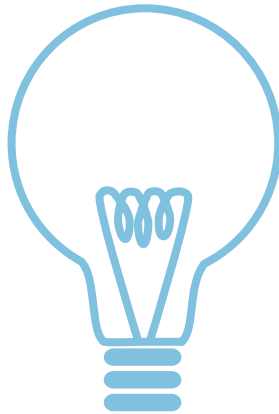# Writing in the Workplace

Strategies to *Plan, Write,* and *Revise* (almost) Any Document

*Dedicated to the many professionals we've worked with over the years
who have encouraged us to write this book.*

We hope you find it useful
as you continue to hone your writing skills.

Table of Contents

Foreword

One principle that professionals would do well to understand is that the writing they do for their company is a direct reflection of their professionalism. Let's face it: we all make judgments about a company based on the documents it produces. The underlying idea is that, for most companies, the written document is their deliverable and, as such, writing is a primary, not secondary, part of any professional's job.

In addition, companies should provide the tools employees need to plan, write, and revise effectively, but too many don't. While any given company will train employees to complete certain tasks, training them to write, something all professionals must do, is often not given as much consideration. And that's unfortunate, because poor writing affects the bottom line and wastes time and resources.

At Hurley Write, we believe that all professionals have the critical thinking skills necessary to create readable, persuasive documents; however, many simply don't know how to apply these skills to the writing process. The truth is that employees with this knowledge make their company more productive and more profitable.

The chapters in this book discuss how to practice and plan writing and how to think like a writer: how to analyze readers, for example, and how to focus on the outcome, or take-away message, of every document. You won't find anything about grammar here, although we have included a few chapters about language, such as when to use active and passive voice and how to write concisely and avoid jargon.

This book is also meant as a kind of journal: it includes "Write-Up Reflections" sections so that writers can reflect on, and perhaps change, their writing habits.

The information we provide isn't meant to replace either instructor-led or online writing courses; rather, the idea is to introduce readers to new strategies, concepts, and techniques that ask them to think differently about how they approach writing. If you have comments or suggestions, please email us at info@hurleywrite.com; we'd be happy to hear from you.

Pam Hurley, PhD
Founder and President,
Hurley Write, Inc.

☑ Aperitif

PART I:

Writing Well Makes a Real Difference

☐ **Appetizers**

☐ **First Course**

☐ **Main Course**

☐ **Dessert**

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Chapter 1:

Writing Well Makes a Real Difference

Here's the bottom line: *Effective writing saves time and money, can improve customer service, results in increased sales, and helps employees do their jobs more effectively and efficiently.*

Joseph Kimble, chair of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School's Research & Writing Department, proves this in his book, *Writing for Dollars, Writing to Please*. Kimble's research focuses on organizations that have benefited from improved writing. His book includes a variety of case studies of organizations that have saved time and money and improved business practices by making their copy easier to read, reinforcing the clear benefits of good writing. Some of his findings include the following eye-popping statistics:

2x as likely	The US Army rewrote a memo to 129 officers suggesting that they perform a certain task; those who received the more readable memo were twice as likely to act on the task on the day they received the memo.
5 re-assigned	In 1977, the FCC rewrote regulations in plain language, resulting in the organization being able to reassign five full-time staff members whose job was to answer questions about the regulations.
$375,000 saved annually	GE rewrote its software manuals, resulting in a decrease of 125 calls per representative from customers asking questions about the software. With its revised manual, GE estimates that it saves up to $375,000 a year for each business customer.
$400,000 saved annually	FedEx saved $400,000 annually when it rewrote its operations manuals. The goal was to ensure that users spent 80 percent less time looking for information.
$37 million saved annually	The US Navy rewrote its business memos to officers and saved $27 to $37 million a year in officer time because they could read the revised memos in 17 to 27 percent less time.

Kimble's book has many other examples demonstrating the advantages of effective writing, including how organizations improved their bottom line simply by reassessing and rewriting their customer-facing documents.

And Kimble is far from the only source of examples of the impact of good writing and effective communications versus the costs of poor writing. Many studies and research projects have found that poor communication and inadequate writing are incredibly costly – and thus, when corrected, provide incredible return on value.

So, what exactly is the kind of bad writing that can compromise benefits like these? Josh Bernoff, a former Senior VP at Forrester Research and best-selling author, says such writing may be "too long, poorly organized, unclear, filled with jargon, and imprecise."

Those problems force readers to slow down to work through what the author is trying to say. In other words, bad writing takes valuable time to decode. By contrast, good writing:

- Saves potentially huge amounts of money;

- Saves hundreds or thousands of hours of time per organization;

- Facilitates action and positive, desired outcomes; and

- Improves productivity and streamlines operational efficiency.

In fact, as the following chapters illustrate, writing well yields a bounty of benefits for both individual writers and the organizations that employ them.

25% more productive	McKinsey and Company estimates that improved communication and collaboration could raise worker productivity 20 to 25 percent by making them more efficient at dealing with email, collaborative tasks, and more.
81% affected	Josh Bernoff studied the cost impacts of bad business writing. He found that 81 percent of people who do a lot of reading for their work agree that poorly written material wastes much of their time.
173 hours saved annually	One study of 4,000 employees found that almost half (46 percent) did not understand instructions provided by their manager, and employees estimated they wasted as much as 40 minutes a day trying to get clarification. That adds up to 173 hours per year per employee of time wasted.

Chapter 2:

Documents are the True "Deliverable"

▶ *"No matter what position level, what industry, and what position focus, if you cannot communicate effectively – both verbally as well as in writing – you cannot be effective in your job,"* **Wade Pierson, owner of Impact Talent Ventures.** ◀

This chapter discusses how documents, whether written well or poorly, reflect upon the writer's image and how to use Aristotle's concepts of ethos (image), logos (logic), and pathos (values) to appeal and persuade readers. The writing that an organization produces can influence how readers perceive that organization. Aristotle called this "ethos" ("persuasion through character, as to make a speaker worthy of credence). While ethos is certainly important in speaking, it's just as, if not more important, in writing.

Because the documents that an organization creates directly affect perception, those documents become a way to improve a company's most valuable asset: reputation. It's a well-known fact that people do business with companies they trust. It's no surprise, then, that how a company treats its customers and employees and stands behind its products or services all influence its reputation. And there is one other factor that has a major effect on a corporation's reputation: the quality of its writing.

And because an organization's writing directly affects how it's perceived, writers should approach every document with the understanding that it's persuasive. We often get pushback when we proffer this idea in a classroom: "No, we're just providing information," is a common refrain. But every document persuades the reader of something, whether it's the professionalism of the company, the intelligence of the writer, or the writer's ability to meet the reader's needs.

For instance, if I write a document that readers struggle to get through because it contains irrelevant information, my reader is being persuaded; perhaps he's being persuaded that I'm not focused or that I don't understand his needs. That's what we mean when we talk about persuasion.

According to Aristotle, there are three ways that we persuade: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Using Persuasion Effectively

Ethos

We've all done it: read a document and judged the writer's intelligence or professionalism based on the written document. Why do we do that? Because, often, the document is all we have to judge how well or how poorly a company conducts its business.

I can write documents that show readers how professional we are!

In short, regardless of the type of work your company does, its documents, whether marketing material, reports, or emails, are the "face" of the organization. Here's an example: I was on LinkedIn the other day and saw a company promoting its services for writing standard operating procedures (SOPs); of course, I was curious, because we offer that service as well.

The posting was riddled with grammatical errors. And the issue with that, beyond the fact of sheer laziness (or perhaps ignorance) of the writer, is that SOPs are incredibly important documents! In fact, they're the backbone (or should be) for most companies, as they dictate how processes are standardized, tasks completed, and injury avoided. So, why would anyone hire a company to write such important documents when the company can't even write a simple post on LinkedIn?

Logos

Logos is how we use logic in our documents. Readers are always looking for logic because that's how they make sense of what they read. If a document is illogical, a reader may simply give up. How do we create logos? Facts, figures, charts, tables, and graphs, but also by ensuring that every document has an argument, which means a

Our documents flow, include support, and include an obvious theme!

- Recognizable premise

- Support for the premise

- Reasoning (why the information matters or what readers should do with the information).

Pathos

Pathos is the appeal to the values of the reader. For instance, if readers value time, they may be less inclined to read through a document that's not well-written. While pathos is certainly part of the document (does the document meet reader expectations, is it clear and easy to read?), pathos can also extend to the actual values of the reader. Does the reader care about the cost of a project, or is the reader more concerned with quality? Understanding reader values can go a long way toward creating a coherent document.

This is a logical document that meets my needs.

What a professional organization!

In short, writing matters a great deal because, in today's global market, many businesspeople never come face-to-face with colleagues or clients, which means that the writing a company produces influences how it is perceived. How often does your company rely on the following in the course of its day-to-day business?

- Business documents: email correspondence, corporate policies, training manuals, and standard operating procedures (SOPs)

- Scientific documents: journal articles, research reports, and grant proposals

- Technical documents: proposals, operational instructions, and instruction manuals.

It's likely that your company and customers rely on these documents daily.

Your organization's reputation may be at risk if your team sees producing these documents as a secondary chore that distracts them from their "real" work.

Poor Writing does Damage

Perhaps your company has dedicated extensive funds and time to bolstering its service offerings, improving products, and hiring and training brilliant experts. Poor writing can quickly spoil all of that:

- Careless emails can confuse or even offend recipients;

- Inconsistent internal documentation jeopardizes product quality and productivity;

- Unfocused or disorganized proposals cost money and lose customers;

- Overly complex, rambling reports leave colleagues and clients confused and angry;

- Error-riddled or carelessly worded social media posts appear unprofessional and can offend public readers; and

- Muddled, wordy, and poorly designed websites frustrate and turn away users.

Poor writing not only drains costs in terms of energy and time, it ultimately hurts your organization's bottom line, too. Fortunately, the opposite is also true: Ensuring that your teams have the skills to write clearly, concisely, and accurately can save money and boost your firm's reputation.

Key Take-Aways

1

Effectively Written Documents Save Time and Money

Well-written documents save readers time and can boost the reputation of a company.

