Learning Objectives

AFTER STUDYING THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Cite four of the most common organization mistakes made by communicators

2. Explain why good organization is important to both the communicator and the audience

3. Summarize the process for organizing business messages effectively

4. Discuss three ways of achieving a businesslike tone with a style that is clear and concise

5. Briefly describe how to select words that are not only correct but also effective

6. Discuss how to use sentence style for emphasis

7. List five ways to develop a paragraph and explain how boilerplates are used

8. Explain how to capture audience attention and be more personal in e-mail messages

9. Explain how to develop a hyperlink structure, and how to modify your style and format for the web
On the Job:
COMMUNICATING AT BARNES & NOBLE

DOING MORE THAN JUST SELLING BOOKS

At Barnes & Noble (B&N), reading is big business. With more than 1,886 stores in 49 states and the District of Columbia, the company serves 7.3 million customers and sells more than $4.4 billion in books annually—which makes it the number-one bookseller in the United States. As senior vice president of corporate communications and public affairs, Mary Ellen Keating handles internal and external communications, media relations, community relations, and public affairs for the B&N corporation, the B. Dalton retail stores, Barnes&Noble.com, and Barnes & Noble College Bookstores. Keating and her team communicate effectively with a wide variety of audiences because they organize and compose their messages carefully.

For example, Keating communicates with customers and the media about B&N's Readers' Advantage program—a frequent-buyer plan that offers members 5 percent off the already discounted prices online and 10 percent off in-store purchases. In addition, B&N uses the frequent-buyer card to give members added value, such as the ability to read interviews with writers, learn about upcoming books, and sign up for special programs. In customer messages, Keating emphasizes strong organization and coherent paragraphs to focus on B&N's friendly, comfortable environment and to point out how the company provides not only the widest selection of books at the best prices but also knowledgeable booksellers who are helpful and pleasant. She conveys the ease and convenience that online customers can expect, and she emphasizes the unique experience waiting for those in-store shoppers who enjoy sipping a latte in comfortable, pleasant surroundings while browsing through section after section of new books.

When Keating communicates with authors, she chooses just the right words to convey the advantages of showcasing their work in the B&N environment. Her team is also responsible for messages that give authors advice about the publishing process, about getting the best exposure possible, and even about how to connect with the right publisher. These messages would not succeed without close attention to style and sentence construction.

For shareholders, Keating concentrates on building value. For example, her team helps explain B&N's expansion plans. The company is reviewing opportunities to open another 500 stores in the United States, each one unique and custom-built for the community. Careful organization also helps Keating explain the logic of why expanding internationally is too complicated for B&N right now—requiring the company to adapt to different publishers, languages, and distribution systems.

When reaching out to the community, Keating discusses topics such as hosting community events, providing educational activities, and running programs that put books in the hands of disadvantaged children. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Keating's team helped B&N announce daily Storytimes for children across the nation—special events that focused on how to deal with such tragic events. The company also posted a recommended reading list for parents to help them and their children cope with the 9/11 tragedy. B&N even brought psychologists and counselors to New York Metro area stores to talk to families about their fears and concerns. In all these messages, Keating's team worked meticulously to get the tone and wording just right.

Keating is also responsible for internal messages that focus on employee needs. Her team's efforts help B&N maintain a work environment that is fair, professional, and diverse. The company helps employees flourish and grow by ensuring that its stores and offices are friendly, supportive places that run on the shared love of books and respect for others. Management wants everyone at Barnes & Noble to feel empowered to succeed, and Keating makes sure her team conveys that message.1

www.barnesandnobleinc.com
ORGANIZING YOUR MESSAGE

As Mary Ellen Keating knows, all business communicators face the challenge of composing messages that their audiences can easily understand. People tend not to remember isolated facts and figures, so successful communicators rely on good organization to make their messages meaningful. But what exactly makes a particular organization “good”? Here’s a closer look at what constitutes good organization and why it is important.

What Good Organization Means

Although the definition of good organization varies from country to country, in the United States and Canada, it generally means creating a linear message that proceeds point by point. If you’ve ever received a disorganized message, you’re familiar with the frustration of trying to sort through a muddle of ideas. Consider this letter from Jill Saunders, the accounting manager at General Nutrition Corporation (GNC), manufacturer of health-food products and nutritional supplements:

General Nutrition Corporation has been doing business with ComputerTime since I was hired six years ago. Your building was smaller then, and it was located on the corner of Federal Avenue and 2nd N.W. Jared Mallory, our controller, was one of your first customers. I still remember the day. It was the biggest check I’d ever written. Of course, over the years, I’ve gotten used to larger purchases.

Our department now has 15 employees. As accountants, we need to have our computers working so that we can do our jobs. The CD-RW drive we bought for my assistant, Suzanne, has been a problem. We’ve taken it in for repairs three times in three months to the authorized service center, and Suzanne is very careful with the machine and hasn’t abused it. She does like playing interactive adventure games on lunch breaks. Anyway, it still doesn’t work right, and she’s tired of hauling it back and forth. We’re all putting in longer hours because it is our busy season, and none of us has a lot of spare time.

This is the first time we’ve returned anything to your store, and I hope you’ll agree that we deserve a better deal.

This letter displays a lack of organization that most readers find frustrating. By taking a closer look at what’s wrong, you can distinguish four of the most common organization mistakes made by communicators:

• **Taking too long to get to the point.** Saunders didn’t introduce her topic, the faulty CD-RW drive, until the third paragraph. Then she waited until the final paragraph to state her purpose: requesting an adjustment. **Solution:** Make the subject and purpose clear.

• **Including irrelevant material.** Does it matter that ComputerTime used to be smaller or that it was in a different location? Is it important that Saunders’s department has 15 employees or that her assistant likes playing computer games during lunch? **Solution:** Include only information that is related to the subject and purpose.

• **Getting ideas mixed up.** Saunders tries to make five points: (1) Her company has money to spend, (2) it’s an old customer, (3) it has purchased numerous items at ComputerTime, (4) the CD-RW drive doesn’t work, and (5) Saunders wants an adjustment. However, the ideas are mixed up and located in the wrong places.
Poor organization costs time, efficiency, and relationships.

Good organization helps you save time, work smart, and delegate.

**Why Good Organization Is Important**

Poorly organized messages can waste readers’ time as they struggle to grasp your meaning. Furthermore, disorganized messages can lead to misinterpretation, which could result in poor decision making and even shattered business relationships. When you consider such costs, you begin to realize the value of clear writing and good organization. Moreover, being well organized helps you compose your messages more quickly and efficiently. In business, the objective is to get work done, not to produce messages. When chief executives were asked what they would most like to improve about their own business writing, they mentioned speed of composition more often than any other factor.

So before you begin to write, think about what you’re going to say and how you’re going to say it. Good organization helps you work better because it

- Saves you time. Your draft will go more quickly because you won’t waste time putting ideas in the wrong places or composing material you don’t need.

- Saves you work. You can use your organizational plan to get advance input from your audience, so you can make sure you’re on the right track before you spend hours working on your draft.

- Helps you delegate. You can use your organization plan to divide large, complex writing jobs among co-workers.

In addition to helping you, good organization helps your audience by

- Increasing reader understanding. As Mary Ellen Keating points out, successful organization is the key to communicating effectively with audiences. By making your main point clear at the outset and stating your needs precisely, your well-organized message will satisfy your audience’s need for information.

- Making readers more receptive to your message. Even when your message is logical, you need to select and organize your points in a diplomatic way. By softening refusals and leaving a good impression, you enhance your credibility and add authority to your messages. When ComputerTime responded to the GNC inquiry, the message was negative, but the letter was diplomatic and positive (see Figure 5–2 on page 129).

- Saving readers time. Well-organized messages are efficient, contain only relevant ideas, are brief, and present all the information in a logical place. Audience members receive only the information they need, and because that information is presented as accessibly and succinctly as possible, they can follow the thought pattern without a struggle.
September 13, 2004

Customer Service
ComputerTime
556 Seventh Ave.
Mason City, IA 50401

Dear Customer Service Representative:

GNC bought an Olympic Systems, Model PRS-2, CD-RW drive from your store on November 15, 2003, during your pre-Christmas sale, when it was marked down to $199.95. We didn’t use the unit until January, because it was bought for my assistant, who unexpectedly took six weeks’ leave from mid-November through December. You can imagine her frustration when she first tried using it, and it didn’t work.

In January, we took the drive to the authorized service center and were assured that the problem was merely a loose connection. The service representative fixed the drive, but in April we had to have it fixed again—another loose connection. For the next three months, the drive worked reasonably well, although the response time was occasionally slow. Two months ago, the drive stopped working again. Once more, the service representative blamed a loose connection and made the repair. Although the drive is working now, it isn’t working very well. The response time is still slow, and the motor seems to drag sometimes.

What is your policy on exchanging unsatisfactory merchandise? Although all the repairs have been relatively minor and have been covered by the one-year warranty, we are not satisfied with the drive. We would like to exchange it for a similar model from another manufacturer. If the new drive costs more than the old one, we will pay the difference, even though we generally look for equipment with substantial business discounts.

GNC has done business with your store for six years and until now has always been satisfied with your merchandise. We are counting on you to live up to your reputation for standing behind your products. Please let us hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jill Saunders
Administrative Assistant

FIGURE 5–1
Effective Letter with Improved Organization

To organize a message, be sure to:
• Define your main idea
• Limit the scope
• Group your points
• Choose the direct or indirect approach

The topic is the broad subject; the main idea makes a statement about the topic.
FIGURE 5–2
Effective Letter Demonstrating a Diplomatic Organization Plan

your message is the **topic**, and your **main idea** makes a statement about that topic. Consider the examples in Table 5–1.

Your main idea may at times be obvious. When you’re responding to a straightforward request for information and your message has little emotional impact on your audience, your main idea may be simply, “Here is what you wanted.” However, defining your main idea is more complicated when you’re trying to persuade someone or when you have disappointing information to convey. In these situations, try to define a main idea that will establish a good relationship between you and your audience. For example, you may choose a main idea that highlights a common interest you share with your audience or that emphasizes a point that you and your audience can agree on.

Longer documents and presentations unify a mass of material, so be sure to define a main idea that encompasses all the individual points you want to make. For tough assignments like these, you may want to take special measures to define your main idea more clearly.
main idea. Figure 5–3 describes six techniques you can use to generate your main idea and key points.

Limit the Scope  The scope of your message (its length and detail) matches your main idea. Whether your audience expects a one-page memo or a one-hour speech, develop your main idea with major points and supporting evidence within the expected framework. Once you have a tentative statement of your main idea, test it against the length limitations that have been imposed for your message. If you lack the time and space to develop your main idea fully, or if your main idea won't fill up the time and space allotted, then redefine it.

As you adjust your message to fit the time or space available, don’t change the number of major points. Regardless of how long the message will be, stick with three or four major points—five is the most your audience will remember. Instead of introducing additional points, develop complex issues more fully by supporting your points with a variety of evidence.

If your message is brief (four minutes or one page), you’ll have only a minute or a paragraph each for the introduction, conclusion, and major points. Because the amount of evidence you can present is limited, your main idea will have to be both easy to understand and easy to accept. However, if you’re delivering a long message (say, a 60-minute presentation or a 20-page report), you can develop the major points in considerable detail. You can spend about 10 minutes or 10 paragraphs (more than three pages of double-spaced, typewritten text) on each of your key points, and you’ll still have room for your introduction and conclusion.

