B

A Casebook of Sample Documents Illustrating the Writing Process

Every writing situation requires deliberate decisions for *working with the information* and for *planning, drafting,* and *revising* the document. Some of these decisions are illustrated in Figure B.1. Each writer approaches the process through a sequence of decisions that works best for *that* person. No stage of decisions is complete until *all* stages are complete.

CRITICAL THINKING IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The writing process is a *critical thinking* process: the writer makes a series of deliberate decisions in response to a situation. The actual "writing" (putting words on the page) is only a small part of the overall process—probably the least significant part.

In this section, we will follow one working writer through an everyday writing situation; we will see how he solves his unique information, persuasion, and ethics problems and how he collaborates to design a useful and efficient document.

CASE 1—AN EVERYDAY WRITING SITUATION: THE EVOLUTION OF A SHORT REPORT

The company is Microbyte, maker of portable microcomputers. The writer is Glenn Tarullo (BS, Management; Minor: Computer Science). Glenn has been on the job three months as Assistant Training Manager for Microbyte's Marketing and Customer Service Division.

For three years, Glenn's boss, Marvin Long, has periodically offered a training program for new managers. Long's program combines an introduction to the company with instruction in management skills (time management, motivation, communication). Long seems satisfied with his two-week program but has asked Glenn to evaluate it and write a report as part of a company move to upgrade training procedures.

Glenn knows his report will be read by Long's boss, George Hopkins (Assistant Vice President, Personnel), and Charlotte Black (Vice President, Marketing, the person who devised the upgrading plan). Copies will go to other division heads, to the division's chief executive, and to Long's personnel file.

Glenn spends two weeks (Monday, October 3, to Friday, October 14) sitting in and taking notes on Long's classes. On

October 14, the trainees evaluate the program. After reading these evaluations and reviewing his notes, Glenn concludes that the program was successful but could stand improvement. How can he be candid without harming or offending anyone (instructors, his boss, or guest speakers)? Figure B.2 depicts Glenn's problem.

Glenn is scheduled to present his report in conference with Long, Black, and Hopkins on Wednesday, October 19. Right after the final class (1 P.M., Friday, the 14th), Glenn begins work on his report.

Working with the Information

Glenn spends half of Friday afternoon fretting over the details of his situation, the readers and other people involved, the political realities, constraints, and consequences. (He knows no love is lost between Long and Black, and he wants to steer clear of their ongoing conflict.) By 3 P.M., Glenn hasn't written a word. Desperate, he decides to write whatever comes to mind:

> Although the October Management Training Session was deemed quite successful, several problems have emerged that require our immediate attention.
>
> - Too many of the instructors had poor presentation skills. A few never arrived on time. One didn't stick to the topic but rambled incessantly. Jones and Wells seemed poorly prepared. Instructors in general seemed to lack any clear objectives. Also, because too few visual aids were used, many presentations seemed colorless and apparently bored the trainees.
> - The trainees (all new people) were not at all cognizant of how the company was organized or functioned, so the majority of them often couldn't relate to what the speakers were talking about.
> - It is my impression that this was a weak session due to the fact that there were insufficient members (only five trainees). Such a small class makes the session a waste of time and money. For instance, Lester Beck, Senior Vice President of Personnel, came down to spend over one hour addressing only a handful of trainees. Another factor is that with fewer trainees in a class, less dialogue occurs, with people tending to just sit and get talked at.
> - Last but not least, executive speakers generally skirted the real issues, saying nothing about what it was really like to work here. They never really explained how to survive politically (e.g., never criticize your superior; never complain about the hard work or long hours; never tell anyone what you *really* think; never observe how few women are in executive or managerial positions, or how disorganized things seem to be). New employees shouldn't have to learn these things the hard way.
>
> In the final analysis, if these problems can be addressed immediately, it is my opinion we can look forward in the future to effectuating management training sessions of even higher quality than those we now have.

Glenn completes this draft at 5:10 P.M. Displeased with the results but not sure how to improve the piece, he asks an experienced colleague for advice and feedback. Blair Cordasco, a senior project manager, has collaborated with Glenn on several earlier projects. Cordasco agrees to study Glenn's draft over the weekend. Because of this document's sensitive nature, they decide to work on it face-to-face instead of transacting via email.

