

Easing the Transition from Academic to Workplace Writing: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

New college graduates often have significant difficulty transitioning from academic to workplace writing. To remedy this problem, universities offer a range of workplace-focused communication courses. However, a limited number of students can take these courses. This study determines if students can develop baseline-writing skills needed for entry-level positions after an intensive half-day, workplace writing program. This program required one hour of classroom instruction and completion of two highly interactive online modules focusing on message organization and style. Student revisions of poorly written messages in both modules were holistically assessed to determine how well students mastered these skills. Nineteen Marquette University students participating in the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps program comprised the data source for this study. Within a year, all of these students will enter the Navy as newly commissioned officers. Results indicated that students mastered efficient message organization skills and were becoming proficient in writing with impact.

The Problem

New college graduates face the significant challenge of transitioning from academic to workplace writing. Ten to fourteen years of academic writing instruction have defined students' thinking about effective writing and shaped their written communication practice. In fact, this perception of what constitutes good writing is so deeply ingrained in student thinking that students often view academic writing as the only lens that defines effective written communication until they start their first jobs (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Pare, 1999). Consequently, the shift from academic to workplace writing represents a major change for students entering the workforce.

To help students make this transition, universities offer a variety of workplace-focused communication courses: business, technical, managerial, professional communications, and so on. However, for a range of reasons--packed academic schedules, a limited number of communication courses and segments offered, and a shortage of highly qualified faculty--a limited number of students are able to take these courses. Furthermore, these courses may not be able to duplicate or mirror the complex contextual workplace factors that workplace writers need to assess when writing on the job.

This situation is particularly true of Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) students who were the focus of this research. These newly commissioned officers often arrive at their first jobs within weeks or even days of graduating from college. Senior officers expect these new officers to be equipped with a basic set of skills, including workplace writing ability. However, they draft correspondence based largely on their *academic* experience of what constitutes good writing. Or, if they

are clever, they will use as a template a previously accepted version of the correspondence they are trying to draft. However, often these templates are inappropriate for the audience or the situation, and, more often than not, are inefficient models of written communication. Furthermore, mimicking a previous document does not result in new officers learning the requisite communication thinking and practice to be effective writers in the complex Navy discourse community.

Given the limited number of students who can take workplace writing courses, are there other means available to help students develop *quickly* the baseline communication thinking and writing skills needed for entry-level job positions?

Purpose of Research

This research has two purposes:

1. to determine if NROTC students can quickly--after a half-day of education--master baseline skills in organization and style that will enable them to write with impact.
2. to determine what effect, if any, this education has on their thinking about academic and workplace writing.

In short, this study sought to determine if the NROTC sample could quickly develop writing skills that would help them clearly and efficiently communicate their message's purpose and important supporting details, thus decreasing the administrative burden on their senior officers. In addition, the study sought to determine methods of empowering future officers to challenge inefficient writing traditions and avoid developing inefficient writing habits.

Literature Review

Numerous researchers have documented differences between academic and workplace writing (see for example edited collections by Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Dias & Pare, 2000; Odell & Goswami, 1985; Spilka, 1993). This brief review focuses on seminal workplace writing studies that have served as the foundation for research in this area. Much of the pedagogical work published in the last five years merely incrementally builds on the concepts in these seminal studies.

Dias et al. (1999) claimed rather dramatically that academic and workplace writing are "worlds apart" because their writing contexts and genres are fundamentally different. Winsor (1996) echoed this claim when she stated that in academic environments, it is difficult for students to see writing as a series of rhetorical choices based on context. She asserted that not until students engage in writing tasks that have professional consequences will the rhetorical and contextual nature of writing become clear.

Drawing on the work of numerous researchers, Schreiber (1993) provided some detailed, albeit now familiar, differences between academic and workplace writing. For example, the academic audience is generally very narrowly defined to instructors, while on-the-job writing often has multiple audiences

who often work in different functions, at different organizational levels, and with very different job roles and reading needs. Furthermore, workplace professionals read to act, to get a task completed; consequently, they quickly need to determine the message purpose and then skim or read quickly to find the supporting detail necessary to support that purpose. In contrast, faculty read academic writing to determine if students have demonstrated the requisite knowledge to fulfill an assignment. As a result, they read to learn if students have learned, and to do that they generally read (at least theoretically) every word. Furthermore, the genres used in workplace writing are different from academic writing and vary by work discipline (law, business, engineering, architecture, etc.) and job function. Students write term papers, lab reports, essay exams, personal essays, and a range of other genres that have limited overlap with the correspondence, e-mail messages, status reports, trip reports, evaluations, recommendations, and other genres that define communication in the workplace.

