

Writing Routine Letters, Memos and Emails

CHAPTER

8

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

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| 8.1 | Decide what information needs to be included in routine messages and what should be left out | 8.2 | Compose subject lines that provide an accurate description of the contents of a message | 8.3 | Structure routine messages to begin with a key idea followed by necessary supporting details | 8.4 | Format email messages, letters, and memos to follow standard business conventions | 8.5 | Write clear, courteous email messages that are sent only to the appropriate readers |
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THE COST OF COMMUNICATION

An article in the *Globe and Mail* estimated that if a \$40 000-a-year employee spent two hours a day reading and writing email, the annual cost would be \$9000. The writer noted that both the \$40 000 salary and the two daily hours spent communicating were probably conservative examples.¹ Communication is expensive.

The cost of communication is undeniable, but it is an expense that most businesses consider worthwhile. What is more, good communication skills can provide a valuable boost to your career. An article in the journal *Supervision* described how one man's career progressed over five years from a low-level supervisory job in the computer department to a management position that paid three times his original salary. The author attributed this meteoric rise to the man's carefully prepared presentations, which improved his image as “a resident communicator” and earned him a reputation as the department problem solver.²

The era we live in is often called the Information Age, largely because the explosive growth in computers has made information a valuable product and communication a useful tool. The cost of communication comes both from the 25 percent of their day³ that people devote to managing their written communications and from the supporting infrastructure: hardware, software, networks, printers, and paper.

Learning how to fine-tune routine communications—letters, memos, and emails—can be invaluable to your career.

ISSUES

in Communication

The Dream of the Paperless Office

The dream of the paperless office was around long before the first computer was introduced. More than a century ago, inventor Thomas Edison predicted that his phonograph would allow office workers to record their words

instead of writing them down on paper.⁴ The phonograph went on to achieve success as an entertainment device, but it was never considered a practical tool for the office. For most types of office communication, reading is faster and more efficient than listening.

During the 1970s, the increased use of computer technology gave rise to numerous predictions about the declining role of paper in the modern office.⁵ Such predictions have a logical basis. Paper is expensive to produce, bulky to store, and awkward to transport.

Nevertheless, such predictions have not become reality.

PROLIFERATION OF PRINTING

Paper is not disappearing. Walk into any office in the country and you will see numerous printers, photocopiers, filing cabinets, staplers, and all the other tools used to process paper. Our volume of paper use has not declined either. World office paper consumption almost doubled between 1980 and 1998.⁶



Paper remains a common sight in almost every office—in some more than others.

With computers, the internet, and email, people are now reading and writing more at work than ever before. A study conducted for Lexmark found that 40 percent of workers in small- to medium-sized businesses print correspondence that is received electronically. Two-thirds of all information created is printed at some point.⁷

TAKE IT FURTHER

Covering the Country in Paper

In 2003, Canadians consumed 91.4 kilograms of paper per person. This is almost 20 000 pages for each person, enough to cover an Olympic swimming pool.⁸

Canada is one of the world's leading producers of paper, yet the paper industry is in trouble. Should people be increasing their use of paper products to support the industry? ■

People often prefer paper when composing, editing, and reviewing documents because it allows them to pencil in quick comments and annotations. People also often prefer to deliver paper copies of completed reports, partly because of the increased feelings of security that come with a tangible product, and partly so that they can answer

questions and maintain a more personal relationship with their readers.⁹

The rising consumption of paper does not mean that people and organizations are rebelling against electronic information. Far from it. Businesses are bypassing paper for many routine transactions. More and more employers pay their employees through electronic direct deposits rather than the pay envelopes filled with cash that were used a generation ago or the paycheques used a decade ago.

TAKE IT FURTHER

The Paperless Office in Canada

The widespread increase of computers that began in the early 1980s sparked predictions of “the paperless office,” in which all information would be transmitted electronically. Instead, Canada’s consumption of printing and writing paper more than doubled between 1983 and 2003; Canada Post deliveries grew by 60 percent during the same period.¹⁰

Assuming that email and electronic bill payments have reduced Canada Post’s volume, how do you account for the net increase? ■

INCREASING USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Email is used heavily. One study says that the typical American spends about half an hour each workday processing email—about ten incoming and five outgoing messages. About 15 percent of workers process more than 50 emails a day, and 4 percent spend more than four hours a day doing email.¹¹ When email was new, and a novelty to many people, it was a routine for many people to print out all the messages that they received—perhaps one or two a week.



Paper will always have a use around the office.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Email: An Investment in Time

Another study estimated that, in 2006, people in business spent 26 percent of each workday reading and writing email.¹²

Do you think that email helps people use their time efficiently? ■

Many North Americans use scanning technology to process information that originated on paper. Documents can be digitized and stored electronically, usually as PDF (portable document format) files. An ever-increasing proportion of most college and university libraries consist of digitized journal articles stored in electronic databases. In offices, blueprints, reports, research articles, and other company records can all be stored this way, saving space and improving efficiency.

THE PERSISTENCE OF PAPER

Not all documents lend themselves to electronic transmission and storage, though. For now, contracts and documents requiring original signatures will continue to be printed. People resist having their personal notes saved for posterity, out of fear that their rough work will be misinterpreted or subpoenaed for court cases. The paperless office is unlikely to become a reality any time soon, but the way everyone uses paper will continue to evolve.

Individuals can make a big difference in the volume of paper being used by paying attention to their own printing habits. People are relying more on printers and less on photocopiers, which indicates that they are

printing documents on an individual basis rather than making multiple copies for distribution. (Between 1988 and 1993, the number of photocopiers in use around the world rose by 5 percent, while the number of office printers jumped by 600 percent.¹³)

If people can choose to print a document, in many cases they can also choose to view it electronically instead.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAPERLESS OFFICE

Undeniably, both computer use and paper consumption have been increasing. This has two implications for students:

1. Being able to write routine documents has increased in importance and will continue to do so.
2. People are growing increasingly alarmed at the costs associated with paper consumption.

Thomas Edison's vision of an office driven by recorded voice messages was never realized. However, the foremost technological innovator of our time, Bill Gates, has predicted an increase in the sophistication of speech recognition tools that allow people to dictate directly into their computers while the program converts their speech to text.¹⁴ Widespread use of this technology will reduce keyboarding time but generally not affect the writing process. The skills required to organize and plan routine messages will likely change very little.

If speech recognition does make it easier to produce documents, it will likely bring about a further explosion

in the amount of written material produced (with further implications for the amount of paper used).

Companies have introduced some measures to reduce paper use (such as by increasing the use of web-based documents), but individuals will find ways to reduce their own use of paper.

TIPS FOR REDUCING PAPER USE

The following ideas can help you make a difference:

- Learn to edit onscreen. Many word-processing programs come with tools to improve the writing process: outlining features that assist planning; spell and grammar checkers that help with proofreading; and reviewing tools that facilitate collaboration.
- Decide whether a printed version is necessary. Some media, such as visual presentations and documents containing hyperlinks, work better electronically.
- When printing is necessary, maximize the use of space. Reduce the size of margins and fonts. Print on both sides of a sheet and single space documents if possible. If you must print slides from a visual presentation, put six slides on a page.
- When printing revisions to a document, check to see which pages have changed, and print only those.

DISCUSSION

1. **Have you noticed paper being wasted at your educational institution? Who are the biggest culprits: students, instructors, or administrators? Give some examples. Consider how people at your college or university could be influenced to reduce paper usage.**

2. Why has the number of printers worldwide soared while photocopier installations have remained almost constant?
3. What advantages are there to reading from a computer screen over reading from paper? What are the advantages of reading from paper?
4. Voice recognition software allows a person to dictate into a microphone and have the computer convert it to text. What impact could widespread use of that technology have on people's writing?

THE PURPOSE OF ROUTINE MESSAGES

Routine messages keep business operations going. Most routine business messages fit into one of these three categories:

1. Providing information: “Our meeting will be postponed until after the contract is settled.”
2. Asking for information: “Have you heard any more information about contract negotiations?”
3. Requesting action: “Please update the other group members on the status of the negotiations”

There is nothing sexy about any of these—no drama, no emotion, no empires won or lost. Routine messages are, by their very definition, routine (some would say boring). Anyone who has ever worked in an office can confirm this simply by reading emails or letters written a year or two ago. For example, an email advising employees that the cafeteria will be closed on May 10 may be important at the time, but after that date it no longer has any value. Once a routine message has been dealt with, it is usually deleted and has no further interest to the reader.

Routine messages may be boring to read and tedious to write, but that does not mean they are unimportant. If you are looking for strong emotion, you will find it instantly if you lose an email that told you the location of an important presentation. If you need drama, see what happens if you accidentally send a complaint about a dishonest customer back to that customer instead of to your supervisor.

Competent writing at work may not even be noticed; it is expected. The time anyone's writing skills are noticed is usually when problems occur. This also applies to associated skills, such as proofreading. A supervisor who sends a memo announcing changes that will affect people on the “late shaft” will be the target of rude jokes from the people receiving that message. A job applicant who writes about the “fast paste” environment of her last job will likely spend more time looking for work.

What would you do if you received an email that contained the following line: “I updated the Status report for the four discrepancies Lennie forward us via email (they in Barry file).”¹⁵ If the writer was a co-worker, you might have to write or call to find out what the message meant. If the person wrote

that way consistently and you were a supervisor, you might have to take stronger actions. Bad writing wastes time and costs money.

Even though routine office communications may not have the glamour of a celebrity news release or the complexity of a business plan, showing that you have developed these basic writing skills will improve your chances of obtaining a good job and future promotions.

Considering Message Outcomes

Each message you compose at work has two main outcomes:

1. It will communicate a set of ideas.
2. It will convey an image of you.

1. Communicating the Ideas You would not begin writing unless you had something to say. When you have something to communicate in routine letters, emails, and memos, remember that all good business writing shares these characteristics:

- *Good organization.* Competent writing starts with a main idea and then provides any necessary details. Understanding the audience will help you to decide which ideas are most important.
- *Audience awareness.* The information a co-worker requires may not be the same information that your supervisors need, so messages must always focus on the needs of a specific audience.
- *Clarity.* Competent writing is simple and clear. Big words do not impress people.
- *Conciseness.* Competent writing is as long as it has to be, but no longer than that. No one appreciates having to read any more than is necessary.
- *Courtesy.* It is sometimes necessary to be firm with people, but it is never acceptable to be insulting or abusive.
- *Correctness.* Providing inaccurate information or using bad grammar and spelling can damage your credibility.

It's easy to draw up such a list but not always easy to follow it. If it were easy, communication books, such as this one, would be unnecessary and people would not be drowning in a sea of poorly written and useless messages.

