Chapter 7: Revising and Presenting Your Writing

I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter.
   –James A. Michener

Half my life is an act of revision.
   –John Irving

Getting Started

One of the hardest tests to pass is the one of peer review. In the academic environment, professors conduct research, learn lessons, and share their findings by contributing articles for professional journals. Each academic journal article undergoes peer review, or evaluation by colleagues in the same field as the professor who wrote the article. These evaluations, often conducted by leaders in each field, do not only consider the value of the writer's findings. They also evaluate the mechanics of the document (spelling and grammar) and its presentation, organization, and design. The first time a scholar submits an article for peer review, he or she can expect rejections and liberal use of the red pen.

You may not experience such a rigorous and vigorous review of your writing, but in many ways the world of business is equally challenging. Academic publications ultimately value solid findings that contribute to the field or discipline. Business writing ultimately values writing that produces results or outcomes in environments where you do not have the luxury of controlling the variables, designing the context, or limiting the scope of your inquiry. Your business document will be evaluated by people you never met or even anticipated would read it, and errors will have a negative impact on its performance.

In every career, industry, and profession, today's business climate is a results-oriented environment. Regardless of what you write, there exists the possibility, even probability, that misunderstandings and miscommunications can and will occur. Although you will not always have control over the importance of the ideas you are assigned to communicate in your writing, there is one thing you can control: errors. If you avoid mistakes, both in the document itself and in the way your audience interprets your message, your document will have its best chance of success. To this end a thorough revision is an important part of your writing process.

As you review and evaluate documents, those written by you and others, you will need to keep in mind the three goals of being correct, clear, and concise. Next you will have to focus on effectiveness and efficiency, recognizing that in a climate of increasing demands and limited resources like time, you need to get it right the first time.

The environment of a business writer can be stressful, but it can also be rewarding. Recognition from your peers—suppliers, internal department colleagues, or customers—can make it all worthwhile. Still, the reward in terms of acknowledgement may come in the form of silence. When your document clearly meets expectations and accomplishes its goal, the outcome may be the absence of error or misinterpretation, a rare occasion that often goes unheralded. As

a business writer you need to value your work and note what works. When it does, take pride in your hard work in effort. You may not always be celebrated for your error-free documents that communicate concepts and ideas clearly, but know that they are successful, and their success is your success.

7.1 General Revision Points to Consider

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the process of revision
2. List three general elements of every document that require revision

Just when you think the production of your document is done, the revision process begins. Runners often refer to "the wall," where the limits of physical exertion are met and exhaustion is imminent. The writing process requires effort, from overcoming writer's block to the intense concentration composing a document often involves. It is only natural to have a sense of relief when your document is drafted from beginning to end. This relief is false confidence, though. Your document is not complete, and in its current state it could, in fact, do more harm than good. Errors, omissions, and unclear phrases may lurk within your document, waiting to reflect poorly on you when it reaches your audience. Now is not time to let your guard down, prematurely celebrate, or to mentally move on to the next assignment. Think of the revision process as one that hardens and strengthens your document, even though it may require the sacrifice of some hard-earned writing.

General revision requires attention to content, organization, style, and readability. These four main categories should give you a template from which to begin to explore details in depth. A cursory review of these elements in and of itself is insufficient for even the briefest review. Across this chapter we will explore ways to expand your revision efforts to cover the common areas of weakness and error. You may need to take some time away from your document to approach it again with a fresh perspective. Writers often juggle multiple projects that are at different stages of development. This allows the writer to leave one document and return to another without losing valuable production time. Overall, your goal is similar to what it was during your writing preparation and production: a clear mind.

Evaluate Content

Content is only one aspect of your document. Let's say you were assigned a report on the sales trends for a specific product in a relatively new market. You could produce a one-page chart comparing last year's results to current figures and call it a day, but would it clearly and concisely deliver content that is useful and correct? Are you supposed to highlight trends? Are you supposed to spotlight factors that contributed to the increase or decrease? Are you supposed to include projections for next year? Our list of questions could continue, but for now let's focus on content and its relationship to the directions. Have you included the content that corresponds to the given assignment, left any information out that may be necessary to fulfill the expectations, or have you gone beyond the assignment directions? Content will address the central questions of who, what, where, when, why and how within the range and parameters of the assignment.

Evaluate Organization

Organization is another key aspect of any document. Standard formats that include an introduction, body, and conclusion may be part of your document, but did you decide on a direct or indirect approach? Can you tell? A direct approach will announce the main point or purpose at the beginning, while an indirect approach will present an

introduction before the main point. Your document may use any of a wide variety of organizing principles, such as chronological, spatial, compare/contrast. Is your organizing principle clear to the reader?

Beyond the overall organization, pay special attention to transitions. Readers often have difficulty following a document if the writer makes the common error of failing to make one point relevant to the next, or to illustrate the relationships between the points. Finally, your conclusion should mirror your introduction and not introduce new material.

Evaluate Style

Style is created through content and organization, but also involves word choice and grammatical structures. Is your document written in an informal or formal tone, or does it present a blend, a mix, or an awkward mismatch? Does it provide a coherent and unifying voice with a professional tone? If you are collaborating on the project with other writers or contributors, pay special attention to unifying the document across the different authors' styles of writing. Even if they were all to write in a professional, formal style, the document may lack a consistent voice. Read it out loud—can you tell who is writing what? If so, that is a clear clue that you need to do more revising in terms of style.

Evaluate Readability

Readability refers to the reader's ability to read and comprehend the document. A variety of tools are available to make an estimate of a document's reading level, often correlated to a school grade level. If this chapter has a reading level of 11.8, it would be appropriate for most readers in the eleventh grade. But just because you are in grade thirteen, eighteen, or twenty-one doesn't mean that your audience, in their everyday use of language, reads at a postsecondary level. As a business writer, your goal is to make your writing clear and concise, not complex and challenging.

