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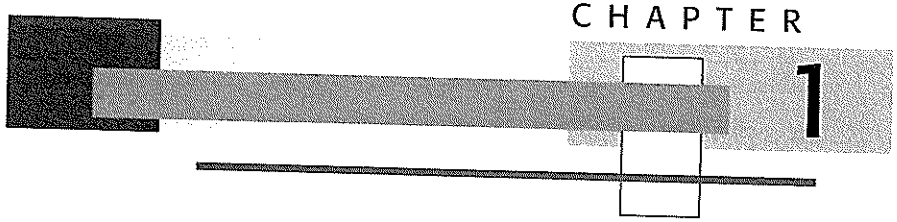
—J.J.Y.

—K.C.M.

—R.M.T.



CHAPTER 1

Understanding Today's Audiences

Each morning, Tom Adams rises at 6 a.m. and turns on his TV to check the weather and last night's sport scores. After he showers and dresses, he checks his BlackBerry for e-mail that would alert him to any emergencies he might have to deal with at work or traffic jams on his personalized commute route. At 7 a.m., he pours a traveling cup full to the brim and heads for his car, stooping carefully to pick up *The Washington Post* on his doorstep. Today's *Post*—all 127 pages of it—rides shotgun for the 15-mile trip to the environmental consulting firm where Adams works.

While driving, Adams plugs in his iPod to listen to a podcast of highlights from his favorite sports talk show from the town where he grew up. His phone buzzes with a text message from his friend—their softball game for tonight may be cancelled because of rain.

Once in the office, Adams flips on his computer. He logs in to his account on Facebook to track his friends throughout the day and quickly browses a few blogs that round up the latest news on environmental science and regulation. At lunch, he scans a few national news sites and then sorts through the day's postal mail: two brochures on upcoming seminars, along with current copies of the *Environmental Reporter* and the *Federal Register*.

It is noon in the Washington, D.C., area, and Adams already has processed hundreds of media messages—and ignored or missed thousands more. By the time he returns home at 6:30 p.m., he will have processed hundreds more before he ever sits down to order an "on-demand" movie or play video games online with his brother in Miami.

Several hundred miles away, Lorayne Oglesbee begins her day with a televised morning show, complete with news, weather, and tips for entertainment,

cooking, and fashion. As she dresses and packs her briefcase, she pauses from time to time for a look at the TV screen or to attend to one of her two school-aged daughters.

She says her goodbyes when the kids board their bus, then picks up her regional newspaper—*The News & Observer*—from the driveway. She relaxes with the paper over breakfast for a few minutes before her three-mile drive to work. As she drives, she listens to XM Radio, a gift from her husband intended to help with the morning's transition to her hectic life at work. She is an attorney for a large regional hospital.

Oglesbee spends most of her days at work reading, researching, and meeting with legal staff and other attorneys. At the end of a day filled with complex information, she likes to spend leisure time watching television drama or mystery shows with her family. Some evenings, by necessity, are devoted to working on her laptop computer or responding to e-mail messages that arrived late in the day.

Mass communicators have trouble reaching active audiences because of heavy competition from various media and from busy lifestyles. Think about your day so far. How did you get information as you moved through the day? You, like Adams and Oglesbee and other people in the 21st century, are bombarded by an overabundance of media messages. You are faced with many choices about what to read, view, and access.

As a result, only a select few messages actually reach the average person, who is blocking or tossing out messages judged irrelevant, unclear, or uninteresting. Messages must be carefully structured to reach an intended audience. The fate of any message lies in good writing that is streamlined to reach a busy and active person. This chapter discusses

- a historical context to understand the evolution of today's media and audiences,
- how writers can understand and serve audiences,
- how writers can overcome roadblocks to reaching audiences, and
- why the writing process is important for communicators.

Reaching Audiences

Heavy competition from various media and from busy lifestyles vie for people's attention today. Children and adults—including you—have developed the skills to sort constantly what will and will not be read, watched, or heard in the limited time available.

People today have a nearly insatiable desire to be informed about breaking news, such as devastating floods in the Midwest, entertainment figures, or how athletes fared in the Olympic Games. How people sought information was clearly evident in the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and in the presidential elections of 2008. They went to live audio and video on television and online news services and used e-mail and text messages to connect with relatives and friends. Newspapers—even if they were morning newspapers—rushed to put out special editions or updated their news sites.

