

10

Steps to

Successful

Business Writing



Jack E. Appleman

2nd Edition

More Praise for *10 Steps to Successful Business Writing*

“Jack Appleman’s *10 Steps to Successful Business Writing* is perfectly aligned with today’s business practices and needs. It is an excellent resource, and an enormously helpful business writing guide.”

—Courtland L. Hines
Senior Manager, Johnson & Johnson

“Jack Appleman offers a time-tested, user-friendly approach that helps executives who don’t necessarily write for a living communicate more effectively and powerfully, even in an age where tweets pass for major pronouncements.”

—Sam Friedman
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“Appleman’s first edition is required reading for my graduate students because it provides outstanding guidance for writing clearly and concisely. The new edition is even better, with sections on social media, email communication, and mobile writing. This book has helped my students and coaching clients land jobs and advance in their careers.”

—Nancy Ancowitz
Presentation and Career Coach
Adjunct Faculty, New York University

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—Anthony Birritteri
Editor-in-Chief, New Jersey Business Magazine

“In this book, Jack Appleman doesn’t just show us the tricks of the trade; he gives us the keys to the kingdom. If you take his word and follow his lessons, you will be doing yourself a great professional service—and you will write better.”

—Thom Gencarelli
Professor and Chair of Communication,
Manhattan College

“The ability to recognize and seize opportunities to train our employees is key. In *10 Steps to Successful Business Writing*, Jack Appleman shows how important it is to continuously develop your skills as business writing evolves with your environment.”

—Lindsay Gaal
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“As you’d expect in a book about clear writing, Jack Appleman’s pointers for better communication are easy to understand and simple to put into practice. His guidance on tone is particularly important in today’s business environment, where so much writing is delivered electronically. Highly recommended for people who want to get their message across and boost productivity at work.”

—Elizabeth Harrin

Content Strategist and Blogger, GirlsGuideToPM.com

“Jack Appleman’s writing methods have helped my business with email composition. They are concise and effective—converting prospects into loyal clients!”

—Michael Cicchine

Founder, Mindbrand

“This book provides invaluable insights and advice on how to master business writing in the digital era. Jack Appleman builds on his earlier edition to show how the fundamentals of effective writing need to be adapted to the digital and social media world. It’s a brilliant must-read for business writers at every level.”

—Patrick Ford

Worldwide Vice Chairman and Chief Client Officer,
Burson-Marsteller

10

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Jack E. Appleman

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PRESS

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Preface

“Nobody can write anymore!” That’s all I hear from executives, human resource managers, learning and development specialists, and others when I explain my profession as a corporate writing instructor and coach. And they’re right, based on many studies on the impact of poor writing in the workplace. According to the *Los Angeles Business Journal*, “Billions of dollars in lost productivity can be traced to employees who are not capable of writing clearly and concisely” (Killeen 2013).

Today, the need for effective business writing has never been greater. With the rising number of communication channels—social media, instant messaging, and whatever else is next—and the accelerating pace of business interaction, we’re writing more than ever. And what we say and how we say it can dramatically affect our careers and the success of organizations in which we work.

Whether it’s providing clear directions to direct reports, conveying bad news to a client, or posting a meaningful comment on social media, your writing needs to be concise, explicit, relevant, professional, well organized, and free of grammatical errors. Plus, in many cases, your text must be captivating enough to break through the clutter and grab readers’ attention.

The good news is that business writing is a learned skill based on fundamental principles of communication. It doesn’t matter how extensive your vocabulary is or what grades you received in high school or college English. If you can tap your natural ability to express your thoughts, first learned as a child, you can become an effective writer. This is the essence of business writing: Say it as simply as

possible so the reader understands and takes the desired action. As you read the techniques, tools, and exercises in *10 Steps to Successful Business Writing*, remember this simple—and powerful—statement.

Why a Second Edition?

Have the skills for successful business writing changed since the first edition was published in 2008? Not really; they’ve remained virtually identical for the past 75 years or more. But a few aspects have changed. The speed of business communication has accelerated, spurring a greater need for concise, clear, and compelling text—which must be written faster than ever. That puts added pressure on you to quickly crank out messages that achieve the desired results and demands an important talent: critical thinking on the go.

Moreover, the digital era seems to have spawned an attention deficit disorder epidemic. Fewer people have the patience to read one paragraph after another. Everyone wants information in bite-sized chunks. So you need to master subject lines, titles, subheads, and bulleted text. Otherwise, your readers won’t pay attention to your message.