How much information you can communicate in a given number of words depends on the nature of your subject, your audience members’ familiarity with the topic, their receptivity to your conclusions, and your credibility. You’ll need fewer words to present routine information to a knowledgeable audience that already knows and respects you; however, to build consensus about a complex and controversial subject, you’ll need more time—especially if the audience is composed of skeptical or hostile strangers.

Structure Your Message  Once you have narrowed the scope of your message, you must provide your supporting details in the most logical and effective way. Constructing an outline of your message, as Mary Ellen Keating does, is one good way to visualize how all the points will fit together. Whether you use the outlining features provided with word-processing software or simply jot down three or four points on the back of an envelope, making a plan and sticking to it will help you cover the important details.

When you’re preparing a longer, more complex message, an outline is indispensable because it helps you visualize the relationships among the various parts.
Brainstorming: Generate as many possibilities as you can think of by letting your mind wander and by being completely uncensored. Then develop criteria to test your ideas against your purpose, your audience, and the facts you've gathered. Finally, eliminate ideas that fail to meet your criteria.

Random List: On a computer screen or a clean sheet of paper, list everything you can think of that pertains to your message. Once you begin your list, your thoughts will start to flow. When you've exhausted the possibilities, study the list for relationships. Sort the items into groups, as you would sort a deck of cards into suits. Look for common denominators; the connection might be geographic, sequential, spatial, chronological, or topical. Part of the list might break down into problems, cases, and solutions; another part into pros and cons. Regardless of what categories finally emerge, the sorting process will help you sift through your thoughts and decide what's important to include in your communication. Of course, the best way to decide importance is to concentrate on the points that will benefit your audience most.

FCR Worksheet: If your subject involves the solution to a problem, you might try an FCR worksheet to help you visualize the relationships among your findings (F), your conclusions (C), and your recommendations (R). For example, you might find that you're losing sales to a competitor who offers lower prices than you do (F). From this information, you might conclude that your loss of sales is due to your pricing policy (C). This conclusion would lead you to recommend a price cut (R). To make an FCR worksheet, divide a computer screen or a sheet of paper into three columns. List the major findings in the first column, then extrapolate conclusions and write them in the second column. These conclusions form the basis for the recommendations, which are listed in the third column. An analysis of the three columns should help you define the information you need to include in your communication.

Journalistic Approach: For informational messages, the journalistic approach may provide a good point of departure. Find the answers to six questions—who, what, when, where, why, and how. The answers you come up with should help you provide all the required information in your message.

Question-and-Answer Chain: Perhaps the best approach is to look at the subject of your message from your audience's point of view. Ask yourself: "What are the audience's main questions? What do audience members need to know?" Write down and examine your answers. As additional questions emerge, write down and examine those answers. Follow the chain of questions and answers until you have replied to every conceivable question that might occur to your audience. By assuming your audience's perspective, you will include the information of greatest value to your audience in your communication.

Storyteller's Tour: Turn on your tape recorder and pretend that you've just run into an old friend on the street. Give an overview of your message, focusing on your reasons for communicating, your major points, your rationale, and the implications for your audience. Listen critically to the tape; then repeat the exercise until you are able to give a smooth, two-minute summary that conveys the gist of your message. Be sure to include the key points you've defined in your communication.

Without an outline, you may be inclined to ramble. As you're describing one point, another point may occur to you, so you describe it. One detour leads to another, and before you know it, you've forgotten the original point. With an outline to guide you, however, you can communicate in a more systematic way. Following an outline also helps you insert transitions so that your message is coherent and your audience can understand the relationships among your ideas.

You're no doubt familiar with the basic outline formats, which (1) use numbers—or letters and numbers—to identify each point and (2) indent points to show which ideas are of equal status. A good outline divides a topic into at least two parts, restricts each subdivision to one category, and ensures that each group is separate and distinct (see Figure 5–4).

Another way to visualize the structure of your message is by creating a message "organization chart" similar to the charts used to show a company's management structure (see Figure 5–5). The main idea is shown in the highest-level box and, like a top executive, establishes the big picture. The lower-level ideas, like lower-level employees, provide the details. All the ideas are logically organized into divisions of
thought, just as a company is organized into divisions and departments. Using a visual chart instead of a traditional outline has many benefits. Charts help you (1) see the various levels of ideas and how the parts fit together, (2) develop new ideas, and (3) restructure your information flow.

Whether you use an outline format or an organization chart to structure your message, your message begins with the main idea, follows with major supporting points, and then illustrates these points with evidence.

**Start with the Main Idea** The main idea helps you establish the goals and general strategy of the message and summarizes two things: (1) what you want your audience to do or think and (2) why they should do so. Everything in the message should either support the main idea or explain its implications.

**State the Major Points** Once you’ve determined the main idea, identify three to five major points that support and clarify your message in more concrete terms. If you come up with more, go back and look for opportunities to combine some of your ideas. The form of your major points depends on your purpose:

- **To inform with factual material.** Your major points might be based on something physical—something you can visualize or measure, such as activities to be performed, functional units, spatial or chronological relationships, or parts of a whole.

- **To describe a process.** The major points are almost inevitably steps in the process.
• **To describe an object.** Major points correspond to the components of the object.

• **To give a historical account.** Major points represent events in the chronological chain.

• **To persuade or collaborate.** Major points develop a line of reasoning or logical argument that proves your central message and motivates your audience to act.

**Illustrate with Evidence**  Specific evidence is the flesh and blood that helps your audience understand and remember the more abstract concepts you’re presenting. For example, if you’re advocating that your company increase its advertising budget, you can support your major point with evidence that your most successful competitors spend more on advertising than you do. You can describe how a particular competitor increased its ad budget and achieved an impressive sales gain. Then you can show that over the past five years, your firm’s sales have gone up and down in relation to the amount spent on advertising.

If you’re developing a long, complex message, you may need to carry the organization chart (or outline) down several levels. Remember that every level is a step along the chain from the abstract to the concrete, from the general to the specific. The lowest level contains the individual facts and figures that tie the generalizations to the observable, measurable world. The higher levels are the concepts that reveal why those facts are significant.

The more evidence you provide, the more conclusive your case will be. If your subject is complex and unfamiliar or if your audience is skeptical, you’ll need a lot of facts and figures to demonstrate your points. On the other hand, if your subject is routine and the audience is positively inclined, you can be more sparing with the evidence. You want to provide enough support to be convincing but not so much that your message becomes boring or inefficient.

Keep your audience interested by varying the type of detail you use as evidence. As you draft your message, try to switch from facts and figures to narration; add a dash of description; throw in some examples or a reference to authority. And be sure to reinforce all these details with visual aids. Think of your message as a stew: a mixture of ingredients seasoned with a blend of spices. Each separate flavor adds to the richness of the whole.

**Choose Between the Direct and Indirect Approaches**  Once you’ve defined your ideas and outlined or diagrammed the structure of your message, you’re ready to decide on the sequence you will use to present your points. When you’re addressing a U.S. or Canadian audience with minimal cultural differences, you have two basic options:

• **Direct approach (deductive).** The main idea (a recommendation, conclusion, or request) comes first, followed by the evidence.

• **Indirect approach (inductive).** The evidence comes first, and the main idea comes later.

To choose between these two alternatives, you must analyze your audience’s likely reaction to your purpose and message. Audience reaction will fall somewhere between eagerness to accept your message and unwillingness to accept it (see Figure 5–6). The direct approach is generally fine when audience members will be receptive—if they are eager, interested, pleased, or even neutral. But you may have better results with the indirect approach if audience members are likely to resist your message—if they are displeased, uninterested, or unwilling.

Bear in mind that each message is unique. No simple formula will solve all your communication problems. For example, audience reaction isn’t the only factor to consider when choosing between the direct and indirect approaches.
consider. True, if you’re sending bad news to outsiders, an indirect approach may be best. However, if you’re writing a memo to an associate, you may want to get directly to the point, even if your message is unpleasant. Also, the direct approach might be the best choice for long messages, regardless of audience attitude, because delaying the main idea could cause confusion and frustration. To summarize, your choice of a direct or an indirect approach depends on:

• **Audience reaction:** Positive, neutral, or negative
• **Message length:** Short (memos, letters, and e-mail—discussed in Part 3 of this text) or long (reports, proposals, and presentations—discussed in Part 4)
• **Message type:** (1) Routine messages; (2) bad-news messages; or (3) persuasive messages (all of which are discussed in Part 3)

Look again at Figure 5–6, which summarizes how your approach may differ depending on likely audience reaction and message type. When used with good judgment, all three message types can be powerful tools of communication. In the following brief discussions, note how the opening, body, and close all play an important role in getting your message across.

**Routine Messages**  The most straightforward business messages are routine, good-news, and goodwill messages. If you’re inquiring about products or placing an order, your audience will usually want to comply. If you’re announcing a price cut, granting an adjustment, accepting an invitation, or congratulating a colleague, your audience will most likely be pleased to hear from you. If you’re providing routine information as part of your regular business, your audience will probably be neutral, neither pleased nor displeased.

These messages get right down to business. They are easy to understand and easy to prepare because they rely on the direct approach. In the opening, state your main
If you have bad news, try to put it somewhere in the middle, cushioned by other, more positive ideas. The indirect approach should not be used to manipulate.

Bad-News Messages If you’re turning down a job applicant, refusing credit, or denying a request for an adjustment, your audience will be disappointed. By blurtling out an unpleasant message, you may think that you’re just being businesslike or that your audience is too far away or too unimportant to matter. However, astute businesspeople know that every person they encounter could be a potential customer, supplier, or contributor or could influence someone who is a customer, supplier, or contributor.

Thus, successful communicators take a little extra care with their bad-news messages and often rely on the indirect approach. Your opening is neutral, acting as a transition to your reasons for the bad news. In the body, you give the reasons that justify a negative answer before actually stating or implying the bad news. Your close is always cordial.

Keep in mind that the indirect approach is neither manipulative nor unethical. The challenge lies in being honest but kind. You don’t want to sacrifice ethics and mislead your audience; nor do you want to be overly blunt. To achieve a good mix of candor and kindness, focus on some aspect of the situation that makes the bad news a little easier to take. As long as you can be honest, can be reasonably brief, and can close with something fairly positive, you’re likely to leave the audience feeling okay—not great, but not hostile either (which is often about all you can hope for when you must deliver negative messages). Bad-news messages are discussed further in Chapter 8.

Persuasive Messages The indirect approach is also useful when you know that your audience will resist your message (will be uninterested in your request or unwilling to comply without extra coaxing). You might find an audience resistant to a sales letter, a collection letter, an unsolicited job application, or a request for a favor of some kind. In such cases, you have to capture people’s attention before you can persuade them to do something. You have to get your audience to consider with an open mind what you have to say. So you have to make an interesting point and provide supporting facts that encourage the audience to continue paying attention.