At 8:05 Monday morning, Cordasco reviews the document with Glenn. First, she points out obvious style problems: wordiness ("due to the fact that"), jargon ("effectuating"), triteness ("in the final analysis"), implied bias ("weak presentation," "skirted"), among others. Can you identify other style problems in Glenn's draft?

Cordasco points out other problems. The piece is disorganized, and even though Glenn is being honest, he isn't being particularly fair. The emphasis is too critical (making Glenn's boss look bad to his superiors), and the views are too subjective (no one is interested in hearing Glenn gripe about the company's political problems). Moreover, the report lacks persuasive force because it contains little useful advice for solving the problems he identifies. The tone is bossy and judgmental. Glenn is in no position to make this kind of *power connection* (see page 48). In this form, the report will only alienate people and harm Glenn's career. He needs to be more fair, diplomatic, and reasonable.

Planning the Document

Glenn realizes he needs to begin by focusing on his writing situation. His audience and use analysis goes like this[1]:

I'd better decide *exactly* what my primary reader wants. Long requested the report, but only because Black developed the scheme for division-wide improvements. So I really have two primary readers: my boss and the big boss.

My major question here: Am I including enough detail for all the bosses? The answer to this question will require answers to more specific questions:

ANTICIPATED READERS' QUESTIONS

What are we doing right, and how can we do it better?

What are we doing wrong, and does it cost us money?

Have we left anything out, and does it matter?

How, specifically, can we improve the program, and how will those improvements help the company?

Because all readers have participated in these sessions (as trainees, instructors, or guest speakers), they don't need background explanations.

I should begin with the *positive* features of the last session. Then I can discuss the problems and make recommendations. Maybe I can eliminate the bossy and judgmental tone by *suggesting improvements* instead of *criticizing weaknesses.* Also, I could be more persuasive by describing the *benefits* of my suggestions.

Glenn realizes that if he wants successful future programs, he can't afford to alienate anyone. After all, he wants to be seen as a loyal member of the company, yet preserve his self-esteem and demonstrate he is capable of making objective recommendations.

Now, I have a clear enough sense of what to do.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE The purpose of my document is to provide my supervisor and interested executives with an evaluation of the workshop by describing its strengths, suggesting improvements, and explaining the benefits of these changes.

From this plan, I should be able to revise my first draft, but that first draft lacks important details. I should brainstorm to get *all* the details (including the *positive* ones) I want to include.

GLENN'S BRAINSTORMING LIST. Glenn's first draft touched on several topics. Incorporating them into his brainstorming, he comes up with the following list.

1. better-prepared instructors and more visuals
2. on-the-job orientation *before* the training session
3. more members in training sessions
4. executive speakers should spell out qualities needed for success
5. beneficial emphasis on interpersonal communication
6. need follow-up evaluation (in six months?)
7. four types of training evaluations:
   a. trainees' reactions
   b. testing of classroom learning
   c. transference of skills to the job
   d. effect of training on the organization (high sales, more promotions, better-written reports)
8. videotaping and critiquing of trainee speeches worked well
9. acknowledge the positive features of the session
10. ongoing improvement ensures quality training
11. division of class topics into two areas was a good idea
12. additional trainees would increase classroom dialogue

13. the more trainees in a session, the less time and money wasted
14. instructors shouldn't drift from the topic
15. on-the-job training to give a broad view of the division
16. clear course objectives to increase audience interest and to measure the program's success
17. Marvin Long has done a great job with these sessions over the years

By 9:05 A.M., the office is hectic. Glenn puts his list aside to spend the day on work that has been piling up. Not until 4 P.M. does he return to his report.

Now what? I should delete whatever my audience already knows or doesn't need, or whatever seems unfair or insincere: 7 can go (this audience needs no lecture in training theory); 14 is too negative and critical—besides, the same idea is stated more positively in 4; 17 is obvious brown-nosing, and I'm in no position to make such grand judgments.