Today, everyone wants to be “social,” in their personal lives and in their work environments. Some organizations expect their employees to participate regularly in traditional social media forums, like LinkedIn and their social enterprise networks, to support various initiatives. That means tough decisions: How do you start? Should you be edgy? How will audiences react to you? It goes back to critical thinking on the go.

Maybe the best reason for a second edition is all of you. Since the first edition came out in 2008, I’ve received so many valuable insights from readers; participants in my corporate writing workshops, coaching sessions, and college classes; and colleagues, friends, and family members. You’ve shared your toughest writing challenges, your most important takeaways from the book, and additional areas to address in this new edition.

So here are your 10 steps with the changes from the first edition:

- **Step 1: Get Started Easily and Naturally** updates the old Step 2 (Know Where You're Taking Your Readers).
- **Step 2: Be Concise, Explicit, and Clear** updates the old Step 3 (Be Explicit, Clear, and Concise).
- **Step 3: Write With Style and Rhythm** updates the old Step 5 (Write With Rhythm to Hold Your Readers).
- **Step 4: Organize to Promote Understanding** updates the old Step 6 (Organize to Help Your Readers Understand).
- **Step 5: Persuade Readers to Take Your Desired Action** updates the old Step 4 (Grab Your Readers' Attention).
- **Step 6: Choose the Right Tone** updates the old Step 7 (Choose a Tone That Produces Good Results).
- **Step 7: Put Your Best Grammar on the Page** updates the old Step 8 (Put Your Best Grammar on the Page).
- **Step 8: Edit and Proofread Effectively** updates the old Step 9 (Edit, Rewrite, and Refine).
- **Step 9: Master Emails and Electronic Communication** is a new step.
- **Step 10: Apply Writing Skills to Social Media Copy** is a new step.
- **Appendix A: Drive Organizational and Personal Success With Better Writing** updates the old appendix (Steps to Improve Workers' Writing Skills).
- **Appendix B: Master the Text You Write Most Often** updates the old Step 10 (Master the Documents You Use Most Often).
- **Appendix C: Commonly Misused Words and Phrases** updates a tool in the old Step 8 (Put Your Best Grammar on the Page).

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For me, taking on a major creative endeavor like writing a book is much easier with the support of people who care about me. A big

thanks to Rosa, my wife; my younger daughter, Sarah; my older daughter, Gail, and her husband, Grayson; my granddaughter, Norah; and my mother-in-law, Lupe. Knowing that you were all behind me made all the difference in the world.

Writing a book is a team effort. And I couldn't have done it without the shrewd advice and continual support I received from my team at ATD: Jack Harlow, Melissa Jones, Caroline Coppel, Hannah Sternberg, Ryan Changcoco, and Kristine Luecker. You made this challenging process more manageable—and a lot more fun!

Finally, I need to thank an individual no longer with us, Christine Cotting, my editor (from ATD) for the first edition of the book. With patience, compassion, and a zeal for excellence, she coached me through each step, explaining the nuances of writing effective copy. Christine, you're sorely missed by me as well as countless authors, former colleagues, and others lucky enough to have known you.

Introduction

I'm frequently asked to identify the single most important quality for good business writing. My answer is always the same: simplicity. It's what readers crave and what will get you the desired results. Yet it can be elusive.

If your text lacks simplicity, you may be overcomplicating your message, perhaps subconsciously. You may be trying to dazzle your reader with million-dollar words. Or you may be including superfluous information in an attempt to be comprehensive. Always go back to the essence of business writing—getting the reader to understand your message as quickly as possible.

Consider these advertising examples that illustrate the power of simplicity:

Around 1990, a major technology company aired a television commercial for its software consulting services that went something like this: One man (we'll call him Bob) is rattling off complex technical jargon to explain to a colleague (let's call him Dave) why his firm should invest in a particular software application. Frustrated with this over-the-top language, Dave implores Bob to cut the technobabble and explain the purchase rationale in a way that management could understand. Bob pauses, reconsiders his initial choice of words, and says: "For every buck we invest, we'll get back two." So simple, so concise, so powerful!

Now, consider three iconic advertising slogans:

Nike: "Just do it."

Subway: "Eat fresh."

BMW: "The ultimate driving machine."