In persuasive messages, you open by mentioning a possible benefit, referring to a problem that the recipient might have, posing a question, or citing an interesting statistic. In the body you then build interest in the subject and arouse your audience members’ desire to comply. Once you have them thinking, you can introduce your main idea. Finally, you close cordially and request the desired action. Persuasive messages are discussed at greater length in Chapter 9. For a reminder of the organization tasks discussed in this chapter, see the “Checklist: Organizing Business Messages.”
### CHECKLIST: Organizing Business Messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognize Good Organization</th>
<th>Structure the Message to Decide What you Need to Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Subject and purpose are clear.</td>
<td>✓ Start with the main idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Information is directly related to subject and purpose.</td>
<td>✓ State the major points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ideas are grouped and presented logically.</td>
<td>✓ Illustrate with evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ All necessary information is included.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Define the Main Idea and Limit the Scope</th>
<th>Arrange Message Sequence According to the Audience’s Probable Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Develop a global statement that sums up the central point of your message.</td>
<td>✓ Use the direct approach when your audience will be neutral, pleased, interested, or eager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Make your global statement audience-centered.</td>
<td>✓ Use the indirect approach when your audience will be displeased, uninterested, or unwilling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Evaluate whether the main idea is realistic, given the imposed length limitations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### COMPOSING AND SHAPING YOUR MESSAGE

Before you begin to compose your first draft, put aside your outline or organization chart for a day or two (if your schedule permits). Then review it with a fresh eye, looking for opportunities to improve the flow of ideas. Composition is easier now that you’ve already figured out what to say and in what order—even if you need to pause now and then to find the right word. As you go along, you may discover that you can improve on your outline. Feel free to rearrange, delete, and add ideas, as long as you don’t lose sight of your purpose.

As you compose, try to let your creativity flow. Don’t worry about getting everything perfect at this point; that is, try not to compose and edit at the same time. Just put down your ideas as quickly as you can. You’ll have time to revise and refine the material later. If you get stuck, try following some of the techniques presented in “Sharpening Your Career Skills: Beating Writer’s Block: Nine Workable Ideas to Get Words Flowing.”

Once you have all your thoughts and ideas jotted down, begin shaping your message. Start by paying attention to your style and tone. Select words that match the tone you want to achieve. Create the most effective sentences possible, and develop coherent paragraphs. The following sections discuss each of these elements.

### Controlling Your Style and Tone

**Style** is the way you use language to achieve a certain **tone**, or overall impression. You can vary your style—your sentence structure and vocabulary—to sound forceful or objective, personal or formal, colorful or dry. The choice of tone depends on the nature of your message and your relationship with your audience. Although style can be refined during revision (see Chapter 6), you’ll save time and a lot of rewriting if you develop a style that allows you to achieve the desired tone from the start.

**Use a Conversational Tone**  The tone of your business messages may span a continuum from informal to conversational to formal. Most business messages aim for a conversational tone, using plain language that sounds businesslike without being stuffy, stiff, wordy, or full of jargon. Rather than trying to impress audiences with an extensive vocabulary, good business communicators focus on being sensible, logical, and objective; they provide supporting facts and a rationale. To achieve a con-
Beating Writer’s Block: Eleven Workable Ideas to Get Words Flowing

Putting words on a page or on screen can be a real struggle. Some people get stuck so often that they develop a mental block. If you get writer’s block, here are some ways to get those words flowing again:

• **Use positive self-talk.** Stop worrying about how well or easily you write, and stop thinking of writing as difficult, time-consuming, or complicated. Tell yourself that you’re capable and that you can do the job. Also, recall past examples of your writing that were successful.

• **Know your purpose.** Be specific about what you want to accomplish with this particular piece of writing. Without a clear purpose, writing can indeed be impossible.

• **Visualize your audience.** Picture audience backgrounds, interests, subject knowledge, and vocabulary (including the technical jargon they use). Such visualization can help you choose an appropriate style and tone for your writing.

• **Create a productive environment.** Write in a place that’s for writing only, and make that place pleasant. Set up “writing appointments.” Scheduling a session from 9:30 to noon is less intimidating than an indefinite session. Also, keep your mind fresh with scheduled breaks.

• **Make an outline or a list.** Even if you don’t create a formal outline, at least jot down a few notes about how your ideas fit together. As you go along, you can revise your notes, as long as you end up with a plan that gives direction and coherence.

• **Just start.** Put aside all worries, fears, distractions—anything that gives you an excuse to postpone writing. Then start putting down any thoughts you have about your topic. Don’t worry about whether these ideas can actually be used; just let your mind range freely.

• **Write the middle first.** Start wherever your interest is greatest and your ideas are most developed. You can follow new directions, but note ideas to revisit later. When you finish one section, choose another without worrying about sequence. Just get your thoughts down.

• **Push obstacles aside.** If you get stuck at some point, don’t worry. Move past the thought, sentence, or paragraph, and come back to it later. Prime the pump simply by writing or talking about why you’re stuck: “I’m stuck because . . .” Also try brainstorming. Before you know it, you’ll be writing about your topic.

• **Read a newspaper or magazine.** Try reading an article that uses a style similar to yours. Choose one you’ll enjoy so that you’ll read it more closely.

• **Work on nontext segments.** Work on a different part of the project, such as formatting or creating graphics or verifying facts and references.

• **When deadlines loom, don’t freeze in panic.** Concentrate on the major ideas first, and save the details for later, after you have something on the page. If you keep things in perspective, you’ll succeed.

### CAREER APPLICATIONS

1. List the ways you procrastinate, and discuss what you can do to break these habits.

2. Analyze your own writing experiences. What negative self-talk do you use? What might you do to overcome this tendency?

versational tone in your messages, don’t use obsolete and pompous language, intimacy, humor, or preaching and bragging.

- **Avoid obsolete and pompous language.** Business language used to be much more formal than it is today, and some out-of-date phrases still remain. Ask yourself, “Would I say this if I were talking with someone face-to-face?” Similarly, avoid using big words, trite expressions, and overly complicated sentences to impress others. Such pompous language sounds puffed up and roundabout (see Table 5–2).

- **Avoid intimacy.** Don’t mention anything about anyone’s personal life unless you know the individual well. Avoid phrases that imply intimacy, such as “just between you and me” and “as you and I are well aware.” Be careful about sounding too folksy or chatty; such a familiar tone may be seen as an attempt to seem like an old friend when, in fact, you’re not.

To achieve a warm but businesslike tone
- Don’t use obsolete language
- Don’t use pompous phrases
- Don’t be too familiar
- Use humor only with great care
- Don’t preach
- Don’t brag
### Table 5–2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Obsolete</strong></th>
<th><strong>Up to Date</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In due course</td>
<td>Today, tomorrow (or a specific time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permit me to say that</td>
<td>(Permission is not necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are in receipt of</td>
<td>We have received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuant to</td>
<td>(Omit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In closing, I’d like to say</td>
<td>(Omit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The undersigned</td>
<td>I; me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindly advise</td>
<td>Please let us know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wish to inform you</td>
<td>(Just say it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attached please find</td>
<td>Enclosed is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has come to my attention</td>
<td>I have just learned; or, Ms. Garza has just told me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Mr. Lydell</td>
<td>Mr. Lydell, our credit manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please be advised that</td>
<td>(Omit)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pompous</strong></th>
<th><strong>Down to Earth</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upon procurement of additional supplies, I will initiate fulfillment of your order.</td>
<td>I will fill your order when I receive more supplies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perusal of the records indicates a substantial deficit for the preceding accounting period due to the utilization of antiquated mechanisms.</td>
<td>The records show a company loss last year due to the use of old equipment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Avoid humor.** What seems humorous to you may be deadly serious to others. And when you’re communicating across cultures, chances are slim that your audience will appreciate your humor or even realize that you’re trying to be funny.\(^8\) Also, humor changes too quickly. What’s funny today may not be in a week or a month from now.

- **Avoid preaching and bragging.** Few things are more irritating than people who think that they know everything and that others know nothing. If you must tell your audience something obvious, place the information in the middle of a paragraph, where it will sound like a casual comment rather than a major revelation. Also, avoid bragging about your accomplishments or about the size or profitability of your organization (unless your audience is a part of your organization).

Your conversational tone may become less or more formal, depending on the situation. If you’re in a large organization and you’re communicating with your superiors or if you’re communicating with customers, your conversational tone would tend to be more formal and respectful. On the other hand, if you were sending a quick e-mail to a colleague that you’ve worked closely with for years, your tone would be somewhat less formal—even though it would still be conversational and businesslike.
Use Plain English  Plain English is a way of writing and arranging technical materials so that your audience can understand your meaning. Plain English is easily understood by anyone with an eighth- or ninth-grade education, so it’s close to the way people normally speak. If you’ve ever tried to make sense of an overwritten or murky passage in a legal document or credit agreement, you can understand why governments and corporations today are endorsing the plain-English movement.

Plain English is already used in loan and credit card application forms, insurance policies, investment documents, and real estate contracts. Even software programmers are trying to simplify their language so that they can communicate clearly with product users who may not understand what it means to “pop out to DOS.”

Plain English has some limitations. It lacks the precision necessary for scientific research, intense feeling, and personal insight. Moreover, it fails to embrace all cultures and dialects equally. But even though it’s intended for audiences who speak English as their primary language, plain English can also help simplify messages to audiences who speak English only as a second or even third language. For example, choosing words that have only one interpretation will surely help you communicate more clearly with your intercultural audience.

Select Active or Passive Voice Appropriately  Your use of active and passive voice also affects the tone of your message. You’re using active voice when the subject (the “actor”) comes before the verb and the object of the sentence (the “acted upon”) follows the verb: “John rented the office.” You’re using passive voice when the subject follows the verb and the object precedes it: “The office was rented by John.” As you can see, the passive voice combines the helping verb to be with a form of the verb that is usually similar to the past tense. Active sentences generally sound less formal and make it easier for the reader to figure out who performed the action (see Table 5–3). In contrast, passive voice de-emphasizes the subject and implies that action was taken by something or someone.

Using active voice produces shorter, stronger sentences and makes your writing more vigorous, concise, and generally easier to understand. Using passive voice

**CHOOSING ACTIVE OR PASSIVE VOICE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Avoid Passive Voice in General</strong></th>
<th><strong>Use Active Voice in General</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The new procedure is thought by the president to be superior.</td>
<td>The president thinks the new procedure is superior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are problems with this contract.</td>
<td>This contract has problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary that the report be finished by next week.</td>
<td>The report must be finished by next week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sometimes Avoid Active Voice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sometimes Use Passive Voice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You lost the shipment.</td>
<td>The shipment was lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am analyzing the production line to determine the problem.</td>
<td>The production line is being analyzed to determine the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have established criteria to evaluate capital expenditures.</td>
<td>Criteria have been established to evaluate capital expenditures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use passive sentences to soften bad news, to put yourself in the background, or to create an impersonal tone. Produces longer sentences and, while not wrong grammatically, makes your writing cumbersome, wordy, and often unnecessarily vague.

Nevertheless, the passive voice is the right choice in some situations when you need to demonstrate the “you” attitude by shifting emphasis away from the actor:

- **To be diplomatic.** When you need to point out a problem or error of some kind, passive voice seems less like an accusation.

- **To avoid attributing either credit or blame.** When you need to emphasize what’s being done, passive voice leaves the actor completely out of the sentence.

- **To create an objective tone.** When you need to sound objective—in a formal report, for example—the passive voice avoids personal pronouns.

