

7. Positive messages are often the most complicated to write because the audience is required to be fairly receptive of the presented information.
8. Place the bad news abruptly before the buffer and before a positive closing to lessen the affect.

**ACTIVITY**

Assume that you are the Marketing Manager for a sports shoe brand. Write a promotional message for your audience focusing on what you have read above.

4.4 STEPS OF THE BUSINESS WRITING PROCESS (BWP)

Online and offline, effective business writing is an important aspect of any workplace, for business owners and employees. As a frequently used form of business communication, writing can provide information, offer detailed instructions and can even relay ideas and suggestions. Create a checklist that includes essential steps necessary to effectively write business communications so that your next business writing piece is engaging and error-free.

Step 1: Identify Audience

Before you sit down to write, identify your reader. Get a clear idea of the person or persons who will read the communication you're writing. Determine what questions they expect you to answer, what tone is appropriate, whether they are a busy executive or a loyal customer. Knowing the audience can help you select the format of your business communication.

Step 2: Determine Purpose for Writing

Whether you're writing to share an idea with a fellow business owner or trying to persuade a customer to try a product or service you offer, it's important to determine the purpose of your communication before you start writing. Knowing the purpose can help keep you on topic and reduce tangents in your writing.

Step 3: Choose Ideal Format

Business writing isn't limited to letters and emails. Newsletters, memos, postcards and even advertisements are written business communications businesses create. Postcards and sales letters are ideal for communicating with potential clients, while newsletters and memos can be used for internal use.

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Step 4: Research Background Information

Thoroughly research the topic you're writing on to ensure that you include all necessary details, facts and figures. For a business report, graphs, charts and images can help to illustrate points. Customer testimonials might be ideal in a business communication targeted to customers.

Step 5: Capture Audience

Business writing has to be clear, concise and creative. Entrepreneur Magazine suggests provoking a reaction from the reader by starting with a question. Start with a joke, story, unusual fact or a piece of information that will shock the reader.

Step 6: Stick to One Topic

Mixing an array of ideas in business writing reduces the effectiveness of the main message. Stay focused on one topic, per written communication to avoid confusing the reader.

Step 7: Proofread for Grammar and Clarity

Proofread your document before sending it your reader. Grammar issues and wordiness can distract readers, so it's important to review all business documents carefully.

**SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

State whether the following statements are true/false:

9. Online and offline, effective business writing is an important aspect of any workplace, for business owners and employees.
10. Whether you're writing to share an idea with a fellow business owner or trying to persuade a customer to try a product or service you offer, it's important to determine the purpose of your communication before you start writing.
11. Proofread your document before sending it to your reader.

**ACTIVITY**

Write an essay about which region you hail from taking your friend to be the audience, following the steps mentioned above. Presume that your friend does not know anything about your state.

4.5**STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING AN EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING STYLE**

The style of your writing refers to how you express yourself rather than what you say. Style affects the tone of your communication and thus gives the reader an indication of what you are feeling or thinking.

Following are the strategies for achieving an effective Business Writing Style:

- ❑ **Use Positive Language:** As much as possible, communicate messages in a courteous manner with positive language. Even when you have to communicate bad news, it is possible to word your message positively. The key to wording messages positively is to say what you can do, not what you can't do. This approach to writing can have a powerful impact on the way the message is received.

Example:

Negative Wording	Positive Wording
We will not be able to approve the budget until the analysis is complete.	We will be able to approve the new budget once the analysis is complete.
We cannot issue you a refund without a receipt; you can only receive store credit.	We will be happy to issue you store credit.
We cannot approve your travel request until your supervisor signs this form.	We will be happy to approve your travel request once your supervisor signs this form.

- ❑ **Use the “You” View:** The “you” view refers to a style of writing where the reader's needs are emphasized, rather than the writer's. Considering the reader's needs and point of view is a smart business strategy, and a great way to provide excellent customer service. Notice how the writer-focused messages below sound self-centred, while the reader-focused messages (written with the “you” view) sound concerned and professional.