Maybe I can unscramble this list by arranging items within categories (strengths, suggested changes, and benefits) from my statement of purpose.

GLENN'S BRAINSTORMING LIST REARRANGED. Notice here how Glenn discovers additional *content* (see italic type) while he's deciding about *organization.*

Strengths of the Workshop

- division of class topics into two areas was useful
- emphasis on interpersonal communication
- videotaping of trainees' oral reports, followed by critiques

Well, that's one category done. Maybe I should combine *suggested changes* with *benefits,* since I'll want to cover them together in the report.

Suggested Changes/Benefits

- more members per session would increase dialogue and use resources more efficiently
- varied on-the-job experiences before the training sessions would give each member a broad view of the marketing division
- executive speakers should spell out qualities required for success and *future sessions should cover professional behavior, to provide trainees with a clear guide*
- follow-up evaluation in six months *by both supervisors and trainees would reveal the effectiveness of this training and suggest future improvements*
- clear course objectives and more visual aids would increase *instructor efficiency* and audience interest

Now that he has a fairly sensible arrangement, Glenn can get this list into report form, even though he will probably think

of more material to add as he works. Since this is *internal* correspondence, he uses a memo format.

Drafting the Document

Glenn produces a usable draft—one containing just about everything he wants to cover. (Sentences are numbered for later reference.)

[1]In my opinion, the Management Training Session for the month of October was somewhat successful. [2]This success was evidenced when most participants rated their training as "very good." [3]But improvements are still needed.

[4]First and foremost, a number of innovative aspects in this October session proved especially useful. [5]Class topics were divided into two distinct areas. [6]These topics created a general-to-specific focus. [7]An emphasis on interpersonal communication skills was the most dramatic innovation. [8]This helped class members develop a better attitude toward things in general. [9]Videotaping of trainees' oral reports, followed by critiques, helped clarify strengths and weaknesses.

[10]A detailed summary of the trainees' evaluations is attached. [11]Based on these and on my past observations, I have several suggestions.

- [12]All management training sessions should have a minimum of ten to fifteen members. [13]This would better utilize the larger number of managers involved and the time expended in the implementation of the training. [14]The quality of class interaction with the speakers would also be improved with a larger group.
- [15]There should be several brief on-the-job training experiences in different sales and service areas. [16]These should be developed prior to the training session. [17]This would provide each member with a broad view of the duties and responsibilities in all areas of the marketing division.
- [18]Executive speakers should take a few minutes to spell out the personal and professional qualities essential for success with our company. [19]This would provide trainees with a concrete guide to both general company and individual supervisors' expectations. [20]Additionally, by the next training session we should develop a presentation dealing with appropriate attitudes, manners, and behavior in the business environment.
- [21]Do a six-month follow-up. [22]Get feedback from supervisors as well as trainees. [23]Ask for any new recommendations. [24]This would provide a clear assessment of the long-range impact of this training on an individual's job performance.
- [25]We need to demand clearer course objectives. [26]Instructors should be required to use more visual aids and improve their course structure based on these objectives. [27]This would increase instructor quality and audience interest.

[28]These changes are bound to help. [29]Please contact me if you have further questions.

Although now developed and organized, this version still is some way from the finished document. Glenn has to make further decisions about his style, content, arrangement, audience, and purpose.

Blair Cordasco offers to review the piece once again and to work with Glenn on a thorough edit.

Revising the Document

At 8:15 Tuesday morning, Cordasco and Glenn begin a sentence-by-sentence revision for worthwhile content, sensible organization, and readable style. Their discussion goes something like this:

> Sentence 1 begins with a needless qualifier, has a redundant phrase, and sounds insulting ("somewhat successful"). Sentence 2 should be in the passive voice, to emphasize the training—not the participants. Also, 1 and 2 are choppy and repetitious, and should be combined.
>
> **ORIGINAL** In my opinion, the Management Training Session for the month of October was somewhat successful. This success was evidenced when most participants rated their training as "very good." (28 words)
>
> **REVISED** The October Management Training Session was successful, with training rated "very good" by most participants. (15 words)[2]
>
> Sentence 3 is too blunt. An orienting sentence should forecast content diplomatically. This statement can be candid without being so negative.
>
> **ORIGINAL** But improvements are still needed.
>
> **REVISED** A few changes—beyond the recent innovations—should result in even greater training efficiency.[3]
>
> In sentence 4, "First and foremost" is trite, "aspects" is a clutter word, and word order needs changing to improve the emphasis (on innovations) and to lead into the examples.
>
> **ORIGINAL** First and foremost, a number of innovative aspects in this October session proved especially useful.
>
> **REVISED** Several program innovations were especially useful in this session.