These companies recognize that the window in which to hook their audience is limited, whether at the end of a 30-second commercial or on a highway billboard. Competing for attention against other brands, not to mention countless other distractions, advertisers know that simplicity is the best way to get people's attention and drive them to action.

But simplicity isn't always easy to achieve—we often make it hard on ourselves by losing touch with the core message. Take a look at these notifications I've come across while navigating my computer:

- “Avsynmgr has caused an error in MCSCAN32DLL. The application will close.” *Oh, I get it. I knew I should have paid more attention to my Avsynmgr.*
- “The instruction at OxSad715131 referenced memory at Ox0000019. The memory could not be found.” *I knew it. I should've referenced that memory at Ox0000019 like I usually do.*
- “The application Windows Genuine Advantage Notification has changed since you first gave it access to the Internet. Do you still want to let it access the Internet?” *I want to access the Internet and don't care if Windows Genuine Advantage Notification (whatever that is) can access it.*

If you're an information technology specialist, these messages may be perfectly clear to you—but not to me or the majority of laypeople who depend on computers and mobile devices. The software developers lost the essence of the message they were trying to convey with these alerts, and as a result, have hindered the users' comprehension of what action they need to take. The good news is that over the past few years, technology and software companies have started to recognize that we need plain instructions—with no chance for misunderstanding. Thank you, Microsoft, for your brilliantly direct messages, such as, “Please do not turn off your computer when configuring Windows and installing updates.” Simplicity is a beautiful thing!

The Demand for Good Writing

Today, working professionals at all levels need to deliver information instantly and accurately to a wide array of discerning readers. Top executives insist that your emails get to the point immediately. Prospective clients need your proposal to explain precisely what separates your firm from competitors. And managers, colleagues, suppliers, and everyone else need text with clear rationale and explicit instructions.

But the quality of business writing continues to fall short of these requirements, based on my experience and observations over the past 20 years. Too many documents, emails, and text messages lack clarity and professionalism and ignore basic grammar rules. Poor writing is an epidemic spreading throughout the workplace. Check out these alarming statistics:

- Bad writing costs American businesses close to \$400 billion every year (Bernoff 2016).
- Poor communication (including emails that don't reach their audiences) is responsible for as much 40 percent of the cost of managing all business transactions (DuBay 2008).
- Only 6 to 7 percent of emails receive a response (Mark, Volda, and Cardello 2012).

And to address these deficiencies, U.S. companies spend more than \$3.1 billion annually on remedial writing training, including \$2.9 million on existing, rather than new, employees (National Commission on Writing and CollegeBoard 2004). This figure has probably risen considerably since the study was published.

Why Don't We Like to Write?

One reason cited for poor workplace writing is that it's one of the least favorite activities for many employees. For some, this aversion goes all the way back to elementary school, when writing was a dreaded assignment. Some teachers, instead of encouraging our creativity and allowing us to experiment with word construction, fixated on correctness—pointing out every last grammar and spelling mistake,

slashing handwritten or typed papers with red ink. That's no way to encourage people to write!

Then came high school and college English courses. Remember? Your 1,000-word essay is due tomorrow morning and you're still 300 words short. You crank out some more sentences. You plug in some flowery new vocabulary words—even if you're not sure what they mean—to impress the teacher. So what if you're rephrasing ideas already written? Keep those words coming until you reach that magic 1,000 mark.

What an agonizing way to write! Yet too many working professionals of all ages haven't let go of this "essay syndrome"—piling up words that don't contribute meaning—and their writing suffers. For them, the consequence is far worse than a poor grade: People lose interest and stop reading their text.

I don't mean to disparage English teachers, who play a critical role in teaching us the fundamentals such as grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. As a business writer, you need to master these skills or risk embarrassing yourself before supervisors, clients, colleagues, and other key audiences. Still, I appeal to all teachers, from elementary school through college: Stress clarity and brevity, the qualities your students will need when they write as working professionals.

Effective Writing Can Be Learned

My goal for you and everyone reading this book is to become a more confident writer. Start with the belief that you can significantly improve your writing by learning several easy-to-follow techniques.

One essential strategy is to stop trying to impress readers. You're *not* completing an academic assignment and won't be judged on the breadth of your vocabulary or whether you surpass a minimum number of words. Instead, you're trying to convey your message in a straightforward, concise, and organized manner. Do that and you'll become a successful business writer.