Example:

Writer-focused Message	Reader-focused Message (“You” View)
To prevent us from losing money, our bank now requires identification when cashing large checks.	To protect your account, we ask for identification when cashing large checks.
So that we may bring our customer records up-to-date and eliminate the expense of duplicate mailings, please update your address information with us.	So that we may keep your records up-to-date and not bother you with duplicate mailings, please update your address information with us.

- ❑ **Use a Conversational Style of Writing:** Business writers should strive to use conversational, everyday language, rather than overly formal language. Overly formal writing can convey a pompous image; it can also interfere with the clear communication of your

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message. Look at how much simpler and clearer the following messages become when more conversational language is used:

Example:

Too Formal	Conversational
It will behove us to henceforth complete all documentation within two business days.	Please complete all forms within two business days.
The board has initiated discussions pertaining to the new policy.	The board began talking about the new policy.
Pertaining to the contracts, all employees are herewith instructed to return the contracts to the undersigned.	Please return the contracts to me.

- **Use Inclusive Language:** As a courtesy to readers, business writers should strive to use language that does not exclude people.

Example: Instead of saying, The attorneys brought their wives to the dinner, you could say instead, The attorneys brought their spouses to the dinner. The second sentence conveys the same meaning but does not exclude the female attorneys and their husbands. One could also substitute the word significant other for spouses so as not to exclude unmarried people.

Similarly, try to avoid using non-inclusive job titles that imply that only a man or woman could hold a particular position. The following are some non-inclusive job titles and their gender-neutral substitutes:

Example:

Non-inclusive Job Titles	Gender-neutral Substitutes
Mailman	Mail carrier
Workman	Worker
Waitress	Server
Policeman	Police officer
Fireman	Fire fighter

- **Use Predominantly Active Voice:** Business writers should strive to use mostly active voice in their writing because it is clearer, more vigorous, and less wordy. In active voice sentences, the subject is the doer of the action, while in passive voice sentences, the subject is acted upon. Notice the difference in style between these active and passive voice sentences:

Active Voice	Passive Voice
The board voted on the proposal.	The proposal was voted upon by the board.

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The president notified
Human Resources of the
change in personnel.

Human Resources were
notified of the change in
personnel.

Susan scheduled the
meeting for July 21.

The meeting was scheduled
for July 21.

Note that in the second and third sentences above, we needed to add subjects (the president and Susan) in order to change the sentences to active voice.

Sometimes it is more appropriate to use passive voice, especially when you don't want to draw attention to the doer of the action.

Example:

Consider these two sentences:

Active Voice

Susan knocked over the coffee
pot in the conference room,
ruining the table.

Passive Voice

The coffee pot was knocked
over in the conference room,
ruining the table.

If we need to communicate the fact that the table was ruined, but we don't want to embarrass Susan, then passive voice would be the best choice in this situation.

Writers should also use passive voice to place emphasis on the most important information in the sentence.

Example:

Consider the following two sentences:

Active Voice

Betty scheduled the meeting
for 4:00 Tuesday.

Passive Voice

The meeting was scheduled
for 4:00 Tuesday.

If it is not important to know who scheduled the meeting (Betty), then we should use passive voice to make the meeting the subject of the sentence, rather than Betty. This places emphasis on the most important information in the sentence.

4.5.1 LAYOUT AND FORMATTING

Formatting refers to the way you enter paragraph and line breaks, indents, spaces, typefaces and punctuation marks. By observing a few basic text-formatting rules, you can help us transform the pages of your manuscript into a final book that looks attractive and professional.

- ❑ **Paragraph Breaks and Indents:** To view all of the spaces, hard returns and tabbed areas in your manuscript as symbols, select the Show All character (¶) in your Microsoft Word toolbar. If you can't find this character in your toolbar, hold down the Ctrl and Shift keys and press the 8/* for the same results.