Though there is agreement among researchers about the differences between academic and workplace writing, there are significant differences as to whether and to what extent the academic community alone can bridge that gap. Dias et al. (1999) believed that the non-academic genres that define workplace writing can be learned only within the workplace. Beaufort (2000) also asserted that workplace writing skills are not portable; these skills can be learned only during and after the assimilation process with a new organization. Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1991) also contended that developing workplace writing competence requires first-hand understanding of the communication contexts and complex factors that determine what constitutes meaningful discourse. Doheny-Farina (1989) observed that writers must learn the politics--internal and external--that influence an organization's and functional area's discourse. Even academic writing classes that use cases and simulations are unable to capture the unique and complex political dynamics that shape organizational writers' rhetorical choices.

Schneider and Andre (2005) acknowledged that transferring writing strategies and skills from the classroom to the workplace is complex and difficult. However, they believe the classroom "can provide students with a grasp of the basic conventions of common workplace genres, a grounding in the research and analytical skills integral to particular genres, practice in producing those genres, and an appreciation for the complex nature of genres and genre acquisition" (p. 196). To support this claim, these researchers found that management and political science students perceived that their academic training, including but not limited to academic writing courses, well prepared them for their workplace writing tasks. Vest, Long, Thomas and Palmquist (1995) found that new engineering hires who were most satisfied with their college preparation for their jobs cited the importance of oral and written communication skills in their academic coursework. Adam (2000) also believed that academic writing courses could prepare students to transition successfully to the workplace writing environment.

Research that focuses on the transitional process of writing in a workplace environment provides one of the most useful lenses to view this difficult process of bridging the divide between academic and workplace writing. Lutz (1989) described this process as one of socialization or acculturation that has three stages: pre-arrival, initiation, and insider. At best, workplace writing courses--technical, professional, and managerial, for example--in conjunction with internships and part-time work can help students reach the pre-arrival and initiation stages of this process. Becoming skilled in workplace

writing--the insider stage--is impossible in the academic environment because workplace writing is more than organizing messages effectively, developing a clear style, and being knowledgeable about the formal features of typical workplace genres. As Bazerman (1999) and Swales (1990) have pointed out, writing and the strategic choices that make that writing effective take place in unique workplace contexts and discourse communities. Dias and his colleagues (1999) believed that no matter how skillful faculty are in creating simulations or cases, they can't prepare students adequately for their workplace writing tasks because "they cannot adequately replicate the local rhetorical complexity of workplace contexts" (p. 201).

Although academic environments can't make students so skilled at workplace writing tasks that their peers and superiors would perceive them to have insider status, university workplace writing education in conjunction with internships can *initiate* students into expected workplace thinking and writing practices. As indicated earlier, this study sought to determine if this initiation could occur quickly--during a half day of instruction--without benefit of a formal course in workplace writing.

Research Methodology

Marquette University NROTC students in their senior year were the data source for this study. These 19 students, comprising the total population of NROTC students, would soon be entering the Navy as newly commissioned officers; consequently, written communication education had significant content validity for them. Marquette, a private Jesuit institution, was chosen because of personal and professional contacts (two of the authors are alumni). These contacts were instrumental in securing student participants and the time to conduct this research.

Listed below is the process used to gather data.

1. **Brief Class Lecture:** A brief (one hour) face-to-face class was conducted that taught the theory behind the bottom-line and high-impact writing strategies.
2. **Interactive Online Modules:** Each student completed interactive bottom-line and high-impact online modules. Both modules included communication concepts discussed in the one-hour class, interactive examples of the concepts, and application exercises through revision of realistic naval correspondence. Student performance on these application exercises became the measure of student learning.
3. **Survey:** A survey was administered to gather demographics and background data about the participants.
4. **Group Interviews:** Group interviews were conducted with the students to gauge their reaction to the education and to determine their understanding of module concepts.

What follows are additional details about the four steps in the data gathering process.

Brief Face-to-Face Class Lecture

An assumption was made that efficient method organization and a high-impact style were not academic writing discourse norms; these concepts were neither taught nor practiced in secondary or

undergraduate courses. The interview results, discussed later, supported this assumption. Consequently, classroom instruction constituted the first step of the process. The instruction was primarily lecture based, using a small number of PowerPoint slides to introduce key concepts and theory and to provide students with examples of ineffective and effective naval documents. Next, junior officer writing expectations and career benefits were stressed based on their ability to produce clear, concise, written communications. Finally, the online writing modules that the students would complete following the classroom instruction were described and framed.

