains the recipient's title (*Mr., Ms., Dr.,* etc.) and last name, followed by a colon. If you are on a first-name basis with the recipient, you would include his or her title and full name in the inside address but use only the first name in the salutation.

EXAMPLES

Dear Ms. Silver:
Dear Mr. Smith:
Dear Dr. Smith:

Dear Captain Smith:
Dear Professor Smith:

(Note that titles such as *Captain* and *Professor* are not abbreviated.)

Dear George:

(if you are on a first-name basis)

For women who do not have a professional title, use *Ms.* (for either a married or an unmarried woman). If the woman has expressed a preference for *Miss* or *Mrs.*, honor her preference. When you do not know whether the recipient is a man or a woman, you may use a title appropriate to the context of the letter. The following are examples of the kinds of titles you may find suitable:

EXAMPLES

Dear Customer:

(letter from a department store)

Dear Homeowner:

(letter from an insurance agent soliciting business)

Dear Parts Manager:

(letter to an auto-parts dealer)

When a person's name could be either feminine or masculine, one solution is to use both first and last names in the salutation.

EXAMPLE

Dear Pat Smith:

In the past, writers to large companies or organizations customarily addressed their letters to "Gentlemen." Today, however, this is inappropriate. Writers who do not know the name or the title of the recipient often address the letter to an appropriate department in the attention line or identify the subject in a subject line in place of a salutation.

EXAMPLES

National Business Systems
501 West National Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55107

Attention: Customer Relations Department

I am returning three calculators we purchased that failed to operate when . . . .

National Business Systems
501 West National Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55107

Subject: Defective Parts for XL-100

I am returning three calculators we purchased that failed to operate when . . . .

The Body

The *body* of the letter is, of course, what the letter is about. Begin the body two spaces below the salutation (or below the heading if no salutation appears). Single-space within paragraphs and double-space between paragraphs. If a letter is very short and you want to suggest a fuller appearance, you may double-space throughout and indicate paragraphs by indenting the first line of each paragraph five spaces from the left. The right margin should be approximately as wide as the left margin. (In very short letters you may increase both margins to about an inch and a half.)

Complimentary Close

Start the *complimentary close* or conventional "goodbye" a double space below the body. Use a standard expression such as *Yours truly, Sincerely yours,* or *Respectfully yours.* (If the recipient is a friend as well as a business associate, you can use a friendly, less formal close: *Best wishes, Cordially, Sincerely, Best regards.*) Only the first word of the complimentary close is capitalized, and the expression is followed by a comma. Two double spaces below the complimentary close, and aligned at the left with the close, type your full name. On the next line you may type in your business title, if it is appropriate to do so. Then sign your name in the space between the complimentary close and your typed name. If you are writing to someone with whom you are on a first-name basis, it is acceptable to sign only your given name; otherwise, sign your full name.

EXAMPLE

Sincerely yours,

Gail Silver

Gail Silver
Production Manager

Second Page

If a letter requires a second page, carry at least two lines of the body over to page two. Do not use a continuation page to type only the complimentary close of the letter. The second page also should have a heading, containing the recipient's name, the page number, and the date (never use letterhead for a second page). The heading may go in the upper-left-hand corner or across the page, as shown in the following examples.

```
Ms. M. C. Marks
Page 2
March 12, 19--
```

```
Ms. M. C. Marks          2          March 12, 19--
```

Additional Information

Business letters sometimes require additional information—the typist's initials, an enclosure notation, or a notation that a copy of the letter is being sent to one or more named people. Place any such information flush left with the margin, a double space below the last line of the complimentary close in a long letter, two double spaces below in a short letter.

Typist's initials follow two basic patterns. No matter which style you choose, however, the letter writer's initials should appear in capital letters and the typist's initials should appear in lowercase letters. (When the writer is also the typist, no initials are needed.)

EXAMPLES JTR/pst

(Typist's initials are separated from the writer's initials by a slash.)

JTR:pst

(Typist's initials are separated from the writer's initials by a colon.)

Enclosure notations, which indicate that the letter writer is sending material along with the letter (an invoice, an article, and so on), may take several forms. Choose the form that seems most helpful to your readers. Remember, though, that no matter which form of enclosure notation you select, you should still make a reference in the body of the letter to the fact that material is enclosed.

EXAMPLES

Enclosures: Preliminary report invoice
Draft contract

(Enclosures are described briefly if the letter is long and formal, or if the nature of the enclosed items is not obvious.)

Enclosures (2)

or

Encs.

(two or more items)

Enc.

(a single item)

Enclosures are not described if the letter is short and the nature of the enclosures is obvious to the reader.

A *copy notation* tells the reader that a copy of the letter is being sent to one or more named individuals.

EXAMPLE

copy: Ms. Marlene Brier
Mr. David Williams

(Brier and Williams receive only the letter.)

copy/enc: Mr. Tom Lee

(Lee receives both the letter and enclosure.)

A business letter may, of course, contain all three items of additional information.

EXAMPLE

Sincerely yours,

Jane T. Rogers

Jane T. Rogers

JTR/pst
Enclosures: Preliminary report invoice
Draft contract

cc: Ms. Marlene Brier

Sample Letter Styles

An important factor in the appearance of a letter is its overall format—the arrangement on the page of the five major parts of the letter. The two most com-

mon styles of business letters are the full block and the modified block. The *full block style,* which is easier to type because every line begins at the left margin, is suitable only with letterhead stationery (see Figure 8–6). In the *modified block style* the return address, date, and complimentary close are aligned just to the right of the center of the page (see Figure 8–7). The remaining elements are aligned at the left margin. All other letter styles are variations of these two basic styles. Again, if your employer recommends or requires a particular style, follow it carefully. Otherwise, choose the style you are most comfortable with and follow it consistently.

Preparing the Envelope

The most widely used form for typing envelopes is the *block* form. The United States Postal Service has established "postal addressing standards," which ensure that automated equipment with optical character readers (OCRs) can process mail quickly and accurately. Figure 8–8 shows a typical address using these standards. Publications that illustrate postal-addressing standards are available through your local U.S. Post Office.

Because they omit punctuation, abbreviate place names, and use all capital letters, such postal address forms may not be appropriate for inside addresses when you need a less mechanical, more personalized look.

The Memorandum

The most frequently used form of communication among members of the same organization is the memorandum. Called memos for short, they are routinely used

Figure 8–8. A #10 envelope, addressed.

for internal communications of all kinds—from short notes to small reports and internal proposals. Among many other uses, memos

Announce policies	Request information
Confirm conversations	Transmit documents
Exchange information	Instruct employees
Delegate responsibilities	Report results

As this partial list illustrates, memos provide a record of the decisions made and virtually all the actions taken in an organization. For this reason, clear and effective memos are essential to the success of any organization. The widely used slogan "Put it in writing" reflects the importance of memos and the care with which they should be written. A carelessly prepared memo sends a garbled message that could baffle readers, cause a loss of time, produce costly errors, or even offend.

Memos play a key role in the management of many organizations because managers use memos (1) to keep employees informed about company goals, (2) to motivate employees to achieve these goals, and (3) to build employee morale. Managers who write clear and accurate memos gain respect and credibility. Consider the unintended secondary messages the following notice conveys:

POOR — It has been decided that the office will be open the day after Thanksgiving.

The first part of the sentence ("It has been decided") not only sounds impersonal but also communicates an authoritarian, management-vs.-employee tone: somebody "decides," you work. The passive voice also suggests that the decision-maker does not want to say "I have decided" and thus be identified (in any case, the office staff would undoubtedly know). One solution, of course, is to remove the first part of the sentence.

BETTER — The office will be open the day after Thanksgiving.

Even this statement sounds impersonal, however. A better solution would be to suggest both that the decision is good for the company and that employees should be privy to (if not a part of) the decision-making process.

BEST — Because we must meet the December 15 deadline to be eligible for the government contract, the office will be open the day after Thanksgiving.

This version is forthright and informative, and it helps employees understand the decision.

Writing Memos

To produce a memo that is both effective and efficiently written, outline your memo, even if you simply jot down points to be covered and then order them

logically. (To review this process, see Chapter 2.) With careful preparation, your memos will be both concise and adequately developed. Adequate development is crucial to the memo's clarity, as the following example indicates.

CHANGE Be more careful on the loading dock.

TO To prevent accidents on the loading dock, follow these procedures:
(1) Check . . .
(2) Load only . . .
(3) Replace . . .

Although the original version is concise, it is not as clear and specific as the revision. Don't assume your reader will know what you mean. Readers aren't always careful, and some provide their own interpretations if you are not as specific as possible. State what you mean explicitly.

Each memo should deal with only one subject. If you need to cover two subjects, write two memos. Multisubject memos are not only difficult to file (thus easily lost) but also confusing to a hurried reader.

In many organizations, memo writing is governed by protocol, whether written or unwritten. A form of etiquette, protocol acknowledges rank by dictating who receives a memo and in what order. Although such practices vary, it is important to be alert to the etiquette of routing memos in your organization.

Memo Openings

Although methods of development vary, a memo normally begins with a statement of its main idea. Even if your opening gives the background of a problem, the main point should appear early in the first paragraph.

EXAMPLE As we discussed earlier, because of our inability to serve our present and future clients efficiently, I recommend we hire an additional claims representative and a part-time receptionist. (main idea)

Last year we did not hire new staff because of the freeze on hiring. . . . (background opening)

When your reader is not familiar with the subject or with the background of a problem, provide an introductory background paragraph. Doing so is especially important in memos that serve as records that can provide crucial information months (or even years) later. Generally, longer memos or those dealing with complex subjects benefit most from fully developed introductions. However, even when writing a short memo about a subject familiar to your readers, remind them of the context. Readers have so much crossing their desks that they need a quick orientation. (Words that provide such orientation are shown in italics below.)

EXAMPLE *As we discussed after yesterday's meeting,* we need to set new guidelines for . . .

EXAMPLE As *Jane recommended, I reviewed the office reorganization plan.* I like most of the features; however, the location of the receptionist and word processor . . .

