Background Readings

REPORT WRITING

Writing and Speaking Skills Program

Revised 2008

HR
Leadership & Organizational Effectiveness

Background Readings

REPORT WRITING

Revised edition, 2008

Writing and Speaking Skills Program
Helping Bank staff and managers develop the skill to communicate effectively

HRSLO
The World Bank Group

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Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly.
Everything that can be said can be said clearly.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.

—Samuel Johnson

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PREFACE

These Background Readings, revised in 2008, were first prepared in 1998 as a supplement to Report Writing, a 20-hour course offered to professional staff at the World Bank/IFC/MIGA. This revised version is also intended to supplement the new distance-learning version of the course. The Readings were prepared by staff of the Writing and Speaking Skills Program with the dual aims of reinforcing the principles of good writing taught in the course and providing a quick reference on Bank style and editorial guidelines. They may also be used as a stand-alone reference.

All sections now contain new or updated information to make them consistent with changes in the Report Writing course and in the World Bank Group. Expanded information, in the final section in particular, provides writers with useful guidelines on World Bank style and the mechanics of writing. With these revisions, the Writing and Speaking Skills staff is confident that the Background Readings will provide Bank staff with the full range of tools they need today to communicate in a style that is simple, clear, logical, and consistent.

1.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING: DIALOGUE WITH THE READER

Order and simplification are the first steps toward the mastery of a subject.

—Thomas Mann

The most critical phase of the writing process occurs before the actual writing begins, when writers think through the task ahead, decide what to focus on, and outline their ideas. They may be tempted to skip or abbreviate this germination phase, believing that the content will define itself as they write, but they usually pay for it later by having to redraft a report that lacks focus and coherence.

This section describes a technique for stimulating the thinking/planning process by imagining a dialogue with the reader. It illustrates how that dialogue, expanded to a pyramid outline, can be used to organize and test ideas and drive the creative process. The section also looks at how the reading habits of managers shape the organization of Bank reports, and it describes the standard parts of those reports.

Planning the Report

The most useful aid you can give yourself in preparing to write a Bank report is a clear definition of the task at hand: what the purpose, main message, and scope will be; what points will be discussed; and how the information will be organized. Even the most complex writing project seems less daunting if it is broken into discrete parts, whose focus, hierarchy, and logical links have been clearly laid out before the writing begins.

Your job as the writer planning the report is to anticipate your readers' needs in reading it and make sure that your readers' expectations and your purpose are aligned. One approach to planning is to imagine that you, the writer, are having a dialogue with your intended readers. What questions will they have about your subject? How will you respond to those questions? Aligning that dialogue directly with your purpose in writing ensures that what you write fulfills your readers' expectations.

To start the dialogue, answer these four questions:

- What is the **purpose** of the report? (What do you expect to achieve in writing it? State the purpose using an action verb, such as to propose, to recommend, to describe.)

- Who is the **primary reader**? (Is there a specific reader or group of readers, or is the readership varied? How informed are those readers about the subject?)

- What is the **main question** your readers will have? (The question should flow directly from your purpose in writing. If the purpose has two parts, for example, to assess progress and suggest next steps, then the main question should have two parts as well—and it will be something along the lines of what progress have we made, and what are the next steps?)

- What is your **main message**? (Does it answer your readers' main question? Does it allow you scope for the content of the document? Again, if the purpose and main question have two parts, the main message will have two parts as well.)

When you keep a direct correlation between the purpose of the report, the readers' main question, and the answer to that question (main message), you ensure that the readers' needs drive your exploration of the subject. An example of how this process works is shown in Box 1.

Depending on your purpose in writing, the main message may state a position (thesis) or assert a fact (umbrella statement), but in either case continuing the dialogue with your readers is critical. A well-constructed main message

- reflects your purpose,
- answers the readers' main question in one or two sentences,
- sets the readers' expectations, and
- establishes the basis for additional questions and answers that will lay out the main lines of discussion for the report.

Box 1. Dialogue with the Reader

Purpose:	To summarize the current economic situation of Country X and outline what the country needs to do in the future
Primary Reader:	Consultative Group for Country X
Main Question:	What is Country X's situation (i.e., what has happened since the last CG and what needs to be done)?
Main Message:	Rapid changes have transformed Country X's economy since 2004, but the country still needs to generate and sustain faster export-oriented growth if all its citizens are to benefit.

Until you have a solidly crafted main message, you do not have the essential tool to take the next step: expanding the dialogue into an outline. Thus, in the early stages of planning, the wise writer takes time to consider carefully the main message. That message may shift slightly as the writer moves forward with planning; nevertheless, it is an essential starting point.

Outlining Ideas

An outline is the writer's equivalent of the artist's preliminary sketch. It allows you to try out different approaches, generate ideas, and examine logical relationships. Several tries may be necessary before you find one that works. The most useful outlines are those that leave you free to test ideas without undue concern for their sequence in the report, as the traditional vertical outline requires.

The pyramid outline shown in Figure 1 builds on the idea of a dialogue with the reader. The main message (the writer's answer to the readers' main question) forms the top level of the pyramid. The dialogue continues with a secondary level of questions that flow from the main message. These are answered with full sentences that may, in turn, generate additional levels of questions and answers. Carrying the dialogue to lower levels of the pyramid may not be necessary for all branches, but in a substantive report at least three levels of questions and answers are usually necessary. You can even extend the dialogue to the paragraph level if you find it helpful in fleshing out your thinking. Through this dialogue, the main points you want to cover in the report emerge on the pyramid. The rules for constructing a pyramid outline are given in Box 2.

Box 2. Rules for a Pyramid Outline

The concept of using the pyramid structure to organize ideas in writing originated with Barbara Minto in her pioneering book *The Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing.* She recognized that a single well-constructed message elaborated within a pyramidal structure could provide the organizing principle for any kind of report writing. The dialogue with the reader builds on that concept, following these core rules:

- Make sure that your main message covers all the ideas grouped below it for the entire document.
- At each level of the pyramid, make sure that every statement covers all the ideas below it.
- Questions are just as important as answers. Include both the reader's questions and the writer's answers at every level.
- Check that each level is consistent in terms of importance. For example, big-picture "why" ideas should usually appear on a higher level than the details of implementation.
- Look at the answers (mini-main messages) on each level to be sure that they are ordered in a logical way and are not just randomly placed.

The pyramid format offers important advantages over the traditional linear listing of topics that many of us were taught in school.

- Making a statement about each topic rather than simply naming it focuses and defines the topics and the writer's positions on them.
- The dialogue with the reader helps the writer stay focused on the reader's needs.

