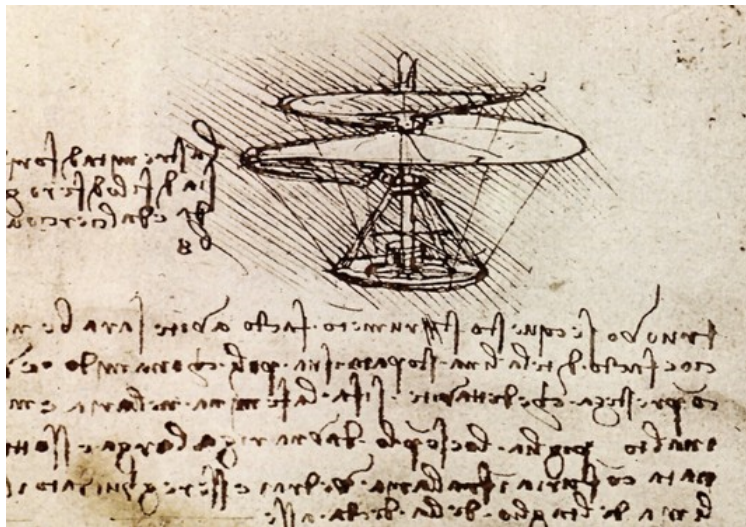# Technical & Professional Writing for the Workplace

Overview of Workshop Modules:

- The Writer as Project Manager
- Pre-Writing Analysis
- Business vs. Technical Writing Styles
- Strategies for Specific Document Formats
- Business Grammar and Punctuation
- Proofreading, Revising & Editing
- Suggested Writing Resources

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The Writer as Project Manager

For effective written communication, the writer(s) must direct and control the document from start to finish, applying a range of skills and techniques for maximum impact. Treat the writing project as you would any other business/technical project (regardless of size or audience). Good project management supports effective writing.

1. **Identify Scope and Goals** – Adopt a "Rhetorical Strategy" targeting topic, purpose, audience, logistics, etc. This may be inherited from client or supervisor, or may need to be developed by the writer.

2. **Plan and Prioritize** – Develop a schedule and note deadlines. Identify resources and tools. Budget as needed. Make assignments (for team writing), etc. Do not omit this step for shorter or "easier" writing projects.

3. **Initiate and Execute** – Stay on task and schedule. Practice discipline and flexibility. Negotiate when new/competing projects or unexpected problems arise.

4. **Control for Quality and Resources** – Monitor progress. Allow for proofreading, revising and editing. Verify delivery options.

5. **Complete, Deliver, Evaluate** – Meet deadlines. Use appropriate delivery methods. Confirm receipt. Assess project success and note any future changes needed.

"All things are created twice; first mentally; then physically. The key to creativity is to begin with the end in mind, with a vision and a blue print of the desired result"

– Stephen Covey

Perceptual (Learning) Styles

Each person has a preferred style of perception for processing stimuli. This style is directly related to the individual's immediate environment, emotionality, physical and sociological needs.

- **Auditory** – Focuses on what is heard
- **Visual** – Focuses on what is seen
- **Tactile** – Focuses on what is touched and manipulated
- **Kinesthetic** – Focuses on moving within contextual environment

While an individual has a preference, different styles may be learned, used and combined to fit a specific context. Different styles may work better in different situations. The most effective methods of learning involve combining styles.

*Adapted from Dunn & Dunn Learning Styles Model

A Rhetorical Strategy (PAT)

Pre-writing analysis enables the writer to focus on what is essential for success, while avoiding unnecessary work. It also improves readability and clarity.

1. **Purpose**
   i. Topic
   ii. Goals (Inform, persuade, entertain, record, respond, etc.)
   iii. Requirements (Schedule, materials, budget, tools, delivery, etc.)

2. **Audience**
   i. Who? Multiple audiences?
   ii. Expectations (Content, style, delivery, etc.)
   iii. Requirements (Schedule, delivery, materials, etc.)