Interactive Bottom Line and High Impact Online Modules

Students completed two interactive modules: bottom-line and high-impact writing. The bottom-line module focused on efficient method organization: stating the message's purpose--its bottom line--upfront unless there are overriding reasons for doing so. This module discussed four bottom-line principles; circumstances when it is wise and risky to bottom line; and the organizational, psychological, and educational barriers to bottom-line organizing. The high-impact module treats style. Module content included effective language choice, the relationship between subject-verb-object word order and efficient information processing, effective document design, and several other topics.

Interactive modules were chosen rather than face-to-face instruction for three reasons. First, the modules carefully sequence and tightly integrate theory, practice, and feedback more effectively than face-to-face instruction. For example, students read about schema theory, see examples that illustrate the concept, do a revision exercise that requires them to apply the concept, and receive feedback in the form of a recommended revision that enables them to assess the quality of their work. Second, the online modules enable students to work at their own pace and to easily review concepts and examples. Finally, the MBA managerial communication students preferred the interactive modules to face-to-face instruction, and, most importantly, were able to more effectively apply the concepts to their own writing.

Based on the authors' knowledge of the various Navy communities' needs, module content originally contained in the MBA managerial communication course was reduced to essential bottom-line and high-impact writing principles. That decision was based on feedback from over 6,000 mid-level officers who have completed the MBA course, the numerous management and executive development courses conducted, and comments made by flag officers (admirals). This process was necessary to answer one of the primary research questions: can time-constrained students quickly learn baseline workplace written communication skills. The modules were also reduced for pragmatic reasons; these students were taking a full load of academic subjects and engaged in demanding NROTC and Marquette University extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the message genre and content within the modules was tailored so they were relevant to the communication requirements of newly commissioned officers.

The interactive portion of the modules consisted of poorly written, realistic, naval correspondence. Although Navy specific, these documents exhibited many characteristics of typical academic writing that ultimately translates into ineffective Navy writing. For example, the messages' purposes were not stated

up front. In addition, sentences lacked subject-verb-object word order, verbs were in the passive voice, and important information was not highlighted by headings and lists.

The students were required to revise the poorly written documents, making use of the bottom-line and high-impact writing concepts. Once the students submitted a response, the module displayed a recommended revision. In the module, the student responses were not classified as correct or incorrect—the module software lacked the sophistication to make these kinds of judgments. Instead, the module displayed possible revisions only after the students had submitted their revisions. These revisions enabled students to compare their work with the sample, “expert” revisions. This process caused students to reconsider module concepts if their work varied significantly from the suggested revisions.

Although the modules did not directly assess student responses to messages needing revision, the researchers did. Each student’s mastery of the module concepts were quantified using a five-point rubric to score each online writing revision. The rubric criteria reflected students’ ability to put in practice the concepts described and illustrated in the modules.

Two researchers independently scored each online revision. If there was more than a one-point disagreement on a revision, a third person assessed the revision. This process resolved the very few situations when there significant rater disagreement occurred. After examining the revisions, the researchers determined that a score of three or higher indicated that a student had the ability to translate this education into action upon commissioning.

Survey Data and Group Interviews

Immediately following the classroom instruction, students answered a survey in which they provided demographic information and data regarding any previous writing experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 19 students to determine their attitudes toward the modules and to better gauge their understanding of the module content. Digital voice recorders were used to capture interview content and to facilitate interview transcriptions. During the interviews, the students were asked to think about their perceptions of the differences between academic and workplace writing, the amount of confidence they had in their workplace writing ability, the implications that skillful naval writing skills might have throughout their careers, and several similar questions. Three weeks after the researchers’ visit to Marquette, the students were asked to complete an online survey to better understand the modules’ impact on the students.

Bottom-Line and High-Impact Module Results

Respondent Demographics

The population consisted of 19 students (the total population available) from the Marquette University NROTC program who were within one year of officer commissioning. Of these students, 74 percent (14) were male and 26 percent (5) were female and represented an average age of 21.3 years. The sample contained no one with significant prior military service.

