CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on authoring content for communication products. After reading this chapter, you should be able to meet the following objectives:

- Select the best words to use in your documents.
- Draft sentences that are effective and punctuated correctly.
- Combine sentences into paragraphs that are unified.
- Craft paragraphs that introduce and conclude your documents.
- Explain the differences between structured and unstructured authoring.
- Explain methods of editing and revising.

Historically, technical communicators were advised to write as clearly and concisely as possible. The theory behind this advice went something like this: technical communicators are responsible for gathering technical, often hard-to-understand information from subject matter experts (such as engineers and scientists), removing the technical terminology and jargon and replacing it with easier language so that less technical users of the information could understand it. Technical communicators were taught to use “windowpane” language, words and sentences that were so clear anyone could understand or “see” their meaning. This advice was based in two working assumptions about technical communication audiences: they were humans, and they were culturally similar to the technical communicators.

While the assumption that audiences are human may sound odd (of course, they are human, right!), humans are not the only readers of technical communication. Much of today’s technical communication must also be machine-readable; that is, it must be written and tagged so that machines, directed by scripting language, can read it and use it to construct texts on the fly. Similarly, today’s technical communication is often translated into multiple languages, and the original text must be created in a way that it can be efficiently, affordably, and accurately translated into another language.

Figure 7.1. Editors often use proofreading symbols when editing by hand.
For these reasons, we now have a broader, more complex awareness about how technical communicators use language in their workplaces, and the guidelines are not as clear as they once were. We know, for example, that technical communicators assess their audiences when they choose their words, and these audiences do not necessarily need or want simplified language. In these situations, technical communicators learn the specialized languages of science, technology, and engineering, to name a few, so they can communicate with others in these fields. In other situations, such as medical websites, technical communicators continue their traditional work, making technical concepts and practices easier for lay audiences to understand. They create content as well as edit it.

Writing situations, too, are not so easily defined; for example, writing for print and writing for digital Internet-based delivery require different knowledge, skills, and technologies. Complicating communication situations even more are new methods of authoring content, requiring technical communicators to consider not only whether human readers (possibly using different languages) can read and understand their products but also whether these products are machine-readable so the content can be used in multiple contexts and displayed by media in variable formats. These situations are just a few of the content development considerations discussed in this chapter.

Because it would be impossible to anticipate all situations in which technical communicators work, this chapter does not attempt to provide strict guidelines for writing or communicating with others. Instead, it offers you guidelines and an introduction to vocabulary. This information will assist you in developing and structuring content so that all readers, whether human or machine, can easily find, read, and understand communications you produce.

The first and longest section of the chapter provides you with guidelines for choosing words, stringing words into sentences, connecting sentences into paragraphs, and combining paragraphs into complete texts. It concludes by providing textual, visual, or computer-coded signposts to help readers assemble all of these parts into a readable document. In doing so, it offers you a specialized vocabulary for talking and thinking about your communication products, whether they are written or spoken, printed or digital. This vocabulary will be useful in situations where you are asked to author a communication product or to edit someone else’s. It will also assist you if you are in other situations, such as writing for translation, which is increasingly common in today’s marketplace, or writing collaboratively with others. The chapter concludes with suggestions for reviewing the content you generate as well as others’ content.

**A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CONTENT AUTHORING**

Traditionally, people who created texts, such as novelists and essayists, were called authors. The words author and authors were used primarily as a noun to name such people. The word author may also be used as a verb, to author, to describe the action of creating or inventing technological texts, such as writing a computer code. The title of this chapter uses the term, **author**, in both senses—as a noun to describe people who create texts and as a verb to describe the act of creating text.

**Authoring** can also be used as an adjective to describe programs or applications that support the work of creating or inventing; we refer to these programs or applications as authoring tools. As these tools have developed, so have other terms coined to describe their work, for example, unstructured authoring and structured authoring.
Unstructured authoring is a term that describes how most people learn to create a document following more ad-hoc practices, such as with a computer; it describes the action of writing and formatting content or texts with a keyboard and word processing application. As the content is entered, the writer makes formatting decisions, such as when to emphasize content using boldface or what font to employ for headings and text. To move content to another document or to a different place in a document, the technical communicator uses the word processor’s cut and paste function. Creating a new document with the same content often requires the content to be reformatted.

In contrast, structured authoring describes a more deliberate organizational process, including the action of writing content in discrete chunks and organizing them into information models or templates. This can be done using a variety of methods including the use of software tools, markup and scripting languages (such as HTML, XML, or CSS), or even content management systems (including blogs, wikis, text editors, and other Web site development tools).

An information model is an outline of content that illustrates the relationship between various content chunks in the document’s structure. After content has been organized, information designers can integrate the use of links, tags, navigation toolbars, or other semantic markup to create a fully interactive document. An in-depth discussion of information models and these related activities will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Structured authoring has become increasingly important and an essential technical writing skill as a result of online and electronically published content. This chapter offers you suggestions and guidelines for choosing effective words, stringing those words into meaningful sentences, and composing sentences into unified and coherent paragraphs. These suggestions and guidelines are good rules of thumb, particularly for situations where you are developing content for printed or oral delivery. Content, today, is often delivered in other ways: it is downloaded and read on smartphones, tablets, laptop and desktop computers, and even televisions. In fact, if you think about it, you probably receive and process technical content on these digital devices more than any other way. To distinguish between structured and unstructured authoring, keep in mind their similarities and differences. Both types of content authoring require you to use good diction, effective sentence construction, and unified paragraphing.

Digital technical content delivery has presented new challenges in technical communication. For example, technical communicators (content developers) have to be able to create documents that are flexible (can be viewed and read easily on a variety of devices) and dynamic (can be updated frequently and easily). They also need to be able to develop content consistently within collaborative teams, and teams need that content to be reusable so that it can be delivered via a webpage but also pushed to and shared by consumers through social media, such as Twitter or Facebook. Structured authoring practices were developed to meet these practices.
Although you may be unfamiliar with structured content delivery as a term or process, you are probably very familiar with it in your everyday life. It is very commonly used for online product documentation, but it is also frequently used for online marketing. For example, if you have received marketing emails from a company or corporation, then you are familiar with the brief descriptions in those emails that link you to longer, more detailed descriptions on websites. Some of the information from the email appears on the website, but the website provides more details. If you have received photographs or video content through social media that leads you to professional content on a photo- or video-sharing website, then you have encountered structured authoring. If you have searched an online help site, then you have accessed content that has been structured to assist your search.

To become proficient in structured authoring, technical communicators need specialized skills with tools, as well as markup language (HTML or XML), and scripting languages (CSS for style and JavaScript or PHP for interactive elements). Markup languages are used to tag or label content, while scripting languages add visual styles, positioning, and interactive features. Figure 7.4 illustrates how a book entry in a library database might be marked up with XML so its parts can be presented as needed in various kinds of lists, ranging from a list of sources to complete citations to a product inventory list like you might see on an online bookseller’s website.

