

Chapter 7: Composing and Editing Written Communication

Overview

This chapter gets to the basics of writing—choosing the right word, writing good sentences and paragraphs, and proofreading and editing work. These are basic skills that all administrative assistants should possess; reference manuals are available and should be used.

Lecture Notes

A. Effective Word Selection

Choosing the word with the right meaning and impression is important in order to get the correct message to the reader.

1. **Positive Language** makes people want to read, think, and act.
 - a. Focus on the reader by using pronouns like “you” and “your.”
 - b. Limit the use of negative expressions in a message; avoid words using not, regret, unfortunately, apologize, neglect, and fail.
2. **Tone** refers to the manner in which a certain attitude is expressed; it should be friendly, conversational, and professional.
3. **Familiar Words** in a sentence make the message easier to understand.
 - a. Synonyms that are commonly used should be substituted for unfamiliar words.
 - b. Technical words should be avoided when you are speaking with someone outside of your profession who may not understand them; if they are necessary, be sure to explain them.
 - c. Use English equivalents for foreign expressions whenever possible.
 - d. Jargon should not be used in business writing.
 - e. Acronyms should be spelled out the first time they are used in a document.
 - f. Slang should be avoided; the words cannot be translated easily.
4. **Concrete Language** refers to the use of words that are precise in meaning; abstract to those where meaning can be interpreted differently.
 - a. A word or phrase may be added to an abstract word to define it more precisely.
 - b. The abstract term may be defined in the sentence.
 - c. Use the most specific word when it impacts the meaning.
 - d. Short, simple words convey meaning more directly.
5. **Active Words** denote action by a performer.
 - a. Active verbs convey precise meaning, the action happening.
 - b. Active voice refers to an emphasis on the performer of the task and passive voice to an emphasis on the action being taken.
 - c. Descriptive adjectives are also called key words or descriptors.

- d. Descriptive adverbs convey precise meanings.
- 6. **Contemporary Words and Expressions** make writing more relevant.
- 7. **Confusing Words** are words that sound similar, but they are spelled differently and have different meanings. Effective word selection between confusing words takes a lot of effort and practice. *Be sure to review them with students so they can distinguish between them.*
- 8. **Unbiased Language** should be used in business writing.
 - a. Gender-free language should be used instead of masculine or feminine words; men and women should be treated equally. Avoid labels, stereotypes, and using “man” and “woman” as the prefix or suffix of a word.
 - b. Racially and ethnically unbiased language should be used so that no member of the audience is offended. Identification of racial or ethnic origins should not appear in writing unless it is pertinent to the message.
 - c. Job-related language should not stereotype different types of jobs held by people.

B. Effective Sentence and Paragraph Construction

Careful construction of sentences (20 words or less) and paragraphs (3-5 sentences) is important for them to be effective.

1. **Constructing Effective Sentences** means they should be a complete thought expressed as a subject and predicate with words that are understandable.
 - a. Errors in sentence construction like fragments, run-on sentences, and comma-splices should be avoided. *Review each of these errors referring to the explanations on pp. 200-202.*
 - b. Types of sentences written should vary in type for interest; use a combination of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. *Review these sentence types referring to the explanations on pp. 202-204.*
 - c. Length of sentences should vary; they should average 15-20 words.
 - d. Connectives should be used to join sentences with related ideas so the reader sees the connection.
 - e. Sentence formats should be chosen to go along with the message; choose between a question or statement and what word might need to be emphasized.
2. **Organized Paragraphs** represent the writer's thoughts on a certain part of the topic.
 - a. Writing approach for paragraphs should be chosen between a deductive (direct) and inductive (indirect).
 - b. Paragraph composition should include an overview statement, supporting statements, and detail statements referring to the main idea.
3. **Criteria for Effective Sentences and Paragraphs** should be examined using the following ideas.

- a. Coherence is demonstrated through consistency in style, word choice, and usage. The writer should pay attention to the stress on words, word choice and usage, and parallelism.
- b. Emphasis means that greater importance is placed on a particular fact or idea. It can be achieved with word choice and order, balancing items of equal value, restating pieces of information, and format of presentation.
- c. Unity suggests a coherent flow of ideas within sentences, within paragraphs, and between paragraphs.
- d. Concise writing is brief, yet comprehensive. It is achieved through planning prior to writing and revising the draft of the document.
- e. Variety in writing maintains the reader's interest; variety can be achieved through word usage (a thesaurus is helpful), combination of sentence types, and appropriate message style.
- f. Clarity is accomplished by knowing the purpose and reviewing the message to be sure it relates to the purpose.
- g. Accuracy in message, format, and language is critical in any type of business writing.

4. **Development of Goodwill** occurs when people work together, with others in their organization or outside, to create a positive, clear, and courteous communication climate.