2

Writing Well can Advance Your Career

Good written and communication skills can make you more hirable and promotable.

3

All Writing is Persuasive

Even when the purpose of a document is to "inform," it's persuasive, in that readers are judging the organization and the writer based on how easy the document is to read and understand.

4

Documents are the True Deliverable

Remember, the documents your organization produces are the face of the organization. Ensure that these documents create a positive image.

Write-Up Reflections

1. How much time do you spend writing per day? How do you think that spending more time writing (even if just practicing) would benefit you? _____

_____

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2. What percentage of the documents that you read every day would you estimate are well written or poorly written? How much time would you estimate you spend trying to figure out the point a writer is trying to make? _____

_____

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3. How often do you get questions about your or your firm's written documents? What kinds of questions are they (questions about clarity and intent or something else)? _____

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4. Have you ever opted to or not to do business with a company due to its written documents? If so, what about the documents impressed you or turned you away? _____

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5. Can you pinpoint a time when a document you'd written helped or hurt your career? _____

_____

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_____

☐ Aperitif

☑ **Appetizers**

PART II:

*Before Putting
Pen to Paper*

☐ First Course

☐ Main Course

☐ Dessert

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Chapter 3:

Create a Strategy

Having a good writing strategy is key. The beauty of strategy is that it helps us create a plan, but also puts us in the mindset that we can change course should things not be going as we'd like or expect.

In this chapter, we discuss why strategy is so important when undertaking any type of writing and how to create a usable strategy. The chapter also focuses on strategies for reader analysis and how writing an outcome statement can help writers stay on track.

To that end, effective writers

- Assess their writing strategy
- Assess if their writing is working
- Keep an open mind about different approaches they can use to plan, write, and revise.

Continual assessment involves asking questions:

1 **Is my writing working?**
- **a.** Are readers taking the action I want (need) them to take?
- **b.** What kind of feedback/questions am I getting?
- **c.** Are the questions (feedback) I'm getting relevant?
- **d.** Are readers coming to the correct conclusion?

2 **Is my writing strategy working?**
- **a.** Do I have a writing strategy that works?
- **b.** Do I take the time to consider what action I want my readers to take (or the conclusion I want them to draw) before I start writing?
- **c.** Am I creating a logical document?
- **d.** Am I spending more time revising than writing?
- **e.** How much time am I spending addressing feedback?

3 **What other strategies are available to me?**
- **a.** Am I using the same strategy again and again and not seeing better results?
- **b.** Are there other strategies that will help me plan and write more effectively?
- **c.** Am I using a strategy that doesn't work for me?

In the end, only you can answer these questions. Ultimately, being open to new strategies will make you a more efficient, effective writer.

Planning and Problem-Solving

Planning and problem-solving are crucial aspects of creating a strategy to produce usable, understandable, and readable documents the first time. While planning may seem like an extra step in the writing process, it's actually a time-saver, and here's why:

1 Knowing who you're writing to and for can ensure that you don't include unnecessary, or too much, information.

2 Articulating the action you want your readers to take can ensure that you write more cogent, targeted documents.

In fact, you should be spending far more time planning the document, which will result in less writing. Keep in mind that when we talk about planning, we're talking about planning on paper (writing it down ensures you'll remember it and will help you create a process). Don't worry! We're going to give you the tools you need. First, seeing writing as akin to problem-solving can help us strategize. Second, planning involves a deep dive into understanding our readers and writing an outcome statement.

Applying Problem-Solving to Writing

When we try to solve problems, most of us go through five steps:
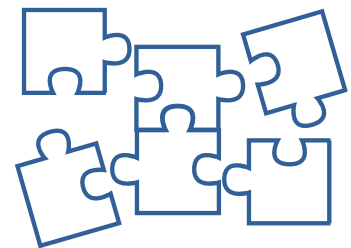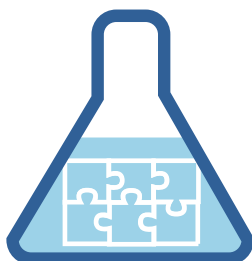
1 Define the writing problem
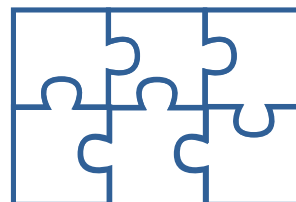
2 Gather data

3 Generate potential solutions

4 Test solutions

5 Implement what works

① Define the writing problem

You may not think about writing in terms of solving a problem, but there is a clear connection. When we talk about defining the writing problem, what we mean is how do we use the tools we have (language, organization, etc.) to convey a message to a particular reader(s) to achieve a certain outcome.

② Gather data

Data, in this case, means learning as much as you can about your reader: how they read, what they're looking for, and what they need from the document, among other things. This can even address things such as reader bias, skepticism, and preferences for how information is relayed (do you have readers who love bulleted lists?).

③ Generate potential solutions

This means thinking differently about how information is relayed. Maybe a different type of document and/or organizational strategy would make the document more readable.

④ Test Solutions

And here's the scary step: trying something new. Perhaps your documents have always been written using chronological order, but you'd like to try bottom line up front. This is where you test your new strategy. If it doesn't work, no harm, but if it does, that opens a whole new way of thinking.

⑤ Implement what works

After following these steps, you should have a good idea of what works and what doesn't. If what you tried was successful, you can use that strategy again. If the strategy was unsuccessful, all that means is that it's time to try a new strategy.

When writers approach writing tasks the same way they do when trying to solve any problem, they're more likely to create a logical process and find solutions that work for a variety of readers. A logical process results in writers spending less time writing and producing more readable documents.

But what does that mean exactly? Many business, technical, and scientific professionals think of their writing task list as a necessary evil that distracts from their core job function. But problem-solving is a writing tool that can bring about a specific, desirable result. Consider the ways problem-solving and writing projects are connected:

PROBLEM

- You need permission to undertake a new project
- Colleagues don't appreciate the value of your work
- Stakeholders don't understand certain key information
- Your supervisor doesn't have time to read your report
- A colleague misunderstood your email

SOLUTION

- Write a persuasive email, proposal, or presentation
- Summarize your accomplishments in a short document
- Write a white paper or create infographics
- Write an executive summary
- Speak to the person face-to-face or via phone

Know Thy Readers!

As you know, writing a usable, readable document requires that writers know who they're writing for. In fact, analyzing readers thoroughly is crucial when writing any document. Unfortunately, however, most writers don't take the time to fully analyze their readers or, if they do, it's a cursory analysis.

What should you know about your readers? It's one thing to say, "My reader is my boss." This doesn't demand a critical analysis of who you're really writing for and therefore thwarts the planning (and writing) process.

In other words, our goal should be to figure out the attributes of our reader(s) that will help us write the document. In most cases, you'll want to know

- Their role in the organization (are they a decision-maker?);

- What information they need and why;

- How they'll use the information;

- What they expect of the information, in terms of both content and organization;

- Why they're reading;

- What biases/attitudes/beliefs they may have;

- How they'll read the document (will they skim or read only certain sections, for instance); and

- Who else might read your document besides your primary reader?

Gathering data about our reader (Step 2 in the problem-solving process) helps us then develop a strategy to appeal to that reader. For instance, if I know my readers are busy (and who isn't?!), I can consider tools that will help them find the information they need quickly and easily.

We've found in the workshops we've taught that many writers "write for the person in the next cube," rather than taking the time to analyze their real readers. While writing for the person in the next cube is relatively easy, it means that the writer often makes mistaken assumptions about the primary reader—the person(s) they most want to influence.

You may be in a situation where you don't know your readers personally, but that shouldn't stop you from analyzing them. For example, sometimes just knowing their role in the organization is enough to create a reader analysis.

You'll probably also want to know if your document will have more than one reader. While the primary reader (the decision-maker) is the most important, your document could be read by secondary readers (readers who are tasked with completing the action the document requires), and tertiary readers (readers who have no impact on the document; for instance, a taxpayer reading a budget).

A proposal, for example, may be read by your boss, your company's lawyers, and the organization you're pitching. Will your readers read the document in its entirety, are they skimmers, or will they read only particular sections? Figuring this out can help you organize and design the document. Consider if your document will have more than one audience, but always, always, always write for the primary reader.

Bottom line: Take the time to learn (and write down) as much as you can about your reader, as doing so will help you create strategies to write.

Consider the "Take-Away" Message and Write an Outcome Statement

Once you have a good grasp of who your readers are and their expectations, it's time to write the outcome statement, which will help you create the "take-away." The take-away is what writers want their readers to do, think, believe, or feel after reading their document; that is, the action the writer wants the reader to take. The outcome statement is a roadmap: it's a statement you create for yourself that explains why you're providing the information and/or what you want the document to achieve.

As we've mentioned, many of the participants in our workshops say that the purpose, or outcome, of their document, is simply to inform. Is that possible?

Yes and no. The reality is that any document's purpose goes beyond informing (remember that writers are always persuading readers of something, even if it's that they understand their readers!). If you're providing information, you must have a reason for doing so. It's not merely that you want to make an impression on the reader, it's that you want something to happen (the reader must take an action).

Keep in mind that "action" doesn't have to be physical, as in using the document to understand how to do something (although this could, in fact, be the action we want our readers to take, as in a set of instructions).

Action can also be intellectual—specifically, how a writer wants a reader to think or feel after reading. For instance, if you're writing a report for a manager about a job you're working on or have completed, one take-away may be that you want that manager to agree (notice the persuasive element here, "agree"; you're not just informing her, you're persuading her) that you're doing, or have done, a thorough job; that you're competent; and that the job is headed in the right direction and/or was done correctly.

Think of an outcome statement, if you will, as an objective coupled with a purpose statement: the objective of the document is to achieve X for the purpose of Y. For example: "The objective of this proposal is to persuade the Air Force that our company is best suited to build this airplane, so that we receive the contract to do so." A well-written outcome statement helps keep the writer on track. That is, if you know what you're trying to achieve via the written document and why, you'll be better able to create a plan to get there.

Taking the time to write a good outcome statement can help keep you on track and help your reader come to the desired conclusion.