Structured authoring offers many benefits to organizations that employ digital content. As this example illustrates, it allows information to be written in discrete chunks of digital information that can be deployed when and where they are needed. It also separates formatting from the content, which allows information to be used and reused whenever and wherever needed. In this way, content can be customized for different audiences. When content is used or reused in different countries or cultures, it allows it to be localized to meet the needs of individuals in specific locations. You will find more detailed information on structured authoring in Chapter 8.
Chapter 7 Writing Content, Technical Style, and Editing

Differences between Unstructured and Structured Authoring

To illustrate the differences between unstructured authoring and structured authoring, consider a genre familiar to you, the résumé. When you create a résumé with a word processor, you type in the content. You then design and format the layout. You may add headings and format them for emphasis. In another section, you use a bulleted list. When you gain new experience or earn a new degree, you open the file and enter the new information directly into the old one, updating and modifying content as well as formatting as necessary. The word processor you use is your authoring tool or technology.

In contrast, when you use an electronic networking or job search application to create a resume, you enter content in structured database chunks. Figure 7.5 is a screen shot from Monster.com’s résumé entry page.

Notice how the content is organized in discrete chunks of information that, in this case, are tagged and stored in a database. These chunks allow the content to be machine-read and modified as needed for one job application or another. As a user of the website, you can pick and choose what content to include. The choices you make generate a script that calls the content you have selected into a new résumé. The organization of the new résumé is structured because its parts are tagged and able to be called on demand, as needed.

While unstructured and structured authoring appear to be quite different—one seems written by and for human readers while the other seems initially to be written by and for machine or computer readers—both types of authoring are human-created systems that rely on hierarchies to work. Unstructured authoring relies first and foremost on a logic called grammar, a system of wordsmithing (the skills of putting words together to create content), and style, the rhetorical choices one makes to create readable documents. Structured authoring, similarly, relies on a hierarchal system of organizing, coding, tagging, and scripting, activities that are also designed to create content.
Chapter 7 Writing Content, Technical Style, and Editing

Figure 7.5. This employment entry page from Monster.com demonstrates how content can be structured and chunked into separate categories of tagged information.

WORDS, SENTENCES, PARAGRAPHS: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF STYLE

The building blocks of any communication—whether unstructured or structured—are its words, sentences, and paragraphs. In this section, you will consider the choices you make when selecting words, crafting them into sentences, and combining these sentences into paragraphs. Additionally, as you make these choices, you must decide how to punctuate your communication. Together the choices you make when combining these components—words, sentences, paragraphs, and punctuation—determine the style of your communication.

Diction: Selecting the Right Words

The English word for “selecting the rights words for a particular audience and situation” is diction. To understand diction choices and their effects on style, you need to develop a vocabulary that helps you to describe and distinguish between words and their functions. This vocabulary can also help you to understand how word choices create various levels of diction, from informal slang expressions to highly formal academic prose. This vocabulary...
begins with recognizing words as parts of speech. Following an introduction to the parts of speech and parts of a sentence, this section discusses levels of diction, methods for improving your diction choices, common diction faults, and strategies for recognizing and correcting these faults.

The Functions of Words
At some point in your schooling, you have certainly encountered the parts of speech in language courses, but, like most college students, you may not remember much about them or the memories you have are not good ones. If you are planning to be a technical communicator, then this linguistic vocabulary will be essential for you to learn, and you should take a linguistic or style class to master it. It will help you to explain how and why you have written and edited documents the ways you have. If, however, you are planning another career, this vocabulary may be less important for you to learn. In either case, what you need to know now is that words are classified by their functions: as naming words (nouns and pronouns), actions words (verbs), modifying or qualifying words (adjectives and adverbs), and connecting words (prepositions, conjunctions). Understanding how words function can help you choose the best word for the sentence you are composing.

Levels of Diction
Another key consideration as you make diction choices is the level of diction of the communication. Recognizing these levels (sometimes called registers) will also help you to make good choices. Simply put, word choice in a document can be described as one of four levels, which are arranged from least formal to most formal: slang, colloquial, informal, formal.

Slang is the least formal level; think of slang as "street talk," words used commonly in speech among friends. New slang words are added daily, and they frequently rise and fall in popularity. Slang terms are often used to designate in-group vs. out-group membership; for this reason, many slang terms may be sexist or racist and, therefore, offensive to individuals who are being described. An example of slang from the 1970s is the term "AFA," meaning "A Friend Always" which is similar to the more current "BFF," "best friends forever." To find other examples of slang, visit the Urban Dictionary online (http://www.urbandictionary.com), where slang is defined as "the only reason UrbanDictionary.com exists." The Urban Dictionary identifies current and past slang words and defines these terms for individuals who do not recognize or know their meaning.

Using slang is acceptable among individuals who understand it; however, in professional communication, this level of diction rarely appears. When it does appear, it is usually inappropriate unless it is defined or used to explain. Here is an example of an appropriate use of slang from the National Institute on Drug Abuse:


In this example, the words in all caps are the scientific names while the words in parenthesis and quotation marks are the slang names for this drug. Using slang in this sentence is appropriate because it provides readers with names users of the drug prefer.
Like slang, **colloquial diction** choices are also informal. The colloquial level is typically used in conversation, and it may even include slang. Colloquial expressions include contractions (for example, “you’ll” instead of “you will” and “shouldn’t” instead of “should not”) and informal expressions (“to check out” instead of “to investigate” or to say “something doesn’t add up” instead of “something is nonsensical”). In the professional communication, you may use colloquial expressions when writing email to or messaging a close colleague, but, in more formal documents, this level is best avoided. Colloquial diction can also be problematic if you are communicating with someone whose first language is not English because colloquial expressions are less easily understood by nonnative speakers.

**Informal diction** includes every day, common conversational language. Informal or standard diction choices are common in magazine or blog articles, emails, social media, texting, and even newscasts. You also likely use informal diction when addressing or writing to your professor or your supervisor. This level of diction is the baseline for professional communication. Most TED talks use informal diction, so everyone who hears them can understand their messages. Informal diction is mid-range on the diction register.

**Formal diction** is the highest range on the diction register. It includes words that are common among highly educated or specialized language users. Formal diction also includes jargon, technical or field-specific terminology. You might encounter formal diction in academic journal articles or a lecture on technical topic, such as a medical procedure. Unless you are member of one of these groups of specialized language users, you will probably not use formal diction very often; in fact, many technical communicators are employed to adapt formal diction into more commonly understood informal or standard language, which is more easily understood.

Table 7.1 illustrates how word choices change depending on their diction level. The words in each column reflect diction choices you might make depending your audience and situation. As this table demonstrates, the key to understanding these levels of diction is to remember the audience you are addressing and the situation. If you are talking to a friend, then slang or colloquial language may be appropriate; however, when you communicate in the workplace, that is, in a professional setting, your diction should rise to informal or formal level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Example 1</th>
<th>Example 2</th>
<th>Example 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slang</td>
<td>Wingman</td>
<td>Big-mouthed</td>
<td>Grok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial</td>
<td>Pal</td>
<td>Chatty</td>
<td>Catch on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal/Standard</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>Understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>Loquacious</td>
<td>Perceive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.1.** Each examples illustrates how words with similar meanings represent different levels of diction.
EXERCISE 7.1

Levels of Diction

Discover other examples of diction levels to add to Table 7.1. Identify a slang term or phrase you know and then seek out other word or phrases you might choose if you were writing at the colloquial, informal, or formal levels of diction. Be sure to choose a term that you can discuss in class without offense to others.