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- ❑ **Paragraphs:** Paragraphs are separated with one paragraph mark (¶). This is also referred to as a hard return, usually accessed by pressing Enter on your keyboard. Lines within a paragraph must continue (or wrap) at the margin; lines should not be broken with paragraph marks or manual line breaks.
- ❑ **First-line Indents:** The first paragraph in each chapter or part should not be indented. However, the first line of all other paragraphs should be indented with one tab.
- ❑ **Indents:** To indent a block of text, such as a passage from a referenced source, highlight the section of text you want indented, select “Format” in the toolbar and choose the “Paragraph” option in most word processors. Indent the paragraph on the left and right each by one-half of an inch (0.5”).
- ❑ **Single-line Indents:** To indent individual lines, such as in a poem or a recipe, use two tabs.
- ❑ **Dashes, Hyphens, and Ellipses:** Dashes, ellipses, and other special characters are found under the “Insert” menu of your word-processing program, under “Symbol/Special Characters.” (See the punctuation section of Part III to learn more about when to use these marks.)
- ❑ **Do Not Use Double Dashes (--):** To express a pause in a thought or duration of time. Instead, use the longest dash, called an em dash (—) or an ellipsis (...) to separate thoughts or clauses within a sentence. To type an em dash, hold the Ctrl and the Alt key and type a hyphen, or hold down the Alt key while typing 0151. See instructions below for typing an ellipsis.
- ❑ **Use En Dashes (–) (the longer dash):** To separate periods of time or numbers. To type an en dash, hold the Ctrl key and type a hyphen, or hold down the Alt key while typing 0150.
- ❑ **Use Hyphens (-) (on your keyboard):** To separate two words that are usually linked with a hyphen.
- ❑ **Ellipses:** Hold Ctrl + Alt + the period key.
- ❑ **Italics:** By going to the font settings in your word-processing software (under “Format” in the toolbar), or by holding down Ctrl + i, you may apply italic type for the following reasons:
 - ◆ Titles of books, magazine articles, movies, plays, television shows, and other titles of major works
 - ◆ Words with emphasis (use sparingly)
 - ◆ Foreign words and phrases

Formatting to Avoid

- ❑ **ALL CAPS:** Do not use all caps for emphasis, for titles or for contents pages. WORDS TYPED IN ALL CAPS ARE DIFFICULT TO READ. Use italics instead.

- ❑ **Underlining:** Underlined text usually looks old-fashioned. Use italics to express emphasis or to indicate key terms instead, but even then, use sparingly.
- ❑ **Centred Text:** Limit the use of centred text. It looks overly formal and can be hard to read.
- ❑ **Manual Hyphenation:** Do not manually hyphenate words that break at the end of a line. Both your word-processing software and our book-design software will automatically hyphenate words when necessary.
- ❑ **Quotation Marks:** Straight quotation marks (") are not acceptable substitutions for traditional quotation marks ("). When straight quotes appear, please exchange them with "curly" quotes (called smart quotes). Microsoft Word may be set to display smart quotes by default through the AutoCorrect menu. Please consult the Help menu of your word-processing software for more information. Or correct individual straight quotation marks as follows: for a smart open quote, press Alt + 0147. For a smart closed quote, press Alt + 0148.

4.5.2 STREAMLINE THE WRITING STYLE

The ability to organize your thoughts quickly and write them down in essay format is a useful skill. Even beyond writing an essay, you'll use basically the same skills whether you need to summarize a report or complete an essay exam. Like any skill, it improves with practice.

Remember that an essay is a logical presentation of facts that begins with a preparation period (during which you brainstorm potential ideas and gather your evidence), followed by the actual writing of the essay.

Here are some helpful tips:

- ❑ **Underline keywords:** This works to emphasize key thoughts within your brainstorming notes and your research.
- ❑ **Think of yourself as a reporter:** As you peruse your research, write down probing questions that come to mind as you discover gaps in what you read. (This will help you know what additional research materials you need to gather and can also provide you with questions to ask experts when you interview them.)
- ❑ **Keep things colourful:** Use different collared highlighters to mark up your notes, distinguishing different types of facts (e.g., yellow for quotes, blue for expert names, etc.) and to mark off material once you've used it.
- ❑ **Ask yourself a question:** If you find yourself stuck at some point in the essay-writing process, ask yourself: What is the most important thing I have learned/discovered while doing research for this project?