Other Considerations

Why are you writing?

Again, on the surface, this may seem like a fairly straightforward question. However, to put this piece of the puzzle in its place, we must have a greater understanding of purpose; that is, what we wish to accomplish with the document. This goes beyond simply saying that the point of the document is to relay findings, for example; in fact, accomplishment can extend to how you wish your readers to view you and your competence (ethos), your ability to do the work, and your ability to understand and solve problems.

What type of message are you sending?

In this case, writers must think carefully about a couple of things: how the reader will view the message (positively, negatively, or neutrally) and what medium is the best to deliver the message. Many people, for instance, deliver all messages via email when email may not be the best medium, and many writers give little thought to how to organize a message based on the reader and how it will be perceived. Believe it or not, there are strategies that writers can use to soften the blow of a negative message, enhance the positivity of a positive message, and emphasize a neutral message. But the writer first must understand the kind of message he is sending.

Key Take-Aways

1

Be Open to Assessment

Be willing to critically assess your own writing strategy and if your writing is working. Continually asking questions can help you devise new strategies to assess what works (and what doesn't).

2

Approach Writing as Problem-Solving

Consider the writing problem you're trying to solve (readers + outcome) and the tools you have at your disposal to solve the writing problem.

3

Know Your Readers

Always write for the decision-maker (primary reader), but keep in mind that your document may have secondary and tertiary readers.

4

Develop the "Take-Away" Message and Desired Outcome

Once you understand who you're writing to, figure out what you want them to do. This is the walk-away message, which is crucial to articulate before you embark on any writing project.

Write-Up Reflections

1. How would you explain your writing strategy? _____

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you feel that your writing strategy is effective? Why or why not? _____

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3. Do you spend more time writing or rewriting? _____

_____

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4. What tools do you use to analyze your readers? When you do analyze your readers, do you take the time to write down what you know? _____

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5. Do you approach writing as a problem-solving activity? If not, do you see how such an approach would be helpful?

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6. Do you write down your objective for the documents you write? If not, why not? If so, do you find that doing so is helpful? What do your objectives typically focus on? _____

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Chapter 4:

Before Writing the First Draft

> *So, now that you've analyzed your readers and written the outcome statement, you have one more step in developing a strategy: prewriting (or the writing you do before you begin that first draft).*

Don't do what most writers do after they've analyzed their readers and written the outcome statement: skip the planning/prewriting stage and fall immediately into the "First Draft Equals Final Draft" or "Modeling" trap.

In the "First Draft Equals Final Draft" strategy, writers dive right into writing; they are, as we say, "putting words on the page and hoping for the best." They have no real strategy, except to write and write and write, while thinking that what they're writing will be the final draft—that all they'll have to do is to correct some grammar and punctuation errors, change passive voice to active, tidy it up a bit, and the document will be ready to submit.

"First Draft Equals Final Draft" is ineffective because it

- Allows writers to skip reader analysis and writing the outcome statement (two crucial steps in the writing process); and

- Hurts the quality of the document, because the goal in this type of "strategy" is simply to get to the finish line, not to write a document that meets readers' needs or achieves a particular goal.

In the modeling strategy, writers either use a document they've written or that someone else has written and cut and paste information. The problems with modeling include:

- An assumption that the model was effective.
- Errors in the original being passed along.
- The document becoming a "one size fits all."

Instead of delving right into writing the first draft after you've analyzed your readers and written the outcome statement, prewrite. Here's why:

Why Prewrite?

- Encourages practice
- Helps writers get ideas on paper so that they can be assessed
- Can identify gaps in knowledge
- Removes the "stress" of writing
- Helps overcome writer's block

21

Freewriting

Freewriting is exactly what it says it is: writing without worrying about content, grammar, punctuation, or the direction the document is taking. It works well if you let the ideas flow as they will.

The benefits of freewriting are that it:

- Eliminates concern about producing a "perfect" first draft

- Helps you get ideas on paper

- Allows your brain to work and problem-solve without constraints

Freewriting differs from "first draft equals final draft" because your free-written material is just the lump of clay you'll later shape – through editing, revisions, and further writing – into a strong written piece.

Brainstorming

Another great strategy. Unlike freewriting, in which the writer writes prose (sentences), in brainstorming the writer lists ideas as quickly as they form, again without passing judgment on them. Sentence fragments, even single words, are fine. So are lines and arrows and even drawings, if they help suggest an idea. The point is not to question the validity of the ideas, ask if they're viable, or if they'll work in the final document; rather, by brainstorming, you're freeing your brain to problem-solve creatively and come up with solutions to the writing "problem."

Incubating

Once you've used freewriting or brainstorming or a combination of the two, let the writing incubate, or rest. That is, set it aside for as long as you can. When you come back to it, you'll see it with fresh eyes and perhaps realize that it's great or that it's garbage, or that it has elements of both.

Experienced writers know that during incubation your brain is working on the document, even if you aren't physically doing so. But incubation works only if you've actually written something.

Ultimately, planning and prewriting can save time and reduce stress.

Planning and prewriting create a strong foundation for the draft and help a writer more clearly see the shape and content of the final document. After prewriting, a writer should be able to more easily pick out ideas and see how they'll fit together, rather than beginning a draft based on a faulty premise or a weak idea and realizing the mistake only after wasting a great deal of time and effort.

That's the power of planning when you write.

But what does a "writing plan" involve? That's the question the next several chapters will answer.
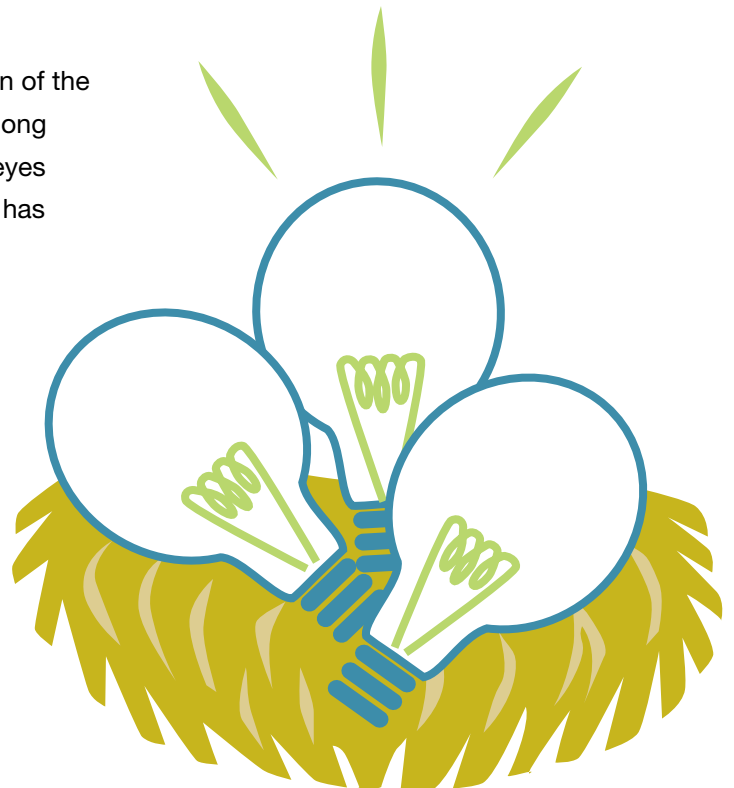
Key Take-Aways

1

Plan!

It can't be stressed enough—when you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

2

Prewrite

Prewriting can help you:
- Figure out what you know and don't know
- Get in the writing habit
- Remove the stress of writing the first draft

3

Practice, Practice, Practice

We recommend a daily writing workout. Simply take 15 minutes a day and free-write (about any topic) without editing. If nothing else, this exercise will make you more comfortable with – and open to – the act of writing.

4

Use Multiple Prewriting Strategies

Until you figure out a strategy that works for you, try brainstorming and freewriting, or perhaps a hybrid. Both tools can help you get ideas on paper without worrying about logic, grammar, or outcome.

5

Incubate

Be sure to let your writing incubate; that is, put it aside for as long as you can. When you come back to it, you'll see it with fresh eyes.

Write-Up Reflections

1. Do you practice your writing? If so, how often? What do your practice sessions look like? _____

_____

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_____

2. Do you use freewriting and/or brainstorming before you write? Is there another strategy you use that you find
works well? _____

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you incorporate incubation? If so, do you find it works well? _____

_____

_____

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4. If you use outlining exclusively, do you do so because you find that it works well or because it's a strategy that you've
been trained to use? Do you incorporate other strategies with outlining? _____

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5. How do you prepare to write the first draft? If you find this strategy lacking, what might you do differently? _____

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☐ Aperitif

☐ Appetizers

☑ **First Course**

Writing is Problem-Solving

☐ Main Course

☐ Dessert

Hurley Write, INC.

Chapter 5:

Creating Readable, Usable Documents Using Organization

You may not have thought much about the role that organization plays in a document's readability and usability, but organization is key to helping readers understand what's important in that document.

This chapter discusses how using the appropriate organizational, sentence, and paragraph structure can enhance the readability and usability of documents.

What is Readability?

George Klare (1963) defines readability as "the ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing." Readability can be affected by language, white space, organization, and sentence and paragraph structure, among other things.

What is Usability?

A document created with usability in mind helps readers achieve specific goals: understanding data, for example, or seeing why a particular solution makes sense. Usable documents make information easily available; they're straightforward, clear, and uncluttered. A successful document gives readers a clear sense of the document's purpose and a clear path toward that purpose. Usable documents save time and reduce effort for their audience.

Organization Enhances Readability

Most readers are interested in themselves, which means they're concerned about how the document impacts them (this is also known as "WIFM," or "what's in it for me?"). For instance, if a document is lengthy, readers will calculate how much time they need to spend on it and what that spent time will mean in terms of other tasks.

How a document is organized speaks directly to WIFM, because it can determine whether a document is read and how it's acted upon.

Types of Organizational Strategies

Many organizational strategies are available, but we'll cover the three most useful here.

First, though, let's discuss the elephant in the room: chronological order. Not saying there's anything wrong with using chronological or sequential order, but too many writers use it for every message, regardless of the content of the message or the action they want readers to take.

