Introduction

The Writing Process

In order to help you meet the course objectives, you will rely on the foundational writing process, a series of recursive steps that take you from planning a message to completing it. How people talk about the writing process can vary, but most agree that it begins with an analysis of the task itself and its audience, moves toward research and idea generation, then to drafting and revising, and ends with editing and proofreading. We'll add an emphasis on document design to those final steps in order to reflect the expectation of polished materials in the workplace.

The chart below demonstrates the nonlinear (or recursive) nature of the writing process, particularly in the drafting and revising stage. Simply put, you will likely be performing several parts of the writing process at the same time: brainstorming ideas can lead to research which can lead back to new ideas; clarifying main points can send you back to your planning outline or idea web, etc.
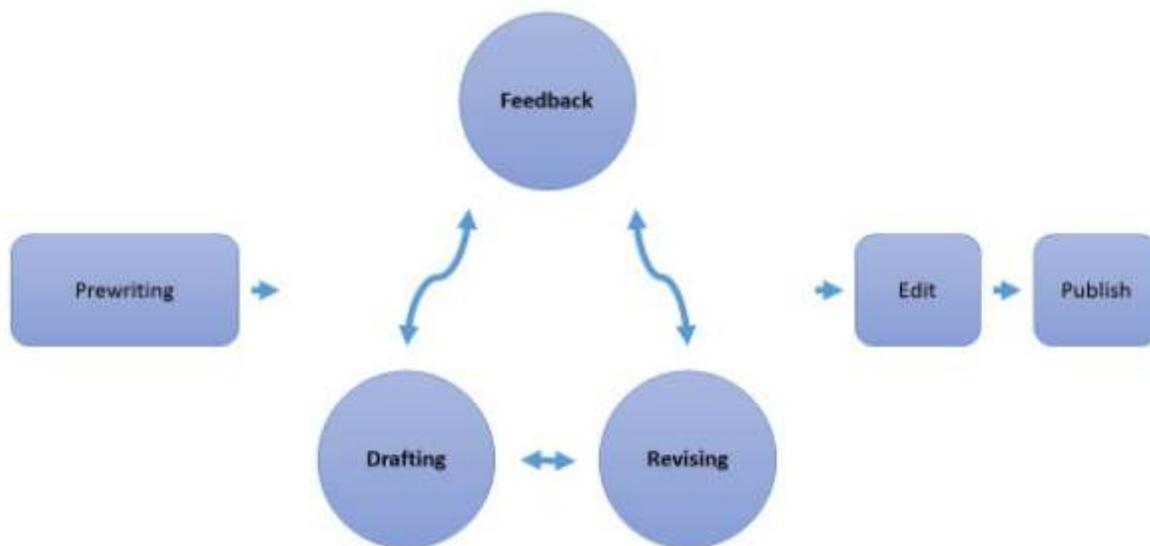

Figure 1: The Writing Process

Depending on the situation, you may move through some of the stages quickly. For example, you probably wouldn't spend a lot of time editing in an IM or text conversation with a coworker, but you would take the time to edit an email to your supervisor or a potential client. Generally, the higher the stakes and the larger the project is, the more involved the steps become.

Let's continue to apply the writing process to the workplace by examining the role planning plays in the writing process and its relationship to rhetorical analysis.

Planning Your Document

Planning involves setting goals and determining procedures that will lead you or a group to completing a project or task. Basically, becoming adept at planning comes down to two things: analyzing the writing situation and identifying different planning strategies to best fit your situation.

Analyzing your Situation

Analysis comes into play throughout the writing process. Early on, you will need to analyze your writing situation to determine what approach will work best in terms of completing the task as well as identify any constraints—time, financial, staffing, etc.—within which you might have to work. Initially, you should focus mostly on identifying your purpose for writing and analyzing your audience.

Rhetorical analysis is the act of interpreting something (a problem, device, concept, etc.) by breaking it up into its component parts with the goal of developing a deeper understanding of the thing being analyzed. Analysis should not be confused with evaluation, which starts with analysis, but involves making a judgment of worth based on established criteria.