People in an uncertain and changing world are looking for information that keeps them safe and saves them money. Today's audiences also seek relief from economic and military tensions around the world, turning to media for entertainment and information about leisure activities. Some people enjoy the analysis and discussion of events found on online independent sites and blogs. Overall, audiences want and need information that will help them cope with—or escape from—everyday life.

How do writers get through the clutter of today's lifestyles and multimedia? How do they reach waiting audiences? They can do it with good writing. They write messages that are simple, clear, and accurate. Audiences will not stick with messages that are confusing, incoherent, or unbelievable. Writers today must craft messages that attract and hold people with their content and structure and that are relevant and emotionally compelling.

Most writers today have a purpose in writing. They want to tell of a family's trauma after massive earthquakes or other natural disasters. They want to inform voters about candidates. They want to entertain viewers of a late-night talk show. They want to highlight a product's usefulness. They want to sell a client's services. These writers want their messages to reach a destination, and they want audiences to pay attention.

Writing Is the Basic Task

Before they are printed, broadcast, aired, or distributed, messages are written. Communicators have to write first, regardless of what medium or technology they use. Consider these examples:

- A school principal writes the monthly calendar of activities before posting it on the school's Web page.
- A radio reporter types stories before she reads them on the 6 a.m. news show.

- A working mother sends her teenage son a text message, asking him to prepare dinner.
- An advertising copywriter creates a direct mail letter for customers of a sporting goods company.
- Three television journalists write their scripts before the weekly Sunday morning news program.
- The editor of the campus newspaper writes two editorials for each edition.
- An advocate of stringent controls on auto emissions adds his opinion to a clean-air blog.
- A student carefully words the subject line of an e-mail to a state senator.
- A Web site developer maps the story flow for an animated guide to holiday performances.

All communicators—whether journalism or mass communication students, newspaper reporters, advertising copywriters, school principals, or even colleagues—must write a message before it is sent to its intended audience. Once writers let go of the message, that is, after the message is aired or distributed, they have little control over whether the audience absorbs the message. Although the message might have arrived, it might be crowded out, deleted, or ignored.

For audiences to pay attention, writers must create messages that are accurate, appealing, organized, readable, relevant, compelling, clear, complete, and simple. Audiences today require good writing.

Roadblocks to Reaching Audiences

A variety of obstacles exist between writers and their audiences:

- **Media and information glut.** More kinds of information delivery systems become available almost daily. Each memo, article, text message, or news brief has infinitely more competition for an individual's attention than could have been imagined a decade ago. People use interactive and on-demand media in addition to traditional magazines and newspapers. They are hungry for information of all kinds and can choose from an array of media most relevant to their lifestyles.

- **Taxing lifestyles.** Despite labor-saving devices, audiences today are busier than ever with multiple commitments to work, family, and recreation. People are spending more of their leisure time on family activities and household chores and less on media consumption.
- **Diversity of audiences.** U.S. society and the media are becoming increasingly diverse in many ways: racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, family structure, and so on. Media writers constantly must work to keep up with changes in audience makeup as well as audience needs and interests. No longer is the average media consumer a white, middle-class man.
- **Unfriendly messages.** Poor writing interferes with message comprehension, just as commuting, working, children, and too many media choices do. A message that bores or taxes or takes too long to understand can be the greatest roadblock to complete communication.

Media Glut

Writers must remember that today's world offers more to read, watch, and listen to than anyone could possibly consume. In the early 1960s, Marshall McLuhan predicted today's trends, suggesting that new media would alter society in dramatic, unanticipated ways:

> *Electronic technology is reshaping and restructuring social patterns of interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your government, your relation to "the others."*

He was right: Society has changed. McLuhan could hardly have envisioned the information explosion today. Blog search engine Technorati reported that between 2003 and 2007 more than 72 million blogs were created, and that the blogosphere continued to grow at a rate of 1.4 new blogs every second.

No one can possibly read or see the tiniest fraction of information available today. Media pervade daily life. Technology has overcome the barriers of geography and cost—almost anyone can buy the equipment to be in touch with anyone anywhere in the world. People in remote areas can tune in to events via satellite dishes; a sailboat captain in the Caribbean can view an

online copy of the latest *Wall Street Journal*; a vacationing executive can send or receive messages via a BlackBerry or iPod; viewers can watch live Web cam broadcasts from Iraq.