Chronological, as I'm sure you know, provides information according to progression of time: first we did "a," then we did "b," and then we did "c." You get the point. There are several problems with chronology, but the most important is that it's often not the best strategy to use because it's rare that your readers need to follow a timeline of events to understand the point of the message. It's a poor strategy for skimmers and, let's face it, many (if not most) readers are skimmers.

LEAST TO MOST

A "Least to Most" important information strategy, also called narrative, takes readers from the least important information (background, for example) to the most important (results, findings, or conclusion, etc.).

The advantages are that it's great for readers who are used to a traditional organizational strategy and for skeptical readers, because it allows the writer to build her case.

The disadvantages are that it can be boring, so the reader may stop reading, and it's not a great strategy for readers who want to get to the point quickly.

MOST TO LEAST

The opposite of "Least to Most" is "Most to Least." In this organizational strategy, the most important information (the BLUF, or "bottom line upfront") is first. It's not that the details or background aren't included elsewhere, they're just not the first in the document. This strategy is great for readers who aren't skeptical or agree with what you're proposing or the topic (they need little convincing).

The downside of most to least is that the reader may stop reading after the BLUF (if this doesn't matter, then you're fine) or that the BLUF is written without considering if the reader fully agrees with the outcome.

ORDER OF *EMPHASIS* BY POSITION

Order of emphasis by position is used for skimmers and, in a nutshell, it ensures that readers can read just the first and last sentence of every paragraph and know what the paragraph is about. This strategy means that both the first and last sentences work together to frame the paragraph and that keywords and other cues are used.

In addition to working well for skimmers, it can be a great strategy for writers and here's why: when I'm writing a paragraph for skimmers, I have to ensure that my first and last sentence work together to "frame" the paragraph. This framing also helps ensure that a paragraph is on point.

In a paragraph written for skimmers, the most important information is housed in the first and last sentences and the details, or less important information, is in the middle. This kind of organizational strategy lets readers know immediately what the paragraph is about and therefore decide if they want to read it.

1 The first sentence is what the paragraph is about

2 The middle of the paragraph provides the details

3 The final sentence tells readers why the information is important and should work with the first sentence to frame the paragraph

Achieving Readability via Sentence and Paragraph Structure

Good writers always look to create readability—that is, making it easy for readers to read and take the desired action. What constitutes a readable document? Some say a readable document is one that "flows" or that is grammatically correct or that uses short sentences. In fact, readability is a bit more complicated.

While flow and good grammar help ensure a readable document, what really creates readability is that a document meets its reader's needs for information, both in the types of content provided and how that content is presented.

A writer can write short sentences, for example, but that doesn't necessarily make a document more readable than one that uses longer, more complex sentences. In fact, shorter sentences can sometimes inhibit readability by making the writer appear juvenile or simplistic. (Consider your first-grade primer, which used only short sentences because it was meant for new readers.)

Case Study: Organization Dictates How Readers Respond

Background

One of our clients, a global tax group, needed clients to submit the correct information and in the requested format so that the tax group could submit the forms on time to regulatory agencies.

Problem

Only about 25 percent of clients were doing what was requested of them. The authors, as is often the case, blamed the clients for not reading as a reason for the documents not being submitted.

Our Analysis

We found, after analyzing the organization's letters to clients, that the authors were

- Writing every document exactly the same way, regardless of the kind of information being relayed, and what action the reader needed to take.

- Including too much information (such as when the firm was founded) in the document that was irrelevant to the reader.

- Using a poor organizational strategy that "buried" the requested action.

Our Solution

To help them think differently about and develop new approaches to their documents, we helped them re-focus their efforts on

- Deciding what information helped the reader take an action

- Using an organizational strategy such that the request for action was first and clearly stated

- Showing how taking the action would benefit the reader (they would get their refunds sooner, they wouldn't have to deal with tax agencies, etc.)

Results

Six months after the workshop, the facilitator reported that compliance was up about 50 percent, which they attributed to a better analysis of their readers, appropriate organizational strategies, and the action they needed their readers to take. After the workshop, we received comments that the strategies "opened their eyes" to new ways of writing and helped them understand that different documents require different strategies; in short, writing isn't "one size fits all."

Write-Up Reflections

1. When in the writing process do you decide what organizational strategy you're going to use? What parameters do you use to decide (reader, objective of the document, or something else)? _____

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2. Do you tend to use a certain organizational strategy often? If so, which one? Use a document you've written to analyze your organizational strategy. What did you learn from this analysis? _____

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3. Under what circumstances might you use a least to most organizational strategy? That is, for what types of readers and documents? _____

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4. Under what circumstances might you use a most to least, or BLUF (bottom line up front),organizational strategy? That is, for what types of readers and documents?_____

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5. Is there a document type that you write for skimmers (for instance, emails)? Can you read just the first and last sentence of each paragraph and understand the paragraph? If not, what might you do differently to ensure that the paragraph is written for a skimmer? _____

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Chapter 6:

Creating Usable, Readable Documents via Sentence and Paragraph Structure

Any sentence can be written any number of ways, but how we write a sentence is determined by what we want to emphasize; in other words, effective writers tell readers what's important by ensuring that it's first in the sentence.

Writing Great Sentences

Consider these two examples:

>**Original:** *The team decided to go in another direction.*

In this case, the fact that the "team" made the decision is what's most important because it's first in the sentence. The reader would expect to learn how the "team" made the decision, etc.

The sentence could also be written as

>**Rewrite:** *Another direction is being taken.*

For the time being, ignore the fact that this is a passive sentence; the point is that "direction" is what's being emphasized in this sentence. We would expect the sentence to focus on the direction that's being taken and perhaps why a new direction has been decided upon.

Let's look at another example:

>**1.** *The system allows engineers to quickly and easily find the information they're seeking.*

>**2.** *Engineers can quickly and easily find information in the system.*

The same idea, but with different emphasis: in the first sentence, "system" is at the front of the sentence, so we would expect the paragraph to focus on the system and how it helps engineers find information they need. The second sentence focuses on engineers, so we would expect the paragraph to focus on engineers and their specific needs in terms of this system.
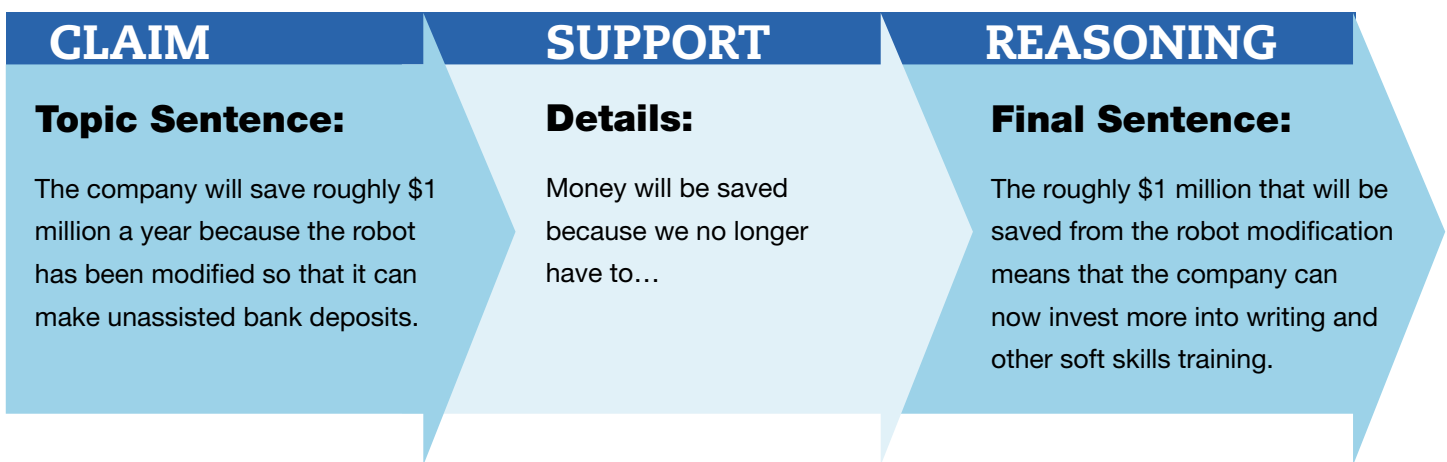
Writing Great Paragraphs

Like sentences, how paragraphs are structured can determine how readers make sense of the information.

Many writers write paragraphs exactly the same way all the time, without considering emphasis. However, readability studies tell us that structure matters and here's why:

> The structure of a paragraph tells readers what's most important (the first sentence of a paragraph should indicate what the paragraph is about.; this is the same concept as using order of emphasis by position when writing paragraphs for skimmers).

As this diagram illustrates, a paragraph should be structured such that the topic sentence is first (this is the sentence that tells readers what the paragraph will discuss); the support for the topic sentence should be in the middle; and the final sentence should be the reasoning sentence (that is, why the information matters or what readers should do with the information).

CLAIM	SUPPORT	REASONING
Topic Sentence:	**Details:**	**Final Sentence:**
The company will save roughly $1 million a year because the robot has been modified so that it can make unassisted bank deposits.	Money will be saved because we no longer have to…	The roughly $1 million that will be saved from the robot modification means that the company can now invest more into writing and other soft skills training.

If we couple the concept of using order of emphasis by position (writing for skimmers) with that of ensuring that what we wish to emphasize is first in a sentence, we should be able to create paragraphs that are one idea and one idea only.

For instance, let's use the sentence about the system and engineers that we just reviewed. If the first sentence is

> ***The system allows engineers to quickly and easily find the information they're seeking.***

We would expect the paragraph to be about the system (since that's what's first in the sentence), and the last sentence should bookend the first sentence. For example,

> ***The system provides for quick and easy information retrieval by excluding all irrelevant data.***

As this example illustrates, a reader could read just the first and last sentences and have a good idea of what the paragraph is about.