The Rhetorical Triangle (Fig 2 below) illustrates four key concepts to consider when analyzing a rhetorical situation.
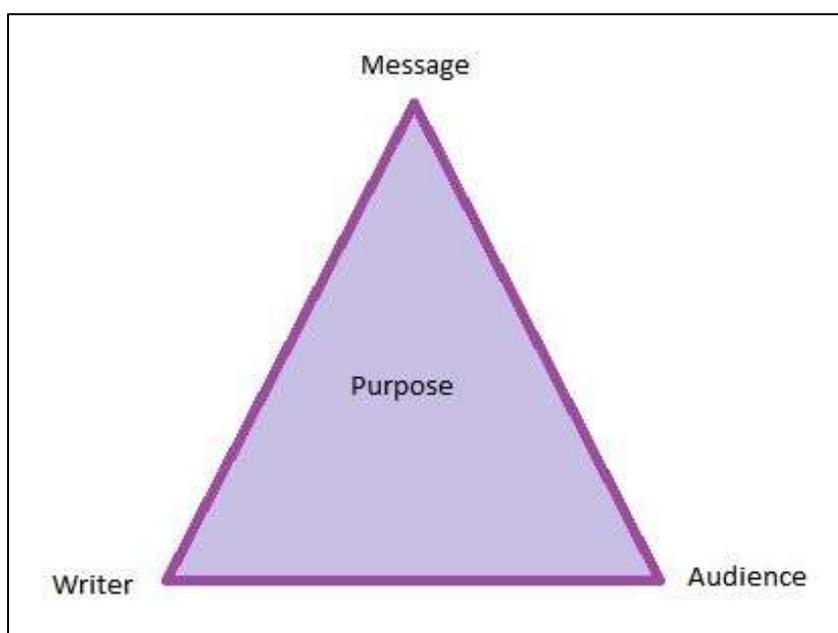

Figure 2: Rhetorical Triangle

The *purpose* for each writing task will usually fall into one of three main categories: to *inform/create a record*, to *persuade*, or a *combination* of informational and persuasive.

Perhaps you respond to an email requesting an answer to a budget question—that would be routinely informative; perhaps you send an email requesting that someone provide you with information—that would be routinely persuasive. A combined purpose would be reflected in a [job application letter](#) as you must provide clear information about yourself as a job candidate while at the same time work to persuade your audience to consider you for the job.

On the job, you might analyze sources of information to determine their credibility and to break down the information offered in the sources. Towards the end of a project, you might also analyze your own writing to determine what revisions to make.

The Rhetorical Triangle is a mnemonic for key concepts, but also for remembering that each of those concepts are related parts of the rhetorical situation. You can analyze the situation by asking questions related to the concepts and their relations to one another. Try asking yourself the following questions:

- What is my purpose/goal with this writing task? What information do I need to provide to satisfy this purpose/goal?
- What does the intended audience or audiences already know about the topic?
- What new information or perspective can (should) I offer on the topic?
- How should I present the information: in an informative or persuasive manner?
- What preconceptions, concerns, or questions might reader(s) have? Will they be resistant to anything I have to say?
- What is my relationship to the reader? How will that effect how I present my message?
- Why will my audience or audiences read this? Do they have different needs or purposes in reading?
- What design or format conventions do I need to follow?

Knowing your Audience

When writing, it's easy to get carried away with your own perspective and needs, particularly if you have strong personal interests in or deep prior knowledge of the topic. However, in workplace writing, *the reader's interests and expectations take priority*. This is because the reader will likely take some sort of action in response to your message. Therefore, a key part of planning a workplace document is stepping back and analyzing your reader, trying to understand what the reader has to gain—or lose—from the message. As you plan your message, try to imagine your reader constantly asking: "What does the writer want or need me to do with this information?" And, perhaps, "What's in it for me?"

Consider these two different lines from a job application letter:

- **Writer Focused:** "This job is a great opportunity for me to gain experience in financial services and would be a great first job for me coming out of college."
- **Reader Focused:** "My ability to build rapport with others will help me build trusting relationships with customers and better identify what services they would benefit from, thus strengthening their bond with your company."

In both cases, the writer is mentioning herself in the first person, but that doesn't mean both are focused on the reader's needs and perspectives. The first example is focused on her desire for the job while the second one is instead focusing on what the reader has to gain from having her as an employee. What particular writing choices does the second example employ in order to focus on the reader?

One of the biggest adjustments when transitioning to workplace writing is keeping the needs of the reader at the center of all your writing decisions.