However, you should *not* state the main point first when (1) the reader is likely to be highly skeptical or (2) you are disagreeing with persons in positions of higher authority. In such cases, a more persuasive tactic is to state the problem first, then present the specific points supporting your final recommendation. For more information on openings and closings, see pages 54–60 in Chapter 3.

Lists and Headings

Whether or not readers agree with your main idea, using lists is an effective strategy that often gives your points impact in a memo. When points are listed—from most to least persuasive—they stand out rather than becoming lost in a lengthy paragraph. *Be careful,* however, *not to overuse lists.* A memo that consists almost entirely of lists is difficult for readers to understand because they are forced to connect the separate items for themselves. Lists also lose their impact when they are overused.

Using headings is another attention-getting device, particularly in long memos. Headings have a number of advantages:

1. They divide material into manageable segments.
2. They call attention to main topics.
3. They signal a shift in topic.

Headings also function like the parts of a formal report. Readers can scan the headings and read only the section or sections appropriate to their needs.

Writing Style and Tone

Whether your memo is formal or informal depends entirely on your reader and your objective. Is your reader a coworker, superior, or subordinate? A memo to a coworker who is also a friend is likely to be informal, while a memo written as an internal proposal to several readers or to someone two or three levels higher in your organization is likely to use the more formal style of a report. Consider the following versions of a statement:

TO AN EQUAL I can't go along with the plan because I think it poses serious logistical problems. First, . . .
(Informal, casual, and forceful response written to an equal)

TO A SUPERIOR

The logistics of moving the department may pose serious problems. First, . . .
(Formal, impersonal, and cautious written response to the superior's plan to move the department)

A memo giving instructions to a subordinate should also be relatively formal and impersonal, but more direct—unless you are trying to reassure or praise. Using an overly chatty, casual style in memos to your subordinates may make you seem either insincere or ineffectual. However, if you become too formal, sprinkling your writing with fancy words, you may seem stuffy and pompous, and managers who *sound* stuffy are assumed to *be* stuffy. They may also be regarded as rigid and hence incapable of moving an organization ahead. When writing to subordinates, then, remember that *managing* does not mean *dictating*. An imperious tone—like false informality—will not make a memo an effective management tool. A positive yet reasonable tone is your goal, as in the following example.

EXAMPLE

Because we must meet the December 15 deadline to be eligible for the government contract, the office will be open the day after Thanksgiving. I am also temporarily reassigning several members of the office staff as shown below.

Format and Parts

Memo format and customs vary greatly from organization to organization. The following forms are typical:

- Preprinted half sheets (8½″ × 5½″)
- Message-and-reply forms ("speed messages")
- Regular 8½″ × 11″ letter stationery
- Special 8½″ × 11″ forms with company name or logo

Although there is no single, standard form, Figure 8–9 shows a typical 8½″ × 11″ format with a printed company name.

Some firms also print short purpose statements on the side or bottom of memos, with space for the writer to check the appropriate box.

EXAMPLE

☐ For Your Information
☐ For Your Action
☐ For Your Reply

You can also use this quick-response system for memos sent to numerous readers whose responses you need to tabulate.

EXAMPLE

I can meet at 1 P.M. _____
2 P.M. _____
3 P.M. _____

Regardless of the parts included, the element requiring perhaps the most careful preparation is the subject line title (such as "Schedule for ACM Electronics Brochure" in Figure 8–9). Subject line titles function much like the titles of reports: they announce the topic. They are also an aid to filing and later retrieval. Therefore, they must be accurate. The memo should deal only with the single subject announced in the subject line, and the title should be complete.

CHANGE	Subject:	Tuition Reimbursement
	or	
	Subject:	Time Management Seminar
TO	Subject:	Tuition Reimbursement for Time Management Seminar

Remember, too, that the title in the subject line should not substitute for an opening that provides a context for the message.

Capitalize all major words in a title. Do not capitalize articles, prepositions, or conjunctions of less than four letters unless they are the first or last words of the title.

The final step is signing or initialing a memo, a practice that lets the reader know that you approve of its contents. Where you sign or initial the memo depends upon the practice of your organization: Some writers sign at the end of a memo, others sign their initials next to their typed name. Follow the practice of your employer. Figure 8–9 shows a typical placement of initials.

International Correspondence

With organizations of all sizes participating in the increasingly global marketplace, you may need to write letters or memos to readers whose native language is not English. These readers may be outside your organization, as in the case of foreign suppliers and distributors. But they may also be inside an organization, as in the case of foreign branch offices that hire employees locally.

Since English is widely taught and used as an international business language, you will be able to send most international correspondence in English. If you must employ a translator, however, be sure that the translator understands the purpose of your correspondence. It is also prudent to let your reader know (in the letter itself or in a postscript) that a translator helped write it. For first-time contacts, consider sending both the English version and a translation of the letter or memo in the reader's native language.

Culture and Business Writing Style

Just as American business writing style has changed over time, ideas about appropriate business writing style vary from culture to culture. You must be alert to

PROFESSIONAL PUBLISHING SERVICES
MEMORANDUM

TO: Barbara Smith, Publications Manager
FROM: Harriet Kaufman, Vice-President HK
DATE: April 14, 19--
SUBJECT: Schedule for ACM Electronics Brochure

ACM Electronics has asked us to prepare a comprehensive brochure for their Milwaukee office by August 9, 19--. We have worked with electronic firms in the past, so this job should be relatively easy to prepare. My guess is that the job will take nearly two months. Ted Harris has requested time and cost estimates for the project. Fred Moore in production will prepare the cost estimates, and I would like you to prepare a schedule for the estimated time.

Additional Personnel

In preparing the schedule, check the following:

(1) Production schedule for all staff writers
(2) Available free-lance writers
(3) Dependable graphic designers

Ordinarily, we should not need to depend on outside personnel; however, since our bid for the Wall Street Journal special project is still under consideration, we could be pressed in June and July. We have to keep in mind staff vacations that have already been approved.

Time Estimates

Please give me time estimates by April 19. A successful job done on time will give us a good chance to obtain the contract to do ACM Electronics' annual report for their stockholders' meeting this fall.

I know your staff can do the job.

cc: Ted Harris, President
Fred Moore, Production

Figure 8–9. Typical memo format.

the special needs and expectations of readers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, in the United States, direct, concise writing may demonstrate courtesy by not wasting another person's time; in other cultures (in countries like Spain and India), such directness and brevity may suggest that the writer dislikes the reader so much that the writer wishes to make the communication as short as possible. Although business writing should always be courteous and efficient, experienced writers understand that the forms of courtesy and ideas about efficiency vary from country to country.

In American business correspondence, traditional salutations like *Dear* and complimentary closings like *Yours truly* have through custom and long use acquired meanings quite distinct from their dictionary definitions. Understanding the unspoken meanings of these forms and using them "naturally" is routine for those who are a part of American business culture. But such customary expressions vary from culture to culture. Therefore, when you read foreign correspondence, be alert to these differences and for how you may employ those that are appropriate to your own writing. Japanese business writers, for example, often use traditional openings that reflect on the season, compliment the reader's success, and offer hopes for the reader's continued prosperity. These traditional openings may strike some American readers as being overly elaborate or "literary."

Decision-making styles also vary from culture to culture. Consequently, the correspondence that supports decision-making processes will vary as well. Whereas an American business writer might consider one brief letter sufficient to communicate a need or transmit a request, for example, a writer in another cultural setting may expect an exchange of three or four longer letters in order to pave the way for action.

Keep in mind that our ideas about business writing have evolved in a particular educational, social, economic, and cultural context. Be sensitive to the expectations of readers who judge effective and appropriate communication from the vantage of a different cultural tradition.

Language and Usage in International Correspondence

Because English may not be your reader's native language, take special care to avoid American idioms ("drop in," "score a touchdown," and the like), unusual figures of speech, and allusions to events or attitudes particular to American life. Such expressions could easily confuse your reader. Avoid humor, particularly sarcasm, because it is easily misunderstood outside its cultural context.

Affectation, as discussed in Chapter 5, will also impede the reader's understanding. Moreover, if you contemplate the use of jargon or technical terminology, ask yourself whether the words you choose might be found in the abbreviated English-language dictionary that your reader would likely have close at hand.

Generally, write clear and complete sentences, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Unusual word order or rambling sentences will frustrate a nonnative user of English. Read your writing aloud to identify overly long sentences and to eliminate any possible misplaced modifiers or ambiguity. Long sentences that

contain more information than the reader can comfortably absorb should be divided into two or more sentences. On the other hand, avoid using an overly simplified "storybook" style. A reader who has studied English as a second language might be insulted by a condescending tone and "childish" language.

Finally, proofread your letters carefully; a misspelled word like *there* for *their* will be particularly troublesome for someone reading in a second language—especially if that reader turns to a dictionary for help and cannot find the word because it is misspelled.

Dates, Time, and Measurement

Countries differ in their use of formats to represent dates, time, and other kinds of measurement. To represent dates, Europeans typically write the day before the month and year. In England, for example, 1/11/97 means 1 November 1997; in the United States, it means January 11, 1997. The strictly numerical form for dates, therefore, should never be used in international correspondence. Writing out the name of the month makes the entire date immediately clear to any reader, whichever format you use. Time poses similar problems: particularly in this age of instantaneous communication and high-speed transportation, you may need to specify time zones or refer to international standards, such as Greenwich Mean Time, to ensure clarity.

Your use of other international standards, such as the metric system, will also help your reader. For up-to-date information about accepted conventions for numbers and symbols in chemical, electrical, data processing, radiation, pharmaceutical, and other fields, consult guides and manuals specific to the subject matter.