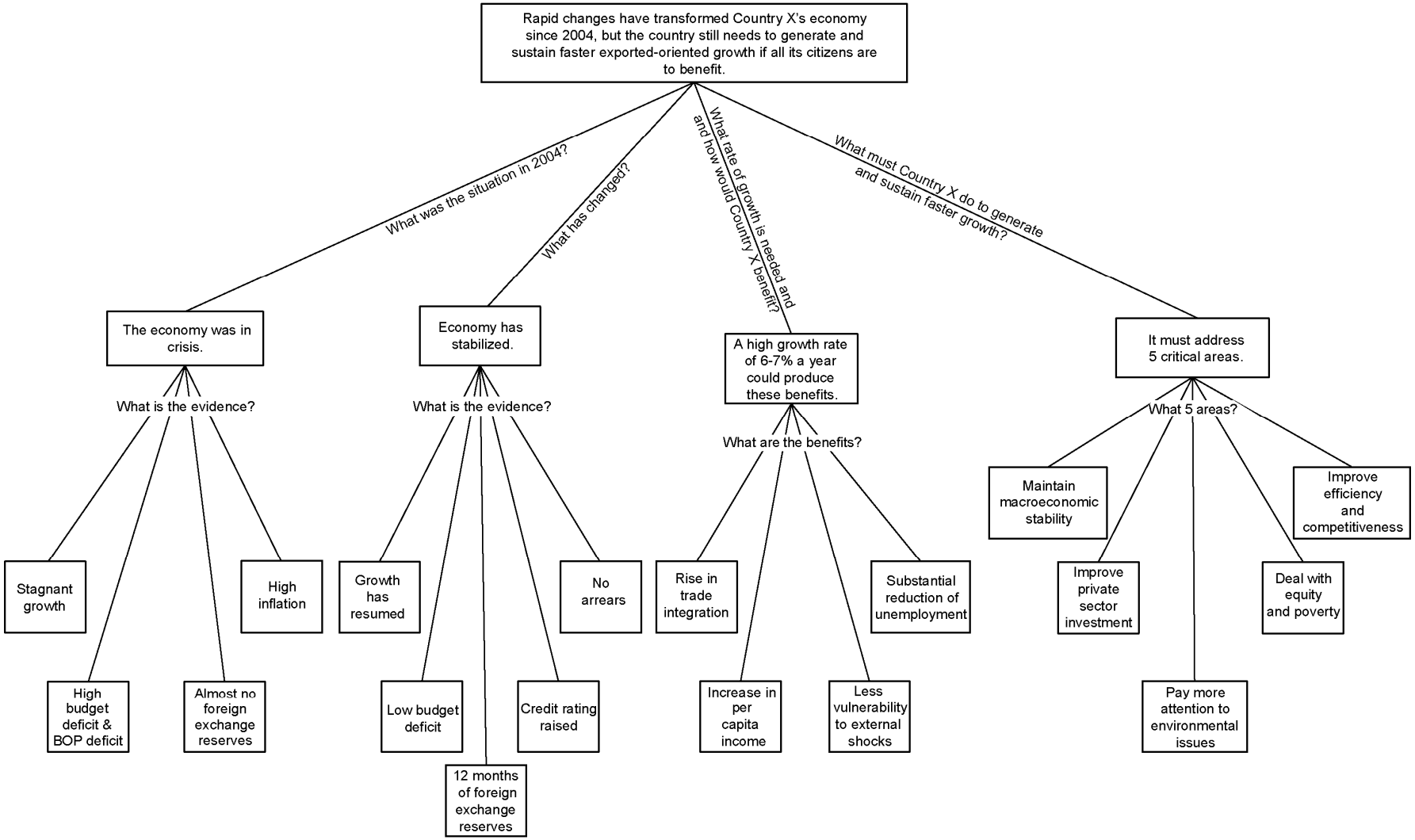
- Representing ideas horizontally rather than vertically makes gaps in logic and missing or overlapping information easier to spot.

- The format can be expanded and adapted to suit documents of any length. For example, with long, complex documents, such as a country economic memorandum, the writer may make a separate pyramid outline of each chapter, in addition to a general outline of the document as a whole.

- Precisely because the pyramid outline requires statements (not just topics), it can serve as a capsule summary of the writer's thinking for supervisors or collaborators on a writing project. Thus, the pyramid can be a very good way of ensuring that all have the same expectations and that any areas of disagreement are resolved in advance of writing.

In addition to these advantages, the pyramid outline provides the writer with a handy drafting tool: the mini-main messages (answers to the readers' secondary questions) can serve as headings or subheadings, and—if the pyramid is carried to lower levels—even topic sentences in the report itself.

Figure 1. Pyramid Outline



Parts of a Formal Report

The process of constructing a pyramid outline gives you, the writer, a head start on deciding how to present the information. The overall organization and the content have now been determined. The main parts of the discussion and their subdivisions are clear. What remains to be decided is what information will go where. Some types of Bank reports adhere to a predetermined format; others follow only general guidelines and leave the specifics up to you.

In deciding how to present your information, consider first the reading habits of managers. No one will read every word of your report, so you must make sure that the words your readers do see are the ones that matter most. Studies of corporate reading habits have found that all managers say they read the summary or executive summary, about half say they read the introduction and conclusions, few say they read the body, and very few, the appendix. Those who do read the body generally skim it. Well-written Bank reports are organized with these habits and the reader's main questions in mind. No matter how many parts your report contains, state the main messages and recommendations up front where managers are sure to see them.

The parts of formal Bank reports and the sequence in which they usually appear are described below. Note that rarely would a single report contain all of these parts.

Front Matter

Contents:	Lists the contents of the report in the sequence given below.
Foreword:	Usually an endorsement by someone other than the author.
Abstract:	A one-paragraph statement giving the purpose and scope of the report, methodology (if relevant), main findings or conclusions, and main recommendations. Used with technical papers, discussion papers, and country studies.
Preface:	The author's statement about the work, including reasons for undertaking it, permissions, and acknowledgments. May also include the purpose, scope, methodology, and road map if the work has no overall introduction.

Main Text

(Executive) Summary:	A review of the main points of the report, highlighting issues or problems, findings, and recommendations or actions. It should focus on information most important to the reader and not attempt to summarize the whole report. It should assume the reader will not read the full report.
Introduction:	Essential information the reader needs to know to read the body of the report. It must include a main message and may include context, purpose, scope, relevance to readers, methodology, and a road map (although rarely all of these), depending on the nature of the report. It may also summarize findings if the work is a research paper and does not contain a summary.
Overview:	A combination of introduction and summary used mainly in lengthy works such as the World Development Report.
Body:	Detailed discussion supporting the points, recommendations, and conclusions presented in the summary or overview.

Back Matter

Appendixes:	Material that is helpful but not essential to understanding the report, such as tables, related studies, technical explanations, and statistics. Must be self-contained, with an introduction and headings.
Endnotes:	Information that is clearly an aside and would interrupt the flow of the text.
References:	A list of every item cited in the text, boxes, notes, tables, and figures.
Bibliography:	A list that may include sources not cited in the text.
Glossary:	A definition of special terms (including acronyms and abbreviations) used in the text. Often included in the Front Matter instead of the Back.

2.

CONNECTING WITH THE READER

Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.

—Albert Einstein

The writer's foremost obligation to the reader is to satisfy the reader's basic needs. Native English readers, whether they are aware of it or not, expect the writer to do three things: provide a context for the document, indicate the hierarchy of the information, and establish expectations and fulfill them. By satisfying these needs, the writer connects with the reader and maintains that connection for the length of the document.

The reader's needs and the ways that writers respond to them are not the same across cultures, however, as the two readings in this section make clear. The first, adapted from the Congressional Budget Office style guide, explains the kinds of structural markers English writers commonly use to guide their readers and looks at the standard components of introductions to Bank reports.

The second reading, by Laura Miller of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia (used by permission), examines from an academic perspective how the writer-reader relationship plays out in other cultures. It looks at the patterns of discourse in the four major language groups most widely represented among Bank readers and writers. English is not included since English patterns are already well covered elsewhere in the Readings, nor are related Germanic languages (the group to which English belongs).

