

The Writing Process: Add-ons

Supplementary material

The Research Phase

The research phase of a business writing project consists of:

- Reviewing existing publications, periodicals, Web sites, and company documents
- Evaluating products and services
- Conducting tests of products and services
- Running tests
- Studying users
- Interviewing experts
- Conducting surveys using questionnaires or observations

Traditional print sources used in research include anything published in print form that is available in libraries and bookstores:

- Books
- Textbooks
- Newspapers
- Scholarly journals
- Trade publications
- Magazines

Materials available for research purposes on the Internet include:

Web pages and blogs

- PDF documents
- eBooks
- Video and audio
- Online versions of print publications
- Press releases
- Message boards
- Discussion lists
- Chat rooms
- Web-based government reports

When searching for information at a library or on the Internet:

- Make a list of keywords related to your subject matter that will likely produce search results.
- Use the Library of Congress subject headings to search for keywords.
- Check Books in Print by subjects for any related keywords.
- Check the Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature for related articles.
- Use Google Scholar at www.scholar.google.com to search for articles across many disciplines and sources.
- Check the New York Times Index for relevant newspaper articles.
- Check a general encyclopedia for information about your topic.

Keep a list of the sources used in your research in order to document them in footnotes, endnotes, and a bibliography.

- Keep your notes organized on note cards or in a word processor.
- For research from books, include the title, authors, city of publication, publisher, date of publication, and the pages for specific quotes and other information.
- For research from magazines, include the title of the article, the magazine's name, the issue date, and beginning and ending page numbers of the article.

- For encyclopedia articles, include the title, edition number, date of publication, and the author's name.
- For government documents, include notes about the department, administration, or agency name, along with any cataloging number.
- For private sources of research from interviews, make notes about the date of the communication, the source's full name, title, and organization.

When making notes from your research sources, you can record any of the following:

- A few sentences or some statistics
- Direct quotes from a publication
- Paraphrased information in your own words
- Summaries that condense the main ideas in an article

Phase 2a: Writing the draft (and outlining)

Outlines are useful in the writing process as a strategy for brainstorming and the logical ordering of content. An outline lists the headings and subheadings for various topics and ideas. Several levels of subheadings may be used to group ideas.

To create an outline:

- Determine the purpose of the document.
- Determine the audience.
- Brainstorm ideas to include in the document.
- Organize the ideas by grouping similar ones together.
- Determine a logical order for the ideas
- Label the groups of ideas for use as headings and subheadings in the outline

In the most common outline format, numbers or letters are assigned to each level of heading or subheading. For example:

- I. Roman numerals
 - A. Capitalized letters
 - a. Arabic numerals
 - b. Lowercase letters

Keep the following ideas in mind when creating an outline:

- Use parallel structure for headings and subheadings.
- Heading content at the same level should be equally significant.
- A heading can contain just a few words or an entire sentence.
- Each heading should have at least two or more items of subordinated content or subheadings.
- Headings should be general, and subheadings should be more specific.

Example:

- I. Introducing the transactional Web site
 - A. What is a transactional Web site?
 - B. Who uses this type of Web site?
- II. Finding a transactional Web hosting service
 - A. Bandwidth pricing
 - B. Shopping cart service
 - C. Credit card merchant service
- III. Typical Web transactions
 - A. Services
 - B. Research
 - C. Downloadable software
 - D. Products

After completing the prewriting stages of audience analysis, brainstorming, research, interviewing, and outlining, you can begin the writing process by creating a first draft. Start by copying your research notes into the related sections of your outline. Phrase your notes as complete sentences, and fill in the gaps with transitions and other commentary. As you work on your first draft, keep the following tips in mind:

- Add introductions and conclusions to the various sections of the outline.
- Don't worry about choosing the best wording when writing your draft; you'll have an opportunity to read and rewrite later.
- If you get stuck on a section, leave it and move on to the next one.
- If you don't like how a particular section sounds, keep writing and revise it later.
- Write notes to yourself with ideas for additional content or revisions using a different-colored font or highlighting tool.

After completing the first draft, look for ways to improve it by proofreading and revising

The Page Design

Page design involves the use of typographical elements and formatting techniques to lay out content in a pleasing way that helps communicate the message.