Chapter Summary

Writing a Business Letter

- Good news pattern
  - Good news or main point
  - Explanation of facts
  - Goodwill close
- Bad news pattern
  - Buffer
  - Explanation
  - Bad news
  - Goodwill close
- Create a brief outline
- Prepare a first draft
- Determine the level of formality

- Review for the "you" viewpoint
- Allow a cooling period
- Revise the draft
- Determine the appropriate format
    - Full block
    - Modified block
    - Other

Writing a Memorandum

- Follow memo protocol
- Organize your ideas
- Prepare an opening
- Adjust the style and tone
- Use lists and headings strategically
- Use appropriate memo format
- Prepare the subject line title

Writing International Correspondence

- Use words likely to appear in your reader's English-language dictionary
- Adjust for cultural preferences in the organization of ideas
- Consider the decision-making style of your recipient's culture
- Eliminate humor and slang
- Read the letter aloud for ambiguity and confusing sentence structure
- Check for appropriate forms of dates, times, and measurements

EXERCISES

1. Bring to class one business letter that you believe is well written and one that is poorly written. Be prepared to explain your reasons for thinking that one is better than the other. If you are working full- or part-time, you may be able to find letters in your office. If not, obtain letters from friends or relatives, or find examples among the correspondence you receive in the mail.

2. Rewrite the following statement to make it more positive and less blunt.

   I will not pay you because you have not sent the double-jointed widget. If you do not send the right one right away, I will not pay you at all.

3. Rewrite the following passage to make it less unfriendly.

   I wrote for the record you advertised on television, and not only did it take six weeks to get here, but it was the wrong record. Can't you get anything right? I'm canceling payment on my check and sending this record back!

4. Revise the following passage to make it clearer and less pretentious.

With reference to and in connection with your recent automobile accident, I have been unable to contact you due to the fact that I have been in Chicago on work-related business. I should be back in the office in the neighborhood of the 15th or so. In the unforeseen and unlikely event that I should be delayed, you can utilize Mr. Strawman, of my office, who will also endeavor in your behalf.

5. Find a letter containing bad news that you believe is unnecessarily blunt. Rewrite the letter to protect the goodwill of the organization that sent it. Attach your revision to the original, and submit both to your instructor.

6. Summarize an article on appropriate style and tone for business correspondence from either the *Journal of Business Communication* or the Association for Business Communication *Bulletin*. Limit the summary to 150–250 words. Submit it to your instructor, and (if your instructor so directs) prepare an oral summary for class discussion.

7. Find an example of overdone goodwill. (Mass-produced sales letters, for example, may be useful.) Rewrite the letter or message, retaining goodwill while eliminating poor style.

8. Revise the following statements so they reflect the "you" viewpoint.
   a. I want you to buy this "Handy-Fone" so I can win the sales award for this month.
   b. We must receive a copy of your W-4 form to complete our files.
   c. Our business is built on our commitment to quality that we pass on to our customers.
   d. I can't finish your income tax calculations until I receive your December receipts. Then I'll be able to file for the expected refund.

9. Improve the business-letter style or memo-writing strategy of the following statements.
   a. As per your request, please find enclosed a copy of the report that was requested by your office.
   b. Persuant to V. B. Lanham's instructions, I have prepared a thorough analysis that your department should have prepared last year.
   c. Records of all long-distance telephonic communications should be submitted prior to the penultimate day of the subsequent month.
   d. You are hereby notified that your vacation schedule must be submitted to my office two months prior to the dates so that I may avoid disruptive interferences. It is hoped this practice will find the acceptance of all staff members. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me. Thanks.

10. You are manager of accounting for a company that sells computer software packages throughout the country. You have just received word from the comptroller that there has been a change in the expense allowances for employees using their own automobiles on business. Research done by your

company's business office has revealed the need to set different allowance rates for two categories of drivers—"regular" and "nonregular." (Previously, one rate was applied to all employees.)

"Regular" drivers are those who use their own cars frequently on the job. Typically, these would be employees who regularly drive to their sales territories. "Nonregular" drivers are those employees who only occasionally use their cars on business; most home office personnel would be included in this category.

The revised allowance is effective immediately. It will be reimbursed according to formulas for each category. "Regular" drivers will receive 20¢ per mile for the first 650 miles driven per month, and 10¢ for each additional mile. "Nonregular" drivers will receive 20¢ per mile for the first 150 miles per month, and 10¢ for each additional mile.

To ensure that these categories are used properly, you want to set up a control procedure. The Accounts Payable supervisor has suggested that the manager of each department notify Accounts Payable, by letter, which employees in his or her department should be classified as "regular" drivers. You agree and decide that Accounts Payable will reimburse those employees not identified by the letter according to the "nonregular" driver formula.

You need to communicate this information to all employees. Prepare a memo to do this.

11. *Part A:* You are director of corporate communications for a nationwide insurance company called The Provider Group. Management has asked you to design a letterhead that reflects a "modern, yet responsible image." For this project, collect as many samples of letterheads as you can. Then, using a word processor with graphics capability, design a letterhead for The Provider Group (using a local address, phone number, and any other appropriate details).

    As you design, consider the image and personality your design will project as well as the amount of information you should provide.

    Part B: Survey six organizations in your area (including your college) to determine the letter formats they use (full block, modified block, etc.). Who makes the decisions (secretaries? word-processing staff? management?)? Is everyone required to use a standard form? Why do they use the forms they do? Prepare a report according to your instructor's directions.

    Part C: Using the results in Parts A and B, determine the best format for letters to be sent to the clients of The Provider Group on the letterhead you have designed.

    Your instructor may assign Parts A, B, and C as an individual or a collaborative project.

12. Assume that you are writing an inquiry letter to Mr. Jose Espinosa of the Spanish Tourist Bureau in Madrid, Spain. You wish to obtain information about work opportunities in Madrid because you are interested in relocating in Spain upon your graduation.

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    Your instructor may assign Parts A, B, and C as an individual or a collaborative project.

12. Assume that you are writing an inquiry letter to Mr. Jose Espinosa of the Spanish Tourist Bureau in Madrid, Spain. You wish to obtain information about work opportunities in Madrid because you are interested in relocating in Spain upon your graduation.

You must determine a realistic street address in Madrid and gather information about both the proper protocol and the format of the letter. To do so, write a draft of the letter as you would if you were writing to a local tourist office. With the approval of your instructor, ask a faculty member at your college who, for example, teaches Spanish (and would understand the form and protocol of such a letter) to comment on the appropriateness of the letter you have drafted.

Chapter 15 | Oral Communications

Although writing is a major form of communication, it is hardly the only one. Oral presentations and the art of listening effectively to a speaker and then responding effectively are other forms of on-the-job communication that can be critically important in the business world.

Writing and speaking have much in common. Both are important means of communication, both must be organized logically in order to be understandable, and both must be delivered clearly and succinctly if they are to be effective. Much of what you have learned about writing is equally applicable to oral communication: knowing your audience, knowing how to organize information, and knowing how to compose effective sentences. But there is also much that is unique about oral communication, and exploring those aspects of oral communication is the purpose of this chapter. Elements unique to oral communication include: (1) understanding the mechanics and the human aspects of listening, (2) preparing and delivering an oral presentation, and (3) conducting a productive meeting.

Listening

Of all the communication skills needed on the job, the ability to listen actively is the key to making all the other skills effective. Listening actively and effectively is the beginning of accurate communication: it is at the heart of carrying out the instructions of a teacher, a manager, or a customer. It is also an essential skill for achieving cooperation among the members of a group.

The Communication Process

The communication process is actually what this whole book is about. All the chapters that deal with the writing process are dealing with some aspect of the communication process. The primary difference between written and oral communication is that written documents are one-way communications (the reader cannot respond immediately), whereas oral communication is usually two-way commu-

nication (the listener can respond immediately). The listener who responds immediately must be able to listen effectively in order to respond appropriately. Just as a reader must take the time to absorb written material accurately, the listener must take the time—slowing down the communication process if necessary—to be sure he or she has accurately absorbed the information that is being transmitted.

Sending the Message

As you take part in most business communications, you will alternate between listening and speaking. If you are the speaker, or the sender of the message, it is your responsibility to organize and present the message logically and succinctly.

All the knowledge you have gained about writing will also help you convey an oral message that is free of confusion and easy for the listener to understand. Everything you have learned about organizing information effectively and composing clear and succinct sentences will also help you to send oral messages effectively. What you learned about knowing your reader will help you determine the same things about your listener.

Interpreting the Message

If you are the listener in a business conversation, you must interpret the message sent by the speaker. Interpreting is the listener's responsibility, just as sending is the speaker's. Accurately interpreting the message sent by the speaker requires conscious effort and a willingness to become a *responder* rather than a *reactor.*

A responder is a listener who can slow the communication down, if necessary, to be certain that he or she is accurately receiving the exact message that is being sent by the speaker. To slow the communication down—by increasing the amount of time that passes between the time the speaker talks and the listener answers—the listener should clarify his or her understanding, ask for more information, or paraphrase the message received before offering his or her thoughts, opinions, or recommendations.

A reactor, on the other hand, simply says the first thing that comes to mind, based on limited information, and might easily take away from the conversation a confused version of the message that was intended.

Formulating a Response

Formulating a response is a crucial facet of oral communications; but a problem that listeners often have is that they focus so much on formulating their response before the speaker is finished that they fail to take in an appropriate amount of the information to respond appropriately. The most effective way to offset this problem is to increase the amount of time you take to process your thoughts so that you can produce a response instead of a reaction.

The Benefits of Effective Listening

Effective listening has many benefits. It helps you avoid miscommunication, manage conflict, realize human benefits, achieve cooperation and synergy, and gather accurate information.

Avoiding Miscommunication

More often than not, we respond *not* to the message that was sent but to (1) the manner in which it was sent (you've heard people say, "It wasn't what he said, it's how he said it"), (2) the way the speaker looks (frowning, closed appearance, purple hair, inappropriate dress for the situation), or (3) a conscious or subconscious prejudice we may have about the subject or the speaker (someone you don't like or trust, a subject you feel strongly about, etc.). Consequently, our response is based on misinformation or assumptions—and miscommunication takes place. Confusion and misunderstanding are inevitable under such circumstances.

