

# Understanding the Writing Process and the Main Forms of Business Messages

**M**uch of this book focuses on writing in business. Is skillful oral communication important? Absolutely. How about skillful use of graphics? It's critical. Then why the extra emphasis on writing?

There are two primary reasons. First, experienced businesspeople themselves tend to place writing skills ahead of other communication skills when asked what they seek in job applicants. And they seek strong writing skills in particular when considering whom to promote. For example, in a recent study, a majority of the 305 executives surveyed commented that fewer than half their job applicants were well-versed enough in “global knowledge, self-direction, and writing skills” to be able to advance in their companies.<sup>1</sup> As people move up, they do more and more knowledge work, and this work often requires the written forms of communication.





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● ● learning **OBJECTIVES**

- L01** Describe the writing process and effective writing strategies.
  - L02** Describe the current usage of the business letter.
  - L03** Describe the purpose and forms of memorandums.
  - L04** Understand the appropriate use of email.
  - L05** Understand the nature and business use of text messaging.
  - L06** Understand how instant messaging works.
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## WORKPLACE SCENARIO Managing Your Writing Process and Choosing the Right Form

Place yourself in a hypothetical situation. You are the owner of a struggling small business, and you work very hard to make certain that all aspects of your business function effectively and efficiently. At the moment, your attention is focused on the communicating done by Max Elliott, your new assistant manager. Specifically, you are concerned about the writing skills—or lack of them—that you see displayed in his emails.

It is clear that he doesn't know when and when not to use email as his communication channel. Some of the more formal situations he writes about would be better handled with letter format, while some of the sensitive material he discusses shouldn't be included in his emails at all. Plus, he doesn't think enough before he writes or review his emails carefully before sending them. Sometimes an email will start with one point and then end on another,

creating an ambiguous message. Sometimes important information is left out. And the slang and grammatical problems in his writing create an unprofessional effect.

Max clearly needs instruction on his writing process, and on the appropriate use of the main forms of business communication. This chapter provides you with just such instruction. ❖

Another reason for our strong focus on writing is that writing is in some ways more difficult to do well than other kinds of communication. Writing is what researchers call a “lean medium,” which means that it does not offer the multiple information cues, feedback, and intense personal focus that face-to-face or even phone conversations offer.<sup>2</sup> Writers essentially have no safety net; they can't rely on their facial expressions, body language, or tone of voice to make up for wording that isn't quite what they mean. The symbols on the page or screen must do the whole communication job. Plus, the symbols used in writing—the alphabet, words, punctuation, and so forth—share no characteristics with the thing they represent (unless you count words that sound like the sounds they name, such as “buzz”). Representing something with a photograph is relatively easy. Representing that same thing in words is much harder. Capturing a complex reality by

### ● ● LO 1

Describe the writing process and effective writing strategies.

## THE PROCESS OF WRITING

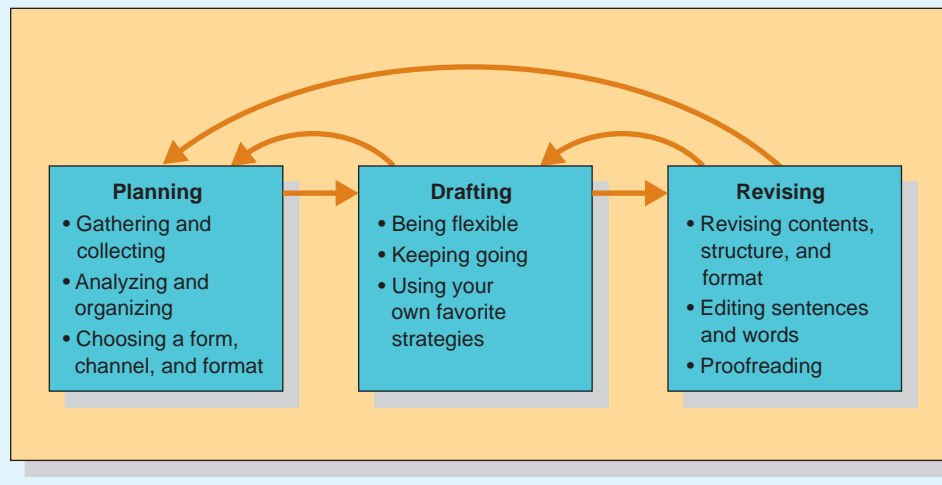
Writing researchers have been studying the composing process since the 1970s. They have found, not surprisingly, that each person's way of developing a piece of writing for a given situation is unique. On the other hand, they have also drawn some general conclusions about the nature of the process and about strategies that can help it along. Familiarizing yourself with these findings will help make you a more deliberate, effective writer.

**As people move up, they do more and more knowledge work, and this work often requires the written forms of communication.**

putting one word after another requires ingenuity, discipline, and the ability to anticipate how readers will be likely to react as they read.

The first major section of this chapter will help you achieve this impressive but commonplace feat in the workplace by showing you how to break the writing process down into parts and skillfully manage each part. The remainder of the chapter will introduce you to the main forms of business messages, which bring with them certain features and conventions of use. These discussions provide the foundation for subsequent chapters on writing different kinds of messages.

As Exhibit 2.1 shows, there are essentially three stages in preparing any piece of writing: planning, drafting, and revising. These stages can be defined, roughly, as figuring out what you want to say, saying it, and then saying it better. Each of these stages can be broken down into various specific activities, which the next section will describe. As the arrows in the figure suggest, however, it is important not to think of the three stages as strictly chronological or separate. In practice, there are interrelations among the stages—that is, like the steps for solving business communication problems described in Chapter 1, they are *recursive*. For example, a writer in the planning stage may start writing pieces of the draft.



Or, he or she may find, when drafting, that gathering more information is necessary. Or, he or she may decide that it's necessary to revise a piece of the document carefully before continuing on with the drafting. An undue emphasis on keeping the stages separate and chronological will hinder the success of your messages. Allow yourself to blend these stages as necessary.

A good rule of thumb for inexperienced writers is to spend roughly a third of their writing time in each of the three stages. A common mistake is to spend too much time on drafting and too little on the other two stages, planning and revising. Preparing to write and improving what you have

writing. As the questions indicate, you will need to develop a definition of the problem that you are trying to address. To find a solution, you will need an informed sense of your audiences and their individual contexts—organizational, professional, and personal. You will also need to think about your own organizational, professional, and personal contexts and their possible impact on your communication goal. And you will need to think about the larger contexts in which your act of communication will be taking place, including the context of your relationship with your reader. All these deliberations will help you figure out what you want your message to achieve.