### Selecting the Best Words

Choose your words carefully. First, pay close attention to correctness. If you make grammatical or usage errors, you lose credibility with your audience. Poor grammar implies that you’re unaware or uninformed, and audiences put little faith in an uninformed source. Even if an audience is broad-minded enough to withhold such a judgment, grammatical errors are distracting.

If you have doubts about what is correct, don’t be lazy. Look up the answer, and use the proper form of expression. Check the “Handbook of Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage” at the end of this textbook, or consult any number of special reference books and resources available in libraries, in bookstores, and on the Internet. Most authorities agree on the basic conventions.

Just as important as selecting the correct word is selecting the most effective word for the job at hand. Writers such as Mary Ellen Keating are careful to use functional and content words correctly and to find the words that communicate.

### Use Functional and Content Words Correctly

Words can be divided into two main categories. **Functional words** express relationships and have only one unchanging meaning in any given context. They include conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and pronouns. Your main concern with functional words is to use them correctly.

**Content words** carry the meaning of a sentence and are subject to various interpretations. They include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. In the following sentence, all the content words are underlined:

Some objective observers of the cookie market give Nabisco the edge in quality, but Frito-Lay is lauded for superior distribution.

Both functional words and content words are necessary, but your effectiveness as a communicator depends largely on your ability to choose the right content words for your message.

### Denotation and Connotation

Content words have both a denotative and a connotative meaning. **Denotative meaning** is the literal, or dictionary, meaning. The denotation of the word desk is “a table used for writing.” Some desks may have drawers or compartments; others may have a flat or sloping top. But the literal meaning is generally well understood.

**Connotative meaning** includes all the associations and feelings evoked by the word. The connotation of the word desk may include thoughts associated with work or study. Basically, the word desk has fairly neutral connotations—neither strong nor emotional.

However, some words have much stronger connotations than others. If you say that a student failed to pass a test, the connotative meaning suggests that the person
is inferior, incompetent, below some standard of performance. Thus the connotations of the word fail are negative and can carry strong emotional meaning.

In business communication, avoid using terms that are high in connotative meaning. By saying that a student achieved a score of 65 percent, you communicate the facts and avoid a heavy load of negative connotations. If you use words that have relatively few possible interpretations, you are less likely to be misunderstood. Moreover, because business is about communicating in an objective, rational manner, avoid emotion-laden comments.

Abstraction and Concreteness  An abstract word expresses a concept, quality, or characteristic. Abstractions are usually broad, encompassing a category of ideas. They are often intellectual, academic, or philosophical. Love, honor, progress, tradition, and beauty are abstractions.

A concrete word stands for something you can touch or see. Concrete terms are anchored in the tangible, material world. Chair, table, horse, rose, kick, kiss, red, green, and two are concrete words; they are direct, clear, and exact. Because words such as small, numerous, sizable, near, soon, good, and fine are imprecise, try to replace them with terms that are more accurate. Instead of referring to a sizable loss, talk about a loss of $32 million.

You might assume that concrete words are always better than abstract words, because they are more precise, but you would sometimes be wrong. For example, try to rewrite this sentence without using the underlined abstract words:

The more abstract a word, the more it is removed from the tangible, objective world of things that can be perceived with the senses.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

As you can see, the Declaration of Independence needs abstractions, and so do business messages. Abstractions permit us to rise above the common and tangible. They allow us to refer to concepts such as morale, productivity, profits, quality, motivation, and guarantees.

However, even though abstractions are indispensable, they can be troublesome. They tend to be fuzzy and subject to many interpretations. They also tend to be boring. It isn't always easy to get excited about ideas, especially if they’re unrelated to concrete experience. The best way to minimize such problems is to blend abstract terms with concrete ones, the general with the specific. State the concept, then pin it down with details expressed in more concrete terms. Save the abstractions for ideas that cannot be expressed any other way.

Find Words that Communicate  Anyone who earns a living by crafting words is a wordsmith—including journalists, public relations specialists, editors, and letter and report writers. Unlike poets, novelists, or dramatists, wordsmiths don't strive for dramatic effects. Instead, they are concerned with using language to be clear, concise, and accurate. To reach their goal, they emphasize words that are strong and familiar, avoid clichés, and use jargon carefully. When you compose your business messages, do your best to think like a wordsmith (see Table 5–4):

- **Choose strong words.** Choose words that express your thoughts most clearly, specifically, and dynamically. Nouns and verbs are the most concrete, so use them as much as you can. Adjectives and adverbs have obvious roles, but use them sparingly—they often evoke subjective judgments. Verbs are especially powerful because they tell what’s happening in the sentence, so make them dynamic and specific (replace rise or fall with soar or plummet).

- **Choose familiar words.** You’ll communicate best with words that are familiar to your readers. However, keep in mind that words familiar to one reader might be unfamiliar to another.
Table 5–4 \hspace{1cm} THINKING LIKE A WORDSMITH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Avoid Weak Phrases</strong></th>
<th><strong>Use Strong Terms</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy businessperson</td>
<td>Tycoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business prosperity</td>
<td>Boom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard times</td>
<td>Slump</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Avoid Unfamiliar Words</strong></th>
<th><strong>Use Familiar Words</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ascertain</td>
<td>Find out, learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consummate</td>
<td>Close, bring about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peruse</td>
<td>Read, study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumvent</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increment</td>
<td>Growth, increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequivocal</td>
<td>Certain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Avoid Clichés</strong></th>
<th><strong>Use Plain Language</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrape the bottom of the barrel</td>
<td>Strain shrinking resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An uphill battle</td>
<td>A challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing on the wall</td>
<td>Prediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call the shots</td>
<td>Be in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take by storm</td>
<td>Attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost an arm and a leg</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new ballgame</td>
<td>Fresh start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst nightmare</td>
<td>Strong competitor; disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall through the cracks</td>
<td>Be overlooked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Avoid clichés.** Although familiar words are generally the best choice, beware of terms and phrases so common that they have become virtually meaningless. For example, instead of saying “We are hammering away at this production backup before sales drop even more,” say “We are striving to relieve this production backup before sales drop even more.” Because clichés are used so often, readers tend to slide right by them to whatever is coming next.

- **Use jargon carefully.** Handle technical and professional terms with care. Technical language and jargon can add precision and authority to a message, but many people won’t understand it. When deciding whether to use technical jargon, let your audience’s knowledge guide you. For example, when addressing a group of engineers or scientists, it’s probably fine to refer to **meteorological effects on microwave propagation**; otherwise, refer to the **effects of weather on radio waves**.

Remember, good business writing is learned by imitation and practice. As you read business journals,
Creating Effective Sentences

In English, words don’t make much sense until they’re combined in a sentence to express a complete thought. Thus the words *Jill, receptionist, the, smiles, and at* can be organized into “Jill smiles at the receptionist.” Now that you’ve constructed the sentence, you can begin exploring the possibilities for improvement, looking at how well each word performs its particular function. Nouns and noun equivalents are the topics (or subjects) you’re communicating about, and verbs and related words (or predicates) make statements about those subjects. In a complicated sentence, adjectives and adverbs modify the subject and the statement, and various connectors hold the words together.

Understand the Four Types of Sentences  

Sentences come in four basic varieties: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. A simple sentence has one main clause (a single subject and a single predicate), although it may be expanded by nouns and pronouns serving as objects of the action and by modifying phrases. Here’s a typical example (with the subject underlined once and the predicate verb underlined twice):

**Profits have increased** in the past year.

A compound sentence has two main clauses that express two or more independent but related thoughts of equal importance, usually joined by *and, but,* or *or.* In effect, a compound sentence is a merger of two or more simple sentences (independent clauses) that are related. For example:

**Wage rates have declined** by 5 percent, *and* employee turnover has been high.

The independent clauses in a compound sentence are always separated by a comma or by a semicolon (in which case the conjunction—*and, but, or*—is dropped).

A complex sentence expresses one main thought (the independent clause) and one or more subordinate thoughts (dependent clauses) related to it, often separated by a comma. The subordinate thought, which comes first in the following sentence, could not stand alone:

**Although you may question Gerald’s conclusions,** you must admit that his research is thorough.

A compound-complex sentence has two main clauses, at least one of which contains a subordinate clause:

**Profits have increased** in the past year, and although you may question Gerald’s conclusions, you must admit that his research is thorough.

When constructing a sentence, choose the form that matches the relationship of the ideas you want to express. If you have two ideas of equal importance, express them as two simple sentences or as one compound sentence. However, if one of the ideas is less important than the other, place it in a dependent clause to

Every sentence contains a subject (noun or noun equivalent) and a predicate (verb and related words).
form a complex sentence. For example, although the following compound sen-
tence uses a conjunction to join two ideas, they aren't truly equal:

The chemical products division is the strongest in the company, and its
management techniques should be adopted by the other divisions.

By making the first thought subordinate to the second, you establish a cause-
and-effect relationship. So the following complex sentence is much more effective:

Because the chemical products division is the strongest in the company, its
management techniques should be adopted by the other divisions.

To make your writing as effective as possible, balance all four sentence types. If
you use too many simple sentences, you won't be able to properly express the rela-
tionships among your ideas. If you use too many long, compound sentences, your
writing will sound monotonous. On the other hand, an uninterrupted series of com-
plex or compound-complex sentences is hard to follow.

Use Sentence Style to Emphasize Key Thoughts Sentence style varies from
culture to culture. German sentences are extremely complex, with lots of modifiers
and appositives; Japanese and Chinese languages don't even have sentences in the
same sense that Western languages do. However, in English try to make your sen-
tences grammatically correct, efficient, readable, interesting, and appropriate for your
audience. In general, strive for straightforward simplicity. For most business audi-
ences, clarity and efficiency take precedence over literary style.

In every message, some ideas are more important than others. You can emphasize
these key ideas through your sentence style. One obvious technique is to give impor-
tant points the most space. When you want to call attention to a thought, use extra
words to describe it. Consider this sentence:

The chairperson of the board called for a vote of the shareholders.

To emphasize the importance of the chairperson, you might describe her more fully:

Having considerable experience in corporate takeover battles, the
chairperson of the board called for a vote of the shareholders.

You can increase the emphasis even more by adding a separate, short sentence to aug-
ment the first:

The chairperson of the board called for a vote of the shareholders. She has
considerable experience in corporate takeover battles.

You can also call attention to a thought by making it the subject of the sentence. In
the following example, the emphasis is on the person:

I can write letters much more quickly by using a computer.

However, by changing the subject, the computer takes center stage:

The computer helps me write letters much more quickly.

Another way to emphasize an idea is to place it at either the beginning or the end of
a sentence:

Less Emphatic: We are cutting the price to stimulate demand.

More Emphatic: To stimulate demand, we are cutting the price.
In complex sentences, the placement of the dependent clause hinges on the relationship between the ideas expressed. If you want to emphasize the idea, put the dependent clause at the end of the sentence (the most emphatic position) or at the beginning (the second most emphatic position). If you want to downplay the idea, bury the dependent clause within the sentence:

**Most Emphatic**: The electronic parts are manufactured in Mexico, which has lower wage rates than the United States.

**Emphatic**: Because wage rates are lower there, the electronic parts are manufactured in Mexico.

**Least Emphatic**: Mexico, which has lower wage rates, was selected as the production point for the electronic parts.

Techniques like these give you a great deal of control over the way your audience interprets what you have to say.

