

## **Business Writing Coverage in First-Year Composition Textbooks**

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Ten widely used first-year composition textbooks were examined to analyze their coverage of writing in business, and to determine what they do to prepare students for writing in their work in business or government in discussion that does not focus specifically on business writing. The ten texts were chosen based on recommendations from composition program directors; information from publishers' staff; the popularity of a text based on its number of editions; and the amount of discussion of business documents and writing style appropriate for work in business and government.

This discussion provides business writing instructors with information about the coverage of business writing topics in those textbooks so that those instructors will know what students may have been taught about writing in business and government before they enter a business writing course. Also, the discussion may help business and agency staff know what new hires who have not taken a business writing course may have learned about business writing. The paper identifies particular texts that business writing instructors might recommend to composition instructors or program directors at their school, texts that provide students with more guidance about writing in their careers as well as in their studies.

Increased pressure from employers to improve graduates' skills for writing in their work has led colleges and universities to revise their writing curricula, and composition textbooks are incorporating more discussion designed to prepare students for writing in their careers. Strauss (2008) notes that the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Virginia Commonwealth University, and other schools have refocused their curricula to emphasize writing and prepare students to meet the demands of writing in business and government. As employers argue that graduates should be better prepared for communication in business and government, university writing programs will come under pressure to prepare all undergraduate students – not just business majors – for writing in their work.

Composition instructors will still teach how to write research papers, literary analyses, and other academic genre, but they and instructors across the university will be pressured to teach students how to analyze rhetorical situations in business and government and write documents for non-academic settings. Some schools are beginning to identify ways to provide instruction in career writing for all undergraduates, many with writing-in-the-disciplines programs. Other approaches, such as having every undergraduate take a course in business writing or in writing in their major, would be costly, so many schools may move toward teaching writing for business in

composition courses. The composition texts surveyed in this study suggest a growing emphasis on preparing students for non-academic writing.

With knowledge of what students may have learned about business writing in their composition courses, business writing instructors can build more effectively on what the students have already learned. Also, as composition program directors face growing pressure to prepare students for writing in their careers as well as in their studies, they will eventually recognize the advisability of asking business writing specialists for guidance in designing assignments and perhaps even courses. If the business writing specialists know what the composition texts are saying, it will be easier for them to suggest assignments that will prepare students better for the writing they will do in business writing courses and in their careers.

## **Method**

The study examined what the texts say about creating resumes, letters (especially letters of application), proposals, instructions, email and memos, presentation materials, reports, questionnaires, abstracts, brochures, newsletters, pamphlets, posters, flyers, and press releases. The study also examined the discussions of writing for the internet (including web pages, blogs, wikis, and Listserv postings) and of creating information graphics. Each text's coverage of traditional composition topics such as audience analysis, patterns of development, thesis statements, paragraph development, and the research paper was examined.

A Textbook Analysis Grid was developed to note each textbook's discussion of various topics common in composition textbooks, from abbreviations through revising through writing for the Internet, and the discussion of documents common in business and government, from abstracts through surveys. Starting with the index in each text but then reading each text to catch discussions that were not indexed, I noted the number of pages or lines devoted to the topic, whether the text provided examples (and if so, how many), and transcribed salient points from the discussion. Qualitative rather than quantitative discussion is provided, as what is said is of more consequence than how much is said.

A Topic Analysis Grid was created to record what each the texts says about a particular topic. For the Letter of Application topic grid, for example, I noted whether each text specifies block format, discusses using broadcast letters, advocates being concise, offers advice on addressing a salary requirement, recommends enthusiasm, etc.

The ten texts surveyed are Anson and Schwegler's The Longman Handbook for Writers and Reader (short title Longman); Axelrod and Cooper's The St. Martin's Guide to Writing (StMartin's); Dietsch's Reasoning and Writing Well (Reasoning); Faigley's Writing: A Guide for College and Beyond (Writing); Hult and Huckin's The New Century Handbook (Century); Kennedy, Kennedy, and Muth's The Bedford Guide for College Writers (Bedford); Lannon's The Writing Process: A Concise Rhetoric, Reader, and Handbook (Process); Maimon, Peritz, and Yancey's The New McGraw-Hill Handbook (MHHandbook); Ramage, Bean, and Johnson's The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing (ABGuide); and Roen, Glau, and Maid's The McGraw-Hill Guide: Writing for College, Writing for Life (MHGuide). Two other widely used texts, Hall and Birket's Writing Well and Trimmer's The New Writing with a Purpose, were examined, but they

do not contain enough discussion of business writing to warrant inclusion in this discussion. For brevity, each text's date of publication is noted only in the References listing (all are 2006 or later), references to the texts are by the short title in parentheses, and page numbers are provided only for quotation.

