

CHAPTER

3

# PLAN

THINK BEFORE YOU WRITE

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## LINK & LEARN

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Required  
Reading



Tips &  
Optional



Examples



Activity



*This is Chapter 3*



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## Without a plan, writing can be frustrating.

You've experienced the desperate boredom of listening to a rambling presentation and the frustration of reading a confusing email that never makes a clear point. Even if you have a short message or are rushed, save your audience's time by planning your message well before delivering it.

To plan a message, follow the steps in the acronym **PASS**:

1. Define your **PURPOSE**
2. Consider your **AUDIENCE**
3. Develop a **STRATEGY**
4. Build a **STRUCTURE**

SECTION ONE

# PURPOSE

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Clearly define your purpose before you start writing. Decide what you want your audience to know, feel, and do after reading your message.

## ASK PURPOSE-DEFINING QUESTIONS

 Your employees have not been accurately documenting company expenses. As a result, your company is losing money. You want to address this issue. Before you compose an email to them, answer the following questions:

What **INFORMATION** do I want to share?

*I want the employees to understand the new protocol for submitting invoices.*

What **FEELING** do I want to convey?

*I want to encourage employees to be more conscientious about how they spend the company's money.*

What **ACTION** do I want to occur?

*I want employees to submit invoices that include a detailed explanation of project expenses.*

INFORMATION?  
FEELING?  
ACTION?



# COMPOSE A MESSAGE STATEMENT

In *Writing Well for Business Success*, Sandra Lamb encourages business writers to define their purpose by composing a **message statement**. “Think through what you want to communicate until you can concisely state your complete message in a single sentence—a message statement. The simpler and shorter, the better.” Condensing your thoughts into one short sentence will clarify your purpose. For example,

NO

*In this memo I want to explain to everyone what is meant by casual dress, especially shorts, collarless shirts, and business dress, as opposed to business casual. I will talk about the new company policy regarding the dress code, to see what people think and try to get them to follow it.*

YES

*I want to explain our company’s new “business casual” dress code and get employees to comply with it.*



3.1

Write a message statement for an important email you need to write soon. Does it affect the outcome?



“Think through what you want to communicate until you can concisely state your complete message

**in a single sentence.”**

Sandra Lamb, author  
*Writing Well for Business*



SECTION TWO

# AUDIENCE

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Who will be reading your message? Always write with your audience in mind. Ask yourself the following questions before you write:

**KNOW.** What does my audience already know about my subject? How will I make my message interesting and relevant to them? Do they know my qualifications?

**FEEL.** Will my audience have positive, negative, or neutral feelings about my message? How should I address those feelings?

**DO.** What action should my audience take based on my message? How will I motivate them to take that action?



# INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES

When doing business with people from another country, research their expectations for business behavior and communication.

## JAPAN

Never use your chopsticks to point during a meal.



## MIDDLE EAST

Don't put your feet up; showing the soles of your feet is disrespectful.

## RUSSIA

Avoid raising your voice—it's a sign of weakness.

Choose a country and learn something about its cultural business expectations



- [Quick Guide to Going Global](#)
- [ProQuest CultureGrams](#)
- [Global Road Warrior](#)

Note: To access some of these databases you may need to sign into your library account first.

# MAKE IT RELEVANT

Everyone has time and resource constraints, so your first goal should be to help your audience see why your message matters to them. In *Business Writing*, Natalie Canavor explains, “There is one universal to count on: self-interest. We react to things and make decisions based on ‘what’s in it for me.’”

# PICTURE YOUR AUDIENCE

Try creating a mental picture of your audience before you write. When world-famous investor Warren Buffett composes [Berkshire Hathaway’s annual report](#), he writes with his sisters in mind. Doing so helps him to avoid jargon because he writes as if he were talking to them and tries to explain concepts in terms they can understand. He informs by using plain English. If, however, he were sharing the same information with one of his colleagues, his approach would reflect their shared knowledge.