Changes in Media and Audiences

Although the preferred media have changed, the need for information and entertainment is constant. The changes, however, have not been so good for traditional media, such as newspapers. Research has shown that fickle audiences may not return to a medium once they have abandoned it for another.

Newspapers have been hard hit by change as audiences have moved to other technologies to get information and entertainment faster. Since the 1980s, the circulation of daily newspapers has dropped, and hundreds of daily newspapers have closed. Critics of the newspaper industry have said that newspapers have not kept up with technology and have not changed enough to attract readers. Some newspapers have taken steps to reach out to readers by distributing news via online social networks or encouraging the creation of "user-generated content." Others have launched special reporting projects targeted to community interests.

Watching television news is still a daily activity for most Americans. Although television still appears to be the main source of news, it also has dealt with declining ratings and increased competition from other news sources. ComScore, a company that tracks and analyzes media usage, reports that 11 billion online videos are viewed each month in the United States. Apple's iTunes Store has more than "100,000 podcast episodes from independent creators and big names like HBO, NPR, ESPN, *The Onion*, CBS Sports, and *The New York Times*." Awards that traditionally recognize excellence in broadcast news are now awarded to newspapers like *The Washington Post*.

Media forms continue to evolve, taking audiences on a rollercoaster ride into an unimagined future of interactive and virtual reality. More specialized media, more ethnic media, and more electronic media—in fact, more media of all kinds—are on the market. And all these media, old and new, compete fiercely for audience share and attention.

You saw in the Adams and Oglesbee examples that people do not accept or assimilate every message that comes their way. They sift through messages and choose which ones they will hear and read. Successful communicators know they must compete for audience attention. Writers must understand

an audience's lifestyles, media preferences, interests, and languages. That knowledge will aid in selecting topics and polishing any message so that it fits an audience's needs and interests. Audiences change, just as society changes, and successful communicators take into account the impact of these changes on their audiences.

The latest census shows that most people in the United States live in households but less than half of those household groups are what was once considered a stereotypical family. Single-occupant, single-parent, and blended families are more common than the so-called typical family household. Neighborhoods and communities that were once homogeneous are now home to many racial and cultural groups.

New media directly affect audiences. New technologies give them greater access to information, entertainment, shopping, bill paying, and even online dating and meditation.

Today's media audiences are filled with people accustomed to fast food, fast travel, and fast information. Today, hundreds of millions of people worldwide have Internet access via desktop PCs and an ever-increasing array of mobile phones, and many of them regularly use the Internet for daily tasks such as banking and shopping. Increasingly sophisticated audiences expect immediate, accurate, high-quality information.

Lifestyles and Diversity

Life today is complex with more sources of news from all directions. Media have proliferated, but no new hours have been added in the day to give audiences more time to use more media. So media choices change and shift.

Even though some audience members use new media to search for information, others are more resistant. Caught in the demands of daily living, they still rely on the more traditional media for information. Perhaps they do not have the financial means to buy computers and software to go online. Writers must be aware, therefore, of how to communicate in both old and new media.

At the same time, people's lifestyles are changing in the United States, and the country is witnessing another trend affecting media use: cultural diversity. Demographic experts predict increasing shifts. The latest U.S. Census data show that minorities make up the fastest-growing one-third of the U.S. population. The traditional categories—African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans—lose meaning as new groups, such

as Caribbean and Pacific Islanders, immigrate and as intercultural families become commonplace. Some young people of mixed heritage will no longer classify themselves in a single ethnic category.

Although ethnic- and gender-specific media have long had a role in this country, the changing complexion of the United States has meant an increase in media that address specific groups and individuals. The changes have meant new topics, new discussions, new themes, and new services. Media, particularly general-interest newspapers, cover issues that for many years were carried only in specialized media, such as the black or Hispanic press.

Changing diversity means media are also working to hire employees who represent different groups so that newsrooms will more accurately reflect the makeup of the population in general. This evolution has not been easy. African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American reporters, for example, are still few in number. They are not represented in newsrooms in the same percentages as they are in the population overall.

To attract and retain audiences, media executives consider constraints such as money, lifestyles, increasing demands on time, and the lure of other media. Smart media managers realize they must adjust and be flexible to reach specific audiences. They recognize that often they need to create a profile of their audience members, by research and other means, to find out exactly who they are and what they need. Armed with knowledge about audiences, media leaders—and writers—can aim messages more specifically at their targeted destinations.