Page design involves the use of the following:

- Headings
- Lists
- Tables
- Fonts and color
- Font styles
- Margins
- Indention
- Alignment
- Footers
- Graphical elements
- Visuals

The first step in creating a page design for a document using a word processor is the document setup:

- Setting the page size
- Setting the margins
- Creating paragraph styles
- Customizing the color pallet
- Selecting a document template

The text used in a document can take on many different forms. You can apply different fonts, font colors, styles (bold, italic, underlined), and paragraph styles (block, paragraph, hanging). Text can be organized visually on the page by using headings and lists. When formatting text on a page:

- Make headings descriptive of the content that follows.
- Use different font styles and margins for headings to make them stand out.
- Use parallel wording for all headings on the same level.
- Use numbered lists for things that must be done in a specified order.
- Use bulleted lists for items when no particular order is required.
- Introduce all lists with a lead-in sentence.
- Punctuate list items with a period only if they are complete sentences.
- Use font styles, such as bold or italic, for emphasis.
- Indent paragraph margins for emphasis.
- Use different font colors for headings for artistic design purposes.
- Use fonts for headings that are different from the text font.
- Use background shading and light-colored text for table column headings

The Editing Phase

Editing consists of reading a draft document, checking for errors, rewriting sentences, adding missing content, and deleting unnecessary content. You can use word processing grammar and spelling checkers to point out potential problems, but don't rely on these tools in place of a thorough editing and proofreading.

During the editing process, keep the following principles in mind:

- *To be* verbs (*is, was, were, etc.*) should be replaced with strong active verbs.
Example: The form was filed by Allan.
Revision: Allan filed the report.
- Rewrite the excessive use of prepositions.
Example: The company's annual report is overshadowed by the company's feeling of dread over the upcoming legislation pending in their state government.
Revision: A feeling of dread over the upcoming state government legislation pervaded the company's annual report.
- Eliminate words that add no meaning or are redundant.
Example: He carelessly and nonchalantly tossed the confidential report into the nonsecure trash bin.
Revision: He carelessly tossed the confidential report into the nonsecure trash bin.
- Vary sentence structure and sentence length.
- Don't start every sentence with the main subject followed by a verb.
- If there are too many sentences of the same length, rewrite them into compound sentences.
Example: I stopped checking my email when I went on vacation.
There were over 300 messages waiting for me when I returned.
Revision: Because I did not check email while on vacation, over 300 messages were waiting when I returned.
- Add transitional words and phrases to connect sentences and show a relationship between sentences and paragraphs.
Example: The copier on our floor broke. I went down to the copy center in the basement to copy the report.
Revision: The copier on our floor broke. So I went down to the copy center in the basement to copy the report.

Use the following checklist when editing a document:

- Are the headings and subheadings consistently used?
- Is the spelling correct?

- Are all proper names accurate?
- Are all lists parallel in structure?
- Do all nouns and verbs agree?
- Are numbered lists correctly numbered?
- Are all dates correct?
- Are all alphabetical lists in alphabetical order?
- Is all punctuation correct and consistent?
- Is all capitalization correct and consistent?
- Are all bibliographical references accurate and consistent?

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The Proofreading Phase

Proofreading is the checking of your documents for grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as for accuracy with respect to the edited version and adherence to style. If someone else proofreads your documents, the reader notes any needed corrections using proofreading marks and abbreviations.

The figure below lists the standard proofreading symbols and abbreviations.

Notation	Meaning	Example	Becomes
<i>wf</i>	Wrong font	The last word is in wrong font .	The last word is in wrong font.
<i>lc</i>	Make lower case.	Decision- M aking Mode	Decision-making mode
<i>lc</i>	Make all lower case.	CAPITAL LETTERS	Capital letters
<i>C</i>	Set in capitals.	<u>capital letters</u>	CAPITAL LETTERS
<i>Caps/lc</i>	Set in caps and lower case.	<u>CAPS AND LOWER CASE</u>	Caps and Lower Case
<i>sc</i>	Set small caps.	<u>Set in small caps.</u>	SET IN SMALL CAPS.
<i>c & sc (c/sc)</i>	Set in caps and small caps.	<u>Set in caps and small caps.</u>	SET IN CAPS AND SMALL CAPS.
<i>roman</i>	Set roman.	Set <u>roman</u> .	Set roman.
<i>italic</i>	Set italic.	Set <u>italic</u> .	Set <i>italic</i> .
<i>lf</i>	Set lightface.	Set <u>lightface</u>	Set lightface.
<i>bf</i>	Set boldface.	Set <u>boldface</u> .	Set boldface .
$\frac{2}{\surd}$	Set as superior ("super").	Set super $\frac{2}{\surd}$	Set super ² .
$\frac{\surd}{2}$	Set as inferior ("sub").	Set sub $\frac{\surd}{2}$	Set sub ₂ .
\square	Move to right.	Move to right \square	Move to right.
\square	Move to left.	\square Move to left.	Move to left.
\square ctr \square	Center.	\square Center. \square	Center.
\square	Lower.	Lower type. \square	Lower type.
\square	Raise.	Raise type. \square	Raise type.
\square	Straighten (horizontally).	<u>Straighten type.</u>	Straighten type.
\parallel	Align (vertically).	\parallel \square Align type.	Align type.
<i>tr</i>	Transpose.	Transp o se.	Transpose.
\sim	Close space (completely).	Close sp \sim ace.	Close space.
$\#$	Close space (partially).	Close $\#$ space.	Close space.
<i>Eq #</i>	Equal space.	Equal $\#$ spaces between words.	Equal spaces between words.
$\#$	Insert space.	Insert $\#$ space.	Insert space.
<i>Space out</i>	More space.	More $\#$ space between words.	More space between words.
\wedge	Insert ("caret").	Insert \wedge word "the."	Insert the word "the."
\curvearrowright	Delete.	Take the word \curvearrowright out.	Take the word out.
\curvearrowleft	Delete and close space.	It is spelled "jud \curvearrowleft gement."	It is spelled "judgment."
$\#$	Correct this letter.	Correct this $\#$ letter. /o	Correct this letter.
<i>Stet</i>	Leave it the way it was ("stet").	Leave it the way $\#$ it was.	Leave it the way it was.
\perp	Start new line.	Hopscotch \perp in the Headlines	Hopscotch in the Headlines
¶	Start a new paragraph.	Start a new paragraph ¶ It's ...	Start a new paragraph. It's ...
<i>Run in</i>	Run in to previous paragraph.	Start a new paragraph ¶ It's ...	Start a new paragraph. It's ...
<i>Flush</i>	Make this flush.	\square Make this flush.	Make this flush.
\odot	Insert period.	Insert period \odot	Insert period.
\wedge	Insert comma.	Insert comma \wedge now.	Insert comma, now.
$;$	Insert semicolon.	Insert semicolon $;$ here's how.	Insert semicolon; here's how.