To make matters worse, a misunderstanding can occur without either party being aware that they are not understanding each other. This happens for a very simple reason: the speaker's ideas are known only to him, and he must rely on his communication skills (which may be good or bad) to make them known to the listener. Similarly, the listener's perception of the speaker's message is known only to the listener, and if the listener doesn't verify her understanding, a miscommunication can occur with neither the speaker nor the listener being aware of it.

Communication can break down for a number of reasons.

- The speaker has difficulty developing and expressing his or her thoughts, and the listener doesn't prompt the speaker with questions so that the message is clarified. The listener responds, therefore, without fully understanding the message (the speaker will assume her message is received and understood unless the listener gives her feedback that tells her otherwise).
- The message is distorted by a poor phone connection, by soft speech, by hearing problems, by background noise, and so forth.
- The listener may not pay full attention to the entire message, may distort the message, or may read things into the message that are not part of it.
- The listener assumes that he or she knows what the speaker is going to say and stops listening. (The more familiar you are with a person or situation, the more likely you are to do this.)
- The listener is more intent on formulating a response than on listening to the complete message.

Managing Conflict

Another benefit of effective listening is that it helps you manage conflict. When we become emotional, our listening efficiency begins to drop—and the more

emotional we become, the more our listening efficiency decreases. Those in conflict begin letting emotion rather than intelligence rule their words. The only workable solution to this situation is to know how to detach yourself from emotions that are hampering listening efficiency so that you can listen objectively and control the emotional barriers that are hampering effective listening. Asking questions and asking for clarification can slow the development of conflict considerably. This and other good active listening techniques will help you avoid conflict, if possible, and give you a better chance of controlling it when it occurs.

Creating an Open Atmosphere

Good listening skills help create an open atmosphere, without which the continuing exchange of ideas and information could not occur. In an open atmosphere people feel more at ease talking and sharing ideas, and they become more cooperative even if they don't share the same point of view. Listening with empathy for the other person's point of view or situation also makes the other person feel important. You are saying nonverbally to that person, "You are important, and so is what you are saying." If you put yourself in the speaker's position, it will be evident why something is important to him or her. Listening with empathy for the speaker helps keep your own emotions from clouding the issue. Listening for clues that tell you what the speaker may be feeling (uncertainty, anger, excitement, etc.) can help you put the message into perspective more accurately so you can formulate a more accurate response and distance yourself from any emotions.

Reducing Tension and Stress

Effective listening reduces tension and stress by contributing to teamwork, trust, and a sense of belonging. When people really listen and try to understand the other person's point of view—without necessarily agreeing with it—even heated situations begin to calm down. (We may believe that if we listen to someone, we are sending the signal that we are agreeing. Active listening is neither agreeing or disagreeing, but simply making sure we understand and that everyone contributes.) Stress is a serious side effect both of conflict and of not being able to voice your thoughts. By listening actively, stress levels can be reduced or eliminated because conflicts are less intense and everyone gets to speak.

A good listener begins a mutually beneficial chain reaction by demonstrating an interest in the speaker and what he or she has to say. Empathetic listening encourages better communication—which can result in more relevant questions and more valid information, less conflict, and a beneficial slowing down of everyone's communication process.

Achieving Cooperation and Synergy

Another benefit of effective listening is that good listening skills can help you achieve cooperation and synergy. Cooperation means that no one gets his or her

way entirely but that everyone's opinion is heard, understood, and taken into consideration. Without effective listening, this is unlikely to be true. Synergy means that the "collective brain" of a group is more productive than any individual brain could be. The information from the collective brain is impossible to gather unless all the parts of the collective brain can be heard. Such an achievement could not occur without good listening skills.

Providing More Accurate Information

When information you get from another person is accurate and complete, three things happen: (1) your own efficiency and productivity increase, (2) misunderstandings are eliminated, and (3) tensions are reduced. Poor listening habits result in less efficient work, with much time spent redoing things that could have been done right the first time. Many of us complain about our lack of time. Yet we rush through conversations, only half listening, and end up bumbling through because we didn't listen effectively or check our understanding in the first place. Active, efficient listening is a great time saver.

Steps to More Effective Listening

To listen more effectively on the job, you should (1) understand that different levels of listening efficiency are appropriate to different business situations, (2) decide to listen effectively, (3) define your purpose for listening, (4) increase your communication time, and (5) take specific actions to listen more efficiently.

Adapt Your Listening Efficiency to the Situation

It is not necessary to listen at peak efficiency at all times. For example, when you are listening to a lecture, you are listening for specific information only. However, if you are on the job, working on a team project where the success of the project is dependent on everyone's contribution, your listening efficiency needs to be at its highest to enable you to not only gather information but also to pick up on other nuances the speakers may be communicating. It is helpful to identify for yourself the degree of listening intensity you need at the outset of any oral communication.

Decide to Listen Effectively

Most of the battle with listening effectively can be won by simply making up your mind that you are going to do it. Effective listening requires conscious effort, something that does not come naturally. One way of thinking that can help you in the business world is to seek first to understand and then to be understood. If you let this rule of thumb be your guide, you may find it easier to take the steps or the time required to ensure that you are indeed exerting a conscious effort to listen effectively.

Increase Your Communication Time

The first step is to tell yourself to take the time to think and ask for additional information if necessary. It will take repetition and discipline, but if you don't take yourself firmly in hand now you'll never create the habit of slowing down your communication time so you can *respond* rather than *react*. It's tiring to fight with yourself, but eventually persistence will win and a habit will take form. As tiring as it is in the beginning, the payoff will be energizing because of fewer misunderstandings.

Seek first to understand what the speaker is trying to tell you before you seek to make yourself understood. Using this frame of mind, you will never speak too soon; you will never act inappropriately based on a misunderstanding of a business situation; you will never suffer the consequences of your words or tone of voice being wrong; and you will never be out of control of your feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Once you've successfully prevented yourself from jumping on an emotional bandwagon, you can begin to listen objectively, without being thrown off course by emotion. When you've received more details about a business situation, it often becomes evident that the surface details really tell only a small part of the story.

To achieve the "seek first to understand and then to be understood" principle you must do the following four things before you provide your answer, opinion, or response to the speaker's topic:

1. Acknowledge and validate the speaker
2. Check your understanding of the speaker's intended message
3. Demonstrate empathy
4. Encourage the speaker to talk

Acknowledge and Validate the Speaker The need to be paid attention to and validated is one that will drive people to extremes—both personally and professionally. Everyone wants to feel intelligent, respected, and even admired. Think how you treat or respond to someone who makes you feel validated.

To make a speaker feel acknowledged and validated really doesn't take much effort. It can be done by:

1. Showing interest through your words, vocal tone, gestures, and facial expressions
2. Not raising your voice or seeming to react negatively
3. Remaining calm and receptive

Check Your Understanding of the Speaker's Intended Message The more familiar you are with someone, the quicker you are to assume that you know what he or she is going to say; and the more familiar you are with a situation, the more likely you are to assume you know what's coming and quit listening. Remember that the more you assume, the easier it is to miss the speaker's intended message. Like acknowledging and validating the speaker, verifying your understanding of the speaker's intended message is not difficult. It's a matter of:

- saying, "It seems to me then that you're saying _____."
- asking, "Could you explain that further?"
- asking, "What do you mean by _____?"
- saying, "Let me see if I understand. . . ."

Demonstrate Empathy Empathy is listening in a way that enables you to put yourself in the speaker's position, or to look at things from the speaker's perspective. It's a way of thinking that corresponds with the idea of not judging another until you've "walked a mile in his or her moccasins."

The value of empathy is that it makes the speaker feel that you are really trying to understand. It also helps keep your own emotions from clouding the issue. When people feel that they are being listened to, they tend to respond with appreciation and cooperation. Empathy on the listener's part can begin a mutually beneficial chain reaction—empathetic listening encourages better communication.

Empathy is something you do mentally, first by picturing what the speaker is saying, and then by imagining how it must have felt or seemed for the speaker. The key is to let the speaker know that you're putting yourself in his or her position. You could use phrases like:

- "That must have felt _____."
- "You must have been _____."

Let the Speaker Talk One big problem for most people is that while we're listening to someone, we tend to want to talk. It's human nature. The same is true for the speaker; he or she wants and possibly needs to talk. When listeners get self-centered, they tend to forget this basic tenet of human nature and focus on getting their turn to talk, completely disregarding the speaker's need. By encouraging the speaker, you are asking for more ideas or opinions, not necessarily more words.

To encourage the speaker, you could say things like:

- "And then what happened?"
- "What more do you know?"
- "What are your feelings about all this?"

Define Your Purpose for Listening

Much of the time, the biggest reason we don't listen effectively is that we haven't told ourselves *why* we are listening. Without some justification to ourselves, our minds may find something more interesting to think about while the speaker is talking.

There are two types of listening opportunities: the first is when you know you'll be expected to listen (a meeting, a lecture, an interview, a consultation, or a presentation), and the other is when you find yourself thrown into a listening situation (someone comes into your office unexpectedly, someone calls you on the phone, or someone stops you in the hall). In either of these situations, the first step

to being effective and active in the communication is to define your purpose for listening. This is a frequently overlooked solution for poor listening, yet it is one of the simplest.

Knowing why you are listening can go a long way toward managing the most common problems people have with listening: drifting attention while the speaker is talking, formulating your response while the speaker is still talking, and interrupting the speaker.

How to Define Your Purpose in a Planned Discussion

When you know you are going to be involved in a situation that will require you to listen actively, take the time to focus yourself for listening. Some possible questions you may want to answer for yourself are:

- What kind of information do I hope to get from this conversation?
- What benefit will that information provide me?
- What kind of message do I want to send while I'm listening? (Do I want to portray understanding, determination, flexibility, competence, patience, etc.?)
- What kind of listening problems do I foresee coming up for me during the interaction—boredom, mind wandering, anger, impatience, etc.? How can I keep these things from prohibiting me from listening effectively?

You may give these questions some thought, or you may go as far as writing out your responses to them. By planning your communication, you can prevent problems that may arise as a result of reacting rather than responding.