Paragraph Length

Readability studies tell us that longer paragraphs are less likely to be read than shorter paragraphs. While many writers think that this means that all paragraphs should be short, that's not the case. In fact, we should reserve shorter paragraphs for more impactful information while using a variety of paragraph lengths to emphasize and de-emphasize and create interest. For example, if I have an outcome that I want readers to pay attention to, I might put that into a shorter paragraph. And contrary to what you may have learned in seventh grade, a one-sentence paragraph is fine and can be used for emphasis.

Case Study: Poorly Structured Sentences and Paragraphs Hindered Translation

Background

A multinational corporation that manufactures agricultural, construction, and forestry machinery, had to produce documents that could be translated into different languages. In this case, translation meant more than simply finding a similar word; it was figuring out the meaning of the message.

Problem

These documents were often mistranslated and there was often much back and forth between the authors and the translators about meaning and importance of information. Real time was being wasted in this process.

Our Analysis

We discovered that a potential reason that the translators had such difficulty was that paragraphs often contained multiple ideas, so the translators were confused about the main gist of the message. In addition, the authors weren't constructing their sentences and paragraphs so that the translators could quickly and easily get the information they needed.

In short, their topic sentences were almost always statements of fact, which meant that the translators had to wade through a lot of (often unnecessary) information and their sentences typically weren't structured so that the most important information was first.

Our Solution

We taught these writers to

1. Use order of emphasis by position to ensure that the translators could read the first and last sentences and figure out the main message.

2. Ensure that the first sentence of the paragraph provided a clear indication of the topic and how it was going to be addressed.

Results

Three months later, the company reported that their translators were complaining less about the documents they were translating, the translated documents were clearer, and there was less back and forth between the translators and writers. The company was extraordinarily pleased with the results they were achieving, so much so that they hired us to teach other teams across the company.

Key Take-Aways

1

Structure Sentences to Emphasize the Main Point

Ensure that sentences begin with the most important information or what you wish to emphasize.

2

Use Topic Sentences to Your Advantage

To help readers understand the gist of a paragraph, ensure that the topic sentence tells them exactly what to expect in the paragraph.

3

Structure Paragraphs so that They Emphasize the Correct Information

Ensure that your paragraphs are structured so that the most important information is first, details are in the middle, and the last sentence tells readers why the information matters or what they should do with it.

Write-Up Reflections

1. Read one of your paragraphs: are you confident that the first sentence indicates what the paragraph is about? Does the information in the middle support the first sentence? Does the last sentence bookend the first?_____

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2. Can you read the first and last sentences of your paragraphs and get the gist of the message? _____

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3. Is there a paragraph in one of your, or your organization's, documents that buries important information in the middle? Rewrite it here. _____

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☐ Aperitif

☐ Appetizers

☐ First Course

☑ **Main Course**

PART IV:

Writing, Writing, Writing

☐ Dessert

Hurley Write, INC.

Chapter 7:

Using Language Effectively

Using too many words to get the point across can damage your ethos, or image, as a wordy document wastes readers' time.

In this chapter, we discuss some best practices in terms of language use and how to use language to ensure your documents are concise and precise.

Language, as probably you're aware, can make or break a document in terms of readability and usability. We've all read documents that have been difficult to get through; often, the blame for this can be attributed to the use of expletives (aka lazy pronouns), overused phrases, buzzwords, too many words, needlessly pompous words, and the inappropriate use of verbs and active and passive voice.

Avoid Expletives

Expletives, in this case, aren't curse words; they're the use of the pronouns "it" and "there" when they don't take the place of nouns (that's what a pronoun is supposed to do). For example, if I write "The robot knew where it could find the food," I'm using "it" as a pronoun to replace "robot," so that I don't have to keep writing "robot."

But if I write "It is assumed that the robot will be able to find the food," I'm using "it" as an expletive, since the "it" in this case doesn't replace a noun.

So, here's the problem with expletives:

- They're usually unnecessary

- They delay what's important (as you recall from a previous section, we discussed that what's first in the sentence should be what's most important)

- They can confuse the reader because the reader is probably looking for the noun that "there" or "it" replaced, and it doesn't exist

Let's use a previous example and add an expletive:

- ***There are methods the system uses to help engineers quickly and easily find information.***

As you can see, besides being unnecessary, the first part of the sentence "there are ways" adds absolutely no value. The sentence can be rewritten without the expletive:

- ***The system includes methods that help engineers quickly and easily find information.***

Do a word search for "it" and "there" in your documents to ensure you're using them as pronouns, not as expletives.

Avoid Overused Phrases

According to The Writing Cooperative, "Clichés prevent readers from visualization, making them an obstacle to creating memorable writing." In this world of texting, tweeting, and emailing, language has changed. While that's not unusual, we would argue that some people have become lazier in their language usage thanks to all this texting, tweeting, and emailing. In many cases, writers are much more likely to use a cliché or overused phrase because doing so is easy and habitual.

Using clichés is problematic for a several reasons:

1. Many clichés have lost their precise meaning, so we may be allowing our readers to decide for themselves what the phrase means, and that means we're not in control of the document.

2. Research shows that when people read clichés their brains shut down. Specifically, overexposure causes the brain to become de-sensitized to the words or phrases, so that they no longer evoke a sensory response in the brain. As a result, they convey our message in a way that's less impactful, less likely to be noticed, and less likely to be remembered.

3. We live in a multicultural society; and while a cliché's meaning may be obvious for most of us, the same may not be true for others.

Examples of clichés include

- It is what it is

- Please feel free to contact me

- I'll socialize this proposal.

One of the biggest dangers in using jargon and clichés is that they can damage the longevity of the document. Ask yourself if the words and phrases you're using, if not conventional, will be understood by someone who has to read and use the document five days, five months, or five years from now.

So, the next time you're inclined to write "utilize," "blue sky thinking," or "moving forward," know that using such clichéd language may make you seem lazy or, worse, may cloud your meaning.

Use Only Words that are Necessary and that Convey the Correct Meaning

Always try to use words and phrases that make reading and understanding the document easy. Be vigilant about using what we call "slash and burn"—be willing to get rid of words that add no value or that confuse meaning.

"Utilize" is a great example of a word that's overused; "use" is just as good and is shorter. Shorter, rather than longer, words should be used for clarity and readability. And we should ensure that every word adds value.

Let's look at a couple of examples:

Original: In order to utilize the robot so that it has the greatest impact, we should ensure that there are multiple ways to connect it.

Rewrite: To use the robot for the greatest impact, we should ensure that it can be connected in multiple ways.

In this example, "in order" isn't necessary, and we can eliminate the expletive "there" to create a more concise sentence.

Use the Real Verb

George Orwell, in his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," discusses what he terms "operators or verbal false limbs," and what we at Hurley Write call "not using the real verb."

Changing verbs into nouns adds unnecessary words to the sentence and lessens the impact of the writing.

Two common examples of this kind of bad writing are "take into consideration" rather than "consider" and "have an effect on" rather than "affect." Using the real verb makes the writing more concise, emphatic, and more precise.

Here are two more examples (real verbs underlined):

Original: Our sales department made a decision to go into that market.

Better: Our sales department decided to go into that market.

Original: The two companies were in agreement about the contract.

Better: The two companies agreed about the contract.

Often, verbs that have been changed into nouns can be identified by the endings "ation," "ence," and "ment" (and their derivatives). And you if have words like "make," "do," or "provide" or their derivatives in your writing, you may have changed a verb into a noun phrase. For example:

Original: We did an assessment of our fourth-quarter expenditures.

Better: We assessed our fourth-quarter expenditures.

Use Active Voice and the Passive Voice Appropriately

Many writers get hung up on active versus passive voice. Here's an example of each:

Active Voice

"*We wrote the contract last month.*"

Passive Voice

"*The contract was written last month.*"

Some people believe that passive voice is always incorrect, as it's wordier than active; others think the passive voice is always appropriate, as it (theoretically) shows impartiality or objectivity. However, both active voice and passive voice are useful, and both have their place in writing. Carefully consider your readers, their expectations for the document, and the action you want them to take, as these elements dictate the choice of active or passive voice.

Use active voice when you want to reveal/emphasize the "doer"

For instance, in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), you want to be very clear about who performs which tasks, so you'd naturally use active voice to reduce ambiguity.

"[You] shut off power before servicing the machine" puts the responsibility squarely on the reader.

This same sentence written in passive voice would say, "The power must be shut off before servicing the machine."

Again, active voice should be used when it's important for the reader to know who or what completed an action. We're all familiar with the line "Mistakes were made," which is clearly passive. In this case, the writer obviously wanted to acknowledge that mistakes were made while (probably intentionally) hiding the identity of the culprit.

Active Voice

"*I will submit the report tomorrow.*"

Passive Voice

"*The report will be submitted tomorrow.*"
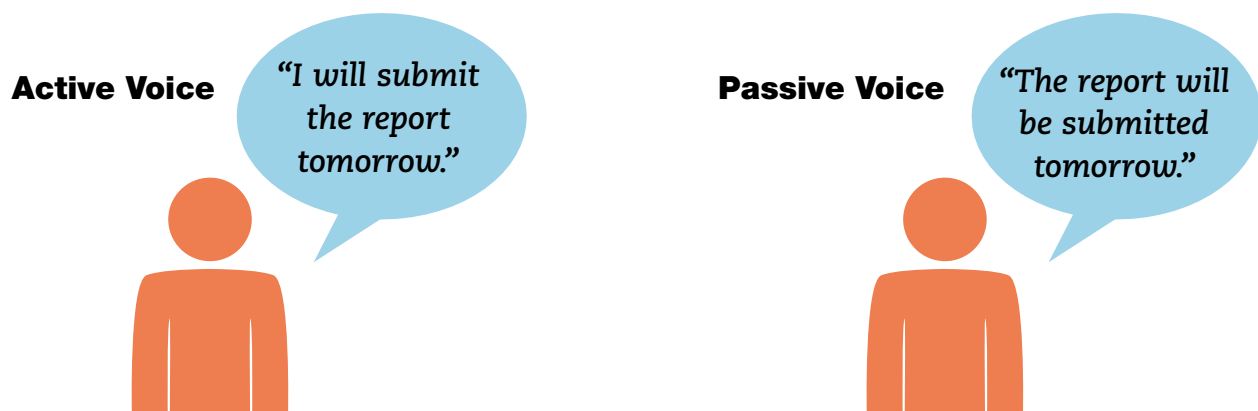
Use passive voice when you don't know who or what completed the action or when that information is unimportant to the reader.