Cultural Awareness

Whether you're writing for an internal or external audience, effective writers know that cultural considerations are key to building and maintaining strong professional relationships. Such considerations might be related to social demographic areas like gender or ethnicity, or they might be tied to language proficiencies and cultural preferences. Your job as the writer is to consistently be aware of the relationship between your own writing choices and your audience's expectations and needs.

It is not the reader's job to ascertain what you meant: you must provide the content in a way that unequivocally delivers your intended meaning.

Project Schedules: Managing Your Writing Tasks

Just as analysis can help you clearly define what your purpose is and strategize how best to reach your reader, taking a few moments (or several!) to develop a writing plan can save you time, particularly on larger collaborative projects. Planning can feel a little overwhelming when you're approaching a new kind of project. You may feel like you can't possibly know every goal or task you need to have in order to finish everything. This can be especially true if you're facing an unfamiliar project, or something that's out of your routine. However, if you stay flexible in your approach to planning and keep in mind that you can always adjust as you gather more information, you will find that creating a plan makes you a more efficient and competent writer in the long term.

Rather than thinking of your plan as a static "carved in stone" document, you should approach it as a "living document" that gets updated regularly.

Establishing Goals: Identifying the questions to be answered

To start, figure out what your goals in writing actually are. In most cases, these will come directly from the overall purpose you identified for your task—Reader X needs Y information. They are also often related to research needed to fulfill that purpose—I need to find out Z about Y before I can share it with Reader X. You should also keep track here of how persuasive or objective your presentation of ideas will need to be in order to satisfy your overall purpose.

You may also have some personal professional goals that you'd like to work toward as you complete the project, particularly if you're writing something new or have a particular skill you want to develop. The key here is to integrate those particular goals within the larger context of the project itself by identifying specific aspects of the project that correlate with your intentions. For example, from the scenario in the previous paragraph, you might connect your personal goal of becoming more adept at research with the larger task of gathering the kind of information necessary to meet Reader X's expectations.

Moving from Goals to Tasks

Once you have a list of project goals, make a list of the steps or writing tasks you need to complete in order to reach those goals. Here again you may feel like you don't know enough to come up with a detailed plan. Keep in mind that the process of writing is recursive and that you may come back and develop your plan more as you move along. Initially, you should outline a rough idea of your writing process based on what you want to accomplish and when it should be done: audience analysis/awareness, research, drafting and revising, editing and proofreading, etc.

Moving from Tasks to a Timeline

The last step in creating your plan together is to put your tasks on a timeline. Typically, you will have a hard deadline for the final draft. On larger projects or collaborative projects, you may have set dates for progress reports, meetings, and/or drafts. List out anything with a fixed, external deadline along with any sliding, internal deadlines in order to create a calendar. From there, determine when you need to have certain tasks finished in order to meet your goals within the designated deadlines.

You might set up your timeline to complete the final draft before your deadline. In the best of situations, you'll simply be done early, but, if problems do come up, you'll have a little room to make adjustments without needing a 24-hour writing session.

There are a few formal ways you can represent your plan, which are discussed below, as well as any number of informal approaches, such as a handwritten outline or checklist. Be willing to try a few different methods in order to find an approach that works best for you (and the writing situation).

Task Schedule

Some people work well with a task schedule that presents tasks and deadlines, usually in a table of some kind. This is a quick and easy way to put your plan together, but it doesn't give you or other readers a sense of the time involved. Therefore, a table works well with small projects and short timelines.

A sample task schedule can be seen in the [collaboration chapter](#).