This Reading has lessons for all Bank writers, whatever their language background. It points out that there is no "normal way" of presenting the logic of a discussion; the norm varies with the culture—a point worth keeping in mind when working with team members from diverse cultures. It also points out how discourse patterns carried over from a writer's native culture may affect his or her ability to connect with readers when writing in English.

A Structure That Guides the Reader

A well-conceived structure provides a context for your ideas and puts the main ideas where readers are sure to see them. It follows a sequence and format that highlight those ideas and indicate their hierarchy. It also signals to the reader how the writing is organized and what to expect. Creating this structure is your first, most important, and often most difficult job as a writer. Observing two principles can make that job easier:

- The bottom line (conclusion or main message) belongs at the top as well as at the bottom.
- Guideposts (markers) must be clear and properly placed so that readers know exactly where the narrative is going.

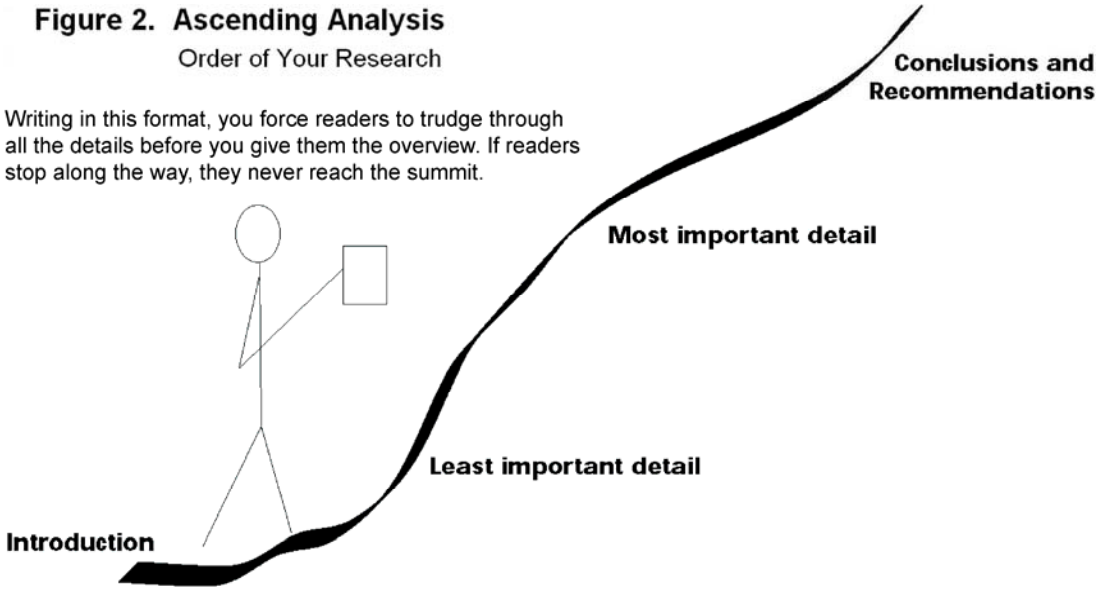
Putting the Bottom Line at the Top

If a study suggests a general conclusion (main message) about some broad concept or specific proposal, the reader should encounter that conclusion at the outset. If the writer is not clearly focused on the bottom line, how can the reader expect to be? Discovering the conclusion may be the last step in an analyst's work before drafting, but it must be the first thing written in a manuscript.

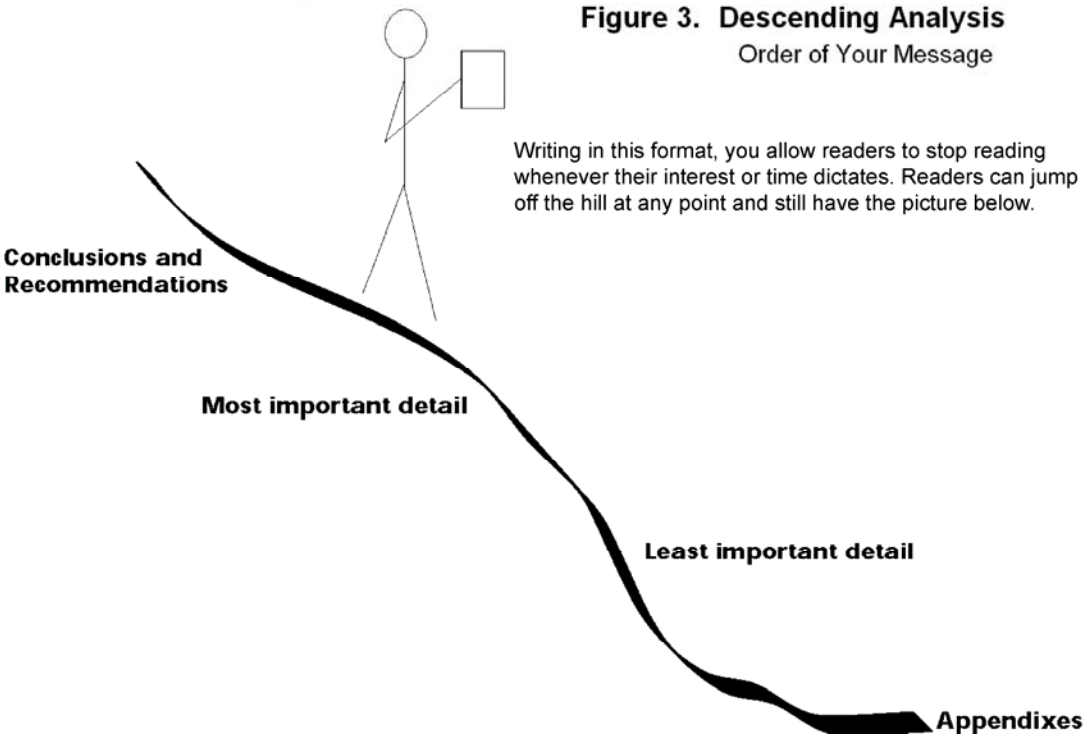
It is often tempting for experts to write in the same order in which they analyze. Starting at the beginning, they walk the reader step by step through the analytic process, displaying all their data in the order in which they used, discovered, or derived them. At the end of the process, they finally report what the analysis showed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ascending Analysis

Order of Your Research



At first glance, this may appear to be a logical process. The problem is that readers want to know where they are going to come out both before they set forth and while they proceed. For that reason, a well-organized piece focuses first on what was learned and then on how it was learned (Figure 3).



The organizing principle of putting the bottom line at the top applies throughout a piece of writing. The summary or executive summary states the overall main message set against a contextual background. Each chapter introduces the main topic or states the mini-message to be discussed. Paragraphs within the chapter begin with topic sentences that alert readers to the relevance of what follows in the paragraph.

Giving Guideposts Along the Way

Readers rely on guideposts, both visual and textual, to focus their reading and understand how a report is organized. Among the most useful guideposts that you can provide your readers are headings and subheadings, introductions (both overall and for sections), road maps, paragraphs, and topic sentences, as well as purely visual aids, such as boldface type, boxes, and displayed lists.

Headings and Subheadings

Headings and subheadings assign priorities to the importance of ideas, graphically showing the reader their relationship and progression. They lay out the structure of a piece of writing and make clear how the ideas fit together. The heading tells readers

the topic of a section; subordinate headings highlight the ideas that support or amplify that topic. All headings should use key words that are repeated in the text. Often the headings can be taken from the main divisions of your pyramid outline.