Once you have chosen your message's purpose, you'll need to figure out the best way to achieve it. You'll consider the different kinds of content you could include and choose what will best serve your purpose. You will develop a rough idea of how to organize and format that content, decide on the kind of channel you will use, and settle on a general sense of the style you will use. Most people, before drafting, have at least some sense of how they want to handle these elements.

For simplicity's sake, we might group all these planning activities into three categories: gathering and collecting information; analyzing and organizing the information; and choosing the form, channel, and format it will take (Exhibit 2.2).

**There are essentially three stages in preparing any piece of writing: planning, drafting, and revising.**

written are as critical to success as the drafting stage, and careful attention to all three stages can actually make your writing process more efficient. When you have become an experienced business writer, you will be able to write many routine messages without as much planning and revising. Even so, some planning and revising will still be essential to getting the best results with your messages.

## Planning the Message

The guide for solving business problems presented in Exhibit 1.8 of Chapter 1 is also a good guide for the planning stage of

Planning consists of three general activities:

- Gathering and collecting information.
- Analyzing and organizing information.
- Choosing the form, channel, and format for the message.

Bear in mind that these are not strictly chronological—you can revisit earlier stages as needed.

# “WHATEVER ORDER WILL DRAW THE MOST POSITIVE REACTION FROM YOUR READERS IS THE BEST ORDER TO USE.”

## gathering and collecting information

Because business writing is largely performed in response to a certain situation, one of your main planning goals is to figure out what you want to do about that situation. Bear in mind that, in business communication, “what to do” means not only what you want your communication to achieve but also any additional action that the larger business problem might require. For example, if you manage a hotel where the air conditioning has stopped functioning, you will need to decide what, if anything, to communicate to your guests about this problem. But this decision is related to other decisions. How and when will you get the air conditioning fixed? In the meantime, will you simply apologize? Make arrangements for each guest to have a free continental breakfast or complimentary beverages? Rent fans for meeting rooms and any guest rooms occupied by people with health problems? Solving the business problem and solving the communication problem are closely related, and you will need to gather information related to both kinds of problems to tackle business communication tasks.

Gathering information means doing some research. In many cases this research can be informal—finding past correspondence; consulting with other employees or with outside advisors; getting sales records, warranties, and product descriptions; and so forth. In other cases you will do such formal research as conducting surveys or reviewing the literature on a certain subject. Chapter 8 discusses various methods and sources at your disposal for this kind of research. In general, you will collect any information that can help you decide what to do and what to say in your message.

But collecting information by using your memory, imagination, and creativity is also important. Visualizing your readers and bearing their interests in mind is an excellent planning technique. Making a list of pertinent facts is helpful. Brainstorming, or generating possible solutions without censoring them, will allow you to come up with creative solutions.

Drawing a diagram of your ideas can also enable you to collect your thoughts. Let yourself use any strategy that shows promise of contributing to a solution.

## analyzing and organizing information

Once you have a good number of ideas, you will start to assess them. If your data are numerical, you will do the calculations that will enable you to see patterns and meaning in the numbers. You will put other kinds of data together as well to see what course of action they might indicate, weighing what the parties involved stand to gain or lose from each possible solution.

As you ponder what to do and say with your message, you will, of course, keep your readers in mind. What kind of information will most matter to them? In the scenario described above, will the hotel guests more likely want information about what caused the air conditioning problem or about when it will be fixed and what they can do to stay comfortable in the meantime? As always, your intended readers are your best guide to what information to include.

They are also your guide for organizing the information. Whatever order will draw the most positive reaction from your readers is the best order to use. If you have information that your readers will want, put it first. This plan, called using the *direct order*, is discussed in Chapter 5. On the other hand, if you think your information could run the risk of evoking a negative response, you will use an *indirect order*, using your message’s opening to prepare the reader to receive the news as positively as possible. As you will see in Chapter 6, such a message usually requires a more skillful use of organization and word choice than one written in direct order. Regardless of the situation, all readers appreciate a logical pattern for the information.

## choosing a form, channel, and format

Writers in school typically produce writing of two types: essays or research papers. But on the job you have a wide range

## COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF Do I Need to Write It?

When you have a substantial message to convey—that is, one not suitable for a quick text or instant message—is it better to write it or speak it? You’ll probably want to write it if one or more of the following applies:

- You want a written record of the communication.
- You want the communication to be perceived as at least somewhat formal.
- You think you can explain better in writing, and you don’t want the recipient to interrupt you until you’re done.
- Your reader will want to be able to go back over what you said.
- You have to reach a lot of people at once with the same message.
- The situation isn’t so sensitive that it requires a richer, more personal communication channel. ❖

of established forms of communication (genres) to choose from. Which one you think you will use has a huge impact on your planning. For instance, if you want to advertise your company's services, how will you do it? Write potential customers a letter? Email them? Include a brochure? Create a website? Use some combination of these? Each form has its own formatting and stylistic conventions, and even conventions about content. Business writers do not launch into writing a document without some sense of what kind of document it will be. On the job, choosing the type of document to be written is an important part of planning.

Closely related to genre is the communication channel or medium. How will you deliver your message? Mail it? Send it electronically? Post it to a blog or wiki? Thinking about the means of transmission will help you decide on form and content.

Because formatting devices have a large impact on readers' reactions, you should also think about them in the planning stage. What kind and size of type will you use? What kind of headings? Will you use any means of typographical emphasis? How about numbered or bulleted lists? Should the document include such visual elements as logos, textboxes, pictures, or diagrams? Smart decisions on such matters not only increase your readers' motivation to read but also enable them quickly to comprehend the main points of the message (see Exhibit 2.3). Including formatting questions in your planning will help you achieve a reader-friendly result.

## Drafting

Writing experts' main advice about drafting boils down to these words: "Be flexible." Writers often hamstring themselves by thinking that they have to write a finished document all at once, with the parts in their correct order and in a perfect style. Writing is such a cognitively difficult task that it is better to concentrate only on certain things at a time. The following suggestions can help you draft your messages as painlessly and effectively as possible.

### avoid perfectionism when drafting


Trying to make your first draft a perfect draft causes two problems. First, spending too much energy perfecting the early parts can make you forget important pieces and purposes of the later parts. Second, premature perfectionism can

make drafting frustrating and slow, thus keeping you from wanting to revise your message when you're done. You will be much more inclined to go back over your message and improve it if you have not agonized over the draft.