You can often use the "Tools" menu of your word processing program to determine the approximate reading level of your document. The program will evaluate the number of characters per word, add in the number of words per sentence, and come up with a rating. It may also note the percentage of passive sentences, and other information that will allow you to evaluate readability. Like any computer-generated rating, it should serve you as one point of evaluation, but not the only point. Your concerted effort to choose words you perceive as appropriate for the audience will serve you better than any computer evaluation of your writing.

Key Takeaway

The four main categories—content, organization, style, and readability—provide a template for general revision.

Exercises

1. Select a document, such as an article from a Web site, newspaper, magazine, or a piece of writing you have completed for a course. Evaluate the document according to the four main categories described in this section. Could the document benefit from revision in any of these areas? Discuss your findings with your classmates.

2. Interview a coworker or colleague and specifically ask how much time and attention they dedicate to the revision process of their written work. Compare your results with classmates.

3. Find a particularly good example of writing according to the above criteria. Review it and share it with your classmates.

4. Find a particularly bad example of writing according to the above criteria. Review it and share it with your classmates.

7.2 Specific Revision Points to Consider

Learning Objective

1. List six specific elements of every document to check for revision

When revising your document, it can be helpful to focus on specific points. When you consider each point in turn, you will be able to break down the revision process into manageable steps. When you have examined each point, you can be confident that you have avoided many possible areas for errors. Specific revision requires attention to the following:

- Format
- Facts
- Names
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Grammar

Let's examine these characteristics one by one.

Format

Format is an important part of the revision process. Format involves the design expectations of author and audience. If a letter format normally designates a date at the top, or the sender's address on the left side of the page before the salutation, the information should be in the correct location. Formatting that is messy or fails to conform to the company style will reflect poorly on you before the reader even starts to read it. By presenting a document that is properly formatted according to the expectations of your organization and your readers, you will start off making a good impression.

Facts

Another key part of the revision process is checking your facts. Did you know that news organizations and magazines employ professional fact-checkers? These workers are responsible for examining every article before it gets published and consulting original sources to make sure the information in the article is accurate. This can involve making phone calls to the people who were interviewed for the article—for example, "Mr. Diaz, our report states that you are thirty-nine years old. Our article will be published on the fifteenth. Will that be your correct age on that date?" Fact checking also involves looking facts up in encyclopedias, directories, atlases, and other standard reference works; and, increasingly, in online sources.

While you can't be expected to have the skills of a professional fact-checker, you do need to reread your writing with a critical eye to the information in it. Inaccurate content can expose you and your organization to liability, and will create far more work than a simple revision of a document. So, when you revise a document, ask yourself the following:

- Does my writing contain any statistics or references that need to be verified?
- Where can I get reliable information to verify it?

It is often useful to do independent verification—that is, look up the fact in a different source from the one where you first got it. For example, perhaps a colleague gave you a list of closing averages for the Dow Jones Industrial on certain dates. You still have the list, so you can make sure your document agrees with the numbers your colleague provided. But what if your colleague made a mistake? The Web sites of the *Wall Street Journal* and other major newspapers list closings for "the Dow," so it is reasonably easy for you to look up the numbers and verify them independently.

Names

Figure 7.1

Always spell a person's name correctly.

kersy83 – Youth Psyche – CC BY-ND-ND 2.0.

There is no more embarrassing error in business writing than to misspell someone's name. To the writer, and to some readers, spelling a name "Michelle" instead of "Michele" may seem like a minor matter, but to Michele herself it will make a big difference. Attribution is one way we often involve a person's name, and giving credit where credit is due is essential. There are many other reasons for including someone's name, but regardless of your reasons for choosing to focus on them, you need to make sure the spelling is correct. Incorrect spelling of names is a quick way to undermine your credibility; it can also have a negative impact on your organization's reputation, and in some cases it may even have legal ramifications.

Spelling

Correct spelling is another element essential for your credibility, and errors will be glaringly obvious to many readers. The negative impact on your reputation as a writer, and its perception that you lack attention to detail or do not value

your work, will be hard to overcome. In addition to the negative personal consequences, spelling errors can become factual errors and destroy the value of content. This may lead you to click the "spell check" button in your word processing program, but computer spell-checking is not enough. Spell checkers have improved in the years since they were first invented, but they are not infallible. They can and do make mistakes.

Typically, your incorrect word may in fact be a word, and therefore, according to the program, correct. For example, suppose you wrote, "The major will attend the meeting" when you meant to write "The mayor will attend the meeting." The program would miss this error because "major" is a word, but your meaning would be twisted beyond recognition.

Punctuation

Punctuation marks are the traffic signals, signs, and indications that allow us to navigate the written word. They serve to warn us in advance when a transition is coming or the complete thought has come to an end. A period indicates the thought is complete, while a comma signals that additional elements or modifiers are coming. Correct signals will help your reader follow the thoughts through sentences and paragraphs, and enable you to communicate with maximum efficiency while reducing the probability of error (Strunk, 1979).

Table 7.1 "Punctuation Marks" lists twelve punctuation marks that are commonly used in English in alphabetical order along with an example of each.