How to Define Your Purpose in an Impromptu Discussion

Because of the fast pace of many business interactions, we are often faced with situations that arise abruptly, leaving us virtually without preparation time and catching us in whatever frame of mind we were in when the situation dropped in our laps. These are the times when communication efficiency can be achieved by slowing the communication down. Without slowing down your thinking and gaining some internal control, you are vulnerable to ineffective thinking patterns and are most likely to go into a reactive mode rather than a more controlled responsive mode.

In an impromptu situation when the speaker is emotionally charged, begin by stopping yourself from getting caught up in whatever emotion, feeling, or nonverbal message the speaker is sending. How you stop yourself from reacting in such a way depends on what kind of listener you are now. If you are someone who reacts instinctively to the way information is presented to you, you will need to begin immediately practicing your patience skills. The lower your patience skill

level, the more challenging you'll find this to be. Reacting too quickly is a habit that can be broken, however, once you decide that you want to do something about it.

Take Specific Actions

Once you have made up your mind to listen actively and attentively throughout a business discussion, there are certain actions you can take that will help both you and the speaker. Make many of the following six actions part of your habitual and normal listening pattern:

- Give the speaker your attention
- Take notes
- Use paraphrasing
- Encourage the speaker
- Ask probing questions
- Use silence effectively

Give the Speaker Your Attention Make the speaker aware that you are actively participating in the conversation. There are benefits in this behavior, both for the speaker and the listener. The *speaker* feels that you are showing an interest in the conversation, and you've begun creating a safe and open atmosphere for the speaker; this atmosphere is then usually reciprocated by the speaker. The *listener* helps himself or herself focus on the speaker, thereby sending good, positive signals to the speaker.

The following are some attention-giving behaviors.

- *Maintain eye contact* with the speaker *most* of the time. Eye contact is one of the strongest nonverbal signals. Think of eye contact as a mental handshake. Be careful that your eye contact doesn't turn into staring, however. Staring can be interpreted as a challenge or a threat.
- *Face the speaker* squarely and lean slightly toward him or her. This posture tells the speaker that you are truly focused.
- *Use positive nonverbal behavior* by nodding, smiling, opening your body posture, or looking pleased whenever it is appropriate. Take care, however, that this behavior doesn't make it appear to the speaker that you are simply faking listening.
- *Use empathetic listening* when it is appropriate. Sometimes people simply need to vent their feelings in a safe environment. To offer an empathetic ear, the listener should be leaning forward (if seated), make eye contact, and have a look of concern on his or her face. Possible comments could be something like, "It sounds as if you're really angry," or whatever the appropriate emotion may be. Or you can encourage the speaker to continue talking by asking "feeling" questions such as, "How does all this affect you now and in the long run?" or

"How are you managing to cope?" Notice that you are not offering advice or solutions but creating an atmosphere in which the speaker can feel safe expressing his or her emotions. The fact that you are in the business world does not mean that you can't be empathetic. This can be one of the most powerful of all listening techniques.

Take Notes Taking notes while you are listening provides you with several benefits.

1. It helps you stay focused on the speaker, especially during a presentation or lecture.
2. It helps you fill the time lag between the speaker's rate of speaking and your rate of processing the information. Writing or expanding on what you hear will keep your mind from drifting off the subject.
3. It helps you remember what you've heard, because you are reenforcing it by writing it.
4. It communicates to the speaker that you are listening thoroughly and that you are interested in what he or she is saying.

Use Paraphrasing To paraphrase means to restate in your own words what you believe the speaker said. Your paraphrasing should be concise and try to capture the essence of the speaker's message. Paraphrasing is a powerful and effective way to (1) let the speaker know that you are listening, (2) give the speaker an opportunity to clear up any misunderstanding you may have about what was said, (3) keep yourself focused, and (4) remember the discussion. Following are some ways to introduce paraphrases.

- "Let me see if I understand . . ."
- "So what you are saying is . . ."
- "Let me review what you've just said to see if I understand you correctly . . ."

The more strained the discussion, the more helpful paraphrasing can be. The more emotional a person is, the faster the thought process; and the faster the thought process, the lower the quality of the thoughts. But when one party starts paraphrasing the other (seeking to understand before being understood), the entire communication is slowed down, and the emotional level can drop considerably.

Another time to concentrate on paraphrasing is when you need to send the message that you're very interested in what the speaker has to say. This can prove useful in repairing strained relationships (both professional and personal), in helping someone open up to you, or in changing an existing way of communicating. Paraphrasing is also a technique you can use to keep your mind from drifting. As you are listening, paraphrase to yourself what you've just heard the speaker say. By filling your mind with a paraphrase of what you've just heard, you will help control your mind's tendency to drift off the subject.

Encourage the Speaker "Encouragers" are those things you say that indicate to the speaker that you'd like to hear more. Encouragers are useful (1) to help you open a line of communication, (2) to help the speaker flesh out what he or she is trying to say, and (3) to show the speaker that you are interested in what he or she has to say. Common phrases you can use to encourage the speaker to continue are:

- "Then what happened?"
- "Tell me more."
- "How did it make you feel when _____?"
- "What do you think of all this?"

Many times your tone of voice will provide all the encouragement the speaker needs. By using an empathetic tone, you will be sending the speaker a very strong message that you want him or her to continue. How encouraging you decide to be should be based on how much you know about the speaker. Encouragement doesn't necessarily mean you're encouraging more words, but encouraging more expression of thoughts, opinions, feelings, or insight.

Ask Probing Questions When your goal is to understand the speaker thoroughly, you must ask questions that will clarify your understanding. Unless your mind is set to seek first to understand, it probably won't occur to you to ask for more information.

Some cautions about questions: you can seem threatening or challenging to the speaker if your tone of voice reveals disapproval, mistrust, doubt, or disagreement. Also, avoid asking too many questions in rapid-fire succession. Doing this puts the speaker on the defensive and may make him or her feel that you're getting too intense about whatever it is you're discussing. Questions, kindly and appropriately asked, will further your understanding greatly. Be aware, however, that they can do as much harm as good if you don't keep the speaker's feelings foremost in your mind.

Use Silence Effectively You've probably heard, "You've got two ears and one mouth, so use them accordingly." It's also called the "21" theory: listen twice as much as you speak. Naturally the only way to do that is to be silent while the speaker speaks.

Silence can be one of the most difficult things for human beings to handle. We tend to feel that we need to fill the vacuum with sound. We sometimes feel that to such a degree that we will fill the vacuum with any sound just to avoid the silence.

To listen effectively, the listener must be silent—even if the silence is sometimes uncomfortable. Some speakers need silence from the listener in order to gather their thoughts, and some need silence to show that the listener will wait for them to respond. If you are a quick responder, the speaker knows that if you ask a question and he or she waits long enough you will get impatient and fill the silence rather than wait it out.

Silence, like questions, can be destructive if used inappropriately or as a power play. Too much silence can be interpreted a number of ways: that you're not interested, that you're unwilling to discuss the topic, that you're unwilling to reveal how you feel about the topic, that you disagree, that you agree, and myriad other things that could occur to the speaker based on what you know about each other.

In summary, the positive benefits of effective listening in the business world are many. To achieve those benefits, you must learn the steps to effective listening and then discipline yourself to practice them regularly. But remember that listening (and responding) is but one method of oral communication—making oral presentations and participating in business meetings are others.

Oral Presentations

Presentation skills are valuable in the business world because knowledge and experience gain in value to you or your company if you can communicate them. Your level of competence in making a presentation is a major factor in how competent you are perceived to be overall.

Many of the steps necessary to prepare an effective oral presentation parallel the steps discussed in Chapters 1 through 5 about preparing to write a document. You must focus your presentation by determining its purpose and the audience to whom you will be presenting it. Then you must find and gather the facts that will support your point of view or proposal. You must then logically organize the information you have collected.

Focusing the Presentation

Focusing a presentation means determining the specific purpose of the presentation and your audience's needs. When your presentation is focused, the scope of coverage—the topics you need to include—fulfills your purpose in making the presentation and meets the needs of your audience.

Purpose

The first step in focusing a presentation is the same as the first step in focusing writing—to determine its purpose. Every presentation has a purpose—even if it is only sharing information. (An inherent secondary purpose is that your presentation is an opportunity for your peers, superiors, or subordinates to form their perception of your competence.) One of the most frequent presentation problems is that the presenter does not have a specific enough purpose. Too many presentations begin with "I'm going to tell you about . . ." and "I'm going to explain. . . ." But the presenter rarely follows with *why* the audience should listen.

Here's an example of a general purpose statement that, given a couple of attempts, gets tightened to a good, direction-giving purpose statement.

- I would like to discuss productivity with you today. (vague)
- I would like to discuss how the productivity in area B can be improved. (better)
- The productivity in area B can be improved with a few simple, inexpensive ideas that I want to share with you. (specific)

To determine the purpose of your presentation, use one or more of the following questions as a guide.

- What do I want the audience to *know* when I've finished this presentation?

EXAMPLE When I've finished with this presentation, I want the audience to know that *Brand X copier is the best copier for us based on our finances, needs, and space.*

- What do I want the audience to *believe* when I've finished this presentation?

EXAMPLE When I've finished with this presentation, I want the audience to believe that *I've thoroughly investigated all the applicable copiers, using identical criteria for each. To ensure that the audience believes that, I will show the system I used to evaluate each copier.*

- What do I want the audience to *do* when I've finished with this presentation?

EXAMPLE When I've finished with this presentation, I want the audience to *approve the purchase of the Brand X copier. To get their approval, I need to assure them that the copier is within budget and that the money is being spent for a good, long-lasting product.*

You may need to answer all these questions, or you may answer any one of them.

Once you've completed one or more of these statements, write a succinct purpose statement for your presentation, based on the answers. This statement will most likely become a part of your presentation's introduction.

EXAMPLE The purpose of my presentation is to show the audience the copiers I compared and to make my recommendation *so that* the audience will approve funds to buy the copier that I am recommending.

Audience Analysis

The second step in focusing a presentation is to gather some specific information about the audience. You need to know not only the type of information to give your audience, but also how to talk to them. To know both those things, you must analyze your audience by asking the following questions.

