

PAUL V. ANDERSON

TECH

COMMUNICATION

a
reader-
centered
approach

COMMUNICATION

EIGHTH EDITION

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TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

a reader-centered approach

EIGHTH EDITION

PAUL V. ANDERSON

Elon University



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FOR MY FAMILY

Margie

Christopher and Kirsten

Soren and Sigrid

Rachel and Jeff

Drew

Mom and Dad

AND FOR MY TEACHERS

James W. Souther and Myron L. White

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PREFACE

PREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS

Welcome to the Eighth Edition of *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*. I have written this book with one central goal: to help you create a teaching and learning experience that significantly increases your students' ability to write effectively in their careers and in their other courses.

Why You and Your Students Will Like This Edition

In this edition, I have added major new features to those that have worked so well for faculty and students in the past.

This book places you at the center of the action in your course.

You are the most important resource your students have. You know what their majors and career plans are, what they bring to the course, and how they learn. However, most textbooks are written as if they were the chief source of the knowledge students can gain from a course. Implicitly, they position the instructor as a person who is supposed to help students learn what the textbook has to teach. In this edition, I've taken the more sensible approach of telling students explicitly—in Chapter 1—that you are their most important resource: “Your technical communication instructor will provide you with an invaluable head start toward mastering the writing skills needed in your career. . . . This book's goal is to support your instructor in this effort” (page 19).

Along with describing the importance of the information, guidance, and feedback you will provide, Chapter 1 tells your students, “In sum, you'll get the most out of this book if you listen carefully to the ways your instructor asks you to use it.”

This book focuses your students on what really matters in the writing they will do in their careers: their readers.

This edition retains the book's distinctive reader-centered approach. Its premise is that for your students, success in the writing they do in their future (or current) careers will be measured by their readers' responses. If they are able to write communications that help their readers quickly find and easily use the information that they need, and if they are able to create communications that influence their readers' attitudes in the intended way, they will write effectively. As this book addresses each aspect of writing, from the largest considerations of content and organization to the smallest details of sentence construction and table design, it supports your efforts to help students so that they can elicit the desired responses from their readers.

It is designed to provide flexible support for the course you design.

The reader-centered approach and the design of the book provide a flexible teaching resource, enabling you to select any array of chapters and projects while still preparing your students, whatever their majors, with sophisticated yet transferable skills they will need wherever they choose to work after graduation.

It includes new features to help students learn transferable skills.

In this edition, I've placed even greater emphasis on teaching transferable skills. To transfer learning, students need to be able to see a new situation as an opportunity to apply acquired knowledge. To assist students in recognizing these opportunities, I've reorganized chapters into "how to" sections. An individual guideline no longer stands alone, as something to be remembered by itself. Instead, each is associated with a recurring writing goal, so that students can call the advice to mind when they encounter the same goal in a new context. Of course, whenever writers apply knowledge they learned in another context, they need to adapt it. The best guide for adapting is the central strategy of this book: look at what you are writing from your readers' perspective.

It includes learning objectives at the beginning of the chapters to help students gain more from their reading.

Research on reading indicates what we already knew intuitively: that people learn more from reading when they read with a purpose, with a focus. I have added *learning objectives* to chapter introductions. And I have added that students should keep these outcomes in mind not only when reading but also when working on their course projects and when discussing the chapters in class with you.

It highlights the importance of writing useful communications.

One goal of almost everything your students will write in their careers will be to help their readers do something they need to do. There are exceptions, of course: thank-you notes, invitations, and other social communications. But the rest will help their readers perform some task, whether physical (repairing a piece of equipment) or mental (deciding which software package to purchase for the company). In previous editions, I described this goal as *usability*. But I discovered that my own students found this term to be too abstract. So, I have replaced it with the more familiar term *usefulness*. And I've rewritten passages in Chapter 1 and throughout the rest of the book to help students imagine the tasks their communications are intended to help their readers perform. Helping students imagine their readers' tasks is a powerful way of helping them write communications their readers will find useful.

It provides in-depth coverage in an easy-to-learn manner.

In most chapters, the major points are distilled into easy-to-remember guidelines whose implications and applications are then elaborated. The guidelines themselves reinforce one another because they all flow from a common set of reader-centered principles and processes.

It provides many, richly annotated examples.