This paper summarizes the findings of this research on business writing coverage in ten composition textbooks so that business writing instructors can anticipate what their students may have learned about business writing in first-year composition courses, and writing specialists in business and government can anticipate what their staff may have learned about business writing in their first-year composition course, which is for most non-business majors the only formal instruction in writing that they will receive in their undergraduate career.

## **Résumés**

The clearest evidence of a trend toward preparing students for non-academic writing is the discussion of resumes in recent editions of composition textbooks and in new textbooks. Seven of the ten composition texts examined in this study discuss résumés, but their definitions vary: MHGuide (2009) calls it a “work history” (p. A28), Longman (2008) “a synthesis (in one or two pages) of one’s education and employment history” (p. 903), and Century (2008) a summary of “accomplishments, skills, experience, and personal interests” (p. 565). Longman recommends including volunteering and internships, and Bedford, skills and activities. Bedford suggests mentioning “personal pursuits” to show that the writer is well-rounded. The texts agree about some aspects of résumés, however. They should be short (one page or two at most for students and recent graduates), and they should describe work experience in reverse chronological order with action verbs (called “active” verbs in most texts) to describe duties. They recommend conciseness and advocate using white space to emphasize structure and key pieces of information.

These composition texts do not recommend providing details of education beyond degree, school(s), major (and perhaps minor). However, a student may have had course work that would make him or her a more attractive candidate than other majors at that or another school. So business writing instructors might encourage students to indicate those subjects in the résumé, since most interviewers will not have a transcript before the interview. Some texts provide an example with a GPA; Reasoning recommends including a GPA if it is B+ or better, and Bedford says to include it “if it reflects well on you” (p. 274). The résumé examples are for students with a high GPA. Even business writing textbooks rarely show a sample for a student whose GPA is 2.5, but those students need to apply for jobs too, and there are more of them than there are students with a GPA of 3.6. Many of the texts still recommend the heading “References available upon request” – as if writers still use the word “upon” – unless the writer has been asked to include references. Longman and Reasoning recommend taking a sheet with reference information to the interview.

The texts surveyed are divided on whether to include an Objective. MHHandbook recommends against one; Longman tells students to have one but provides in its example the Objective “entry-level position as an electrical engineer” (p. 295). The texts recommend omitting personal

information such as age, but Century does this in a sidebar for ESL students that other students might not read.

Some of the texts, especially Reasoning and Century, discuss the differences between a traditional chronological and a functional résumé, but they do not explain how to decide whether or when to change to the functional format. Century calls the functional format “somewhat unconventional” and says that “some employers may not care for it” (p. 565). Some résumé examples contain bullets (a few arrowheads in the example in MHGGuide and many traditional bullets in the examples in Bedford and Reasoning), but others (MHHandbook and Century) do not.

Most of the texts discuss the scanning of résumés and how to prepare a scannable or other electronic résumé. Some are very specific about using white or light-colored paper, and some instruct not to fold the résumé. No text recommends a date on the résumé to indicate how current the information is. The texts do not indicate how much time a screener might spend reading a print résumé, nor do they stress placing the most important information on the top half of the first page.

Reasoning has the fullest discussion of résumés, offering pages of suggestions on determining content and format, but its example of a résumé in chronological format overuses bullets, and the author makes the debatable recommendation that the writer revise his or her résumé for each application instead of using the time that would require to identify more opportunities.

Increasingly, students in business writing courses will have used a composition text with suggestions on preparing a résumé. At this point, however, more students probably have used a Word or a Career Center template for their résumé than the guidelines in a composition text, which vary from text to text. Business writing instructors can anticipate the usual questions about including an objective, the GPA, volunteering and activities, and bullets. Instructors should be aware that depending on which texts the students used in composition, the students may have been given advice that conflicts with what other students were told or with what the instructor is suggesting in the business writing course.