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- ❑ **Summarize your main points:** Write your opening and closing paragraphs in advance and then complete the writing about those points necessary to support your summary.
- ❑ **Simplify your transitions:** If you're having difficulty knowing how to make the transition from one point to the next, start out using "the first point I'd like to make" and "the next point I'd like to make" and so on; you can then revise those when you edit your draft.

Keeping these tips in mind throughout your essay project will ease whatever burden you may feel about the task at hand. Because they help keep you on track by focusing on the essential elements of your essay, the tips can help ease any initial intimidation you may feel.

4.5.3 TYPES OF BUSINESS DOCUMENTS

Following are the types of business documents:

Letters

Letter writing is a prized skill in the world of work. The higher you advance in your career, the more you will need to write letters. Letters are more formal and official than other types of business communication. They offer personal, verifiable authorization. Unlike e-mail, letters often must be routed through channels before they are sent out. Letters are the expected medium through which important documents such as contracts and proposals are sent to readers.

There are four basic types of business letters: inquiry letters, special request letters, sales letters, and customer relations letters. Business letters can be further classified as positive, neutral, or negative. Inquiry and special request letters are neutral, sales letters are positive, and customer relations letters can be positive or negative.

- ❑ **Inquiry Letters:** An inquiry letter asks for information about a product, service, or procedure. Businesses frequently exchange inquiry letters, and customers frequently send them to businesses. Three basic rules for an effective inquiry letter are to state exactly what information you want, indicate clearly why you must have this information, and specify exactly when you must have it.
- ❑ **Application Letters and Cover Letters:** Many people believe that application letters and cover letters are essentially the same. For purposes of this hand-out, though, these kinds of letters are different. The letter of application is a sales letter in which you market your skills, abilities, and knowledge. A cover letter, on the other hand, is primarily a document of transmittal. It identifies an item being sent, the person to whom it is being sent, and the reason for its being sent, and provides a permanent record of the transmittal for both the writer and the reader.
- ❑ **Special Request Letters:** Special request letters make a special demand, not a routine inquiry. The way you present your request

is crucial, since your reader is not obliged to give you anything. When asking for information in a special request letter, state that you are, why you are writing, precisely what information you need, and exactly when you need the information (allow sufficient time). If you are asking for information to include in a report or other document, offer to forward a copy of the finished document as a courtesy. State that you will keep the information confidential, if that is appropriate. Finally, thank the recipient for helping you.

- ❑ **Sales Letters:** A sales letter is written to persuade the reader to buy a product, try a service, support a cause, or participate in an activity. No matter what profession you are in, writing sales letters is a valuable skill. To write an effective sales letter, follow these guidelines: (1) Identify and limit your audience. (2) Use reader psychology. Appeal to readers' emotions, pocketbook, comfort, and so on by focusing on the right issues. (3) Don't boast or be a bore. Don't gush about your company or make elaborate explanations about a product. (4) Use words that appeal to readers' senses. (5) Be ethical.

The "four A's" of sales letters are attention, appeal, application, and action. Firstly, get the reader's attention. Next, highlight your product's appeal. Then, show the reader the product's application. Finally, end with a specific request for action.

In the first part of your sales letter, get the reader's attention by asking a question, using a "how to" statement, complimenting the reader, offering a free gift, introducing a comparison, or announcing a change. In the second part, highlight your product's allure by appealing to the reader's intellect, emotions, or both. Don't lose the momentum you have gained with your introduction by boring the reader with petty details, flat descriptions, elaborate inventories, or trivial boasts. In the third part of your sales letter, supply evidence of the value of what you are selling. Focus on the prospective customer, not on your company. Mention the cost of your product or service, if necessary, by relating it to the benefits to the customer. In the final section, tell readers exactly what you want them to do, and by what time. "Respond and be rewarded" is the basic message of the last section of a sales letter.