It is true that competent writing skills are a basic expectation in business and that poor writing ability will short circuit a person's career, and it is also true that people who display superior writing skills are likely to make a favourable impression in any organization. When someone rises above mediocrity, those in authority take notice.

2. Creating Your Written Image The second outcome of business messages—image—is often overlooked. The initial impression someone has of you often comes from a written message that you have prepared. That impression affects the reader's image not only of you but also of the organization you work for. Just

as polished shoes and a neatly tailored suit will create a far more favourable impression of you in a job interview than cut-off jeans and a T-shirt, careful attention to spelling and capitalization will help you to project an image of professionalism to your clients and to your employers.

Think of every letter, memo, report, or email message that you write as a sales letter. The product you are selling is your image and that of your employer. Attention to detail, good grammar, and a well-organized writing style will have as much impact on the image you project as a designer jacket and a \$300 pair of shoes.

Beginning Employees An American survey of 120 corporations employing nearly 8 million people described workplace writing as a “threshold skill” for hiring and promotion among professional employees. The term “threshold skill” is perhaps best explained by the survey’s no-holds-barred title: *Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . Or a Ticket Out*.

Many personnel officials said that they did not believe that salaried employees with poor writing skills would reach the point where they would ever be considered for promotion. Good writing skills were considered a basic expectation of all employees looking to advance. Poor writing skills were, however, an important factor in decisions to terminate employees.¹⁶

STRATEGIES FOR WRITING ROUTINE MESSAGES

Email, memos, and letters all have their place in routine business communication. Email has replaced many paper-based documents, but it is still worth knowing that memos, letters, and email can all be used well—and badly—for getting your point across.

Choosing Email and Memos

Email is the most common form of written communication used in offices today. It long ago overtook letters and memos as the primary means of communication for routine business messages. It is fast, cheap, and efficient. Email messages are used for both internal messages that stay within an organization and for external communication with people outside the organization.

At one time people would write a memorandum (usually shortened to memo) when they wanted to send an informal written document to co-workers, subordinates, or supervisors inside the organization. They would send letters to communicate with people outside their organization. Today, memos are used mainly in organizations in which some employees may not have easy access to computers. A memo announcing a change in work procedures could be posted on the wall of a break room, for example.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Phishing

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that the term *phishing* was coined in 1996 and refers to internet fraud; specifically, “the impersonation of reputable companies in order to induce individuals to reveal personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers, online.”¹⁷

What is the best way to educate people about the danger of phishing? ■

The format and writing style of memos and email messages is similar. The biggest difference between the two media is the audiences for each:

- Memos are used strictly for internal documents.
- Emails are used for both internal and external communication.

Both documents are relatively informal and are usually unsigned, meaning that they do not carry the same weight as more formal letters or contracts.

Although the absence of a signature makes emails informal documents, the tone and writing style of emails vary greatly with the audience. A quick note to a co-worker or a friend may contain misspellings or grammatical errors that the writer does not bother to correct—errors that are usually ignored as long as the message is understood.

Longer messages or those that are sent to people who are less well known to the writer require the same care and attention as any other written document and for the same reason: people are judged by the style of their writing.

An email containing technical errors could be dismissed as spam or “phishing” if it is sent to a stranger, even if the message is legitimate. Because many fraud artists disguise their messages as ones that come from legitimate organizations, the appearance of spelling and keying errors are seen as signs of a scam.

The importance of a good writing style increases in direct relation to the size of the audience and to your difference in familiarity with your reader(s). You may be able to get away with writing “C U l8r” in an email to a family member or a close business associate but not in one sent to a larger group or to your company president.

Bad Email Look at **Figure 8-1** to see an example of a poorly written email message.

The message doesn’t contain any spelling or grammatical errors, but it is poorly written for four reasons:

1. *Poor organization.* The most important information is buried in the middle of the document.
2. *Key information missing.* How will the new ID codes work with the new printer?
3. *Unnecessary details.* It is not necessary to provide detailed descriptions of the ways that people waste paper.
4. *Confrontational tone.* Several negative expressions, such as “heads will roll,” needlessly antagonize readers.

Good Email in Action Solving all the problems with the poorly written email in **Figure 8-1** requires two steps:

1. Making a few minor changes to the content of the message
2. Taking a more structured approach to the way it is organized

In **Figure 8-1**, the outcome was a vague threat of the consequences if printing was not reduced during the next three months. The revised version of the email message in **Figure 8-2** explains the introduction of the new

FIGURE 8-1

A Poorly Written Email Announcing a Change



The subject line is vague.

The body of the message includes unnecessary information.

The main idea is buried in the middle of the document.

Important details are omitted.

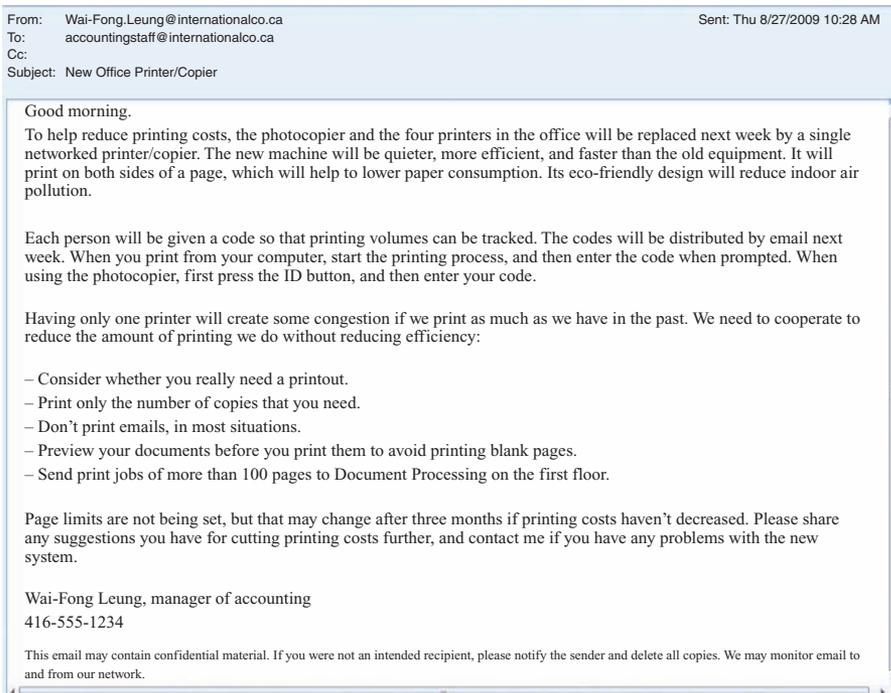
The tone is too negative.

No signature or contact information is provided.

The email takes too long to get to the point and includes irrelevant chatter while omitting important information.

FIGURE 8-2

An Improved Email Message Announcing a Change



The subject line is informative.

The message begins with the main idea, followed by the necessary supporting information.

The important details are included.

The tone is more positive and cooperation is stressed.

The signature block has additional contact information.

A confidentiality notice is included.

machines in more detail and presents the information in a less confrontational way that is less likely to anger the readers.

Luckily, similar messages have already been written. We will discuss those patterns next, and you can use them in your own writing.



“Begin at the beginning,” the King said gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

—Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

Beginnings and Endings for All Messages

Some of the truest words about business writing appeared in Lewis Carroll’s classic book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*: “Begin at the beginning,” the King said gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

Business messages have no set length. Many email messages are only a few words long. Some letters go on for two or three pages. Your job, when writing, is to focus on accomplishing a specific goal—for example, answering a question, making a sale, or organizing a meeting.

Often the hardest part of the job—especially if you have little experience writing at work—is to decide where to begin, where to end, and when to stop.

Some inexperienced writers start letters or email by introducing themselves. “My name is . . . and I am a . . .” Such an approach may work in a few limited situations, such as a new sales representative introducing herself to clients in her area. In almost all other situations, though, it is unnecessary. Your name always appears in the signature block of letters and at the top of email messages. It does not need to be repeated in the opening sentence of a message. It is also not usually necessary to begin with polite chat about the weather or the state of anyone’s health.

Psychologists say that the placement of information has an impact on how it will be noticed and remembered. People have the best memory of the information they read first and the information they read last. Since people do not always read documents through to the end, the most important information should be placed at the beginning of most routine documents. If you are making a request or asking a complicated question, it may be necessary to explain yourself, but this information can follow the main idea.

Beginnings and Endings in Action **Figure 8-3** and **Figure 8-4** are two versions of a letter to the local city council requesting information about the development of a meat-processing plant. Notice how long the first version (**Figure 8-3**) takes to get to the point.

Figure 8-4 contains the same message, but it has been restructured. It begins with the main idea and is more polite and easier to understand than the first version.

After reading the opening sentence in **Figure 8-4**, the reader would understand the key point of the request. The body of the letter explains the reasons for the request and presents further details about the exact requirements. The ending presents a specific date by which the information is needed, along with a reasonable justification.

Knowing When to Stop The letter in **Figure 8-4** was simple and polite. The writer’s objective was to obtain information about a prospective city development. There was no political agenda and no attempt to convince the reader of anything.

The first letter (**Figure 8-3**) put the reader on the defensive by using intimidating language and threatening a lawsuit against someone whose only role is to distribute information. Strong language does have a time and a

FIGURE 8-3

A Poor Request for Information

The tone is emotional and demanding.

The request being made is unclear and the language is confrontational.

The closing includes a threat.

Two Rivers Taxpayers' Federation
Box 1991A
Winnipeg, MB R2R 2G9
204-555-2345
www.TTTF.ca.

April 7, 2010

City Clerk's Department
Council Building, 510 Main Street
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1B9

To Whom It May Concern:
SUBJECT: Pork Processing Pollution

We, the members of the Two Rivers Taxpayers' Federation, strongly protest the move by Concorné Foods to begin construction of a hog slaughtering plant in the Two Rivers Industrial Park. An industry such as this will do irreparable damage to our businesses, to the neighbourhood surrounding the park, and to the city in general. We will be doing everything in our power to put a stop to this ill-advised proposal.

As such, we demand that you provide us with copies of the Clean Environment Commission's report, a poll that was commissioned on the Concorné hog plant, and information provided by Concorné on its efforts to control odours both at the Two Rivers plant and at its other operations.

We have a legal right to this information under the Access to Information Act, and we will be pursuing legal action if the documents are not forthcoming.

Sincerely,
Bob Knolten

The angry tone of this request would do little to ensure the cooperation of the employee being asked to provide the information.

place, but the writer has to choose the circumstances carefully to avoid alienating the reader.

An employee whose job had been eliminated once sued his former employer when a manager writing a letter about the need for more efficient production equipment explained his needs but then made the mistake of going on to write about “getting rid of deadwood” and “targeting those over 55 for early retirement.”¹⁸ If the writer had known when to stop writing, he would have saved his company an expensive lawsuit.