In collaboration with his colleague, Glenn continues this editing and revising process on his report. Wednesday morning, after much revising and proofreading, Glenn prints out the final draft, shown in Figure B.3.

Glenn's final report is both informative and persuasive. But this document did not appear magically. Glenn made deliberate decisions about purpose, audience, content, organization, and style. He sought advice and feedback on every aspect of the document. Most importantly, he *spent time revising.*[4]

NOTE *Writers work in different ways. Some begin by brainstorming. Some begin with an outline. Others simply write and rewrite. Some sketch a quick draft before thinking through their writing situation. Introductions and titles are often written last. Whether you write alone or collaborate in preparing a document, whether you are receiving feedback or providing it, no one step in the process is complete until the whole is complete. Notice, for instance, how Glenn sharpens his content and style while he organizes. Every document you write will require all these decisions, but you rarely will make them in the same sequence.*

No matter what the sequence, revision is a fact of life. It is the one constant in the writing process. When you've finished a draft, you have in a sense only begun. Sometimes you will have more time to compose than Glenn did, sometimes much less. Whenever your deadline allows, leave time to revise.

CASE 2—PREPARING A PERSONAL STATEMENT IN AN INTERNSHIP OR FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION

Applications for jobs, grants, scholarships, and graduate school typically require a personal statement that addresses these basic questions:

- *Why should we select you?*
- *Why do you want this?*
- *What will you bring to this experience?*
- *How, exactly, do you plan to use this opportunity?*
- *What do you hope to gain?*

In a short essay, the candidate presents her/his best argument for being selected. Statements that stand out are the ones that make the final cut.

In the situation that follows, Mike Duval, a junior in marine biology, is applying for a prestigious and highly competitive summer research internship at a leading oceanographic institute. Application requirements include a personal statement. Before writing a word, Mike wisely decides to analyze and anticipate what, exactly, his audience is looking for.

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS IN A PERSONAL STATEMENT

About Content

- a brief but specific proposal for a research project
- some new and *significant* ideas about the research topic
- a summary of the writer's qualifications to undertake this project
- neither too much nor too little information
- answers to questions about *what, why, how,* and *when*

About Organization

- a distinct line of reasoning and a clear, sensible plan, consistent with the best scientific methods
- an introduction that offers brief background and justifies the need for the project
- a body section that outlines the scope, method, and sources for the proposed investigation
- a conclusion that describes the benefits of the research and encourages the reader's support

About Style

- a decisive tone with no hint of ambivalence
- at least a suggestion of enthusiasm
- an efficient style, in which nothing is wasted

Mike's technical writing instructor has invited him to bring in his best draft (shown in Figure B.4) for review by the entire class.

Discussion of Mike's First Draft (Figure B.4)

For the workshop on Mike's statement, the instructor asked the class to assume they were members of the committee screening fellowship applicants. Here is the summary of the class's critique:

1. An opening paragraph—especially in a competitive application—should grab the reader's attention and make the candidate stand out. Here, Mike opens with a self-evident observation followed by an unconvincing apology and then a rambling final sentence. Because the content is vague, readers have nothing concrete to *visualize*. Because the style is wordy, readers work harder than they should. Mike needs to paint a more vivid picture of who he is, why he is applying, and what he plans to do.
2. The second paragraph is where Mike should begin focusing on his proposed research topic, offering something new and significant. Instead, the content seems vague and abstract, lacking any real point or personality. Also the passive voice, excessive prepositions, and overall wordiness almost make the writer disappear. Mike needs

to spell out his topic and show why it's important.

