Topic: Message Revising

Using the 3-x-3 writing process to write a business message, phase one is prewriting, the analysis and planning. Phase 2 is the creating of a first draft. Phase 3 is revising the message. Only amateurs accept their first draft as polished. No matter how hurried you may be or how minor a message, if you always proofread and revise your messages you will gain a reputation as an excellent business communicator.

Revising can be much easier than writing. Facing the plank page can be daunting, while facing even a terribly written page that needs revising can be much less daunting. Reread and revise every business messages you create. This process of editing, proofreading, and evaluating the message includes items of spelling and grammar, conciseness, clarity, readability, and effectiveness. This process can include using any of a range of computer programs, but also requires careful attention to detail directly from you.

Subtopics

Message Revising: Evaluation
Message Revising: Second Draft
Message Revising: Readability
Message Revising: Proofreading

Subtopic: Evaluation

Once you have completed a first draft you are ready to start evaluating your business message. Before you begin writing your second draft, use the tools below to evaluate your first draft and make notes of all the things you will want to change in your second draft. This phase, the evaluation, is note taking, in preparation of refining your first draft.

Proofread all documents you create. You are checking for conciseness in your writing. Primary focus in proofreading needs to include: spelling, grammar, punctuation, names and numbers, and format. Additionally be aware of the following.

Remember that after all of the technical details of writing, the most important thing is that your document makes its point clearly, articulately, supporting all of the important points. The business message is a surrogate for you being these to speak to the reader in person, so make sure that you are well represented.

- Read your first draft and ask yourself if you have said what you wanted to say.
- Ask yourself if you have supported the things that you have asserted.
- Does the structure of your document make sense; does your position or argument have a logical progression?
- Have you appropriately anticipated major questions that could arise (remember that this document is standing in for you)?
- Ask yourself if this document would inform or convince you.

Once you have evaluated for content, evaluate for form and technique:

- Use spellcheck.

- Most word processing programs also offer grammar-check.
- External programs such as Grammarly offer more in depth spelling and grammar checking.
- Editing electronic documents can employ strikethroughs and the use of different colors.
- Editing hard copy documents on paper should be done using standard proofreading symbols. Know the standard symbols for:
  - delete,
  - capitalize,
  - insert,
  - insert comma,
  - insert period, and
  - start a new paragraph.
- Keep it short. State what you want in the fewest words possible.
- Keep it simple. Beware of embellishing until your key ideas get lost.

Subtopic: Second Draft

Using all of the notes you have taken and notations you have made on your paper or digital page, incorporate all of those changes into you editing of the first draft, in order to arrive at the the second draft of your document. All of the following rules will make your second draft more readable, more concise, and more compelling than your first draft.

- Eliminate trite business phrases like "as per your request" (which can be replaced with "as you requested") and "under separate cover" (which can be replaced with "separately").
- Remove cliché expressions. Phrases like "beyond the shadow of a doubt," "first and foremost," and "last but not least" should be eliminated.
- Do not use buzzwords. Buzzwords like "cost effective," "positioned to perform," and "value-added services with end-to-end fulfillment" should be cut.
- Get rid of slang. Words or phrases that you might use in informal conversation might not be appropriate in a business message. Words like "snarky," "lousy," "bombed" or Twitter slang like FOMO (fear of missing out), ICYMI (in case yu missed it) have no place in a business message.
- Scrap buried verbs. Verbs that are unnecessarily turned into wordy noun expressions should be replaced. Phrases like "engage in the preparation of" or "make an assumption of" should be replaced with the words "prepare" or "assume."
- Overused intensifiers can have the opposite effect than intended, they can diminish rather than intensify. Words like "very," "definitely," "extremely," can sound un-businesslike. Control your enthusiasm.
- Eliminate flabby expressions, which are phrases using filler words to make your sentences longer and feel more erudite. Fewer words are better. Consider replacing phrases like "as a general rule" or "despite the fact that" with single words like "generally," or "although."
- Part of being concise is eliminating long lead-ins. The sentence "I am sending you this notification that our department will undergo thorough evaluation and redesign this quarter," should be replaced by "Our department will undergo thorough evaluation and redesign this quarter."
- Frequently the phrases "there is," "there are," it is," and "It was" are merely filler. Eliminate these phrases everywhere possible. The sentence "There are less buyers shopping in brick and mortar on Black Friday than ever before in merchandising history,"

should be replaced with the sentence "Less buyers a shop in brick and mortar on Black Friday than ever."