3. **Technique**
   i. Format
   ii. Style
   iii. Delivery

Stylistic Issues

Business Style

- Purposeful
- Persuasive
- Flexible
- Economical
- Reader-focused

Strategies

- Gain attention early in the document.
- Clarify benefits to the reader.
- Always include a "request for action" (direct or implied).
- Frontload a positive message/backload a negative message.
- Use and repeat identifiable key words.
- Explain technical or unfamiliar terms as needed.
- Prepare for multiple audiences.
- Avoid conversational and narrative styles.
- Consider multiple modes of delivery.

Technical Style

- Purposeful
- Informative
- Structured
- Economical
- Product/process-focused

Strategies

- Design document to be "used" rather than "read."
- Provide for document navigation.
- Frontload most technical documents.
- Use appropriate technical and industry terms including acronyms.
- Create distinct document sections based on functional use.
- Use technical graphics whenever possible.
- Provide necessary caution and warning messages.
- Prepare document for use within technical setting (e.g. factory floor).
- Consider multiple modes of delivery.

Common Document Formats

- o **Letters :** Formal correspondence used for "official" business; Contractual significance; Signature required; External communications (usually)

- o **Memos:** Less formal correspondence providing information, requesting action or documenting decisions; Internal communications

- o **E-mails:** Less formal than letters and memos; May serve same functions as letters, memos or phone; "Electronic paper trail"; Internal and external communications

- o **Reports:** Formal presentation of factual information or results (various formats); Internal and external communications

- o **Proposals:** Formal document meant to inform and persuade (various formats); Internal and external communications

- o **Executive Summaries:** Synopsis of report or proposal usually submitted as part of a larger document; Internal and external communications

- o **Product/Process Descriptions:** Formal technical descriptions, usually part of larger document (various formats); Internal and external communications

- o **Instructions:** Step-by-step directions of actions for user to follow; Used while performing specific tasks (rather than read beforehand); Internal and external communications

- o **Caution/Warning Messages:** Important information included in instructions or process descriptions limiting action of user; May be stand-alone messages; Internal and external communications

- o **White Papers:** An informational and persuasive document detailing the features of a solution, product or service; External communications

*Some documents may include multiple formats. Many documents reference other documents.

Grammar & Punctuation

Review – Parts of Speech

- **Noun** – Names a person, place, thing, idea
- **Verb** – Expresses action, being or state of being
- **Pronoun** – Substitutes for a noun or group of nouns
- **Adjective** – Modifies/describes a noun/pronoun
- **Adverb** – Modifies/describes a verb, adjective or another adverb
- **Preposition** – Introduces a phrase functioning as an adjective or adverb
- **Conjunction** – Joins words or groups of words
- **Interjection** – Expresses emotion
- **Article** – Points to a noun

Review – Sentence Structure

- **ALL** sentences have a Subject **and** a Predicate.
- Both Subject and Predicate may be simple or complex (w/ modifiers).
- Sentences may have more than one subject and more than one predicate.

Review – Paragraph Structure

- Topic sentence with support sentences (details and examples).
- Usually topic sentence comes first.
- Start a paragraph when you introduce a new topic sentence.

Diction (Word Choice and Order)

Diction affects meaning, tone and emphasis.

- Use specific, familiar language to ensure understanding.
- Use appropriate formality and connotation.
- Avoid figures of speech, pretentious and sexist language.
- Use active voice to emphasize the actor or subject of the sentence; use passive voice to emphasize results or object of the sentence.
- Use direct/front loaded message to emphasize the main point early in the document (e.g. for "good" news).
- Use indirect/back loaded message to emphasize the main point later in the document (e.g. for "bad" news).

Proofreading

Purpose: Locate and mark errors and needed changes in a document.

General Strategies:

- Approach w/ *fresh eyes.* (Wait before proofing or use another proofreader.)
- Know why you are proofreading. (Proof ideas and flow for revision; proof sentence structure and grammar for editing.)
- Proofread for the audience. (Look for what the reader will stumble on or miss.)
- Mark the problems; don't fix them. (Proofreading is not revision or editing.)
- Proof multiple times. (Proof at least once for revision and once for editing.)
- Look for necessary changes only. (Don't create a new document.)
- Read both silently and aloud. (This tests both meaning and flow.)
- Proofread in *chunks.* The order typically doesn't matter.