- What is my audience's level of knowledge and experience about my topic before hearing my presentation?

EXAMPLE The experience or level of knowledge that my audience currently has about my subject is fairly basic. They know how to use a copier, and they know what they use it for. Beyond that, they have little knowledge. Therefore, based on their existing knowledge, I should begin with a basic description of how a copier works and how copiers differ so they will understand how I made my comparisons.

- What is the general educational level of my audience?

EXAMPLE Since the general educational level of my audience is bachelor's degree and up, I don't need to worry about talking over their heads as far as general English vocabulary is concerned.

- What type of information will it take to move my audience to act on what I am presenting?

EXAMPLE The type of information I should provide this audience in order to achieve my objective is:
- the basics of how a copier works;
- the criteria used to compare copiers;
- the benefits of Brand X over the other copiers in terms of quality, performance, how it fits our needs, and how it will be performing after 500,000 copies; and
- how we can justify the extra expense up front—how that extra expense will save money in the long run.

Next, anticipate the questions that may come to the audience's mind during the presentation. Then incorporate the answers to those questions in your presentation.

EXAMPLE Some questions the audience might have during the presentation are:
- Can Brand X handle the volume we do without breaking down during a project?

- Is a maintenance contract available?
- What is the response time for maintenance and supplies?
- Will the vendor provide us with a loaner should our copier need to go out for repairs?
- Does the vendor deliver supplies?
- How soon will our copier be installed should we approve the purchase?
- Will our people be trained, and if so what kind of schedule is proposed for training?

Gathering Information

By determining your specific purpose and analyzing your audience, you have precisely focused the presentation. Now you need to find the facts that will support your point of view or proposal. While you are gathering information, keep in mind that you should give the audience only the facts it will need to enable you to accomplish your presentation goals. Too much information tends to overburden the audience, and too little information leaves your audience with a sketchy understanding of your topic. The trick is to know exactly what information you need to include to achieve your purpose and meet the needs of your audience.

Ask yourself the following question to help guide you in gathering the information: Based on what I know about the members of my audience, what do I need to include to meet their needs?

EXAMPLE

Based on what I know about the audience, I'll need to:

- explain how copiers work;
- provide an analysis of our needs in a copier;
- explain which copiers I chose to compare and why;
- go over the maintenance contract, comparing all brands (including cost per page for maintenance and supplies);
- show the long-term performance histories of all three copiers;
- show the quality of copies after 120,000 copies, and
- show the copier I recommend and why I am recommending it.

Organizing the Presentation

Once you have your data collected, you need to organize it in a way that is logical and easy to understand. Logical organization is both powerful and persuasive. Organizing the presentation includes deciding how to develop the topic and how to structure the presentation. Organizing an oral presentation is no different than organizing a writing task, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Developing the Topic

You first need to determine the best method for unfolding (or developing) your topic for your audience. Choosing a method of development means determining the best way to sequence your information to make it easiest to understand or most persuasive. An appropriate method of development will move the topic smoothly and logically from your opening to your closing.

Make certain that the method of development you select is appropriate to both your audience and your objective and that it is based on your audience's needs. For example, if you were trying to get approval to purchase a particular copier, you could *compare* the various brands available on the basis of features, price, maintenance, and so forth. Or if you were trying to persuade your boss to reorganize your department, you might use division and classification. Review the "Methods of Organization" section of Chapter 2 for specific guidelines about organizing your information.

EXAMPLE

The best way to sequence my presentation would be to compare the different copiers and let the audience come to the same conclusion I did; in other words, let their decision be built on the evidence. So I'll use the comparison method of development.

Structuring the Presentation

A presentation has three distinct parts: an introduction, a body, and closing. It is usually best to write the body of your presentation first because you'll be able to write a better introduction after you decide what to include in the body.

Body

How to pull your presentation together is going to be evident now because you know what your purpose is, what your audience needs, how to talk to your audience, and you have collected the appropriate data and decided on the best way to develop your topic.

Now it is only a matter of listing your major points, in the most appropriate order, and incorporating the data you have collected under the appropriate major points. Structuring your presentation is like structuring a document (review Chapters 2 and 3). To structure your presentation, create an outline; begin by dividing your topic into its major points or divisions. You should know your topic well enough that you can readily identify its major divisions. Write them down in a sequence that reflects your method of development. Then consider them carefully to make sure they divide the topic logically.

Continuing with the copier example, you could start with the following major divisions:

Introduction
How a Copier Works
Construction Comparison
Quality-of-Copies Comparison
Maintenance Contracts Comparison
Cost Comparison
Proposal
Closing

The next step is to outline your presentation (see Chapter 3). This permits you to recognize at a glance the relative importance of divisions within your topic. The copier example could be broken down as follows:

I. How a Copier Works
   A. Overhead with Drawing
II. Construction Comparison
   A. Brand X
   B. Brand Y
   C. Brand Z
III. Quality-of-Copies Comparison
   A. Brand X
   B. Brand Y
   C. Brand Z
IV. Maintenance Contracts Comparison
   A. Brand X
   B. Brand Y
   C. Brand Z
V. Cost Comparison
   A. Brand X
   B. Brand Y
   C. Brand Z
VI. Proposal
   A. A Comparison Chart of All Three Copiers

Introduction The introduction may include an opening—a catchy beginning that is designed to focus the audience's attention. In the copier presentation, you could use any of the following types of openings.

- *An attention-getting statement.* "The Brand X copier exceeds the ability of Brands Y and Z in several areas by a wide margin."
- *A rhetorical question.* "Are all copiers alike?"
- *A dramatic or entertaining story.* "When I first began researching these three brands of copiers, I thought there really couldn't be much difference. Boy was I wrong!"
- *A personal experience.* "I first saw the Brand X copier at our branch office in Memphis. After using it a few times, I feel sure this copier is just what we need."

- *An appropriate quotation.* "The bitterness of poor quality lingers long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten!"
- *A historical event.* "When the first copy machine came out, there weren't many options. There have been a lot of changes since then . . . some changes better than others."
- *A reference to a current news story.*
- *A joke or humorous story* that ties directly to your topic . . . just be sure your humor ties in and is not off color.

Following your opening, if you have one, you will need to create a formal introduction that sets the stage for your audience. The following guidelines will help you create your introduction.

- *What is the purpose of your presentation?* Not every presentation needs to announce the purpose in the introduction, but many do. If there is a good strategic reason to wait until the closing to announce your purpose, by all means do so. The point is, know what you are doing.
- *What general information will your audience need* in order to understand the more detailed information in the body of your presentation?
- *What is your method of development?* Tell your audience up front how you are going to tell them what it is you have to say.

EXAMPLE

The purpose of my presentation is to show you the copiers I compared and to recommend the one I believe will best meet our needs. To do that, I'm going to show you:

- how a copier works;
- the criteria I used to compare copiers;
- the brands of copiers I compared, and why; and
- which copier I propose we buy.

Closing The closing should be designed to achieve the goals of your presentation. If your purpose is to motivate the audience to take action, ask them to do what you want them to do; if your purpose is to get your audience to think about something, summarize what you want them to think about. The mistake presenters make most frequently with closings is that they fail to close at all—they simply quit talking, shuffle papers around, and ask "Are there any questions?" That's not a closing; that's a subtle cover for "get me out of here!"

Since your closing is what your audience is most likely to remember, it's the time to be strong and persuasive. Let's return to our copier example and take a look at one possible closing:

EXAMPLE

Based on all the data, I can only conclude that Brand X is the copier for us. The fact that it is $600 higher in price than the other brands I looked at is unimportant compared to the value and quality you can see that we'd be getting.

> I highly recommend that we purchase Brand X. After all, we've all experienced the bitterness of low quality long after the sweetness of low price has been forgotten, haven't we?
>
> If you could allocate the money to buy this copier by the 15th of this month, we can not only be up and running before the first of next month, but we'll be well equipped to prepare for next quarter's customer presentations.

This closing brings the presentation full cycle and asks the audience to fulfill the purpose of the presentation—exactly what a closing should do.

Transitions

A planned transition should appear between the introduction and the body, between the points in the body, and between the body and the closing. Transitions let the audience know that you're moving from one topic to the next, and provides you, the speaker, with insurance that you know where you're going and how to get there.

Most delivery problems in a presentation happen at points of transition. When you are on a point that you know, it's easy to speak. The problems usually occur when you have to move from one point to the next. Most of a presenter's fidgeting and audible pauses ("Uh", "O.K.", and "You know") happen when the presenter can't figure out how to get off one point and on to the next. Transition neatly solves that problem.

EXAMPLE

> Before getting into the specifics of each of the copiers I compared, I'd like to show how copiers in general work. That knowledge will provide you with the background you'll need to compare the different brands of copiers.

It's also a good idea to pause for a moment after you've delivered a transitional line between topics to let the audience shift gears with you. Remember, they don't know your plan.

Visual Aids

Well-planned visual aids can not only add interest and emphasis to your presentation, but they can also clarify and simplify your message because they communicate clearly, quickly, and vividly. Use visual aids, however, *only* if they clarify or emphasize a point. Don't try to use visual aids to flesh out a skimpy or weak presentation, and don't use them to deflect the attention of your audience away from you. Also, don't use visual aids, especially overheads, simply because "everyone else does." Visual aids that don't aid communication just get in the way of communication.

It is a good idea to start planning your visual aids when you begin to gather information. For example, the bulleted list of the kinds of information needed for the sample presentation described under "Gathering Information" in this chapter could have been altered as follows to include the kind of visuals that would most likely be needed.

EXAMPLE

Based on what I need to know about the audience, I'll need to:

- explain how copiers work—*good place for a drawing that shows the process as simply as possible*
- provide an analysis of our needs in a copier—*perhaps a bulleted list on an overhead transparency*
- explain which copiers I chose to compare and why—*perhaps a chart that lists the necessary criteria*
- go over the maintenance contracts, comparing all brands (including cost per page for maintenance and supplies)—*overhead transparency*
- show the long-term performance histories of all three copiers
- show the quality of copiers after 120,000 copies
- show the copier I recommend and why I am recommending it—*perhaps on an overhead that lists the advantages of Brand X over the others*

Keep your visual aids simple and uncluttered. Keep the amount of information on each visual aid to a minimum (usually one idea per visual). When the visual contains text, space the lines of type so the audience can read them easily, and make the letters large enough to be read easily.