FIGURE 8-4 An Improved Request for Information

Two Rivers Taxpayers' Federation
 Box 1991A
 Winnipeg, MB R2R 2G9
 204-555-2345
 www.TTTF.ca

April 7, 2010

City Clerk's Department
 Council Building, 510 Main Street
 Winnipeg, MB R3B 1B9

SUBJECT: Information request: Concorné Foods' Proposal to build a pork processing plant

Please provide us with information regarding the proposal from Concorné Foods to build a pork processing plant in the Two Rivers Industrial Park. The Two Rivers Taxpayers' Federation is concerned that the plant may have a serious impact on existing businesses.

Specifically, we are requesting the following documents:

- The Clean Environment Commission's environmental assessment of the plant's operations
- The results of a taxpayer-funded poll on the Concorné processing plant
- The report provided by Concorné Foods on the effect that its plants have had on other municipalities and the measures it uses to control odours

The TRTF will be meeting on June 1 to discuss its position on the Concorné proposal. We would appreciate having the documents by May 15 so that we can distribute copies to our members and give them time to study the information.

Sincerely,

Alice Strongpela
 President, TRTF

The subject line is specific.

The request is clear and uses neutral language.

The specific documents needed are listed.

A reasonable date for delivery and an explanation are given.

The writer's signature and title are included.

The formal request for information is assertive yet polite.

Applying a Pattern to Your Writing

Reading in the workplace is work. People have deadlines to meet and do not enjoy wading through unnecessary details to get to important information. They expect the messages they receive to be structured in a way that makes it easy for them to extract the information they need. They may still get that information if it is found at the end of a long, rambling document, but they will be as annoyed at having to sort through the irrelevant information as they would be at receiving their pay a week late.

There are several reasons why you should not let the idea of writing with a pattern intimidate you:

- It will not stifle your creativity.
- It will not make your writing tedious to read.
- Over the years, simple patterns for writing have evolved for many types of communication. The writers of murder mysteries, for example, use a structure where the crime is committed at the beginning of the book and solved at the end. People who watch slasher movies know the fate of the first person to explore the basement alone.

Simple structures impose order on the writing process, but they do not necessarily inhibit the writing—they can enhance it. They provide a framework for your creativity. If you begin a writing task knowing that you will begin with a key idea and then deal with a number of related issues, you will be able to concentrate on identifying those ideas rather than on trying to sort out other less important issues.

When you are writing at work, you want people to pay attention to the quality of your ideas. In almost all cases, that means beginning with the most important ideas and ending when you have provided all the necessary information. Providing unnecessary details can be almost as bad as leaving out important information.

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician and philosopher once wrote, “I am sorry for the length of my letter, but I had no time to write a short one.”¹⁹ Pascal’s point was that it takes time and effort to separate the key ideas from all the other useless information that surrounds them.

The Direct Pattern Business writers apply different patterns to different types of documents. There are patterns for writing persuasive documents, for refusing requests writing, and for writing employment application letters.

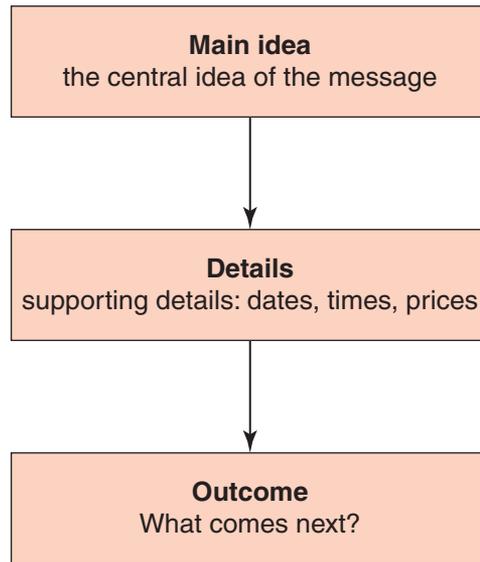
Most routine workplace documents follow the fairly simple direct pattern shown in **Figure 8-5**, which can be applied to most common letters, emails, and memos.

Main Idea The most important information should appear at the very beginning of the message—often in the first sentence. People will not always read the entire message, but they will usually read the first part. (Some email programs even encourage the practice by flashing the first few words of incoming messages in the corner of the recipient’s computer screen.) The main idea should be thought of as the information that the reader needs most. Often it is a summary of the entire message.

In the example that appeared earlier, the writer began with a blunt statement that printing was out of control, followed by a list of complaints about wasted paper that would probably have most people’s eyes rolling at the thought of a highly paid manager chasing after them for a few dollars’ worth of excess printing. The most important information in this case is the fact that the printers and photocopiers are being replaced, a statement that does not appear until the middle of the message.

FIGURE 8-5

The Direct Pattern for Writing Routine Messages



Details All the information that supports the main idea should be placed in the middle of the document. In the case above, the details are the information relating to the installation of the new printer/copier. In other cases, the details might include background information on an issue, dates of an event, prices of equipment, or names of key personnel—anything that helps the reader to understand the main idea. Often the middle section is the longest part of the message.

Figure 8-5 implies that the entire message is made up of three paragraphs. It could be, but if the message is detailed, then the details section itself could be much longer.

The only details of the original message that need to be included from the example above are the reasons for replacing the old machines (cost, noise, indoor air pollution) and the fact that the new machine will require passwords.

Details that should have been included are the dates for the changeover, information on how passwords will be distributed, and explanations of how to use the new machine.

Outcome The final section should tie everything together by explaining what happens next. It could be an explanation of what the writer intends to do next or a question or a request.

Lists in Documents

Letters, emails, and other business documents frequently contain lists of various types. Sometimes they are numbered; sometimes they are set off with bullets.

Lists help readers to find important information quickly. This improves reading efficiency and shortens documents. Lists can be made up of a group

of items, steps in a procedure, or key points for discussion. Your lists will be more effective if you follow these four guidelines:

1. Keep lists brief—three to six items.
2. Keep items short—a few words or a sentence at most.
3. Use lists sparingly—no more than one list per page.
4. Introduce lists with a sentence that leads smoothly into the list—usually ending with a colon (i.e., :).

Bullets or Numbers? Use numbered lists to indicate sequence or importance. Numbers should also be used when the preceding text emphasizes the number of items, as above, or when a later paragraph refers to a specific item.

For example, a memo to workers in a factory may list the company's priorities this way:

1. Eliminate all lost-time accidents!
2. Increase customer satisfaction.
3. Improve productivity.

This list indicates that safety is the company's top priority, with customer satisfaction and productivity coming next in importance.

Instructions for operating a fire extinguisher would also use a numbered list:

1. Remove the pin.
2. Direct the nozzle at the base of the flames.
3. Pull the trigger.
4. Spray the foam in a fanning motion.

The steps for these instructions (and most others) have to be followed in this precise order for the equipment to work properly.

However, when there is no intent to indicate chronology or importance, neutral bullet points should be used. For example, a meeting reminder might ask participants to come prepared with a number of items:

- Year-end reviews
- Monthly departmental reports
- Proposals for next year's campaign

In this case, the sequence of the items is unimportant, so no numbers are needed.

Consistency of Lists Items in a vertical list should follow a consistent style. Make each item in the list grammatically parallel with the others. These guidelines will help:

- Try to start each point with a key word, often a verb or a noun.
- Ensure that verbs are all in the same tense, usually either the present or the past tense.

- Capitalize the first word on each line.
- Use punctuation at the end of the line if the points are sentences; otherwise use no punctuation.

Remember that lists should be used sparingly. A document that has more bullets than narrative is usually thought of as an outline. Although outlines are a useful tool and you should definitely make use of them when planning documents, your readers will think your message is incomplete if you use too many lists.

Choosing between Letters and Email

Letters have not completely disappeared as a tool for conducting routine business, but their use is rapidly declining. Two main reasons for this are as follows:

1. *Speed.* Traditional letters are often called “snail mail” and with good reason. A local letter may take a few days to be delivered; an international letter could take several weeks. An email usually arrives in minutes, no matter where in the world it is being sent.
2. *Cost.* Email is usually cheaper than traditional mail. As long as both parties are connected to an email network, the only cost of the email message is the time it takes to write and to read the message. Traditional letters have the same costs in the time it takes to write them, along with the additional costs of printing the message and delivering it to the recipient. The additional delivery costs for a single message may amount to only a dollar or so, but with a mass mailing, which could involve a thousand letters or more, the costs will begin to add up fast.

Reasons in favour of choosing letters over email include the following:

- *Confidentiality.* Letters are a more secure form of communication than email and are useful when confidentiality is an issue. Although letters do not ensure complete confidentiality—they can always be photocopied or scanned and sent to unintended audiences—they are more secure than emails. Emails can be forwarded to unintended audiences with a click of a mouse, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes on purpose. Stories frequently appear in the news media about people who have been publicly embarrassed—or worse—when their email messages were read by unintended audiences.
- *Formality.* Letters also convey more formality than email messages. It is easy to include pictures and graphics in an email, or even animations and sound, but it is not possible to include embossed paper, genuine watermarks, or original signatures. Although the importance of paper-based letters as a tool for conducting routine business may be declining, letters will continue to be a common business tool for many years to come.
- *Signatures.* Letters carry signatures. In legal documents or in situations in which it is necessary to verify the identity of the sender, a letter (or other paper document) may be the only medium that the receiver will accept. In situations in which the information could be considered confidential, a signed letter may be required.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Document Security in an Earlier Time

Long before computers and document encryption, document security was protected with sealing wax. A blob of hot wax imprinted with the writer's seal was used to close a folded document. This acted both as a signature and as a means of preventing unauthorized people from reading or altering documents. Sealing wax is used today as a decoration, not as a security device.²⁰

Many business emails come with a warning that readers should ignore and delete any messages they receive by mistake. Are these warnings useful? ■



Wax seals were once used to guarantee documents' authenticity and to prevent them from being read by unauthorized readers.

In some special situations, writers may prefer to use letters for other reasons. Many direct marketing campaigns depend on the sales or fundraising letters that people find in their mailboxes every day. Job applicants are often encouraged to write a cover letter when submitting their resumés, and employers may write letters of reference to recommend job candidates. People may write letters when making complaints, or when responding to them. Letters can convey a more personal touch than email messages.

Goodwill Letters In some situations, the formality that letters provide may be far more important than the speed email offers. Although a quick email message may be appropriate to thank a co-worker who has done a favour for you, a formal letter of thanks would be far more appropriate to acknowledge the services of a long-time business associate. See **Figure 8-6**.