## **Correspondence**

Of the ten composition texts, six discuss letters, focusing more on format than on type, purpose, or strategy. They recommend block format and addressing the letter to a person; none mention the use of a Subject line. Most specify a colon after the salutation and a comma after the closing. Only MHGGuide specifies a serif font, but the examples in that text and in Bedford and MHHandbook use a sans-serif font. Century and StMartin’s do not recommend a serif font in the discussion, but their examples use one. Most suggest indicating an enclosure or attachment.

On types of letters, only Century mentions (briefly) direct/indirect, bad news, and good news messages; consequently, most business writing students will be unfamiliar with the types. Only MHHandbook discusses letters of complaint and praise; only Bedford and Reasoning mention thank-you letters. MHGGuide discusses letters of recommendation, and ABGuide mentions them.

Other recommendations about letters are presented in some of the texts. The MHGuide, Century, and StMartin's recommend a professional tone. Bedford and MHHandbook recommend brevity and a focus on the requested action or response. Only Bedford and Longman recommend a courtesy title in the inside address. Century, Bedford, and Longman specify white or off-white paper, and Bedford calls for a matching envelope.

Letters are not discussed in Writing, Process, or ABGuide, and Reasoning says little about them. However, given the importance of formal correspondence in business, the growing concern for graduates' writing skills, and the fact that comparatively few undergraduates at most schools take a business writing course, discussion of letters will become more prominent in composition textbooks. For some time, though, there will be variations in the coverage of letters and discrepancies in the guidelines presented. Instructors can anticipate a need to discuss the use of a Subject line and proper fonts. Also, as these texts do not introduce students to types of messages, students will be unfamiliar with the usual strategies for good-news and bad-news messages.

### **Letters of Application**

The seven texts that discuss letters also discuss letters of application, indicating that the instructions regarding letters in general (especially format) apply also to letters of application. Century, Longman, and Reasoning call the letter of application a "cover letter," risking confusion between a form letter and a tailored letter of application. None of these texts use term "broadcast letter." MHHandbook and StMartin's indicate that letters of application are sometimes called "cover letters." Consequently, many business writing students might confuse a form letter of application (cover letter) with the preferable tailored letter of application. Because the texts do not provide a position announcement with the sample letter of application, students cannot see a sample letter that has been tailored to the specifics of an advertisement. So in essence, the samples in these texts are form letters.

The texts do recommend identifying the position being applied for and summarizing qualifications with relevant details. MGHandbook and StMartin's recommend a three-paragraph or four-paragraph format; MHGuide provides a four-paragraph example, and Century a three-paragraph example. While it is logical to indicate the reason for writing, then present qualifications, and then state the desired action, the recommendation that content fit organization rather than vice-versa is clearly dangerous, and business writing instructors will need to remind students that organization should fit the content.

The seven texts offer other recommendations as well. They state that one page or at most two is appropriate for the letter, and most recommend that the writer specify their or the reader's next step. Some of the texts recommend enthusiasm; as MHGuide puts it, the writer should appear "eager but not desperate" (p. A26). MHGuide also recommends that the writer learn about the prospective employer and demonstrate in the letter that he or she has done so. Reasoning and MHGuide recommend honesty (Century does so in the discussion of resumes). The texts do not tell the writer to refer to the resume in the body of the letter, but the examples in MHGuide and MHHandbook do so. No text encourages the writer to sign the letter of application legibly, but the examples do so with a script font.

Generally, the discussions of letters of application in the texts examined are sparse, each text providing some of the usual instructions but omitting others. So with letters of application, a business writing instructor might begin by asking what the students know about them. The students may have received very different if not conflicting advice about creating letters of application.

## **Proposals**

The composition texts examined in this study identify proposals as arguments designed to convince readers to adopt a solution to a social problem. Bedford defines a proposal as “a recommendation for taking action” (p. 167), its purpose being “to convince readers that something should be done about [a] problem” (p. 173). In StMartin’s, a proposal is “an argument for a solution,” and proposals “are vital to a democracy” (p. 328). The other texts take the same approach. However, ABGuide also notes that businesses use proposals “to generate revenue” (p. 475), and Bedford notes that “proposals often suggest new projects, recommended purchases or changes in procedures, and solve personnel problems” in business (p. 181). Grant proposals are mentioned only in Writing, as a way to “persuade someone – usually a foundation, corporation, or government agency – to give money for a charitable purpose” (p. 507).