Slide projectors and overhead projectors are easy to use. As you prepare your presentation, decide which visuals you will use and where each one will go. If you have a large number of them, use slides rather than overheads to avoid the distraction of constantly changing overheads. Have visuals made up far enough in advance so you can rehearse with them.

Preparing to Deliver a Presentation

When you have taken all the steps outlined so far, you are ready to think about delivery techniques. It is *only* after you have the presentation carefully created that you can begin practicing your delivery.

Practice

Begin by familiarizing yourself with the sequence of the material in your outline. Then you are ready to practice your presentation. Bear in mind the following points about practicing:

Practice on your feet and out loud. The reason for practicing out loud rather than just mentally rehearsing is that you can process the information in your mind many times faster than you can possibly speak it. Mental rehearsing will not tell you how long your presentation will take or if there are any problems, such as awkward transitions.

Videotape your practice session if possible. Seeing yourself will show you not only what you're doing wrong but also what you're doing right. If you can't videotape yourself, at least use an audiotape recorder to evaluate your vocal presentation.

In your practice sessions, force yourself to do exaggerated gesturing, physical movement, walking, and vocal inflection. Continue practicing those things until you don't feel awkward with any of them.

Practice with your visual aids. The more you actually handle your visuals and practice using them, the more smoothly you'll use them during your presentation. And even then things may still go wrong, but being prepared and practiced will give you the confidence and poise to go on.

Try to get a practice session in the room where you'll be giving the presentation. This will let you learn the idiosyncrasies of the room: acoustics, lighting, how the chairs will most likely be arranged, where electrical outlets and switches are located, and so forth.

Delivery Techniques

Delivery is both audible and visual. Your audience is affected by all of you, not just your words or message. Therefore, you need to breathe life into your presentation. To make an impact on your audience and keep them mentally with you, you must be animated. Words will have more punch when they are delivered with physical and vocal animation. The audience must believe in your enthusiasm for your topic if you want them to share your point of view.

When using visuals, give your audience time to absorb the information before you comment on it. Don't talk while you are changing visuals or doing something physical. Pause while you do it.

Practice with your visual aids so you become comfortable and familiar with them. During the practice sessions, point to the visual aid—with both gestures and words. Be sure you are talking to your audience, however, rather than to the visual, and be sure you do not block the visual with your body. Cover your visual both before and after discussing it so it won't distract your audience.

If possible, don't distribute handouts early in the presentation. Hold them until you are ready for your audience to look at them. Then be sure to direct the audience's attention to the appropriate places in the handout.

There are a number of other techniques you should use to give your presentation the animation it needs to make you look enthusiastic: eye contact, movement, gestures, and pace.

Eye Contact Eye contact is the best way to establish rapport with your audience. The smaller the audience, the more important it is that you make eye contact

with as many people as possible. In a large audience, find people in different parts of the audience who are responding to you, and talk directly to those people one at a time. Look at one person and talk to that person for several seconds. Then go to the next person and do the same thing, and so on.

Movement To establish maximum interest from your audience, use physical movement to add animation to your presentation. Movement can mean that you simply take a step or two to one side or the other after you have been talking a minute or so. The strategic points at which movement is most likely to be effective is between points, before transitional words or phrases, after pauses, or after a point of emphasis. Be careful, however, to stay in one place for a minute or so—do not pace!

Another way to achieve movement is to walk to the screen and point with a pointer. Touch the screen with the pointer, to hold it in place, and then turn back to the audience before beginning to speak (touch, turn, and talk). Or you can leave the screen and go to the overhead projector, pointing by placing the pointer on the overhead (the pointer will cast a shadow pointing to the appropriate item on the overhead).

Gestures Gestures not only help provide animation to your presentation, but they can help you communicate your message. Most people gesture naturally when they talk; however, nervousness can inhibit you from gesturing when you make a presentation. If you discipline yourself to always keep one hand free and above your waist during your presentation, you will almost certainly use that hand to gesture. Leave your other hand by your side or in your pocket. Be careful not to put both hands above your waist and then lock them together; there is nothing wrong with bringing them together for effect, but don't lock them up and keep them together, because that inhibits gesturing. If you make yourself gesture during practice, you will automatically gesture at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way when you make your presentation.

Voice The effective use of your voice is another way to get animation into your presentation—and a very important one. Since much of your believability is projected through your vocal tone, your ability to use your voice effectively is of enormous importance. Hypnotists use a monotone speech pattern to hypnotize people, and as a speaker you can have the same effect on your audience if you speak in a monotone. Vocal inflection, on the other hand, provides variety and interest to your presentation. It also allows you to emphasize and de-emphasize different points.

Your vocal delivery should sound conversational rather than contrived and formal. By using simple, everyday words, you will draw your audience into your subject more quickly and easily. When your delivery is conversational, each member of the audience feels as though he or she is the only one you are speaking to. Use the personal pronoun "you," speaking as though you are talking to only one person, to make it easier for yourself to do this.

Projection Most speakers think they are projecting more loudly than they are. Just remember that if anyone in the audience cannot hear you, your presentation has been ineffective for that person—and that if the audience has to strain to hear you, they will usually give up.

Inflection Vocal inflection is the rise and fall of your voice at different times, such as the way your voice naturally rises at the end of a question. It is like using a musical scale in your speaking. As an example of vocal inflection—and the value of good inflection—read the following sentence aloud several times, putting emphasis on the italicized word each time.

"*Have* you seen the new movie?"
"Have *you* seen the new movie?"
"Have you *seen* the new movie?"
"Have you seen the *new* movie?"
"Have you seen the new *movie*?"

Did you notice how your voice changed when you put emphasis on different words? Can you hear the difference in the message sent by each version of the same sentence? Vocal inflection helps you communicate your meaning more effectively.

Pace Pace is the speed at which you deliver your presentation. If the pace is too fast, your words will run together, making it difficult for your audience to follow you. If your pace is too slow, the audience will get impatient and their minds are likely to wander to another topic.

Facial Expressions If your audience is small, your facial expressions can be quite important. Both smiling and scowling are tremendously powerful nonverbal signals. Smiling is a frequently overlooked asset among presenters. If you have a nice natural smile, use it to help communicate your message—as well as to communicate the tone you wish to convey. Smiling also helps you appear in control. And no matter how "technical" your topic is, smiling helps the audience understand that you are comfortable with them.

Nervousness

It is natural to be apprehensive, and that feeling will probably never go away. Stage fright shouldn't worry you. Perhaps the lack of it should, in fact, because nerves can be a helpful stimulant. But nervousness and fear are not the same thing. Fear is the result of a lack of confidence, and nervousness is the energy you feel when you are as well prepared as possible. If you are prepared, you can expect to be nervous; however, if you know what you are going to say and how you are going to say it, you will probably relax as you start to speak. You can use the power of positive imaging (imagining yourself making the presentation perfectly) to over-

come your nervousness. You can also use the "as if" technique: act "as if" you are completely in control, or act "as if" you can't wait to get started with the presentation. You can also give yourself a pep talk to control nervousness: "My subject is important. I am ready. My listeners are here to listen to what I have to say."

Conducting Productive Meetings

Ideally, a meeting is a personal interchange among a group of people who have come prepared to make a contribution to a collective effort, an effort that will produce better results than any one of the participants in the meeting could have produced alone. If this definition does not apply to a situation, a meeting may not be necessary; an oral presentation or a written report might be a more effective method of communication.

As a form of oral communication, a meeting requires planning and preparation just as writing and oral presentations do. Although both the leader and the participants of a meeting are responsible for making the meeting effective, the leader must plan the meeting and provide any necessary guidelines for the conduct of the meeting.

Leadership Philosophy

If you are a meeting leader, you could conduct yourself as a dictator, as a coach, or as a spectator. Ideally, you should conduct yourself as a coach most of the time, but you should be aware that there are times when you need to be a bit dictatorial (such as when a strong personality begins to take over) or when you need to be more of a spectator (such as when productive interaction among participants is taking place).

As a meeting leader, your focus needs to be on getting a group of people—all individuals—to come to an agreement in spite of their individual goals, preferences, and personalities. You must look at the big picture, and your goal should be to get the participants to focus on the collective goal rather than fragmenting into adversarial groups. As a meeting leader, you should see to it that individuals feel free to offer their thoughts, ideas, and facts in a receptive environment—thereby maximizing the contributions of each individual. You should encourage collective effort and make sure that one person does not dominate other participants. Much of what you learned in Chapter 6, on collaborative writing, is equally applicable to a meeting.

Mechanics of a Meeting

Understanding the mechanics of a meeting can help to solve common meeting problems. The mechanics of a meeting include (1) planning, creating, and distributing an agenda for the meeting; (2) deciding on the time and duration of the

meeting; (3) determining the best site for the meeting and the best room setup; and (4) writing and distributing the minutes following the meeting.

Agenda

The agenda is a road map of your meeting, and it is the primary mechanical factor in successful meetings. Never begin a meeting without an agenda, even if it is only a handwritten list of topics you want to cover. It gives the chairperson a tool for steering the group. Since you cannot be aware of all the hidden agendas that people bring to meetings, tempers can flare, people can get off the issue, and the meeting can bog down. With an agenda, the chairperson can simply look at it, look at the group, and calmly say, "All this is good, but let's get back to the agenda. These other issues may need to be addressed, but let's plan another time to address them. Now back to Item 4, . . ." This allows you to gently steer the group back to the appropriate topic. Without an agenda, the leader can only become a dictator or a spectator.