**keep going** When turning your planning into a draft, don't let minor problems with wording or grammar distract you from your main goal—to generate your first version of the document. Have an understanding with yourself that you will draft relatively quickly, to get the ideas down on paper or onto the screen, and then go back and carefully revise. Expressing your points in a somewhat coherent, complete, and orderly fashion is hard enough. Allow yourself to save close reexamination and evaluation of what you've written for the revision stage.

**use any other strategies that will keep you working productively** The idea with drafting is to keep moving forward at a reasonably steady pace with as little wheel spinning as possible. Do anything you can think of that will make your drafting relatively free and easy.

For example, write at your most productive time of day, write in chunks, start with a favorite part, talk aloud or write to yourself to clarify your thoughts, take breaks, let the project sit for a while, create a setting conducive to writing—even promise yourself a little reward for getting a certain amount accomplished. Your goal is to get the first orderly expression of your planned contents written out just well enough so that you can go back and work with it.

 **Writing experts' main advice about drafting boils down to these words: "Be flexible."**

## Revising

Getting your draft ready for your reader requires going back over it carefully, again and again. Did you say what you mean? Could someone misunderstand or take offense at what you wrote? Is your organization best for the situation? Is each word the right one for your goals? Are there better, more concise ways of structuring your sentences? Can you move the reader more smoothly from point to point? Does each element of format enhance readability and highlight the structure of the contents? When revising, you turn into your own toughest critic. You challenge what you have written and look for possibly better alternatives.

## COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF When Drafting, Satisfice!

Problem-solving expert and Nobel Prize winner Herbert Simon coined the term *satisfice* (*satisfy* plus *suffice*), meaning to use an adequate solution when an ideal one is not—or not yet—possible. Writing teachers have

adopted this word to describe a powerful drafting strategy. When you aren't sure exactly what to say or how to say it, just write something that will be good enough to capture your basic idea and then keep going. Once

you finish your draft, you'll be in a much better position to figure out what the ideal wording for each part should be. ❖

Here is the starting text of a memo (sent by email) from a university registrar to the faculty regarding two new grades about to go into effect. How inviting do you find the format of the following message, and how easy is it to extract the information about the two new grades?

At its October 20, 2005, meeting, the Faculty Senate, having received a favorable recommendation from the Academic Affairs Committee, voted to approve the creation and Autumn Quarter implementation of two new grades: “X” and “WX.” Instructors will record an “X” on the final grade roster for students who never attended any classes and did not submit any assigned work. The “X” will appear on the transcript and will carry zero (o) quality points, thus computed into the GPA like the grades of “F” and “UW.” Instructors will record a “WX” for those students who officially withdrew from the class (as denoted on the grade roster by either EW or W) but who never attended any classes and did not submit any assigned work. The “WX” may be entered to overwrite a “W” appearing on the grade roster. An assignment of “WX” has no impact on the student’s GPA. A “W” will appear on the student’s online grade report and on the transcript. The “WX” recognizes the student’s official withdrawal from the class and only records the fact of nonparticipation. The need to record nonparticipation is defined in “Rationale” below. With the introduction of the “X” and “WX” grades to denote nonparticipation, by definition all other grades can only be awarded to students who had participated in the class in some way. Instructors will record a “UW” (unofficial withdrawal) only for students who cease to attend a class following some participation. Previously, instructors utilized the “UW” both for those students who had never attended classes and for those who had attended and participated initially but had ceased to attend at some point during the term. In cases of official withdrawal, instructors have three options available at the time of grading: “W,” “WX,” and “F.” If the student has officially withdrawn from the class, a “W” (withdrawal) or “EW” (electronic withdrawal) will appear on the grade roster. If the student participated in the class and the withdrawal was in accordance with the instructor’s withdrawal policy as communicated by the syllabus, the instructor may retain the student’s “W” grade by making no alteration to the grade roster.

Now look at the first part of the actual message that was sent out. What formatting decisions on the part of the writer made this document much more readable?

At its October 20, 2005, meeting, the Faculty Senate, having received a favorable recommendation from the Academic Affairs Committee, voted to approve the creation and Autumn Quarter implementation of two new grades: “X” and “WX.”

#### Definition of “X” and “WX” Grades, Effective Autumn Quarter 2005

- “X” (nonattendance):

Instructors will record an “X” on the final grade roster for students who never attended any classes and did not submit any assigned work.

The “X” will appear on the transcript and will carry zero (o) quality points, thus computed into the GPA like the grades of “F” and “UW.”

- “WX” (official withdrawal, nonattending):

Instructors will record a “WX” for those students who officially withdrew from the class (as denoted on the grade roster by either EW or W) but who never attended any classes and did not submit any assigned work.

The “WX” may be entered to overwrite a “W” appearing on the grade roster. An assignment of “WX” has no impact on the student’s GPA. A “W” will appear on the student’s online grade report and on the transcript. The “WX” recognizes the student’s official withdrawal from the class and only records the fact of nonparticipation. The need to record nonparticipation is defined in “Rationale” below.

#### Participation and Nonparticipation Grades

With the introduction of the “X” and “WX” grades to denote nonparticipation, by definition all other grades can only be awarded to students who had participated in the class in some way.

Instructors will record a “UW” (unofficial withdrawal) only for students who cease to attend a class following some participation. Previously, instructors utilized the “UW” both for those students who had never attended classes and for those who had attended and participated initially but had ceased to attend at some point during the term.

#### Official Withdrawals

In cases of official withdrawal, instructors have three options available at the time of grading: “W,” “WX,” and “F.”

1. *If the student has officially withdrawn from the class, a “W” (withdrawal) or “EW” (electronic withdrawal) will appear on the grade roster.*

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There are so many facets to any given message that it can help to use what professional writers call “levels of edit.” There are three main levels of edit, commonly referred to as *revision*, *editing*, and *proofreading*.

With revision, you look at top-level concerns: whether or not you included all necessary information, if the pattern of organization is logical and as effective as possible, if the overall meaning of the message comes through, if the formatting is appropriate and helpful.

You then move to the editing level, focusing on your style. You examine your sentences to see if they pace the information in such a way that the reader can easily follow it, if they emphasize the right things, and if they combine pieces of information coherently. You also look at your word choices to see if they best serve your purpose.

Finally, you proofread, looking at particular mechanical and grammatical elements—spelling, typography, punctuation, and any particular grammar problems that tend to give you trouble. Editing functions in your word-processing applications can help you with this task. Careful attention to each level will result in a polished, effective message.

One last word about revision: Get feedback from others. As you may well know, it is difficult to find weaknesses or errors in your own work. Seek out assistance from willing colleagues, and if they give you criticism, receive it with an open mind. Better to hear it from them, not from your intended readers, when costly mistakes may have already been made.