Table 7.1 Punctuation Marks

	Symbol	Example
Apostrophe	'	Michele's report is due tomorrow.
Colon	:	This is what I think: you need to revise your paper.
Comma	,	The report advised us when to sell, what to sell, and where to find buyers.
Dash	—	This is more difficult than it seems—buyers are scarce when credit is tight.
Ellipsis	…	Lincoln spoke of "a new nation…dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."
Exclamation Point	!	How exciting!
Hyphen	–	The question is a many-faceted one.
Parentheses	( )	To answer it (or at least to begin addressing it) we will need more information.
Period	.	The answer is no. Period. Full stop.
Question Mark	?	Can I talk you into changing your mind?
Quotation Marks	" "	The manager told him, "I will make sure Renée is available to help you."
Semicolon	;	Theresa was late to the meeting; her computer had frozen and she was stuck at her desk until a tech rep came to fix it.

It may be daunting to realize that the number of possible punctuation errors is as extensive as the number of symbols and constructions available to the author. Software program may catch many punctuation errors, but again it is the committed writer that makes the difference. Here we will provide details on how to avoid mistakes with three of the most commonly used punctuation marks: the comma, the semicolon, and the apostrophe.

Commas

The comma is probably the most versatile of all punctuation marks. This means you as a writer can use your judgment in many cases as to whether you need a comma or not. It also means that the possible errors involving commas are many. Commas are necessary some of the time, but careless writers often place a comma in a sentence where it is simply not needed.

Commas are used to separate two independent clauses joined by a conjunction like "but," "and," and "or."

Example
The advertising department is effective, but don't expect miracles in this business climate.

Commas are not used simply to join two independent clauses. This is known as the comma splice error, and the way to correct it is to insert a conjunction after the comma.

Examples
The advertising department is effective, the sales department needs to produce more results.
The advertising department is effective, *but* the sales department needs to produce more results.

Commas are used for introductory phrases and to offset clauses that are not essential to the sentence. If the meaning would remain intact without the phrase, it is considered nonessential.

Examples
After the summary of this year's sales, the sales department had good reason to celebrate.
The sales department, *last year's winner of the most productive award*, celebrated their stellar sales success this year.
The sales department celebrated their stellar sales success this year.

Commas are used to offset words that help create unity across a sentence like "however" and "therefore."

Examples
The sales department discovered, *however*, that the forecast for next year is challenging.
However, the sales department discovered that the forecast for next year is challenging.

Commas are often used to separate more than one adjective modifying a noun.

Example
The sales department discovered the *troublesome, challenging* forecast for next year.

Commas are used to separate addresses, dates, and titles; they are also used in dialogue sequences.

Examples
John is from Ancud, Chile.
Katy was born on August 2, 2002.
Mackenzie McLean, D. V., is an excellent veterinarian.
Lisa said, "When writing, omit needless words."

Semicolons

Semicolons have two uses. First, they indicate relationships among groups of items in a series when the individual items are separated by commas. Second, a semicolon can be used to join two independent clauses; this is another way of avoiding the comma splice error mentioned above. Using a semicolon this way is often effective if the meaning of the two independent clauses is linked in some way, such as a cause-effect relationship.

Examples
Merchandise on order includes women's wear such as sweaters, skirts, and blouses; men's wear such as shirts, jackets, and slacks; and outwear such as coats, parkas, and hats.
The sales campaign was successful; without its contributions our bottom line would have been dismal indeed.

Apostrophes

The apostrophe, like the semicolon, has two uses: it replaces letters omitted in a contraction, and it often indicates the possessive.

Because contractions are associated with an informal style, they may not be appropriate for some professional writing. The business writer will—as always—evaluate the expectations and audience of the given assignment.

Examples
It's great news that sales were up. *It is* also good news that *we've* managed to reduce our advertising costs.

When you indicate possession, pay attention to the placement of the apostrophe. Nouns commonly receive "'s" when they are made possessive. But plurals that end in "s" receive a hanging apostrophe when they are made possessive, and the word "it" forms the possessive ("its") with no apostrophe at all.

Examples
Mackenzie*'s* sheep are ready to be sheared.
The parents' meeting is scheduled for Thursday.
We are willing to adopt a dog that has already had its shots.

Grammar

Learning to use good, correct standard English grammar is more of a practice than an event, or even a process. Grammar involves the written construction of meaning from words and involves customs that evolve and adapt to usage over time. Because grammar is always evolving, none of us can sit back and rest assured that we "know" how to write with proper grammar. Instead, it is important to write and revise with close attention to grammar, keeping in mind that grammatical errors can undermine your credibility, reflect poorly on your employer, and cause misunderstandings.

Jean Wyrick has provided a list of common errors in grammar to watch out for, which we have adapted here for easy reference (Wyrick, 2008). In each case, the error is in *italics* and the *[correct form]* is italicized within square bracket.

Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and verb should agree on the number under consideration. In faulty writing, a singular subject is sometimes mismatched with a plural verb form, or vice versa.

Examples
Sales have not been consistent and they *doesn't [do not]* reflect your hard work and effort.
The president appreciates your hard work and *wish [wishes]* to thank you.

Verb Tense

Verb tense refers to the point in time where action occurs. The most common tenses are past, present, and future. There is nothing wrong with mixing tenses in a sentence if the action is intended to take place at different times. In faulty or careless writing, however, they are often mismatched illogically.

Examples
Sharon was under pressure to finish the report, so she *uses [used]* a shortcut to paste in the sales figures.
The sales department holds a status meeting every week, and last week's meeting *will be [was]* at the Garden Inn.

Split Infinitive

The infinitive form of verb is one without a reference to time, and in its standard form it includes the auxiliary word

"to," as in "to write is to revise." It has been customary to keep the "to" next to the verb; to place an adverb between them is known as splitting the infinitive. Some modern writers do this all the time (for example, "to boldly go…"), and since all grammar is essentially a set of customs that govern the written word, you will need to understand what the custom is where you work. If you are working with colleagues trained across the last fifty years, they may find split infinitives annoying. For this reason, it's often best to avoid splitting an infinitive wherever you can do so without distorting the meaning of the sentence.

