

Spring 2003

The Right Writing Process

By Dr. Maureen Archer

It is time to write that dreaded report; you have put it off as long as you dare. You face the blank computer screen, wondering how to begin. During the next few hours you hammer out sentence after sentence, stopping often to correct words and phrases. Glad to be finished, you print and send it. Reading it later, however, you cringe when noticing you have forgotten key details and omitted entire words.

Writing does not need to be so painful. Advice books, such as Marty Stuckey's The Basics of Business Writing, recommend spending the largest portion of your writing time in planning. By adopting the following writing process, you can take control of the writing task, complete it in the same (or less) time, and enjoy yourself more.

1. **Plan** (45% of the writing time)

This is the most important and most overlooked phase of the writing process. Before writing a document, figure out what you will say and in which order you will say it. Begin by thinking about your readers' needs. Here are some good questions to answer:

- What do my readers know about this topic?
- What should they know?
- What should they do with the information I give them?

Next, jot down all the ideas that should appear in your document. This should be messy: create lists and idea webs -- use incomplete sentences. After you have your ideas scribbled on paper, decide which ones are important enough to mention first, second, third, etc. Only with your ideas down and organized should you move on to the next phase.

Bottom line: Jot down and organize ideas first; don't write yet.

2. **Write** (15% of the writing time)

With your ideas organized in front of you, begin typing your document. Start at the beginning and go to the end. The most important part of this phase is that you do not stop to edit; turn off your internal editor and just keep writing. You will have plenty of time to edit during the next phase. Bottom line: Write without stopping to correct anything; just put your ideas into sentences. (**continued on the back**)

From Paragraphs to Punctuation: A Writing Workshop

After discussing the "Right Writing Process," we will examine strategies for creating effective paragraphs and for polishing common grammar and punctuation concerns. Bring your writing utensils and your questions!

Professional English will offer this three-hour workshop at two locations in May:

On the Peninsula

Friday, May 9, 2003

1:00 – 4:00

**Peninsula Chamber of Commerce
(near the Hampton Coliseum)
1919 Commerce Dr., Suite 320
Hampton, VA 23666**

On the Southside

Friday, May 16, 2003

1:00 – 4:00

**Holiday Inn Select
1570 N. Military Highway
Norfolk, VA 23502**

Cost: \$90 (includes refreshments). **Group Discounts** are available. **Advanced registration is required by May 5.** (VISA/MC are accepted.) Call 873-0116 or write to archer@allenglishtraining.com.

Please register early; seating is limited.

The Right Writing Process (cont.)

3. Edit (35% of the writing time)

Now that you have your ideas organized and in sentences, you can go back to make corrections. Edit two aspects: the organization of your ideas and the correctness of your sentences. It is best to reorganize first because you may delete or add whole sentences. Here are questions to ask when evaluating the organization of your writing: Can your readers easily follow your reasoning? Will they know what to do and why? What needs additional explanation? If you have a trusted reader available, ask him or her to show you which parts are clear and which are not.

After editing the ideas and their order, look at each sentence. Be sure to READ YOUR WRITING ALOUD. This technique is crucial for detecting garbled sentences, wordy phrases, missing words, and repeated vocabulary. Your ear is a better editor than your eye. Be sure to use the spell checker before you move to the next phase.

Bottom line: Spend about 1/3 of your writing time editing for content, organization, and sentence clarity.

4. Format (5% of the writing time)

During this phase you will improve the look of the document. Are the page numbers correct? Should you add headings and/or break up paragraphs for easier reading? Are the graphics where they should be? This is the time to polish the document for visual and professional concerns.

By employing this advice, you will discover that writing can be almost fun. The planning phase is a low-stress, playful time when you let your ideas flow without worrying about correctness. The writing phase is faster with your ideas already organized and your internal editor switched off. The editing phase lets you be an investigator, searching for faulty parts to fix. The formatting phase takes you outside the writing, allowing you to match form with function.

The next time you must write, spend 45% of your time planning, 15% writing, 35% editing, and 5% formatting. I guarantee you will enjoy yourself more and produce a better product.

“Bad Reports and manuals get written not merely because the authors don’t have adequate command of style, but because they don’t select, interpret, or write for people.” -- Russell Ritter

A Three-Day Writing Workshop

Professional English, Inc. will customize a writing workshop for your staff. We will analyze your writing samples, incorporate excerpts from the samples into the training materials, and deliver a program that is interactive, challenging, and beneficial. For maximum writing improvement, we recommend the following three-day program:

Day 1

- Identifying characteristics of good writing
- Following an efficient writing process
- Analyzing the readers’ needs
- Clarifying the purpose of the document
- Gathering and prioritizing details
- Organizing ideas into effective paragraphs
- Writing a first draft

Day 2

- Review of first drafts
- Advice for writing the second draft
- Explanation of proofreading techniques
- Strategies for eliminating wordiness
- Common grammar errors to avoid
- Key punctuation rules to know
- Review and preparation for coaching session

Day 3

- Each participant will meet with a writing coach for one hour. During the coaching session, participants will receive expert advice for improving their own writing.

Call Dr. Maureen Archer (873-0116) to arrange this important workshop for your employees.

Dear Dr. A:

How can someone overcome **speaker’s anxiety** when talking in front of a group?

**Michelle N.
Hampton, VA**



Dear Michelle:

Some degree of stage fright is experienced by most people. When our adrenaline increases, our palms may sweat, our mouths dry up, our hearts race, and our minds go blank. If these happen to you, don’t worry; you are having a normal reaction to this high-stress situation.

Here are a few ways to reduce your anxiety:

- 1) Prepare well for your speech. Practice aloud several times so you will be comfortable with the material, especially if you are using visuals. Also, practice answering possible audience questions.
- 2) Breathe deeply before you speak. I take three long, deep breaths before I present; the motion relaxes me and the oxygen enhances my thinking. Tensing and relaxing muscles may also calm you while waiting, but deep breathing is vital.
- 3) Remember that your listeners want to hear your information, and they appreciate your efforts.

Send your communication and English questions to Dr. Maureen Archer (info@allenglishtraining.com).