Guidelines can be mere abstractions to students unless they see concrete examples illustrating their application in the kinds of documents the students will write. Throughout, the book includes sample communications with annotations that illustrate the application of its advice. Moreover, these annotations are written in a way that focus on the writer's purpose, in order to focus your students' attention not on the features of the communication but on the decisions and strategies of the writer and, by implication, on the decisions they can make and the strategies they can use.

It includes other new material.

Two major additions to this edition have already been noted: inclusion of learning objectives for every chapter and the new section of Chapter 1 that explains that the book's goal is to help you help your students. Here are some other additions.

- New figures help students see the importance of matching the way they write their résumés and job application letters to the ways employers read applications for employment (Chapter 2).
- New discussions explain to students that carefully defining the goals of a communication is as crucial to their success as preparing a design specification is for engineers, computer scientists, architects, and other professionals (Chapter 3).
- A new chapter on conducting reader-centered research help students integrate strategies for finding, analyzing, and thinking critically about information and data that had appeared in two chapters in the previous edition (Chapter 6).
- New sections guide students in the use of online databases for research (Chapter 7).
- New figures help students distill the chapter's advice for creating an effective, professional voice; creating effective, high-impact sentences; and choosing the words they use (Chapter 10).
- New sections help students define the goals of the endings of the communications they will write in their careers (Chapter 12).
- New sections tell students how to increase the commitment and effort of all members of their writing teams in school and on the job (Chapter 19).
- New sections describe ways students can use to increase motivation and reduce misunderstanding among members of the virtual teams (teams that collaborate partly or solely on the Internet) (Chapter 19).
- New advice helps students select the points on which they should focus their oral presentations (Chapter 20).
- New discussions tell students how to achieve the appropriate level of formality in e-mails, instant messages, memos, and letters they write on the job (Chapter 23).
- New sections tell students how to use the IEEE style for documenting sources (Appendix A).

It includes revised discussions of many topics.

In addition to increasing students' ability to transfer their learning by reorganizing the chapters around “how to” topics, this edition includes the following changes designed to increase its helpfulness to students.

- More practical details about ways students can envision the tasks—whether physical or mental—that their communications will help their on-the-job readers perform (Chapter 3).
- Additional suggestions to help students organize their communications to maximize their usefulness to their readers (Chapter 3).
- Additional suggestions for ways students can determine what to say in communications and how to organize their messages (Chapter 4).
- Streamlined section on using memory and creativity (Chapter 7).
- Clearer explanation of formal and informal classification (Chapter 9).
- Fuller discussion of ways to establish an effective, professional voice (Chapter 10).
- Redesigned layouts of the book's pages on creating reader-centered graphics that make their guidelines easier for students to use (Chapter 15).
- Additional suggestions for ways students can avoid biasing the results when they are testing drafts (Chapter 18).
- Fuller discussion of differences among the ways writing teams are structured in the workplace (Chapter 19).
- More advice for choosing among the various technologies that can support team writing (Chapter 19).
- More complete advice for defining the goals of an oral presentation (Chapter 20).
- Simpler advice for choosing the most effective visual medium for an oral presentation (Chapter 20).
- New suggestions students can use to structure their oral presentation (Chapter 20).
- More complete advice for developing the content for a website (Chapter 22).
- More practical suggestions for helping readers navigate a website (Chapter 22).
- Fuller advice for determining what background information readers need in e-mails, instant messages, memos, and letters written at work (Chapter 23).
- Expanded advice for writing effective e-mails (Chapter 23).
- Revised *Writer's Guides* throughout the book to reflect the new organization of chapters around the “how to” goals that support transfer of writing strategies and skills.

It includes key updates.

In the tutorials and examples, this edition uses the latest versions of Microsoft Office (tutorials using earlier versions are available via the text's CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com). Appendix A describes the newest versions of APA, IEEE, and MLA documentation styles, including the use of the digital object identifier (doi).

ADDITIONAL KEY FEATURES OF THIS EDITION

Among the many features retained from the previous edition, I have paid special attention to the following because I believe they increase the book's breadth and effectiveness for teaching and learning.