Examples
The Marketing Department needs assistance *to accurately understand our readers [to understand our readers accurately]*.
David pondered *how to best revise [how best to revise]* the sentence.

Double Negative

A double negative uses two negatives to communicate a single idea, duplicating the negation. In some languages, such as Spanish, when the main action in the sentence is negative, it is correct to express the other elements in the sentence negatively as well. However, in English, this is incorrect. In addition to sounding wrong (you can often hear the error if you read the sentence out loud), a double negative in English causes an error in logic, because two negatives cancel each other out and yield a positive. In fact, the wording of ballot measures is often criticized for confusing voters with double negatives.

Examples
John *doesn't need no [any]* assistance with his sales presentation. [Or *John needs no assistance with his sales presentation*.]
Jeri *could not find no [any]* reason to approve the request. [Or *Jeri could find no reason to approve the request*.]

Irregular Verbs

Most verbs represent the past with the addition of the suffix "ed," as in "ask" becomes "asked." Irregular verbs change a vowel or convert to another word when representing the past tense. Consider the irregular verb "to go"; the past tense is "went," not "goed."

Examples
The need *arised [arose]* to seek additional funding.
Katy *leaped [leapt]* onto the stage to introduce the presentation.

Commas in a Series

A comma is used to separate the items in a series, but in some writing styles the comma is omitted between the final two items of the series, where the conjunction joins the last and next-to-last items. The comma in this position is known as the "serial comma." The serial comma is typically required in academic writing and typically omitted in journalism. Other writers omit the serial comma if the final two items in the series have a closer logical connection than the other

items. In business writing, you may use it or omit it according to the prevailing style in your organization or industry. Know your audience and be aware of the rule.

Examples
Lisa is an amazing wife, mother, teacher, *gardener, and editor*.
Lisa is an amazing wife, mother teacher, *gardener and editor*.
Lisa is an amazing teacher, editor, gardener, *wife and mother*.

Faulty Comparisons

When comparing two objects by degree, there should be no mention of "est," as in "biggest" as all you can really say is that one is bigger than the other. If you are comparing three or more objects, then "est" will accurately communicate which is the "biggest" of them all.

Examples
Between the twins, Mackenzie is the *fastest [faster]* of the two.
Among our three children, Mackenzie is the *tallest*.

Dangling Modifiers

Modifiers describe a subject in a sentence or indicate how or when the subject carried out the action. If the subject is omitted, the modifier intended for the subject is left dangling or hanging out on its own without a clear relationship to the sentence. Who is doing the seeing in the first sentence?

Examples
Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, celebrations were in order.
Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, *we decided* that celebrations were in order.

Misplaced Modifiers

Modifiers that are misplaced are not lost, they are simply in the wrong place. Their unfortunate location is often far from the word or words they describe, making it easy for readers to misinterpret the sentence.

Examples
Trying to avoid the deer, *the tree hit my car*.
My car hit the tree when I tried to avoid a deer in the road.

> ### Key Takeaway
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> By revising for format, facts, names, spelling, punctuation, and grammar, you can increase your chances of correcting many common errors in your writing.

> ### Exercises
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> 1. Select a news article from a news Web site, newspaper, or magazine. Find as many facts in the article as you can that could require fact-checking. Then check as many of these facts as you can, using sources available to you in the library and on the Internet. Did you find any errors in the article? Discuss your findings with your classmates.
> 2. Find an example of an assertion without attribution and share it with classmates.
> 3. Find an example of an error in a published document and share it with classmates.
> 4. Interview a coworker or colleague and specifically ask them to share a story where an error got past them during the revision process and made it to print or publication. How did they handle it? How much time did it take to correct? What did they learn from the experience? Compare your results with classmates.

References

Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Macmillian.

Wyrick, J. (2008). *Steps to writing well* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth.

7.3 Style Revisions

1. Discuss and demonstrate the use of twelve points to consider for style revisions.

You know the difference between cloudy and clear water, but can you tell when your writing is cloudy, when meaning is hidden in shadows, when the message you are trying to communicate is obscured by the style you use to present it? Water filtration involves removing particulates, harmful inorganic and organic materials, and clarifying the water. In the same way, the revision process requires filtration. You may come across word choices you thought were appropriate at the time or notice words you thought you wrote but are absent, and the revision process will start to produce results. Some words and sentence constructions will be harmful to the effective delivery and require attention. Some transitions fail to show the connections between thoughts and need to be changed.

Another way of conceptualizing the revision process in general and the clarifying process specifically is the common reference to a diamond in the rough. Like muddy water, diamonds do not come to have significant value until they have had their rough edges removed, have received expert polish, and been evaluated for clarity. Your attention to this important process will bring the value quotient of your writing up as it begins to more accurately communicate intended meaning. As we've discussed before, now is not the time to lose momentum. Just the opposite, now is the time to make your writing shine.

Here we will discuss several strategies to help clarify your writing style. If you have made wise word choices, the then next step to clarifying your document is to take it sentence by sentence. Each sentence should stand on its own, but each sentence is also interdependent on all other sentences in your document. These strategies will require significant attention to detail and an awareness of grammar that might not be your area of strength, but the more you practice them the more they will become good habits that will enhance your writing.

Break Up Long Sentences

By revising long sentences you can often increase the overall clarity of your document. To do this, let's start off with one strategy that will produce immediate results. Count the number of conjunctions in your document. Word processing programs will often perform a search for a specific a word and for our use, "and" will do just fine. Simple sentences often become compound and complex through the use of the word "and." The further the subject, the action, and the modifiers or descriptions are from one another is directly related to the complexity of the sentence, increasing the probability of reader error and misunderstandings. Look for the word "and" and evaluate whether the sentence has two complete thoughts or ideas. Does it try to join two dissimilar ideas or ones better off on their own?