## Developing Coherent Paragraphs

A *paragraph* is a cluster of sentences all related to the same general topic. It is a unit of thought, separated from other units by skipping a line or indenting the first line. A series of paragraphs makes up an entire composition. Each paragraph is an important part of the whole, a key link in the train of thought. As you compose your message, think about the paragraphs and their relationship to one another.

### Elements of the Paragraph

Paraphraphs vary widely in length and form. You can communicate effectively in one short paragraph or in pages of lengthy paragraphs, depending on your purpose, your audience, and your message. The typical paragraph contains three basic elements: a topic sentence, related sentences that develop the topic, and transitional words and phrases.

**Topic Sentence** Every properly constructed paragraph is *unified*; that is, it deals with a single topic. The sentence that introduces that topic is called the *topic sentence*. In business writing, the topic sentence is generally explicit and is often the first sentence in the paragraph. It gives readers a summary of the general idea that will be covered in the rest of the paragraph:

The medical products division has been troubled for many years by public relations problems. [In the rest of the paragraph, readers will learn the details of the problems.]

Relocating the plant in New York has two main disadvantages. [The disadvantages will be explained in subsequent sentences.]

To get a refund, you must supply us with some additional information. [The details of the necessary information will be described in the rest of the paragraph.]

**Related Sentences** The sentences that explain the topic sentence round out the paragraph. These related sentences must all have a bearing on the general subject and must provide enough specific details to make the topic clear:

The topic sentence
- Reveals the subject of the paragraph
- Indicates how the subject will be developed

Paragraphs are developed through a series of related sentences that provide details about the topic sentence.
The medical products division has been troubled for many years by public relations problems. Since 1997 the local newspaper has published 15 articles that portray the division in a negative light. We have been accused of everything from mistreating laboratory animals to polluting the local groundwater. Our facility has been described as a health hazard. Our scientists are referred to as “Frankensteins,” and our profits are considered “obscene.”

The developmental sentences are all more specific than the topic sentence. Each one provides another piece of evidence to demonstrate the general truth of the main thought. Also, each sentence is clearly related to the general idea being developed; the relation between the sentences and the idea is what gives the paragraph its unity. A paragraph is well developed when it contains enough information to make the topic sentence convincing and interesting.

**Transitional Elements** In addition to being unified and well developed, effective paragraphs are coherent; that is, they are arranged in a logical order so that the audience can understand the train of thought. When you complete a paragraph, your readers automatically assume that you’ve finished with a particular idea. You achieve coherence by using transitions that show the relationship between paragraphs and among sentences within paragraphs. Transitions, words, or phrases that tie ideas together, show how one thought is related to another; they help readers understand the connections you’re trying to make. You can establish transitions in various ways:

- **Use connecting words:** and, but, or, nevertheless, however, in addition, and so on.
- **Echo a word or phrase from a previous paragraph or sentence:** A system should be established for monitoring inventory levels. “This system will provide . . .”
- **Use a pronoun that refers to a noun used previously:** Ms. Arthur is the leading candidate for the president’s position. “She has excellent qualifications.”
- **Use words that are frequently paired:** The machine has a minimum output of . . . “Its maximum output is . . .”

Some transitional elements serve as mood changers; that is, they alert the reader to a change in mood from the previous paragraph. Some announce a total contrast with what’s gone on before, some announce a causal relationship, and some signal a change in time. They prepare your reader for the change. Here is a list of transitions frequently used to move readers smoothly between sentences and paragraphs:

**Additional detail:** Moreover, furthermore, in addition, besides, first, second, third, finally

**Causal relationship:** Therefore, because, accordingly, thus, consequently, hence, as a result, so

**Comparison:** Similarly, here again, likewise, in comparison, still

**Contrast:** Yet, conversely, whereas, nevertheless, on the other hand, however, but, nonetheless

**Condition:** Although, if

**Illustration:** For example, in particular, in this case, for instance

**Time sequence:** Formerly, after, when, meanwhile, sometimes
Intensification: Indeed, in fact, in any event

Summary: In brief, in short, to sum up

Repetition: That is, in other words, as I mentioned earlier

Although transitional words and phrases are useful, they’re not sufficient in themselves to overcome poor organization. Your goal is first to put your ideas in a strong framework and then to use transitions to link them together even more strongly.

Consider using a transition device whenever it might help the reader understand your ideas and follow you from point to point. You can use transitions inside paragraphs to tie related points together and between paragraphs to ease the shift from one distinct thought to another. In longer reports, transitions that link major sections or chapters are often complete paragraphs that serve as mini-introductions to the next section or as summaries of the ideas presented in the section just ending. Here’s an example:

Given the nature of this product, the alternatives are limited. As the previous section indicates, we can stop making it altogether, improve it, or continue with the current model. Each of these alternatives has advantages and disadvantages, which are discussed in the following section.

Paragraph Development  Paragraphs can be developed in many ways. Your choice of technique depends on your subject, your intended audience, and your purpose. Following are five of the most common techniques:

• Illustration: Giving examples that demonstrate the general idea
• Comparison or contrast: Using similarities or differences to develop the topic
• Cause and effect: Focusing on the reasons for something
• Classification: Showing how a general idea is broken into specific categories
• Problem and solution: Presenting a problem and then discussing the solution

In practice, you’ll often combine two or more methods of development in a single paragraph. To add interest, you might begin by using illustration, shift to comparison or contrast, and then shift to problem and solution. However, before settling for the first approach that comes to mind, consider the alternatives. Think through various methods before committing yourself. If you fall into the easy habit of repeating the same old paragraph pattern time after time, your writing will be boring.

Some of the paragraphs that business communicators use in their documents are “prewritten.” For example, say that you want to announce to the media that you’ve developed a new product or hired an executive. Such announcements—called press releases—usually end with a standard paragraph about the company and its line of business. Any standard block of text that is used in various documents without being changed is called a boilerplate. Using boilerplates saves time and reduces mistakes because you’re not retyping the paragraph every time you use it.

For a reminder of the tasks involved in composing your messages, see the “Checklist: Composing and Shaping Business Messages.”
CHECKLIST Composing and Shaping Business Messages

Control Your Style and Tone
✓ Avoid obsolete and pompous language.
✓ Use the appropriate level of formality.
✓ Avoid being overly familiar.
✓ Avoid inappropriate humor.
✓ Avoid sounding preachy or bragging.
✓ Use plain English.
✓ Write mainly in the active voice, but use the passive voice to achieve specific effects.

Select the Best Words
✓ Choose words that avoid negative or multiple connotations.
✓ Choose abstract words only for ideas that cannot be expressed any other way.
✓ Blend abstract words with concrete ones, explaining the general with the specific.

Create Effective Sentences and Coherent Paragraphs
✓ Use simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences, choosing the form that best fits the thought you want to express.
✓ Emphasize key points through sentence style, giving important points the most space.
✓ Be sure paragraphs contain a topic sentence, related sentences, and transitional elements.
✓ Choose a method of development that suits the subject: illustration, comparison or contrast, cause and effect, classification, problem and solution.

WRITING EFFECTIVE E-MAIL MESSAGES

E-mail messages need as much care and attention as other business messages.

In your replies, include relevant parts of the original message.

Respect your audience's limited time by keeping e-mail messages short and to the point.

The level of formality in your e-mail depends on your audience and purpose.

Even though e-mail is less formal than letters and seems transitory, organization and style are just as important for these messages as for any other type of business message. In addition to the principles and techniques already discussed in this chapter, consider the following when writing e-mail messages.

Organizing Your E-Mail Messages

If you are responding to a question or a request for information, be sure to start your e-mail by inserting the original question into your reply. You can preprogram most e-mail software packages to automatically include the sender's original message in your e-mail replies and forwards. Or you can cut and paste the message yourself. Either way, use this feature with care. Save your readers' time by editing the original message and including only enough to refresh their memory about why you are sending the e-mail and how it addresses their specific needs.

Keeping your audience in mind, try to limit e-mail messages to one screen. Otherwise, include the most important information first, adding detail in descending order of importance. That way you'll be sure to get your point across as early as possible, in case your reader doesn't have the time or interest to finish reading your message.

Composing Your E-Mail Messages

E-mail can be as informal and casual as a conversation between old friends. But it can also emulate “snail mail” by using conventional business language, a respectful style, and a more formal format—such as a traditional greeting, formalized headings, and a formal closing and “signature.” As with any business communication, how formal you make your message depends on your audience and your purpose.

Before sending your e-mail message, know how to use your e-mail's address fields. When you enter more than one address in the To: field, you need to direct your
message to all of these people. Write the message as if you're talking to everyone at once. However, if you wish to talk to only one or two people while providing copies of your message to others, then you need to handle header information differently.

In the To: field, insert only the address(es) of the person(s) to whom you are actually speaking. Then by entering addresses in the Cc: (courtesy copy) field, you can send copies of your message to additional people, and everyone who receives your e-mail will be able to see who else received a copy of it. Or by entering addresses in the Bcc: (blind courtesy copy) field, you can send copies of your message to additional people without other recipients knowing—a practice considered unethical by some.

Compose your e-mail so that readers can follow it easily. Avoid lines that run off screen or wrap oddly by using the Enter key to limit lines to 80 characters (60 if e-mail will be forwarded). Also avoid styled text (boldface, italics), unless your receiver's system can read it.17 Write short, focused, logically organized paragraphs, using the composition tips discussed throughout this chapter.

Some e-mail old-timers insist that spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation take a back seat in cyberspace.18 But in business communication, e-mail needs to be as clear and as easy to understand as possible. Be sure to use correct spelling and proper grammar in these messages. Also remember to create informative subject lines and to personalize your message (see Figure 5–7).

**Create Informative Subject Lines**   Effective e-mail subject lines grab audience attention. When e-mail recipients are deciding which messages to read first, they look at who sent each message, they check the subject line, and then they may or may not scan the first few lines. A message with a blank subject line or a general one (such as “Question” or “Read This!”) will probably go unread and will perhaps be deleted.19

To capture your audience’s attention, make your subject line informative. Do more than just describe or classify message content. You have 25 to 40 characters to build interest with key words, quotations, directions, or questions:20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ineffective Subject Line</th>
<th>Effective Subject Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July sales figures</td>
<td>Send figures for July sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomorrow's meeting</td>
<td>Bring consultant's report to Friday's meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing report</td>
<td>Need budget for marketing report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee parking</td>
<td>Revised resurfacing schedule for parking lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status report</td>
<td>Warehouse remodeling is on schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are exchanging multiple e-mails with someone on the same topic, be sure to periodically modify the subject line of your message to reflect the revised message content. Most e-mail programs will copy the subject line when you press the Reply key. However, multiple messages with the same subject line can be confusing. In fact, newer messages may have evolved so that they now have nothing to do with the original topic. Modifying the subject line with each new response can make it easier not only for your audience but also for you to locate a message at a later date.

**Personalize Your Messages**   Adding a greeting to your e-mail message makes it more personal. Naturally, whether you use a formal greeting (Dear Professor Ingersol) or a more casual one (Hi Marty) depends on your audience and your purpose. Your closing and signature also personalize your e-mail message. In most cases, select simple closings, such as Thanks or Regards, rather than traditional business closings such as Sincerely yours. However, you may want to use a more formal closing for international e-mail.

Be considerate and correct when using address fields (To:, Cc:, Bcc:).

Consider your audience’s ease of reading your e-mail on screen.