- Sometimes two word phrases are made up redundant words; eliminate one. The phrase "basic fundamentals" could be replaced by either word alone.
- Look for other words that do not clarify and just take up space. The sentence "In the example of the McDonalds and Burger King, it is McDonalds who dominates the market globally." Can easily be replaced with "McDonalds dominates the global market over Burger King."

Subtopic: Readability

You can have the most conclusive data, presented in the most well structures and conclusive business message possible; but if your document is not inviting to the eye, it is likely that your message might be skimmed, if not ignored altogether. A well-designed document visually will enhance the readability of your messages and make your writing appear that much more accomplished to your reader. Some of the most effective tools to use in enhancing readability include:

- Effective use of white space. White space is the empty space on a page. When used effectively white space acts like a frame around a piece of art, helping the audience to focus on the salient points without cluttering up the visual field. Short sentences (20 words or fewer) and paragraphs (8 or less printed lines) are inviting to the eye; they are made even more compelling when surrounded by white space, making your key points more readable. As you revise consider the appearance of the facts on the page in addition to the actual content.
- Appropriate use of margin and text alignment. In standard business documents, side margins are usually 1 to 1.5 inches. English and other Western-European languages align to the left. Right margins can either be justified or ragged (as it is in textbooks and magazines). Headings can centered, but most often are left-justified.
- Appropriate typefaces. While many typefaces are available for your use. The sans serif family include Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Tahoma, Univers, and Veranda; these typefaces are used on material that does not require continuous reading like headings and signs. Traditional serif typefaces include Century, Garamond, Georgia, Goudy, Palatino, and Times New Roman; these are the most commonly used typefaces and suggest tradition, maturity, and formality. More casual messages might employ a more happy or creative type, like Brush script, comic sans, Gigi, or Jokerman.
- Appropriate use of diverse fonts. The word font refers to different styles within a typeface. The rule of thumb is to use these for emphasis, but never use them so much that they become distracting or annoying. Fonts include:
  - Capitalization. Useful for headings or emphasizing particular words of phrases, but lengthy sections that are capitalized can make readers feel as if they are being shouted at and can make them uncomfortable.
  - Boldface, italics, and underlining are useful for calling attention to a word or phrase, but be careful that these fonts are not overused and do not become annoying.
  - Small caps, Outlining, and shadowing are infrequently used in business messages.

- Use of numbered lists and bullet points. Bullet points (like the list you are reading now) list a series of items with a small do denoting each new item. Numbered lists are similar, but instead of the bullet (or dot), they are sequentially numbered.
- The effect of a bullet or numbered list can also be accomplished by a list in which all lines consistently start with the verb or other stylistic device connoting that all of these lines are parallel.
- Appropriate use of headings. Headings can be used, often highlighted, to give a quick preview of the text that follows.

Subtopic: Proofreading

Having proofread the first draft, you are now familiar with the process. Once you have evaluated your document, written a second draft and checked it for readability, it is time to proofread this final draft. Check carefully; do not completely rely on your computer spelling and grammar check program, and whenever possible read out loud. It can also be very useful to get someone to read your document with a fresh set of eyes that are likely to catch small errors you might miss.