In prose, and your expository writing classes, you may have learned that complex sentences can communicate emotions, settings, and scenes that evoke a sense of place and time with your reading audience. In business writing, our goals aim more toward precision and the elimination of error; a good business document won't read like a college essay. A professor may have advised you to avoid short, choppy writing. Are we asking you to do something along those lines? No. Choppy writing is hard to follow, but simple, clear writing does the job with a minimum of fuss and without decoration.

In their best-selling book *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White emphasize clarity as a central

goal. However, the following is one of their rules: "Do not break sentences in two." As effective business writers we would agree with this rule, and while it may seem to contradict the preceding paragraph, let's consider what they mean by that rule. They encourage writers to avoid sentence fragments by refraining from using a period where the sentence needs a comma. That means that an independent clause should be connected to a dependent clause when necessary, and as we've discussed previously, a comma and a conjunction are appropriate for the task. The sentence fragment cannot stand alone, so we would agree with the rule as written.

But we would also qualify its use: when you have two long and awkward independent clauses that form an unwieldy sentence, it may indeed be better to divide the clauses into two independent sentences. Your skill as a business writer is required to balance the needs of the sentence to communicate meaning with your understanding of audience expectations, and clarity often involves concise sentences.

Revise Big Words and Long Phrases

Big words can clutter your writing with needless jargon that may be a barrier to many readers. Even if you know your audience has significant education and training in a field, you may need to include definitions and examples as effective strategies to communicate meaning. Don't confuse simple writing with simplistic writing. Your task will almost certainly not require an elementary approach for new readers, but it may very well require attention to words and the degree to which they contribute to, or detract from, the communication of your intended message. Long noun sequences, often used as descriptive phrases, can be one example of how writing can reduce clarity. If you need to describe a noun, use a phrase that modifies the noun clearly, with commas to offset for example, to enhance clarity.

Another long phrase to watch out for is often located in the introduction. Long preambles can make the sentence awkward and will require revision. Sentences that start with "It is" or "There are" can often be shortened or made clearer through revision.

Evaluate Long Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase is a phrase composed of a preposition (a "where" word; a word that indicates location) and its object, which may be a noun, a pronoun, or a clause. Some examples of simple prepositional phrases include "with Tom," "before me," and "inside the building security perimeter."

Prepositional phrases are necessary—it would be difficult to write without them—but some add to the bottom line word count without adding much to the sentence. Bureaucratic writing often uses this technique in an attempt to make a sentence sound important, but the effort usually has the undesirable dual effects of obscuring meaning and sounding pompous.

Examples
The 1040 Form will *in all certainty* serve the majority of our customers.
The 1040 Form will *certainly* serve the majority of our customers.

The revision places an adverb in place of a long prepositional phrase and allows for a reduction in the word count while strengthening the sentence.

Delete Repetitious Words

Some level of repetition is to be expected and can be beneficial. It is also important to be consistent in your use of words when precise terminology is appropriate. However, needless repetition can make your document less than vigorous and

discourage readers. For example, use of the word "said" when attributing dialogue is acceptable a couple of times, but if it is the only word you use, it will lose its impact quickly. People can "indicate," "point out," "share," and "mention" as easily as they can "say" words or phrases. Synonyms are useful in avoiding the boredom of repetition.

Eliminate Archaic Expressions or References

Some writing has been ritualized to the point of cliché and has lost its impact. For example, consider "Heretofore, we have discussed the goal of omitting needless words." *Heretofore* is an outdated word that could easily be cut from the previous sentence. Another example is "as per your request for documents that emphasize clarity and reduce reader error." Feel free to eliminate *as per your request* from your word choices.

Similar to outdated words and phrases, some references are equally outdated. While it is important to recognize leaders in a field, and this text does include references to pioneers in the field of communication, it also focuses on current research and concepts. Without additional clarification and examples, readers may not understand references to an author long since passed even though he or she made an important contribution to the field. For example, Shannon and Weaver pioneered the linear model of communication that revolutionized our understanding of interaction and contributed to computer interfaces as we know them today (McLean, 2005). However, if we mention them without explaining how their work relates to our current context, we may lose our readers. Similarly, references to films like *My Fair Lady* may well be less understood than the use of *The Princess Diaries* as an example of the transformative process the lead characters undergo, from rough, street-smart women to formally educated, polished members of the elite.

Avoid Fillers

Like, you know, like, you know what I mean, ahh, umm, and all the fillers you may use or hear in oral communication have, well, little or no place in the written representation of the spoken word. Review your writing for extra words that serve the written equivalent of "like" and omit them. They do not serve you as an author, and do not serve the reading audience.

Eliminate Slang

Many college professors can give examples of e-mails they have received from students that use all the modern characteristics of instant message and text abbreviation combined with a complete disregard for any norms of grammar or spelling, resulting in nearly incomprehensible messages. If your goal is to be professional, and the audience expectations do not include the use of slang, then it is inappropriate to include it in your document. Eliminate slang as you would a jargon term that serves as a barrier to understanding meaning. Not everyone will understand your slang word no more than they would a highly specialized term, and it will defeat your purpose. Norms for capitalization and punctuation that are routinely abandoned in efficient text messages or tweets are necessary and required in professional documents. Finally, there is no place in reputable business writing for offensive slang or profanity.