It is ideal if the agenda can be distributed a day or two before the meeting so that those attending have time to prepare or gather the necessary materials. But if there is no time to distribute the agenda early, be sure to distribute it at the beginning of the meeting. For an elaborate meeting requiring that a participant make a presentation or be prepared to discuss an issue in detail, try to distribute the agenda a week or more in advance.

Planning the Agenda Before attempting to write an agenda, you need to do some planning. To guide your planning, ask yourself the following questions.

- What is the specific purpose of this meeting? If you can't write a single sentence stating the precise purpose of the meeting, you are not ready to call a meeting.
- What topics need to be discussed to achieve the purpose of the meeting? The agenda should concentrate on just a few related major points or issues. If a number of unrelated topics must be dealt with, consider holding several short meetings instead of one long one.
- What should the end result of the meeting be?
- What must happen to achieve the desired end result?
- Who must be there for the goal to be met?

Formatting the Agenda In formatting the agenda, concentrate on just a few major items. Organize well, but not too tightly (if the agenda seems to be in control of the meeting, rather than just steering it, people may be hesitant to introduce new thoughts or ideas). Indicate who will attend and where the meeting will be held. Be specific about times. Indicate the starting time and the time allotted for each presentation. Indicate the time allotted for discussion and for breaks, as well. And finally, indicate the stopping time. Figure 15–1 shows a sample agenda for a sales meeting.

Sales Meeting Agenda

Purpose: To introduce new products and plan both short-range and long-range sales strategy.

Date: January 27, 19xx

Place: Conference Room 15-C

Time: 8:00 - 1:30

Attendees: Entire Sales Force

Topic	Presenter	Time
New Products	Jim Lebatt	Presentation, 8:00 - 8:30 Discussion, 8:30 - 9:00
BREAK		9:00 - 9:15
Sales Strategy for New Products	Helen Kabal	Presentation, 9:15 - 9:45 Discussion, 9:45 - 10:15
BREAK		10:15 - 10:30
Future New Products	Walt McElvey	Presentation, 10:30 - 11:00 Discussion, 11:00 - 11:30
LUNCH		11:30 - 12:30
Long-Range Planning	Willa Brady	Presentation, 12:30 - 1:00 Discussion, 1:00 - 1:30

Figure 15–1. Sample Agenda.

Meeting Time and Duration

The time of day and duration of the meeting can have a negative or positive effect on the meeting's success. Keep the following things in mind in planning your meeting.

The Four Worst Times to Have a Meeting Following are the four worst times to have a meeting.

Monday morning—People need Monday morning to get their work mode set for the week and to take care of anything urgent that has occurred over the weekend. It is a busy, harried time. People are distracted and unfocused from having been away for two days.

Friday afternoon—People need Friday afternoons to wrap up the week and take care of anything that must be finished before the week ends. Again, you are challenged by distractions.

Immediately after lunch—During the hour following lunch, most people fall victim to "post-prandial letdown," which is the body's natural need to regroup after lunch. Interestingly, the "down" feeling after lunch occurs as frequently in those who skip lunch as in those who eat lunch. It simply takes the body about a half hour to re-accelerate after being down for a break.

The end of the work day—If you schedule a meeting during the last fifteen minutes of the day, you can be assured of a quick meeting, but it is likely that no one will know what you said.

The Duration of a Meeting Psychologists tell us that group productivity tapers off considerably after an hour and a half, and after two hours it drops drastically. Therefore, any single session should be less than an hour and a half—and an hour is ideal. Several short meetings that are quick, sharp, and well planned are far more productive than fewer longer ones.

Breaks During a Meeting

Breaks are critical in long meetings and the amount of the break time is equally critical. If a break is too long, participants can become detached, and it will take time to get the group back to the point where they were before the break. If a break is too short, it will not be refreshing enough.

Meeting Site

Give some thought to the best site for your meeting. There are certain advantages to having a meeting off site, or away from the office. However, it takes much more time, in addition to substantially increasing the cost. But meeting off site can have some good psychological benefits. Since it is neutral territory, it can encourage a more open discussion. Everyone loses the "home court" advantage. You are also assured that meeting participants will not be interrupted with messages and problems unrelated to the meeting topic.

Room Setup

How you have the room set up when the participants arrive will help you set the tone for the meeting. Whether or not the room is set up will, by itself, deliver a message. For example, having the room in disarray sends the message that things are not organized. In general you should have the chairs arranged in an orderly

fashion; have note pads, pens or pencils, and a copy of the agenda (if not distributed prior to the meeting) at each seat; and have name tents assigning the seating (if that is appropriate in your organization).

Minutes of Meetings

All the time and planning you put into a meeting will be wasted if the results are all jumbled in the minds of the participants. Minutes are important for settling disputes about what happened or what was decided, and they can also be used as evidence in legal proceedings. Therefore, they must be accurate, complete, and clear.

Recruiting Someone to Take Minutes In your premeeting personal call to participants, recruit someone to take the minutes. Do not automatically choose a woman for this job; your request could be considered sexist. Also avoid giving the responsibility to the quietest person in the room because that would only lead to that person's nonparticipation. Actually, this responsibility is excellent for someone who tends to talk a lot; the distraction of taking notes will help the talkative person concentrate on what's going on.

Help the person who is taking minutes by checking the accuracy of every decision made during the meeting. Do this by restating the decision, summarizing any action that needs to be taken, identifying who is responsible for the action, and specifying the deadline for the action. Be sure the minutes taker has written that information down before you move on to the next topic.

Writing the Minutes See "Minutes of Meetings" in Chapter 14 for detailed guidance in writing minutes.

Distributing the Minutes · Issue your minutes as soon after the meeting as possible, certainly within three working days.

The "action plan" represented by minutes provides participants with a sense of accomplishment following the meeting.

Chapter Summary

To maximize your effectiveness as a listener:

- Adopt your level of concentration as the situation warrants.
- Take the time to understand what the speaker is saying before speaking yourself.
- Acknowledge the speaker through questions and gestures.
- Let the speaker have his or her say before you respond.

- Define what you need or hope to take away from listening to someone else.
- Consciously work to control yourself from letting boredom, distractions, anger, or other impediments affect you.

In planning an oral presentation, ask the following questions:

- What's your purpose?
- Who's the audience?
- What amount of information should you prepare to adequately cover the topic for the audience and in the time available?
    - Locate the information.
    - Decide how to organize it.
    - Structure the presentation around this organization.
    - Decide on the types of visual aide you will need.

In rehearsing your presentation:

- Attempt to rehearse as much of the actual presentation as possible.
- Practice on your feet, out loud, and with your visual aids.
- Videotape your practice sessions, if possible, and review them for posture, gestures, and voice, as well as for content.
- Try to rehearse in the room where the presentation will take place to familiarize yourself with its layout.

In delivering the presentation:

- Remember that nervousness before a presentation is normal.
- Show enthusiasm for your topic through the use of effective movement, gestures, and your voice.

In conducting effective meetings:

- Begin with a well-planned agenda and distribute it in advance of the meeting.
- Schedule the meeting to avoid times of the day or week that are not productive.
- Select and set up the meeting site to accommodate attendees and to isolate everyone from interruptions.
- Assign someone to record, transcribe, and distribute the minutes if a record of the meeting is necessary.

EXERCISES

Following are some of the most common barriers to effective listening.

- You assume you know what the speaker is going to say and stop listening.
- You stop listening in order to formulate your response to what the speaker is saying.

- You interrupt the speaker and do not allow him or her to complete the message.
- Your mind wanders because you aren't really interested in what the speaker is saying.

a. Select one of your barriers to effective listening.
b. Write what usually triggers this listening problem.
c. List the negative consequences of this listening problem.
d. How would the effectiveness of your communication improve if you eliminated this listening problem?
e. What obstacles keep you from eliminating this listening problem?
f. How can you overcome these obstacles?

2. List some of your personal prejudices (such as a person being unkempt or overweight) that might make you dislike someone on first meeting them. How would these prejudices prevent you from listening effectively to that person?

3. For the listening problem you identified in Exercise 1, identify what you need to be more of and less of in order to overcome that problem. For example, if you have a habit of formulating a response while the speaker is talking, you might be more patient and less impulsive.

4. Select a topic for a presentation and write a purpose statement that is based on the answer to the following three questions.
   a. What do I want my audience to know when I've finished this presentation?
   b. What do I want my audience to believe when I've finished this presentation?
   c. What action do I want my audience to take when I've finished this presentation?

5. Complete the following statements about the audience for your presentation:
   a. The experience or level of knowledge that my audience currently has about my subject is: _____.
      So based on their existing knowledge, I should: _____.
   b. The general educational level of my audience is: _____.
      So based on their general educational level, I'll need to: _____.
   c. The type of information I should provide this audience to achieve my objective is: _____.
   d. List some of the questions that the audience may have throughout the presentation.

6. Prepare an introduction for your presentation that includes the following:

- An interesting opening
- A statement of purpose
- Why you are making the presentation to them (so that)
- How you are going to do it (method of development)

7. Create a closing for your presentation that asks the audience to do what you want them to do or that summarizes the main points and restates the purpose of your presentation.

8. Create an outline for your whole presentation.

9. Use the following form to plan an agenda for a meeting. Select as the topic of the meeting any situation that is comfortable for you.

PRE-AGENDA PLANNING FORM

PURPOSE OF MEETING:

_____

_____

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED:

_____

_____

WHAT SHOULD BE THE END RESULT OF THE MEETING?

_____

_____

WHAT MUST HAPPEN TO MAKE THIS GOAL ATTAINABLE?

_____

_____

WHO MUST BE THERE IN ORDER TO PROCEED TOWARD THE GOAL?

_____

_____

Personal Call to Participants

BEST MEETING TIME: _____

BEST MEETING DATE: _____

10. Complete the following form, based on Exercise 9.

MEETING NOTIFICATION

Date: _____

To: _____

From: _____

Meeting Date: _____ Place: _____

Time: Start _____ End _____

Who Should Attend Meeting: _____

_____

_____

Meeting Objective: _____

_____

_____

Pre-meeting Preparation: _____

_____

_____

AGENDA

Topic	Responsible Person	Estimated Time Allotted