In addition to guiding readers through the text, headings—often along with subheadings—make up the table of contents on which readers depend to locate information in the text. To be useful in a table of contents, all chapter titles and internal headings should be meaningful—not necessarily long, but made up of substantive words that announce or suggest the topics of the narrative to follow.

Headings and subheadings can also serve as drafting tools to help you, the writer, prioritize and focus large volumes of information. By using headings to state the main ideas from the pyramid outline, you may find it easier to pull together similar sections and see relationships as the drafting progresses. Even before you finalize the headings for the complete report, these draft forms can be useful, time-saving tools in analyzing information and writing up the results of that analysis.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs articulate the page visually by showing where one topic ends and another begins. In a page of prose unbroken by paragraphs, everything looks uniform and nothing particularly interesting or significant. The reader is left to puzzle out where topics begin, end, and shift. All readers welcome short, well-defined paragraphs that clarify the logic of the argument.

Topic Sentences

The first sentence of a paragraph should make clear what topic the paragraph will treat by making a summary statement about it. The topic sentence is essential to establish the details that follow. A good topic sentence arouses the reader's interest promptly and draws him or her into the discussion. Introducing a paragraph with a question is one good way to do both. For example, instead of writing this: *In view of the unpredictability of many variables, it is difficult to estimate the size of the expenditure the proposed plan could involve,* you could write: *What might the plan cost?*

Road Maps

Road maps are used to explain the structure of a longer or more complex piece of writing when the reader may need additional guidance. When a road map is needed, it typically appears at the end of the introduction. It briefly describes what sections the report contains and gives a rationale for the structure, not merely a repeat of the table of contents.

Sometimes mini-maps are needed as well when a single chapter or section has subdivisions and the reader needs to know what to expect. In that case, the mini-map is placed in a paragraph introducing the subdivided section. Writers should avoid back-to-back headings without any text between them.

The key words used in road maps should be the same as those used in the headings and the table of contents. Usually, these words are derived from the pyramid outline. They should also be repeated in topic sentences to reinforce their importance as guideposts to the reader.

Introductions

The introduction provides a context and framework that prepare readers to focus on your purpose and main message as they read your report. Generally, the introduction begins with information the reader is already familiar with and acts as a funnel, narrowing the focus as it draws the reader to the main message. The length and components of an introduction will vary depending on how much context is needed to establish common ground with the reader. For short documents such as memos, a few sentences stating the purpose and main message may suffice. For book-length reports, the introduction may be an entire section. If you have done a pyramid outline, you already know the scope of your report and the components you need to include in the introduction. The following are possible components of introductions to World Bank reports:

Context:	Gives your reader just enough background knowledge about the subject to establish a point of common understanding.
Relevance to readers:	Highlights why this report will be important to the reader, the institution, or the client.
Scope:	Explains what the report includes and what it deliberately omits.
Purpose:	Establishes what the writer wants to achieve with the report.
Methodology:	Explains how the study or review was carried out. If included, this should be very brief. Often reports have separate sections to explain the methodology in detail.
Summary of findings:	Briefly states the main points. If used, it often provides the theoretical or factual basis for the main message.
Main message:	Answers the readers' main question. It states the writer's thesis or provides an overview of key topics in the form of an umbrella statement.
Road map:	Reveals the structure of the report and explains how the report is organized. Use it only if you think your readers will need extra guidance on the structure or if it is required by your work unit for a particular type of report. If included it should be brief and not merely repeat the table of contents; instead, it should give some rationale for the structure.

Not all of these components will go in every introduction, nor will they necessarily follow this order. The exception is the road map, which, if used, always goes last.

Since the main message in a long introduction may appear somewhere other than in the first paragraph, the writer can help the reader by marking it—that is, by placing the main message at the beginning or end of a paragraph rather than in mid-paragraph where it might be missed. Introductory phrases such as “the key message is…” or “our research shows…” also help to identify the main message to the reader.

Language Background and Writing in English

Writing in any language involves more than a working knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. In addition, there are thought connections and organization patterns that extend beyond sentences and go deeper than the surface meaning of sentences alone. As any person who has command of more than one language knows, these larger communication patterns, or elements of discourse, are not the same in every language. The field of contrastive rhetoric analyzes these elements and, in doing so, has identified the discourse patterns underlying the main world language groups.

Contrastive rhetoric scholars posit the idea that writers tend to follow discourse patterns "embedded" in their own language and culture and that when writers learn an additional language, they run the risk of carrying over the embedded patterns of their first language into the new one. As a result, communication problems are inevitable for people writing in a language that is not their own. Their writing may be difficult for native speakers of the new language to read because it does not meet the subconscious discourse expectations of that group of native speakers.

Finding ways to overcome these problems is not easy. Being immersed in the target language and its culture for an extended period is always helpful but sometimes not enough. Another approach is to look at the common discourse patterns and strategies of a writer's native language and see if those patterns appear in his or her writing in English. If they do, the writer can work to more consciously use the discourse patterns of written English instead.

The following discussion draws on the work of scholars to look at the discourse patterns of four major language groups. Not every writer in a specific language group writes in exactly the same way, so the generalizations made here are just that—generalizations. They are presented as diagnostic tools for looking at the discourse structure of nonnative English writing.

Asian Discourse

Asian writers tend to use an inductive or "quasi-inductive" pattern of idea development, in which there is a "delayed introduction of purpose" (Hinds, 1990). Main ideas are not strongly stated at the outset but are presented later in the paper in an indirect fashion. Details are not overtly connected to the main idea. The purpose of this technique is to get "readers to think for themselves, to consider the observations made, and to draw their own conclusions. The task of the writer, then, is not necessarily to convince, although it is clear that such authors have their own opinions. Rather, the task is to stimulate the reader into contemplating the issue or issues that might not have been previously considered" (Hinds, 1990).

This means that Asian discourse, in general, requires more effort on the reader's part than English does. English writers assume primary responsibility for creating meaning, spelling out for the reader the main ideas and details and the connections between them. In contrast, Asian writers present details without explaining the connections; the writer shepherds the reader toward a main idea, but the responsibility of actually arriving at it is left up to the reader.

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean discourse patterns all have their roots in traditional four-part models, which are similar in style. The first part prepares the reader for the topic, the second develops it, the third introduces a seemingly unrelated topic, and the fourth concludes. Studies have shown that up to 50 percent of Chinese students studying English use this pattern in their English compositions (Connor, 1996). Similarly, other research has shown that Japanese students writing in English tend to follow the inductive (specific to general) pattern of development, putting the main idea at the end (Kobayashi, 1984). Korean students, on the other hand, are now taught to use the Western-style deductive pattern (main idea to specific detail) in writing; however, they differ in their application of it. They will use the traditional units of a Western-style essay, even presenting a thesis in the introduction, but that thesis often turns out to be a "hint" or suggestion that is only confirmed at the conclusion. In other words, they employ a pattern of "induction within deduction."

In addition to following an inductive style, Asian discourse patterns often employ abstract vocabulary that gives them an official or "artistic" sound; this approach can create difficulty for English readers, who are used to direct, concise vocabulary, especially in nonfiction writing. These readers often "give up" before they get to the writer's main idea at the end of the inductive discourse. They will think they know what the writer is talking about but not be sure. Native speakers of English find Asian discourse styles more like poetry or literature than nonfiction prose.