Evaluate Clichés

Clichés are words or phrases that through their overuse have lost their impact. That definition does not imply they have lost their meaning, and sometimes a well-placed cliché can communicate a message effectively. "Actions speak louder than words" is a cliché, but its five words speak volumes that many of your readers will recognize. This appeal to familiarity can be an effective strategy to communicate, but use it carefully. Excessive reliance on clichés will make your writing trite, while eliminating them altogether may not serve you well either. As an effective business writer, you will need to evaluate your use of clichés for their impact versus detraction from your message.

Emphasize Precise Words

Concrete words that are immediately available to your audience are often more effective than abstract terms that require definitions, examples, and qualifications. All these strategies have their place, but excessive use of abstractions will make your document less than precise, requiring additional clarification that can translate to work for you as the author and, more importantly, for your readers. Qualifiers deserve special mention here. Some instructors may indicate that words like "may," "seems," or "apparently" make your writing weak. Words are just words and it is how we use them that creates meaning. Some qualifiers are necessary, particularly if the document serves as record or may be the point of discussion in a legal issue. In other cases direct language is required, and qualifiers must be eliminated. Too many qualifiers can weaken your writing, but too few can expose you to liability. As a business writer, your understanding of audience expectations and assignment requirements will guide you to the judicious use of qualifiers.

Evaluate Parallel Construction

When you are writing in a series or have more than one idea to express, it is important to present them in similar ways to preserve and promote unity across your document. Parallel construction refers to the use of same grammatical pattern; it can be applied to words, phrases, and sentences. For example, "We found the seminar interesting, entertaining, and inspiring" is a sentence with parallel construction, whereas "We found the seminar interesting, entertaining, and it inspired us" is not. If your sentences do not seem to flow well, particularly when you read them out loud, look for misplaced parallels and change them to make the construction truly parallel.

Obscured Verbs

Business writing should be clear and concise. If the meaning is obscured, then revision is required. One common problem is the conversion of verbs into nouns with the addition of suffixes like: -ant,-ent, -ion, -tion, -sion, -ence, -ance, and ing. Instead of hiding meaning within the phrase "through the consolidation of," consider whether to use the verb forms "consolidated" or "consolidating." Similarly, instead of "the inclusion of," consider using "including," which will likely make the sentence more active and vigorous.

The "Is It Professional?" Test

Finally, when revising your document with an attention to detail, you simply need to ask the question: is it professional? If a document is too emphatic, it may seem like an attempt at cheerleading. If it uses too much jargon, it may be appropriate for "nerds" but may limit access to the information by a nontechnical audience. If the document appears too simplistic, it may seem to be "talking down" to the audience, treating the readers more like children than adults. Does your document represent you and your organization in a professional manner? Will you be proud of the work a year from now? Does it accomplish its mission, stated objectives, and the audience's expectations? Business writing is not expository, wordy, or decorative, and the presence of these traits may obscure meaning. Business writing is professional, respectful, and clearly communicates a message with minimal breakdown.

Key Takeaway

Revising for style can increase a document's clarity, conciseness, and professionalism.

Exercises

1.

Which of the following sentences are examples of good business writing in standard English? For the sentences needing improvement, make revisions as you see fit and explain what was wrong with the original sentence. Discuss your results with your classmates.

    a. Caitlin likes gardening, golfing, hiking, and to swim.

    b. At any given point in time, well, there is a possibility that we could, like, be called upon for help.

    c. The evaluation of writing can be done through the examination and modification of each sentence.

    d. While in the meeting, the fire alarm rang.

    e. Children benefit from getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, and outdoor playtime.

    f. Yee has asked us to maximize the department's ka-ching by enhancing the bling-bling of our merchandise; if we fail to do this the darn president may put the kibosh on our project.

    g. Ortega's memo stated in no uncertain terms that all employees need to arrive for work on time every day.

    h. Although there are many challenges in today's market and stock values have dropped considerably since last year, but we can hope to benefit from strategic thinking and careful decision making.

    i. If you are unable to attend the meeting, please let Steve or I know as soon as possible.

    j. One of the shipping containers are open.

2. Find an example of a good example of effective business writing, review it, and share it with your classmates.

3. Find an example of a bad example of effective business writing, review it, and share it with your classmates.

4. Revision requires attention to detail, and you may be under pressure to produce quality results within a deadline. How do you communicate your need for time for the revision process to those who are waiting on you to complete the document? Share and discuss your responses with your classmates.

References

McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

    Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Macmillian.

7.4 Evaluating the Work of Others

Learning Objectives

1. Describe five elements of critical analysis to use in evaluating someone else's writing.
2. Demonstrate how to deliver an evaluation constructively and respectfully.

As an experienced business writer, you may be called upon to review others' work. Having a clear understanding of the process will help you be efficient in your review, producing constructive advice that would benefit the essay while resisting change for change's sake.

Five Steps in Evalution

By following a sequence of orderly steps, you can increase the likelihood that your evaluation of someone else's writing will be fair, constructive, and useful. Below are the five steps in evaluation:

1. Understand the assignment.
2. Evaluate how well the writing carries out the assignment.
3. Evaluate assertions.
4. Check facts.
5. Look for errors.

First, review the instructions that were given to the writer. Make sure you understand the assignment and the target audience. What resources did the writer have access to, and how much time was allotted for completing the assignment? What purpose did the document need to fulfill, and what role will this document have in future business activities or decisions?

Second, evaluate how well the document fulfills its stated goals. As a reader, do you see the goals carried out in the document? If you didn't know the writer and you were to find the document next year in a file where you were searching for information, would it provide you with the information it aims to convey? For example, suppose the document refers to the sales history of the past five years. Does the writer provide the sales history for the reader's reference, or indicate where the reader can get this information?

Evaluate the assertions made in the document. An assertion is a declaration, statement, or claim of fact. Suppose the writer indicates that the sales history for the past five years is a significant factor. Does the writer explain why this history is significant? Is the explanation logical and sufficient?