- **Easy-to-remember guidelines** in the first twenty-two chapters help students retain the most central strategies, thereby increasing their resourcefulness and confidence as writers.
- **Writer's Tutorials** guide students step-by-step through certain processes. (See pages 37 and 164 for examples.)
- **Ethics Guidelines** are integrated into the chapters, so ethics becomes a continuous topic throughout a course rather than the topic for one day's reading. In addition, most chapters include special exercises that focus on ethical issues particular to the topic of those chapters.
- **Marginal notes** highlight key points in the text and bookmark key discussions.
- **Web guideposts** in the margin direct students to supplementary resources and information at the book's CourseMate.
- **Learn More guideposts** in the margin direct students to related discussions in other chapters.
- **Try This** features in the margin invite students to explore beyond the book even as they are reading it.
- **Planning Guides and Revision Checklists** assist students as they work on their course projects and professional communications. Downloadable versions of these are available at the book's CourseMate.
- **Global Guidelines**, which are also integrated into the chapters, help students learn the many ways that cultural difference affects communication and provide concrete suggestions for increasing their effectiveness in cross-cultural communications.
- **Exercises** at the end of chapters promote students' ability to apply the book's advice by asking them to Use What You've Learned. The exercises are grouped in four categories: *Apply Your Expertise*, *Explore Online*, *Collaborate with Your Classmates*, and *Apply Your Ethics*.

ORGANIZATION AND COVERAGE OF THIS EDITION

I have also retained the book's overall organization into four major sections. This structure balances attention to communication processes and products, and it provides you and other instructors with the flexibility to take up the chapters from each section in the way that best advances your courses.

- **Introduction.** Chapter 1 helps students understand the nature of writing in the workplace, the way this book builds on what they've learned in other courses, and the kinds of expertise this book will help them develop. Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of the reader-centered approach by leading students through the process of creating highly effective résumés and job application letters.

- **Communication Process.** Chapters 3 through 18 guide students through the activities in the writing process, helping them become confident, resourceful writers. Three reference guides help students use a variety of research methods, employ seven organizational patterns that are often useful in workplace communications, and create eleven types of graphics. Richly annotated examples enable students to see the book's advice in action.
- **Applications.** Chapters 19 through 22 provide detailed advice for applying the reader-centered approach when communicating and collaborating through the Internet, creating communications with a team, creating oral presentations, making websites, and working on client and service-learning projects.
- **Superstructures.** Chapters 23 through 28 take a reader-centered approach to six of the most common types of career-related communications: correspondence, proposals, empirical research reports, feasibility reports, progress reports, and instructions.

In addition, Appendix A explains the APA, IEEE, and MLA documentation styles. Appendix B includes a variety of effective projects for student assignments. Downloadable and editable versions of projects are available at the book's CourseMate.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS

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On CengageBrain.com students will be able to save up to 60% on their course materials through our full spectrum of options. Students will have the option to rent their textbooks, purchase print textbooks, e-textbooks, individual e-chapters, and audio books, all for substantial savings over average retail prices. CengageBrain.com also includes access to Cengage Learning's broad range of homework and study tools and features a selection of free content.

- **Instructor's Manual.** Accompanying this edition of *Technical Communication* is an updated instructor's manual that includes a thorough introduction to the course; information on how to integrate supplemental materials into the class, advice on teaching the exercises and cases in the textbook, and more. Instructors may request printed copies by calling 1-800-423-0563 and requesting ISBN-13: 978-1-285-06468-0, by contacting their local Cengage sales representative, or by downloading a PDF version from the book's CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.
- **English CourseMate.** *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*, Eighth Edition includes English CourseMate, which provides additional resources for your students.

English CourseMate includes:

- an interactive eBook, with highlighting, note taking and search capabilities
- interactive learning tools including:
 - **Quizzes**
 - **Tutorials**, many in video form, offering thorough guidance on key technical communication, grammar, and writing topics.

- o **Exercises** supplementing those in the text, interactive chapter quizzes, and a final exam provide students with additional opportunities to work with core concepts from the text.
- **Annotated sample documents** modeling reader-centered communication in a realistic format.
- **Cases**—some suitable for homework or class discussion, others appropriate for course projects—to help students hone their reader-centered communication skills.
- **Downloadable and customizable Planning Guides** to help students navigate the process of creating many kinds of communication.
- **Superstructures** to serve as quick reference guides to crafting specific types of documents, from reports to proposals.
- **PowerPoint presentations** for every chapter, providing handy tools for concept review and class discussion.
- **A Style Guide** that provides brief, user-friendly guidance on issues of grammar, punctuation, style, and usage.
- **Projects from Appendix B**, so students can consult their assignments even when their book isn't handy. Additional projects provide instructors with a wider selection from which to choose assignments that are most appropriate for their students.
- **Web Resources**, directing students to additional online tools and technical communication sites of interest.
- and more!