Letters of Condolence A letter or a card can be used to express emotion far more effectively than any electronic medium. If, for example, you need to express sadness for the loss of a business associate, it may be preferable to use a handwritten letter or card, rather than typing the message. Messages of

FIGURE 8-6 An Appropriate Goodwill Message

Blue Skies Development
2175 Avenue Road.
Regina, SK S3T 1S9
306-555-0987

February 10, 2010

Troy Eastwood
CEO, Prairie Interweb Design
41 Albert Street
Regina, SK S4R 2N3

Dear Mr. Eastwood:

Congratulations on winning the Most Innovative Website regional award from the Canadian Society of Graphic Designers. When I saw the announcement in last Tuesday's *Leader Post*, I immediately agreed with the judges' choice. Your design showing a banjo morphing into a football was brilliant. I'm sure that the recognition that accompanies the award will help create a bright future for your company.

Since our first meeting, I have continually been impressed by the professionalism and creativity of your web designers. Their ideas are always fresh, their attention to detail is exceptional, and our deadlines are always met. I am happy to have chosen your firm to design and maintain our website.

Again, let me offer my sincere congratulations. I am confident that the website will go on to win further awards when it is entered in the national competition next month. Good luck.

Sincerely,

Nickolas Scratch

Nickolas Scratch
Manager of media relations, Blue Skies Development

FIGURE 8-7 An Appropriate Letter of Condolence

Dear Alecia,

I was deeply saddened to learn of your loss. Fred was one of the most cheerful people I have ever met. He never had an unkind word for anyone.

If there is anything that I can do for you, please give me a call. You will always be a part of BRL Electronics.

Jesse Armstrong

condolence are usually short. They express sympathy over the loss, share a personal memory of the person, and offer any assistance that you may be able to provide. See **Figure 8-7**.

Even though such messages are usually very short, tone is important. Do not try to minimize the person’s pain with banal expressions, such as “Sally is now in a better place.” Do not go to the opposite extreme either by focusing on the difficulties yet to come: “I know how hard it will be for you to continue without Bill.” Instead, share a sincere message showing what the person meant to you: “Sheila was always the first person to offer her assistance whenever she saw someone needing help.”

Layout of Letters Many computer programs contain templates for writing letters that help with some of the formatting. Four commonly used styles follow. The key differences relate to the placement of the inside address, date, and signature blocks:

1. The *full block* style (see **Figure 8-8**) is the easiest to remember; everything lines up with the left margin.
2. The *modified block* style is the same as full block but the date and signature block are centred.
3. The *semi-block style* is the same as modified block, but the first line of each paragraph is indented.
4. The *simplified* style is perhaps more logical than the other three. It omits the salutation entirely (Why do we refer to strangers as “Dear” anyway?) and replaces it with a subject line. This style leaves out a complimentary close for the same reason (Does “Sincerely” have any meaning at all in the closing of a letter?). When writing in the simplified style, some people insert the reader’s name into the opening line to give the letter a more personal tone. “We have received your application, Ms. Jones, and will be reviewing it during the next week.”

Although this style may be logical and more practical than other styles, it is considered less formal and may not be acceptable for more formal situations.

Punctuation Options in Letters Punctuation in the body of letters follows the standard rules of writing. However, addresses and salutations in letters

FIGURE 8-8 Letter in Full Block Style with Mixed Punctuation

Date: Day, month, and year written in full

Return address or letterhead paper

An **attention** line would be inserted before the company name if the name of the recipient were unknown: Attention: Museum director

Nunavut Artists' Co-op
Box 1310
Rankin Inlet, NU CANADA
X0C 0G0
Ph: 867-555-1234 Fax: 867-555-4321

August 7, 2011

Subject lines help readers classify the contents of letters. Do not write the subject line using only capital letters.

Señor Juan Montoya, Director Del Museo
Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla
Plaza del Museo, 9
41001 Sevilla
SPAIN

The **inside address** follows the conventions of the destination country. Use capitals and North American spelling for the name of the country (SPAIN, not España)

Salutation: Type Dear followed by the recipient's name. A colon (:) or a comma (,) follows the name in some letter styles.

It is safer to be too formal than not formal enough: Dear Señor Montoya instead of Dear Juan

Dear Señor Montoya:

Body: Single space the document and align the message with the left margin. Insert a blank line between paragraphs. Indent the paragraph's first line when using the semi-block style.

Re: Invitation to exhibit at the Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla

Thank you for inquiring about the state of Inuit art in Nunavut and for your generous invitation to our artists. Inuit art continues to flourish because of the innovative ways that contemporary artists have found to interpret traditional themes.

The artists of Rankin Inlet use a variety of art styles. Some of our sculptors work with several colours of soapstone and with black Keewatin stone. Ivory, whalebone, caribou antlers, and marble are also frequently used.

Carving is not our artists' only skill. Many of them produce beautiful wall hangings, drawings, and caribou-hair tuftings. I have enclosed a brochure that shows examples of their work.

Ceramics have also been an important part of the Nunavut Artists' Co-op since the first kiln was fired in 1963. Made from imported materials by using a variety of techniques, these pots reflect the vibrancy of Inuit art.

At the last meeting of our artists' co-op, I shared our discussions about a month-long exhibition at your museum. Our members were excited and honoured to be invited to show their works in Spain. We will choose two people, as specified in your invitation, and then we can begin to make the travel arrangements.

You had asked about the possibility of a reciprocal visit to Rankin Inlet by artists from Sevilla. Although Rankin Inlet has a thriving arts community, it is a small town with a population of just over two thousand people. Our artists exhibit their works in local venues, mostly to tourists. Many of our artists do have work exhibited in the Winnipeg Art Gallery. It might be more practical to contact them about an exhibition by your artists.

I will contact you when we have chosen the artists to visit Spain. Thank you once again for the generous invitation.

Complimentary closing: Sincerely, Sincerely Yours, or Respectfully

Sincerely

Signature

Edith Twomey
Edith Twomey
Business manager, Nunavut Artists' Co-op

Name and position: Include titles that indicate rank or position (Rev., Dr., Sgt.), if they are relevant to the situation. Omit courtesy titles (Mr., Miss, Mrs. or Ms.). Include your job title if writing on behalf of an organization, and the organization's name.

ET/sj

Enc. or Enclosure indicates that something is enclosed.

Enclosure: Brochure

Use cc: and a person's name when sending a copy of a letter to someone else

CC: John Brown, director of Winnipeg Art Gallery

Reference initials indicate that someone else typed the letter. The writer's initials are in capitals and the typist's initials in lowercase

TABLE 8-1 Punctuation Choices for Letter Addresses and Salutations

Mixed Punctuation (the most common approach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No punctuation at the end of lines in the inside address – A colon follows the salutation (after the name, not between the “Dear” and the name) – A comma follows the complimentary closing
Open Punctuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No punctuation at end of lines in the inside address – No punctuation following the salutation or the complimentary closing
Closed Punctuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A period follows the date and the last word of the inside address – A colon follows the salutation – A comma follows the complimentary closing

follow three different approaches: (1) open, (2) closed, and (3) mixed punctuation. See **Table 8-1**.

Addressing Envelopes To improve the speed and accuracy by which addresses are scanned by computerized postal equipment, Canada Post provides these guidelines for addressing mail:

- Write addresses entirely in capital letters (although lower-case letters are acceptable).
- Place postal codes on the same line as the province or territory, written in two blocks of three characters with a single space between them (no hyphens). (See **Table 8-2** for provincial, territorial, and state abbreviations.)
- Do not use underlining, the # symbol, or any punctuation that is not part of a name.²¹

Following the Canada Post guidelines results in the following address style:

SUM SOO DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
 ASIAN-CANADIAN IMPORTS
 10-123 MAIN ST NW
 PORT ALBERNI BC V9Y 2P6

Layout of Email Messages Email toolbars vary depending on the program you are using. Typically they allow you to change the formatting of the message, or to insert pictures or attachments. Since email was designed with efficiency in mind, the date and footers found in most email messages are inserted automatically, and you can insert addresses with a few clicks of a mouse.

The Address Lines To contains the email address of the main recipient(s). You can type in the address directly, but a single typing error will prevent the

TABLE 8-2 Canadian and U.S. Postal Abbreviations

Canadian Postal Abbreviations			
Alberta	AB	Nunavut	NU
British Columbia	BC	Ontario	ON
Manitoba	MB	Prince Edward Island	PE
New Brunswick	NB	Quebec	QC
Newfoundland and Labrador	NL	Saskatchewan	SK
Northwest Territories	NT	Yukon	YT
Nova Scotia	NS		
U.S. Postal Abbreviations			
Alabama	AL	Montana	MT
Alaska	AK	Nebraska	NE
American Samoa	AS	Nevada	NV
Arizona	AZ	New Hampshire	NH
Arkansas	AR	New Jersey	NJ
California	CA	New Mexico	NM
Colorado	CO	New York	NY
Connecticut	CT	North Carolina	NC
Delaware	DE	North Dakota	ND
District of Columbia	DC	Northern Mariana Islands	MP
Federated States of Micronesia	FM	Ohio	OH
Florida	FL	Oklahoma	OK
Georgia	GA	Oregon	OR
Guam	GU	Palau	PW
Hawaii	HI	Pennsylvania	PA
Idaho	ID	Puerto Rico	PR
Illinois	IL	Rhode Island	RI
Indiana	IN	South Carolina	SC
Iowa	IA	South Dakota	SD
Kansas	KS	Tennessee	TN
Kentucky	KY	Texas	TX
Louisiana	LA	Utah	UT
Maine	ME	Vermont	VT
Marshall Islands	MH	Virgin Islands	VI
Maryland	MD	Virginia	VA
Massachusetts	MA	Washington	WA
Michigan	MI	West Virginia	WV
Minnesota	MN	Wisconsin	WI
Mississippi	MS	Wyoming	WY
Missouri	MO		

Source: "Addressing Guidelines." *Canada Post*. 22 June 2009. Web. 31 Aug. 2009.
 "Official USPS Abbreviations." *United States Postal Service*. Web. 20 Oct. 2009.

message from reaching the desired recipient. Most people and organizations use contact lists or address books containing the addresses of people with whom they communicate. Many programs also allow people to set up group address lists so that by selecting a single entry, you can send the same message to all the people in your department, customer list, or workgroup.

Cc originally stood for “carbon copy” and now means either “courtesy copy” or “computer copy.” The abbreviation itself is old-fashioned, but its use continues. The *Cc* line functions exactly the same as the *To* line, but it indicates to the reader that he or she is receiving a copy of the message that was sent to the main audience on the *To* line. Often this implies that the person receiving the *Cc* is being included in the information chain as a courtesy and is not expected to reply. Workers will often send a *Cc* to their supervisors to update them on the progress of their work.