The remaining sections of this chapter describe specific purposes and traits of different message types. In-depth advice about their physical design can be found online. No matter what you’re writing, a thorough, methodical writing process will significantly enhance your chances of achieving your communication goals.

## ● ● LO 2

Describe the current usage of the business letter.

# LETTERS

Letters are the oldest form of business messages. The ancient Chinese wrote letters. So did the early Egyptians, Romans,

and Greeks. Although many of these early letters pertained to military and personal matters, some clearly concerned business.

Today, letters are used mostly in relatively formal circumstances and primarily for corresponding with people outside your organization. When you write to internal readers, they are often familiar to you—and even if they are not, you all share the connection of being in the same company. Your messages to such audiences tend to use less formal media. But when you write to customers, to suppliers, to citizens and community leaders, and to other external audiences, you will often want to put your company’s best foot forward by choosing the letter format, complete with an attractive company letterhead and the elements of courtesy built into this traditional format. And your readers will expect this gesture of respect.

Once you have established friendly relations with them, you may well conduct your business through emails and phone calls. But especially when corresponding with an external party whom you do not know well, a letter is usually the most appropriate form to use.

You probably already know the format of the business letter, illustrated in Exhibit 2.4. Although some variations in format are generally acceptable, typically these information items are included: date, inside address, salutation (Dear Ms. Smith), body, and complimentary close (Sincerely yours). Other items sometimes needed are attention line, subject line, return address (when letterhead paper is not used), and enclosure information. Placement of these items as well as guidelines for processing the text of the letter are presented online.

A century ago, business letters used a stiff and stilted manner, including such expressions as “enclosed herewith” and “please be informed.” Today, unduly formal, impersonal writing has fallen out of favor. Like other forms of business writing, letters should be viewed as exchanges between real people. And as with other forms, they should use any formatting devices and organizational strategies that will help you achieve your purpose. You can write engaging, easy-to-read letters, even with their heightened formality.



**Successful writers often seek out others’ perspectives on important documents.**

*Doing it right . . .  
the first time*

**Ralston's Plumbing and Heating**  
2424 Medville Road  
Urbana, OH 45702  
(515) 555-5555  
Fax: (515) 555-5544

February 28, 2009

Ms. Diane Taylor  
747 Gateway Avenue  
Urbana, OH 45702

Dear Ms. Taylor:

Thank you for allowing one of our certified technicians to serve you recently.

Enclosed is a coupon for \$25 toward your next purchase or service call from Ralston. It's just our way of saying that we appreciate your business.

Sincerely yours,  
*Jack Ralston*  
Jack Ralston  
Owner and President



Businesses with multiple locations send many of their documents by fax, email, or instant messaging.

appears at the top in large, heavy type. But some companies prefer other titles, such as *Interoffice Memorandum* or *Interoffice Communication*. Below this main heading come the specific headings common to all memorandums: *Date*, *To*, *From*, *Subject* (though not necessarily in this order). This simple arrangement is displayed in Exhibit 2.5. Because memorandums are often short, some companies use 5 × 8½-inch stationery for them instead of the conventional 8½ × 11-inch size. Hard-copy memorandums are usually initialed by the writer rather than signed.

Large organizations, especially those with a number of locations and departments, often include additional information on their memorandum stationery. *Department*, *Plant*, *Location*, *Territory*, *Store Number*, and *Copies to* are examples (see Exhibit 2.6). Since in some companies memorandums are often addressed to more than one reader, the heading *To* may be followed by enough space to list a number of names.

Because memorandums usually are sent and received by people who work with and know one another, they tend to use casual or informal language. Even so, their degree of formality ranges from one extreme to the other. At one end are the casual notes that workers exchange. At the other are the formal messages written by lower-ranking workers to their top administrators. The typical memorandum falls somewhere between these extremes.

The techniques for writing memorandums are much like those for writing the other business messages (letters and email). Short, simple memos are often written in casual or informal language, much like short, simple email messages. Longer, more formal memorandums are appropriately organized in the patterns appropriate for longer, more formal messages, such as those discussed in Chapters 5 through 7. Even a short or medium-length report can use memo format. Like most of the other business messages, most memorandums are appropriately written in a direct pattern, beginning with the most important point and working

### LO 3

Describe the purpose and forms of memorandums.

## MEMORANDUMS

Memorandums (memos) are a form of letter written inside the business. While in rare cases they may be used in communicating outside the business, they are typically written messages exchanged by employees in the conduct of their work. They may be distinguished from other messages primarily by their form. Originally, they were used only in hard copy, but with the advent of computers, many were processed electronically as faxes. Nowadays, their function of communicating within the business has been largely taken over by email. Even so, they still are a part of most company communication. They are especially useful in communicating with employees who do not use computers in their work.

Some companies have stationery printed especially for memorandums, while many use standard or customized templates in word processors. Sometimes the word *memorandum*

## EXHIBIT

2.5

Illustration of Good Form  
for the Memorandum Using  
the MS Word Professional  
Template

**Lenaghan Financial**

**Memo**

**To:** Matthew Lenaghan, President

**From:** Payton Kubicek, Public Relations (PK)

**CC:** Kathleen Lenaghan, Chair

**Date:** June 1, 2009

**Re:** May meeting of Plant Safety Committee

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As we agreed on March 30 meeting of the Environmental Impact Committee, we will meet again on May 12. I am requesting agenda items and meeting suggestions from each (etc.) . . .

## EXHIBIT

2.6

Memorandum Stationery with  
Special Headings Adapted to the  
Needs of an Organization with  
Multiple Locations

PENNY-WISE STORES, INC.  
MEMORANDUM

**To:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**From:** \_\_\_\_\_ **From:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Store:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Store:** \_\_\_\_\_

**At:** \_\_\_\_\_ **At:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Territory:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Territory:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Copies to:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject:** Form for in-house letters (memos)

This is an illustration of our memorandum stationery. It should be used for written communications within the organization.

Notice that the memorandum uses no form of salutation. Neither does it have any form of complimentary close. The writer does not need to sign the message. He or she needs only to initial after the typed name in the heading.

Notice also that the message is single-spaced with double-spacing between paragraphs.

down. Still, memorandums conveying sensitive or negative information are best written in an indirect order. Direct and indirect patterns are discussed in detail in following chapters.

● ● L0 4

Understand the appropriate use of email.

## EMAIL

The rapid growth of email has been the most exciting business communication development in recent years. In just a short time, email has emerged as a mainstream form of business communication. Its volume surpasses that of the U.S. Postal Service. According to one authority, there are more emails sent every day than telephone calls. It has become widely used in both small and large organizations, and its explosive growth continues.