Tasks to be completed:
1. Choose a slang word that can be shared in class
2. Work though the levels of diction to identify examples of colloquial, informal, and formal words for the slang word.

Other Word Choice Considerations
Recognizing the appropriate level of diction to use in professional communication is the first step in making good diction choices. These additional guidelines can assist you as you select words for the most impact in your documents. They are useful to remember whether your audience is comprised on people who speak English as a first language or who speak English as a foreign language.

Choose Words that are Grammatically Correct
Understanding how words work together in English to create sentences will help you to decide which word works best in any given situation. Using grammar appropriately in your sentences assures that your diction choices are correct. Correctness is an important key to making your communications understandable. A simple way to enact this guideline is to use nouns as nouns and verbs as verbs. For example, “sandwich” is a common English noun, but it can sometimes be used as a verb to mean “placing between two other things.” Using “sandwich” as a verb may cause confusion for readers who do not use English as a first language. Another example is the word “weasel” when used as a verb as in “to weasel out,” meaning “to avoid” or “to mislead.” The verb’s meaning arises from the behavior of the animal called a weasel, but readers who are unfamiliar with weasels may not understand what the verb means. Finally, this example illustrates how using a verb instead of noun can cause confusion: “The only interrupt designed into the system supported RF communication.” (Instead of the verb “interrupt,” the writer should have used the noun “interruption.”) While these usages may be acceptable in some situations, using words in grammatically unusual or incorrect ways can confuse readers.

Use References Like Dictionaries and Thesauruses Carefully
Improving your vocabulary gives you more diction choices from which to select. To improve your vocabulary, you must read, but reading alone will not help you to increase your vocabulary. You must also use a dictionary to grasp the subtle differences between words. If you choose to use a thesaurus, a tool that can provide you with many potential synonyms, do not use it alone. Always use a thesaurus and a dictionary together to be certain that the word chosen is the best for the sentence’s context and ultimately your intended meaning.
Know the Difference Between a Word's Denotation and Connotation

The denotation is a word's dictionary meaning while the connotation is the feeling, nuances, or attitudes that readers attach to the word. Because many words have similar meanings, choosing the right word requires you to know its connotation as well as its denotation. For example, if you are writing a report about a weight loss experiment and describing the participants in the study, you might use the following words to describe individuals who weigh below the national average ("underweight," "scrawny," "thin," "malnourished," or "skeletal") or these words to describe individuals who are above the national average ("overweight," "fat," "heavy," "chunky," "obese"). As you can see, some of these words have an almost neutral meaning while others convey more positive or negative feelings. Choosing words with an appropriate connection is essential. The best word for your writing situation would need to take into account the communication's situation and purpose (a scientific report) and the connotations of the word you choose.

Choose Words that are as Concrete and Specific as Possible

Readers are more likely to get a clear picture of what you are describing if you use concrete specific words rather than abstract, general words. Concrete words are words that relate to the five senses whereas abstract words describe feelings or emotions. General words are summary terms while specific words are examples. If you must use general or abstract words, try to modify them or follow these words with specific examples to clarify what you mean. For example, if you are explaining how hot an oven should be in a recipe, you might write a "medium oven," and some readers would understand while others would not. Stating that the oven should be "preheated to 350 degrees" is specific and provides readers with exactly the heat setting needed. Or consider how easy it would be to find a car in a mall parking lot with these descriptions: "a car," "a red car" or "a red Jetta Sportwagen." The third description narrows the field considerably, doesn't it?

Prefer Expressive Words to Impressive Ones

Impressive formal word choices may strike your reader as pretentiousness in professional communications. To avoid pretentiousness, choose words that best express what you mean, and avoid using literary language in nonliterary writing. Unless you are communicating with an audience in a very formal situation, avoid using formal words when less formal ones will do. For example, use "fire" instead of "conflagration," "use" instead of "utilize," "count" instead of "enumerate." While using less formal expressive words may lower the reading level of your communication, it ensures that everyone who reads it will understand your meaning.
Chapter 7 Writing Content, Technical Style, and Editing

EXERCISE 7.2

Practice Making Good Word Choices

Working in pairs, practice good word choices by writing sentences to describe each situation:

1. Imagine that you are writing a restaurant review for a new hamburger restaurant in your area. Think about connotations and denotations as you write three sentences that describe the restaurant’s cheeseburger as irresistible, average, and inedible.

2. Translate the following sentences to make them more understandable:
   a. Terminate the engine to prevent excessive heating.
   b. He attempted to employ his expertise in securities to accrue a fortune.
   c. Lubricate the chain with oil often.

Tasks to be completed:

1. Working with a partner, choose a hamburger restaurant to review.
2. Collaboratively write one sentence to describe the restaurant’s hamburgers as irresistible, average, and inedible, for a total of three sentences.
3. After you have completed this exercise, revise the three sentences in #2 above to make them easier to understand.

Syntax: Writing Effective Sentences

Just as choosing the right words helps you to write stylistically appropriate sentences, writing effective sentences also improves your communication’s style. Sentence structure, also called syntax, refers to how sentences are arranged or organized. Effective sentences are complete and well punctuated. This section helps you to make choices that will improve the sentences you write.

All sentences have at least one main clause. A main clause must contain both a subject (noun or pronoun) and a simple predicate (a verb). Together the subject and predicate create a complete thought. A main clause is independent; it makes sense and can stand alone. In contrast, subordinate clauses are dependent on the main clause and cannot stand alone. They must be attached to a main clause can act, and they serve as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs to rename or describe something in the main clause. Like main clauses, subordinate clauses have subjects and predicates, but they usually start with a connecting word (a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun) that makes them dependent on the main clause. The following list of subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns is not complete, but it will give you an idea of the kinds of words that frequently begin dependent clauses:

- Subordinating conjunctions—although, because, since, when, while, how, since, though
- Relative pronouns—that, which, who, whom, whose, whomever, whichever, whatever
A good dictionary will help you identify other examples of conjunctions and relative pronouns that create dependent clauses.

**Common Arrangements of Main Clauses**

The most common order for complete sentences or main clauses is subject + predicate, but this pattern can be changed or expanded depending on communication needs. What follows are the six most common arrangements of main clauses and examples of each:

1. **subject + verb**
   - Alanna runs in two marathons each year.
   - John runs in only one.

2. **subject + verb + direct object**
   - Alanna runs marathons in Buffalo Springs Lake and in Austin every year.
   - Marathons test an athlete’s physical and emotional stamina.

3. **subject + verb + indirect object + direct object** *(Verbs that commonly take indirect objects include give, buy, teach, bring, tell, teach, and offer.)*
   - Marathons give John an opportunity to test his stamina.
   - After marathons, local businesses offer runners breakfast items and other nourishment.