This goal is well within your reach; just follow the steps in this book. And pay more attention to how others write, everyone from authors and journalists to top executives, middle managers, colleagues,

and direct reports. As a reader, notice what's clear and what's confusing. Evaluate how effectively the information is presented to you—a process that will help you deliver effective messages to others.

The Payoff of Good Writing

In the corporate world, your documents, emails, and instant messages become your personal brand. Co-workers, clients, suppliers, and others form impressions about you based on your written words, which can convey enthusiasm, intelligence, and empathy, and inspire others to action. These written messages can fuel your ability to be a more effective leader. Here's how:

- As a company head, you can shape the future of your organization.
- As a senior executive, you can clarify complex sales or management strategies.
- As a midlevel manager, you can demonstrate or underscore your leadership abilities to direct reports and supervisors.

Above all, as an employee at any level, well-written text can also show others that:

- You understand all aspects of a situation and can clearly convey their relevance.
- You understand how a problem affects various people and departments.
- You can “manage up,” which includes helping a supervisor understand an issue and weigh potential solutions.
- You know what steps others should take and why they should take them.

Inside This Book

This book has been designed for people at different levels of writing proficiency, ranging from those looking to polish their superior text to those who struggle to find the right words, including those for whom English is a second language.

If you're looking for a book with extensive discussion on the philosophy of writing, audience analysis, readability matrixes, sentence diagrams, and endless grammar rules, this isn't it. I didn't have the patience to go into such detail—and you probably wouldn't have had the patience to read it. Instead, I developed a short, practical guide with the most important steps for taking your writing to the next level.

The skills are explained through examples, in which you'll see the same message presented two ways, one less polished and one preferred. Then, in the “Your Turn” section at the end of each step, you'll get a chance to complete exercises addressing these concepts. Here's a preview of how examples will be shown:

Too Many Words: Starting next year, our division will sponsor monthly social outings. These will be designed for the purpose of building camaraderie among all personnel, enabling employees to better know their fellow workers.

Concise: Starting next year, our division will sponsor monthly social outings to help build camaraderie among the staff.

Much of the content in the book is based on my 20-plus years as a business writing instructor, writing coach, and professor. Feedback from employees and students I've taught (especially in the 10 years since the first edition was published) helped me identify common challenges and the most desired competencies. Here are your 10 steps to writing effective business text.

Step 1: Get Started Easily and Naturally

Unleash your innate ability to communicate effectively. Break through writer's block by answering a few simple questions that define your message. Then choose a method such as outlining or freewriting, and you're on your way.

Step 2: Be Concise, Explicit, and Clear

Get to the point immediately with clarity and precision. Spare readers the murky swamp of vague terms, jargon, buzzwords, and stuffy phrases.

Step 3: Write With Style and Rhythm

With a professional and down-to-earth style, create a smooth flow of words and sentences. Insert transitions to unify your ideas so readers move easily through your message.

Step 4: Organize to Promote Understanding

Select the organizing method best suited for each document you create. Hold readers' attention so they grasp your points. Start with the bottom line and arrange ideas in a logical order. Use tools such as subheads to separate sections and topic sentences to frame ideas.

Step 5: Persuade Readers to Take Your Desired Action

Push readers' hot buttons, address their WIIFM (what's it in for me?), and overcome their objections to win them over to your side. Strengthen your persuasive emails with active verbs and compelling language.

Step 6: Choose the Right Tone

Compose messages that convey professionalism, respect, and empathy. Avoid hidden insults, and reply civilly to rude emails or text messages. Fit your language and your attitude to each reader's needs.

Step 7: Put Your Best Grammar on the Page

Use your common sense when following grammar rules. Avoid frequently made errors, and learn which old rules can be broken. Don't expect perfection, but ensure that substandard grammar never muddles your message.

Step 8: Edit and Proofread Effectively

Put yourself in your readers' shoes and refine your text until your gut tells you it's ready. Then proofread it for clarity, organization, and mechanics.

Step 9: Master Emails and Electronic Communication

Enhance email efficiency with precise messages and clear next steps, avoiding excessive back-and-forth dialogue. Spur action with explicit

subject lines. Practice proper etiquette for email and instant messaging to save time and to come across professionally.

Step 10: Apply Writing Skills to Social Media Copy

Tailor your writing to platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, and to social enterprise networks within your organization. Speak one-on-one to your audience, and stop readers with engaging headlines. Ask intriguing questions, and post thoughtful replies that extend conversations.