## Evaluating Email's Pros and Cons

The reasons for this rapid growth are the advantages email has over other communication forms, especially over its principal competitor, the telephone. Among the reasons, the following are most significant:

- Email eliminates “telephone tag”—the problem of trying to contact busy people who are not always available for phone calls. Messages sent to them can be stored in their digital mailboxes until they are ready to read them.
- Conversely, email saves the time of these busy people. They are spared the interruptions of phone calls.
- Email can speed up the process of making business decisions because it permits rapid exchanges from all involved in the decisions.
- Email is cheap. It permits unlimited use at no more than the cost of an Internet connection.
- It provides a written record.

# EMAIL CAN SPEED UP THE PROCESS OF MAKING BUSINESS DECISIONS BECAUSE IT PERMITS RAPID EXCHANGES FROM ALL INVOLVED IN THE DECISIONS.

Email also has its disadvantages. The following stand out:

- Email is not confidential. “It’s just about as private as a postcard you drop in the mail box.”<sup>3</sup>
- Email doesn’t communicate the sender’s emotions well. Voice intonations, facial expressions, body movements, and other such elements are not a part of the message. They are in phone, video, and face-to-face communication.
- Email may be ignored or delayed. The volume of email often makes it difficult for some respondents to read and act on all their messages.

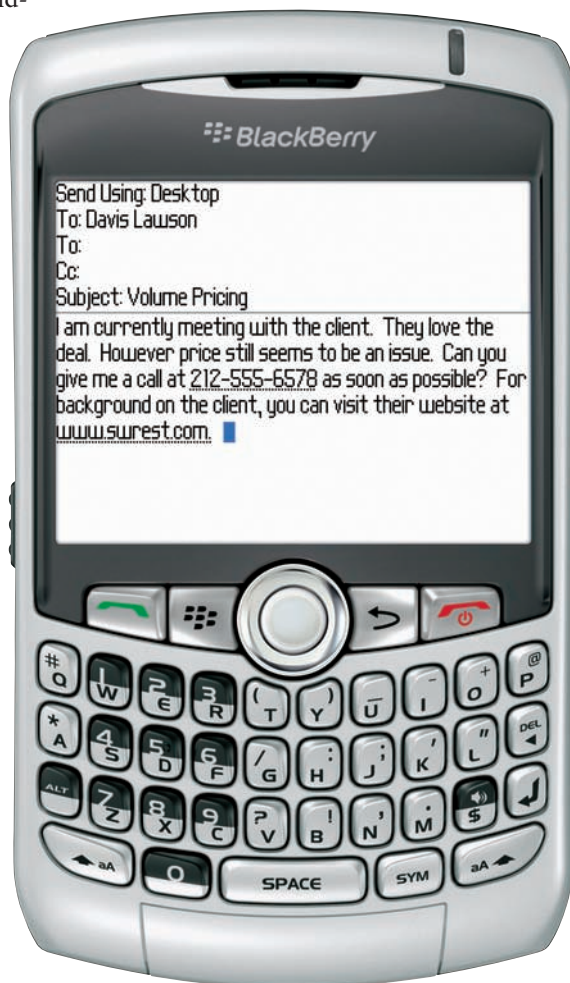
## Including the Prefatory Elements

The parts of the email header are generally standardized, though what they look like will be determined by the email software you use in constructing the message. But the second part of your effort, writing the message, is far from standardized. Although the following review covers both, the writing receives the greater emphasis. It is here that you are likely to need the most help.

Although the various email systems differ somewhat, the header components are standardized (see Exhibit 2.7). They include the following parts:

- **To:** Here the sender places the email address of the recipients. It must be perfect, for any error will result in failure to reach the recipient.
- **Cc:** If someone other than the primary recipient is to receive a *courtesy copy*, his or her address goes here.
- **Bcc:** This line stands for *blind courtesy copy*. The recipient’s message will not show this information; that is, he or she will not know who else is receiving a copy of the message.

- **Subject:** This line describes the message as precisely as the situation permits. The reader should get from it a clear idea of what the message is about and feel motivated to read the rest of the message.



*Internal email forms a significant part of the communication used to coordinate the work in small and large businesses alike.*

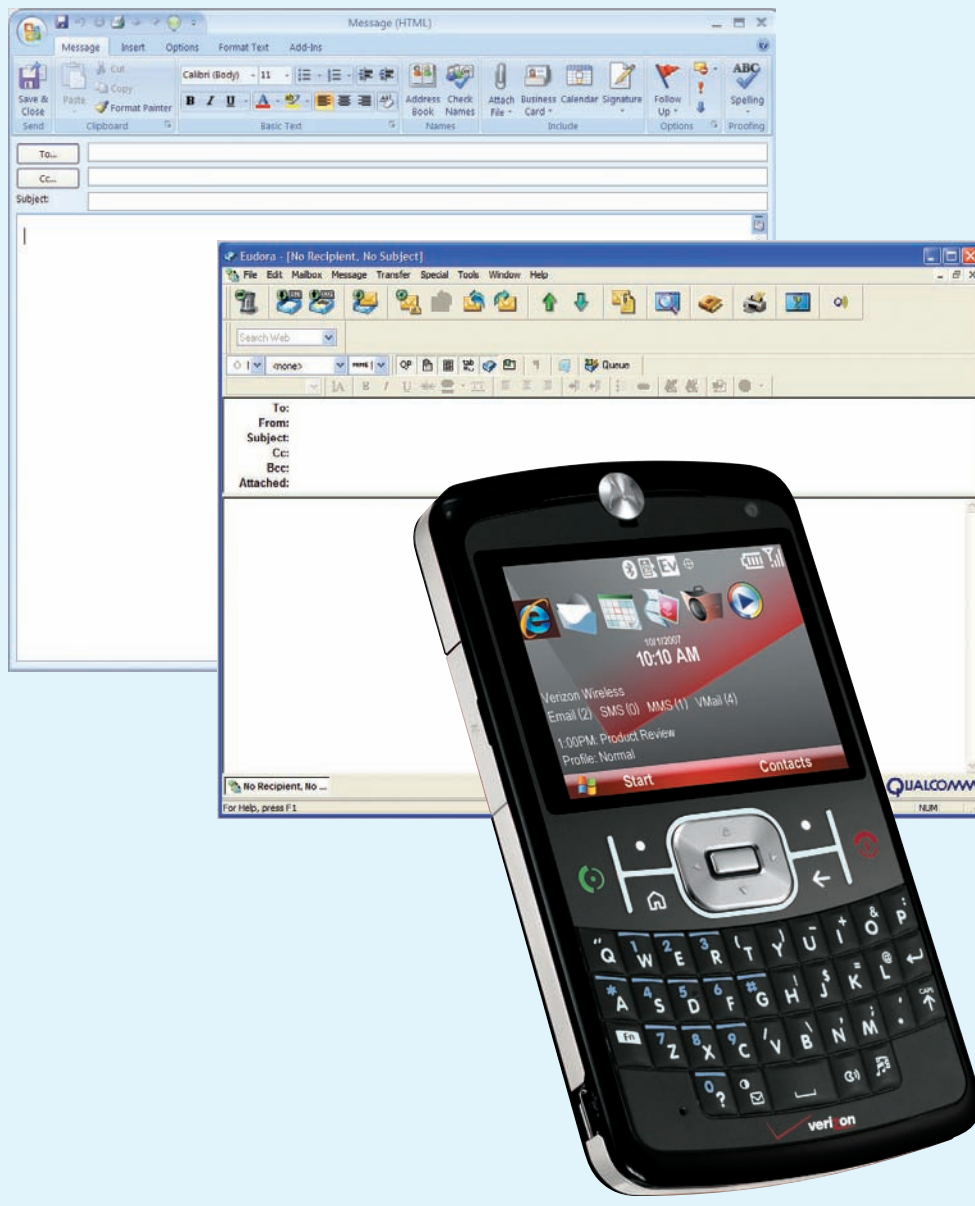
- **Attachments:** In this area you can enter a file that you desire to send along with the message. As will be emphasized later, you should make certain that what you attach is really needed.
- **The message:** The information you are sending goes here. How to write it is the subject of much of the following discussion.