Romance Discourse

Linguists have long classed the Latin-based languages (French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish) together in generalizing about their rhetorical patterns. The distinguishing feature of Romance discourse, in contrast to English, is digression. Native readers in these languages expect to find embellishment of ideas that are tangential to the main line of explanation. These readers know the writer will eventually get back to the main topic, so what seems like a sidetrack to an English reader is not a distraction to a Romance language reader. An additional feature of Romance discourse is the use of broad, philosophical introductions, especially in formal writing.

French

Students are taught a specific essay form in French schools and in many francophone African schools. This five-part pattern includes an introduction, thesis, antithesis, synthesis, and conclusion (Hyman, 2007; askoxford.com, 2007). Native English

readers expect to find a succinct introduction that includes a thesis at the start of a paper. French students are taught to use the introduction to raise questions or define terms and suggest the form the argument will take in the body, where the thesis itself is presented. To native English readers, the beginning of such an essay seems meandering and unfocused. English readers expect to find a succinct introduction that includes a thesis at the start of the paper. In addition, the French inclusion of both an antithesis and synthesis section at the end of the body often strikes native English readers as an unnecessary digression. The extended introduction and additional antithesis and synthesis sections that French writers often include when writing in English test English readers' focusing skills since these readers expect direct, clear statements of main ideas early in a text and a linear thought progression without "sidebars" that do not move the main argument directly forward.

Spanish

English texts written by Spanish writers also have a flavor of digression to native English readers. In Spanish writing, formality and elaboration are typical, and topics develop through digressions, with "proof or specific examples passed over in favor of generalization" (Reid, 1984). In addition, Spanish writers tend to favor "elaborate and ornate language" and to prefer long sentences composed with complex clauses. Furthermore, they often write run-on sentences (Connor, 1996). In contrast, native English writers tend to use "simple vocabulary, few synonyms, and no flowery language" (Montaño-Harmon, 1991). As a result, when Spanish speakers write in English, their texts can seem elaborate and unfocused to native English readers.

Slavic Discourse

Writing in this language group (Czech, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian) shows some similarity to that in the Romance language group in that Slavic writers also include more digression in their texts than native English writers do. This may take the form of a discussion of a seemingly unrelated or unimportant topic in relation to the thesis, but the reader's focus is usually drawn back to the main argument near the end of the text.

In addition to being less linear than English writing, Slavic writing relies less on transition words and phrases and on formatting markers (such as paragraph breaks and subheads) that signal to the reader the structure of the text—all staples of English writing (Petric, 2005). Therefore, to native English readers Slavic writing seems less organized than English writing.

Another characteristic of Slavic writing is that, like Chinese writing, it places more responsibility on the reader than English writing does. The writer gives details but does not need to explain how the details support the main idea; instead, the reader is expected to figure this out (Petric, 2005). The presentation of purpose and thesis are delayed compared to English writing. In addition, writers in this group prefer elaborate wording

and sentence structure as a means to demonstrate their mastery of both vocabulary and style (Petric, 2005). These features all require extra effort on the reader's part.

Semitic Discourse

Writers in this group (Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew) tend to use a series of coordinated parallel forms, in contrast to English, which favors subordinating one idea to another. For example, an Arabic writer would be inclined to write, "The man was here, and he had a laptop, and the laptop's hard drive crashed, and the man took the laptop to a shop to be repaired"; an English writer would write, "The man was here with a laptop, but he took it to the repair shop after the hard drive failed." Turning two of the independent clauses into dependent elements makes the sentence feel smoother to a native English writer. Researchers have found that when Arabic writers write in English, they use a significantly higher number of coordinated sentences than writers whose first language is English (Ostler, 1987).

Another characteristic of Semitic discourse is repetition. This can be in the form of paraphrasing content on the idea level or on a smaller scale through the use of specific synonyms and hyponyms (class/subclass relationships; falcon is a hyponym of bird). To native English readers, this writing style seems to stay on a surface level; it does not go into a deeper analysis.

The heavy use of coordination and repetition in Semitic languages is often attributed to their strong oral traditions. In oral communication, keeping your message simple and clear makes sense. It is difficult to follow a train of thought if you constantly have to attend to layers of explanation and their connection to a more general idea. It follows that languages with strong oral traditions favor coordinate structures. Likewise, the use of repetition is an effective oral communication device as it ensures that your audience understands your ideas.

The influence of oral tradition can also be seen in another characteristic of Semitic writing: attention to the writer's relation to the reader. Arabic writers often start essays with broad, sweeping information about their place within their families and societies, including references to religion. Attention to the social interaction between people is important within this discourse and often includes stylistic features that honor the reader's position.

Implications for Writing in English

Writers are often unaware that they use a rhetorical style characteristic of their first language; they write that way because they have been taught to write that way either through direct instruction or by absorbing it from reading and communicating in their native language. The fact that writers use different discourse styles in writing is not negative; different approaches are often helpful when explaining complex ideas.

However, international writers would benefit from becoming aware of the discourse patterns used in their native language and using that awareness to reduce the risk of following those patterns when writing in English.

What international writers need to pay attention to most is making their writing accessible to their audiences. If the primary audience for a text is native English readers—or bilingual readers accustomed to working in English—writers should adjust their discourse pattern so that it matches what their readers expect. This means using a direct line of explanation that overtly connects ideas as it moves from a general statement of the main idea or purpose to concrete details that support it.

—by Laura L. Miller, George Mason University
Used by permission.

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3.

DRAFTING

"Begin at the beginning," the king said gravely,
"and go on till you come to the end; then stop."

—Lewis Carroll

Writing coherent paragraphs, each of which advances the discussion in a logical progression, is key to good drafting. This section focuses on the structure of paragraphs and on devices that unify a paragraph and lead the reader from one paragraph to the next. The first reading lays out basic guidelines for writing tight, well-focused paragraphs. It is taken from a directive on the drafting of IMF staff reports written by Michael Deppler when he was Director of the European I Department at the International Monetary Fund. The second piece, drawing on sample paragraphs from Bank publications, examines a variety of rhetorical devices used to aid coherence, move from one idea to another, and guide the reader through the text.

Elements of Structure

Every paragraph should have a point that is clear and obvious to the reader. Note the use of the singular: a paragraph should have a point, not several. Thus, if one wants to say that wage claims are up but the consumer price index is decelerating, the point of the paragraph should be that inflation prospects are mixed or uncertain or something along this line. More fundamentally, writers must (for the sake of their readers) be clear on the key thought each paragraph is intended to convey. If the author cannot, at the time of writing, formulate a one-sentence answer to the "what is the point" question, the task confronting the readers escalates from challenging to well nigh impossible as they make their way through a thicket of incidental material that is, at worst, irrelevant and, at best, not treated in a sufficiently subordinate fashion. The only way out of these problems is to be very deliberate about what the point of the paragraph is. Only then does it become clear what does and does not belong.

Reference to proper subordination and, more generally, to apt prioritizing prompts a digression into a frequent source of frustration between authors and reviewers. Authors often respond to the charge that they have neglected such and so with a disguisedly righteous "What do you mean? See, there is a sentence here and another one there precisely on such and so." In most cases, this is to miss the point. The fact that something is said is not proof that it is said tellingly. Indeed, the fact that a reader who presumably read the paper with more care than can be expected of Directors missed the point is prima facie evidence that it is not being said tellingly. The more appropriate lesson to draw is either that there is a difference of view on what is important or, more likely, that the author needs to work on paragraph development.