The largest percentages of students were enrolled in the liberal arts and nursing programs: 42.1 percent (8) and 26.3 percent (5), respectively. The remaining students were majoring in engineering and business related fields: 15.8 percent (3) and 15.8-percent (3), respectively. Almost all respondents had completed two or more undergraduate English/expository writing courses. During the course of their secondary and university education, 68 percent (13) of the students claimed to have had previous exposure to clear-writing guidelines. However, only three had taken either a business or technical communication course. Finally, as part of their NROTC administrative duties, 63 percent (12) of the students had previously crafted military correspondence in the form of memoranda, fitness reports, letters of instruction, and the five-paragraph order.

Although 19 students were enrolled in the two online modules, several students experienced technical difficulties with their written submissions. Specifically, for bottom-line writing revision tasks two and three, either the Internet browser or the online tutorial itself timed-out. This resulted in seven students' revisions being deleted during the submission process. Four students later emailed their written submissions, which were included in the analysis. As a result of this technical difficulty, three fewer responses to bottom-line module tasks 2 and 3 were received than were anticipated.

Table 1 summarizes the student scores from both modules' online writing submissions. In the analysis, the median and mode were chosen as indicators of central tendency because of the relatively small sample size. In short, the median and mode were found to better represent the sample than did the mean, though the mean scores provided interesting data points.

Table 1: Module Revision Statistics

	Mean	Median	Mode
Bottom Line Module	4.56	5.00	5.00
High-Impact Module	2.88	3.00	3.00

Bottom Line Results

The scores from the bottom-line module conclusively show that these students are capable of comprehending and putting into practice the bottom-line organizing concepts. In fact, 100 percent of the students in the sample averaged a score of three or higher across all three revision tasks. As mentioned earlier, this score was determined the minimum required to demonstrate proficiency. The median score for the student sample, averaged across all tasks, was five, which is far above the threshold of three to demonstrate proficiency. In addition, the modal score of five (59 percent achieved an average score of five) demonstrated that the students mastered the bottom-line organizing skills. Finally, the mean of 4.56 adds support to this level of mastery.

Bottom-line organizing--putting the purpose of the communication "upfront" unless there are overriding reasons for doing so--is an essential workplace communication skill. The inability of junior officers to communicate the message's purpose quickly and effectively is a complaint commonly heard from senior officers. Furthermore, graduates of the MBA program--typically mid-grade officers--report that bottom-line organizing has been essential to their success in operational and staff positions. Consequently, the researchers were heartened that these students were able to quickly master this essential written communication skill.

High-Impact Results

Although the scores for the high-impact written submissions were significantly lower than the bottom-line scores (see Table 1), most students (71 percent) scored three or higher (three was the cut off score for mastery of the concepts) on their high-impact revision submission. The median and mode of three indicated that most students were able to apply the high-impact writing concepts to a document needing revision.

It is fairly easy to account for the differences in student performance between the bottom-line and high-impact modules. The bottom-line module focused on one fairly straightforward, albeit extremely important, concept: efficient document organization. Consequently, the bottom-line concepts were fairly straightforward, particularly when linked with how workers read on the job. In addition, there were fewer--namely three--bottom-line concepts to master than the six high-impact concepts.

The high-impact concepts were more complex. For example, many students have difficulty understanding differences in information processing between active and passive voice constructions, the value of subject-verb-object word order to facilitate skimming and quick information retention, and the impact that personal and organizational schema have on clear language choice. In addition, the high-impact concepts often run counter to the stylistic writing norms internalized over years of academic writing education. In short, students were asked to change a deeply ingrained habit about effective style. Finally, the high-impact module did not provide students the opportunity to apply each concept separately to sentences or a document passage needing revision before completing the large-scale revision task. That inability to test their understanding of, for example, use of the active voice by revising a short paragraph riddled with passive voice verbs undoubtedly affected their performance on the high-impact revision assessment. However, the module was deliberately streamlined and revision exercises kept to a minimum to determine if students could master basic on-the-job writing capabilities in a short time. The data, though, indicate that students needed practice implementing each high-impact concept before trying to effectively revise a complete document. That would add about 45-60 minutes to the high-impact module.

Interview Data Results

Semi-structured group interviews were conducted with most participants to determine their reaction toward the writing instruction and the two modules as well as their perceptions of academic and workplace writing. Each of two group interviews was made up of five to seven participants and lasted

approximately 60 minutes. Furthermore, the researchers had a number of informal conversations with the participants. Transcripts were then analyzed from the interviews to determine if there were any themes that resulted. Four themes emerged from the analysis:

1. students understood a number of the important differences between academic and workplace writing,
2. students felt after completing the modules better prepared and more confident in their ability to handle their future workplace writing assignments,
3. the Marquette University NROTC organization creates and perpetuates its own discourse standards that appear to be inefficient, and
4. students perceived that clear writing leads to success in initial workplace assignments.