## Beginning the Message

Typically, email messages begin with the recipient’s name. If writer and reader are acquainted, first name only is the rule. If you would normally address the reader as Ms., Dr., Mr., and such, address him or her this way in an initial email. But you can change the salutation in subsequent messages if the person indicates that informality is desired. A friendly generic greeting such as “Greetings” is appropriate for a group of people with whom you communicate. Use of the recipient’s full name also is acceptable. The salutations commonly used in letters (Dear Mr., Dear Ms.) are rarely used in email. When writing to someone or a group you do not know, it is appropriate to identify yourself early in the message. This identification may include your purpose and your company. Your title and position also may be helpful.

## Organizing the Contents

Even though email messages often are written under time pressure, you would do well to organize them carefully. For most short, informative messages, a “top-down” order is appropriate. This plan, used in newspaper writing, involves presenting the



most important material first. The remaining information follows in descending order of importance. Such an arrangement permits a busy reader to get the essential facts first, and the reader accessing email on a smartphone or other small screen can get the essential facts more easily. Many writers routinely follow this practice.

As with letters and memos, longer, more complex, and formal email messages frequently follow more involved and strategic organization patterns. As you will see, these patterns vary depending on how the reader will likely perceive the writer's objective. In general, those messages that are likely to be received positively or neutrally are written in a

direct pattern, while those messages that are likely to be received negatively are appropriately written in an indirect pattern, with their negative content preceded by conditioning and explanatory words.

Some long email messages may resemble business reports. With these messages, you may well follow the organization and writing instructions for business reports (Chapters 8 and 9). In fact, almost any kind of message can be communicated by email as long as your reader will expect this choice of medium.

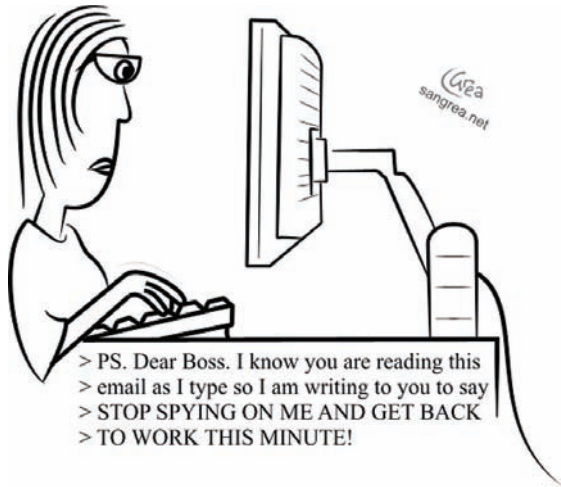
## Writing the Email Message

The characteristics of effective email messages are much the same as those described in Chapter 4 for messages in general. For the purpose of email writing, we may group the more important of these under four heads: formality, conciseness, clarity, and etiquette. A fifth, correctness (covered online), is equally vital. Each of these important dimensions of email writing is briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs.

**formality** Emails run the range from highly informal to formal. Some sound like chitchat among friends, while others convey important policy statements from the highest executive officers in the company. How formal

should your business emails be? When deciding, consider three general classifications: casual, informal, and formal.<sup>4</sup>

On rare occasions, *casual* language can be appropriate. It uses contractions and personal pronouns freely and may use slang, colloquialisms, and text-messaging initialisms. It may even lack complete sentences. While such writing is not always out of bounds in business, it should be used sparingly and only with readers who you know prefer such language. A better style for business email is usually *informal* language, which may retain the use of contractions and personal pronouns but which is carefully structured and grammatically correct. It is the writing that you will find in most of the



**EXHIBIT**

**2.8**

**Say Goodbye to “Reply All”**

The “reply all” button is not your friend.

New York consulting firm BaseX says hitting “reply all” to e-mail messages contributes to information overload at work. BaseX’s advice? Be conservative when sending replies. After all, e-mail messages might not waste paper, but they can waste time.

Source: *The Tampa Tribune* 7 January 2008: Bus. 1.

positive examples in this book, and in the text of the book itself. Occasionally, you will use a *formal* style in your emails. Formal writing tends to avoid contractions and may contain no personal pronouns. Because it creates a greater distance between writer and reader than the informal style, it is appropriate to use in email messages resembling formal reports, in messages to people of higher status, and to people not known to the writer.

Frequently in email communication, a need exists to refer to previous email messages. The easiest way, of course, is to tell your mailer to include the entire message. Unless the entire message is needed, however, this practice adds length. It is better either to paraphrase the essentials from the original or to quote the selected parts that cover the essentials. All quoted material should be distinguished from your own words. Symbols (>), color, and font can be used to indicate whose words are whose.