Argumentative writing is a major focus in the ten composition texts, and as proposals are argumentative, it makes sense to mention proposals in a discussion of argumentative writing. However, teaching students about proposals in business and government requires much more than discussion of argument (with its usual explanation of logical fallacies). None of the texts discuss requests for proposals, solicited versus unsolicited proposals, storyboarding, compliance matrixes, staff qualifications, previous experience, and other important subjects. So business writing instructors might expect that some of their students recognize the argumentative nature of proposals but may think that proposals address only issues of social concern. The ten composition textbooks surveyed cover proposals less adequately than any of the other types of business documents.

## **Instructions and Process Descriptions**

Instructions and process analyses are discussed in only five of the ten texts (MHGuide, Process, Reasoning, StMartin’s, and Bedford). The first four distinguish instructions from process descriptions. All five recommend determining the audience’s knowledge of the subject, using chronological order, using sufficient but no extraneous detail, and using transitions to emphasize sequence.

On other topics, though, the recommendations vary. Only Reasoning tells writers to place a warning or caution before each step requiring one; only Process specifies only one step per sentence and recommends identifying needed materials or equipment and using shorter sentences. Only Reasoning and StMartin’s stress using second-person; only Reasoning and MHHandbook stress conciseness. Process recommends an appropriate non-patronizing tone; it and MHGuide indicate that a process description might be part of a persuasive document such as

a proposal. Process has a more thorough discussion of instructions and process analyses than the other texts.

These composition texts do not encourage students to write about procedures or processes in the field they plan to enter, perhaps out of a concern that instructors might be uncomfortable if students write about subjects with which the instructors are unfamiliar. So business writing students' experience with writing instructions or process descriptions may be limited to lab reports, scientific processes, or baking cookies or changing the oil in a car. Based on the discussions in these texts, business writing instructors can assume that they should start at Step 1 with instructions and process descriptions.

## Reports

All of the composition texts examined discuss the research paper, but the naming of the document in some texts may suggest a movement away from the research paper in first-year composition. For example, in Process it's the "research report" rather than "research paper"; in MHGuide, the research paper is discussed in two chapters titled "Finding and Evaluating Information from Sources and the Field" and "Synthesizing and Documenting Sources." These chapters address the research paper, but the titles might make the discussion (and the textbook) more attractive to instructors teaching research-report writing in a writing-in-the-disciplines course. Most students entering business writing courses will have spent much if not most of their second semester of composition on a traditional thesis-driven research paper, but as writing-in-the-disciplines programs proliferate they will address research report writing, and the traditional research paper may no longer be the major focus of second-semester composition.

Other types of reports are discussed in some of the texts. Century does refer to lab reports, trip reports, progress reports, final project reports, feasibility reports, environmental impact statements, and activity reports as documents that the student may need to write, but it does not discuss how to create them beyond a few sentences about planning content, layout, and design, and identifying and discussing briefly the basic and optional parts of a report. Longman, MHHandbook, and StMartin's describe briefly the main sections of a lab report and provide a short sample or selection from a student report. Purpose indicates that the student might have to write a "narrative report" on an accident at work, and MHHandbook offers suggestions for creating a report on a case study. Several texts instruct the student to do what their instructor or supervisor wants in a report – a recommendation that might be made more frequently and emphatically in composition texts.

That report writing is not emphasized in these composition textbooks is not surprising. Many students are not taking nor will take a course that involves laboratory research. As fewer and fewer composition instructors have had recently a college-level science course in which they had to write lab reports, fewer will be sure what to teach and how. Too few composition instructors have experience with reports in business, and few students write reports rather than thesis-driven research papers, so it is not surprising that outside of short discussions of lab reports, about the only coverage of report writing in these composition textbooks focuses on research papers. Proposals, progress reports, and final project reports could easily be worked into the research paper assignment in composition courses, but most composition instructors do

not take the opportunity to introduce these types of documents in the traditional research-paper unit.

### **Email, Memos, and Instant Messages**

Email is discussed in eight of the texts and memos in seven; instant messages (IMs) are mentioned in six. Few of the texts say much about memos, as email is replacing memos for most internal communication. The usual information about memo format (margins, single spacing, paragraph length), content (clarifying purpose and action desired), and style (being professional and concise) is presented in MHGuide, Longman, Bedford, and StMartin's. The texts disagree about the heading and the subject line, however; for example, Bedford has To, From, Subject, and Date in the example but Date, To, From, and Subject in the discussion; MHGuide has Date, To, From, and RE; StMartin's has DATE, TO, FROM, and SUBJECT; and Longman has **TO, FROM, DATE, and SUBJECT**. MHGuide and Longman recommend following company format, and Bedford and StMartin's indicate that some organizations have format guidelines.