3. By this stage, Mike should be explaining what he can contribute to this fellowship experience instead of focusing only on the personal benefits he expects. In the audience's view, Mike's stated goal "to become a more marketable person" is hardly a persuasive reason. Mike needs to make a better case not only for what he hopes to gain but also for what he can offer—and he needs to project a likable *persona* (page 67) throughout.
4. The closing paragraph should leave readers with a clear and positive sense of this writer as a unique candidate who deserves to "make the cut." Instead, the paragraph continues the abstract theme about what the writer hopes to gain, then tells readers what they already know, and closes with a vague "this" statement that drowns the whole point of the essay. Mike needs to sum up his case clearly and emphatically.

Discussion of Mike's Final Draft (Figure B.5)

After additional revisions and class workshops, Mike produced the final draft shown in Figure B.5. This version is far more concise as well as more visual, offering concrete, persuasive support in a tone that is decisive. Mike's ideas are significant; his plan is clear and sensible; and his attitude is mature, realistic, and engaging. The persona suggests a writer who knows what he wants and how he can contribute.

CASE 3—DOCUMENTS FOR THE COURSE PROJECT: A SEQUENCE CULMINATING IN THE FINAL REPORT

Mike Cabral, a communications major, works part-time as assistant to the production manager for *Megacrunch,* a computer magazine specializing in small-business applications.[5] (**Production** is the transforming of manuscripts into a published form.) Mike's writing instructor assigns a course project and encourages students to select topics from the workplace, when possible. Mike asks *Megacrunch* production manager Marcia White to suggest a research topic that might be useful to the magazine.

White outlines a problem she thinks needs careful attention: Now six years old, *Megacrunch* has enjoyed steady growth in sales volume and advertising revenue—until recently. In the past year alone, *Megacrunch* has lost

$150,000 in subscriptions and one advertising account worth $60,000. White knows that most of these losses are caused by increasing competition (three competing magazines have emerged in 18 months). In response to these pressures, White and the executive staff have been exploring ways of reinvigorating the magazine—through added coverage and "hot" features, more appealing layouts and page design, and creative marketing. But White is concerned about another problem that seems partially responsible for the fall in revenues: too many errors are appearing in recent issues.

When *Megacrunch* first hit the shelves, errors in grammar or accuracy seemed rare. But as the magazine grew in complexity, errors increased. Recent issues contain misspellings, inaccurate technical details, unintelligible sentences and paragraphs, and scrambled source code (in sample programs).

White asks Mike if he's interested in researching the error problem and looking into quality-control measures. She feels that his three years' experience with the magazine qualifies him for the task. Mike accepts the assignment.

White cautions Mike that this topic is politically sensitive, especially to the editorial staff and to the investors. She wants to be sure that Mike's investigation doesn't merely turn up a lot of dirty laundry. Above all, White wants to preserve investor confidence—not to mention the morale of the editorial staff, who do a good job in a tough environment, plagued by impossible deadlines and constant pressure. White knows that offending people—even unintentionally—can be disastrous.

She therefore insists that all project documents express a supportive rather than critical point of view: "What could we be doing better?" instead of "What are we doing wrong?" Before agreeing to release the information from company files (complaint letters, notes from irate phone calls, and so on), White asks Mike to submit a proposal, in which the intent of this project is made absolutely clear.

The Project Documents

Three types of documents lend shape and sequence to the research project: the **proposal,** which spells out the plan; the **progress report,** which keeps track of the investigation; and the **final report,** which analyzes the findings. This presentation shows how these documents function together in Mike Cabral's reporting process.

The Proposal Stage

Proposals offer plans for meeting needs. A proposal's primary audience consists of those who will decide whether to approve, fund, or otherwise support the project. Reviewers of a research proposal usually begin with questions like these:

- *What, exactly, do you intend to find out?*
- *Why is the question worth answering, or the problem worth solving?*
- *What benefits can we expect from this project?*

Once reviewers agree that the project is worthwhile, they will want to know all about the plan:

- *How, exactly, do you plan to do it?*
- *Is the plan realistic?*
- *Is the plan acceptable?*

Besides these questions, reviewers may have others: *How much will it cost? How long will it take? What makes you qualified to do it?* and so on. See Chapter 23 for more discussion and examples.