Grab audience attention by making your subject line informative.

Change subject lines in multiple e-mails on the same topic.

Use a greeting to make your e-mail more personal.
FIGURE 5–7
Effective On-Screen E-Mail Message

For your signature, you can simply type your name on a separate line. Or you may want to use a signature file, a short identifier that can include your name, company, postal address, fax number, other e-mail addresses, and sometimes even a short quotation or thought. Some business writers believe you should include only your contact information. Once you create a signature file, you can save it in your mail program and add it to e-mail messages without retyping it. You can also use a digital copy of your handwritten signature, which is becoming acceptable as legal proof in
CHECKLIST: Composing E-mail with Style

Create the Right Tone
✓ Don’t use cyberspace shorthand or offbeat acronyms such as bcnu (“be seeing you”), fwiw (“for what it’s worth”), and obo (“or best offer”).
✓ Avoid smileys and other gimmicks—rely on the strength of your writing to convey your message in the appropriate tone.
✓ Use exclamation points sparingly, if at all.

Cultivate Good Communication Skills
✓ Keep subject lines truthful—be careful you don’t stretch the truth to grab attention.
✓ Limit the scope—each e-mail message should have only one purpose.
✓ Craft tight, meaningful messages by covering only what is necessary.
✓ Write short, direct messages that include all the relevant information.
✓ Rely on short, concise sentences to make your message easier to read on screen.
✓ Aim for clarity over hype—don’t include thinly disguised marketing material.

Make E-Mail Easy to Read
✓ Use a plain typeface (Times New Roman, Courier, Arial) with a 10- to 12-point font size.
✓ Don’t yell—avoid writing messages in all uppercase letters.
✓ Don’t whisper—avoid writing messages in all lowercase letters.
✓ Use ample white space—avoid great amounts of text; separate paragraphs with a blank line.
✓ Use bullets and headings for clarity and ease of reading.
✓ Avoid double spacing.

Make Responsible, Careful Replies
✓ Avoid carelessly hitting the “reply to all” button.
✓ When you do choose to “reply to all,” do so wisely.
✓ Keep subject lines relevant—modify them after a few rounds of replies.
✓ Slow down—avoid instantaneous responses and think about what you want to say.
✓ Reread your message to ensure it will convey exactly what you want.
✓ Carefully edit content, completeness, fluency, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
✓ Correct misspelled proper names.

Handle Attachments Appropriately
✓ Ask permission to send long attachments—downloads may impose on recipients’ time and could even choke their mailbox so that no other messages can be delivered.
✓ Use as few resources as possible by compressing attachments with WinZip or Netzip.
✓ In the body of your message, include a synopsis of lengthy attachments.
✓ Mention the attachment file name in your e-mail message so that recipients can locate it.
✓ Don’t forget to attach your attachment.
✓ Send virus-free attachments (for short messages, cut and paste attachment contents directly into your e-mail message).

business transactions, especially when accompanied by a date stamp, which is automatically inserted by your mail program.

For an overview of e-mail strategies and etiquette, consult the “Checklist: Composing E-mail with Style.”

WRITING EFFECTIVELY FOR THE WEB

The web is unlike any other medium you may be required to write for. People who use the web want to get information efficiently. So you need to grab their attention and make your main points immediately. When writing for the web, you still follow all the guidelines discussed throughout this textbook. But you also need to address some new challenges: understanding how web audiences differ from other readers, developing a well-organized hyperlink structure, and modifying your style and format.
Web readers are impatient to get the information they need.

The web is physically demanding, nonlinear, interactive, and three-dimensional.

Understand the Unique Needs and Expectations of Web Readers

The rapid pace of business today and the sheer amount of information available have made business readers impatient. As these readers turn to the Internet for information, they develop needs and expectations that are unique to the web environment. Reading online is

- **Cursory.** Racing to digest mountains of information, online readers hunger for instant gratification. They have hundreds of millions of pages to choose from—each page competing for attention. Thus, these web readers tend to move from webpage to webpage, seeking the most appealing segments of each one in as little time as possible. This skim-and-scan style demands extreme brevity. Web writers must hook readers quickly, write concisely, and get directly to the point.

- **Difficult.** Reading speeds are about 25 percent slower on a monitor than on paper. Screen settings and quality vary, but even using the best monitors, people find reading from a screen to be tiring on the eyes. Moreover, one page of written information can take up multiple screens on the web, forcing readers to scroll through a document.

- **Nonlinear and interactive.** Although most readers move through a printed document in a fairly linear path, web readers choose their own path and move about a document in any order they please. This nonlinear interactivity is possible because of hyperlinks—the in-text tags that let readers click on a screen element and be instantly transported to information that may be on the same webpage, on a different page in the same website, on a page in a different website, or just about anywhere on the web.

- **Three-dimensional.** The ability to jump into, out of, and all around a document gives the web its three-dimensional format. Consider the Orbitz site. Visitors may arrive from search engines, from the sites of Orbitz alliance partners (such as United, American, or Northwest Airlines), or from online newspaper articles,

Regardless of how or why visitors arrive at the Orbitz homepage, their initial evaluation of this site determines whether they will explore further or go somewhere else.
financial sites, travel sites, and so on. Once visitors arrive (at a page that may or may not be the site’s homepage), they decide whether to visit other pages on this site, return to the site later, or go elsewhere.24

Being able to access information from all directions is a powerful benefit for readers. But it also makes it difficult for them to judge the depth and scope of a website. Moreover, cyber content is always changing. So effective web writers help readers along by developing a hyperlink structure that is well organized.

**Develop a Well-Organized Hyperlink Structure**

When writing for the web, you must incorporate the effective writing skills discussed in this book, but that’s not all. You must also coordinate your words with your navigational elements. Your goal is to help readers either find the information they want or bypass the information that is of no interest to them. The following tips will help you develop a well-organized hyperlink structure:

- **Plan your navigation first.** Incorporate navigation as an integral part of your written material, not as an afterthought or an element to be left to a designer or developer.25 Think about who your readers are and what paths they will follow to get key information.26 Decide up front how much information you will actually write and how much your readers will access via links to other sites. This knowledge helps you avoid writing information that your readers can obtain elsewhere.

- **Let your readers be in control.** Help readers move about your document in a smooth, intuitive fashion. Be sure that each step on your navigational path makes sense and leads naturally to the next step. Also, avoid forcing readers to follow a specific path. Let them explore on their own. Consider including a search engine, a site map (an outline of your site’s layout that helps readers understand the structure and depth of your site), and an index or a table of contents (placed at the top, side, or bottom margin of your webpage).

- **Write effective links.** Links can be words, graphics, phrases, or even complete sentences. You will most likely use a mixture of textual and graphical hyperlinks. If you choose to use graphical links, be careful not to overdo it. Including too many images can slow down the loading time of your webpages, and you need to accommodate those readers who conserve downloading time by turning off the graphic capabilities in their web browsers.

**Modify Your Message Style and Format**

Once you have established a navigational structure for your message, begin composing it in a style and format suitable for the web. Even though a good design is important for effective web messages, substantive content is what drives a site’s success. One of the most common errors found on corporate websites is lackluster copy—messages written without interesting and specific details.27

**Modify Your Message for Global Audiences**

Web material speaks to everyone around the globe, including people who may speak English only as a second language or not at all. Generally use a lighter, less formal tone—but without being chatty. Also, infuse as much of your organization’s or your own personality into your text as possible. But be careful to avoid clever, humorous, or jargon-filled phrases that can be misunderstood by readers from other cultures.

If many of your visitors are overseas, it may pay to have your site and material “localized” to reflect not only a region’s native language but local norms, weights, measures, time, currency, and so on. Much more than simply translating your material for all the interest in graphics, the web is content-driven. The web is a global medium.
into another language, localization makes your site and material appear as if it were originally developed in that language.

This process demands a keen understanding of your target audience so that you can adapt your style and tone, translate your text, include appropriate design elements (colors, icons, imagery), and develop a navigation system that works for your target culture. For example, local teams would know that the picture of a raised flag on a mailbox indicates mail waiting in the United States but has no meaning for many in Europe and Asia. Such teams would also understand that, in U.S. address books, names are sorted alphabetically; but in some Asian countries, names must be sorted according to the number of keystrokes.28

**Break Your Information into Chunks** Because reading online is so difficult, you need to help web readers scan and absorb information more easily. Break text into self-contained, screen-sized chunks (or pages) that may be accessed in any order. Each chunk includes several paragraphs that are brief, are focused, and stick to a single theme.

These theme-related chunks make up one webpage, but that webpage may not necessarily be viewable all at once on your computer screen (readers may have to scroll the screen to see your entire message). Breaking information into manageable chunks and then linking them to other chunks allows you to provide comprehensive coverage in a concise way. Consider these tips:

- **Make the content of each webpage independent.** Don’t assume that readers approach your material in a linear order, as they might in a book. Present your message so that readers can understand the subject matter of a webpage regardless of the navigational path they followed to get there.

- **Don’t force subdivisions.** Be careful not to make your readers tunnel through too many links to get the information they need. If the information can be succinctly presented in a short paragraph or on a single webpage, hyperlinks aren’t necessary.

- **Reduce the length of your text.** Online text should be at least 50 percent shorter than printed text. Try to limit your web articles to one computer screen. But if doing so is impossible, try not to exceed three full screens of text.

- **Handle longer documents with care.** If your written material is longer than three screens and you cannot break down your concept any further, do not randomly divide it into several webpages. Illogical interruptions in a single piece of linear material can irritate readers.30

- **Provide a printable version of longer documents.** Most readers prefer to print out lengthy documents and read them offline. Provide a print-ready version of your document that readers can link to. Indicate the file size so that readers can gauge how long it will take to download. Also, put your URL in the document title so that the source will print on the page.

**Adopt an Inverted Pyramid Style** Make sure your online messages get right to the point and give your readers all the information they need in as little time as possible. One way to do so is to write your material using an inverted pyramid style. Journalists have long used this inverse approach—writing the main idea first and providing the details later. Then readers can stop at any time and still get the most important parts of the article.

The inverted pyramid becomes even more important on the web, since users don’t like to scroll and frequently read only the top portion of an article. This inverted style allows you to place your most important information above the scroll. As with newspapers, this top-level space is prime property, so use it economically. The Wall Street Journal, for example, reserves its front page for short summaries of articles that are discussed in detail on interior pages.
On the Job:  
SOLVING COMMUNICATION DILEMMAS AT BARNES & NOBLE

At Barnes & Noble, Mary Ellen Keating is responsible for messages to customers, authors, shareholders, members of the community, booksellers, managers, and employees. As part of Keating’s team, you help prepare both internal and external messages. Using the principles outlined in this chapter, handle each of the following situations to the best of your ability. Be prepared to explain your choices.

1. CEO Steve Riggio has asked your team to send an e-mail message to store managers, asking whether the Readers’ Advantage program is affecting sales. Which of the following is the best subject line for this message?
   a. Readers’ Advantage.
   b. Changes in recent sales.
   c. Need sales feedback on Readers’ Advantage.
   d. Help us evaluate effects of the Readers’ Advantage program on sales.