A *Cc* may also be used strategically, almost like a 10-year-old saying “I’m telling Mom.” If, for example, you have a disagreement with someone and attempts to resolve it have failed, it may be appropriate to send a copy to other people with authority to resolve the problem. Such people could be your member of Parliament, the person’s supervisor, or an official in a regulatory body. Keep in mind, however, that whenever you bring outsiders into a dispute, you are escalating the conflict.

Be careful, as well, about sending copies of routine correspondence to people who do not need the information. People find it annoying to receive needless copies of emails that do not concern them.

Bcc is a variation on *Cc*, but the *B* stands for “blind.” The *Bcc* button has two uses: It is handy when a message is being sent to a very large group of people. Putting all the names on the *Bcc* line makes the email shorter when people do not have to scroll through a long list of names to reach the main message.

You can also use *Bcc* when you are sending a document to a list of people and you do not want each person to see the names of the others. People receiving a message from the *Bcc* function see only their own name and email address plus that of the sender. The identities of all other readers are concealed.

Be careful with this function. It is often useful for readers to know the names of others who have received the message.

Subject Lines Subject lines are a crucial part of most messages. Because people receive so many email messages—many of them junk—they frequently use the subject line to help them decide whether to read the rest of the message. A vague or missing subject line could cause the message to be deleted unread. Subject lines should contain the main idea of the message expressed in a few words. Since many people use spam filters that automatically filter out messages containing suspicious words, be careful about including such words as *free* or *urgent* in your subject line, since these are also common in many illegitimate messages.

Some guides recommend that you write the subject line using only capital letters (SUBJECT: SALES MEETING ON APRIL 1). This may not be a

good idea, because spell checkers can be set to ignore words that are spelled in capitals so that they do not flag initialisms, such as HBC or RBC, as errors. If you depend on your spell checker and you write everything in caps, you may inadvertently introduce an error into your document. It is far safer to write the subject line by following the conventions you would use for any other title (Subject: Sales meeting on April 1).

Effective Subject Lines in Action All email messages and memos begin with a subject line that usually summarizes the main idea. Many letters include one as well. The reason is the same. People are exposed to an enormous amount of information. To help manage this information, most people look at the name of the sender and the subject line before deciding when to read the messages (or to delete them). Subject lines are titles that help readers identify the contents of the message.

Subject lines speed the flow of information and improve people’s efficiency by allowing email recipients to judge the level of urgency of messages. Although a message from your supervisor with the subject line “Meeting in 15 minutes” may require your immediate attention, you may not rush to read one from a co-worker labelled “Photocopier malfunction” (unless, of course, you need to copy something). You will probably delete, unread, an email message from a stranger that has the subject line “Discount inkjet cartridges by mail.”

Subject lines should contain enough information for people to identify the contents of a message. Make the subject line as specific as possible. See **Table 8-3**.

In some organizations, people transmit short messages by using only the subject line. If only a few words are needed to respond to another message, putting all the information in the subject line will save the other person the trouble of opening the message. Those who adopt this strategy often use a notation system to identify brief messages. Some people use an asterisk (*) or the letters “EOM” (end of message) to identify such messages. Thus, a response to an email asking when a meeting will be held may have this response: “Re: Time of sales meeting—3 p.m. Room 403 EOM.”

Such strategies will save time only if everyone in the organization understands the abbreviations and agrees to use them. If you try implementing

TABLE 8-3 Subject Line Examples

Vague	Specific
Meeting	Safety committee meeting Friday @ 1 p.m.
New staff	Welcome Sally Smith to the marketing department
Proposal	Call for proposals—Canada Revenue Agency
Question	Location of your new branch office?
Health benefits	Health benefits will increase next year
Environmental options	New telecommuting positions becoming available

TAKE IT FURTHER

Email Overtakes Snail Mail

In 1996, for the first time, the volume of email messages sent in the United States exceeded the volume of letters delivered by the postal service.²²

Now, regular mail volume is far exceeded by email messages—most of them junk.

Junk mail is now being sent as text messages. What can people do to prevent all of these forms of unwanted advertising?

such a practice without consulting others, you will waste time answering inquiries about the meaning of EOM and explaining why the body of your message is blank.

Salutations Salutations are becoming increasingly common in email messages. Since email tends to be less formal than many other forms of communication, one common approach is for people to begin with “Hi” followed by the recipient’s first name. However, a more formal approach may be more appropriate when the writer and reader are unknown to each other or when there is a big difference in the people’s levels of authority.

Footers You can add these automatically to messages. Some people set the footer to include the writer’s name, title, phone number, and mailing address. Others include a confidentiality warning telling people not to forward a message or to delete it if they have received it in error. Many workplaces have specific guidelines on the information that should be included in the footers.

Last Word on Memos

It is no coincidence that the format for memos is very much like that of email messages. Memos (or memoranda) were used in offices long before computers were invented. Memos were designed to transmit information efficiently and this format was imitated when electronic mail was invented.

Although email is used for both internal and external documents, memos are typically reserved for documents that stay within the organization. You may need to send a memo to people in your workplace who do not have access to email.

Memos in Action See **Figure 8-9** for an example of a bad memo providing information to people in an office and **Figure 8-10** for an example of a good memo.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE

Email has become the main vehicle for much of the written communication in the workplace today, mostly because of its efficiency. However, this ease of use is also becoming one of its drawbacks. People are sending more and more emails because it is so easy to send them—and others are complaining about receiving too much email. Aside from the issue of junk mail or spam, which is a separate problem, people complain about being sent messages that they have no reason to receive.

A person in one department, for example, may send out a message to all staff within an organization that her office will be closed for an afternoon staff meeting “just in case” someone needs to contact them. Meanwhile countless people in the organization who have no need to contact anyone in the department will have to filter the message and delete it.

FIGURE 8-9

A Poorly Written Memo

Watrun Industries
670 King Street
Fredericton, E3B 1G1
506-555-2468
www.watrun.com

Date: April 4, 2010
To: All occupants of office 234
From: Darryl Harding
Subject: Complaints

A few people have complained to me about the noise levels in the central office. I looked into it and asked around. Most people said that they were not bothered by the noise, but a few kept insisting that they are unable to concentrate. So for their sake, I looked into the matter further.

I found that a lot of people were engaging in personal discussions that should not be taking place in the workplace. You are not being paid to talk about the fight at last night's hockey game or to relay the intimate details of your domestic difficulties to other people. Even legitimate business meetings should not be taking place in an open office. This area is intended for quiet work only.
PLEASE CONDUCT THESE DISCUSSIONS SOMEWHERE ELSE!

I also went a lot of trouble to measure the noise levels in the room and found that there is no cause for alarm. Everything is well within the limits that the CSA considers safe, so the complaints have little justification. The measurements show a level of 52–62 dBA, depending on where and when the measurements were taken. The CSA does recommend a design goal of 45–48 dBA for occupied “busy open offices,” so technically, we are a bit on the high side, but once again, I must repeat, you are not in any danger.

Just to be on the safe side and to ensure that we finally get some quiet around here, I've arranged for the photocopier to be moved, and I've had the maintenance department replace a faulty compressor. I've also asked senior management to look into the installation of some other things that will control noise levels. White noise generators and sound-dampening materials are expensive though, so don't hold your breath waiting for these purchases to be approved.

I hope that settles things.

The subject line is vague.

The opening paragraph belittles the people who are complaining.

Sarcasm does not contribute to the message.

The request should come at the end of the memo, and more information is needed.

Never use all-capital letters.

The abbreviations CSA and dBA are never explained. The tone is disrespectful.

More detail is needed about how this addresses the problem. The issue has not been resolved.

This poorly written memo has problems with both tone and organization.

Someone else will send a Cc to his supervisors or co-workers to keep them informed of work that he is doing even if these people have no real need for the information. The result is that many people are beginning to think of email as more of a time-wasting curse than a convenience.

Some organizations have even instituted email-free Fridays in which employees are required to phone people or walk over to talk rather than sending electronic messages.²³

FIGURE 8-10 An Improved Memo

- The subject line summarizes the content.
- Key information is given in the opening paragraph.
- Neutral, unemotional language is used.
- The terms *CSA* and *dba* are explained.
- An explanation of the changes being made to address the problem is provided.
- The tone is respectful.
- The ending invites more discussion because the problem is not completely resolved.

Watrun Industries
670 King Street
Fredericton, E3B 1G1
506-555-2468
www.watrun.com

Date: April 4, 2010
To: All occupants of office 234
From: Darryl Harding
Subject: Noise-reduction changes to room 234

In response to complaints about noise in the central office, some changes have been made, and several larger changes have been recommended.

Office employees were consulted, and many expressed concern about their ability to concentrate because of the noise. Others said that they were not bothered by the noise.

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) recommends occupied “busy open offices” have noise levels of no more than 45–48 decibels (dba). We had noise-level measurements taken in our office, which ranged from 52 to 62 dba, depending on the room activity and where in the office the measurement was taken.

These noise levels are well below what that the CSA considers hazardous to hearing; however, they are slightly above the recommended levels. Improvements will be made to reduce the noise levels:

- The photocopier has been moved to the outside wall beside the washroom and kitchen area. The interior walls should also help dampen the noise.
- Noises coming from the ventilation system have been corrected. A faulty compressor that was causing a rumbling noise throughout the office has been replaced.
- The installation of sound-dampening materials and a white noise generator have also been recommended. These modifications need senior management’s approval.

These changes should help reduce the noise, but please remember that this is a large office and we all need to be considerate of our co-workers. Please conduct meetings in one of the meeting rooms rather than in the open office. Personal discussions should be held in the cafeteria or other common areas of the building.

I will keep you informed about any other changes that take place. If you have any further concerns, please call me at extension 3434 or drop by my office.

This memo provides the readers with the necessary information in a diplomatic and well-organized manner.

Here are ten guidelines that may help prevent you from annoying people with your email messages:

1. *Do not ignore the basic rules of writing.* Email may be less formal than many other forms of communication, but you will be judged by the people who read your messages. If you are careless with your grammar and spelling, or you do not bother to put capital letters at the beginning of names or sentences, your lapses will reflect poorly on you.

2. *Avoid cuteness.* Emoticons, such as :) or :(, are commonly used by many people. Some programs will even convert them automatically to more recognizable icons: ☺ ☹. Emoticons have no place in business writing. Shorthand expressions, such as LOL (laughing out loud) and IMHO (in my humble opinion), are fine in chat rooms and personal communications but not in the office.

A few shorthand expressions, such as FYI (for your information) and FAQ (frequently asked questions) have made their way into common usage in many offices. Your employer may also use other expressions that are specific to the organization, but the general rule to follow when deciding whether or not to abbreviate is “When in doubt, write it out.”