Go to CengageBrain.com to access these resources, and look for this icon  to find resources related to your text in English CourseMate.

- **Enhanced InSite for *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*, Eighth Edition**

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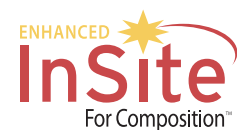
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- **Turnitin.** This proven online plagiarism-prevention software promotes fairness in the classroom by helping students learn to correctly cite sources and by allowing instructors to check for originality before reading and grading papers. Visit www.cengage.com/turnitin to view a demonstration.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PAUL V. ANDERSON

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Elon, North Carolina



PART I

INTRODUCTION

- Chapter 1 Communication, Your Career, and This Book
- Chapter 2 Overview of the Reader-Centered Communication Process: Obtaining a Job



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1 | Communication, Your Career, and This Book

From the perspective of your professional career, communication is one of the most valuable subjects you will study in college.

Why? Imagine what your days at work will be like. If you are majoring in engineering, computer science, ecology, or any other specialized field, you will spend much of your time using the special knowledge and skills you learned in college to answer questions asked by co-workers and to complete projects assigned by managers. Furthermore, you'll generate many good ideas on your own. Looking around, you'll discover ways to make things work better or do them less expensively, overcome problems that have stumped others, or make improvements others haven't begun to dream about.

Yet all of your ideas and knowledge will be useless unless you communicate them to someone else. Consider the examples of Sarah and Larry. A recent college graduate who majored in metallurgy, Sarah has spent three weeks analyzing pistons that broke when her employer tested a fuel-saving automobile engine. Her analysis has been skillful. Her conclusions are valid. However, the insights she gained about why the pistons failed will be useless to her employer unless she can communicate them clearly and usefully to the engineers who must redesign the pistons. Similarly, Larry, a nutritionist newly hired by a hospital, has several ideas for improving the efficiency of the hospital's kitchen. However, his ideas will reduce costs and improve service to patients only if he can present his recommendations persuasively to the people who have the power to implement these changes.

WEB For additional information, examples, and exercises related to this chapter, go to your English CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.

COMMUNICATION EXPERTISE WILL BE CRITICAL TO YOUR SUCCESS

Like Sarah and Larry, you will be able to make your work valuable to others only if you communicate it effectively. Numerous studies indicate that the typical college graduate spends about 20 percent of the work week writing (Beer & McMurrey, 2009; Sageev & Romanowski, 2001). That's one day out of every five-day work week! And it doesn't include the additional time you'll spend talking—whether in person or on the phone and Internet, whether in meetings or one-on-one.

Your writing ability will also help you advance in your career. College graduates judged to be in the top 20 percent of writing ability earn, on-average, more than three times as much as workers rated in the bottom 20 percent of writing ability (Fisher, 1998). Writing ability is a major consideration for promotion, according to the U.S. National Commission on Writing (2004).

Writing is so important to employers that they spend an estimated \$3.1 billion annually on writing instruction for their employees (National Commission on Writing, 2004). Moreover, private corporations, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies the world over hire professional technical writers. In the United States, technical writing is consistently rated as one of the top 50 jobs, based on employee satisfaction and projected number of job openings through at least 2020 (Wolgemuth, 2010). It could be an ideal career for you if you enjoy writing and learning about computers, health, engineering, or similar fields.

Besides being essential to your career, communication expertise will enable you to make valuable contributions to your campus or community. Volunteer groups, service clubs, and other organizations will welcome your ability to present their goals, proposals, and accomplishments clearly and persuasively.

College graduates typically spend one day a week—or more—writing.