Proofreading for Revision

Purpose: Check content and order for clarification or restatement. The writer "becomes" the reader, asking, "Does this make sense? Does it work?"

- Read for overview. Does the document present ideas effectively and appropriately? Does the document *flow*? Is *formality* appropriate?
- Determine purpose of document.
- Find the main point or thesis. Does it match the purpose?
- Find the evidence or details. Do these support the main point?
- Check paragraph *order* and *weight*. Is order and development effective and appropriate?
- Proof individual paragraphs for relevance and transitions. Are all paragraphs needed and connected?
- Repeat as necessary.

Proofreading for Editing

Purpose: Find sentence-level problems. Spot awkward or unclear sentences, and mechanical (i.e., spelling, punctuation and grammatical) errors.

- Proofread at least two times. (Once for clarity and once for mechanical problems.)
- Be aware of your problem patterns as a writer (spelling, sentence structure, etc.). Check for these first.
- Find the topic sentence within a paragraph before the support sentences. (The topic sentence "drives" meaning.)
- Make sure each paragraph has only one topic sentence. (If the topic changes, start a new paragraph.)
- Check spelling separate from grammar & punctuation.
- Read sentences backwards to check spelling.
- Use writing assistants (spell-check, grammar-check), but don't use *autocorrect*. WA's don't catch all errors and frequently make grammatical misdiagnoses.

Suggested Writing Resources

- **Technical & Professional Writing Web Site**
  On-line at http://spot.pcc.edu/~gknox/workshop/technicalprofessional.html

- **How 14 (Handbook for Office Workers)**
  By James L. Clark, Lyn R. Clark

- **Keys for Writers: A Brief Handbook**
  By Ann Raimes

- **The American Heritage® Book of English Usage**

- **The Elements of Style**
  By William Strunk
  On-line at http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html

- **Merriam-Webster Dictionary & Thesaurus**
  On-line at http://www.merriam-webster.com/

- **Purdue University's Writing Lab for Workplace Writers**
  On-line at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/681/01/

- **Common Errors in English**
  On-line at http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/

- **Better English Grammar**
  On-line at http://www.better-english.com/grammar.htm

Proofread, Revise, Edit – Practice Exercise

*Edit each of **William Safire's Rules for Writers**. (Safire tells you how to do this.)*

1. Remember to never split an infinitive.

2. The passive voice should never be used.

3. Do not put statements in the negative form.

4. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.

5. Proofread carefully to see if you words out.

6. If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be fixed by rereading and editing.

7. A writer must not shift your point of view.

8. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction. (Remember, too, a preposition is a terrible word to end a sentence with.)

9. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!!!

10. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.

11. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.

12. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.

13. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixing metaphors.

14. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.

15. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.

16. Always pick on the correct idiom.

17. The adverb always follows the verb.

18. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague; seek viable alternatives.

Proofread, Revise, Edit – Practice Exercise

Proofread the body of a formal letter below. Mark all errors to be fixed later.

Dear Bob;

This letter is being written to clarify your needs in processing claims and billing requests. Many carriers use a variety of policies in regards to medical and payment claims.

In order to meet your organizations claim processing needs it would be helping for us to know those policies for the following components.

1. Global medical service periods for both major and minor procedures.
2. Multiple treatment guideline in terms of ranking procedutes
3. pro-rated % for primary and secondary procedures
4. modifiers that are recognized and can be used for additional procedural explanation.
5. Medical and officesupplies that will be reimburse for in-office procedures
Your reply regarding these polices will help our firm accurately file claims to you by knowing your billing requirements, it should help eliminate unnecessary claim denials and request for follow-up that is costly and time consuming for both of us.

Yours truly,

(Answer key available on the course website.)