Use the topic sentence approach to paragraph development. While unified paragraphs can be achieved in any number of ways, anyone who has not mastered English exposition would be well advised to follow this approach. The point of the paragraph is formulated as a simple declarative sentence and, except for any linking material to the preceding paragraph, placed at the very beginning of the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph then provides the supports (possibly including the defense against counterarguments) justifying the initial assertion. This type of paragraph development is foreign to most people. Indeed, it is a way of writing that differs rather sharply from the inductive reasoning that seems to "come naturally" to many. It is particularly foreign to many non-Anglo-Saxon cultures wherein it would be viewed as the antithesis of good writing. The approach has, however, a number of major advantages: it is an excellent discipline for the writer, who can hardly fail to make his or her point clear with this approach; it makes life easy for the readers; and it virtually guarantees that the readers cannot miss the point or mistake the basic line of argumentation—even if they just skim the paper, which will be the case for many.

Each paragraph should represent an important step forward in the presentation. That is, instead of making a series of separate paragraphs on lesser points, the material needs to be pulled together and summarized under larger, more substantive points that become the themes of meaningful paragraphs. Such packaging of the information makes it much easier for readers to keep track of the argumentation and of the thought the author is trying to convey.

Summarizing statements should insofar as practicable have an analytical content, particularly when viewed in the context of the broader logical development. For instance, the key thoughts in a background section might be: *demand picked up significantly . . .*; *supply responses were muted, however . . .*; *progress on inflation became patchy . . .*; *monetary conditions tightened*. Such a development makes an analytically coherent whole. Careful readers will check the analytics of the argument regardless, and it will make life easier and the paper more readily persuasive if the analytical structure is spelled out for them. Moreover, it will make the paper inherently more interesting.

Summarizing statements should be nontechnical. They should be understandable to a non-economist. The supporting material within the paragraph, by contrast, should insofar as possible focus on the "why" rather than the "what" aspects of the main assertion. Such an emphasis on explanation rather than description is what lies behind many of the calls for more analytical papers.

Finally, writers who have mastered English exposition—who write smoothly flowing prose and well-unified paragraphs—must resist exhibiting their skill. The result is too often verbosity, arcane word choice, backhandedness, and indirection in exposition. None of this makes for good report writing, which requires brevity and directness.

Excerpted from "Some Considerations on the Drafting of Staff Reports"
—by Michael Deppler, International Monetary Fund

Devices for Writing Coherent Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the main organizational unit in writing. A paragraph groups information visually and logically so that readers can readily follow the ideas discussed. Its purpose is to organize a group of sentences around a single main idea. There is no ideal length for a paragraph; it should be whatever length is most effective in supporting the idea. A coherent paragraph uses three main techniques to guide the reader:

- It focuses on a single point or idea that is expressed as a mini-main message in a topic sentence. The other sentences work together to support that idea.
- It follows a recognizable pattern that reveals the logical arrangement of the information. The choice of pattern depends on the writer's intentions.
- It uses transition techniques and connecting words and phrases to make the logical pattern clear. In this way, it alerts the reader to the relationship between sentences within the paragraph and between one paragraph and the next.

Writers use a variety of devices to aid coherence, but none is more important than the topic sentence, which typically is the first sentence of the paragraph. Topic sentences serve two main functions:

- They predict what information is going to be included in the paragraph.
- They establish the relevance of the paragraph to the preceding text. They do this in two ways: by relating the new information logically or sequentially to what has come before and by continuing the "story line" of the document as the new information is set in the context of the old.

A topic sentence that performs both these functions well is an essential tool for readers who speed read or skim documents. Even if they read only the topic sentences, they will still be able to follow the story line and get the main message of each paragraph.

Topic sentences and other devices that aid coherence are illustrated in the following examples from World Bank publications.

A Single Point

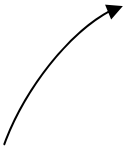
Typically, a paragraph begins with a topic sentence that states the main point and is followed by supporting statements that discuss or illustrate the point.

> Higher education, like secondary education, is highly compartmentalized and rigid. Students apply to only one faculty at only one institution—with no chance of multiple applications since all examinations are given on the same

day—and their choice of faculty is completely constrained by their secondary school curriculum. If they are rejected, they must wait a year to reapply. Students also face strong practical pressures to enroll in institutions near their homes. Once they embark on a program, shifting to another program, even within the same institution, is difficult, and they may not transfer to another institution without going through the whole admission process again and starting from the beginning in the new institution.

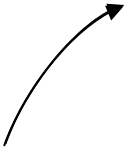
Putting the topic sentence at the beginning is by far the most widely used pattern—and with good reason, since that is where readers expect to find the main point. But other patterns, used sparingly, can add variety to a piece of writing. For example:

1. Begin by asking a question about the main point, which the supporting sentences then answer.

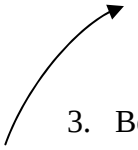


Given the range of support that international relief agencies can provide, what role does the World Bank play in responding to major natural disasters? The Bank has focused its response on reconstruction and long-term development, areas in which it has a comparative advantage. It has assumed a major role as lead donor, trusted adviser, and coordinator of reconstruction in global disasters. In the past two decades, emergency-related lending through more than 500 projects and their components constituted some 10 percent of total Bank lending. Bank support generally comprises a mix of interventions….

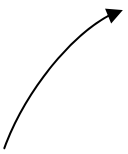
2. Begin with a topic sentence and conclude with a sentence that reaffirms or comments on it.



A flat or a means-tested pension or a minimum pension guarantee to a mandatory saving plan is the simplest and least costly way of providing a minimum level of security to all. For high-income countries, flat benefits could be universal and financed from general revenues. For lower-income countries, benefits could be tied to years of service in covered employment and financed through payroll taxes. Countries with significant flat or means-tested components to their public pension plans spend less than other countries on old-age security, and this spending is better targeted toward the poverty alleviation goal.



3. Begin with a topic sentence followed by a series of items of equal weight that support the point it makes. (In the example below, two series are used, corresponding to the two kinds of changes mentioned in the topic sentence. The writer could have written this as a solid paragraph but chose, instead, to display each series as a list to give it greater prominence. In either case, the series serves to explain the topic sentence.)



Since the revolution, a number of changes have been made in the system of social insurance and social assistance, and others are pending in draft legislation. The changes already enacted include the following:

a) creation of an independent state social insurance fund, implying a separation of revenues;
b) an increase in the payroll tax rate for contributions to this fund;

c) a temporary decrease in the retirement age and expansion of eligibility for early retirement; and
d) expansion of maternity benefits.

The pending legislation would streamline family benefits and widen eligibility. The proposed changes include the following:

a) expanding eligibility to all households regardless of where the parents work;
b) simplifying the structure; and
c) increasing benefits on average.

Clear, Logical Connections

The inherent logic connecting the ideas in a paragraph usually follows a basic pattern, such as general statement and illustration, question and answer, cause and effect, problem and solution, or chronological sequence. Since readers are generally familiar with these patterns, simple markers are all that is needed to indicate which pattern applies. Most writers are well aware of the role that conjunctions and connector words play in guiding the reader, but they are usually less aware of other types of markers that help clarify logical connections in the reader's mind. These markers include:

- enumerating items in a series and telling readers in advance how many there will be.
- using labeling words for series (several factors, three variables).
- repeating key words.
- using parallelism to highlight parallel ideas.
- using a PRONOUN or DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVE that refers clearly to a noun in the preceding sentence.
- using **connector words** and **phrases** to link or subordinate ideas

Note how the markers highlighted in the paragraph below add clarity and coherence.