Knowing Audiences

People who write tend to read more than the average person. They are likely more educated, have a larger vocabulary, and exhibit a greater interest in various topics. They may write to please themselves or to satisfy what they think audiences want to know. As lifestyles and diversity change, these writers might be out of touch with their audiences and not know who their audiences truly are.

Such ignorance is dangerous. Writers are at risk if they do not know their audiences or if they assume they know their audiences. They also cannot assume that all audiences can grasp complicated, technical messages. Successful writers make an effort to know and get in touch with their audiences.

Identifying Audiences

This explosion of media choices means it is more important than ever to know your audience. A survey of online journalists indicates that analysis of how people are using their Web sites is one of the most common and time consuming parts of their job.

Few writers have a single audience, although many mistakenly write for what they call a mass audience. In today's world, mass audience is only a rough term used to describe a conglomeration of many smaller, specific audiences. Some may consider CNN, for example, to have a mass viewing audience. But even its audience can be broken into subgroups.

Members of small audiences have much in common. Some typical smaller audiences are veterans, working mothers, union members, and power company customers. An audience may be tiny (members of Temple Sinai) or huge (Americans interested in better health care).

Regardless of size, every audience may be subdivided. For example, members of the congregation at Temple Sinai will include smaller audiences of children, teens, young adults, singles, marrieds, new parents, empty nesters, maintenance staff, grounds workers, and so on. Even a smaller audience in the congregation, such as immigrants from other countries, could be further divided into those from specific countries, such as Poland, Germany, or Israel.

Breaking an audience into its composite groups is an important activity for people who need to communicate essential messages. Each subgroup may have specific needs for information and a particular way of getting it. A university, for example, has many audiences, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, potential students, governing bodies, the press, and potential donors. No single message will effectively reach all of these audiences. Most universities spend a great deal of time and money developing specific messages targeted to their many audiences, such as the alumni newsletter for alumni, direct mail for potential donors, and news conferences for the media.

Writers must identify their audiences. A shortcut is to ask the question, "Who cares?" The answer will be a list of groups or audiences that are potential consumers of the message.

Let's try the "Who cares?" method for listing audiences for a message. You are writing an article for your company newsletter on a new policy that

provides preventive health care benefits to employees with children. "Who cares?" yields this list:

- married employees with children,
- single employees with children,
- employees thinking about having or adopting children, and
- part-time employees who have no children but wish they had health care benefits.

Listing audiences is important because once writers have at least listed them, they may change their writing approach. For the employee newsletter, your initial attempt at an introduction might have read:

> A new company policy will provide health care benefits for preventive medicine.

But after you list audiences, your introduction becomes more personal:

> As a single parent, staff geologist John Payne has worried about the extra expense of annual medical exams for his three children and a doctor's visit if the children were only mildly ill.
>
> But Mega Oil's new health benefits program will ease those worries. The plan will reimburse employees with children for preventive health expenses such as well-child checkups.

As audiences are subdivided and defined, so are writing tasks. When writers take time to identify specific audiences, such as single parents, messages can be targeted for those audiences. The approach, structure, and language can be chosen to suit the audience, and communication becomes possible—and even likely.

The Writing Process Explained

E. B. White, in the introduction to *The Elements of Style*, explains that good writing is a writer's responsibility to the audience. He tells how his professor and coauthor, William "Will" Strunk, taught rules to writers out of sympathy for readers:

> *All through* The Elements of Style *one finds evidences of the author's deep sympathy for the reader. Will felt that the reader was in serious trouble most of the time, a man floundering in a swamp, and that it was the duty of anyone attempting to write English to drain this swamp quickly and get this man up on dry ground or at least throw him a rope. . . . I have tried to hold steadily in mind this belief of his, this concern for the bewildered reader.*

It is time to return to Strunk's wisdom. As a teacher in the early 20th century, Strunk knew that audiences were hindered by poor type quality and low levels of literacy. Today, writers contend with new distractions Strunk could never have imagined. But the remedy in either era is the same: clear messages that show consideration for audiences.

Many people believe that good, skillful writing springs not from teaching and learning but from inborn talent that eludes most ordinary people.

Nonsense.

