

Writers use form letters and boilerplate to save time and energy and to use language that has already been approved by the organization's legal staff. However, as Glenn Broadhead and Richard Freed point out, reusing old text creates two problems.¹¹

- Using unrevised boilerplate can create a document with incompatible styles and tones.
- Form letters and boilerplate can encourage writers to see situations and audiences as identical when in fact they differ.

Before you use a form letter, make sure it is well written and that it applies to the situation in which you are thinking of using it.

Before you incorporate old language in a new document,

- Check to see that the old section is well written.
- Consciously look for differences between the two situations, audiences, or purposes that may require different content, organization, or wording.
- Read through the whole document at a single sitting to be sure that style, tone, and level of detail are consistent in the old and new sections.

How can I overcome writer's block and procrastination? **LO 4-8**

► *Talk, participate, and practice. Reward yourself for activities that lead to writing.*

According to psychologist Robert Boice, a combination of five actions works best to overcome writer's block:¹²

- **Participate actively in the organization and the community.** The more you talk to people, the more you interact with some of your audiences, the more you learn about the company, its culture, and its context, the easier it will be to write—and the better your writing will be.
- **Practice writing regularly and in moderation.**
- **Learn as many strategies as you can.** Good writers have a “bag of tricks” to draw on; they don't have to “reinvent the wheel” in each new situation. This book suggests many strategies and patterns. Try them; memorize them; make them your own.
- **Talk positively to yourself:** “I can do this.” “If I keep working, ideas will come.” “It doesn't have to be wonderful; I can always make it better later.”
- **Talk about writing to other people.** Value the feedback you get from your boss. Talk to your boss about writing. Ask him or her to share particularly good examples—from anyone in the organization. Find colleagues at your own level and talk about the writing you do. Do different bosses value different qualities? What aspects of your own boss's preferences are individual and which are part of the discourse community of the organization? Talking to other people expands your repertoire of strategies and helps you understand the discourse community in which you write.

To avoid procrastination, modify your behavior by rewarding yourself for activities that lead to writing:

- **Set a regular time to write.** Sit down and stay there for the time you've planned, even if you write nothing usable.
- **Develop a ritual for writing.** Choose tools—paper, pen, computer, chair—that you find comfortable. Use the same tools in the same place every time you write.
- **Try freewriting.** Write for 10 minutes without stopping.
- **Write down the thoughts and fears you have as you write.** If the ideas are negative, try to substitute more positive statements: “I can do this.” “I'll keep going and postpone judging.” “If I keep working, I'll produce something that's OK.”
- **Identify the problem that keeps you from writing.** Deal with that problem; then turn back to writing.
- **Set modest goals** (a paragraph, not the whole document) **and reward yourself for reaching them.**



Proofreading is especially important when reusing language. For 2009, a mint produced Chilean 50-pesos coins, each worth about a U.S. dime, with the name of the country spelled “CHILE.” Chile's Central Bank did not learn of the engraver's error until a year later, when the newspaper *El Mercurio* reported the story. About 1.5 million of the errant coins were in circulation by then.

Source: Eva Vergara, “Is It ‘Chile’ or ‘Chile’? Mint Issues Bad Coins,” *The Boston Globe*, February 12, 2010, http://www.boston.com/news/world/latinamerica/articles/2010/02/12/is_it_chile_or_chile_mint_issues_bad_coins/.



Dealing with procrastination can be challenging, but Kevin Purdy recommends several strategies. Among them are getting rid of clutter, acknowledging that you're actually procrastinating, and dealing with the more difficult tasks early. Believe in yourself, too. Says Rory Vaden, author of *Take the Stairs: 7 Steps to Achieving True Success*, “The number one reason we procrastinate is we don't believe we have what it takes to pull it off.”

Source: Kevin Purdy, “Get to Work by Meeting Procrastination Head-On,” *Fast Company*, April 10, 2012, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1830018/get-work-meetingprocrastination-head>.