Other customary recommendations about memos are presented in few of the texts. MHGuide calls for initialing memos, but the examples in that text and the others do not have the sender's initials. Century and Bedford recommend that memos be kept short, but Bedford indicates that memos can be longer, with headings for sections. Few of the texts emphasize the standard guideline that memos are used almost solely for internal correspondence.

The texts all advise students to remember that email is not private; surprisingly, none recommend a telephone call or face-to-face conversation for delicate matters that might require privacy. The texts recommend polite language and sparing use of highlighting for emphasis, and they warn against flaming and advise against using emoticons. A few caution against blind-copying and replying to all when inappropriate, and four recommend placing contact information in a signature that is professional in design (especially font) and content. Email is still "e-mail" in three of the texts. Of the texts, Century has the fullest discussion of email, but even that text does not focus on some topics that students should consider, such as clarifying any requested action.

Little is said about instant messaging in these composition texts, except that IMs can contain acronyms and chopped spellings that are inappropriate in other types of documents, that IMs can be distracting (MHGuide), and that IMs may displace email for routine communication and may in the future be able to be saved (Process). Surprisingly, Writing: A Guide for College and Beyond discusses email only in connection with sources for research papers and does not discuss memos and IMs; ABGuide has only two sentences on email and does not discuss memos or IMs. There is in the other texts, though, considerable discussion of effective use of email, and general agreement about preparing memos.

Some composition texts acknowledge that email is becoming a more important mode of business communication. The replacement of the memo by email will require writers to approach writing the email message differently: judiciously – without exaggeration – indicating the importance of the message, formatting the email for printing and posting or filing if the announcement is not



sent as an attachment, and avoiding the informality typical of email messages when information is presented for-the-record, such as changes in company policies or procedures.

### **Oral Presentation Materials**

All but one of the texts examined discuss oral presentations, focusing less on preparing materials for presentations than on delivering presentations. They encourage students to define the purpose and consider the audience's knowledge for each presentation; offer suggestions for rehearsing the presentation and overcoming anxiety and nervousness; warn against reading slides or a prepared script, note cards, or slides; and recommend enthusiasm, eye contact, and projecting one's voice.

The texts assume some familiarity with PowerPoint. MHHandbook includes 12 sample PowerPoint slides illustrating "rules of design" for PowerPoint (p. 252), and Century, Longman, and MHHandbook encourage presenters to control the special effects that PowerPoint permits. Half of the texts recommend opening and closing strongly; most recommend summarizing in the conclusion, but Writing calls summarizing "a dull way to close" and instead recommends that the presenter close with "an example or an idea that your audience can take away with them" (p. 683). Most recommend using bulleted lists, MHGGuide identifying them as "talking points." ABGuide recommends that presenters use the "Tell them what you're going to tell them" approach to announce the main points and structure of the presentation.

Five texts (Bedford, Century, MHGGuide, MHHandbook, and StMartin's) advise students to use type large enough for all in the audience to see and to limit the amount of text per slide. Dark type on a light background to ensure readability is recommended by Writing, Century, and Bedford. MHGGuide and MHHandbook urge readers to use only those graphics that complement or support the presentation. Three texts (Longman, ABGuide, and MHGGuide) recommend using signposts to clarify the structure and main points of the presentation. Century discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different types of visual aids (transparencies, flip charts, etc.). Four texts discuss using handouts, Reasoning suggesting that a handout might be distributed before or early in a presentation if "several statistics or other complex items" are to be presented (p. 368), but ABGuide warns against giving the audience something to read if the presenter wants the audience to be listening.

The texts do not emphasize preparing hard copy of the slides to distribute at a presentation, nor do they discuss the growing preference in business and government for reports formatted like a PowerPoint presentation, which will affect the way business writing instructors teach chunking information, using displayed lists and signposts to make organization and main points apparent, and incorporating graphics in reports. Eventually, however, this topic will appear in composition textbooks.