If you use passive voice, do so ethically, which means it shouldn't be used to avoid assigning blame (as in the "Mistakes were made" sentence).

Sometimes, of course, it just doesn't matter who completed the action. For instance, "The alloys were heated to 120°C" is fine in a scientific report because, in this case, it doesn't matter who was responsible for heating the alloys (active would be "We heated the alloys…").

For this reason, many scientific journals and scholars that prefer writing about science is done in passive voice; however, simply writing in passive voice doesn't assure that the information conveyed is going to be seen as objective and unbiased; objectivity is conveyed via tone and style as well.

Key Take-Aways

1 Enhance readability and usability by using the language and words your readers expect and will understand.

2 Delete words that add no value.

3 Avoid clichés and other overused phrases.

4 Use the real verb, not a verb changed into a noun.

5 Use active and passive voice appropriately.

Write-Up Reflections

1. Do you tend to use expletives when you write? Find a few examples of expletives in your documents and rewrite.____

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2. What instances of overused phrases and/or buzzwords do you use in your documents? Is your organization guilty of "expecting" these types of phrases to be used? What simpler equivalents can you come up with? _____

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3. Can you find examples in your own writing where you've used more words than are necessary to get the point across? If so, rewrite here. _____

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4. Do you use active voice when it's appropriate to do so? Does your organization favor passive voice? If so, are there instances where using active voice makes more sense?_____

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Chapter 8:

Creating Flow

▶ *What does "flow" have to do with readability? Everything! We all know* **when** *a document flows, but we may not know* **how** *to ensure that a document flows.* ◀

Flow, which is simply how a document transitions logically from one idea to another, can be created using a variety of different strategies. This chapter focuses on three: keywords and transitional words, phrases, and paragraphs.

Keywords

Most of us are familiar with keywords—we use keywords to find information on the internet and when searching for documents. In this case, however, they're a bit different: keywords as we're discussing them are the words we use in the document that provide the gist of the message.

We want to ensure that we use them consistently and often. The idea is to create a list of keywords that we'll use in the document that will provide readers the main ideas of the document. These keywords should be directly related to the outcome statement we discussed earlier.

For instance, if I'm writing about how my team was able to get a robot to make an unassisted deposit at the bank, and I want my reader to agree that this is an extraordinary feat, I would create a list of keywords that would accomplish this. For instance, "extraordinary," "first time," and "unprecedented." It's not necessarily that these words would be used, it's that they help me tell the story I'm trying to tell.

These keywords would then show up in each paragraph to create a "theme" or "thread." It's important, in this regard, to use consistent terminology; in other words, once I call something a "vessel," it's a vessel throughout.

Transitions

Transitions help us show readers how ideas are connected, and they create flow. For instance, I can write two sentences:

I went to the store. It was raining and I couldn't get out of the car.

In this case, you may assume that the sentences are related, but that may not be the case at all. As a writer, I haven't made that connection for you. But I can add a transitional word, and suddenly, the connection is clear and obvious:

I went to the store; however, it was raining; and I couldn't get out of the car.

What we see often is a failure on the part of writers to show how ideas are related; instead, writers often write sentence

after sentence without showing the relationship between and among them. The result is that readers come to an incorrect conclusion.

Transitions are of three types: words, phrases, and paragraphs. "However," "therefore," and "thus" are examples of transitional words.

"In summary," "in conclusion," and "in addition" are examples of transitional phrases.

Both transitional words and phrases act as cues to help readers figure out the connection between and among ideas and drive readers to the correct conclusion.

Transitional paragraphs act a bit differently: they are short and summarize for readers what came before and tell them what they can expect later in the document or section.

Transitional paragraphs are great for readers who may not read the document in its entirety and they help us emphasize points. For example, if I know my reader probably won't read the entire document, and I want to emphasize a point, I might write a transitional paragraph that looks like this:

- **In Section 3, we discussed how the budget is affected by our new offerings and what we can expect next year. The next section focuses on ways to alleviate budget concerns.**

- **As discussed, the concerns about our president retiring is impacting how our clients view us. Many of our clients are concerned that the president's replacement will be less experienced and that the company will therefore be less profitable. While this concern is valid, in Sections 5-8 we discuss how we plan to alleviate those concerns.**

Key Take-Aways

1　**Make a list of keywords, and use them throughout the document, to help ensure that the message is clear and consistent.**

2　**Use transitional words and phrases to show relationships between and among ideas.**

3　**Use transitional paragraphs to alert readers about what's come before in the document or section and what they can expect.**

Write-Up Reflections

1. Can you underline the keywords in your paragraphs? If not, are there instances you can pinpoint in your paragraphs where keywords would work (for instance, in the topic and last sentences)? _____

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2. Do you use transitions in your documents to show relationships? If not, why not? Can you pinpoint instances where transitions would help? If so, rewrite here. _____

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3. Do you use transitional paragraphs in your writing? Can you find an instance where a transitional paragraph would be helpful? Write a short transitional paragraph to connect two sections or paragraphs in one of your documents. _____

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Chapter 9:

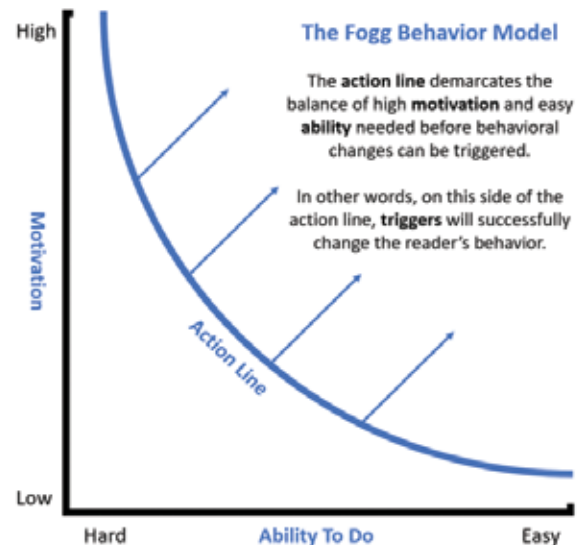## Applying the Fogg Behavioral Model to Your Writing

> *In the business world, writing has a job to do. You don't write just for the pleasure of it. You write to bring about change in the reader. Regardless of the specific goal, everything you write should affect the reader's behavior somehow.*

Enter the Fogg Behavioral Model

This model was designed by a behavioral scientist at Stanford named B.J. Fogg, who wanted to create a tool to help designers understand why users might not engage in desired behaviors. Fogg identified three elements key to inducing behavioral changes: motivation, ability, and triggers. If behavior doesn't change, it's because one of those three elements is missing.

Fogg illustrated his theory of behavior change with a graph.

As the graph reveals, insufficient ability and motivation create a negative region (the bottom left) where triggers, even if present, will fail. By contrast, when motivation is high, action is easy, and a trigger for action is present, you can easily catalyze the behavioral change you desire.

The Fogg Behavior Model

The **action line** demarcates the balance of high **motivation** and easy **ability** needed before behavioral changes can be triggered.

In other words, on this side of the action line, **triggers** will successfully change the reader's behavior.

How does This Apply to Writing?

Motivation

First, your written work must motivate the reader to undertake the desired behavior. That motivation may be physical, promising tangible rewards for the behavior. It might be emotional, creating anticipation for a desirable experience if the reader will just undertake a certain behavior. Or it may be social, cultivating a sense of belonging and place if they act.

Consider proposal writing. You might respond to a Request for Proposal in the hopes of gaining new business, and you want the readers to select your company as their new vendor. In that case, the proposal needs to provide the information to motivate that action. Specifically, you want to help readers understand the benefits they'll enjoy from working

with your company. (This is a common failing of proposals, which frequently focus on features rather than on benefits and deliverables. The proposals don't spell out why the reader should want to do business with you as opposed to a competitor).

Action

Second, your work must enable the reader to take the behavior, and it should not throw up barriers or blockages to action. Fogg describes what he calls the "six elements of simplicity" that underlie the ability of readers to take the action you desire: time, money, physical effort, mental effort, social deviance, and non-routine.

In other words, an action that takes no time and costs no money, requires no physical labor or mental exertion, is socially acceptable, and fits into normal daily habits is an action that pretty much anyone can do at any time. Unfortunately, in the business world, the reader will usually have some issue that blocks action.

For example, imagine that you're writing a scientific manuscript aimed at a government agency or a certifying entity. You want them to approve or certify your product or service. As you write, you'd want to keep in mind the barriers that inhibit action, which might be mental effort in this case. Poorly written scientific writing might be so confusing and unclear that readers must do a lot of mental legwork to come to the conclusions that the writing should just spell out for them. This is why clarity is so important in writing: it is an action-enabler.

Trigger

Finally, your work must trigger the desired behavior. This means it must make an appropriate call-to-action. Fogg identifies three kinds of triggers that depend on the combination of motivation and ability.