2. Which of the following approaches is the best organization for this message?
   a. Direct approach:
      • Introduce the main point of the message. (Please reply to the following questions about the effectiveness of the Readers’ Advantage program.)
      • Give readers a reason to comply with your request. (Your feedback will help us decide whether to continue with the program, alter it, or discontinue it.)
      • Give readers a deadline for responding. (Please reply before July 15.)
   b. Indirect approach:
      • Introduce yourself. (I have recently joined Mary Ellen Keating’s communication team.)
      • Explain Riggio’s assignment to your readers. (Steve Riggio has asked our team to send you an e-mail message.)
      • Give readers a reason to comply with your request. (Your feedback will help us decide whether to continue with the program, alter it, or discontinue it.)
      • Introduce the main point of the message. (Please reply to the following questions about the effectiveness of the Readers’ Advantage program.)
      • Give readers a deadline for responding. (Please reply before July 15.)
   c. Persuasive approach:
      • Get readers thinking about the program. (Is the Readers’ Advantage program working? You be the judge.)
      • Tell readers why you’re writing. (We’re polling all store managers for their reaction to the program. Cast your vote today.)
      • Give readers a sense of power. (Is it thumbs up or thumbs down on Readers’ Advantage?)
      • Introduce the main point of the message. (Please reply to the following questions about whether the Readers’ Advantage program is working.)
      • Give readers a deadline for responding. (Please reply before July 15.)

3. Which of the following best conveys the appropriate sentence structure for your e-mail message?
   a. We need to know whether you have noticed, of the specific books you’ve featured during the past six months, any increase in sales.
   b. During the past six months, have your featured books shown any increase in sales?
   c. Have sales of your featured books increased or decreased during the past six months?
   d. We need to know whether, of the specific books you’ve featured during the past six months, you have noticed any increase or decrease in the sales.

4. One of the company’s buyers has drafted a letter to an author who inquired about shelf space in B&N’s reference section. The self-published author is a professor of herpetology who has written a book titled *Reptiles of North America*. Keating has asked you to critique the following letter:

   As you are undoubtedly aware, Barnes & Noble is the largest and most profitable bookselling chain in the country. Our reputation with publishers is excellent, so rest assured we deal just as fairly with individual authors.
   We are currently expanding the reference sections in some of our superstores. Accordingly, we may be able to find you a bit of shelf space for your newly self-published reference, *Reptiles of North America*.
   Of course, you’ll need to send us an examination copy, so that we might determine whether your book appeals to our customers. If your book meets Barnes & Noble standards, you can expect to receive an order from us forthwith.
   Please ship your book promptly.

   a. The letter is fine the way it is—businesslike and efficient.
   b. The tone of the letter is condescending, but contents are well organized.
   c. The tone is appropriate, but the organization is poor.
   d. Both the tone and the organization need improvement.
Learning Objectives Checkup

To assess your understanding of the principles in this chapter, read each learning objective and study the accompanying exercises. For fill-in items, write the missing text in the blank provided; for multiple choice items, circle the letter of the correct answer. You can check your responses against the answer key on page AK-1.

Objective 5.1: Cite four of the most common organization mistakes made by communicators.

1. Which of the following is not a common organizational mistake made by business communicators?
   a. Getting to the point too quickly
   b. Getting ideas mixed up
   c. Including irrelevant material
   d. Leaving out necessary information

Objective 5.2: Explain why good organization is important to both the communicator and the audience.

2. Good organization is important to you as a communicator because it
   a. Saves you time
   b. Saves you work
   c. Helps you delegate
   d. Does all of the above

3. Good organization helps your audience by
   a. Providing them with more information than they really need
   b. Dispensing with diplomacy
   c. Saving them time
   d. Doing all of the above

Objective 5.3: Summarize the process for organizing business messages effectively.

4. The first step in organizing your business messages is to
   a. Prepare an outline
   b. Define the main idea
   c. Limit the scope
   d. Choose between the direct and indirect approaches

5. Which of the following is an example of the main idea for a business message?
   a. Advertising budget
   b. To persuade the board to increase the advertising budget
   c. The current advertising budget is not comparable to the budgets of competitors and is not meeting our advertising needs
   d. All of the above are examples of main ideas.

6. If your business message will be a long one, you
   a. Can increase your number of major points up to a maximum of ten
   b. Should have one major point for each 10 minutes of a speech or each 5 pages of a report
   c. Can have more than one main idea, each with several major points
   d. Should stick to having no more than five major points

7. When you are preparing a longer, more complex message, an outline
   a. Becomes indispensable

b. Should be replaced with an organization chart
   c. Will help you determine your main idea
   d. Should use numbers but not letters

8. When is it best to use the direct approach?
   a. When your message is nonroutine
   b. When your audience is likely to be receptive to your message
   c. Only when your message is brief
   d. When your audience is likely to resist your message

9. When writing a persuasive message, you should
   a. Leave supporting facts until the very end of the message
   b. Use the opening to catch the reader's attention
   c. Assume that your audience will be receptive to what you have to say
   d. Do all of the above

Objective 5.4: Discuss three ways of achieving a businesslike tone with a style that is clear and concise.

10. A good way to achieve a businesslike tone in your messages is to
   a. Use formal business terminology, such as “In re your letter of the 18th”
   b. Brag about your company
   c. Use a conversational style that is not intimate or chatty
   d. Use plenty of humor

11. Plain English is
   a. Never recommended when speaking with people for whom English is a second language
   b. A movement toward using “English only” in American businesses
   c. A way of writing and arranging technical materials to make them more understandable
   d. An attempt to keep writing at a fourth- or fifth-grade level

12. The passive voice
   a. Should never be used in business messages
   b. Should always be used in business messages
   c. Should be used if you want to make your messages more informal
   d. Is a good choice when you want to avoid attributing blame

Objective 5.5: Briefly describe how to select words that are not only correct but also effective.

13. Which of the following defines the connotative meaning of the word flag?
   a. A flag is a piece of material with a symbol of some kind sewn on it.
   b. A flag is a symbol of everything that a nation stands for.
   c. A flag is fabric on a pole used to mark a geographic spot.
   d. A flag is an object used to draw attention.

14. Which of the following is a concrete word?
   a. Little
   b. Mouse
   c. Species
   d. Kingdom
Objective 5.6: Discuss how to use sentence style for emphasis.
15. What is the most emphatic place to put a dependent clause?
   a. At the end of the sentence
   b. At the beginning of the sentence
   c. In the middle of the sentence
   d. It doesn’t really matter

Objective 5.7: List five ways to develop a paragraph and explain how boilerplates are used.
16. When developing a paragraph, keep in mind
   a. That you should stick to one method of development within a single paragraph
   b. That once you use one method of development, you should use that same method for all the paragraphs in a section
   c. That your choice of technique should take into account your subject, your intended audience, and your purpose
   d. All of the above

Objective 5.8: Explain how to capture audience attention and be more personal in e-mail messages.
17. To capture attention in your e-mail messages, be sure to
   a. Make your subject line longer than you would in a memo
   b. Avoid key words, quotations, directions, and questions
   c. Make your subject line informative
   d. Retain the same subject line in multiple e-mails on the same topic no matter how the content changes

18. Which of the following is not a good way to personalize your e-mail message?
   a. Select simple closings.
   b. Use a signature file.
   c. Add a greeting.
   d. Leave out all formal punctuation.

Objective 5.9: Describe how to develop a hyperlink structure, and tell how you modify your style and format for the web.
19. Which of the following will help you develop a well-organized hyperlink structure?
   a. Write all information completely before incorporating your navigation.
   b. Make sure each navigational step makes sense and leads naturally to the next step.
   c. Compel readers to follow the specific navigational path that you design.
   d. Use textual hyperlinks only.

20. Which of the following is not recommended when breaking information into theme-related chunks?
   a. Increase the length of your online text by 50 percent.
   b. Try not to force subdivisions.
   c. Provide a printable version of longer documents.
   d. Make the content of each webpage independent.

Apply Your Knowledge

1. When organizing the ideas for your business message, how can you be sure that what seems logical to you will also seem logical to your audience?
2. Would you use a direct or an indirect approach to ask employees to work overtime to meet an important deadline? Please explain.
3. Which approach would you use to let your boss know that you'll be out half a day this week to attend your father's funeral—direct or indirect? Why?
4. Select a short article from any print magazine or newspaper. Now rewrite the article in a format suitable for the web, using the techniques discussed in this chapter. Focus on writing only one webpage. Include some hyperlinks on that page and in your article, but you need not develop material for the linked page.
5. Ethical Choices Do you think that using an indirect approach to cushion bad news is manipulative? Discuss the ethical issues in your answer.

Practice Your Knowledge

DOCUMENT FOR ANALYSIS
A writer is working on an insurance information brochure and is having trouble grouping the ideas logically into an outline. Prepare the outline, paying attention to appropriate subordination of ideas. If necessary, rewrite phrases to give them a more consistent sound.

ACCIDENT PROTECTION INSURANCE PLAN
- Inexpensive coverage—only pennies a day
- Benefit of $100,000 for accidental death on common carrier
- Benefit of $100 a day for hospitalization as result of motor vehicle or common carrier accident
- Benefit of $20,000 for accidental death in motor vehicle accident
- Individual coverage—only $17.85 per quarter; family coverage—just $26.85 per quarter
- No physical exam or health questions
- Convenient payment—billed quarterly
- Guaranteed acceptance for all applicants
- No individual rate increases
- Free, no-obligation examination period
- Cash paid in addition to any other insurance carried
- Covers accidental death when riding as fare-paying passenger on public transportation, including buses, trains, jets, ships, trolleys, subways, or any other common carrier
- Covers accidental death in motor vehicle accidents occurring while driving or riding in or on automobile, truck, camper, motor home, or nonmotorized bicycle
Exercises

For live links to all websites discussed in this chapter, visit this text's website at www.prenhall.com/thill. Just log on and select Chapter 5, and click on “Student Resources.” Locate the page or the URL related to the material in the text. For the “Learning More on the Web” exercises, you’ll also find navigational directions. Click on the live link to the site.

5.1 Message Organization: Structuring Your Message
Using the GNC letter on page 128 (Figure 5–1), draw an organizational chart similar to the one shown in Figure 5–5 (see page 132). Fill in the main idea, the major points, and the evidence provided in this letter. (Note: Your diagram may be smaller than the one provided in Figure 5–5.)

5.2 Message Organization: Limiting Scope
Suppose you are preparing to recommend that top management install a new heating system (using the cogeneration process). The following information is in your files. Eliminate topics that aren’t essential; then arrange the other topics so that your report will give top managers a clear understanding of the heating system and a balanced, concise justification for installing it.