Evaluate the facts cited in the document. Does the writer credit the sources of facts, statistics, and numbers? For example, suppose the writer mentions that the population of the United States is approximately three hundred million. Obviously, the writer did not count all U.S. residents to arrive at this number. Where did it come from? If you have access to sources where you can independently verify the accuracy of these details, look them up and note any discrepancies.

Finally, check the document for proper format and for errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Word processing spell checkers do not catch all errors.

Delivering the Evaluation

If you are asked to evaluate someone else's written work, keep in mind that not everyone can separate process from product, or product from personality. Many authors, particularly those new to the writing process, see the written word as an extension of self. To help the recipient receive your evaluation as professional advice, rather than as personal criticism, use strategies to be tactful and diplomatic.

Until you know the author and have an established relationship, it is best to use "I" statements, as in "I find this sentence difficult to understand." The sentence places the emphasis on the speaker rather than the sentence, and further distances the author from the sentence. If you were to say, "This sentence is awful," all the author may hear is, "I am an awful writer" and fail to pay attention to your message, the sentence under examination, or ways to improve it. Business writing produces products, and all products can be improved, but not all authors can separate messenger from message.

Avoid the use of the word *you* in your evaluation, oral or written, as it can put the recipient on the defensive. This will inhibit listening and decrease the probability of effective communication (McLean, 2005). If you phrase an evaluation point as, "Why did you include this word here?" it can be interpreted as a personal attack. Just as speakers are often quite self-conscious of their public speaking abilities, writers are often quite attached to the works they have produced. Anticipating and respecting this relationship and the anxiety it sometimes carries can help you serve as a better evaluator.

Figure 7.2

To help the recipient receive your evaluation as professional advice, rather than as personal criticism, use strategies to be tactful and diplomatic.

Julie Kertesz – Evaluation Contest Winner, detail – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Phrasing disagreement as a question is often an effective response strategy. Let's rephrase that previous question to, "What is this sentence intended to communicate?" This places the emphasis on the sentence, not the author, and allows for dialogue. Phrasing your evaluation as a question emphasizes your need to understand, and provides the author with space to respond in a collaborative fashion.

Focus on the document as a product, an "it," and avoid associating the author or authors with it. There may be times when the social rank or status of the individual involved with work requires respectful consideration, and choosing to focus on the document as a work in progress, distinct from authors themselves, can serve you well. This also means that at times you may notice a glaring error but be reluctant to challenge the author directly as you anticipate a less than collaborative response. By treating the document as a product, and focusing on ways to strengthen it, keeping in mind our goals of clear and concise as reference points, you can approach issues without involving personalities.

Key Takeaway

When evaluating the work of others, make sure you understand the assignment, evaluate how well the writing

carries out the assignment, evaluate assertions, check facts, and watch for errors. Deliver your evaluation with tact and diplomacy.

Exercises

1. Select a piece of writing from a Web site, book, newspaper, or magazine. Imagine that you are delivering an evaluation to the author of the piece. Using the strategies in this section, write a tactful and diplomatic critique. Your instructor may choose to make this a class exercise, asking students to exchange papers and evaluate each others' writing.

2. Select a piece of writing from a Web site, book, newspaper, or magazine. Imagine that you are editing it half its original length. Share the article and your revised copy with your classmates.

3. What responsibility do you have to point out the need for correction in a document when the author or team leader outranks you at work? Does it make a difference if you anticipate they will take the feedback negatively? How do you reconcile these concerns with your responsibility to the organization? Share and discuss your responses with your classmates.

References

McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

7.5 Proofreading and Design Evaluation

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the difference between revising and proofreading, and how to use proofreading marks.
2. Describe six design elements for evaluation.

In traditional publishing, proofreading and design are the final stages a book undergoes before it is published. If the earlier steps of research, organizing, writing, revising, and formatting have been done carefully, proofreading and design should go smoothly. Now is not the time to go back and revise a document's content, or to experiment with changes in format. Instead, the emphasis is on catching any typographical errors that have slipped through the revision process, and "pouring" the format into a design that will enhance the writer's message.

Proofreading

By now you have completed a general and specific review of the document, with attention to detail. You may have made changes, and most word processing programs will allow you to track those changes across several versions and authors.

If you work in an environment where a document exists as a hard copy during the revision process, you may use or see handwritten proofreading symbols. Professional proofreaders often use standard markings that serve to indicate where changes needed to be made on a physical document. Some of today's word processing programs incorporate many proofreading symbols in their menus. It is useful to be familiar with the various proofreading marks that were traditionally used to review and revise hard copy documents. Even if you never use the symbols in a document, your awareness of them—and the points of emphasis under review—will serve you well. Do you need to insert a word, delete a word, capitalize a letter, or start a new paragraph? There are specific symbols for each of these actions because the review and revision process has common and consistent elements that need to be addressed.

Design Evaluation

If you are asked to review a document, design an element that deserves consideration. While most of our attention has focused on words (i.e., sentence construction and common errors), design can have a strong impact on the representation and presentation of information.

Framing

Framing refers to how information is presented, including margins, line justifications, and template expectations. Just as frame creates a border around a painting, highlighting part of the image while hiding the margins, the frame of a page influences how information is received. Margins create space around the edge and help draw attention to the content. One-inch margins are standard, but differences in margin widths will depend on the assignment requirements. A brief letter, for example, may have margins as wide as two inches so that the body of the letter fills up the stationery in a more

balanced fashion. Template expectations are distinct from audience expectation, though they are often related. Most software programs have templates for basic documents, including letters, reports, and résumés.