3.2

Read Warren Buffett’s preface to the [Plain English SEC Filings Handbook](#). Try to emulate his understanding of audience in your next email.

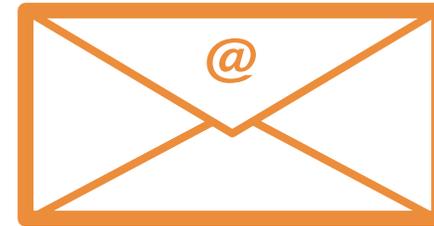


## TEST YOUR MESSAGE

What might be obvious to you because of your background, education, and training might not be obvious to your audience. Harvard professor Steven Pinker refers to this phenomenon as "The Curse of Knowledge." Does your audience understand the terms you are using? Can they make the connections you are making? Don't oversimplify. Supply information at your audience's level of knowledge and experience. Test your message by having someone read it who has a similar background to your audience.

## CONSIDER PRIVACY AND SECURITY ISSUES

Consider a possible secondary audience. Even if you think your document is electronically secure, write your email as if your conversation is not private. Hackers uncovered secure emails of Sony executives that revealed a general lack of professionalism from the executives. This hurt the professional image of a respected global company. Compose your emails with the widest possible readership in mind, and remember that written words can easily go viral.



Be aware that  
**ANYONE**  
might read your  
business emails. Plan  
*carefully* and write  
*consciously*.

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SECTION THREE

# STRATEGY

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Never underestimate the power of emotion in the decision-making process. More than 2,000 years ago, Aristotle introduced three rhetorical strategies that are still relevant today: ethos, logos, and pathos. Research increasingly demonstrates that our emotions are pre-cognitive. In other words, ***the way we feel often precedes and influences how we process facts.***



**Emotion, values.**

Emotional appeal doesn't necessarily mean an argument devoid of facts and logic. Remember, the first step in planning is to think through what you want the audience to know, *feel*, and do.

**Credibility, trust.**

Part of being credible is knowing the facts. We'll explore the importance of research and evidence in Chapter 6.

**Logic, reason, proof.**

Decision makers tend to be analytical thinkers who prize logical arguments supported by data. We'll cover developing arguments in Chapter 10.

# HOW, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, AND WHERE

## HOW

**Choose the communication channel that best supports your content and most appeals to your audience.** Would a paper document, an electronic message, or an in-person conversation be best? Different communication methods involve different costs; speeds of delivery; and non-verbal, non-written cues (such as voice inflection and body language).

For example, face-to-face dialogue enables richness of both verbal and non-verbal communication, but such conversations do not have the permanence of written documents. While emails can be efficient, they do not have the personal touch of a handwritten note or the urgency of a text message. A formal report might package information better than a long email.

All such factors play into your choice of channel. The impact of one communication channel over another can determine whether your message is received in the way you intended.

## WHY

**Emphasize why the audience needs to read your message.** You have seconds to capture your audience's attention before another message or task distracts them. This is true in communication to senior executives, in marketing to new consumer audiences, and in situations with skeptical or unfamiliar audiences. Make your message relevant and let readers know why they should keep reading.

Even when you have bad news to share, find a starting point that helps your audience understand why your message matters to them. Think of questions your reader will have and answer them quickly and clearly.



**Note the preferred communication channels of your key business contacts. Does your boss ignore emails but respond to texts? Message people where they are paying attention.**



# HOW, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, AND WHERE

## WHAT & WHERE

When formulating a strategy, **be aware of the context**. What professional pressures weigh upon your audience—both from within and without their organization? What industry-wide problems affect them? What personal biases might influence them at the moment? What internal or external factors may shape the way your message is received? Context for a message is like the weather for an event; it affects everything and can't be ignored.