Understanding of Differences between Academic and On-the-Job Writing

The interview data indicated students understood some of the differences between academic and workplace writing, and the differences they cited echoed those of researchers (e.g., Beaufort, 2000; Schreiber, 1993). For example, one student stated, “In academic writing, oftentimes you have a lot more space to write more, and in professional writing [...] you’ve got less space to write in.” In essence, the student recognized significant genre differences between academic and workplace writing. Another student perceptively stated, “In academic writing, you’re going to have full arguments where you’re going to have multiple points backing up each argument, whereas in professional writing, you [have] very few backups.” Although the student did not have a deep understanding *why* claims require different degrees of support in academic and workplace writing (e.g., the intertextuality of workplace discourse), he did recognize that degree of support for an argument was a distinguishing feature.

All students indicated that their writing was a product of their high school and undergraduate English and other expository writing courses. As a result of that imprinting, a student described her writing as “flowery and lengthy.” She said that the modules made clear that this kind of writing that has served her well in the academic community would be ineffective in the Navy workplace where efficiency and task completion within tight time constraints is paramount. Beaufort (2000) and Schreiber (1993) describe professional writing as a business exchange and a call to action between professionals. Like Beaufort and Schreiber, the students spoke of professional writing as job-specific and directed to readers with varying levels of interest in its content. Just as importantly, the students agreed that effective professional writing is concise and to the point, with its bottom line--its purpose--stated up front. One student stated, “[...] in professional writing, you [have to] get to the point right away.” Another said that professional writing is “clear, and precise [and] to the point.”

The brief instruction provided and the two interactive modules helped students crystallize differences between academic and work place writing. As part of their NROTC duties and training, these students had seen examples of a number of typical Navy and Marine Corps genres--e.g. fitness reports, five-paragraph orders, point papers, e-mails. Furthermore, they had noticed differences in form, organization, and style between these work place genres and the academic writing they were familiar with. However, these students didn’t have a language to describe these differences nor did they have

education and training in different organizational and stylistic strategies appropriate for the workplace environment. The instruction and modules provided both the language and the education, practice, and feedback that enabled them to more clearly articulate differences between workplace and academic writing.

Feelings of Being Better Prepared and More Confident for Upcoming Workplace Assignments

After completing the online modules, all students felt better prepared for their future professional writing assignments. Not surprisingly, this feeling of being better prepared led to increased confidence to meet workplace writing requirements. The most significant indication of this confidence was that several students discussed ways to improve future Marquette NROTC written communications at a staff meeting several hours after completing the online modules.

Three factors contributed to these perceptions of preparedness and confidence. First, these students recognized that within 9 to 12 months they will be a Navy ensigns tasked with writing assignments and expected to perform. In essence, the education was timely. Second, the modules contained scenarios and examples that were Navy junior officer specific. That gave the modules content validity. Finally, two of the researchers were mid-level Navy officers who would soon be going to jobs with significant responsibilities. These officer-researchers conducted the brief education segment, introduced the modules, gathered the demographic data, and conducted the group interviews. These officers had credibility because of their position in the Navy, their experience, and their expertise; consequently, the students viewed the module as being important to their future careers.

Marquette University NROTC Creates its Own Discourse Community

The third theme that emerged was that the Marquette University NROTC organization, commonly called the battalion, creates and perpetuates its own discourse standards. During group interviews, students were found to typically modify and issue previous versions of similar written documents throughout the battalion. The two officer-researchers, themselves former Marquette NROTC students, remembered producing documents the same way--by merely modifying past documents as dictated by the situation.

Research on the power and importance of discourse communities explains this phenomenon. Suchan and Dulek (1990) defined a discourse community as a socially constituted system that has evolved complex language standards that govern its members' decisions about document content, organization, design, style, and even syntax and usage. Blyler and Thralls (1993) described members of a discourse community as having similar mental models and shared beliefs about writing that they derive from the organization's culture, its guiding principles, and, most importantly, from its communication norms. These factors result in written standards that are reinforced through ongoing practice. Interestingly, most organizational members are unaware of the discourse norms that their community perpetuates; however, they are quick to alter communications or to judge them as lacking if they don't meet those norms.