WEB For more information on careers in technical communication and related fields, go to your English CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

Your technical writing instructor and this book share the goal of helping you develop the communication expertise needed to realize your full potential on the job and in your community. By reading this chapter and discussing it in class you will build the foundation for the rest of your technical writing course. As you read and discuss the chapter, focus on learning how to do the following things. You might imagine that your instructor will give a quiz in which you will be asked to do one or more of them.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

1. Describe the major ways writing at work differs from writing at school.
2. Name and explain the two qualities that writing at work must have to be effective.
3. Summarize in one sentence the reader-centered approach to writing.
4. Explain why you should focus constantly on your reader when writing at work.
5. Use six reader-centered strategies when writing a brief communication.
6. Describe this book's approach to ethics.
7. Tell how to gain the most benefit from your technical writing course and this book.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKPLACE WRITING

First, let's ask an obvious question. You already write well enough to have been accepted to college. You may also have earned advanced placement credit for a first-year writing course. Why do you need another writing course?

It's true that what you already know about writing will be useful at work. However, the writing done at work differs significantly from the writing typically assigned in school. To succeed in your career, you need to develop additional skills—even new ways of thinking.

Serves Practical Purposes

The most important difference concerns purpose. On the job, you will write for practical purposes, such as helping your employer improve a product or increase efficiency. Your readers will be supervisors, co-workers, customers, or other individuals who need information and ideas from you in order to pursue their own practical goals. You may already have prepared this type of communication for instructors who asked you to write to real or imagined readers, people who need your information in order to make a decision or take an action.

However, most of your academic writing—term papers, essay exams, and similar school assignments—have a much different purpose. They are intended to help you learn and to demonstrate your mastery of course material. Although your instructors will read them in order to assess your knowledge and decide what grade to assign, they usually don't need information and ideas from you in order to guide their decisions and actions as they pursue their own goals.

Different purposes profoundly affect the kind of communication you need to produce. For an essay exam or term paper whose purpose is to show how much you know, you succeed by saying as much as you can about your subject. At work, where your purpose is to help your readers make a decision or perform a task, you succeed by telling your readers only what they need, no matter how much more you know. Sarah, the metallurgist, doesn't need to tell the design engineers everything she learned about the broken pistons, just the information that will help them make better ones. Extra information will only clog their paths to what they require in order to do their work.

Learning what your readers need and determining the most helpful way to present this information are the most critical skills in workplace writing, though they are not relevant for most writing assigned at school.

Must Satisfy Different Readers in a Single Communication

Students usually write to a single reader, the instructor. In contrast, at work, you will often prepare communications that addresses two or more people who differ from one another in important ways, such as their familiarity with your specialty, the ways they will use your information, and their professional and personal concerns. For example, in his report recommending changes to the hospital kitchen, Larry's readers may include his supervisor, who will want to learn how operations

in her area would have to change if Larry's recommendations were adopted; the vice president for finance, who will want to analyze Larry's cost estimates; the director of personnel, who will want to know how job descriptions would need to change; and members of the labor union, who will want assurances that the new work assignments will treat employees fairly.

On the job, you will often need to construct communications that, like Larry's, must simultaneously satisfy an array of persons who will each read it with his or her own set of concerns and goals in mind.

Addresses International and Multicultural Audiences

When writing at work, you may often address readers from other nations and cultural backgrounds. Many organizations have clients, customers, and suppliers in other parts of the world. Thirty-three percent of U.S. corporate profits are generated by international trade (Lustig & Koester, 2006). The economies of many other nations are similarly linked to distant parts of the globe. Corporate and other websites are accessed by people around the planet. Even when communicating with co-workers at your own location, you may address a multicultural audience—persons of diverse national and ethnic origins.

Uses Distinctive Types of Communication

At work, people create a wide variety of job-related communications that aren't usually prepared at school, including memos, business letters, instructions, project proposals, and progress reports. Each of these types of communication has its own conventions, which you must follow to write successfully.

Employs Graphics and Visual Design to Increase Effectiveness

In communications written at work, tables, charts, drawings, photographs, and other graphics are often as important as written text. To write effectively, you will need expertise at creating graphics and at arranging your graphics and text on a page or computer screen in ways that make your communications visually appealing, easy to understand, and easy to navigate. Figure 1.1 shows a page from an instruction manual that illustrates the importance of graphics and visual design.

Created Collaboratively

Whatever experience you gain at school in writing collaboratively will benefit you on the job. For long documents, the number of co-writers is sometimes astonishingly large, into the hundreds. Even when you prepare communications alone, you may consult your co-workers, your boss, and even members of your intended audience as part of your writing process.

LEARN MORE To learn strategies for addressing international and intercultural communication audiences, read the Global Guidelines included in most other chapters.