## WHEN

Deliberately **pace the delivery** of your content. What time of day should you send that email or hand-deliver that report? Readers appreciate directness, so introduce vital information right away instead of slowly winding up to it. Keep your tone upbeat and friendly to avoid being seen as abrupt. Deliver delicate, disappointing, or disturbing news with more context and less directness. We'll cover strategies for delivering bad news in CH 10: PERSUADE.

Most of all, remember to **be concise**. If you take too much time to explain or deliver your message, the audience will likely move on to another more pressing matter or communication.



Check out the [Best Time of Day to Send an Email](#)

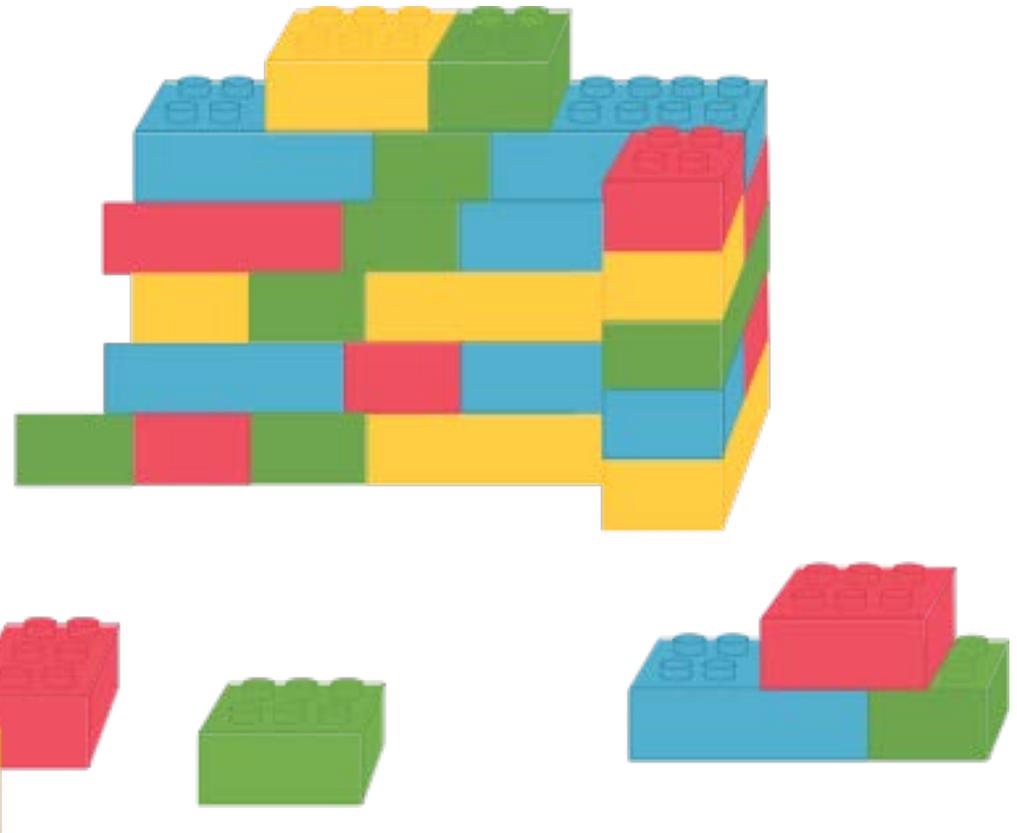
## SECTION FOUR

# STRUCTURE

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The human brain is wired to look for order, patterns, and structure—chaotic and poorly structured messages quickly lose a reader’s respect and interest. Make that brain preference work for you by **building clear frameworks** into your writing.

The next chapter (CH 4: ORGANIZE) will explore this process in detail.



# IN CONCLUSION

The **PASS** steps require work, but the process is worth it. Being aware of **PURPOSE**, **AUDIENCE**, **STRATEGY**, and **STRUCTURE** as you plan your work will turn potentially mushy, untidy, and costly messages into sharp and effective ones.

Plan well.



# LEARN MORE



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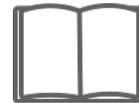
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