Writing a straightforward message requires no more inherent talent than following a road map. Author Joel Saltzman compares learning to write with learning to make salad dressing:

> *This is the only way I know to make a terrific salad dressing: Mix up a batch. Taste it. Mix again.*
>
> *The secret ingredient is the patience to keep trying—to keep working at it till you get it just right.*
>
> *Do most people have the talent to make a terrific salad dressing? Absolutely.*
>
> *Are they willing to make the effort to develop that skill? That's a different question.*

Good writing, like good salad dressing, can make even dry material palatable and can make good subject matter great. Like ingredients in a recipe, each word, sentence, and paragraph is selected carefully with one goal in mind: pleasing the consumer. The first bite will determine whether the diner eats more; good writing will sell a piece beyond the first paragraph. Like cooking, not every writing session will produce a masterpiece, but the end product must be palatable.

Writers today work in the same way as writers have worked throughout time—by following a regimen called the writing process. Once writers have identified their topics, they follow seven stages of the writing process presented here: information gathering, thinking and planning, listing, drafting, rewriting, sharing, and polishing.

All writers—whether producing a dissertation or a birth announcement—follow these steps. Even students writing under deadline pressure in class can go through the process in an abbreviated way: thinking, organizing, drafting, and revising.

Stages of the Writing Process

The same sequence of steps outlined here occurs in good writing of all kinds. Once they have a topic, all communicators must gather information, think about and plan the message, list key information, draft the message, rewrite the draft, share the message, and polish by checking and editing. Together, these separate stages of activity form the writing process: a set of behaviors common to all writers. The order of stages may vary, and some stages may be repeated, but each stage is essential to producing a good message.

Critical thinking is essential at each stage as well. In selecting a topic, writers have to assess the value of the idea, whether it will appeal to audiences, whether information is available, and how to approach the research and information gathering. At the actual writing stages, writers again think carefully about how to communicate the information clearly in such a way that the audience gets the message. If readers or listeners cannot understand the relevance of the message because the language is convoluted, full of jargon, or unappealing, then the writer has failed. For communication to be successful, audiences have to understand and react or act. Often for inexperienced reporters or writers, knowing the broader context within which an event or situation lives is the greatest challenge to understanding and presenting information to audiences.

Each stage in the writing process is briefly explained here. As you read through them, consider the critical thinking skills needed in each. Later chapters in this book will explain writing tasks in greater detail. You will be referred to relevant chapters as each stage is discussed. Following these stages will produce successful writing in business, education, advertising, public relations, the new media and news media, and daily life. Throughout this text, you will learn what professional writers know: Writing is a skill that can be learned like other skills, one stage at a time. And the first stage is to go beyond yourself to gather information. Good writers are seekers.

Stage One: Information Gathering. Gathering information or reporting on your topic is the first stage of the writing process. To begin the search for information, you must answer questions that all people are prone to ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? How much? Then what?

New technologies put many answers at our fingertips. Basic facts and figures are easy to obtain online, but every writer needs to go beyond superficial statistics. The Internet is just one tool.

Never begin to write without talking to other people or reading their work. Good writing requires basic external information or reporting. Once you know the questions, go beyond your own knowledge to find the answers. Even if you are an expert on the topic, you must find other reliable authorities as quotable sources.

In writing an announcement of an art exhibit at a local art gallery, for example, a writer might begin the questioning by talking with obvious experts—perhaps the curator and an art professor—who can provide answers and lead the writer to additional sources. For the exhibit announcement, aside from the basic *when* and *where* questions, the audience still needs to know the following: What types of artwork will be shown? Will prizes be awarded? Will any special guests appear at a reception? The additional questions will guide the next steps in the information-gathering search:

1. **Interviews.** Writers talk, in person or by phone or e-mail, to authorities or to people when initial sources suggest. (Interviewing is discussed in Chapter 10.)
2. **Library and online research.** Any kind of writing can require research in libraries, Web sites, or databases. For example, if the art on display at the art gallery celebrates Impressionism, the writer needs to find out about the Impressionists and their art. (Basic research skills are included in Chapter 9.)
3. **Other sources.** Brochures, publications, or archives can provide helpful information. For example, an article or brochure about last year's art exhibit could be located through a newspaper index or online archive. (Chapter 9 explains how to use traditional and innovative reference sources.)

It is important to gather information from a variety of sources. Ideally, a writer compiles more information than actually needed so that he or she can be selective about which information to use.