4. **subject + verb + direct object + object complement**
   - John find marathons challenging.
   - The news about the Buffalo Springs marathon made John and Alanna happy.
   - The marathoners elected Alanna their team leader.

5. **subject + verb + predicate adjective** *(describes subject)*
   - Marathons are challenging.
   - Running in marathons is emotionally and physically exhausting.

6. **subject + verb + predicate nominative** *(renames subject)*
   - John and Alanna are athletes.
   - Marathons were one of the first Olympic events.

All of the sentences in the examples above are simple sentences, having only one main clauses. When sentences have two more main clauses but no subordinate clauses, they are classified as compound sentences. When they have two or more main clauses and at least one subordinate clauses, they are called complex sentences. Sentences with two or more main clauses and two or more subordinate clauses are called compound-complex sentences. Being able to recognize each of these types of sentence constructions can help you create better sentences as well as punctuate them more effectively.
EXERCISE 7.3
Sentence Choices and Audience

Compare the sentences in two comparable news stories written for two different audiences—one for adults (parents or teachers) and the other children (students). For example, you might visit one of the following websites that provides educational content for teachers, parents, and students:

- NASA.gov (http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/)
- Scholastic (http://Scholastic.com)
- Society for Science and the Public’s Student Science page (https://student.societyforscience.org/sciencenews-students)
- Any major news outlet, such as Time, Newsweek, CNN, or FOX, that has a student section

As you examine the articles, note the following information:

- How many sentences are in each article?
- What is the average length of sentences in each article?
- What kinds of sentences (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex) are included in the article?

Finally, be ready to discuss with your classmates how audience might be affecting the kinds and complexity of sentences found in your two articles.

Tasks to be completed:

1. Find a news story reported on two different online news sources and written for different two different audiences.
2. Compare the articles’ contents by noting the following:
   a. How many sentences are in each article?
   b. What is the average length of sentences in each article?
   c. What kinds of sentences (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex) are included in the article?
3. Bring your findings to class and discuss whether and how sentences changed in each article.

Punctuating Sentences

All sentences are required to have end punctuation. End punctuation helps readers to understand the function of the sentence: making a statement of fact, asking a question, commanding the reader to do something, or exclaiming. Each of these functions is a designated type of sentence, and each requires a different form of punctuation:

- **Declarative sentences** end in periods (.)
- **Interrogative sentences** end in question marks (?)
- **Imperative sentences** end with either a period or an exclamation point (. or !)
- **Exclamatory sentences** end with an exclamation point (!)

While end punctuation may seem straightforward, you may have problems with it if you forget your level of diction. For example, in emails, texts, and other messaging communications, end punctuation is less formal; individuals sometimes use multiple end


marks (?!?) to indicate confusion, excitement, or indifference. More formal communications, however, should reflect the conventional use of end punctuation as described above.

Some sentences also require punctuation internally in addition to end punctuation. While there are many types of internal punctuation that you may use, two punctuation marks are essential to know: the comma and the semicolon. These two punctuation marks and their misuse cause more sentence faults that any other marks. The following guidelines will help you to understand common comma and semicolon guidelines.

**Commas**

These guidelines will help you to use commas effectively in sentences. Following each guideline is an example incorrectly punctuated without commas and correctly punctuated with commas.

| 1. **Use a comma to join items in a series.** (Remember that items in a series must be similar or parallel. That is, join words with other words, phrases with other phrases, and clauses with other clauses. If you join dissimilar words, you create a parallelism fault.) Example without commas (incorrect): Our new business sells office supplies computers and other electronic equipment. Example with commas (correct): Our new business sells office supplies, computers, and other electronic equipment. |
|---|---|
| 2. **Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses in a compound sentence.** Example without commas (incorrect): We offer students a 10% discount on all online electronic purchases and college students are our most loyal customers. Example with commas (correct): We offer students a 10% discount on all online electronic purchases, and college students are our most loyal customers. |
| 3. **Use a comma after an introductory phrase of three words or longer.** Example without commas (incorrect): In the computer market it is important to distinguish your product from your competitors'. Example with commas (correct): In the computer market, it is important to distinguish your product from your competitors'. |
| 4. **Use a comma after an introductory subordinate clause.** Example without commas (incorrect): When I shop for a computer I always compare prices using the Internet. Example with commas (correct): When I shop for a computer, I always compare prices using the Internet. |
| 5. **Use two commas to set off non-essential phrases and clauses in the middle of a sentence.** Example without commas (incorrect): Best Buy which has several locations in our college town and a strong online presence is our biggest competitor. Example with commas (correct): Best Buy, which has several locations in our college town and a strong online presence, is our biggest competitor. |
| 6. **Never separate the subject of the sentence from its verb/action with a single comma.** Example without commas (incorrect): College students are using mobile devices, such as mobile phones and tablets to take notes in their classes. |
Example with commas (correct): College students are using mobile devices, such as mobile phones and tablets, to take notes in their classes. **Use commas to prevent misreading.**

Example without commas: Soon after starting our business has grown quarterly.

Example with commas: Soon after starting, our business has grown quarterly.

**Semicolon**

Semicolons separate main clauses that are closely related. Following each guideline is an example incorrectly punctuated without a semicolon and correctly punctuated with a semicolon.

1. **Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses in a compound sentence when the clauses are not linked by a coordinating conjunction.**
   
   Example without semicolon (incorrect): Starks Business Supply and Staples are the two office supplies stores in our town Starks is locally owned while Staples is a franchise.
   
   Example with semicolon (correct): Starks Business Supply and Staples are the two office supplies stores in our town; Starks is locally owned while Staples is a franchise.

2. **Use a semicolon to join independent clauses in a compound sentence when the clauses are linked with a conjunctive adverb, such as therefore, however, consequently.**
   
   Example without semicolon (incorrect): Starks Business Supply offers the best service and equipment in our town, therefore, I shop there before searching online.
   
   Example with semicolon (correct): Starks Business Supply offers the best service and equipment in our town; therefore, I shop there before searching online.

3. **Use a semicolon to separate compound sentences when one of the main clauses contains commas.**
   
   Example without semicolon (incorrect): Whenever I can, I prefer to buy electronic equipment for our office locally because Starks Business Supply offers the best service and equipment in our town, I stop there first.
   
   Example with semicolon (correct): Whenever I can, I prefer to buy electronic equipment for our office locally because Starks Business Supply offers the best service and equipment in our town, I shop there before searching online.

**Sentence Faults**

The end punctuation, comma, and semicolon guidelines in the previous section can help you to avoid sentence faults. While it is true that professional writers sometimes include sentence faults in their writing, they do so intentionally. You should be sure that your use or decision to include such faults in your writing is intentional as well. Recognizing the following sentence faults and knowing strategies for correcting them can help you improve your sentence structure:
1. **Fragment**: A fragment is an incomplete sentence (lacks a subject or predicate/verb); although commonly used by professional writers, fragments that are unintentional can cause problems for readers. Fragments can be corrected in two ways: (1) adding the missing subject or predicate/verb, or (2) connecting the fragment to a nearby complete that it modifies or renames.