Appendix A: Drive Organizational and Personal Success With Better Writing

Determine how the quality of writing affects productivity, profitability, and engagement. Identify employees at all levels who need to upgrade their writing skills. Get management buy-in, and design a sustainable writing training program tailored to participants' needs. And devise a plan to improve your own writing.

Appendix B: Master the Text You Write Most Often

Become adept at writing the kind of text you most frequently compose to save time and get better results. See how the 10 steps apply to a performance review, an audit report, a proposal, an email to irritated customer, presentation slides, a project status report, a press release, and a LinkedIn profile summary.

Appendix C: Commonly Misused Words and Phrases

Make the grammatically correct choice when deciding between more than 25 confusing pairs of words, including aggravate and irritate, comprise and compose, and imply and infer.

Step 1

Get Started Easily and Naturally

Overview

- Answer a few questions to clarify your message.
- Overcome writer's block—write like you speak.
- Jump-start your writing through outlining, freewriting, or a structured process.

The blank screen is staring back at you. How should you start?

Many writers—including journalists, novelists, and bloggers—frequently struggle to figure out what they're going to say and how they're going to say it. If you have a get-started system that works, more power to you. But if you spend too much time looking at a blank page, check out the strategies that follow.

Start With a Few Basic Questions

Begin with what you know. To help define your purpose and message, answer these questions:

1. What is the situation, problem, or issue that is prompting you to write?
2. Who is going to read it?
3. What do your readers need to know?
4. What action do you want your readers to take?

To see how these questions help you begin writing, let's say that your company's travel costs are too high, and your boss, a senior executive, has demanded that expenses be reduced. That's the answer to question one—the problem that prompts you to write. So you need to inform the division heads who report to you that travel costs must be lowered and explain the recommended measures to achieve this goal.

The answer to question two (who are your readers?) is your direct reports. For your readers to act on this request, they need to know several things (question three):

- Travel expenses rose 30 percent—\$175,000—this year, compared with the same period last year.
- Your division must lower travel costs by at least \$100,000 next year.
- Working with the finance team, we've come up with three steps to achieve this goal:
 - videoconferencing sales meetings every other month
 - booking plane tickets two months ahead of travel to take advantage of lower fares
 - arranging for group rates at mid-range hotels instead of higher-priced properties.

When your readers have grasped that information, you want them to take these steps (question four):

- Let me know by February 1 if you can implement these steps and save \$100,000 or more next year.
- Contact me if you have any questions or if you need to schedule a call to discuss the proposal.

By answering these four key questions, you've virtually drafted the entire email. It's not always that easy, especially with complex documents, but answering the questions can often help you get started writing faster.

Write Like You Speak

This might sound counterintuitive. Many people try *not* to write like they talk. They believe that they speak in language that's disjointed

and too informal for written business communication. But that's not normally the case. Saying your message out loud can free you to express your thoughts in a clear, uncomplicated manner. In my 20 years of one-on-one writing coaching, this type of conversation keeps repeating itself:

Me: I don't understand what you're trying to say in this paragraph.

Individual: I'm trying to say "this," "this," and "this" (each representing a concept).

Me: Then write "this," "this," and "this"!

Most people find talking easier than writing. And their spoken language is typically more straightforward and concise than their written text. So if you're ever stuck on what to write, think about how you'd say it in an oral conversation. Then move those naturally flowing words from your lips to the keyboard, and make a few edits as needed. This goes back to the essence of business writing—conveying your message as simply as you can.

POINTER

If you're stuck getting started, write the words you'd use in a conversation.

The following example illustrates how writing what you would instinctively say out loud can help overcome writer's block: You're about to start writing an email to your supervisor, summarizing yesterday's meeting about strategies for LX Partners, one of your company's most important clients. No one else from your firm attended the meeting. While staring at the screen, you get a frantic call from your supervisor.

"Listen," he says, "LX Partners wants me to be on a conference call in two minutes and I have no idea what happened at yesterday's meeting. You were there. I need you to tell me—in 60 seconds—what was decided and what the next steps are!"

Talk about being put on the spot. But that's good, because your boss's demand for the bottom-line information in one minute forces you to get to the point and omit the unimportant details.