- ❑ **Customer Relations Letters:** These deals with establishing and maintaining good working relationships. They deliver good news or bad news, acceptances or refusals. If you are writing an acceptance letter, use the direct approach-tell readers the good news up front. If you are writing a refusal letter, do not open the letter with your bad news; be indirect.
- ◆ **Follow-up Letters:** A follow-up letter is sent to thank a customer for buying a product or service and to encourage the customer to buy more in the future. As such, it is a combination thank-you note and sales letter. Begin with a brief expression of gratitude. Next, discuss the benefits

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already known to the customer, and stress the company's dedication to its customers. Then extend this discussion into a new or continuing sales area, and end with a specific request for future business.

- ◆ *Complaint Letters:* These require delicacy. The right tone will increase your chances of getting what you want. Adopt the “you” attitude. Begin with a detailed description of the product or service you are complaining about. Include the model and serial numbers, size, quantity, and colour. Next, state exactly what is wrong with the product or service. Briefly describe the inconvenience you have experienced. Indicate precisely what you want done (you want your money back, you want a new model, you want an apology, and so on). Finally, ask for prompt handling of your claim.
- ◆ *Adjustment Letters:* Adjustment letters respond to complaint letters. For an adjustment letter that tells the customer “Yes,” start with your good news. Admit immediately that the complaint was justified. State precisely what you are going to do to correct the problem. Offer an explanation for the inconvenience the customer suffered. End on a friendly, positive note. For adjustment letters that deny a claim, avoid blaming or scolding the customer. Thank the customer for writing. Stress that you understand the complaint. Provide a factual explanation to show customers they're being treated fairly. Give your decision without hedging or apologizing. (Indecision will infuriate customers who believe they have presented a convincing case.) Leave the door open for better and continued business in the future.
- ◆ *Refusal of Credit Letters:* Begin on a positive note. Express gratitude for the applicant for wanting to do business with you. Cite appropriate reasons for refusing to grant the customer credit: lack of business experience or prior credit, current unfavourable or unstable financial conditions, and so on. End on a positive note. Encourage the reader to reapply later when his or her circumstances have changed.

Memos

The chief function of a memo is to record information of immediate importance and interest: announcing a company policy, alerting readers to a problem or deadline, reminding readers about a meeting, and so on. Memos are important tools for companies and reflect company politics, policies, and organization. They are sent down the administrative ladder from executives to middle managers to employees and up the ladder from employees to supervisors. Learn your company's protocols regarding memos.

Memos look different from letters, with a more streamlined, less formal format. Basically, a memo consists of two parts: the identifying

information at the top, and the message itself. At the top, identify for whom the memo has been written, who is sending it, the subject, and the date. The subject line serves as the memo's title.

The style and tone you use in a memo will be determined by your audience: you can use a casual tone in a memo to a co-worker you know well, but you should use a more formal tone in a memo to your boss. It's important to organize your memos well. Longer memos consist of an introduction, a discussion, and a conclusion. In the introduction, tell readers what prompted you to write (such as a problem or question about a specific procedure or policy), and provide any necessary background information. In the discussion section, or body, indicate what changes are necessary to address that problem or question. In the conclusion, state specifically how you want the reader to respond.

Reports

There are two kinds of reports in business writing: Long Report and Short Report.

Writing Effective Short Reports

Business cannot function without short reports. They tell whether work is being completed, schedules are being met, costs are being contained, sales projections are being met, clients are being served, and unexpected problems are being solved. You may write a short report in response to a specific question or regularly to report on routine activities. The six most common types of short reports are periodic reports, sales reports, progress reports, trip/travel reports, test reports, and incident reports.

