

## Professional and Business Writing

Adapted from: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/624/01/>

Professional and business writing, or workplace writing, is **action-oriented** and **user-centered**. It aims to incite and shape actions, through both persuasive and informative strategies.

Workplace writing benefits from user-centered design—design that focuses on the expectations, goals, situations, and needs of the readers. To produce a work-related document that is effective, you must first and foremost understand the purpose and focus of your document.

- What is your purpose in writing the document?
- What purpose should the document serve for your reader?
- Is your main point stated early in the document?
- What do you want your readers to do when they finish reading the document?

### Rhetorical Awareness

Workplace writing is often intended to *persuade* the reader and is usually intended to *inform* the reader as well. For example, when a writer composes a résumé, the aim is to convince the prospective employer to grant a job interview. To have the desired effect, a writer needs to take into account the “rhetorical situation”:

- **Purpose**—why the document is being written, the goals of the document
- **Readership**—who will read the document
- **Stakeholders**—who may be affected by the document or project
- **Context**—the background of and situation in which the document is created

### Reader Analysis

For good communication, the writer must keep the readership, or audience, in mind. The intended audience typically has a vested interest in your project.

- **Considering your readership will help you make a better argument.**
  - Have you researched your readers and their organization(s)? Is your document likely to come to the attention of “shadow readers” (unanticipated readers)?
  - Is your document tailored to the needs of a specific group of readers?
  - Are your tone and language appropriate for your readers?
  - Will you have persuaded your readers by the end of the document?
- **Identify information readers will need and make that information easily accessible and understandable.** User-centered documents must be usable, so consider how the document will be used rather than just how it will be read. For example, if a writer wants information regarding MLA formatting for an essay, s/he needs this information quickly in order to start work. The MLA information must be easily accessible, so the author can find, read, and understand it to begin writing.

## Document Design

A clean, correct, and professional-looking document presents you as professional. Effective document design increases the usability and persuasiveness of your communication and highlights important information, which helps busy readers. Design the appearance of your document with these factors in mind:

- Does your document conform to the expectations for the type of document you are composing? (résumé, cover letter, memo, report, etc.)
- Can your readers find information where they expect to see it?
- Are key points emphasized by using boldface, underlining, or italics?
- Do you have clear and specific headings?
- Is there any place where you can improve the readability of the document by using indentation or bullets?

## Development

Anticipate that your audience will read your document carefully, questioning its validity and claims. Your document should be informative and persuasive, and yet concise enough not to waste your readers' time.

- Do you provide enough background information for the message?
- Have you included specific examples, numbers, dates, names and percentages to support your claims?
- Do you have graphics (charts, graphs, diagrams, and tables) where appropriate?
- Have you eliminated information that is unnecessary and/or obvious to your audience?

Ask someone to read the document and tell you if something is unclear and needs more description, explanation, or support. Anticipate, also, that your audience may consist of many different readers, who may have different needs. Design your communication in a modular fashion, so that different readers can find information they need quickly and easily. Use summaries and section headings in order to address specific audiences within the document.