Gantt Chart

A Gantt Chart is a type of bar chart that shows the start and end dates of different elements of a project. There are lots of fancy programs that focus on making Gantt charts, but you can make a simple one using a spreadsheet. Use the x-axis to represent dates and the y-axis to represent elements of the project (tasks). This approach helps you visualize overlapping elements of a project and can help you plan which days on the project will be the busiest. This approach is particularly useful when planning a group project because you can add a column to represent each person assigned to a task.
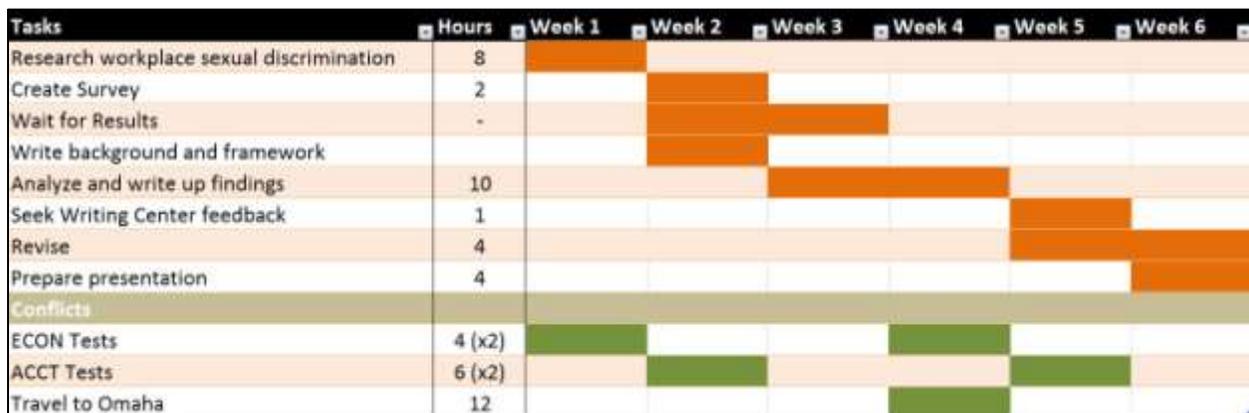
Tasks	Hours	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Research workplace sexual discrimination	8	▓					
Create Survey	2		▓				
Wait for Results	-		▓	▓			
Write background and framework							
Analyze and write up findings	10				▓		
Seek Writing Center feedback	1					▓	
Revise	4					▓	▓
Prepare presentation	4						▓
Conflicts							
ECON Tests	4 (x2)	▓			▓		
ACCT Tests	6 (x2)		▓			▓	
Travel to Omaha	12				▓		

Figure 3: Sample Gantt Chart

Research in the Workplace

So far, we have looked at skills central to planning and preparing to write in the workplace. Another foundational skill that will help you meet your writing objectives is research, or the act of gathering information. Given your prior experiences in academic writing, you are likely already familiar with the

more formal, comprehensive type of research required by essays and reports that seek to demonstrate knowledge on a topic. However, there is a very good chance that when you enter into your professional fields, you will face tasks and projects that require you to gather very specific information in order answer immediate questions or solve problems.

In the workplace, audience awareness also plays a key role in gathering information. Indeed, if your intent to is to truly understand the needs and concerns of your readers, and to connect to that understanding your message itself, you might need to spend as much—or more!—time researching your audience as you do the topic.

Common Types of Research: Finding Information

Generally, there are two ways of categorizing research: primary and secondary.

Primary research is likely the most unfamiliar to you as students, but it is perhaps the most common type of research in the workplace. It is, in short, information unmediated by anyone other than the writer. This can include published results of original studies, but what you're more likely to encounter in the workplace is *self-generated primary research*—here, *you* are the author of the information: you design the survey, conduct the observation study, interview someone, etc. Primary research also includes making inquiries by sending letters or emails, and by making telephone calls. Thus, primary evidence does not undergo any outside process.

Secondary sources, such as news articles, have undergone an outside process. For many, secondary research is actually what we think of first when we think about gathering information, and includes all the common resources of our library: academic journals, books, industry/trade publications, magazines, newspapers. Secondary research can also include the primary research of others.

In the workplace, it's unlikely that you'll head to the library, brick and mortar or otherwise, to complete your research; rather, you often will look to company records or files, consult institutional memory by talking with someone who has worked for the company for a long time, and/or utilize the plethora of resources available online.

Now that you know a little more about the common types of sources, we need to consider the importance of evaluating the credibility of the information you collect from them.

Evaluating the Credibility of Research

Underpinning your application, analysis, and interpretation of information is the credibility of the information itself. Your professional reputation is often tied to this credibility. Your readers may reject an idea or decide not to pursue a claim if you fail to provide the necessary support. So, what do you need to know when it comes to evaluating a sources? The following section will (re)introduce six criteria to consider when choosing whether or not to include a source in your documents. Taking the time to apply the six principles will help ensure that your information is top notch and will be effective in persuading and informing your readers. Let's look at the components.