Summary of Learning Objectives

- Processes that help writers write well include expecting to revise the first draft, writing regularly, modifying the initial task if it's too hard or too easy, having clear goals, knowing many different strategies, using rules as guidelines rather than as absolutes, and waiting to edit until after the draft is complete. (LO 4-1)
- Spend a third of your time planning, a third writing, and a third revising. (LO 4-2)
- To think of ideas, try brainstorming, **freewriting** (writing without stopping for 10 minutes or so), and **clustering** (brainstorming with circled words on a page). (LO 4-3)
- Planning, writing, and revising can include analyzing, gathering, writing, evaluating, getting feedback, revising, editing, and proofreading. **Revising** means changing the document to make it better satisfy the writer's purposes and the audience. **Editing** means making surface-level changes that make the document grammatically correct. **Proofreading** means checking to be sure the document is free from typographical errors. (LO 4-4)
- If the writing situation is new or difficult, plan to revise the draft at least three times. The first time, look for content and clarity. The second time, check the organization and layout. Finally, check style and tone. (LO 4-4)
- Grammar checkers and spell-checkers only catch some errors. Be sure to also check documents manually. (LO 4-5)
- You can improve the quality of the feedback you get by telling people which aspects of a draft you'd like comments about. If a reader criticizes something, fix the problem. If you think the reader misunderstood you, try to figure out what caused the misunderstanding and revise the draft so that the reader can see what you meant. (LO 4-6)
- If you get feedback you don't understand, paraphrase, ask for more information, or test your inference. (LO 4-6)
- If you get feedback you don't agree with, check against a grammar book for grammar issues, consider something could be improved if the comment is about content, show the reader where any disputed facts came from, try another option if the suggestion is about wording, or make information more clear if readers are confused. (LO 4-6)
- Boilerplate** is language from a previous document that a writer includes in a new document. Using form letters and boilerplate can encourage writers to see as identical situations and audiences that in fact differ. Putting boilerplate into a new document can create incompatible styles and tones. (LO 4-7)
- To overcome writer's block, (LO 4-8)
 - Participate actively in the organization and the community.
 - Follow a regimen. Practice writing regularly and in moderation.
 - Learn as many strategies as you can.
 - Talk positively to yourself.
 - Talk about writing to other people.
- To overcome the tendency to procrastinate, modify your behavior to reward yourself for the activities that lead to writing. (LO 4-8)

Assignments for Module 4

Questions for Comprehension

- What processes do expert writers use? (LO 4-1)
- How is revision different from editing? From proofreading? (LO 4-4)

Questions for Critical Thinking

- Which processes that expert writers use do you already use? How could you modify your process to incorporate at least one more on the list? (LO 4-1)
- Of the people who have seen your writing, which one(s) have given you the most useful feedback? What makes it useful? (LO 4-6)

Exercises and Problems

4.8 Interviewing Writers about Their Composing Processes (LO 4-1)

Interview someone about the composing process(es) he or she uses for on-the-job writing. Questions you could ask include the following:

- What kind of planning do you do before you write? Do you make lists? Formal or informal outlines?
- When you need more information, where do you get it?

4.3 What are good strategies for overcoming writer's block? Procrastination? (LO 4-8)

4.6 In which areas are you best at giving feedback to other people? How could you make your feedback even better? (LO 4-6)

4.7 Think about the form letters you have received. How do they make you feel? If they have flaws, how could they be improved? (LO 4-7)

- How do you compose your drafts? Do you dictate? Draft with pen and paper? Compose on screen? How do you find uninterrupted time to compose?
- When you want advice about style, grammar, and spelling, what source(s) do you consult?
- Does your superior ever read your drafts and make suggestions?

- Do you ever work with other writers to produce a single document? Describe the process you use.
- Describe the process of creating a document where you felt the final document reflected your best work.
- Describe the process of creating a document that you found difficult or frustrating. What sorts of things make writing easier or harder for you?

As Your Instructor Directs,

- Share your results orally with a small group of students.
- Present your results in an oral presentation to the class.

4.9 Analyzing Your Own Writing Processes (LO 4-1)

Save your notes and drafts from several assignments so that you can answer the following questions.

- Which of the activities discussed in Module 4 do you use?
- How much time do you spend on each activity?
- What kinds of revisions do you make most often?
- Do you use different processes for different documents, or do you have one process that you use most of the time?
- Which practices of good writers do you follow?
- What parts of your process seem most successful? Are there any places in the process that could be improved? How?
- What relation do you see between the process(es) you use and the quality of the final document?

4.10 Checking Spell and Grammar Checkers (LO 4-5)

Each of the following paragraphs contains errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Which errors does your spelling or grammar checker catch? Which errors does it miss? Does it flag as errors any words that are correct?

1. Answer to an Inquiry

Think you fur your rescind request about are "Bitter Burger" campaign. We initiated thee champagne after hiring from customers who said they wouted a moor nutritious berger from our companion. Sew, we towed hour chiefs to devise something. And they. Did. To help you enjoin your "Better Booger" even mare, here hour to coupons for a free drank wit any purchase off a sandwitch and frie.

2. Performance Appraisal

This quarterly perform appraise is. Four lisa. She have a good quart, witch ending with a 22 percent in crease in here sales for the three month. In fax Lissa outperform aviary one in her compartment. Lisa is a good employment, often straying late or working threw the weekends. Her dedication is great? Won of her peers, said "She is a la mode salesperson and a goon coat working."

4.11 Giving and Evaluating Feedback (LO 4-6)

In a group with other students, use the Checklist for Thorough Revision in Figure 4.4 to provide feedback on drafts of letters or memos for this course.

As you give feedback, answer the following questions:

- When you give feedback, do you normally start by looking for places to add, delete, substitute, or change? Or do you normally start by looking for grammatical errors and typos?

- Present your results in a memo to your instructor.
- Post an e-mail message to the class discussing your results.
- Share your results with a small group of students and write a joint memo reporting the similarities and differences you found.