3. *Do not contribute to information overload.* Many people complain about receiving too much email. Before using the Reply to All button, ask yourself whether everyone on the list needs to hear from you.
- Sending people emails thanking them for sending you things is necessary only if the information was very important or if you know they had to work hard to give you the information.
 - Do not pass along chain letters, virus warnings, or other such messages that waste people’s time and clog the system. Most of these warnings are hoaxes. Your employer’s network administrator will inform you of the correct procedure to follow when you come across suspicious messages.
 - Do not reply to spam. It simply encourages people to keep sending it.
 - Do not click the “remove me” link in a spam message. This confirms that your address is active. Although your name might be removed from one delivery list, it will likely be added to several more. However, you should use the unsubscribe link to remove your address from any legitimate mailing list that you voluntarily subscribed to but no longer want to receive.
4. *Keep it brief.* Try to restrict your email messages to one screen or less so that people do not have to scroll through your message to read it all. If you have longer messages to deliver, consider sending them as attachments.
5. *Limit each message to one topic.* Email is cheap. If you have two or three messages to the same person or group, send them more than one email. That will help readers organize their information and reduce the chances of some of the information being missed or accidentally passed along to the wrong people.
6. *Find out your employer’s policy for personal email use.* Some employers allow a reasonable amount of personal use of company email accounts; others forbid it entirely. Even if you are allowed to use your work account for personal reasons, be very careful about the information you send. Email is not private; do not send emails containing information that could embarrass you if read by the wrong person. Personal email accounts

are cheap and easy to set up. It is far safer to have one account for work and another account for your private life.

7. *Watch the tone of your messages.* The convenience and speed of email can be a drawback if you respond too quickly to messages that you find upsetting. It may be better to wait and calm down before replying to emails that bother you rather than dashing off a reply that you will later regret. WRITING EVERYTHING IN CAPITALS IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING.
8. *Remember that email is forever.* If you have information that is confidential or that could be used against you if read by the wrong person, consider sending it through a different channel. Even deleted messages can be recovered.
9. *Do not annoy people with technology.* Many programs contain features that allow people to attach an icon to a message indicating that it is urgent. Although the urgent indicator is a useful tool for messages that must be dealt with immediately, it loses its effectiveness and annoys readers when it is used with unimportant email. It conveys the message that the writer has no regard for the time of the reader or that the writer has an inflated sense of self-importance.

Delivery receipts can be included with an email to send a message back to the sender that the email has been received. However, unless the email is very important or time sensitive, most people want to manage their email in private. When they see a pop-up box that says someone wants a return receipt for non-urgent email, they will get the feeling that they are not being trusted to manage their mail.

10. *Do not use email for sensitive matters.* If you need to make a serious complaint to a manager, discipline someone, or lay off staff members it is better to use a channel other than email. Face-to-face communication or a telephone call will allow two-way feedback as well as better expression of emotion, while a signed letter will provide more formality than an email message.

Chapter Summary

In today's business world, where computers sit on an overwhelming number of desks, email has become one of the primary communication tools in business. Writing is a basic skill in all areas of business, and writing skills have never been more important. Your writing style is an important factor in determining the impression that you make on other people.

Email is the most common channel for communicating routine information, but letters and memos are also used frequently. Whatever channel you use, messages should start with the main idea and then include any supporting ideas. Subject lines should be planned carefully because they will often determine whether the message is read or deleted. The final thought will point to the outcome. Messages do not have to be long—most people prefer brevity—but they must contain the necessary information written in a clear and well-organized manner.

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- Document Makeovers
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- Grammar exercises and much more!

Thinking and Writing Exercises

1. Composing Subject Lines

Write a suitable subject line for each of the situations described below. For example:

A request to a computer technician for instructions on how to defragment your computer's hard drive

Defrag question

- a. An announcement that a payroll-deduction option is available for employees wanting to purchase Canada Savings Bonds
- b. A request for a co-worker who lives close to you to give you a ride to work tomorrow because your car will be in the repair shop
- c. A message to a regular customer announcing that the delivery date for his latest order of office supplies has been delayed a week to November 10
- d. A reprimand to an employee who has been coming in late and missing work without offering any excuses (This is a trick question.)
- e. A question to your supervisor about whether he wants you to include statistics about employee turnover in a report he has asked you to write about your company's hiring practices

2. Organizing a Message about Reducing the Use of Paper

Assume that you work for the human resources department of a large bank that is attempting to reduce its paper consumption. Write a message to bank employees encouraging them to submit ideas for a new employee awareness program. Workers should be encouraged to submit ideas on ways to reduce paper waste in return for cash prizes. Answer the following questions to plan the message:

- a. Which two of these groups would be the audience for this document?
- b. Pick two channels that would be the most effective in delivering the message to your target audience.
- c. What would be a suitable subject line for the message?
- d. What main idea should be found in the opening line of the document? Identify one idea from the list below that would not likely be included anywhere in the document.
 - One litre of oil can contaminate 1 million litres of water. Dispose of hazardous materials properly!
 - Employees' suggestions on ways to reduce paper use could earn cash prizes while helping the bank protect the environment.
 - Last year your bank employed approximately 38 000 employees worldwide and had \$11.3 billion in revenue.
 - The bank's paper purchases have decreased from 2100 tonnes in 2002 to 1650 tonnes in 2008, a reduction of 21%.
 - Canada signed the Kyoto Accord in 2002 but has never come close to meeting its energy-reduction commitments.
 - In 2001 Canada was producing almost 60 million documents a day—enough to form a pile 27 kilometres high.
 - Company vision statement: "Our vision is to be recognized as the leader in customer service. To get there, we have made commitments to deal with each of our stakeholders in a friendly, profitable, and environmentally responsible manner"
 - In some countries, almost 50 percent of paper is made from recycled fibres, wood chips, and by-products from forestry.
- e. Select two items from this list that would be contained in a section of the document explaining how to submit ideas. Pick one idea that would not likely be included in the final draft because it

does not help to send the message on the need for employees to submit ideas. One of these ideas would likely be moved to another part of the document. Which idea is this and why?

- Ideas may be submitted online—a form is available on the company’s website.
- Suggestion boxes and forms are found in all lunchrooms.
- Installation of double-side copying machines saved \$50 000 in paper costs last year.
- Suggestions are to be restricted to ideas about paper use only.
- Forms that contain unprofessional comments will result in disciplinary action.
- Employees need to identify areas where paper is being wasted.

f. Select all the items that would be contained in a section of the document explaining how prizes will be awarded.

- Winning entries selected by a committee of labour and management representatives
- A yearly award of \$500 for the idea that saves the most in printing costs
- Names of winners posted in the monthly newsletter, *Banking News*
- Descriptions of the winning ideas posted in the monthly newsletter
- Monthly prizes of \$100 drawn from a list of all people whose ideas have been selected

g. What would be the most suitable way to close this message?

Using the ideas that you have selected, write the complete message about the paper-saving incentive program.

3. A Memo Encouraging College Students to Conserve Paper

Assume that you are the director of information technology in a small business college that has several computer labs that students use both to learn business applications and to complete their assignments. Each lab contains a networked printer that students can use for printouts. During the last several years, you have become concerned with the amount of wasted paper and unnecessary printing taking place in the labs. During random checks of the printouts left behind in recent months, you have observed multiple printouts of resumés containing the same error, PowerPoint presentations printed with one slide to a page, and spreadsheets containing only a single number.

Over the last year you have tried various approaches to reduce printing costs.

You have already tried restricting the amount of paper put into printers each day, posting signs by the printers encouraging conservation, and asking instructors to monitor students’ printing habits more closely. None of these measures has caused a significant drop in the amount of paper being wasted.

Printing costs have reached an intolerable level—both in terms of the expenses associated with paper and printing supplies and in terms of the environmental damage caused by such waste.

Therefore, you have decided to implement a different solution. Beginning next term, all printing from labs will be charged to the students, just as it is now for photocopying. Here are the new procedures:

- Students will receive 50 pages of free printouts at the start of each term.
- When printing, students will have to enter their passwords and log on to their college accounts.
- Students’ print balances will be recorded on their college accounts.
- Cost of additional printouts: \$10 for 100 pages.
- Printouts can be purchased at the college bookstore and added to their accounts.
- Students who have used all their printing credits will not be able to print until they have purchased more credits.
- Bookstore hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday.

An email has already been sent to all students in the college informing them of the new printing procedures. Many students do not use their college email accounts on a regular basis so you will also be posting the information in a memo on the bulletin board next to each printer. It is not necessary to use all the information above, but you will have to explain the new procedures carefully so that people do not lose the ability to print. You will need to win support for the new procedures (or at least minimize complaints) so your announcement should present the information in a positive way.

4. An Email Enquiring about Implementation of a Paperless Office

Assume that you are the vice-president in charge of customer relations in a company that installs specialized telecommunications equipment for large corporate clients. The company recently changed from a paper-based system to a computerized approach in

an attempt to remain competitive in a changing marketplace.

The sales department was chosen to be the first to move toward digital information because it interacts with all other departments within the company as well as dealing extensively with clients—producing complex multi-page documents that contain details of new projects.

The move to a paperless approach within the sales department consisted of a two-part plan:

- i. Improving the bidding process so that the various departments involved with preparing cost projections can store their estimates in a central database and update information rapidly when conditions change.
- ii. Providing sales representatives with laptops and a database containing information on their customers' technical requirements that will allow the reps to share information with other people within the company about the customers' needs.

You are happy to see that the sales department has made a relatively smooth transition to the new system. The new graphical interface produced fewer technological problems than expected. Sales representatives working in the field and engineers and technologists working in the office were able to work out the details of the new bidding process so that it is workable by everyone concerned.

However, the transition from the older system of sales reps keeping their clients' records in personal notebooks to the new digital database has not gone as smoothly. Some of the sales representatives have entered some data into the customer database, indicating that there are probably no technical problems, but much of the information is too general to be very useful. Write an email to Justin Gavoya, manager for sales and client accounts, to find out the cause of the problem.

Select information from this list for your message. You do not need to use all the information.

- Details that would enable the company to gain a better understanding of its customers' requirements were often entered just before a contract was drawn up, too late to be useful.
- Sales representatives spend much of their time on the road, meeting with clients, and socializing with customers during luncheon meetings, hockey games, and other face-to-face contacts.
- Unlike the engineers and technical people who work at the main office, the sales reps spend only a day or two each week in the office.

- A shared database of customer information should facilitate contact among sales representatives and between the sales department and the main office.

Ask Gavoya to pass on your appreciation to the sales representatives for the smooth transition to the paperless bidding system. Ask him for an explanation for the vague information about clients that is being entered into the customer database. Find out if the problem is due to a technical glitch, a lack of time on the sales reps' part, or some other reason.²⁴

5. Email about the Ownership of Sales Data

Assume that you are the manager for sales and client accounts for the telecommunications company described above. This morning you received an email inquiry from the vice-president in charge of customer relations. Sabrina Winzinowich congratulated you on your department's relatively smooth transition to the new system. However, Winzinowich expressed concern that the database of customer information contained far less data than expected, much of it vague. She has asked you to explain why your sales representatives have been reluctant to enter the data and instead have continued to store the information in paper notebooks.