**clarity** Especially important in email writing is clarity of wording. As you will see in Chapter 4, several techniques help make your writing easy to read. You should select words that quickly create clear meanings. Typically, these are the short,

**Especially important in email writing is clarity of wording.**

**conciseness** As we have mentioned, email often is written by busy people for busy people. In the best interests of all concerned, email messages should be as short as complete coverage of the subject matter will permit. This means culling out the extra information and using only that which is essential. It means also that the information remaining should be worded concisely. (See Exhibit 2.8 for a related point: sending the message only to those who actually need it.)

familiar ones. You should strive for concreteness, vigor, and precision. Your sentences should be short, and so should your paragraphs. In fact, all of the advice about clear writing in Chapter 4 is applicable to email messages.

**etiquette** It goes without saying that courtesy should be practiced in all business relations. Even so, the current literature has much to say about anger among email participants. “Flaming,” as the practice of sending abusive or

**COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF** Should I Use Shortcuts in My Email?

Probably because email began as an informal medium with space and character limitations, certain shortcuts have become widely used. Here are some of the more popular ones:

- ASAP as soon as possible
- BTW by the way

- FYI for your information
- IMHO in my humble opinion
- LOL laughing out loud
- THX or TX thanks
- UR you are

Be cautious in your use of such shortcuts. If your readers know them and expect them, they can be appropriate. But at least for now, they tend to be suitable only when the situation is casual or where message-length limitations exist. ❖

offensive language is called, has no place in business. Good email etiquette should prevail. Chapter 4 emphasizes using the you-viewpoint in your messages, and email is no exception email. In fact, virtually all the instructions given for building goodwill apply here.


**correctness** One would think that the need for correctness in email writing would be universally accepted. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Because of the fast pace of email communication, some practitioners argue that “getting the message out there” is the important goal—that style need not be a matter of concern.

Most businesspeople do not accept this view. *How* one communicates is very much a part of the message. As expressed by one authority, “People still judge you on how well you communicate. . . . Commercial email represents your company and your brand. There’s no room for excuses.”<sup>5</sup> Bad spelling, illogical punctuation, awkward wording, and other flaws stand out like sore thumbs. Such errors reflect on the writer. And they can reflect on the credibility of the message.

To avoid any such problems, you should follow the grammatical and punctuation principles presented in the online chapter on correctness. And you should follow the basic instructions for using words, constructing sentences, and designing paragraphs presented in Chapter 4. Before pressing the Send button, proofread your message carefully.

## Closing the Email Message

Most email messages end with just the writer’s name—the first name alone if the recipient knows the writer well. But in some messages, especially the more formal ones, a closing

 “Flaming,” as the practice of sending abusive or offensive language is called, has no place in business.

statement may be appropriate. “Thanks” and “Best” are popular. In casual messages, shortcuts, such as THX (thanks), are often used. The conventional complimentary closes used in traditional letters (sincerely, cordially) are not widely used, but they are appropriate in messages that involve formal business relationships. In messages to other businesses, it is important that your signature include your company name and position title.

Today most email applications have a signature feature that will automatically attach a signature file to a message. Most programs even allow the writer to set up an alternative signature, giving users the flexibility to choose between a standard signature, an alternate, or none at all. Writers sometimes set up both a formal full signature and an informal signature. The important point to remember is to close with a signature that gives the reader the information he or she needs to know.

## Avoiding Inappropriate Use of Email

In spite of its popularity and ease of use, email is not always a good medium for your communications. As summarized by two authorities, “it should not be used when:

- The message is long, complicated, or requires negotiation.
- Questions or information need clarification and discussion.
- The information is confidential or sensitive, requires security, or could be misinterpreted.
- The message is emotionally charged and really requires tone of voice or conversational feedback to soften the words or negotiate meaning.

## TECHNOLOGY IN BRIEF Using Good Email Etiquette Helps You Convey Your Message

Using proper email etiquette is as easy as applying a bit of empathy to your messages: send only what you would want to receive. The following additional etiquette guides will help you consider a variety of issues when using email.

- Does the recipient really need your message?
- Is your message for routine rather than sensitive messages?
- Are you sure your message is not spam (an annoying message sent repeatedly) or a chain letter?
- Have you carefully checked that your message is going where you want it to go?
- Has your wording avoided defamatory or libelous language?
- Have you complied with copyright laws and attributed sources accurately?
- Have you avoided humor and sarcasm that your reader may not understand as intended?
- Have you proofread your message carefully?
- Is this a message you would not mind having distributed widely?
- Does your signature avoid offensive quotes or illustrations, especially those that are religious, political, or sexual?
- Is your recipient willing or able to accept attached files?
- Are attached files a size and format that your recipient’s system can handle?
- Are the files you are attaching virus free? ♦

- The message is sent to *avoid* direct contact with a person, especially if the message is unpleasant and uncomfortable or seems too difficult to say face-to-face.
- The message contains sensitive issues, relays feelings, or attempts to resolve conflict. Email can make conflict worse.”<sup>6</sup>

## LO 5

Understand the nature and business use of text messaging.

## TEXT MESSAGING

Probably you are already well acquainted with text messaging. Although a recent technological innovation, it is widely used, especially by young people. With about 170 million active

mobile phones in the United States in 2006, it is estimated that about 7.2 billion text messages are sent a month.<sup>7</sup> As you read this text, the number is likely growing as the use of text messaging is increasing rapidly.

Text messaging, also called short message service (SMS), allows one to use a mobile phone to send, receive, and view short messages using the phone’s keypad and screen. Typically, its messages are limited to 160 characters. Some carriers allow longer messages but may break them into multiple messages when forwarding them to receivers. The input screens count the characters as you enter them, helping you keep your message concise. Some even allow you to customize for shortcuts, and most use predictive technology to complete the spelling of words quickly. In addition to being able to send messages between mobile phones, users can use their email programs on desk-

top, laptop, or hand-held hardware to send text messages (see Exhibit 2.9).

Although text messaging currently is used primarily for personal communications, it is beginning to find a place in business communication. Marketers have begun to test its potential. McDonald’s and Budweiser have used it in their advertising campaigns. It is especially useful in businesses with a mobile work force, permitting communication between home office and sales representatives, maintenance support staff, field service engineers, and such. It is a good way to keep in touch with staff while at a meeting, on the road, or otherwise indisposed.

Writing text messages is quite different from writing other messages. As the message generally is limited to 160 characters, the emphasis is on brevity. You include only the bare essentials. The need for brevity has led to the use of many shortcuts. Some examples: b4 (before), u (you), gr8 (great),

## COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF Taking Time Can Save Time

Although e-mail is an essential communication medium in business today, many businesspeople and business students take it casually and fail to realize its full potential. It’s easy to assume that since e-mail can be produced quickly and easily, readers can comprehend e-mail messages quickly and easily

too. Yet overly speedy e-mail writing can result in much slower e-mail reading and even miscommunication.