The group interviews revealed that the NROTC students' writing practices *within the NROTC organization* were influenced by their organization's discourse norms. To put it another way, the students quickly shifted from academic to NROTC discourse norms. These students reported that they used examples for written correspondence from "pass down" files or directly from their senior officers. The students justified using these documents with comments ranging from "that's the way we were taught," to lack of training (if a similar document was successful in the past, there's a good chance this new document will be successful), to simply following orders.

The habit of using past correspondence as a model for current messages is what *The Navy Correspondence Manual*, the Navy's policy manual for effective written communication, describes as "the most stubborn of all obstacles" (Secretary of the Navy, 2005, p, 95). The interview data suggested that Marquette NROTC discourse norms might be imprinting students with inefficient writing habits. This possibility is particularly worrisome because these students are at a formative stage in their workplace writing careers. Of course, the crucial question is whether Marquette's written message norms are aligned with the mandates of *The Navy Correspondence Manual* and an often-cited reference guide to good Navy writing entitled, *The Naval Institute: The Guide to Naval Writing* (Shenk, 1997). When asked if they had ever referenced these two guides when drafting NROTC battalion messages, none of the 19 students participating in this study had done so. When asked if the NROTC battalion made either publication available for reference, only 2 of the 19 students said yes; the remaining 17 were not sure.

The Importance of Clear Writing to Career Success

The final theme that emerged was that students overwhelmingly agreed that their ability to write professionally would help them succeed and convey a perception of competence in their first assignments. During the group interviews, one student observed that her future senior officers might not know her from personal interaction or her day-to-day accomplishments in her first months at a new command. These senior officers are likely to create perceptions of her work competence and even her personality based entirely on the messages she creates, approves, or forwards up the chain-of-command for their signature. This student believed that the clarity and precision of the messages she sends to senior officers will create a perception of her that will affect their interactions when they begin working face-to-face. Another student observed, "We are what our paper says [...]; we can save time and face with senior officers by writing well the first time."

The modules, particularly the Navy-specific examples, helped these students focus on the importance and significance of their writing tasks. However, clear writing is not an absolute in the Navy dictated by policy guidance provided in the *Navy Correspondence Manual* and reinforced by feedback aligned with the manual's guidelines. From the researchers' 35 years of experience working with and in the Navy, it is evident that the *Correspondence Manual* guidelines often are not followed and feedback from students on effective writing is spotty and even counterproductive. Furthermore, the examples of various genres of naval messages in "passed down" files often perpetuate inefficient writing. To frame this issue from a more theoretical perspective, the various Navy discourse communities--aviation, surface warfare, submarine, contracting, supply, logistics, etc.--determine what constitutes "good" (i.e. clear) writing.

These freshly minted officers will face significant pressure to conform to their community's discourse norms for their writing to be viewed as effective. Consequently, some officers may face opposition when putting into practice the concepts and guidelines provided in the two modules. Ironically, they may be producing writing that senior officers will view as "abnormal." It will be up to these junior officers to make a case for the value of their "abnormal" discourse and the wisdom of their commanding officers to recognize the value of these junior officers' feedback.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that soon-to-be commissioned Marquette University NROTC students were able to adequately comprehend and put into practice clear writing concepts after only a one-half day education program. The data indicated that all students mastered the bottom-line organizing concepts; they all scored three or above on all three revisions, with 59% scoring five. The students demonstrated adequate mastery of the high-impact writing concepts; 71 percent scored three or higher on the revision. To improve mastery of these concepts, students need practice and feedback on each high-impact writing concept--e.g. use of active voice, effective document design, subject-verb-object word order--rather than only demonstrating that mastery in one revision. This change would add between 45 to 60 minutes to the module. Data revealed that the quick, highly focused, and streamlined instruction provided served as an important primer for the workplace communication students will soon be writing.

Just as importantly, the brief instruction prior to the modules and the module content affected student perception about what is clear workplace writing and its importance. Group interview data revealed that the one-half day session helped students better understand the differences between academic and workplace writing, enabled them to feel more confident and better prepared for professional writing tasks they soon will be required to complete, and increased their perception of the importance clear writing and its linkage with job performance. These perceptions will decrease the discontinuity and shock many ensigns experience when they transition from academic to workplace writing. Finally, several students commented that the instruction served as a timely, important "wake-up call" about what constitutes efficient workplace writing and a means to help them identify weaknesses in their own writing. In fact, all students recommended that this writing instruction be incorporated into their NROTC program.

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