

## The Typical Shape of Workplace Documents

### 10.1 Work from an introduction-body-conclusion structure

Standard introduction/body/conclusion pattern

Organize your material to make the document logical from the reader's point of view. Begin with the basics: Useful documents of any length (memo, letter, long report, and so on) typically follow the pattern shown in Figure 10.1: introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction attracts the reader's attention, announces the writer's viewpoint, and previews what will follow. The body delivers on the promise implied in the introduction. The body explains and supports the writer's viewpoint, achieving *unity* by remaining focused on that viewpoint and *coherence* by carrying a line of thought from sentence to sentence in a logical order. Finally, the conclusion has various purposes: it might reemphasize key points, take a position, predict an outcome, offer a solution, or suggest further study. Good conclusions give readers a clear perspective on what they have just read.

A nonstandard structure also can be effective in certain cases

There are many ways of adapting this standard structure. For example, Figure 10.2 provides visual features (columns, colors), headings, and an engaging layout. Although organized differently from the previous document, Figure 10.2 does provide an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The heading "What is arsenic?" represents a form of introduction. The next several headings answer the question posed in the introduction, forming, in essence, the body of the document. The final heading, asking about EPA standards, represents a form of conclusion, moving beyond data and description to the topic of policy and use. In organizing any document, we typically begin with the time-tested strategy known as *outlining*.

## Outlining

### 10.2 Create informal and formal outlines

Outlining is essential


Even basic documents require at least an introduction-body-conclusion outline to start with, or a few ideas jotted down in list form. Longer documents require a more detailed outline so that you can visualize your document overall and ensure that ideas flow logically from point to point.

### An Outlining Strategy

Start by searching through the information you have gathered and creating a random list of key topics your document should include. For instance, in preparing the drinking water document in Figure 10.2, you might start by simply listing all the types of information you think readers need or expect:

Start by creating a list of essential information

- Explain what the EPA is doing about arsenic in drinking water
- Define what arsenic is
- Explain how arsenic gets into drinking water
- List some of the effects of arsenic (stomach, heart, cancer)
- Include specific data
- Mention/explain the Safe Water Drinking Act
- Refer to/define MCLGs

Powell  Rabkin

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Department Managers  
**From:** Jill McCreary, General Manager  
**Date:** December 8, 20XX  
**Subject:** Diversity training initiative

As part of our ongoing efforts to highlight the company's commitment to diversity, we recently conducted two surveys: one directed to company employees and one to our retail buyers. We have just received the survey results from our outside analysts. The employee survey indicates that the members of all departments appreciate our efforts to create a diverse and comfortable work environment. The customer survey indicates that our company is well regarded for marketing products in ways that appeal to diverse buyers. However, both surveys also illuminate areas in which we could do even better. As a result, we will be initiating a new series of diversity training workshops early next year. Let me explain the survey findings that have led to this initiative.

First, the employee survey indicates that our workforce is rated "highly diverse" in terms of gender, with nearly equal representation of male and female employees in both managerial and nonmanagerial positions; however, we could do better in terms of minority representation at the managerial level. Meanwhile, the customer survey demonstrates that our customers are "very satisfied" with the diversity of our marketing materials, but that we fail to provide enough materials for our native Spanish-speaking buyers.

Those are the survey highlights (see the attached analysis for a more detailed picture). Again, we are doing well, but could do better. We feel that the best solution to address our weaker areas is to conduct a second series of diversity training workshops in the upcoming 12 months. We hope that these workshops, which are often illuminating to both new employees and those who have attended diversity trainings earlier, will help keep the word "diversity" at the forefront of everyone's thoughts when hiring and mentoring employees and creating marketing materials. More information will follow, but for now please emphasize to your department employees the importance and value of these workshops.

Introduction announces the topic and provides an overview of what will follow

Body provides the evidence and data to support the claims made in the introduction

Conclusion summarizes by taking a position and making recommendations

Figure 10.1 Document with a Standard Introduction-Body-Conclusion Structure