Mary Munter, Dartmouth College  
Priscilla S. Rogers, University of Michigan  
Jone Rymer, Wayne State University ❖

**Source:** “Business E-mail: Guidelines for Users,” *Business Communication Quarterly* 66.1 (2003): 26.

BTW (by the way), ASAP (as soon as possible), CU (see you), NP (no problem), IMO (in my opinion), HRY (how are you), TC (take care), TYT (take your time). There are so many of these abbreviations that one might say a new language has developed. Because text messaging is less formal than other types of messages, these shortcuts are often used and accepted. However, they still force the reader to stop and interpret the meaning. You should avoid using them whenever there is a likelihood they will not communicate quickly and clearly.

In composing text messages, the writer's objectives should be to convey all critical information the receiver needs and to keep needed responses as short as possible. For example, if you learn that an important visiting customer is a vegetarian and you have reservations for lunch at Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, you might need to let your boss know—before the lunch meeting. However, the boss is leading an important meeting where a phone call would be disruptive and inappropriate. So you decide to send a text message. An immediate thought might be to send something like this: *Marina Smith is a vegetarian. Where*



“...and I'm proficient in two languages  
— English and text messaging.”

**In composing text messages, the writer's objectives should be to convey all critical information the receiver needs and to keep needed responses as short as possible.**

*should we take her for lunch today? Zeke* Although it does convey the major fact and is only 77 characters counting spaces, it forces the recipient to enter a long response—the name of another place. It might also result in more message exchanges about availability and time. A better version might be this: *Marina Smith is a vegetarian. Shall we go to 1-Fish House, 2-Souplantation, 3-Mandarian House? All are available at noon.* *Zeke* This version conveys the major fact in 130 characters and allows the recipient to respond simply with a 1, 2, or 3. Before sending this message, the writer took the initiative to identify appropriate alternatives. Such efforts will help you write effective, efficient text messages.

While text messaging is relatively new for business use, you will find it a valuable tool if your messages are clear, complete, and concise with a pleasant and professional tone.

## LO 6

Understand how instant messaging works.

## INSTANT MESSAGING

Another type of digital message that continues to grow in popularity is instant messaging. Commonly referred to as IM-ing, instant messaging, or online chatting, is much like a telephone conversation.

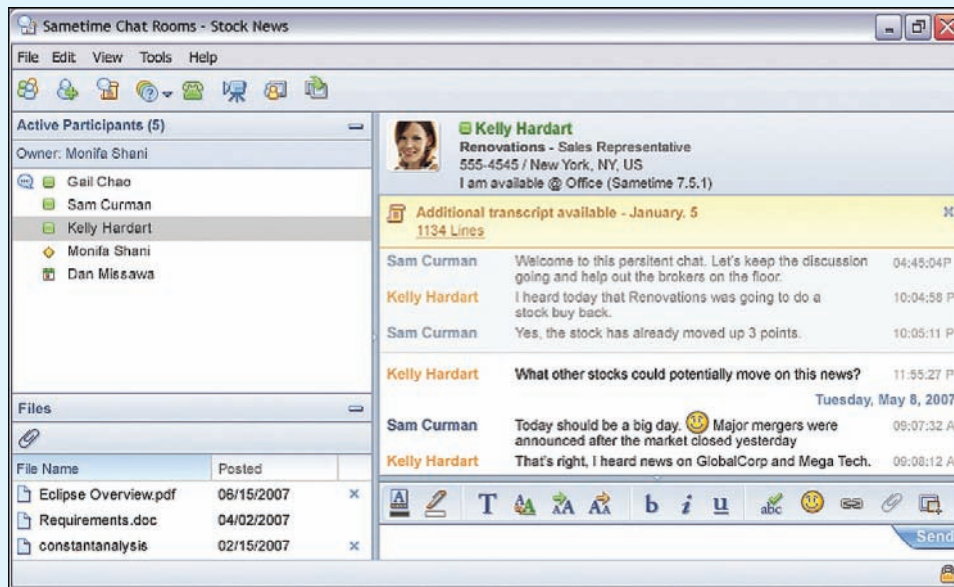
As with a phone call, the parties communicate in real time (immediately). Instant messaging differs primarily in that it uses text-based (typed) rather than voice-based communication, although recent developments have made voice-based

## COMMUNICATION IN BRIEF Text Messaging: Another Language?

A dictionary of over 300 text-messaging abbreviations and over 40 kinds of smiley faces has been compiled at [Webopedia.com](http://www.webopedia.com/quick_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp), an online computer technology encyclopedia. If you don't know what WYGAM or %-( mean, you can find out at [http://www.webopedia.com/quick\\_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp](http://www.webopedia.com/quick_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp).

As with shortcuts in emails, be careful when using such abbreviations and emoticons. It's true they can save on typing, but they can also derail your communication if your reader doesn't speak the same text-messaging language. Predictive technology—the capability of some devices to finish typing a word or

phrase for you—helps solve this problem while also spelling correctly. ❖



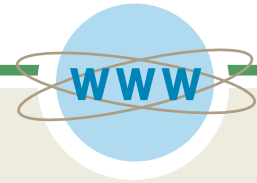
messaging software to monitor and log employee instant messaging (see Exhibit 2.10). This communication management software is designed to audit and control instant message use. Specifically, it detects excessive use, inappropriate or unethical behavior, disclosure of proprietary information, use of sexually explicit language, and attachments with viruses. It also has features that protect the company from legal liabilities.

While we've covered the most common forms of business messages here, new ones will continue to develop as communication technologies and business needs change. Staying abreast of these changes and analyzing each situation carefully will help you choose the right form at the right time.

instant messaging possible. With some exceptions, in instant messaging both parties are logged into their instant message server at the same time. They then communicate in much the same way as they would with email. Instant messaging allows you to develop a list of people with whom you wish to communicate (often called a "buddy list"). You can engage in instant messaging with any of these people as long as they are online when you are. When you send a message, a small window opens where you and the other person can type. Both of you can see these messages immediately. You continue exchanging these message bits until you have achieved your objective.<sup>8</sup>

You should write instant messages much as you would talk in conversation with the other person. If the person is a personal friend, your language should reflect this friendship. If the person is the president of your company, a business associate, or a fellow worker, this relationship should guide you. The message bits presented in instant messaging are determined largely by the flow of information. Responses often are impromptu. Even so, in business situations you should consciously direct the flow toward your objective.

In writing instant messages you should keep in mind that your instant messages may not be just between you and the other person. Companies often use enterprise instant



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