Two broad approaches to land reform could be considered for Nepal, the first based on confiscation and compensation programs and the second based on tenancy reform complemented by market incentives. The experiences of South Korea and Taiwan Province of China show that confiscation and compensation programs can be very effective, especially if the form and amount of compensation are appropriate and ensure consensus. **As an alternative**, the government could address the inefficiencies generated by the size of landholdings by introducing tenancy reforms and market incentives. THIS approach would entail significant changes to the present system of tenancy rights and establish new, lower land

ceilings. IT would **also** give landholders a period of time to reduce their holdings through the direct sale of land to tenants and landless laborers. Concessional financing for THESE purchases would be provided by the government. Complete and accurate land records would be essential to EITHER approach. **Therefore**, the Nepalese government would have to assemble a national database of landholdings before embarking on land reform.

Transitions Between Paragraphs

Many of the techniques writers use to guide readers through a paragraph can also serve to connect one paragraph to the next; for example, enumerative and time words (*first, finally, in the interim, in the 1990s*); contrastive expressions (*conversely, on the other hand*); and summarizing words (*in short, thus, in conclusion*). But such brief connectors are not always enough to establish a logical transition that supports the story line between paragraphs. Below are examples of other transition devices.

1. Begin a paragraph with a subordinate clause or phrase that refers to the discussion in the preceding paragraph; then, in the main clause, introduce the new point for discussion. In effect, the introductory element establishes the context for, or relevance of, the new information.

> Personal savings schemes are probably preferable to occupational plans for the funded pillar, except for countries that already have substantial coverage under well-functioning, employer-sponsored schemes. A privately managed mandatory personal saving scheme was pioneered in Chile and is now being incorporated into new systems in other Latin American countries.
>
> Despite the advantages of privately managed, mandatory personal savings schemes, governments should not rush to establish one. Rather, they need to assess carefully market and regulatory capacities before deciding to go ahead. A banking system, rudimentary stock and bond markets, and the capacity to develop these further in response to demand from pension funds are essential preconditions.

2. End a paragraph with a question that sets up the discussion in the next paragraph, or use a heading to pose the question.

> The cultures of subgroups can differ with respect to the status and roles accorded to women. Where women are secluded or expected to work long hours performing domestic chores or agricultural labors, cultural beliefs and norms limit girls' educational opportunities. Girls face special cultural barriers associated with their roles in the home and as future wives. As a result, their social exclusion has severe consequences for girls' education and will require different, more tailored policies to remedy them. The degree and nature of exclusion dictates the approach and scope of interventions; The need for multiple efforts becomes apparent when we ask a simple question: How many girls are excluded?

Although no formal government estimates are available, data from various other sources reveal a staggering finding: nearly three-quarters of girls who do not go to school come from groups that practice exclusion.

3. End a paragraph with a sentence that undermines the main point and prepares the reader for a counterargument in the next paragraph.

Alarmed by the rapid rate of fertility decline, President Ceausescu issued Decree 770 of 1966, which declared abortion and family planning illegal, ordered the immediate cessation of abortions, and prescribed severe penalties on those performing and receiving abortions or any other form of family planning. Women were to be checked every three months for their pregnancy status and to be sure they were not using any form of birth control, and monetary incentives in the form of family allowances were established to reward high fertility. The results were immediate and dramatic. The crude birth rate shot up from 14.3 to 27.4 between 1966 and 1967, the annual rate of natural population increase rose from 0.6 to 1.8 percent, and the total fertility rate increased from 1.9 to 3.7 children per woman. Such a rapid increase was historically unprecedented. But there was an unanticipated and tragic negative side to this apparent policy "success."

As a result of Romania's population policy, an illegal abortion industry sprang up. Following the spectacular rise in fertility in 1967, women turned to any means they could find, including a very large number of self-induced abortions, to control their fertility. Consequently, in 1967 the birth rate began a steady decline, which has persisted to the present. In 1965, the last full year in which abortion was legal, there were 1.2 million abortions in Romania—5 for every live birth.

4. Begin a new paragraph that poses a series of questions to set up the discussion in subsequent paragraphs. In effect, the whole paragraph acts as a transition.

Whatever metric is used, girls' school attendance, enrollment, and completion rates have increased substantially in the past 45 years. As schooling improves across the globe, girls benefit disproportionately. The trend is clear: children increasingly go to school, and girls are entering school at a faster rate than boys.

The era of ignoring girls' education appears to be past. But why has there been so much progress? Can it continue? How much more is needed? Identifying the factors behind the recent progress in education is important because progress has been uneven, both within and across countries, and continued progress cannot be assured.

4.

REVISING

I have made this letter longer than usual because I lack the time to make it short.

—Blaise Pascal

There is no such thing as good writing—only good rewriting.

—Anonymous

When writers say they are revising, they generally use the term in the broadest sense to mean any changes they make in their text between the first and final drafts. Editors, by contrast, distinguish different levels, from wholesale rewriting or substantive editing to the final proofreading, and they treat those levels differently. Since writers at the World Bank are responsible for all levels of revision, even if the document will go to a reviewer or editor, common sense suggests that writers take some tips from editors on how to handle the revision process. The most important tip, whether you are revising your own work or editing someone else's is this: anticipate the response of the reader or reviewer, particularly regarding the content, organization, and clarity of the document.

This section examines the writer's dual role as creator and critic of the text and looks at the purpose and nature of revision. Drawing on the observations of longtime Bank writers Chris Parel and Bruce Fitzgerald, it points out common pitfalls in institutional writing and the reasons Bank writers stumble into them. It suggests how you can better manage the switch from writing to revising. It also provides a checklist of specific points you should focus on at different levels in the revision process and suggests editorial techniques to help you review, revise, and proofread your writing.

Pitfalls of Bank Writing

The pitfalls of institutional writing are legendary, and World Bank writing is no exception. If anything, Bank writers have even more pitfalls than usual to contend with since many are writing in a language not their own for readers who are also not native to it. Often the result is long-winded prose filled with jargon, hedge words, unnecessary elaboration, and verbs whose action is buried in abstract nouns. Add strings of prepositional phrases and you get sentences like this: The main element of explanation is that in the context of budget constraints the regional budget allocation has mainly been for funding the increasing cost of existing project supervision. Translation: Owing to fiscal constraints, the regional budget has mainly been allocated to supervising current projects.

Why do we write this way? One reason is the culture of this institution—its jargon, its apparent lack of clear accountability, its elaborate review process. Another is the understandable insecurity of writers new to the job, writing in a language that is not their own. A third is that we have been subjected to institutional writing for so long that its familiarity makes it seem right. As a result, we feel a need to justify every action, add caveats, show we know the latest buzzwords and jargon, and leave ourselves "wiggle room" in case we have made a misstatement.

The best way to avoid the pitfalls of institutional writing is to learn to recognize the forms in which they lurk and root them out as you revise. The rest of this section looks at forms to watch out for in World Bank writing and suggests ways of avoiding them.

Weak Verbs

The English language is rich in verbs, yet many Bank writers limit themselves to a well-worn few and bury the action of the sentence in abstract nouns instead. *To disagree* becomes *to have a disagreement*. In addition, they may write in the passive voice more than the active voice because so often in Bank writing what is done is more important than who does it. As a result, sentences are often longer than they need to be:

If you bury a verb in an abstract noun, you have to replace it with another verb.