A writer takes notes on every source used in the information-gathering stage. He or she never knows when an important fact or statistic will emerge or when a quotable statement will be uttered. It is best to have a notepad always ready. In addition, careful notes enable writers to attribute interesting or unusual information to sources and to be accurate in what they have written.

Some writers refer to the information-gathering stage as "immersion" in the topic or reporting. Whatever it is called, this first stage of writing turns the writer into an informal expert on the subject matter.

Stage Two: Thinking and Planning. Once information is gathered, the writer studies the notes taken in Stage One, scanning the material for what information that seems most important and most interesting, and then determines the angle and focus.

A good writer always makes decisions about priorities, keeping in mind the audience that will receive the message. Successful writers actually picture the probable audience, hold that image in mind, and plan the message for that imaginary group. Some writers say they write for a specific person, such as a truck driver in Toledo or Aunt Mary in Hartford. Sometimes the thinking stage will allow the writer to see possibilities for creative approaches to writing.

In this stage of the writing process, the writer may realize that more reporting is needed before listing and writing can begin. Once the writer has gathered enough information, he or she will begin to evaluate and set priorities, asking, "What does my audience need to know first? What next?" and so on. If no further gaps in information become apparent at this stage, the writer takes pen and notepad in hand and moves on to Stage Three.

Stage Three: Listing. Listing requires writers to list the facts and ideas that must be included in the message. Some writers note key words; others write detailed outlines. Initial lists should be made by brainstorming, jotting down each important message element, and perhaps scratching out, adding, or combining items in the lists. The lists incorporate the decisions the writer made in Stage Two.

Once lists are committed to paper, the writer reviews them and attempts to rank the information. Imagine, for example, the top priority item on the list is "student art in the show." Another item is "students outside the arts," and another is "Impressionism is the theme." Isolating these items guides the writer

to structure a message that will feature student art, mention Impressionism, and appeal to students in majors other than the arts.

In this stage, the writer imposes order and organization on the information, and the text begins to take shape.

Stage Four: Drafting the Message—As You Would Tell It. For most people, even experienced writers, writing seems somewhat unnatural. In contrast, conversational speech always seems to flow. So the efficient writer drafts a message by writing it as it might be told to a friend, thinking about the language that will appeal and resonate.

Checking the lists made in Stage Three, the writer would begin by "talking" about the first and most important element in the message, perhaps like this:

> A student art show that displays the talents of 27 of the University's young Impressionists will open at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Parents' Association Gallery in Stamp Student Union.

Once this telling process has begun, it continues easily. The writer will move smoothly through interesting aspects of the message to a stopping point after the listed priorities have been included.

By the end of this stage, the writer has created a draft, rather than a message. The term *draft* distinguishes this version from a finished product. It is different from a polished message, and purposely so. Think of the draft as a raw lump of clay, in which substance is what counts. The stages that follow will shape the clay, giving form to the finished message. Drafting messages is discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Stage Five: Rewriting. In this stage, conventions of the written language are imposed on the draft. Writers must look at their work with the eye of an editor, critically assessing how to improve the earlier draft. Sentences are checked for completeness and coherence, paragraphs are formed and organized, and transitions and stylistic flourishes are added.

A good portion of this book is devoted to the skills involved in rewriting or content editing. Only through rewriting—sometimes repeated rewriting—can a message be streamlined to reach its intended audience. All good writers

rewrite; great writers pride themselves on the painstaking reworking of their original phrases. Author E. B. White labored for three years over his slim classic *Charlotte's Web*, and he willingly revised much of his other work as many as 14 times.

Of course, writers on deadline cannot afford the luxury of spending years, or even hours, rewriting a draft. But they can carefully edit the content and check the accuracy of their work even in a few minutes, determining if all facts are included and supported in effectively organized language. At this stage, every writer is a tough editor of his or her work.

Writers develop shortcuts to rewriting as they become familiar with print formats, as described in Chapters 6 and 8. But no good writer ever skips the rewriting or content editing stage.

Rewriting is separate from polishing (Stage Seven), in which fine points of style, such as capitalization, are debated. If a writer stops in mid-draft to debate a style point, the train of thought is interrupted, and the writing process stops. Small decisions are left for the last stage—a stage that may be conducted by someone other than the writer.