After a few moments of panic, you intuitively focus on the relevant information you know he wants and reply, “LX Partners has had three system-level security breaches in the past six months. In the meeting, I recommended that LX invest \$200,000 on a new software system that would prevent breaches at the application level. This purchase needs to be approved by April 1 to be fully operational by July 1.”

The takeaway: If you’re forced to be concise, you *will* be concise! So approach every email, text, and document with the same urgency you’d feel if the reader were talking to you on the phone or standing beside your desk impatiently waiting for your spoken answer. In other words, write it like you’d say it!

Develop an Outline for Complex Documents

The traditional outline you learned somewhere between grade school and high school can still work well, especially for longer documents like proposals, procedures, and reports. Start with general categories and then incorporate more specific ones. Example 1-1 shows how an outline could be developed.

Feel free to use roman numerals or any combination of bullets, letters, and numerals that’s clear to you. Remember, readers will only see your final document, not all the drafts you use to get there.

EXAMPLE 1-1

OUTLINE OF PLAN TO OUTSOURCE TRAINING

Purpose: Suggest outsourcing time management training

List simple, general categories:

1. Introduction: recommend outsourcing time management training
2. Why we need it
3. Implementing the training
4. Benefits of outsourced versus in-house training
5. Cost
6. Next steps

Expand categories with more details:

- Introduction: recommend outsourcing time management training
- Why we need it
 - Staff works inefficiently
 - Too many projects behind schedule
 - In-house training is not practical
- Implementing the training
 - Suppliers (training firms) that would meet our needs
 - Supplier A: pros and cons
 - Supplier B: pros and cons
 - Supplier C: pros and cons
 - Setting objectives
 - Scheduling
 - Evaluation and follow-up
- Benefits of outsourcing the training
 - Staff working 15 percent more efficiently
 - Better morale
 - Greater productivity
- Cost
 - Facilitation fees
 - Video tutorials
 - Other expenses
- Next steps
 - Management approval
 - Selecting a supplier
 - Scheduling training
 - Developing evaluation method

For more about organizing your text, see Step 4 (Organize to Promote Understanding).

Freewriting: Your Personal Brainstorm

Another method for getting started is called freewriting, because it frees you from all those constraints of writing—spelling, grammar,

sentence structure, organization, and your own judgment—that can stifle your ability to crank out the right words. When you freewrite on a topic, you just unleash your thoughts and get them on the screen or on paper as quickly as you can. What you write can be cut, organized, and better expressed later. What matters is that you dump out all your thoughts about the subject—and then feel good because you started.

Here's what freewriting might produce for a blog post on effective customer service over the phone:

POINTER

To freewrite, just write down your thoughts on the topic.

Customer service over the phone stinks in most cases. Companies don't put enough effort to training the reps or they don't teach the right skills. Most people can't stand talking to service reps over the phone. It's so frustrating—I've had to do it and what a waste of time. What kills me is the phoniness of it all. Those reps sound like robots. "Yes, I'll be happy to help you with that,"

or some other canned response. These reps don't really listen to what you say—they may hear but they don't really listen. And they've got this surly attitude that makes the customer feel like chopped liver.

Be real, be genuine—that's the way to service customers. There's actually a simple step to come across more friendly over the phone and show that you're willing to solve their problem. Smile—yea, just smile! It actually releases endorphins that put you in a better mood. And you know that customers will sense that when they hear your voice. Reps need to ask better questions. If their questions were better, they'd get to the crux of the customer's problem sooner. I couldn't believe when I heard that 84 percent of people said their expectations weren't exceeded in their last customer service interaction. That's from *Harvard Business Review*. Reps should show more empathy and let customers know that they feel the person's frustration.

Poor customer service can be brutal to companies. People stop buying products when service is lousy. I couldn't believe when I read that a lot people who were going to purchase something decided not to because of poor

customer service. It was more than half—55 percent—according to American Express. Corporate America isn't doing enough about this—and they're missing a huge opportunity. Effective customer service promotes additional purchases. And here's a hopeful stat: 73 percent of consumers say customer service reps who are friendly (not easy to find!) can make them fall in love with a brand, according to RightNow Technologies. That's huge!

While it's an extremely rough draft, it's a start.