- a. Considerateness for others when preparing a message will convey an interest in the reader.
- b. Empathy toward the reader shows understanding of the feelings or emotions of the reader; use the "you" approach. *Be sure students know the difference between sympathy and empathy.*
- c. Courtesy for the reader can be demonstrated by using terms like please and thank you where applicable.
- d. Sincerity expresses confidence and trust in others; it must be genuine.
- e. Respect should be shown to the company, products, and reader of the message so that the reader responds in a positive way.

C. Proofreading and Editing

Proofreading and editing is one of the most important responsibilities of an administrative assistant; all final documents should be error-free. The quality of the outgoing documents sends an impression to the reader; error-free documents make a positive impression. *Throughout this section, emphasize the importance of proofreading and editing.*

1. **Proofreading Techniques** can be applied to a document on-screen or on paper; they include looking for spelling, punctuation, and formatting mistakes.

- a. Proofreading for typographical errors should go beyond spell check. *Be sure to explain that spell check just finds words that it doesn't recognize in its dictionary; if the mistake represents a real word, it will not be highlighted.*

- b. Proofreading by office professionals besides the originator of the document is important; if possible, read aloud to another person to check for errors.
- c. Proofreading techniques include reading the copy slowly, using a straight-edge to follow the lines of copy, proofreading tables vertically, counting entries where possible, and delaying the final proofreading for an hour or more after keying is complete.
- d. Proofreading symbols should be used; they are displayed in figure 7-1 (p. 212). *Explain that these symbols are recognized by people across many organizations.*

2. **Editing** (copyediting) is the revision of a draft for consistency, conciseness, and grammatical accuracy. Revisions are marked manually in the text or using software tools.

- a. Preparing copy for editing means the document should be keyed in rough-draft format with space to allow for markings.
- b. Basic editing skills should be strong in areas of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and composition. *Encourage students to make use of reference books in areas where they have questions.*

3. **Editing for Organization** is the process of checking for clear and logical writing.

- a. Communication among team writers is necessary to develop a collaborative document. Communication may be face-to-face or electronically.
- b. Communication between the writer(s) and copy editor needs to be very clear and understood by both parties so that the topic and purpose of the document is understood.
- c. The writing approach should be clear to the copy editor; he or she should know if the author uses a direct or indirect approach.
- d. The outline used by the writer can also be used by the copy editor to be sure they are both using the same approach.

4. **Editing for Completeness and Content Accuracy** is a tedious task, but it is a very important one.

- a. Looking it up in a reference manual is the way to find spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules as necessary.
- b. Checking and double-checking the document for accuracy in facts and structure may mean asking questions of the writer for clarification.
- c. Being consistent with grammar and punctuation rules is essential; it is also important to be observant of any inconsistencies and make corrections.
- d. Maintain the author's writing style while editing; this skill develops as a writer works more with a particular copy editor.
- e. Document format is the first impression that a document gives the reader; use specific formatting guidelines for a professional appearance.
- f. Document appearance should be neat and attractive (and error-free) in its final format.

5. **Use of Editing Software** can save time, but it does not eliminate the need for manual proofreading and editing.

- a. Spell-check tools are available in all productivity software. They have the ability to update the dictionary; *however, spell-check does not catch all errors. (Students must remember to proofread for spelling errors on their own too.)*
- b. Grammar-check tools are available in word processing programs. *Like using spell-check, emphasize that while they can be helpful, they do not reduce the need to check those things manually.*
- c. Software editing tools may include highlighting changes, tracking changes in text, and collaborative writing options. Be sure users can utilize the options effectively before trying them on a document. *Point out figures 7-2a, 7-2b, and 7-3 to demonstrate the use of software editing tools.*

6. A **Copyediting Style Sheet** will display all the formatting points the author is expected to follow; it helps the editor maintain consistency throughout the document.

7. **Copyediting Symbols** are used to make manual editing easier; the proofreader's marks were presented in figure 7-1 (p. 212). *Students might find it helpful to have a summary sheet of proofreader's marks to refer to at their desk when they are editing documents.*

Additional Resources for Students

Recommended readings (no texts should be more than two years old):

- Boone, Louis E. and David L. Kurtz. *Contemporary Business Communication*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Bovee, Courtland L. and John V. Thill. *Business Communication Today*. McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Guffey, Mary Ellen. *Business and Administrations Communication*. South-Western Publishing Co.
- Himstreet, William C. and Wayne M. Baty. *Business Communication*. Kent Publishing Co.
- Lesikar, Raymond V. *Basic Business Communication*.
- Ober, Scott. *Contemporary Business Communication*.
- Wolf, P. and S. Kuiper. *Effective Communication in Business*.

Current issues of periodicals or business publications are also an excellent resource. Some of the following periodicals have an accompanying Web site.

Current Periodical

Web Address

Gregg Reference
Manual

<i>IAAP Complete Office Handbook</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/products/handbook.htm
<i>Modern Office Technology</i>	
<i>OfficePro</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/officepro/toc.htm
<i>The Office</i>	