2. **Comma splice**: A comma splice is a faulty sentence in which two or more independent clauses are joined using a comma rather than a coordinating conjunction, a period, or a semicolon. Comma splices can be corrected by separating the main clauses with end punctuation, a comma and a coordinating conjunction, or a semicolon.

3. **Fused or run-on sentences**: A fused or run-on sentence is similar to a comma splice without the commas. It is a faulty sentence in which two independent clauses are placed together with no coordinating conjunction or punctuation. Like the commas splice, fused or run-on sentences can be corrected by separating the main clauses with end punctuation, a comma and a coordinating conjunction, or a semicolon.

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**EXERCISE 7.4**

**The Importance of Punctuation**

The selection below has been modified from an article on a U.S. government website Women’s Health. All beginning of sentence capitalization, end punctuation, and internal punctuation have been removed.

Working with a partner, revise this paragraph. Because you have punctuation choices, your revision may be different from other teams.

> each year on Thanksgiving which coincides with National Family Health History Day I encourage everyone to focus on the importance of family health history through the Office of the Surgeon General’s Family Health History Initiative why is it important to discuss your family’s health history diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease often run in families tracing the illnesses of your parents grandparents and other blood relatives can help your health care practitioner predict your risk for specific diseases and make vital screening and treatment decisions before any disease is evident with our online tool My Family Health Portrait you can gather together with your family and record your family health history. The tool is a great resource to use before going to medical appointments so you have your health history to discuss with your health care practitioner in addition the tool allows users to save their family history information to their own computer and share health history information with other family members before you start using this tool you will need to talk with your family members to collect details about their health histories we even have tips on starting the conversation for you and in about 20 minutes you can create a unique family health history portrait

When you have finished your revision, compare your work to the website (http://www.womenshealth.gov/blog/family-health-history-priceless-gift-you-and-your-family.html). If your choices are different, be ready to explain why you punctuated and capitalized the selection as you did.

**Tasks to be completed:**

1. Rewrite the paragraph above with correct sentence capitalization, end punctuation, and internal punctuation.

2. Compare your revision with others in your class. If you find differences, explain why. Decide which revision is best.
Constructing Sentences for Economy, Variety, and Emphasis

Three of the most common strategies for constructing sentences well are to improve sentence economy (make every word count), variety (vary your sentences length and structure), and emphasis (put important words in positions of power). This section of the chapter provides you with strategies for improving your sentence economy, variety, and emphasis.

Economy

Economy means using no needless words—getting the most mileage from the fewest number of words. Economy is almost always required in technical and professional communications, although it is not always a concern in creative writing when words may be added for aesthetic purposes (sound, rhythm, and/or visual interest) or other reasons. The guidelines that follow describe ways to improve the economy of your sentences. In the examples below, phrases are underlined and subordinate clauses are boxed.

1. When possible, use adjectives, rather than prepositional phrases.
   Original: The sponsor of the contest is offering the winner of the contest a prize of grand proportion. (Sentence length: 20 words; 3 prepositional phrases)
   Revised: The sponsor is offering the contest winner a hefty prize. (Sentence length: 10 words; 0 prepositional phrases)

2. Change who, which, and that (subordinate) clauses to adjectives.
   Original: The signal strength indicator that is on the front panel of the receiver identifies the strength of the wireless connection. (Sentence length: 20 words; one subordinate clause with two prepositional phrases; one additional prepositional phrase)
   Revised: The signal strength indicator on the receiver’s front panel identifies the wireless connection’s strength. (Sentence length: 14 words; no subordinate clauses, one prepositional phrase.)

3. Choose strong, active verbs to reduce wordiness.
   Original: Figure 2 gives estimates of all of the sizes of the boards and boxes that the boards will ship in. (Sentence length: 20 words; weak verb; three prepositional phrases; one subordinate clause)
   Revised: Figure 2 estimates boards’ and their shipping boxes’ sizes. (Sentence length: 9 words; strong verb; no prepositional phrases; no subordinate clauses)
Chapter 7 Writing Content, Technical Style, and Editing

Original: If the temperature is below the desired temperature of the aquarium system, then the heater is turned on. (Sentence length: 18 words; 2 weak verbs; one subordinate clause with one prepositional phrase)

Revised: If the aquarium system’s temperature dips below 72 degrees, then the heater activates. (Sentence length: 13 words; no weak verbs, more specific temperature stated; one subordinate clause with one prepositional phrase)

4. Eliminate “there are,” “there were,” “it is,” and “it was” at the beginning of your sentences. Exceptions: Use “there are” and “there is” constructions to shift a phrase toward the end of the sentence and thereby emphasize it. You can use this device at the beginning of a paragraph to introduce concepts that you will develop in sentences that follow.

Original: There were a few decisions that we made that had a definite impact on the outcome of our project. (Sentence length: 19 words; “there were” start; weak verb; two subordinate clauses, one with two prepositional phrases)

Revised: Two decisions impacted our project’s outcome. (Sentence length: 6 words; strong verb, no subordinate clauses, no prepositional phrases.)

Original: It is thought that Visual Basic might have been a better way to go for the interactive map graphics. (Sentence length: 20 words; “it is” start; one subordinate clause with one prepositional phrase)

Revised: Using Visual Basic might have improved our interactive map graphics. (Sentence length: 10 words; strong verb; no subordinate clauses or prepositional phrases)

Variety
Sentence variety means that your sentences are different lengths. When you are writing for a general audience, remember that the more complex the information, the shorter the sentences. Why is this so? Shorter sentences are easier to read and understand. Varying the length of your sentences will also improve the rhythm of your communication and reduce the monotony created when sentences are all the same length. Short sentences create sudden emphasis. Longer sentences suggest a longer thought process or flow. Follow these suggestions to increase variety in your sentences.

1. Count the words in your sentences and note their lengths. Do you have a variety or does one length predominate? If necessary, shorten longer sentences and combine shorter ones to make them longer.

2. Check the sentence structures you have used in your sentences. Identify them as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex. Do you tend to write simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex sentences? Does one sentence structure dominate? If so, combine some sentences to make them into more complex forms, or separate more complicated sentences into simple or compound ones. Revise your sentences to vary your patterns.

3. Vary your sentence beginnings and endings to create variety. To create variety, think about starting your sentences with prepositional phrases or subordinate clauses. If you frequently start your sentences with these constructions, then reorder your sentences to start with the subject and verb.
Emphasis

Each sentence has two power points—its beginning and its end. The most powerful position of the two is the end. For this reason, the most important information in the sentence should appear at the beginning or the end. Non-essential information, including interrupters and parenthetical comments, belong in the sentence’s mid-section. The examples below illustrate how you can revise to improve sentence emphasis:

**Original:** When removing toast slices, *be very careful* as the toaster’s metal parts and the bread become very hot.
**Revised:** *Be very careful* when removing toast slices because the toaster’s metal parts and the bread become very hot.
**Original:** The fact that she acknowledged the mistake impressed me.
**Revised:** I was impressed that she acknowledged the mistake.
**Revised:** She impressed me when she acknowledged the mistake.