- History of the development of the cogeneration heating process
- Scientific credentials of the developers of the process
- Risks assumed in using this process
- Your plan for installing the equipment in your building
- Stories about its successful use in comparable facilities
- Specifications of the equipment that would be installed
- Plans for disposing of the old heating equipment
- Advantages and disadvantages of using the new process
- Detailed 10-year cost projections
- Estimates of the time needed to phase in the new system
- Alternative systems that management might wish to consider

5.3 Message Organization: Choosing the Approach
Indicate whether the direct or the indirect approach would be best in each of the following situations; then briefly explain why. Would any of these messages be inappropriate for e-mail? Explain.

a. A letter asking when next year’s automobiles will be put on sale locally
b. A letter from a recent college graduate requesting a letter of recommendation from a former instructor
c. A letter turning down a job applicant
d. An announcement that because of high air-conditioning costs, the plant temperature will be held at 78 degrees during the summer
e. A final request to settle a delinquent debt

5.4 Message Organization: Drafting Persuasive Messages
If you were trying to persuade people to take the following actions, how would you organize your argument?

a. You want your boss to approve your plan for hiring two new people
b. You want to be hired for a job
c. You want to be granted a business loan
d. You want to collect a small amount from a regular customer whose account is slightly past due
e. You want to collect a large amount from a customer whose account is seriously past due

5.5 Message Composition: Controlling Style
Rewrite the following letter to Mrs. Betty Crandall (1597 Church Street, Grants Pass, OR 97526) so that it conveys a helpful, personal, and interested tone:

We have your letter of recent date to our Ms. Dobson. Owing to the fact that you neglected to include the size of the dress you ordered, please be advised that no shipment of your order was made, but the aforementioned shipment will occur at such time as we are in receipt of the aforementioned information.

5.6 Message Composition: Selecting Words
Write a concrete phrase for each of these vague phrases:

a. Sometime this spring
b. A substantial saving
c. A large number attended
d. Increased efficiency
e. Expanded the work area

5.7 Message Composition: Selecting Words
List terms that are stronger than the following:

a. Ran after
b. Seasonal ups and downs
c. Bright
d. Suddenly rises
e. Moves forward

5.8 Message Composition: Selecting Words
As you rewrite these sentences, replace the clichés with fresh, personal expressions:

a. Being a jack-of-all-trades, Dave worked well in his new selling job.
b. Moving Leslie into the accounting department, where she was literally a fish out of water, was like putting a square peg into a round hole, if you get my drift.
c. I knew she was at death’s door, but I thought the doctor would pull her through.
d. Movies aren’t really my cup of tea; as far as I am concerned, they can’t hold a candle to a good book.
e. It’s a dog-eat-dog world out there in the rat race of the asphalt jungle.
5.9 **Message Composition: Selecting Words** Suggest short, simple words to replace each of the following:

a. Inaugurate
b. Terminate
c. Utilize
d. Anticipate
e. Assistance
f. Endeavor
g. Ascertain
h. Procure
i. Consume
j. Advise
k. Alteration
l. Forwarded
m. Fabricate
n. Nevertheless
o. Substantial

5.10 **Message Composition: Selecting Words** Write up-to-date versions of these phrases; write none if you think there is no appropriate substitute:

a. As per your instructions
b. Attached herewith
c. In lieu of
d. In reply I wish to state
e. Please be advised that

5.11 **Message Composition: Creating Sentences** Suppose that end-of-term frustrations have produced this e-mail message to Professor Anne Brewer from a student who believes he should have received a B in his accounting class. If this message were recast into three or four clear sentences, the teacher might be more receptive to the student’s argument. Rewrite the message to show how you would improve it:

I think that I was unfairly awarded a C in your accounting class this term, and I am asking you to change the grade to a B. It was a difficult term. I don't get any money from home, and I have to work mornings at the Pancake House (as a cook), so I had to rush to make your class, and those two times that I missed class were because they wouldn't let me off work because of special events at the Pancake House (unlike some other students who just take off when they choose). On the midterm examination, I originally got a 75 percent, but you said in class that there were two different ways to answer the third question and that you would change the grades of students who used the “optimal cost” method and had been counted off 6 points for doing this. I don't think that you took this into account, because I got 80 percent on the final, which is clearly a B. Anyway, whatever you decide, I just want to tell you that I really enjoyed this class, and I thank you for making accounting so interesting.

5.12 **Message Composition: Creating Sentences** Rewrite each sentence so that it is active rather than passive:

a. The raw data are submitted to the data processing division by the sales representative each Friday.

b. High profits are publicized by management.
c. The policies announced in the directive were implemented by the staff.
d. Our computers are serviced by the Santee Company.
e. The employees were represented by Janet Hogan.

5.13 **Message Composition: Writing Paragraphs** In the following paragraph, identify the topic sentence and the related sentences (those that support the idea of the topic sentence):

Each year, McDonald’s sponsors the All-American Band, made up of two high school students from each state. The band marches in Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade in New York City and the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena. Franchisees are urged to join their local Chamber of Commerce, United Way, American Legion, and other bastions of All-Americana. McDonald’s tries hard to project an image of almost a charitable organization. Local outlets sponsor campaigns on fire prevention, bicycle safety, and litter cleanup, with advice from Hamburger Central on how to extract the most publicity from their efforts.

Now add a topic sentence to this paragraph:

Your company’s image includes what a person sees, hears, and experiences in relation to your firm. Every business letter you write is therefore important. The quality of the letterhead and typing, the position of the copy on the page, the format, the kind of typeface used, and the color of the typewriter ribbon—all these factors play a part in creating an impression of you and your company in the mind of the person you are writing to.

5.14 **Teamwork** Working with four other students, divide the following five topics among yourselves and each of you write one paragraph on his or her selected topic. Be sure each student uses a different technique when writing his or her paragraph: One student should use the illustration technique, one the comparison or contrast technique, one a discussion of cause and effect, one the classification technique, and one a discussion of problem and solution. Then exchange paragraphs within the team and pick out the main idea and general purpose of the paragraph. Was everyone able to correctly identify the main idea and purpose? If not, suggest how the paragraph might be rewritten for clarity.

a. Types of cameras (or dogs or automobiles) available for sale
b. Advantages and disadvantages of eating at fast-food restaurants
c. Finding that first full-time job
d. Good qualities of my car (or house, or apartment, or neighborhood)
e. How to make a dessert recipe (or barbecue a steak or make coffee)

5.15 **Internet** Visit the Securities and Exchange Commission’s (SEC) plain-English website at
www.sec.gov, click on “Online Publications,” and review the online handbook. In one or two sentences, summarize what the SEC means by the phrase “plain English.” Now read the SEC’s online advice about how to invest in mutual funds. Does this document follow the SEC’s plain-English guidelines? Can you suggest any improvements to organization, words, sentences, or paragraphs?

5.16 Message Organization: Transitional Elements Add transitional elements to the following sentences to improve the flow of ideas. (Note: You may need to eliminate or add some words to smooth out your sentences.)

a. Steve Case saw infinite possibilities in cyberspace. Steve Case was determined to turn his vision into reality. The techies scoffed at his strategy of building a simple Internet service for ordinary people. Case doggedly pursued his dream. He analyzed other online services. He assessed the needs of his customers. He responded to their desires for an easier way to access information over the Internet. In 1992, Steve Case named his company America Online (AOL). Critics predicted the company’s demise. By the end of the century, AOL was a profitable powerhouse.

b. Facing some of the toughest competitors in the world, Harley-Davidson had to make some changes. The company introduced new products. Harley’s management team set out to rebuild the company’s production process. New products were coming to market and the company was turning a profit. Harley’s quality standards were not on par with those of its foreign competitors. Harley’s costs were still among the highest in the industry. Harley made a U-turn and restructured the company’s organizational structure. Harley’s efforts have paid off.

c. Whether you’re indulging in a doughnut in New York or California, Krispy Kreme wants you to enjoy the same delicious taste with every bite. The company maintains consistent product quality by carefully controlling every step of the production process. Krispy Kreme tests all raw ingredients against established quality standards. Every delivery of wheat flour is sampled and measured for its moisture content and protein levels. Krispy Kreme blends the ingredients. Krispy Kreme tests the doughnut mix for quality. Krispy Kreme delivers the mix to its stores. Krispy Kreme knows that it takes more than a quality mix to produce perfect doughnuts all the time. The company supplies its stores with everything they need to produce premium doughnuts—mix, icings, fillings, equipment—you name it.

5.17 Ethical Choices More and more unhappy employees and customers are launching websites to write negative information about companies. Log on to Untied.com at www.untied.com, for example, and read what some customers and employees have to say about United Airlines. Do you think it is ethical for employees to criticize their employers in a public venue such as the web?

Expand Your Knowledge

LEARNING MORE ON THE WEB

Compose a Better Business Message owl.english.purdue.edu

At Purdue’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) you’ll find tools to help you improve your business messages. For advice on composing written messages, for help with grammar, and for referrals to other information sources, you’d be wise to visit this site. Purdue’s OWL offers online services and an introduction to Internet search tools. You can also download a variety of handouts on writing skills. Check out the resources at the OWL homepage and learn how to write a professional business message.

ACTIVITIES

To reinforce what you’ve learned in this chapter about writing a business message, log on to Purdue’s OWL.

1. Explain why positive wording in a message is more effective than negative wording. Why should you be concerned about the position of good news or bad news in your written message?

2. What six factors of tone should you consider when conveying your message to your audience?

3. What points should you include in the close of your business message? Why?

EXPLORE THE WEB ON YOUR OWN

Review these chapter-related websites on your own to learn more about writing business messages.

1. Write it right by paying attention to these writing tips, grammar pointers, style suggestions, and reference sources at www.webgrammar.com.

2. Looking for the perfect word? Try Word Play at www.wolinskyweb.com/word.htm, where you’ll find links to more than 30 helpful sites, including Acronym Finder, Book of Clichés, Oxymorons, Rhyming Dictionary, and Word Frequency Indexer.

Learn Interactively

INTERACTIVE STUDY GUIDE
Visit the Companion Website at www.prenhall.com/thill. For Chapter 5, take advantage of the interactive “Study Guide” to test your chapter knowledge. Get instant feedback on whether you need additional studying. Read the “Current Events” articles to get the latest on chapter topics, and complete the exercises as specified by your instructor.

This site offers a variety of additional resources: The “Research Area” helps you locate a wealth of information to use in course assignments. You can even send a message to online research experts, who will help you find exactly the information you need. The “Study Hall” helps you succeed in this course. “Talk in the Hall” lets you leave messages and meet new friends online. If you have a question, you can “Ask the Tutor.” And to get a better grade in this course, you can find more help at “Writing Skills,” “Study Skills,” and “Study Tips.”

PEAK PERFORMANCE GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS
To improve your skill with adverbs, visit this text’s website at www.prenhall.com/thill. Click “Peak Performance Grammar and Mechanics,” then click “Adverbs.” Take the Pretest to determine whether you have any weak areas. Review those areas in the Refresher Course, and take the Follow-Up Test to check your grasp of adverbs. For advanced practice, take the Advanced Test. Finally, for additional reinforcement, go to the “Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage” section that follows, and complete those exercises.

Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage

The following exercises help you improve your knowledge of and power over English grammar, mechanics, and usage. Turn to the “Handbook of Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage” at the end of this textbook and review all of Section 1.5 (Adverbs). Then look at the following 10 items. Underline the preferred choice within each set of parentheses. (Answers to these exercises appear on page AK-3.)

1. Their performance has been (good/well).
2. I (sure/surely) do not know how to help you.
3. He feels (sick/sickly) again today.
4. Customs dogs are chosen because they smell (good/well).
5. The redecorated offices look (good/well).
6. Which of the two programs computes (more fast, faster)?
7. Of the two we have in stock, this model is the (best, better) designed.
8. He doesn’t seem to have (any, none).
9. That machine is scarcely (never, ever) used.
10. They (can, can’t) hardly get replacement parts for this equipment (any, no) more.

For additional exercises focusing on adjectives and adverbs, go to www.prenhall.com/thill and select “Handbook of Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage Practice Sessions.”