Rewriting or content editing a draft is the bulk of the writing process. It is hard, time-consuming work; factors to consider in the process are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. A rewritten draft is far from a finished work, however.

Stage Six: Sharing. The revised draft should go to another reader—almost any other reader. By this stage, most writers have lost perspective on the message. They have become knowledgeable about the topic, and they may no longer be able to judge how the message would be received by an average member of the audience.

Sharing your work at this stage gives you a much better idea of how an audience member may react. Outside readers will quickly let you know whether the information is confusing or unclear or whether any important details are missing.

It is a good idea to share your work with a naive reader—someone who knows far less about your topic than you. Sometimes a colleague at work or a family member is an excellent choice for sharing because of that person's distance from your topic. In class, your instructor might allow peer editing of stories.

In large offices, outside review of your revised draft might be built in. For example, in big companies, drafts usually are reviewed by one or more editors and often by top management. Such an editing process is helpful in

many ways, and certainly it saves the time and trouble of finding someone with whom to share your writing.

Regardless of who is sharing and commenting on your work, you as a writer must never forget that you did the initial research. You have expertise on your topic that your colleagues, family members, or even top managers may not have. Be sure to get feedback from your outside readers in a setting where you both can talk. You may need to explain why certain parts of your message are written as they are. Good editing is negotiation; no editor is an absolute dictator. You as a writer need to work with, and not for, editors and outside reviewers. Together, you can produce clear, correct writing.

Stage Seven: Polishing. The final stage in the writing process is one that many people ignore or abhor. This stage ensures the mechanical aspects are accurate and clear. A misplaced comma can confuse a reader.

Here's where writers consider: Is there an apostrophe after "Parents"? Is the "the" capitalized in "The Parents Gallery"? Finding the answers to such polishing questions is an essential and critical part of the writing process, and it is appropriately the last stage. Many young writers feel that all capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and spelling must be perfect, even in an initial draft. Concentrating on perfection in all those areas is unimportant in the early stages of writing. You might spend 10 minutes looking in the dictionary for a word you eventually decide not to use!

Working on word-by-word perfection at the early stages of writing is wasteful and even paralyzing. Writers who worry about every comma will find it difficult to get through the stages of drafting and revising. Writing becomes a much more comfortable and speedy task when polishing is put off until its proper place at the end of the process. After the important substance and form of the message have been established, writers should spend time with style books, dictionaries, and thesauruses.

All writers should polish their work, even when they pass the message to someone else to edit. An editor or editorial assistant may make the final checks for correctness and consistency and put a message in final form. Confident writers welcome assistance with this final, cosmetic touch, knowing that letter-perfect writing will add to the credibility and clarity of their message.

Getting across messages to people in today's society is an unparalleled challenge. Writers have to accept that they cannot do much to change an individual consumer's lifestyle. They cannot reduce the number of media.

They cannot modify society's diversity. They cannot alter the fact that audiences pay attention to only a few messages amid the daily clutter.

But they can control one aspect: the structure of the message. Good writers have context for today's media world. They know which techniques and which structures best fit their audiences. They use their critical thinking skills to select topics and the approach to developing a story, and they follow the stages of writing to ensure messages are concise, complete, and correct.

Exercises

1. Keep a media log for a 24-hour period between today and the next class. Make a chart showing how you got information, how you communicated information, and which media you used. Indicate how long you viewed or read, a summary of messages, and what else you were doing while using each medium. Indicate whether you had interferences or distractions. Be prepared to compare your media-use patterns with those of others in the class.
2. Interview a relative about his or her media use, formulating questions based on your log. Explore how his or her media use has changed during the last five years, 10 years. Where does the person get most news? entertainment? information that is dependable? in-depth information? Does your relative use new media or more traditional media? What is his or her age?
3. Write a few paragraphs describing the characteristics of the audience for your student newspaper. Then explain how you could follow Strunk and White's advice to help the audience use and better understand the student paper.
4. Choose a news event that occurred today. Select several sources from different media that reported the event. Compare the way each introduced and developed the story. Look at writing style, language, length of story, anecdotes, and quotations. Does the format for presenting the news fit the medium's audiences? How?
5. Interview a classmate. Follow the stages of writing in producing a 30-line story about the person. Explain what you did in each stage. For example, in listing, you might list the person's accomplishments or extracurricular activities. In sharing, you might have another classmate read your draft.

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