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On the job, groups of employees often work together to plan, draft, and revise proposals, reports, and other printed, online, and oral communications. To learn strategies for using graphics and visual design to achieve your communication objectives on the job, see Chapters 14 and 16.

FIGURE 1.1

Page That Illustrates the Way Graphics and Visual Design Work Together with Words in Technical Communications

The visually prominent heading explains what readers will learn from this page.

The drawings show exactly what a reader needs to do to clean the printer; they even show a hand performing these tasks.

The drawings include arrows to indicate the direction of movement.

Each numbered drawing corresponds to the step with the same number.

The numbers for the drawings and steps are visually prominent to help readers match each drawing with its corresponding step.

- In the drawings, the numbers are large and bold.
- In the steps, the numbers are bold and placed in a column of their own.

The cautions are highlighted visually.

- Horizontal lines (called rules) set the cautions off from the text.
- The word **Caution** is printed in bold and blue.

To Clean the Printer

- 1 Turn the printer off and unplug the power cable, and then open the printer's top cover by pressing the top cover release on the side of the printer.
- 2 Remove toner cartridge.

Caution
Because light damages the cartridge's photosensitive drum, do not expose the cartridge to light for more than a few minutes.

- 3 With a dry lint-free cloth, wipe any residue from the paper path area and the toner cartridge cavity as shown.
- 4 Remove the cleaning brush from the shoulder above the toner cartridge area. Place the flat part of the brush on the shoulder while allowing the brush to be inserted below the shoulder where the mirror is located. Move the brush from side to side several times to clean the mirror.
- 5 Replace the brush and toner cartridge, close the top cover, plug in the power cable, and then turn the printer on.

Caution
Do not touch the transfer roller (shown in the illustration) with your fingers. Skin oils on the roller can cause print quality problems.

Caution
If toner gets on your clothes, wipe it off with a dry cloth and wash your clothes in **cold** water. Hot water sets toner into fabric.

4 Troubleshooting and Maintenance

Troubleshooting and Maintenance 4-19

From HP Laser-Jet 5P and 5MP Printer User's Manual, pp. 4-19, Boise, Idaho, Hewlett Packard. © Hewlett Packard. Reproduced with permission.

At the side of this and every page in the manual is a colored rectangle that gives the section number and title. These rectangles help readers flip quickly to the specific information they need.

In one common form of collaboration, you will need to submit drafts of some of your communications for review by managers and others who have the power to demand changes. The number of reviewers may range from one to a dozen or more. Some drafts go through many cycles of review and revision before obtaining final approval.

Created in a Globally Networked Environment

At work, increasing numbers of employees are doing their collaborative writing in a globally networked environment. Using the Internet, project team members

**FIGURE 1.2**

Writing Team Members in Australia and Germany Conduct a Work Session Online

© Monty Rakusen/Jupiterimages/Getty Images

write reports, proposals, and other documents even though these people may be located in different countries or on different continents. The teams may hold their work sessions entirely online (see Figure 1.2), never meeting in person. Their members may come from different cultures and have different languages as their native languages.

Shaped by Organizational Conventions and Culture

Each organization has a certain style that reflects the way it perceives and presents itself to outsiders. For example, an organization might be formal and conservative or informal and progressive. Individual departments within organizations may also have their own styles. On the job, you will be expected to understand the style of your organization or department and employ it in your writing.

Shaped by Social and Political Factors

Every communication situation has social dimensions. In your writing at school, the key social relationship usually is that of a student to a teacher. At work, you will have a much wider variety of relationships with your readers, such as manager to subordinate, customer to supplier, or co-worker to co-worker. Sometimes these relationships will be characterized by cooperation and goodwill. At other times, they will be fraught with competitiveness as people strive for recognition, power, or money for themselves and their departments. To write effectively, you will need to

LEARN MORE To learn strategies for writing collaboratively in the globally networked workplace, see Chapter 19, pages 406–407. See also the Global Guidelines included in many chapters.

adjust the style, tone, and overall approach of each communication to these social and political considerations.

Must Meet Deadlines

In many jobs, deadlines are much more significant—and changeable—than most deadlines at school. A deadline may be pushed back or advanced several times during a project, but no matter what the deadline is, the work must be completed on time. For example, when a company prepares a proposal or sales document, it must reach the client by the deadline the client has set. Otherwise, it may not be considered at all—no matter how good it is. Employers sometimes advise that “it’s better to be 80 percent complete than 100 percent late.”