Mike Cabral knows his proposal will have only Marcia White (and possibly some executive board members) as the primary audience. The secondary audience is Mike's writing instructor, who also must approve the topic. And at some point, Mike's documents could find their way to his coworkers.

White already knows the background and she needs no persuading that the project is worthwhile, but she does expect a realistic plan before she will approve the project. (For his instructor, Mike attaches a short appendix [not shown here] outlining the background and his qualifications.) Also, Mike concentrates on his emphasis: He wants the proposal to be positive rather than critical, so as not to offend anyone. He therefore focuses on achieving *greater accuracy* rather than *fewer errors.* So that his instructor can approve the project, Mike submits the proposal by the semester's fourth week (Figure B.6).

The Progress Report Stage

The progress report keeps the audience up to date on the project's activities, new developments, accomplishments or setbacks, and timetable. Depending on the size and length of the particular project, the number of progress reports will vary. (Mike's course project will require only one.) The audience approaches any progress report with two big questions:

- *Is the project moving ahead according to plan and schedule?*

- *If not, why not?*

The audience may have various subordinate questions as well. See pages
388-92 for more discussion and examples.

Mike designs his progress report for his boss *and* his instructor, and turns it in by the semester's tenth week (Figure B.7).

The Final Report Stage

The final report presents the results of the research project: findings, interpretations, and recommendations. This document answers questions like these:

- *What did you find?*
- *What does it all mean?*
- *What should we do?*

Depending on the topic and situation, of course, the audience will have specific questions as well. See Chapter 24 for discussion and examples.

During his research, Mike Cabral discovered problems over and above the published errors he had been assigned to investigate. For instance, after looking at competing magazines he decided that *Megacrunch* needed improved page design, along with a higher quality stock (the paper the magazine is printed on). He also concluded that a monthly section on business applications would help. But despite their usefulness, none of these findings or ideas was part of Mike's *original* assignment. White expected him to focus on these questions, specifically:

- *Which errors recur most frequently in our publication?*
- *Where are these errors coming from?*
- *What can we do to prevent them?*

Mike therefore decides to focus exclusively on the error problem. (He might later discuss those other issues with White—if the opportunity arises. But if *this* report were to include material that exceeds the assignment *and* the reader's expectations, Mike could end up appearing arrogant or presumptuous.)

Mike tries to give White only what she requested. He analyzes the problem and the causes, and then recommends a solution. Mike adapts the general outline on page 616 to shape the three major sections of his report: *introduction, findings and conclusions, and recommendations.* For the user's convenience and orientation, he includes the report supplements discussed in Chapter 25: *front matter* (title page, transmittal letter, table of contents, and informative abstract)

and *end matter* (a Works Cited page and appendices [not shown here]).

After several revisions, Mike submits copies of the report to his boss and to his instructor (Figure B.8).

Appendix

FIGURE B.1 Typical Decisions during the Writing Process

FIGURE B.2 Glenn's Fourfold Problem

Glenn's first draft

[1]Throughout this section, Glenn's analysis will address *all* the areas illustrated in the audience and use profile sheet (page 65).

A later draft

[2]Notice throughout how careful revision sharpens the writer's meaning while cutting needless words.

[3]This revision has more words, but also much more concrete and specific detail (in italic type). Completeness of information always takes priority over word count.

[4]A special thanks to Glenn Tarullo for his perseverance. I made his task doubly difficult by having him explain each of his decisions during this writing process.

FIGURE B.3 Glenn's Final Draft

FIGURE B.3 Glenn's Final Draft *(continued)*

What readers
of a personal statement want to know

FIGURE B.4 Mike's Best Early Draft

FIGURE B.5 Mike's Final Draft

[5]In the interest of privacy, the names of all people, publications, companies, and products in Mike's documents have been changed.

FIGURE B.6 Mike's Proposal

FIGURE B.7 Mike's Progress Report

FIGURE B.8 Mike's Final Report