Current

In most cases, your workplace readers will want up-to-date information. Looking at when the source was published or posted is a good first step. Be sure to look and see whether or not the author updated or revised the information. Also, be aware of web links that are no longer functional. Nothing is more

annoying than clicking a link or entering a URL only to find it no longer works. Of course, not every topic demands the most current source; in some cases, an older, established source is acceptable. For example, you may need to outline what has been done in the past in order to establish precedence for a policy. So, once again, it pays to begin by analyzing the rhetorical situation (i.e. your audience and purpose) thoroughly in order to determine the importance of obtaining the most current information.

Authority

Here you take the time to investigate the credibility of the writer(s) of the source. Try and answer the following:

- What qualification or credentials do the author/publisher/sponsor have?
- Is there a peer review process for this research or is this source sponsored by a commercial non-profit, or special interest group?
- Is the author in fact qualified to write on this topic?
- Is there any contact information in the authority of the source?

When using web sources, you can often learn a lot by simply looking at the site's URL (.com .edu .gov .org .net, for example).

Accuracy

Unless you are using peer reviewed sources, it is important to do a little fact checking. Plan on looking in a couple different locations to validate the information; in the process, you may find a more reliable source to use in your project. For example, verify the statistics you find in grey literature like brochures or magazines. Once you have considered where the information came from, you want to look critically at the evidence using to support the claims.

- Has the information been reviewed by others?
- Can you verify the information to be accurate in another source, or from your own knowledge?
- Look at the word choice; is the language used unbiased and free from emotions?
- Do you note any spelling, grammar, or typographical errors that be a good indication that the accuracy of the source can be called into question?

Purpose

When analyzing a source's purpose, consider the following:

- What the source's main purpose? Is it intended to inform, educate, entertain, sell, or persuade?
- Does the author/sponsor make the purpose clear?
- Is the writer's point of view appear to be objective and impartial?
- Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
- Is there a clear political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal bias in the content?

You want your research to remain as unbiased and objective as possible. This means undertaking the research gathering process without a predetermined outcome in mind, and remaining true to the facts rather than letting personal opinions overshadow those facts. When bias is unavoidable, a not uncommon situation, you will need to acknowledge the role bias is playing in a source in order to determine if the source's bias will diminish the credibility of your research. For instance, if you are looking at product or service information on a company's website, this information is going to be quite positive because the purpose of the website is to persuade and sell the company's product or service. In order to remain objective in this case, you would want to look at another source for reviews of this product in order to learn of potential drawbacks or customer complaints.

Relevance
Be very clear about why you are using each and every source; basically, you want to make sure the source matches up with the rhetorical situation: your purpose and audience for writing the document.

Also, at this point it is a good idea to ask yourself: Do you want to either avoid sources of information geared towards a very different reader from your own or are you able to bridge that gap for your reader? You do not want to alienate your reader by using sources that are not at an appropriate level. For example, you could validate the relevance of a national statistic by surveying employees in a small workplace to see if the trends are comparable.

- How are your readers going to use this information?
- Who was the intended audience of this source?

Variety
One final recommendation for ensuring the credibility of your research is to diversify your source types. Remember the common types of research we discussed above? Well, it is a good idea to gather the same sort of information in a couple of different ways. Your reader will be more likely to adopt your recommendation or agree to your proposal if your ideas are backed up with more than one type of research.

Bottom-line: be willing to look at a variety of sources (rather than simply grabbing the first one you encounter) before deciding what to include in your project. Too often, a writer's credibility and the overall integrity of her researched work is diminished when the first source is selected without thoroughly looking at a variety of information.

In addition to effectively persuading and informing your reader, taking the time to investigate the currency, authority, accuracy, purpose, and relevance of your sources can save you time in the long run. And, by focusing on gathering quality research that meets these criteria, you are also safeguarding your professional reputation.

Citing Your Sources
Once you have worked hard to gather relevant, current information from a variety of credible, accurate sources that align nicely with your project's purpose, you need to know how to properly cite that information. And why fuss with proper citations? As long as you do not deliberately copy the work of another or falsify your primary research who will really care? Often, the person(s) who authored the source cares a great deal- they expect and deserve to be given credit for their ideas.