Some composition courses require oral presentations related to the research paper, and some instructors teach students how to use PowerPoint. Most business writing students will have had experience using PowerPoint, but based on the discussions of presentation materials in these texts, most students will need guidance about special effects, backgrounds, fonts, parallelism, and other aspects of presentation materials. As with letters of application, business writing

instructors will find that their students have been exposed to only some of a broad range of guidelines regarding presentation materials, so instructors may need to begin by asking the students what they have been taught about presentation materials, especially PowerPoint design, graphics, posters for poster sessions, and handouts.

### **Writing for the Internet**

Writing for the internet is discussed in six of these composition texts; the other four focus their discussion on using the internet for gathering information for the research paper and do not provide guidelines about writing for the internet. The six texts (MHGuide, Writing, Century, Bedford, MHHandbook, and StMartin's) encourage writers to define their purpose and audience; five discuss the need to consider how users navigate websites before planning the organization of a website. MHGuide, Century, MHHandbook, and StMartin's provide the fullest discussions, encouraging writers to control load time by using smaller graphics, to chunk information, to limit scrolling, to make navigation apparent (at the top or left of the screen), and to use graphics as directed in the text's discussion of graphics.

All of the texts except ABGuide and Reasoning mention blogs and wikis, usually as sources of information for the research paper, with the caveat that the information on a blog may not be authoritative but might identify peer-reviewed sources. Writing, Century, and Longman offer suggestions for writing blogs and wikis, including using shorter sentences and paragraphs and less formal language than in most documents, and in blogs allowing emotion but avoiding flaming. MHGuide, Process, Century, and MHHandbook provide brief information about posting to a Listserve.

Other aspects of writing for the internet are mentioned in only one or two of the texts, such as limiting line length, using tables or frames, including on each page a link to the home page, including a site map, getting permission to use copyrighted material, telling when the site was last updated, and providing contact information for the webmaster or site owner. Students entering a business writing course will have considerable experience using websites, but many principles of writing for the internet will be new to them unless they have already taken a course that involved web design.

### **Other Types of Documents**

Other types of business documents receive less focus in these composition texts. Questionnaires and abstracts receive more coverage than brochures, posters, flyers, newsletters, pamphlets, and press releases. None of the texts discuss writing journal articles or books.

All of the texts discuss using a questionnaire as possible steps in a research project. They present all or most of the usual instructions: decide what information you need, determine your sample, construct unbiased questions that are clear and easy to answer, avoid leading questions, determine the best question formats for the information you seek, determine the best answer format for each question, provide directions for the respondents, distribute and collect the questionnaire expeditiously, avoid improper generalizing from the results, design the questionnaire so that the results will be easy to tabulate, and test the questionnaire before

administering it. The texts concur on the subject of questionnaires more than on any other type of document. Some, however, use “survey” and “questionnaire” nearly interchangeably, so a business writing instructor may need to clarify the terms.

Abstracts and summaries are also discussed in all of the texts, primarily because of the importance of the research paper in composition courses. In most texts, abstracts are defined as a type of summary that appears at the beginning of a research paper or in an index of abstracts. They are identified as sources of information in the research process. Instructions for writing summaries are provided so that students will be able to summarize documents as they do research and then create an abstract for a report. Writing and MHHandbook mention executive summaries in business documents, especially proposals, but the texts focus on summaries of articles and reports.

Brochures receive less attention, but Writing, MHGuide, and Century discuss them. Writing uses a two-page flowchart illustrated with drawings (one of which is a storyboard) and photographs to tell how to create a brochure (pp. 676-677). MHGuide and Century list the features of a brochure, and both texts provide an example, but the details about brochures in Century are mainly in the discussion of its example. Process identifies brochures as a type of document created in business (along with annual reports, pamphlets, and prospectuses) but does not address creating one. Only Writing and MHHandbook recommend creating a template. Century recommends using color in brochures and newsletters; it emphasizes the importance of headings in brochures and the banner in a newsletter to indicate topics and attract the reader’s attention, and states that the writing should be “lively and engaging” in brochures and newsletters (p. 510). Of the other types of documents, some are described in one or two of the texts; for example, MHGuide lists the features of a poster and provides a sample.

Only MHHandbook mentions press releases, as something a student might write for a community organization; only Longman discusses flyers, listing the elements of a flyer and presenting an example; only Bedford discusses pamphlets, in a table comparing sources writing a research paper; and only MHGuide discusses posters, listing their features and providing examples.