Guidelines for Writing Short Reports

To write any short report successfully, follow these guidelines:

- ❑ **Do necessary research:** This may be as simple as telephoning or e-mailing a colleague or inspecting a piece of equipment. The Web is also a valuable source of information for short reports.
- ❑ **Anticipate how your audience will use your report:** Make sure your report will meet your audience's needs.
- ❑ **Be objective and ethical:** Avoid guesswork, impressions, unsupported personal opinions, and biased, skewed, or incomplete data.
- ❑ **Choose a reader-centred format and design:** Include a clear, precise subject line, and use headings, lists, underlining, and visuals to clarify your message.
- ❑ **Write concisely and clearly:** Don't waste readers' time. Allow time when you write for careful revising and editing.
- ❑ **Organize carefully:** Include the right amount of information in the most appropriate places for your audience. Usually you

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will begin with your purpose, report your findings, provide a conclusion, and, finally, present your recommendations.

Periodic Reports

Periodic reports provide readers with information at regular intervals—daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly. Managers rely on them when making schedules, ordering materials, assigning personnel, budgeting funds, and determining general corporate needs.

Sales Reports

Sales reports provide businesses with records of accounts, purchases, losses, and profits over specified periods. They help managers assess past performance and plan for the future.

Progress Reports

Progress reports inform readers about the status of on-going projects. They detail whether you are maintaining your schedule, staying within budget, using the proper equipment, making the right assignments, and completing the job properly. They are intended primarily for people who need a record of your activities to coordinate them with others. Progress reports should include information on the work you have done, the work you are currently doing, and the work you will do.

Trip/Travel Reports

Trip reports keep managers apprised of how a trip affected on-going or future business. In a trip report, document where you went, when you went there, why you went there, whom you saw, what they told you, and what you did about it. Common types of trip/travel reports include field trip reports, site inspection reports, and reports on home health or social work visits. Always write a trip report promptly upon returning from your travels, while the necessary details are fresh in your mind.

Test Report

These report on physical research-experiments and tests conducted in the field or a lab. Objectivity is essential in this type of report. Readers want to know the facts, not your feelings. A test report needs to explain why you performed the test and describe how you performed it, what the outcomes were, and what implications or recommendations follow from it.

Incident Reports

Incident reports describe events such as accidents, breakdowns, delays, and cost overruns. They can be used as evidence in a court of law, so it is important to write them properly. Be accurate, objective, and complete. Give facts, not opinions. Do not misrepresent yourself; answer only those question you is qualified to answer. Identify yourself and the people involved in the incident, identify what type of incident it was, record the time and location of the incident, and describe what happened, what caused the incident, and what was done after

it occurred. Be specific about all of these points. Finally, give your recommendations for preventing such incidents in the future.

Writing Careful Long Reports

A long report is the culmination of many weeks of hard work. It differs from a short report in purpose, scope, format, and, many times, audience. A long report provides an in-depth view of an issue and may discuss not just one or two current events but a long history. It requires much more research than a short report does (although information gathered for a series of short reports may be used to prepare a long report). A long report is too detailed and complex to be adequately organized in a memo or letter format. It may take weeks or even months to write. The audience for a long report is generally broader and higher up in an organization's hierarchy than the audience for a short report. Finally, long reports are written collaboratively more often than short reports are.

The Process of Writing a Long Report

View writing a long report not as a series of isolated tasks but as an evolving project. Identify a broad yet significant topic for your report. Expect to confer regularly with your supervisor and to revise your work often. Your revisions may be extensive, depending on what your superior recommends; be sure to share all major changes with your supervisor. Keep the order flexible at first; a long report is not written in the order in which it will finally appear. Use both a calendar and a checklist to track your progress, checking off major parts of the report as you finish them.

Parts of a Long Report

A long report consists of *front matter*, the *report text*, and *back matter*. The front matter may include a letter of transmittal, a title page, a table of contents, a list of illustrations, and an abstract. The report text consists of an introduction, the body, a conclusion, and recommendations. The introduction includes background information, defines the problem the report addresses, and describes the report's purpose and scope. The body, or *discussion*, is the longest part, making up as much as 70 per cent of the report. It should be carefully organized around a coherent, well-defined plan. The conclusion ties everything together by presenting your findings. The recommendations tell readers what should be done about the findings described in the conclusion. The back matter may include a glossary, a list of references, and one or more appendixes.

