



# 3

## Getting Started: Planning, Writing, and Revising Business Messages

### Chapter Overview

This chapter covers essential steps in planning, producing, and refining business messages. You'll learn how to get ready to write focused, purposeful messages that respond to the needs of your readers and the specifics of the situation at hand. You'll be introduced to strategies to help you break free of writer's block, organize facts and ideas, and find the best way to transmit your message. You'll also learn best practices for working with others on collaborative writing projects and providing feedback to peers.

### Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn to do the following:

1. Recognize the four key concepts in understanding the writing process.
2. Take contextual factors and genre differences into consideration when you write.
3. Identify steps in the writing process.
4. Plan a message according to its purpose, scope, audience, medium or channel design, and content.
5. Use prewriting techniques such as brainstorming, mapping, and questioning to generate content and gather ideas.
6. Describe types of detail and narrative used in business messages.

7. Organize business documents by creating informal and formal outlines.
8. Apply strategies for overcoming writer's block and writing under pressure.
9. Employ guidelines for revising and editing your messages and critiquing the writing of others.
10. Use methods for effective group communication, including collaborative writing.

## Key Concepts

**Audience:** The receivers and decoders of a message. (p. 80)

**Audience analysis and adaptation:** The process of assessing the needs and knowledge of readers and listeners and adapting messages accordingly. (p. 80)

**Brainstorming:** A method of generating content by listing ideas as they come to mind. (p. 87)

**Cause-and-effect development:** A method of organization that links events with the reasons for them. (p. 92)

**Chronological development:** A method of organization that describes events in the order in which they occurred. (p. 92)

**Collaborative writing:** The process of writers working together to create finished reports, proposals, and other important documents. (p. 100)

**Contextual factors:** Elements of a writing task, such as the situation, organization's procedures, and the readers, that influence the writer's choices at every step. (p. 72)

**Credibility:** The extent to which you are viewed as believable, based on your competence, ethical character, and caring for others. (p. 82)

**Discourse community:** A group of communicators who share a goal or an interest in adopting a way of participating in a public discussion, including the use of particular genres, registers, and terminology. (p. 73)

**Drafting:** The preliminary writing of a document. (p. 93)

**Editing:** The process of checking a writing draft to ensure it conforms to standards of good English, style, and accepted business-writing practice. (p. 95)

**Freewriting:** A method of generating content based on unstructured writing and the recording of ideas as they come to mind. (p. 89)

**General-to-specific development:** A method of organization that begins with general information on a topic followed by specific details. (p. 92)

**Genres:** The agreed-upon forms of writing that develop in response to recurrent situations and that allow users to act purposefully in a particular activity. (p. 72)

**Journalistic questions:** The essential questions (*who, what, why, when, where, and how*) that frame journalists' inquiries as they focus and prepare their stories. (p. 88)

**Mapping or clustering:** A method of generating content by visualizing the main topic and its sub-categories. (p. 88)

**Market research:** The process of gathering information about how people will react to current or proposed products and services. (p. 89)

**Medium or channel:** The physical means by which an oral or written message is transmitted. (p. 83)

**Organizing and outlining:** The process of arranging information for clarity and impact. (p. 92)

**Outline:** A framework for a document, showing its divisions and elements. (p. 92)

**Prewriting:** The process of gathering ideas and establishing the purpose, audience, and channel for a message. (p. 77)

**Primary audience:** The intended receiver of a message; the person or persons who will use or act on a message's information. (p. 81)

**Proofreading:** A process of checking the final copy of a document for errors and inconsistencies. (p. 95)

**Purpose:** Your reason for communicating and the objectives your message is meant to achieve. (p. 77)

**Reader benefits:** The advantages the reader stands to gain by complying with what the writer is proposing in buying products, following policies, or endorsing ideas. (p. 82)

**Register:** The level of formality gauged to a specific purpose and social setting. (p. 72)

**Revising:** The process of reviewing and making changes in a draft document—adding, deleting, reorganizing, or substituting—to transform it into a finished document. (p. 95)

**Richness:** The quality of containing plentiful types of cues by which meaning can be derived from a message. (p. 85)

**Scope:** The breadth or limitations of a document's coverage. (p. 78)

**Secondary audience:** Anyone other than the primary audience who will receive a message and be affected by the action or decision it calls for. (p. 81)

**Sequential development:** a method of organization that describes the arrangement of steps in a process. (p. 92)

**Writer's block:** A psychological state of being unable to begin or continue the process of composition out of fear or anxiety over the communication task. (p. 93)

## Review Questions

For sample answers, see below.

1. What are the four key concepts in understanding the writing process?
2. What is the difference between casual register and formal register?
3. How is credibility measured?
4. What are the four major steps in the writing process?
5. What are some things you need to consider before choosing a medium or channel for message transmission?
6. What are three different ways to generate content?

7. Why do you need to consider your audience when writing a message?
8. What is writer's block and how can you overcome it?
9. How can you effectively revise your message?
10. If you are writing in a group, how can you write effectively?

## Review Questions: Answers

1. Understanding four key concepts can help you become a better writer: contextual factors (the situation), genres and registers (the writing format and formality), discourse communities (the communicators in your group), and rhetorical situations (the ways you can persuade your audience). (pp. 72–73)
2. Register refers to the language and level of formality used. When a formal register is appropriate, complete sentences and more complex language is used; the use of slang, contractions, and colloquialisms are typically part of a casual register. (pp. 73–74)
3. Professional confidence, ethical character, and capacity for caring for others are measures of credibility. (p. 82)
4. There are four major steps in the writing process: prewriting, organizing and outlining, drafting, and revising and editing. (pp. 74–75)
5. Many things need to be considered before choosing a medium or channel for message transmission: accuracy, speed, cost, message detail, importance, privacy, capacity and constraints, audience size and location, required level of formality, feedback immediacy, channel richness, and organizational preferences. (pp. 84–85)
6. Three ways to generate content are brainstorming, mapping or clustering, and asking questions. (pp. 87–88)
7. It is important to consider your audience when writing a message so that you include appropriate details and adapt the message accordingly. (p. 79)
8. Writer's block is a temporary inability to express one's thoughts because of a lack of inspiration. Ways of overcoming writer's block are listed on pages 93–94 of the text, and include starting early and freewriting.
9. Some effective ways of revising a message include using a paper copy; reducing your reading speed; looking at the document as the reader, not the writer; polishing in three stages using the content-organization-style (COS) method; reading your draft aloud; and using spell- and grammar checkers. (pp. 95–97)
10. Effective writing strategies you can use if you are writing in a group include active listening, having a team leader, planning what needs to be written and who will write it, and agreeing on a writing style. You can also choose a specific strategy for collaborative writing (sequential integrating writing, sequential single-writing, parallel simultaneous writing, and reactive integrating writing), so everyone understands the process. Collaborative writing tools (e.g. groupware, wikis, virtual offices, and enterprise collaboration software) also help writers work together. (pp. 100–104)