Use the following checklist when proofreading a document:

- Are all headings and other text elements consistent in style and layout?
- For letters, are the dateline, reference line, initials, enclosure, and carbon-copy notation accurate?
- Are all cross-references accurate?
- Are all margins consistent and proper?
- Are all tables aligned consistently?
- Have any footnotes been omitted?
- Are all end-of-line word divisions accurate?
- Are any words accidentally repeated in the same sentence or paragraph?
- Are the page numbers correct?
- Are all headings and captions separate elements, that is, on lines by themselves?

Rather than make edits on paper, you can make edits electronically in a word processing document using the Track Changes feature (in Microsoft Word). The revisions show up in a different color. When you proofread the document, you can review each revision and either accept or reject it.

The Document Review Phase

Prior to its release or publication, a document should be reviewed by subject matter experts, management, or your peers. The purpose of this review is to evaluate the document, criticize it, and suggest improvements. Writers are often uneasy about having their documents reviewed out of fear their egos will be bruised. People who are asked to review a document are also often uneasy about offering criticism. Prior to the review, the writer should meet with the reviewers and discuss the following points:

- The writer's goals and concerns for the document including its topic, audience, and purpose
- Potential problems and concerns uncovered during the writing process
- Questions about accuracy that subject matter experts need to answer

When asked to review another writer's document, review the document several times and look for:

- Grammar, spelling, and punctuation issues
- Appropriate tone and level for the target audience
- Organization of the content
- Clarity of the writing
- Sentence style
- Use of graphics

When offering feedback, avoid making criticisms based on your own writing style. Instead, do the following:

- Base your comments on guidelines, concepts, and rules.
- Document your comments in the margins of the review copy or on a separate document.
- Provide specific details to explain your comments.
- Offer suggestions for correcting any problems you see.
- Avoid going overboard and rewriting the draft completely.

The Revision Phase

In the revision process, you rewrite content to make improvements to the language, level of clarity, content organization, and tone that may be the result of a reviewer's comments or your own review. As you revise your document, consider the following questions:

- Have you adequately defined all the key terms used in the document?
- Do some things in the document, such as products, services, or people, need to be described in more detail?
- Do some processes in the document need more description?
- Do you need to add analogies or comparisons to make a particular concept easier to understand?
- Does the document have subcategories of information that need their own subheadings and introductory sentences?
- Is the content in the correct order?
- Have you provided sufficient examples?
- Do you need to provide more historical background to help readers better understand the content?
- Have you provided any necessary instructions in the correct step-by-step format?
- Do you need to insert overviews at key points to summarize topics?
- Do you need to add topic sentences that introduce new topics?
- Do the transitions between paragraphs and topics allow the ideas to logically flow from one to another?
- Do you need to break long paragraphs into shorter ones?
- Do you need to rewrite redundant or wordy phrases?
- Do you need to rewrite passive sentences in the active voice?
- Are there any subject-verb mismatches in your sentences?
- Are there series of sentences that are either all the same length, all too long, or all too short?