	High Motivation	Low Motivation
High Ability	**Signal Trigger** With both high motivation and high ability, the reader is already primed to do what you want. Just include an appropriate call-to-action. All you need is to signal your desired behavior.	**Facilitator Trigger** The reader wants to take the action but faces blocks in doing so. Be very directive and include all the information needed to make the behavior clear, easy, and straightforward.
Low Ability	**Spark Trigger** The trigger should help to overcome the lack of motivation. Think about ads: discounts, special offers, or other incentives can often help spark action even with low motivation.	*If the reader has low motivation and low ability, the trigger isn't your concern. Instead, focus on the reader's increasing motivation or ability.*

Chapter 10:

Revising and Editing Effectively

> *Revising is often where the real magic happens, where poor writing is rewritten, fine-tuned, and polished until it shines. As author Roald Dahl said, "Good writing is essentially rewriting."*
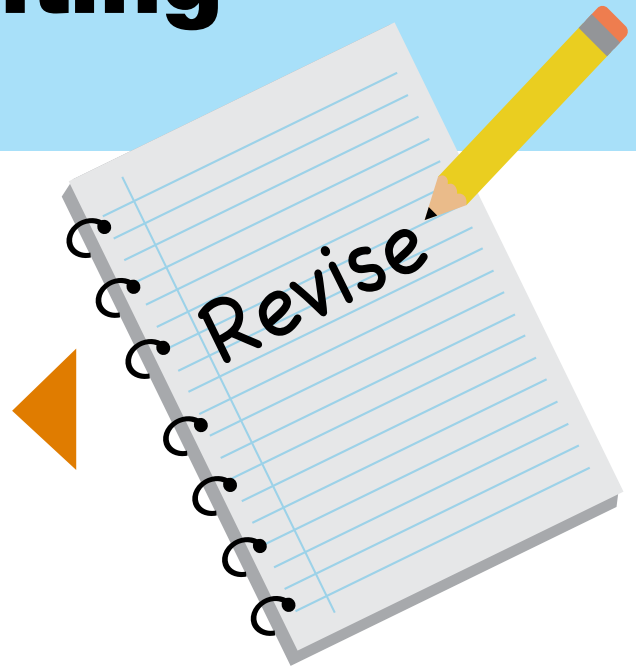
Editing and revision are part of the writing process. Don't think of them as "extra work" that you do because you've somehow failed the first time. They aren't a mark of failure; they're keys to success.

Josh Bernoff's survey on the 2016 State of Business Writing found that writers spend limited time on rewrites. He surveyed 547 businesspeople who write at least two hours per week for work, excluding email. He discovered that while they spend 45 percent of their writing time on prep and research, they devote only 19 percent to rewrites.

That finding may help account for why his respondents also rate the overall effectiveness of the business writing they read at a mediocre 5.4 out of 10.

Studies also underscore the importance of revision. When researchers from the University of Albany surveyed revising practices in schools, they found distinct differences between skilled and ineffective revisers. Effective revisers were able to "improve the quality of the text they generate" by spending a "greater proportion of time" in revision. By contrast, ineffective revisers would devote "negligible time to revising."

Part of that finding seems to stem from a lack of understanding around what revision is. Specifically, ineffective revisers would focus on surface-level changes that would not appreciably impact the quality of the writing; they focused on correcting spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc., whereas skilled revisers spent their time on deeper changes to content, structure, and meaning.

The Four (or Five) Types of Editing

In other words, there are different types of editing, and they have different impacts on the writing. In descending order from "big picture" down to "word-by-word" type editing, these include:

Developmental Editing

Big picture editing considers overarching structure, organization, flow, and impact.

Mechanical Editing

This editing aligns the writing with a specific formal style, like Associated Press (AP) Style, or an organization's internal style guidelines.

Line Editing

Here, reviewers literally look at the work line-by-line. Unconcerned with big picture considerations, the editor simply wants to make sure each sentence is as trim, functional, and effective as it can be.

Copyediting

The most granular form of editing, copyediting means looking for typos, grammatical mistakes, etc.

We've also found that most businesspeople add a fifth kind of editing that's usually counterproductive: editing for "voice" or "personal style."

This kind of editing means that, even if there's nothing wrong with the piece that one of the four main forms of editing would catch, the reviewer just doesn't like how it was written. In other words, they edit the work to make it sound more like how they would have written it, without actually correcting any errors or improving the effectiveness of the piece.

Sometimes this fifth form of editing can be appropriate. If someone is "ghostwriting" for you (they do the writing, but it's your name that will go on the piece), it's 100 percent appropriate to tailor the writing to your personal voice.

However, in most cases, editing for voice or personal style is a total waste of time. It doesn't change the clarity, effectiveness, or impact of the piece at all. Whoever is reading that report, presentation, memorandum, proposal, etc.,will have pretty much the same reaction regardless. So why spend extra time when it has no functional impact? Plus, it can result in unnecessary resentment from the writer. Many writers view comments from reviewers as derisive, and a comment we often hear is "I don't know why I should learn to write because my boss/supervisor will just change it." These situations arise mostly when the edits are based on style rather than substance.

How to Revise Your Work from its First Rough Draft through the end of the Polishing Process.

1. Revise	Re-envision your project. This is the stage to look at issues affecting your work on a structural level. Is it organized correctly? Does it contain all the information or arguments it needs to educate or persuade? Does content need to be added or removed? Does it meet your readers' needs and expectations?
2. Edit	While revision looks at structure and functionality, editing comes down to prose and style. To use a building metaphor, if revision concerns basic architecture, editing looks at siding and paint. Is tone consistent throughout? Do sentences flow and are they logical? Reading the document aloud can help in this stage. Often our ears and tongues can catch awkward phrases our eyes skip.
3. Proof	In our building metaphor, this is where you caulk the cracks and sand any rough edges. The difference between editing and proofreading is that while editing is a matter of readability, proofreading looks at the specific technical details of a work. Are words misspelled? Is the formatting correct for the type of document? Is the punctuation correct? You don't want to let a transposed period slip by. like this (Looks horrible, doesn't it?).

Targeted Editing

Targeted editing is another technique that organizations can use. The benefits of targeted editing are twofold:

1. It saves time for reviewers.

2. It better ensures that writers will get the feedback they need.

A targeted edit is just that: a writer asks a reviewer, who may be a colleague or peer, to focus on one thing. For instance, I may need help with my topic sentences to ensure they tell readers what to expect in the paragraph. I would ask a colleague to review for that and that alone.

The beauty of the targeted edit is that my reviewer is probably going to agree to do it, because it's not a lot of work and I'll benefit because I'll get only the feedback I'm looking for instead of a bunch of comments that may not be helpful.

Establish Guidelines

We've all been there: we get a document back from a group of reviewers and the comments are all over the place; there are so many comments and so many types of comments the writer doesn't know where to begin to start addressing them. Consequently, the writer simply accepts all the comments so that she can move on with her life. The problem, of course, is that most reviewers provide comments as teaching tools; however, when there are too many and they disagree, the writer often has no choice but to accept them all without assessing them.

Establishing agreed-upon guidelines can help. In this process, the reviewers and the writers collaborate to figure out the top five or 10 things that they feel would be most beneficial to improving their documents. They can then create a rubric,

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or checklist, that both groups will use to write and review. The checklist eliminates surprise comments for writers and helps reviewers streamline the writing process.

Establishing guidelines accomplishes a few things:

1. Writers know what reviewers will most likely be focusing on;

2. Reviewers can focus on what's most important instead of trying to focus on everything, thereby saving time; and

3. Everyone has a say in what's important, which eliminates surprises.

Case Study: The Value of Group Editing

Background

An engineering client's teams wrote many multi-authored documents that decision-makers used to understand how a project was progressing, what issues the teams were having, and if the project would be finished on time and within budget. The documents were written by various individuals on the team who'd meet once before the project was undertaken and again at its completion. The group, when assigned a writing task, would parcel out the various sections to the writers on the team and that would be it. When the document was due, the team would reconvene and give one another feedback on the writing and content before submitting it.

Problem

It was clear that these documents were written by multiple authors and the decision-makers often complained that the documents were difficult to understand and lacked a common "story." The teams then spent quite a bit of time responding to reviewers' comments and revising the documents. The result was often no better than the initial result, and the authors were frustrated at the lack of progress and at having to spend additional time rewriting.

Our Analysis

The problem was that because the team wasn't communicating and giving feedback **during** the writing process, by the time the document was due, there was little that could be done to make the document more readable. The team was stuck in that they were trying to solve the writing problem using the strategy they'd always used: have the authors write their section and then come together to give feedback a day or two before the document was due.

In addition, the team had no real strategy for review; each reviewer would focus on what was most important to that reviewer. Essentially, the writer would receive multiple comments, some of which helped the quality of the document and some of which were personal "pet peeves" of the reviewer.

In short, the review process was broken, most of the team felt that the review process was a waste of time, and the documents weren't improving.

Our Solution

We taught this group new ways to look at the review process. With our guidance, they began to

1. Schedule periodic reviews as part of the writing process. That is, they stopped the process of waiting until the entire document had been written before reviewing and started reviewing early and often.

2. Brainstorm:

    a. Before the writing process started, they brainstormed to analyze readers, decide content, and figure out strategies to provide that content to meet their readers' needs.

    b. During the writing process, they discussed strategy and problems and got feedback from the team on the document's direction.

    c. After the document had been written to discuss processes and lessons learned.

3. Establish review guidelines. As a group, they provided the five issues that were most important to their readers.

4. Use their established guidelines to review documents and set expectations for writers.

5. Use targeted edits, which meant that writers had to figure out what their writing weaknesses were and they received more useful feedback.

Outcome

After our workshop on reviewing, the facilitator told us that the review process has become more streamlined and that the teams are saving time by brainstorming early and often. Since the initial workshop, the organization has asked that more time be devoted to discussing the review process, since it's resulted in saved time and less frustration on the part of the writers.

Key Take-Aways

1   View revision as an opportunity.

2   Collaborate before and during the writing process to ensure that writers (and reviewers) are on the same page.

3   Schedule regular brainstorming sessions throughout the writing process.

4   Use targeted editing to get useful feedback and reduce time spent reviewing.

5   Establish guidelines in terms of what's most important when reviewing.

Write-Up Reflections

1. How much time do you spend reviewing your documents or the documents of others? Do you feel that most of this time results in better documents? _____

_____

_____

_____

2. When reviewing/editing, do you try to focus on one thing? If so, what is that one thing?_____

_____

_____

_____

3. When you receive feedback on one of your documents, do you a) go through the comments carefully and analyze each; b) accept all changes and move on; c) use the feedback to improve your writing? Reflect upon why you take this action._____

_____

_____

_____

4. What does your/your team's review process look like? How effective is it?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. What strategies might you incorporate into your editing process to make it more effective? _____

_____

_____

_____

☐ **Aperitif**

☐ **Appetizers**

☐ **First Course**

☐ **Main Course**

☑ **Dessert**

PART V:

Turning Writing into Desirable Outcomes

Hurley Write, INC.