As these examples illustrate, communicators must decide what is the most important idea in the sentence and then craft the sentence emphatically. Deciding what to emphasize then informs the content placement in the sentence.

Thinking about economy, variety, and emphasis will improve your sentence construction. These strategies also assist readers by reducing word count, increasing flow and rhythm, and placing key ideas in strong locations.

**EXERCISE 7.5**

*Improving Your Sentence Construction*

Look through your files and find a short piece (seven to ten sentences) you have written for this class or another. Analyze your sentence style in this piece for economy, variety, and emphasis. Answer these questions in your analysis:

1. How many sentences are in your piece?
2. How many words are in each sentence?
3. What is the average length of your sentences?

After you have examined sentence length, locate sentences that you could revise for better economy, variety, and emphasis. Revise. Bring the original and the revised pieces to class and be prepared to discuss your findings.

**Tasks to be completed:**

1. Locate a short writing sample from this class or another class you have taken.
2. Analyze the writing to determine the following:
   - How many sentences are in your piece?
   - How many words are in each sentence?
   - What is the average length of your sentences?
3. Based on what you find, evaluate your writing and revise for improvement.
4. Be prepared to show your changes and explain why you revised as you did.
Writing Paragraphs

A sentence collects words to express a complete thought. Paragraphs work similarly to collect sentences into a larger, more complex unit of meaning. Paragraphs are effective when all of the ideas in them function to convey meaning, when the ideas are related, when they are organized logically, and when they are clearly connected. These qualities are defined in more detail below.

Functional Paragraphs

Paragraph length will vary greatly from writer to writer and from document to document, depending on the document’s purpose. Like sentences, paragraphs conveying complex or unfamiliar information should be shorter than paragraphs that convey simpler information. Most importantly, whatever length of your paragraph you choose, all of the ideas in it must be relevant and build toward a unified point.

Unified Paragraphs

The point of a paragraph, as you likely know, is stated as a topic sentence; topic sentences typically are stated at the paragraph’s beginning or end. All of the other sentences in the paragraph must, in some way, relate to the topic sentence and to each other. If a sentence does not relate to the topic sentence or other sentence in the paragraph, delete it.

Developed Paragraphs

Adequately developed paragraphs are logically organized. How you organize your paragraph’s content depends on the paragraph’s function: are you trying to explain, to summarize, or to categorize content in your paragraph? Each of these functions, as well as others, have a specific organizational method that you should follow. Below is a list of possible developmental organizations you might follow:

• Classify information
• Compare or contrast
• Define and give examples
• Describe a person, place, or thing
• Describe a process
• Describe cause and/or effect
• Present facts
• Present or refute an argument or part of an argument
• Qualify, elaborate, or restate the main idea
• Summarize or analyze
• Tell a story

Coherent Paragraphs

When ideas are connected, they are coherent. Coherent paragraphs are not only organized logically, but their sentences are also connected with obvious organizational patterns and transitional words. Communicators have many organizational patterns to choose from: sentences can move from general to specific or, conversely, from specific to general.
Ideas can be also be organized by chronological, spatial, or climatic order. When using chronological order, you may chunk items into lists which are usually numbered 1., 2., 3., etc. When items in a list are not in any specific order, use bullets instead of numbers. Other common organizations include alternating order, question and answer, and numerical order. The organizational pattern you choose will depend on the content you are communicating.

**Chunking**
For electronic or online publications, such as Web sites, content chunks may be used instead of or alongside paragraphs. A content chunk is a discrete block of textual, visual, and spatial content on a specific topic. A content chunk can be written using any of the paragraph types described above. In structured authoring, technical communicators write text that is strictly controlled and written in small discrete content chunks, such as “title,” “description,” “example.” In content management systems, such as wikis, blogs, and some Web sites, these chunks are tagged with keywords and stored in databases for retrieval, based on search results. Structured authoring requires technical communicators to think about online or electronic version of texts differently, not as complete documents but as units of meaning that can be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed as needed for specific communication situations.

**Transitional Words and Phrases**
Another strategy for connecting sentences is related to organizational patterns: the use of transitional words and phrases. For example, if you are describing an object in space, you might use words or phrases, such as “to the right,” “in the back,” “next to the...” Chronological and numerical order organizations call for numeric transitions like “first,” “second,” “third,” or even numbered lists. For alternating order, “on the other hand” and “in contrast” cue readers to a change from one subject to the next. Incorporating these words and phrases into your sentences as you build your paragraph assists readers as they move from one sentence to the next. These words and phrases create cognitive bridges that build coherence.

Transitional words and phrases are not the only kinds of words that build coherence. You can also create connections by repeating key words, repeating key ideas, and substituting a pronoun for a noun. A final strategy for building coherence is to use a given/new order to construct your sentence. Using the given/new order, you begin your sentences with a given idea, that is, an idea that you have already addressed, explained, or introduced in some way. After introducing the sentence with given idea, you end your sentence with new information, ideas that your readers do not know or are less familiar with. Like these other strategies for building coherence, the given/new order provides the reader with something familiar (a word, a phrase, an idea) before moving to something new and unfamiliar. The familiar information thus sets a hook for the new information to hang on.

All of the transitional strategies are useful for creating coherence within a paragraph, but they can also be used to make entire documents coherent. You may use all of them to connect sentences to sentences within paragraphs, paragraphs to paragraphs within sections, and sections to sections within entire documents.
EXERCISE 7.6

Transitional Words and Phrases

Choose two of the organizational patterns listed below, and make a list of transitional words and phrases that are commonly used to connect sentences in paragraphs using these organizational patterns.

- Classify information
- Compare or contrast
- Define and give examples
- Describe a person, place, or thing
- Describe a process
- Describe cause and/or effect
- Present facts
- Present or refute an argument or part of an argument
- Qualify, elaborate, or restate the main idea
- Summarize or analyze
- Tell a story

Tasks to be completed:

1. Choose two common organizational patterns from the list above.
2. Make a list of transitional words for each pattern.
3. Prepare to share your list with the class.

EXERCISE 7.7

Using Effective Paragraphing Strategies

Visit the Wikitravel description of Bologna, a city in Germany (http://wikitravel.org/en/Bologna). This travel guide introduces potential visitors to the city, its attractions, and its history.

Read the Bologna travel guide and find at least five strategies the writer uses to make paragraphs functional, unified, developed, and coherent.

After you have identified the writer’s strategies within paragraphs, examine the guide as a whole. What strategies does the writer use to make the complete guide functional, unified, developed, and coherent? That is, how does the writer connect all the paragraphs into a unified whole?