Templates represent the normative expectations for a specific type of document. Templates have spaces that establish where a date should be indicated and where personal contact information should be represented. They also often allow you to "fill in the blank," reflecting each document's basic expectations of where information is presented.

For example, line justification involves where the text lines up on the page. Letters often have a left justify, lining up the text on the left side of the page while allowing the ends of each line on the right side to be "ragged," or not aligned. This creates even spaces between words and gives the appearance of organization while promoting white space, the space on the page free of text. Balance between text (often black) and white space creates contrast and allows for areas of emphasis. Left justify often produces the appearance of balance, as the words are evenly spaced, while left and right justify can produce large gaps between words, making the sentences appear awkward and hard to read.

Typefaces

Typeface refers to design of symbols, including letters and numbers *Kostelnick, 1998). The creation of the face of the type, as in a typing machine or printing press, has long been both an art and a science. In past centuries, carvings of the face of the type in copperplate, where ink was applied and then pressed to paper, created intricate and intriguing images designed to communicate style, prestige, status, and formality with the communication of words and symbols. We no longer use copper or hot lead type, but the typeface still exists as a medium for communication in addition to the word itself.

There are two general categories of typeface: serif and sans serif. "Sans" means without, so the emphasis here is on whether the face of the type has a serif or not. A serif is a small cross line, often perpendicular to the stroke of the letter, that is decorative but also serves the useful purpose of differentiating characters that could otherwise look similar (e.g., "m" and "rn," "d" and "cl," or "3" and "8"). For this reason, serif typefaces, such as Times New Roman and Garamond, are often easier to read, especially when the font size is small. Sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Helvetica, lack the serif and can be harder to read in long text sequences. They are most commonly used for headings. However, when text is to be read electronically (on the screen of a computer or other device), serifs can tend to break up, so sans serif typefaces can be a better choice.

The rule of thumb, or common wisdom, is to limit your document to two typefaces, contrasting sans serif (headings) with text (serif). Take care not to use a font that is hard to read, creating an unnecessary barrier for your reader. Also, use a font that conveys the tone of your professional message to enhance your effectiveness.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the basic organizational unit for presenting and emphasizing the key points in a document. Effective paragraphs can provide an effective emphasis strategy, but the placement within the page can also influence recall and impact. The first point presented is often the second in importance, the second point is the least important, and the third point in a series of three is often the most important. People generally recall the last point presented, and tend to forget or ignore the content in the middle of a sequence. Use this strategy to place your best point in the most appropriate location.

A lengthy document that consists of paragraph after paragraph can become monotonous, making reading a chore and obscuring pieces of information that need to stand out. To give the document visual variety and to emphasize key information, consider the following strategies:

- Bullets
- Numbers
- Boldface
- Italics

- Underlining
- Capitalization (all caps)

Remember, however, that using all caps (all capitals) for body text (as opposed to headings) is often considered rude, like shouting, particularly in electronic communications.

Visual Aids

If you have the luxury of including visual aids, such as graphics and pictures, in your document, take care to make sure that the verbal and visual messages complement each other. The visual should illustrate the text, and should be placed near the words so that the relationship is immediately clear. Sometimes during editing, a photograph will get pushed to the next page, leaving the relevant text behind and creating discontinuity. This creates a barrier for your reader, so avoid it if possible.

Designing Interactive Documents

Finally, documents increasingly have an interactivity component that can lead the reader in many directions. Providing links can facilitate interactivity, and that depth of resources can be a distinct advantage when writing documents to be read on a computer. However, be careful when integrating a web link within your document, as your audience may leave your message behind and not return. If you create a link associated with clicking on a photograph or icon, make sure that the scroll-over message is clear and communicates whether the reader will leave the current page. As we have seen in many design elements, there are strengths and weaknesses associated with each option and it requires a skilled business writer to create and deliver an effective message.

Key Takeaway

Proofreading and design put the finishing touches on a completed document.

Exercises

1. Using proofreading marks, mark the errors in the following paragraph:
2. With a writing assignment in draft form from your class, swap with a classmate and review the spelling, grammar, and punctuation, using proofreading marks where applicable.

References

Kostelnick, C., & Roberts, D. (1998). *Designing visual language: Strategies for professional communicators*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

7.6 Additional Resources

Online Writing Laboratory (OWL) at Purdue University provides a comprehensive guide to the revision process. OWL is open access, free, and an excellence resource for any writer. Please feel free to consult it anytime during our discussion to go more in depth on a grammatical point or writing tip. http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/05

Visit this YourDictionary.com page for a useful article about punctuation marks. http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/punctuation/punctuation-rules-help.html

Visit this site for a useful list of irregular verbs in English. http://www.englishpage.com/irregularverbs/irregularverbs.html

This site from Capital Community College in Connecticut provides a menu of English grammar resources. http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar

EnglishClub.com is dedicated to English learners and those for whom English is a second language—but it can be useful for all of us. http://www.englishclub.com/grammar

The original (1918) edition of the famous style guide *The Elements of Style* is available online at Bartleby.com. http://www.bartleby.com/141

The Writers and Editors site presents an article on tact and tone in editing the work of others. http://www.writersandeditors.com/tips_on_tact_and_tone_30805.htm

Merriam-Webster provides a chart of proofreader's marks and their meanings. http://www.merriam-webster.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm

Visit this About.com site for information on designing a document. http://desktoppub.about.com/od/designprinciples/Principles_of_Design.htm

For in-depth information on how to present visuals effectively, visit the Web site of Edward Tufte, a Professor Emeritus at Yale University, where he taught courses in statistical evidence, information design, and interface design. http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/index

For a wealth of articles and information about typefaces and other aspects of document design, explore the Web site of AIGA, the professional association for design. http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/about