As Your Instructor Directs,

- Discuss your process with a small group of other students.
- Write a memo to your instructor analyzing in detail your process for composing one of the papers for this class.
- Write a memo to your instructor analyzing your process during the term. What parts of your process(es) have stayed the same throughout the term? What parts have changed?

3. Brochure

Thin Lost Vegans is lonely a place to gambling! Thank again? There is mooch to do do in Las Vega for families to, such as them parks, magic shoes, and sporting. Events. Ewe cane also experience fin dining and tours of the surrendering desert with it's bootyful florid and fawna. The warm colors of the dessert well stay with your four many years two come. Visited Las Vegetables for a vacate of a. Lifeboat. Time.

4. Presentation Slides

How to Crate a Web résumé

- Omit home addressee and phone numb
- Use other links only if the help a employer evaluate ewe.

A. be Professionally!

- Carelessly craft and proof read the phrase on the index pager.

Cow to Create a Scanable Resume

- Crate a "plane vanilla" document.
- Use include a Keywords" section. Include personality trades as will as accomplishments.
- Be specific aunt Quantifiable.

- On which aspects is it easiest for you to comment? Which aspects require more thought? Why?
- How many times do you have to read the draft to answer all of the questions in the Checklist?
- Do you tend to suggest mostly big changes, mostly small ones, or a mix?
- How do you tend to word your comments? Are they mostly positive or mostly negative? Do you tend to

- **The name and address of the person who should receive the letter.** To get this information, check the ad or the web or call the organization. An advantage of calling is that you can find out whether a woman prefers *Ms.* or *Mrs.*
- **What the organization does and at least four or five facts about it.** Knowing the organization's larger goals enables you to show how your specific work will help the company meet its goals. Useful facts include
 - Market share.
 - Competitive position.
 - New products, services, or promotions.
 - The kind of computer or manufacturing equipment the company uses.
 - Plans for growth or downsizing.
 - Challenges the organization faces.
 - The corporate culture (◀◀ p. 28).

The directories listed in Figure 26.1 provide information including net worth, market share, principal products, and the names of officers and directors. Ask your librarian to identify additional directories. To get specific financial data (and to see how the organization presents itself to the public), get the company's annual report on the web. (Note: Only companies whose stock is publicly traded are required to issue annual reports. In this day of mergers and buyouts, many companies are owned by other companies. The parent company may be the only one to issue an annual report.) Many company websites provide information about training programs and career paths for new hires. To learn about new products, plans for growth, or solutions to industry challenges, read business newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Financial Post*; business magazines such as *Fortune*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, and *Forbes*; and trade journals. Each of these has indexes listing which companies are discussed in a specific issue. A few of the trade journals available are listed in Figure 26.2.

The Internet has much of this information, including information about corporate culture and even anonymous statements from employees. Figure 26.3 lists some of the best sites. Check professional listservs and electronic bulletin boards. Employers sometimes post specialized jobs on them: They're always a good way to get information about the industry you hope to enter.

Should I do information interviews? LO 26-4

- ▶ *They'll help any job hunter. They're crucial if you're not sure what you want to do.*

In an **information interview** you talk to someone who works in the area you hope to enter to find out what the day-to-day work involves and how you can best prepare to enter that field. You do not ask for a job. However, an information interview can

Figure 26.1 Print Sources for Addresses and Facts about Companies

General Directories

Directory of Corporate Affiliations
Dun's Million Dollar Directory
Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives
Thomas Register of American Manufacturers

Specialized Directories and Resource Books

Accounting Firms and Practitioners
California Manufacturers Register
Directory of Hotel and Motel Systems
Franchise Annual: Handbook and Directory
O'Dwyer's Directory of Public Relations Firms
The Rand McNally Banker's Directory
Standard Directory of Advertisers ("Red Book")
Television Factbook



In 2011, 1.5 million bachelor's degree holders under the age of 25 were jobless or underemployed—that's 53.6% compared to 41% in 2000. The job market showed little change in the prospects for graduates in 2012, though demand for workers continued to be strong in science, education, and health fields. Among the college majors most likely to find jobs appropriate to their education level were nursing, education, and accounting. In 2012, however, employers in other fields were scrambling to find applicants. Jeff Silver, CEO of Coyote Logistics, cited 300,000 open trucker jobs in the U.S., and a recent survey by ManpowerGroup ranked the toughest positions to fill, with skilled trades like plumber and electrician at the top. Also on the list were IT, mechanic, and engineering jobs. The biggest problem? Too few applicants with the necessary skills.

Sources: Hope Yen, "1 in 2 New Graduates Are Jobless or Underemployed," April 23, 2012, <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/1-2-graduates-jobless-underemployed-140300522.html>; and Darren Dahl, "A Sea of Job Seekers, But Some Companies Aren't Getting Any Bites," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/28/business/smallbusiness/even-with-high-unemployment-some-small-businesses-struggle-to-fill-positions.html?pagewanted=all>.



Site to See

Go to

www.jobhuntersbible.com/

Dick Bolles' useful site identifies five ways to use the Internet, explains how to make contacts (whether you already have the name of a person or not), and offers advice about career and personality tests.