Tasks to be completed:

1. Locate the Bologna description online.
2. Identify at least five strategies the writer uses to create functional, unified, developed, and coherent paragraphs.
3. Identify strategies the writer uses to make the entire descriptions functional, unified, developed, and coherent.
Putting it all together

Paragraphs serve specific functions in professional and technical communication. Depending on its location in the document, a paragraph can serve to introduce the content of the document, develop and elaborate that content, or conclude the content. While it is true that genres have differing requirements, almost all professional and technical communication have paragraphs that serve these functions. This section briefly describes how you can draft these types of paragraphs.

Introducing a Text

As you learned in an earlier chapter, professional and technical communications address specific readers or audiences for specific purposes. The purpose of introductory paragraphs is to set the stage and inform your readers of the purpose of the document. With their opening sentences, introductory paragraphs explain what you are doing—for example, providing information on a recommended purchase, responding to a call for proposals, requesting a refund on a defective product. Telling the reader immediately what and why you are writing provides the reader with an immediate understanding of the intention of your document, no guessing required.

These opening remarks may be very detailed or quite short. Shorter introductions may be only a sentence or two setting the stage. Longer opening paragraphs may provide background, describe a problem, or, in the case of communication across some cultures, set the stage by polite inquiry about the reader’s health or with a brief inquiry about seasonal celebrations.

However long your opening, most introductions end with a forecasting or mapping statement that overviews the rest of the document’s content. Forecasting statements are typically a brief list of major sections that follow. These statements may be one sentence long in short documents or they may expand to one or more paragraphs in longer reports with many major sections. The forecasting statement is important for a number of reasons: it gives readers a preview of the sections to follow, it sets expectations for the content to follow, and it provides readers with a clear organization of the contents. Having this content at the beginning of the document assists readers to read selectively and to easily find the contents they want to read first. In a sense, the forecasting statement is a navigational tool provided early in the document that helps readers to find the information they need quickly and efficiently.

Developing the Middle of the Text

The middle sections of professional communication develop and elaborate your content. These paragraphs should be well developed using conventional organizational patterns, such as comparison and contrast or description of a process, and they should be carefully ordered to reflect this organization (for example, spatial or chronological order). In
addition to these considerations, you can help readers understand how your content is developed and elaborated by providing advance organizers. Advance organizers provide readers with textual and visual cues to the content that follows. Below are four of the most common advance organizers that help readers to understand the content you are providing:

- **Headings**: Headings can be used at the beginning of sections and subsections. They may be complete sentences, phrases, clauses, or simply words that preview the content of the section or subsection.

- **Topic sentences**: Topic sentences are typically located at the beginning of a paragraph. They introduce the main idea of the paragraph. Using a topic sentence helps you to keep all the ideas in your paragraph unified, and it provides readers with an overview of paragraph content.

- **Bulleted and numbered lists**: Lists indicate that the items are related. Bulleted lists are not necessary chronological; use bulleted lists when items are related but not necessary in any specific order. Numbered lists suggest an order (a specific number of items or a specific order from first to last for those items). Both list types require a sentence before the list items that tells readers what kind of list follows.

- **Other visual cues**: In addition to headings and lists, you may use other visual cues to orient readers. These cues include page numbers, headers, and footers. Like other advance organizers, these document elements tell readers where they are in the document and remind them of content they are reading or viewing. Chunking content into short readable bites is also an effective visual cue to assist readers with skimming when combined with other advance organizers.

**Concluding the Text**

Like introductions, conclusions may be very short or very long, depending on your document; interestingly, some short documents such as brief instructions may have almost no conclusion, simply ending with the last step. When conclusions appear in documents, however, they tend to serve these purposes: they restate the purpose of the document and request action from the reader; they draw conclusions about the research being reported (such as implications or findings); and they suggest next steps that the reader should take. Some concluding paragraphs provide a combination of these purposes.

These brief descriptions of the paragraphs that appear at the beginning, middle, and end of professional documents overview their purposes. Later chapters discuss methods of developing conclusion for different types of technical documents.
EXERCISE 7.8

Identifying Paragraph Functions in a Section

The section of paragraphing introduced you to three specific types of paragraphs that typically appear at the beginning, middle, and end of professional documents. The paragraphs in this section were written to illustrate how these paragraph types work. Analyze the paragraphs in this section, and prepare to discuss how each paragraph in this section works. Specifically, be able to answer these questions:

• How does each paragraph in this section function?
• How is each paragraph organized and ordered?
• What are the topic sentences in each paragraph?
• What advance organizers cue readers to paragraph and section content?

Tasks to be completed:
1. Reread this section.
2. As you read, identify how paragraphs function in it.
3. Describe how each paragraph is organized, and locate each paragraph’s topic sentence.
4. Identify the advance organizers used to cue paragraph and section content.

REVIEWING AND EDITING YOUR OWN AND OTHERS’ CONTENT

Reviewing your own work is often harder than reviewing the work of others, but, in both cases, good technical communicators are systematic when they review documents. Eventually you will develop your own system for reviewing documents, but, until then, this final section of the chapter will offer you a series of questions to guide your review. These questions, you may notice, summarize guidance provided in other parts of this textbook.

Editing includes two important tasks: assessment and revision. The assessment task involves using a set of clearly defined criteria to evaluate a document, which vary depending on the type of editing you need to use. For example, you may want to have your work assessed based on its content accuracy, completeness, appropriateness for the intended audience and purpose, or simply its grammatical and mechanical correctness. You may even want to develop a checklist or a list of questions in assessing a document to more clearly document your comments. You may even enlist different individuals to review your work, that is, a subject matter expert to check for content accuracy and completeness or a professional editor to evaluate writing style and grammar. The second task involves revision, including making use of the assessment your document receives from its review. This task also involves reading the review comments, making a list of revision tasks, and prioritizing those tasks in revising your document.
The next few sections describe the five rounds of editing, which can be seen as different kinds of assessments you can perform to assist with editing and revising documents. A good review of technical and professional content requires you to complete a number of review rounds. As you become more proficient in your review, you may be able to conduct some of these rounds simultaneously; but, as you learn to review, try to focus on specific concerns in each round. As you complete each round, take notes. At the end of the process, you should write up a report or meet with the author to make suggestions for improvement, or, if you are the author, developing effective strategies and tasks for revising.

**Round One: General Background of the Document**

To complete the first round, you will need to gather background information before you even begin to review the document. When you review your own work, this background can easily be gathered by returning to planning documents, including user profiles, use scenarios, and tasks analysis. If you are reviewing for others, ask to see their planning documents. If they do not use planning documents, then interview them briefly to generate quick guides to inform you of who will read the document, why they will read it, and for what purpose. Reviewing these plans will help you to evaluate whether the document meets those goals and, if not, how the document might be revised to meet them.

Questions to answer during this round include the following:

- Who is the document’s audience? (How do you know?)
- What is the purpose of the document, or what is its intent?
- What is the reader or audience supposed to do with the information?
- What kind of document are you reviewing? What is its genre?
- What genre conventions will the reader expect the writer to include in the document?
- Was the document’s author required to work under any specific constraints? What were they, and how did they affect document production?