After talking with your sales reps, you have assembled a list of their comments. Write a reply to Winzinowich's email by using some of the information below:

- Much of the work of sales representatives involves "relationship management" with key people within the customer organizations.
- Information on customers was acquired through lunch meetings, golf games, and other face-to-face contacts.
- Reps' notes often contained information on customers' leisure activities, family lives, and personal characteristics.
- The notes also included the names of people with whom they did not want to negotiate, as well as their reasons for wanting to avoid particular people.
- The sales representatives insisted that the information was subjective and useful only to the reps themselves.
- Some of the information could be considered libellous if released to the wrong people.
- Others felt that sharing the information with others in the company would make the sales representatives easier to replace, thus jeopardizing their long-term job prospects.

- Most sales reps insisted that they would continue to keep the information in their own notebooks, releasing only the most general information into the company database.
- They argued that as long as they did their jobs, the information that they kept on their clients was of no business to anyone else within the company.
- Several reps threatened to quit (and take their notebooks with them) if any further attempt was made by pushy members of upper management to coerce them into providing the company with personal data from their client lists.

Respond to Winzinowich's email, explaining that the sales representatives are willing to enter customers' technical requirements into the database but will continue to record personal information about the clients in their own notebooks.²⁵

6. Letter Informing Bank Customers about Online Banking

Assume that you are part of the environmental working group at the Bank of Yellowknife. In 2004, the group was asked to create an environmental policy for paper use. The policy gives direction on paper conservation efforts and on improving the environmental qualities of the bank's paper choices, such as the use of recycled content and the introduction of measures to reduce paper use. The policy was reviewed by an external group of stakeholders and was launched in 2006.

Your task is to write a letter to account holders inviting them to convert their existing accounts to online accounts that use less paper.

Use some, but not all, of the information from the list below to explain the features of online banking:

- Electronic banking accounts are paper-free and eco-friendly.
- Online accounts do not require passbooks or mailed monthly statements.
- Accounts record 24 months of online transaction history.
- Online banking customers can receive and pay bills online, saving postage and transportation costs.
- Customers can find out more information and begin the process of converting their accounts by going to the bank's website: www.bankofyellowknife.ca/online_accounts.
- The Bank of Yellowknife introduced paperless record keeping for all Canadian staff in 2005.
- The bank does not use email to warn customers of security risks. Any email messages claiming to be from the bank and asking for account information should be reported to the bank, but phishing attempts should never be answered.
- The use of passwords and 128-bit encryption makes online banking a safe alternative to traditional banking.
- During 2007, more than 15 000 employees switched to online banking.
- The bank now has more than 51 000 paperless employee accounts.
- Internet banking requires a computer and an internet connection.
- The bank has already saved millions of printed pages as a result of the implementation of paperless staff accounts.
- At the head office in Yellowknife, more than 70 percent of waste has been diverted from landfill through recycling programs.

7. Email Informing Staff of a Conversion to a Paperless Office

Assume that you are the assistant to the manager of engineering at an engineering consulting firm. Yesterday, Steve Grey, the manager of engineering, informed you that he had finally received approval to convert the office to a new operating mode that relies more on electronic communication and less on paper. Grey has asked you to pass on the news to the other people in the office.

The conversion will require changes in three key areas:

- i. A greater use of email for communication with clients and co-workers
- ii. Increased use of databases and electronic forms for customer orders and client records
- iii. Scanning of old paper-based files so that they can be stored electronically

The increasing dependence on email and electronic communication should produce few problems, but Grey expects that the scanning of the old files will be met with resistance.

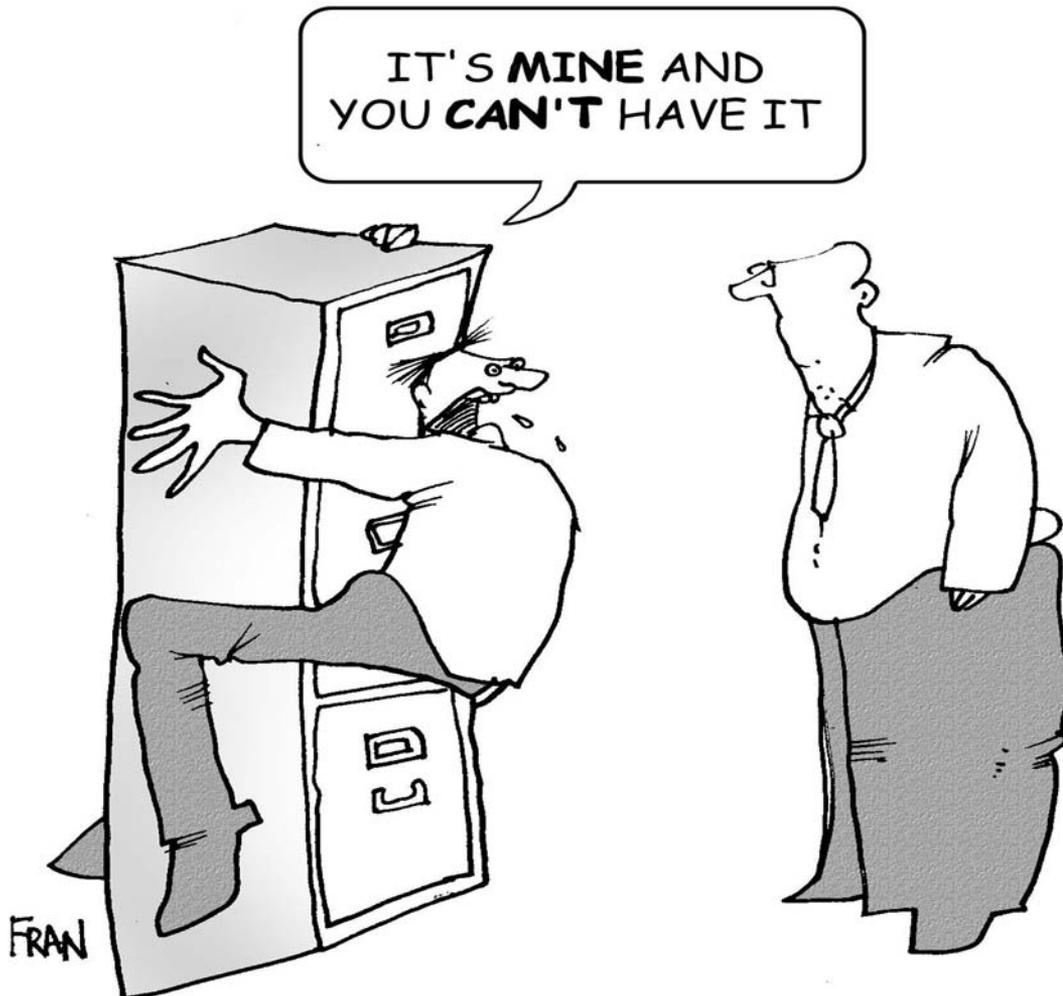
He wants you to take steps to make the work go as quickly as possible.

"We do not expect the office staff to do the actual scanning, but we do want the technicians' work to go as smoothly as possible," says Grey. "I want you to write an email informing the engineering staff of the change. Some of those people have two or three filing

cabinets filled with files they haven't looked at in years. They should welcome the opportunity to get rid of some of their junk. Unfortunately, some of them will be annoyed. You've got to convince them that a purge will be good for everyone."

He goes on to tell you the specific details of how the transition will work. The rough notes from your meeting with Grey appear below. It is not necessary to use all the information:

- Staff will now be allotted one drawer of a filing cabinet for paper files related to their current projects.
- All other information will be stored electronically.
- Place unneeded files in a disposal bin for shredding.
- Place archival information into the basket (provided) to be scanned
- Archive signed contracts, records of meetings, correspondence, reports more than three years old.
- Filing cabinets will be collected in one month and replaced with new, smaller units.



MORRIS WAS FINDING IT MORE DIFFICULT THAN MOST TO ADJUST TO THE CONCEPT OF A 'PAPERLESS' OFFICE

Some people have a difficult time accepting the concept of the paperless office.

- More than 16 tonnes of paper is expected to be shredded from this office.
- Electronic files will be stored in a secure location and backed up every night.

8. Best Places to Work Contest: Letter Requesting Information

Assume that you are the manager of human resources for your employer. At a meeting of the company's managers, your company's CEO, Ali Stein, produced a copy of the article entitled "50 Best Employers in Canada" and said, "We should be on that list. Our company is making a profit, our employees are content, and our products are selling well. Please look into it and get back to me."

After reading the article and looking into the website that was set up to explain the contest, you reported the information found below to Stein. "All of this is good," he said, "but before I can commit to the project, we need more information. See if you can get a copy of each of the surveys. Also find out what it would cost to provide us with a detailed analysis of the results. And ask them for a more detailed description of the analysis.

"Also I need you to find out how many companies have entered the contest; it's not very flattering to be in the top 50 if only 55 companies entered. See if you can find out whether the losing companies' names are released as well. I'm not sure if we will want to be a part of this if they are.

"Some of this sounds too good to be true. I know the website says it's free and that they even pay the postage, but they have to get their money from somewhere. See if you can find out if there's a catch."

As your instructor directs, write either a letter or an email message to Hewitt Associates requesting further information. Here are the company addresses:

Hewitt Associates
 1111 West Georgia Street
 Suite 2010
 Vancouver, British Columbia V6E 4M3
 bestemployerscanada@hewitt.com

9. Best Places to Work Contest: Email Informing Employees

Assume that you work in the human resources department of a medium-sized business. Since the company began in 1995, it has gained a positive local reputation as a good place to work. Your company has grown from a small business employing 20 people to its present position of employing almost 800 full- and

part-time employees, making it one of Canada's fastest-growing businesses.

Yesterday in a department meeting, the manager of human resources, Amelie Trebeck, announced that the company was planning to enter *The Globe and Mail Report on Business Magazine's* "50 Best Employers in Canada" contest. The annual contest surveys employees to identify the best places to work in Canada. According to Trebeck, the company's CEO, Ali Stein, is thinking of expanding the company's operations to other provinces, and he believes that the publicity of winning a place on the list should provide a boost to the company's reputation. "In addition," Trebeck pointed out, "winning such an award will enhance the department's reputation as well. And it won't hurt anyone in the department when it comes time for year-end bonuses to be awarded."

She goes on to explain that a company's standing is based on the results of several surveys that are to be completed by employees. Use any (but not all) of the information from the list below that will help you to prepare the email.