Sensitive to Legal and Ethical Issues

Under the law, most documents written by employees represent the position and commitments of the organization itself. Company documents can even be subpoenaed as evidence in disputes over contracts and in product liability lawsuits.

Even when the law does not come into play, many communications written at work have moral and ethical dimensions. The decisions and actions they advocate can affect many people for better or worse. Because of the importance of the ethical dimension of workplace writing, this book incorporates in most chapters a discussion of ethical issues that may arise in your on-the-job communications.

WEB For more on the legal and ethical dimensions of workplace communication, go to your English CourseMate at www.cengagebrain.com.

Ethics are discussed further on page 18.

AT WORK, WRITING IS AN ACTION

As you can infer from the preceding section, there is tremendous variety among communications written on the job, depending on such variables as their purposes and readers; organizational conventions and cultures; and the political, social, legal, and ethical contexts in which they are prepared. Some people diminish their ability to write effectively in these multifaceted, shifting situations because they mistakenly think of writing as an afterthought, as merely recording or transporting information they developed while acting as specialists in their chosen field.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

When you write at work, you act. You exert your power to make something happen, to change things from the way they are now to the way you want them to be. Consider, again, the examples of Sarah and Larry. Sarah wants to help her team develop a successful engine. Acting as a metallurgical specialist, she has tested the faulty pistons to determine why they failed. To contribute to the success of the engine, she must now perform a writing act. She must now compose sentences, construct tables of data, and perform other writing activities to present her results in a way the engineers will find useful. Similarly, Larry believes that the hospital kitchen is run inefficiently. Acting as a nutrition specialist, he has devised a plan for improving its operation. For his plan to be put into effect, Larry must perform an act of writing. He must write a proposal that persuades the hospital’s decision makers to implement his plan.

AT WORK, WRITING SUPPORTS THE READER'S ACTION

Just as writing at work is an action, so, too, is reading. The engineers' only reason for reading Sarah's report is to obtain information that helps them do their job, which is to redesign the pistons. When the hospital's administrators read Larry's report, their goal is to perform one of their jobs: looking for ways to reduce costs while treating patients effectively.

Similarly, almost every time you write in your career, your goal will be to help others do their work. The exceptions? Thank-you notes, invitations to office social events, and other communications that don't require the expertise you are developing in your college major. When you are using writing as a specialist, you will be acting for the purpose of helping your readers do their jobs.

THE TWO ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING AT WORK: USEFULNESS AND PERSUASIVENESS

When you understand that the purpose of workplace writing is to help readers do something they need to do, you can see why your two major goals as a writer on the job are to create communications that are *useful* and *persuasive* for your readers.

To be *useful* a communication must help readers perform their tasks effectively and efficiently. Their tasks may be physical, such as installing a new memory card in a computer. Or their tasks may be mental, as when Sarah's readers use her report to redesign the pistons and Larry's readers compare his recommended procedures with those currently used in the hospital kitchen. Many features of a communication affect its usefulness. Sarah's report must contain all the information the engineers require, but exclude all unnecessary information that would make it difficult for them to find the crucial facts they need. Her report must also organize and present her information in a way that makes it easy for them to use as they redesign the pistons. Similarly, Larry's report must contain the information the hospital administrators consider relevant to their decisions about the kitchen. In addition, it must be organized around their criteria so they won't have to search through disparate sections of the report to find what they need.

A communication's *persuasiveness* is its ability to influence its readers' attitudes and actions. For instance, a proposal's goal would be to persuade its readers to change their attitude toward a proposed action (such as upgrading software used at the organization) from neutral—or, possibly, from hostile—to favorable.

In most communications, either usefulness or persuasiveness dominates: usefulness in instructions, for example, and persuasiveness in proposals. However, every workplace communication must possess both to succeed. Instructions are effective only if the intended readers are persuaded to use them. A proposal can persuade only if its readers can easily find, understand, and analyze its content. To see how communications combine usefulness and persuasiveness in a single communication, look at the web page and memo shown in Figures 1.3 and 1.4.

Thus, the starting point for creating any communication in your career is to ask, "What will make it useful and persuasive to my readers?"

Usefulness defined

Persuasiveness defined