**Round Two: Genre Conventions and Content Organization**

Readers will expect professional communications to meet their generic expectations. They will expect memos to look like memos and to be organized like memos they frequently reader. The same is true for other genres, such as reports, proposals, and progress reports. In the first round, you determined the genre called for in this communication situation. In this round, you briefly review the document to see if it complies with generic conventions. Later chapters will provide you with the various conventions associated with different genres. Compare the document you are reading to these conventions, and ask the following questions:

- Does the document conform to generic expectations?
  - If yes, how does it conform?
  - If no, how does it not conform?
- Does the document need revisions better to conform?
  - If yes, what revisions do you suggest?
  - If no, why not?
Round Three: Design

If the document is unstructured and requires formatting, this round requires you to consider how the document looks and whether this design supports the reader's use and navigation of the document. To review the design, ask these questions:

- Does the document include advance organizers, such as page numbers, headers or footers, and headings?
- Does the document include visuals to support and elaborate on its written contents?
  - Are visuals properly labeled as tables or figures?
  - Are visuals captioned and titled?
  - Does the author clearly reference and explain these visuals in the text?

Round Four: Style

This round requires you to read for style, specifically checking for possible improvements in diction, syntax, and punctuation. If you are reviewing some else's document, you may want to familiarize yourself with common editing symbols. You can find many examples of these marks online, such as Merriam Webster Online (http://www.merriam-webster.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm). To review for style, ask these questions as you review the document:
Round Five: Overall Effectiveness of the Document

In the fifth and final round, consider any notes you have written or marked in the previous four rounds and comment on the overall effectiveness of the document. Asking these questions can help you to think about the document as a whole:

- Is the document readable?
  - Do you understand what it is asking the audience/reader to do?
  - Are its parts coherent and unified?
  - Does everything in it make sense?
- Is the document usable?
  - Can you find the information you need quickly and easily?
  - Is it easy to navigate through the document?
- Is it persuasive?
  - Does it meet its objectives?
  - Do you know what you are expected to do after reading it?
  - What has the author done particularly well in this document?
  - What are the overall and most important revisions necessary to improve the document?

Completing the Review Assessment and Planning Revision Strategies

To conclude your review, you may either meet with the author to discuss improvements or send the author a marked copy with comments or an emailed report. Offer your critique positively, focusing first on what worked well in the draft and following with suggestions for improvement. Base your observations and recommendations on actual instances in the text, and be ready to explain where you encountered difficulties and think improvements are necessary. The more specific your critique, the more likely the author will know how to make changes. Finally, approach the review of others’ work with generosity. Remember that writing is hard work, so hearing criticism of that work can be difficult. Acknowledge this challenge as you make suggestions for improvement.

Once the review has been completed, revision of the document is the next task. Depending on the kinds of reviews, as well as quality and quantity of review comments, the time and amount of work necessary to successfully revise your document may vary. Some suggestions for planning your revision strategy include the following:
• Read the review comments carefully.
• Take notes as you read.
• Prioritize comments, in terms of their importance.
• Make a list of specific tasks to complete.
• Note the kind of revision needed for each task, (i.e., content, design, style, grammar).
• Try not to take a defensive posture.

Taking time to plan your revision will help ensure a higher level of quality in your final product. It is important to identify and prioritize tasks, so you know which ones are absolutely necessary to complete, and which ones are simple suggestions to consider. And finally, remember to keep in mind the overall purpose of a review is to help you with revision, so that you can improve the quality of your document.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has focused on writing content in both structured and unstructured authoring environments. It has offered you a number of writing style guidelines for choosing words, crafting sentences, punctuating sentences, and creating paragraphs. It also addressed techniques for reviewing and editing your own and others’ work, including five levels of editing technical documents. It also discusses how to complete an editorial review and strategies for approaching revision of your document. The guidelines in this chapter are essential to writing and developing content, whether your writing is structured or unstructured, or published in print or electronic venues.

**Chapter Assignments**

The exercises in this section ask you to apply what you have learned in this chapter as well as explore how this knowledge applies to and connects with other information in the textbook.

1. Develop a one-page review checklist, using the five rounds of review you read about in this chapter. Include important questions, criteria, and a description of how you will assess each round. If you use specific criteria to develop the checklist, write a clear definition of each criterion so readers will understand the scope of each one. If you use questions, make sure your questions are specific and provide space for plenty of written comments. Also, you may want to include a rating scale (1 to 10, letter grade, etc.) for each category, criterion, or question.

2. Find a brief one- to two-page document you’ve created for another class and review it. Identify its strengths and weaknesses. Then revise the document for improved writing style. Bring the revised document to class and be prepared to discuss the changes you have made.

3. The Internet has dozens of résumé builders. Search and find a free résumé builder online, enter your résumé’s content into the building, and compare your unstructured résumé to the one the builder generates. How are they similar? How are they different? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
ASK A SPECIALIST: HOW CAN I KEEP MY BIRD FEEDER SAFE?

Terry Messmer, Utah State University Extension wildlife specialist

Adapted from Utah State Today (http://utahstatetoday.usu.edu/archives/february2003/02-07-03/newsreleases-02-07-03.cfm#3) February 7, 2003 News Releases (Released 2/6/03)

Feeding birds in the winter is both a humanitarian act and a way to bring birdwatching to your own backyard during the cold winter months. Poorly maintained bird feeding stations, however, may do more harm than good to the birds you are trying to help. It is important to be aware of the diseases that can be spread through bird feeders.

According to the National Wildlife Health Center, five diseases can affect birds visiting feeders. They are salmonellosis, aspergillosis, avian pox, trichomonias, and mycoplamosis. All of these diseases can lead to death, either directly or indirectly, by making the bird more vulnerable to predators. Sick birds can easily be spotted. They appear less alert and less active. Their feathers look unkempt, and they are often reluctant to fly away.

Consider these tips to lessen the chance of spreading diseases from your bird feeder.

• **Give them space.** Avoid crowding at bird feeders by providing ample feeders.
• **Clean up waste.** Keep the feeder area clear of droppings and waste food. A broom and shovel will work, but a wet and dry vacuum is great.
• **Make feeders physically safe.** Use feeders with rounded corners. Feeders with sharp edges can cut a bird, leaving an opening where bacteria can enter and infect an otherwise healthy bird.
• **Keep feeders clean.** Clean and disinfect feeders regularly. Use one part liquid chlorine bleach in nine parts of warm water. Make enough solution to immerse empty feeders completely for 2-3 minutes. Allow the feeder to air dry. This should be done at least once a month.
• **Use clean food.** Discard food that is wet, smells musty, looks old or has fungus growing on it. Clean and disinfect storage containers or scoops used on unclean food.
• **Prevent contamination.** Keep rodents and pets out of stored food. Rodents can carry and spread some bird diseases without being affected themselves.
• **Spread the word.** Tell your bird feeding neighbors and friends about the risks. Since birds may use several feeders in a neighborhood, your feeder is only as safe as your neighbor's.

Follow these precautions and both you and the birds will enjoy a wintertime of bird feeding. For more information, contact your local USU County Extension office or the National Wildlife Health Center, USGS, Biological Resources Division, 6006 Schroeder Road, Madison, WI 53711-6223.
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