- All surveys are anonymous, so employee participation cannot be made mandatory.
- Entrants must have operated in Canada for at least three years and have 400 or more permanent employees.
- Participating organizations are required to administer all three of the following surveys in their organization:
 - i. Leadership Team Survey—completed by all members of senior management. The online survey takes 45 minutes to complete.
 - ii. Employee Opinion Survey—completed by 60% of your employees (480 people). The online or paper-based survey takes 35 minutes to complete.
 - iii. Human Resources Survey—completed by the head of HR. The online survey takes 2 hours to complete.
- The service is free to the company. Both online and paper-based surveys are provided free of charge. Postage is also paid by Hewitt Associates.
- Data is analyzed by Hewitt Associates, an international company that specializes in providing human resource services to companies around the world.
- Surveys must be submitted by June 30.
- Winners will be announced in the January issue of *Report on Business*.

- All companies participating will receive a standard report of the results. Further, more detailed analysis can be arranged at a cost.
- The survey measures three elements of employee engagement: whether workers speak positively about the organization to others, have a desire to remain a member of the organization, and are dedicated to helping the business succeed.²⁶

Trebeck announces that you have been appointed to the position of survey coordinator. Your job, she says, is to encourage employees to participate in the surveys and to deal with the agency conducting the contest, Hewitt Associates. Your company will be included in this year's contest only if a sufficient number of employees complete the survey. Write an email to all employees in the company, explaining the contest and encouraging them to participate.

10. Letter Inquiring about a Rewards Program

Assume that you are employed by a locally owned credit union that provides financial services to the community in which you live. You have been looking for ways to improve employee morale. Employees are relatively content with their wages and benefits package, so you have decided to look into award vouchers that will allow your better workers to choose from a few luxury items for themselves rather than monetary awards, which would probably go toward paying bills. Rather than managing the program yourself, you have decided to contract the plan out to a business that specializes in such things, but you need to find out more information.

If all you wanted to do was present gift cards to employees, you could pick them up at any local mall but you want more than that. You need an organization that will allow managers to award a few points for coming in early and many points for winning a major contract. Employees would then redeem the points for various gifts.

Write a letter to a potential supplier asking about its rewards program. Your address is Precambrian Credit Union of Ontario, Box 1222, Sundridge, Ontario, P0A 1Z0. Before you agree to such a service, you require further information. Use some, but not all, of the ideas in the following list to help you put together your questions.

Background information:

- Precambrian Credit Union pays better wages than most other similar employers in the area.
- Sundridge is located between Toronto and North Bay.

- Last year out of a total staff of twenty, you lost three employees and hired four.
- Half of your employees are male; half are female.
- Employees already have a dental plan and government health insurance.

Information needed:

- Procedure for employees to redeem points
- Procedure for managers to award points
- Evidence that reward programs improve employee performance
- Catalogue of available prizes
- Cost of the service
- Are rewards considered taxable income? If so, does the employee or the company pay?

11. Memo Soliciting Volunteers

Assume that you are the human resources director at Peak of the Market, a community-minded company that processes and sells fresh vegetables to markets across North America and Asia. Part of your company's mission is to serve the community. Last year the company donated more than 400 000 kilograms of fresh vegetables to various community-based foodbanks.²⁷

As HR director you believe that employees want more from a job than just a paycheque at the end of the week. In addition to their regular paycheques and benefits, your employees receive other rewards from helping others that go far beyond money. Sometimes your company's community service activities give you the opportunity to reward workers in other ways. Assume that Peak of the Market has been asked to provide volunteers to collect food donations for a local food bank from people attending a local sporting event. You have been asked to recruit volunteers. Use some, but not all, of the information below in your memo or email to all employees:

- This is a playoff game. Tickets are hard to find.
- You have made a similar offer during other games this year. Support has been good but not great.
- So far this year volunteers have collected almost one tonne of canned and dried food.
- This is the first time in five years that the team has made the playoffs.
- The team missed the playoffs last year because of a coaching error in the final game of the regular season.
- All volunteers receive a ticket to the game plus a voucher for a burger and soft drink.

- Employees' spouses or children may also volunteer provided they are able to perform the required duties. (Children under 16 are ineligible.)
- People may sign up either by email or on one of the sign-up sheets posted in the break rooms.
- People should sign up only if they actually intend to volunteer. (You haven't had a problem with no-shows in the past, but you don't want to start now.)
- Volunteers need to indicate which position they are volunteering for and the ages of any children who will be assisting.
- The deadline for signing up is the first of next month.
- The game is on the tenth of next month. Game time is 2:00 p.m. Volunteers should be there by 1:00.
- Tickets and vouchers will be distributed by the supervisors a few days in advance of the game.

Duties of Game day Volunteers:

- Staff drop-off booths
- Load donations onto trucks (some lifting required)
- Arrive an hour before game time and to miss the first thirty minutes of the game

Duties of Pre-game Volunteers:

- Organize volunteers into work teams and notify them of their drop-off stations
- Notify media outlets of the food drive
- Complete advance work a week before the game and an hour before the games
- Involves no lifting
- Expect to see most of the game

Duties of Post-game Volunteers

- Return to the warehouse after the game and sort donations (estimated time about 90 minutes)
- Do some lifting
- Expect to see the entire game
- Do not consume alcohol during the game to ensure safety

12. Letter Inquiring about an Overseas Business Opportunity

Assume that you work for the marketing department of Ten Thousand Villages, a business that specializes in fair trade marketing. Ten Thousand Villages helps

artisans and food producers in developing countries market their products across North America so that they receive fair value for the work that they do.²⁸ In addition to operating retail stores in many cities, it also offers its products for sale over the internet at www.tenthousandvillages.ca.

Product offerings range from chocolate purchased from farmers' co-ops in Central and South America, drums and handicrafts from a non-profit marketing outlet in India, and hand-knotted oriental rugs from the Middle East to soapstone bookends from an artisan group in Kenya.

Ten Thousand Villages is always interested in expanding its product line as long as the profits go directly to the producers and are not absorbed by brokers or intermediaries. Recently a colleague returned from the South Pacific country of Papua New Guinea (PNG) with a number of fascinating artifacts that she suggested that you look into carrying. The crafts are indeed interesting, but before you can carry them, you have to ensure that you will be able to stay faithful to the principles of the store and ensure that the producers receive maximum benefits of their work. After doing some research on the country by using the internet, you have come up with a potential source of information about village cooperatives in PNG. Write a letter to the following address explaining the idea behind Ten Thousand Villages and asking whether they can put you in contact with artisans' co-operatives so that you can purchase locally produced crafts from PNG:

Village Development Trust
PO BOX 2397 Lae 411
Papua New Guinea

You will need to find out details of existing cooperatives that could supply your store and whether there are any government or environmental regulations on the types of purchases you make. Since shipping costs from the South Pacific could add up, you are especially interested in products that are easy to ship.

Some of the information in the following lists may be useful in your letter:

- Papua New Guinea has a population of about 5 million people and more than 700 native languages are spoken.
- PNG was a colony of Australia until 1975 and is now a member of the British Commonwealth, governed by a parliamentary democracy.
- PNG is home to 3000 different kinds of orchids and 30 species of the bird of paradise.

Your colleague has told you about these village-made crafts:

- Net bags, or bilums, made by hand from natural fibres
- Stone axes that were once used as tools and weapons but that are now purely ceremonial
- Masks made of wood and clay and decorated with shells and pig’s teeth
- Carved walking sticks, stools, and tables
- Handheld Kundu drums shaped like an hourglass
- Carved wooded storyboards that illustrate incidents of village life²⁹

Here is further information about Ten Thousand Villages:

- You work with more than one hundred artisan groups in more than thirty countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
- Your work is based on the principle that trade should have a conscience.
- You choose handicrafts that reflect rich cultural traditions, that are environmentally sensitive, and that appeal to North American consumers.
- Ten Thousand Villages was started in 1946 by Edna Ruth Byler, a Mennonite Central Committee worker.

Writing Skills Checkup: Using Numbers in Business Writing

Numerals are used in the following situations:

- Showing precision (a 2.1 percent increase)
- Expressing large quantities (178 cars in the lot)
- Stating money, serial numbers, phone numbers (416-555-6789)

Numbers are written as words in these situations:

- Beginning a sentence (Twenty-one people signed the petition).
- Expressing small numbers (usually numbers that can be expressed in one or two words). Two-word numbers expressing ninety-nine or less require a hyphen.
- Showing approximate amounts (Almost fifty people entered).

Combinations of words and numerals are sometimes needed for clarity:

- Showing very large numbers (Canada has a population of 33 million.)
- When two numbers appear together (I ordered 25 eighty-page booklets.)

Numbers with symbols are used in these cases:

- Showing specific amounts of money (They received a \$1.25 increase in hourly wages.) More general references use words (That is as phony as a three-dollar bill.)
- Showing serial numbers (We requisitioned a new computer: #123abc456.)

- Indicating percentages in tables or in scientific writing; business writing usually uses the word “percent” (Productivity increased by 13 percent.)

In statistical writing and other documents that make frequent use of numbers, numerals and symbols are often used instead of words.

Correct the use of numbers in these sentences. Some are correct. An example is shown:

Incorrect: Reformatting a property tax form to save paper saved one county twenty seven thousand dollars and twenty-five hundred kilograms of paper³⁰

Correct: Reformatting a property tax form to save paper saved one county \$27 000 and 2500 kilograms of paper.

1. It has been estimated that one market-size pulpwood tree makes about twelve thousand sheets of standard writing paper.
2. Some experts claim that electronic records will be readable for only a fraction of the two- to 300-year life expectancy of acid-free paper.
3. Worldwide in 1998 there were 218 000.000 printers, 22 000 000 multifunction machines (printer, scanner, and copier in 1), and 12 000 000 copiers.³¹
4. The average employee in a large company in Canada prints almost fifty pages a day, while the average employee based in a small-to-medium-sized environment (fewer than 500 employees) prints 35 pages a day.

5. Business documents represent 62 percent of pages being printed, while email and Internet printing represent averages of 16 and nine percent of total print volumes.³²
6. In 2003, the TD bank evaluated all paper reports sent to retail branches and eliminated approximately twenty-five % of all existing reports or converted them to an online format, reducing the amount of stationery consumed each year by approximately forty-four and a half million sheets.³³
7. Online banking offers the convenience of banking 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can save 100s of dollars each year in postage and travel expenses.
8. Currently, the average U.S. office worker is estimated to use a sheet of paper every 12 minutes—a ream per person every 2 1/2 working weeks—and to dispose of 50 to 90 kilograms of paper every year.
9. To store 2 000 000 paper documents, an organization can expect to spend between \$40 000 and \$60 000 on filing cabinets alone. Those same files could fit on fewer than ten CD-ROMs and require considerably less rented floor space.