To create order from the chaos of your freewritten document, read it over and pick out the key points you need to communicate to readers. When put into a logical order, these points will form your outline. Using the previous freewritten paragraphs, you might create this outline:

Effective customer service over the phone:

- Poor customer service on the phone: a critical business problem
- Alarming statistics on cost to corporate America:
 - 55 percent of consumers who intended to make a purchase backed out because of poor customer service (American Express)
 - 84 percent of consumers said that their expectations hadn't been exceeded in their last customer service interaction (*Harvard Business Review*)
- Lack of adequate training
- Consumers' most frequent complaints about reps:
 - Phony, canned replies
 - Failure to listen
 - Surly attitude
- Best practices for customer service over the phone:
 - Smile to elevate mood
 - Ask good questions
 - Show empathy
- Huge opportunity for companies:
 - Promote additional purchases
 - Build loyalty—73 percent of consumers say friendly service reps can make them fall in love with a brand (RightNow)

Now you've got the framework from which to write sentences and paragraphs that are arranged in a logical sequence.

Use a More Structured Process

Certain writers feel more comfortable with a clearly defined step-by-step process that they follow from topic development to finished document. And some instructors (not me) believe that writers should follow the same process for virtually everything they write. However you feel about that, a structured process can be an excellent tool when completing certain documents, especially the longer ones. If you want a process to follow, see the steps outlined in Tool 1-1. Modify the steps based on your own style.

TOOL 1-1

A STRUCTURED PROCESS FOR PREPARING YOUR TEXT

1. Determine the purpose. (What is the situation, problem, or issue to be addressed, and why are you writing the document?)
2. Analyze the audience.
3. Identify the key points to convey.
4. Identify the action you want readers to take.
5. Develop an outline.
6. Write the first draft.
7. Revise the first draft for message, organization, and mechanics.
8. Make the document visually appealing.
9. Proofread.

Your Turn

You can use many strategies to get started, including answering your own questions, using a simple outline, and freewriting. To practice different strategies, try these exercises:

5. Think of the next email you need to write. From your answers to the following questions, develop a simple outline:

- Why are you writing this message?
 - Who is your audience?
 - What do your readers want to know?
 - What actions do you want your readers to take?
6. Read over a report or lengthy email you wrote within the past six months. Imagine that you had just 30 seconds to explain the key message to a colleague waiting on the phone. Come up with the words you'd use and say them aloud. See if you got to the point faster in your imaginary conversation than you did in your text.
7. Review the freewriting below and develop a practical outline from it. Remember that certain points should be omitted and that some ideas may be repeated at different points of the text.

Finally, yea, we're addressing a problem, three years what a pain in getting stuff in the hands of customers in the south-west states. So many of them have a fit when the products take as long as two weeks to arrive, can't have that no way. Everyone has their own idea about which city to open the new distribution center. Carlos Molina says Phoenix is the Mecca of the southwest, I don't know where he gets that from, aside from thinking about going to some Phoenix Suns basketball games. I'm not saying Phoenix doesn't have pluses, like an able workforce, so we could easily fill the jobs, I don't know maybe 20 to 30. Whatever city it is, we've got to move on it, management wants it fully operational by July 1 of next year, nine months from now. So decision time is upon us, by about start of Oct. Construction's gotta start no later than Feb. 1. At least weather is less of an issue in Phoenix, and with the other places in the southwest too. I say we hold a meeting with all the marketing and operations managers by this Friday, that's Oct. 5, discuss it, have everyone do their research and come back in three weeks so we can vote and get that decision done so we can move forward.

Amber Nassar will be at the meeting. She's been touting Santa Fe as this enchanted city, she's traveled there quite a bit. Actually, New Mexico is known as the land of enchant-

ment, but who cares if they charge so much for rent, a helluva lot more than Phoenix for some unknown reason? Management wants good reasons for our decision, so we gotta go way beyond “enchantment.” The best thing about Santa Fe is that they got the absolute perfect spot for the distribution center, I mean right off the highway and near a shopping center and if we ever have to visit, some outstanding pubs, but maybe I should leave this out of the next draft, I don’t want anyone thinking my priorities aren’t in the right place. Then you got good old Tucson, which has always had that weird quality to me. The guy in Chicago, I don’t know him very well, Pete Marcus, thinks Tucson is hands-down the best place. Pros, the lowest rent and lowest construction costs. The cons, the location identified is hard to get to, 15 miles off the highway, on a treacherous two-lane curvy hilly road.

The Next Step

Once you’ve gotten your ideas on the screen or on paper, you need to write in a way that’s easily understood, using as few words as possible. That’s what we’ll cover in Step 2 (Be Concise, Explicit, and Clear).

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