Business writing instructors discussing questionnaires and abstracts can assume that most of their students will be familiar with those types of documents, given their importance in the discussion of research papers in these composition texts, but instructors can assume that most students will not have learned about the other types of documents in their composition courses.

## **Graphics**

All the texts recommend using information graphics; many discuss them in the section on the research paper. Only some emphasize defining the purpose and audience as part of the process of creating graphics, but the texts do emphasize in their general discussions of writing the importance of determining purpose and audience in documents.

Longman, Century, Bedford, MHHandbook, and MHGuide have fuller discussions of graphics, recommending that students choose the proper type of graphic, give each graphic a clear

message, indicate all borrowings, number and call out graphics, provide a title or a caption for each graphic, and place the graphic near the discussion it illustrates. All of the texts except Reasoning discuss the use of and provide examples of photographs (Writing and Century have the fullest discussions), line graphs, bar graphs, tables, and pie charts. Flow charts, drawings, diagrams, and maps are discussed briefly in half of the texts. Only MHGuide discusses font choices for graphics and giving the graphics throughout a document a consistent “look” in design, especially the use of colors. Only MHGuide, ABGuide, and St. Martin’s discuss labeling graphics.

Most of the textbooks have an example or two of the most common types in the section on graphics, and some contain more examples scattered through the text. As with many business writing texts, some of the composition texts contain many photographs that are extraneous design elements rather than instructional elements, complicating an instructor’s attempt to suggest that extraneous graphics should not be used. Century and Writing contain good discussions of elements of photographs such as composition and framing that might be part of any business writing text’s discussion of photographs. None of the texts recommend examining the graphics in previous documents for the audience to see what that audience is familiar with and perhaps expects in that type of document. These composition texts do not discuss information management and reuse, probably as part of the customary attempt to discourage plagiarism.

## **Conclusion**

The academic focus of these widely-used composition textbooks is especially apparent in their emphasis on personal narrative and the research paper. The texts provide sound discussions of the expository writing process, but they under-emphasize sentence-level correctness, often relegating grammar and punctuation to an appendix. They say little about writing in business and government except in the context of service-learning. For example, they do not discuss the importance of proposals in new business efforts, the use of different types of messages in correspondence, and the importance of various types of reports, especially progress reports and final project reports. Also, they are weak in their discussions of collaborative writing. They note that in business and government a document might have several authors, but their discussion of collaborative writing tends to focus on the involvement of reviewers in creating a document rather than examining the various activities that collaborative writing requires, such as the project planning that divides a document into parts, each part usually the responsibility of one writer.

As composition textbooks increase their coverage of documents traditionally taught in business writing courses, and as pressure to prepare students for writing in their careers grows, more composition programs will move toward some instruction in business writing. Business writing instructors will find that more and more students have had some instruction in writing for their careers, so instructors will be challenged to determine how much their students already know about letters, reports, résumés, etc. A business writing instructor will no longer be able to assume that most students have little familiarity with business writing concepts and common business documents. Also, an instructor may discover that what the students learned from composition staff contradicts that instructor’s points. The problem will be compounded by the

fact that few composition staff have much experience writing outside of academia, examining business writing textbooks, or participating in organizations like the Association for Business Communication, and consequently many are not well informed about business writing.

To prepare for changes in when and how business writing is taught, business writing instructors might communicate their interest in composition courses to composition program directors, especially regarding texts. They might find out which composition textbook(s) are used in their school and examine it/them to determine what business writing students need to be taught (or might need to be untaught). Also, they might try to participate in discussions of how to incorporate career writing in composition courses, to offer program directors their expertise in course and assignment design. If composition staff are open to suggestions of composition texts that prepare students well for academic writing but also introduce them to writing in their careers, the business writing instructor might recommend any of these ten texts but especially The McGraw-Hill Guide or The Century Handbook, which appear to have the fullest and most useful discussions of a broader range of topics in business writing.

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### Biography

DON SAMSON teaches professional writing, technical editing, and Shakespeare at Radford University, in Virginia. His PhD is from UNC - Chapel Hill. A former proposal writer in aerospace and instructional designer for software developers, he is the author of Editing Technical Writing (Oxford UP). For fun, he fly-fishes and helps coach the Radford University men's rugby team, the 2003 and 2008 Division Two national champions.