Also, you want your readers to know when you are using your researching skills to support your points; impress and dazzle them into taking action based in part on the research you incorporated into your company's proposal or formal report. Additionally, properly citing research can add a great deal of credibility to your project and prevents your reader from challenging your claims.

A final reason why citations are important is a matter of efficiency: citations provide an easy way for recording and retrieving the original source for future reference; you will have readers who are interested in taking a closer look at the sources you have referenced in your document and may even offer you additional resources to consider using in your project. Now that we have hopefully convinced you that proper citation are important, let's look at how to craft great citations.

We will be using the APA style in the following examples. Keep in mind that the exact format of your citations will depend on the style being used in your particular industry; the most common styles are MLA, APA, and Chicago. Your instructor, and later your company or organization, will likely determine the style manual you will be using. However, all of these citation styles have two main components in common: they require both an in-text citation as well as a full reference at the end of the document. Only the format for these two components will vary depending on the style being used. You can find explanations and examples of all types of sources (book, websites, interview, etc.) using MLA, APA, as well as Chicago style at Online Writing Lab (OWL) part of Purdue University's website.

Using Someone Else's Ideas: When to Summarize, Quote, and Paraphrase

An important aspect of researching is knowing how to most effectively *use* the information you've found. How, then, do you decide when it is best to summarize, directly quote, or paraphrase source information in your work? Proper citation, as guided by your professional industry, is equally important here.

Let's start with summary. You use a summary when you want your readers to have the general gist or main points of a source, but do not need to get into the details. Summaries are notably shorter in length than the original because they focus on reiterating the main points in *your own words*. For example, this can mean taking an entire chapter or lengthy report and siphoning it down to just a few sentences or a paragraph. In order to avoid plagiarism, be sure to avoid using any of the original author's phrasing or syntax. A helpful strategy here is to write your summary without looking at the original.

Next, let's look at quoting. You have decided that you want to keep the information as it appears in the original. Sometimes, including a quote from an authority on your topic can add validity and credibility to your project. And, in some cases, there is simply no way to change the author's original wording and still retain the emphasis and clarity of its meaning. In these instances, you want to quote the source. Here, you likely already know that you need to include a set of quotation marks around the text and an in-text citation that aligns with the full citation located at the end of the document in your works cited, references, or bibliography. Here is an example of a passage followed by the same text properly quoted in the APA style:

Original Passage from a Published Source
> Your networking will be much more effective if you build relationships with your contacts. Look beyond the short term goal of acquiring your next job to the task of forging contacts that will be beneficial in your new position and for future career transitions.

Properly Quoted Passage using APA

"Your networking will be much more effective if you build relationships with your contacts. Look beyond the short term goal of acquiring your next job to the task of forging contacts that will be beneficial in your new position and for future career transitions" ("Networking Tips," 2015).

Lastly, let's look at proper paraphrasing. Too often, we believe that by simply changing one or two words from the original we are employing paraphrase. This is not the case. A proper paraphrase requires you to use your own words and unique voice, just like in summarizing. Paraphrases are useful when we want to focus on the details that might get left out of a summary, or when the original text is too dense or full of jargon for our own audience's needs. Paraphrasing helps prevent your readers from having to do more work in deciphering the content you've deemed important to your message.

Even with a citation, not properly rewriting the content and inadvertently using the author's language without quotation marks is in fact plagiarism. Look at the following original passage followed by a paraphrase for an example.

Original Passage from a Published Source

Your networking will be much more effective if you build relationships with your contacts. Look beyond the short term goal of acquiring your next job to the task of forging contacts that will be beneficial in your new position and for future career transitions. When establishing a relationship with a new contact, communicate your sincere interest in his or her work and advice and be informed enough to have a conversation about his or her job. If you remember that you are building a professional relationship and not just a casual acquaintance, you will approach the networking process with a greater sense of purpose. ("Networking Tips," 2015).

Properly Paraphrased Passage using APA

Successful networking involves investing the time in forming a professional relationship with someone in your field, but not just to get help landing a particular job. Think of networking as seeking mentors who you can build a relationship with and who you can consult with throughout your career. ("Networking Tips," 2015).

Regardless of whether you summarize, quote, or paraphrase a source, you will also want to list the complete citation at the end of your document according to the style dictated by your industry.