Chapter 11:

Four Reasons to Invest in Employee Writing

▶ *Skillfully written documents support your organization's image and improve internal operations, both of which can have a measurable positive effect on your bottom line.* ◀

Courses

Often companies want to cut, not increase, costs and see training as an added and unnecessary expense. That means that training programs aren't high on the list of priorities. But employee writing courses deserve special consideration.

Did you know?

1 **Employees may spend half their time at work communicating through writing.**

This may include reading and writing emails, generating memos, coordinating an instant messaging service, and writing reports. Improving that process means that more work can get done in a day and less time/effort wasted on misunderstandings and requests for clarification.

2 **Many supervisors, and others, spend too much time proofreading and editing their team's documents.**

That's a triple-punch to your operating efficiency: it's additional work hours spent on fixing documents, it's time your supervisors don't spend supervising, and it's a sure way to increase employee discontent.

3 **Most colleges don't focus on writing skills.**

Even though writing and communication skills are essential for business, most colleges and universities require only basic composition skills. According to a recent study by staffing firm Adecco, 44 percent of recent college-graduate applicants possess lackluster soft skills, including communication skills, critical thinking, and creativity. Employee writing courses are a way to fill in that missing skill set.

4 **Even employees who write well may not know the most efficient ways to go about it.**

In fact, surveys suggest that almost three-quarters of writers think they could make better use of their writing time. Streamlining the writing process by knowing how to brainstorm, organize, draft, and revise equates to greater efficiency and more time to focus on other tasks.

Chapter 12:

Making the Most of Formal Training for Writing

▶ If poor writing is an issue in your organization, or if your team simply needs to learn new strategies to write more cogent documents in less time, you should consider corporate writing courses. But it's also crucial that training be successful and include learning retention strategies. ◀

An in-depth look at training programs from *Forbes*, titled "The Great Training Robbery: Why the $60 Billion Investment in Leadership Development is Not Working," looks at why training is so often ineffective in the long term.

The paper focuses primarily on leadership training, but its ideas apply to virtually all types of training. According to the paper's author, Rajeev Peshawaria, part of the issue is the "70:20:10 myth."

This myth is based on the belief that 70 percent of an employee's development comes from on-the-job training and learning by doing; 20 percent via coaching, feedback, and learning from others; with the final 10 percent from formal training.

Peshawaria argues that while 70 percent of the development does occur on the job, "[Y]ou cannot be on the job without training and education." And, he suggests, employers must be willing to analyze the root cause of any performance problems and be open to considering potential solutions that may fall outside the 70:20:10 formula.

A similarly titled working paper from The Harvard Business School, "The Great Training Robbery," also looks at why so much training fails to result in behavioral or cultural changes in an organization. This study concurs with Peshawaria's argument that, too often, management is unwilling to "hear the truth about the system of management they have created and to embrace the challenge of organizational change."

A primary requirement for success, according to the study, is support for the desired changes throughout the company culture that is driven by senior staff and executive management.

If you're considering writing training, how can you protect your return on investment?

Although The Harvard Business School study focuses on leadership training, some of these basic tenets can be applied to effective writing skills as well:

- Senior management must value the results of the training.

- Company culture must provide opportunities for practice and honest feedback.

- If organizational changes are necessary to support the desired outcomes, they should be made before training takes place.

- Help and coaching must be provided to teach employees how to enact new behaviors in the workplace.

- HR should not be expected to lead successful training efforts unless the broader organization is ready and willing to support necessary changes.

According to the Human Resources Council for the Nonprofit Sector, a project of the former Canadian Sector Council Program, a "positive environment for learning is always critical for success." Thus, companies should:

- Acknowledge that learning is integral to every aspect of the company.

- Include learning resources in annual budgets and company goals.

- Encourage opportunities for all staff members, not just executives.

- Treat problems and mistakes as opportunities for learning.

- Develop a specific policy on employee training, including expectations for how often employees will participate in formal training, which types of programs to consider, and how training will be funded.

- Provide time and support for both learning and practicing learned skills.

And of course, it's essential to choose a training company and program that supports your organization's culture and matches the value your firm places on quality writing. Canned, one-size-fits-all training can miss the mark, leaving participants struggling to apply learning to their specific needs and challenges. Look for a program that's customized to meet your company's needs and industry; type of writing (standard operating procedures, scientific writing); and individual challenges. Then, within an environment of support, watch your investment take root and your employees thrive.

Chapter 13:

Maximizing Learning Retention from Training Programs

> Why waste time and money on training if participants can't practice their newfound skills or engage in long-term learning?

Training employees can yield amazing benefits for organizations. For example, a study from the Association for Talent Development found that companies in the top quarter of per-employee spending on training had, on average, 24 percent higher profit margins and 218 percent higher income per employee than firms in the bottom quarter.
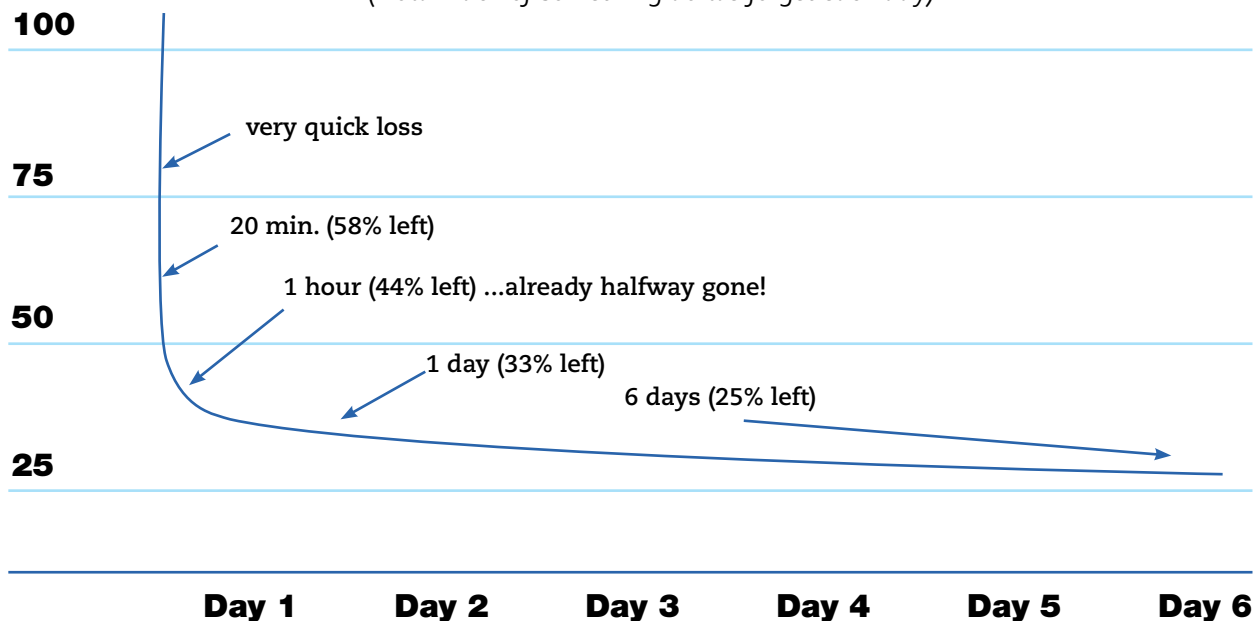
It makes sense. Training is a professional investment that pays off in performance and productivity gains, as employees learn to do their jobs more skillfully, effectively, and quickly. This is especially true of writing skills' development, since writing is so foundational to every aspect of a business.

However, there's a hidden roadblock that derails many writing courses: The Forgetting Curve.

Developing employee skills can pay off only if the new learning sticks. Unfortunately, most people forget most new information almost immediately. This is called the Forgetting Curve, a formula first tested and articulated by German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus in the late 19th Century. Ebbinghaus discovered – and later studies confirmed – that most new information is forgotten almost immediately after learning it, and only a fraction of the new information is retained over time – as illustrated in this chart.

Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve

(How much of something do we forget each day)

- very quick loss
- 20 min. (58% left)
- 1 hour (44% left) ...already halfway gone!
- 1 day (33% left)
- 6 days (25% left)

100 · 75 · 50 · 25

Day 1 · Day 2 · Day 3 · Day 4 · Day 5 · Day 6

If trainees forget what they learned, they'll simply default to previous habits, behaviors, and skills, yielding no real impact on behavior or productivity.

In other words, it turns out that retaining new knowledge is just as important a process as – and separate from – learning it in the first place. Yet many writing courses fail to account for retention over time.

How do you solve the professional training retention problem?

Repeated exposure is key, but there's a science to it. Studies have found, for example, that you can't just throw the new information at a person repeatedly in a brief timespan and expect them to retain it. We must use something called "spaced repetition." This even works on animals: in one study, researchers trained bees to distinguish sugar water from other stimuli. Some bees were trained every 30 seconds, others every 10 minutes; the latter group learned much better.

Training reinforcement and retention activities also need to be baked into the learning process from the start. When designing in-house training scenarios or selecting training vendors, verify that they include tools and activities that will reinforce the new information and boost skills and information retention over time, like those employed at Hurley Write:

- **Training reinforcement.** This easy-to-use platform sends email reminders about concepts and asks participants to engage in short writing tasks and reflect upon how they're using the concepts. This type of reinforcement has been shown to increase talent retention by 79 percent.

- **Digital library.** Includes short videos that remind participants about key concepts, mini-handbooks, and quizzes.

- **One-on-one and group coaching.** We use screenshare technology to ensure that your team gets the feedback they need.

- **Customized webinars.** These 60-minute webinars are completely customized and can be used for a deeper dive into concepts, for group discussion, or as refreshers.

- **Pre- and post-class writing assessment.** Our pre- and post-class writing assessment provides participants with feedback on their writing before and after the workshop and provides analytics in terms of what your team learned in the workshop.

- **Pre-workshop writing assessment/feedback.** Our pre-workshop writing assessment provides participants' substantive feedback on their writing before the class to help them better understand what concepts will be most applicable to them and their writing.

- **Editorial help.** Either before or after the workshop, we can provide editorial assistance to your team or individual writers.

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