- Time permitting, put the document aside for a while. You can return to proofread it later, preferably the next day.
- Spelling can be checked electronically but these programs will usually only catch non-words. They are not capable of telling you that you wrote "effect" but should have used "affect." If you question either the spelling or usage of a word, look it up. Watch for words like "to," "too," and "two."
- Check your grammar. Make sure that subjects agree with verbs, pronouns agree with their antecedents, and that you have adhered to all other rules of grammar.
- Check punctuation. Are introductory clauses flowed by commas? In compound sentences are commas placed prior to the coordinating conjunctions? Double check how you have used colons and semi-colons.
- Make sure that names are correct and consistent. Double-check the spelling of names.
- Make sure that numbers are correct and consistent. Double-check any numbers and make sure you are consistent whether in your use of spelling numbers or using numerals.
- Consider your formatting; does your document look balanced and readable on the page, or is it crammed too full of material? Are you consistent in your use of typefaces and fonts? Is your document inviting to readers or off-putting?
- When possible proofread from a printed document.
- Use standard proofreaders marks when proofreading on paper.
- Track your changes or use comments to track changes electronically; this way you have a clear record of the progression of your document in case you need to know or go back to an earlier version.
- Complex documents require additional proofreading steps. These include:
  - Print your hard copy double-spaced. It is easier on your eyes and provides space for comments and editing notes.
  - Make sure that you leave sufficient time to properly proofread, do not just cram it in at the end of the process.
  - Assume that you will have made errors and overlooked mistakes; congratulate yourself for catching them rather than criticizing yourself for making them initially.

- Read at least twice, once for word meaning and intent and a second time for grammar and other mechanics of writing. For longer documents read a third time to check formatting.
- Read slowly – focus on individual words rather than reading merely to grasp the ideas.
- Enlist help. Having someone read your document out loud to you and question spellings of names, difficult wordings, capitalization, and punctuation can be an enormous help.

Topic Review

The two most important things about any business message are that it says what you want to say and that it helps you achieve your immediate goal. Most writers agree that having written a first draft, revising the document is much easier, but too often writers focus on the mechanics of writing to the point of losing sight of the objective. Begin and end any period of revising by considering what you want to communicate/achieve and whether you feel your document accomplishes that.

This study guide offers you many specifics to look at when revising, and many tools that you can use to make a clearer and more effective document. These include tools for evaluating, developing a first draft into a second draft, checking for readability, and proofreading.

What is similar to all of these activities is keeping your writing focused on your objective and removing any material that may hamper the reader's ability to receive your message. By the time you have taken the first draft of your document through this process, you should have a document that is ready to be delivered.

Question(s) to Consider:

1. You have been tasked with writing the "quarter-to-date" sections for an upcoming report to be distributed to stockholders, your assignment was 12 pages, but you have reported on all of the salient points and presented a solid summation in 9 pages. Do you have to write the full 12 pages, and if so, what more do you include to extend your document by 3 pages?
2. Reports that you have read in your organization seem to be driven by technical jargon, business-speak, and industry "buzz" words. You are not necessarily comfortable writing in that style. How do you prepare your report?
3. You have chosen to check your message with Grammarly (an online spelling and grammar checker) and your word processor's onboard spelling and grammar checker. There are a few small points of grammar on which they disagree. What is your best course of action?
4. You have inherited ultimate responsibility for a report for which six different people are each providing you a different section. The sections have all come in, but five of they seem to be heavy reading, especially considering they will all be in one report. How might you consolidate them and find a consistent style?

Answers to Question(s) to Consider:

1. You need to ask if it is possible to turn in a 9-page report. You may need to present 12 pages if it is a necessity of the typesetter, or to match pagination for an already published table of contents or index. If you do need to extend, do not add needless material, it will clutter your pages and possibly confuse your audience. Consider the possibility of including charts or diagrams that put some of

your written data and analysis into visual form. You can also investigate the possibility of alternative spacing.

2.   A report written in clear concise English that is not filled with business-speak, jargon, or "buzz" words will be much more welcome and effective than a report written in a style that is uncomfortable to you. You may find once you get into the writing of it that some of that technical jargon is necessary to clarify specific points, but remember that less is always better. Speaking, or writing, in your own voice will be clearer and preferable.

3.   Both of these computer programs are good tools, but neither of them is infallible. Go back to the rules of grammar, which you can check through a variety of online sources, and determine for yourself which is correct. Simply saying that these are small grammatical points and not addressing them is sloppy and lazy, as is randomly choosing one over the other. Do the work to get it correct.

4.   Nobody likes to read a ponderous or imposing report. You can begin by reduce the more onerous parts of each document in the form or either bullet points or numbered lists. Having eliminated all of that extra verbiage, make the look of the paper consistent by putting everything into the same typeface and making the use of fonts consistent (capitals for headings, italicizing the key word in each bullet point, and so on). You can include a short summation at the bottom of each section, and a lengthier one at the end of the report.