Proposals

A proposal is a detailed plan submitted for approval to a person or group in a position of authority. Proposals are among the most important kinds of occupational writing. They are written for many purposes and audiences and vary greatly in size and scope. Whether large or small, a proposal must be highly persuasive to succeed.

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Types of Proposals

Proposals may be solicited or unsolicited, internal or external. When a company has a job to be done, it may issue a request for proposals, or RFP, to solicit proposals from bidders. RFPs are often full of legal requirements and extensive details on how the job is to be performed. Unlike a solicited proposal, an unsolicited proposal has to convince the recipient that there is a problem that needs to be solved. An internal proposal is written to a decision maker in your own organization; an external proposal is sent to a decision maker outside your company.

Internal Proposals

Internal proposals cover almost every activity and policy of a business. You must be aware of office politics when planning an internal proposal. Don't assume your reader will agree that there is a problem or that your plan is the best way to solve it. Your reader may even feel threatened by your plans. Always consider the implications of your plan for others in the organization, and never submit a proposal that leaves it to someone else to work out the details to make your plan work.

Internal proposals usually contain four parts:

- ❑ **Purpose:** Begin with a brief statement of why you are writing the proposal.
- ❑ **Problem:** Prove that a problem exists by documenting its importance for your boss and the company. Avoid vague generalizations: provide quantifiable details about the implications or consequences of the problem, indicate how many employees or customers are affected by it, and describe how widespread it is.
- ❑ **Solution:** Describe the change you want approved. Tie your solution directly to the problem you just described. Supply details to show that the plan is workable and cost-effective, and demonstrate that the costs of implementing the plan are less than the costs of not solving the problem. Also, raise alternatives to your plan and discuss their disadvantages.
- ❑ **Conclusion:** Make this section short-no more than two paragraphs. Remind the reader that the problem is serious, the reason for change is justified, and action needs to be taken. Reemphasize the most important benefits of your proposed solution.

Sales Proposals

Sales proposals are the most common type of external proposal. Most sales proposals include the following elements:

- ❑ **Introduction:** This section may include a statement of purpose and background information on the problem you propose to solve.

- ❑ **Description of the product or service:** This section is the heart of your proposal. It needs to provide hard evidence that what you propose can and should be done. Here you should show potential customers that your product or service is right for them, describe your work in suitable detail, and stress any special features, advantages, or benefits of your product or service.
- ❑ **Timetable:** A carefully planned timetable shows readers you know your job and can accomplish it in the right amount of time.
- ❑ **Costs:** Make your budget complete, accurate, and convincing. Don't underestimate or overestimate costs. A proposal, once accepted by both parties, is a binding legal agreement.
- ❑ **Qualifications of your company:** Emphasize your company's accomplishments and expertise. Never misrepresent your company or co-workers.
- ❑ **Conclusion:** This section contains your "call to action," where you encourage your reader to approve your plan.

Proposals for Research Papers and Reports

As with internal and sales proposals, you will be writing to convince your reader to approve a major piece of work. A proposal for a school research project can be a memo or e-mail, divided into five sections: introduction, scope of the problem or topic, methods or procedures, timetable, and request for approval.

Writing a Successful Proposal

The following guidelines will help you write successful proposals of any type:

- ❑ Approach your proposal as a problem-solving activity. Make readers feel that your goal is to solve a problem for them and that you have the ability to do so.
- ❑ Regard your audience as sceptical. Don't think readers will automatically accept your plan as the best way to solve their problem. Expect them to question everything you say.
- ❑ Research your proposal thoroughly. You need facts, not generalizations, to persuade your readers.
- ❑ Scout out your competitors. Check your competitors' Web sites for information on their products or services and to get an idea of their costs.
- ❑ Prove that your proposal is workable. The bottom-line question from your readers will be whether your plan will work.
- ❑ Be sure your proposal is financially realistic. Another basic question readers will ask is if your plan is worth the money. Do not submit a proposal that requires excessive funds to implement.