Drafting and Revising Your Documents

When you have gathered sufficient information to satisfy the rhetorical situation of your writing task, you are ready to put words-on-paper/screen, and begin drafting your message. Remember, too, that you don't need to wait until the entire message is drafted to begin revising; often going section-by-section in longer messages can help you better focus on the content's accuracy. Full-document revising can then focus more on audience awareness and effective organization.

While it can be useful to rely on a trusted colleague to provide a second set of eyes for revision, often taking a physical break from the text (as in, getting up from your desk and walking away), however brief, can also be remarkably helpful.

Editing Your Documents

The final step in your writing process is editing. During this stage, regardless the length of the message or its category as formal or routine, effective writers assess their documents for accuracy in three areas: formatting, grammatical correctness, and tone/style.

Formatting

The last piece of the rhetorical situation puzzle is choosing the best format with which to present your message. Format, or genre, options are commonly designated as routine or formal, and there are several choices within each category. Your job is to match the audience and purpose of the message to the most appropriate format. For example, if your message is a brief update to your boss on a longer project, you would need to decide if an email or memo would be most appropriate. Part of your decision rests on your understanding of the audience's preferences—maybe they dislike email—as well as your understanding of the genres themselves. You'll learn more about common workplace genres as the handbook continues.

Grammatical Correctness

Likely what most of us consider editing, checking for grammatical correctness is an important step in providing professional polish to your written work. Here, we look for accurate spelling, consistent tense use, and proper Standard American English usage.

Style and Tone

Lastly, you want to consider the document's overall style and tone. Style refers to the sentence-level choices you make, i.e. word choice and syntax, which add up to the overall attitude conveyed through the message, the tone. Contemporary North American workplace writing seeks to be active, concise, and direct.

For more information, please visit these handouts from The University Writing Center at Texas A&M:

- Clear and Concise Writing
- Active-Passive-Voice

Activities

Workplace Writing

1. Find three examples of workplace writing. These examples could be promotional letter you received in the mail, or an email that provides information about a product, or memo from your boss (please feel free to remove any identifying information, if necessary). Then for each document, answer the following:

   - What is the document's purpose(s)?
   - How would you characterize the primary reader(s) of the documents? Are there are also secondary readers?
   - What genre is the document (letter, email, report, flier, manual, etc.)?
   - Does the document contain any visuals? If so, how many? What is the purpose of each visual?

- Describe the document's layout and organization.
- Describe the document's use of color. What do the color choices reveal about the writer's understanding of audience?

Be sure to bring both your examples and analysis to class as instructed by your teacher.

Planning a Writing Project

2. Alex, a safety consultant for OSHA, has been asked to respond on behalf of the United States to the recent controversy surrounding the building of the FIFA World Cup facilities in Qatar. While he already knows quite a bit about construction safety from his own professional and cultural perspective, he knows that he needs to research safety standards and issues in global construction as well as human rights/labor protection guidelines, before he can effectively reach his audience. He decides to create a plan, or writing schedule. Use the following prompts to create a plan or schedule to help Alex fulfill his writing project goals:

Rhetorical analysis:

- Who is his primary audience? Is there a secondary audience?
- What is the overall purpose of this project?
- What is the final deadline for the project's completion?
- What are the writing steps necessary to meet that purpose?
- What are his scheduling, or process, goals?
- How should he best schedule the writing tasks in order to meet that final deadline?
- What personal or professional learning/development goals might he set for himself?
- What aspect(s) of the writing process could he want to strengthen during this project?

Research

3. Conduct a brief interview, either in-person or via email, with a professor in your major, seeking answers to questions you have about the field. Prepare your findings as instructed and share with the class.

4. Look for a trade journal in your field. [Note: K-State librarians are a great resource if you're not sure where to begin.] Browse the table of contents, scan the articles, glance at the ads, etc. Overall, what kind of information is being shared? Who are the writers and the readers? In what ways can trade journals be useful to you as you prepare to enter the workforce?

Cultural Awareness

5. In pairs or as a small group, research "high and low context cultures" and prepare a brief report on your findings that both provides a definition of terms and applies them to the contemporary workplace. Your instructor might request a written or oral report of your findings.

Editing

6. Using the weakest of the three examples of workplace writing that you found earlier, practice your editing skills by making formatting suggestions or changes, necessary grammatical fixes, and offering more professional style and tone suggestions, as directed by your instructor.