> Direct verb: We decided to cancel the meeting.
>
> Verb buried in abstract noun: We made a decision to cancel the meeting.

If you use passive voice, you have to add a form of the verb "to be" to the verb and you have to put the doer of the action in a prepositional phrase.

> Active voice: The commissioner suggested purchasing bicycles for healthcare workers who live some distance from the clinic.

Passive voice: The purchase of bicycles for healthcare workers who live some distance from the clinic was suggested by the commissioner.

The next section, "The Shift from Writing to Revising," presents a technique for rewriting sentences that suffer from weak verbs.

Hedge Words

A sure way to diminish the authority of a statement is to add words that qualify it. Nevertheless, the urge to insert qualifiers, or hedge words, such as *generally, relatively, perhaps,* and *it would seem,* can be hard to resist if you are a writer in a bureaucracy. What if your statement is not true in all cases or turns out to be false? Hedging it leaves you a little wiggle room in case someone asks. It also leads to statements such as this:

> It seems unlikely that the new billing procedure would allow significant savings in human and financial resources in most cases in the long run.

Whatever sense of protection the writer gains from hedging, it cannot outweigh the burden it puts on the reader, who must interpret it. Does the statement mean that the new billing procedure might possibly save some human and financial resources (whatever those are) but don't count on it? Or does the hedge conceal a statement of fact? The proposed new billing procedures will not save much time or money in the long run.

Instead of hedging their statements, writers would do better to trust that the reader is not out to cross-examine them. Unless you are producing a legal document (or one with similar authority) that actually will be scrutinized word for word, use hedge words sparingly and only where the context truly warrants it. For example, a statement is qualified as being "generally the case" and the text goes on to explain the exceptions, or political considerations call for a nuanced use of language ("the authorities might wish to reconsider their stance").

Elaboration

Another temptation for writers to guard against is adding adjectives that state the obvious. The temptation is fed by the understandable desire to emphasize that the Bank's project or the writer's work will improve things. But do the readers of a memo really need to be told that it contains relevant information? Would they otherwise expect the information to be irrelevant?

Box 3 contains examples of elaborations that are common in Bank writing. Consider: Are they really needed? Without the adjectives, are the phrases any less meaningful?

Box 3. From Elaboration to Plain English

Elaborated Style	Plain English
develop necessary programs for staff training	develop programs for staff training
outline detailed plans for the next phase	outline plans for the next phase
provide adequate technical assistance	provide technical assistance
in accordance with the requisite statutes	in accordance with the statutes
apply safe health standards	apply health standards
develop clear guidelines	develop guidelines
expect a rational explanation	expect an explanation

Writers may also elaborate just to make sure they have gotten their point across. Emphasizing a point, however, does not require adding rhetorical flourishes or redundancies; nor does it require strings of abstract nouns and prepositional phrases, as illustrated in Box 4.

Box 4. From Redundancy and Abstraction to Plain English

Elaborated Style	Plain English
plans for the further expansion of the program	plans to expand the program
in close proximity to	near
projections of relatively recent origin	recent projections
projects that are ongoing	current projects
consensus of opinion	consensus
make an assessment of the feasibility of the proposal	assess the proposal
advance planning	planning
certain recommendations that are in conflict with our existing policy	recommendations that conflict with our policy
due to the fact that	because
economic growth experienced a slowing trend	economic growth slowed
the minister acted with the knowledge that the accuracy of the information was in question	the minister acted knowing that the information might be inaccurate
grouped together	grouped
example that is intended to be illustrative	illustrative example
intention of fulfilling all of the above-mentioned obligations	intend to fulfill these obligations

Jargon

Jargon and "buzzwords" (terms currently in vogue) are a shorthand way of communicating with others who perform similar work within an institution. All bureaucracies use them, and each develops its own variants (see Box 5 for a sampling). Jargon has its place, but unchecked it can act as a barrier to communication, particularly for readers outside the bureaucracy. Even for readers within it, a heavy dose of jargon can be deadening, causing the reader to tune out whole paragraphs at a time.

Box 5. Buzzwords and Jargon Selector

This table contains three columns of buzzwords and jargon widely used in the World Bank. To get a sense of how just deadly such writing can be, pick any three words, one from each column, for example: comprehensive, regional, capacity.

balanced	management	components
comprehensive	organization	outcome indicators
integrated	development	projection
compatible	monitored	implementation
synchronized	strategic	ownership
optimal	sustainable	objective
relevant	regional	flexibility
functional	incremental	capacity
transparent	community-based	stakeholders
innovative	policy	options

When a paper argues for a comprehensive regional capacity that will provide integrated development options in the context of transparent strategic outcome indicators, the writer should not be surprised if readers ask, "What exactly are we going to do?"

The Shift from Writing to Revising

When you move from writing a draft to revising it, you undertake a significant shift in roles. You, the creator of the text, must suddenly become its critic. Acting as a stand-in for the reader, you must try to review the text with the objectivity and expectations of someone encountering that text for the first time. You must be prepared to sacrifice lines of laboriously crafted words if they don't hold up under scrutiny. Moreover, you must become adept at making this shift because no revision can succeed without it. If you are too wedded to your text to review it from the reader's perspective, you cannot effectively revise your work.

This role change is best made when you can put the text aside long enough to come back to it with a fresh pair of eyes. Ideally, try to take at least a day's break from the text, but even an hour's break will help. Changing the format is another way to gain a fresh perspective. Text reads differently in hard copy than it does on a computer screen; it reads differently when the font or size of type is changed. Still another approach is to read the document aloud.

What to Look for in Revising

Box 6 shows what to look for as you revise your work. It provides a checklist of specific points to consider at each level of revision. If no revision is needed at one level, you should review the text for points at the next level, and so on, revising accordingly. No serious writer would attempt to revise on all levels at once because the focus changes with each level. Even the most experienced eyes cannot read for mechanical errors while also checking the sequence of information.

Box 6. Checklist for Revising: Five Levels

Level 1 review: Check context, content, and sequence.

- ☐ Have I provided sufficient context (purpose, main message, road map) to introduce the document or sections of the document?
- ☐ Have I covered all my points in appropriate detail? Have I included any unnecessary or redundant information?
- ☐ Is this the best sequence in which to present this information?
- ☐ Do the topic sentences convey the main point of each paragraph?
- ☐ Is the information in each paragraph presented in a logical sequence that is clearly connected to the topic sentence?

Level 2 review: Check the guideposts that help the reader anticipate and follow the discussion.

- ☐ Have I provided sufficient headings?
- ☐ Are key words used consistently in headings, tables, and road maps (if needed), as well as in the text?
- ☐ Are the transitions between paragraphs clear?
- ☐ Does the format support the logic and hierarchy of the text?
- ☐ Are bulleted items parallel and introduced by a sentence or heading that explains what they are?

Level 3 review: Check clarity, conciseness, and appropriateness of language.

- ☐ Could I say the same thing better in fewer words?
- ☐ Are any sentences too long or structured in a way that is hard to follow?
- ☐ Could I find a more precise word to express my meaning?
- ☐ Have I used qualifiers or hedge words for good reason or can I delete them?
- ☐ Could my meaning be misinterpreted?
- ☐ Is the tone appropriate to the reader and the situation?

Level 4 review: Check the mechanics of writing.

- ☐ Are sentences correctly punctuated?
- ☐ Do subjects and verbs agree?
- ☐ Do pronouns have clear antecedents (the nouns or pronouns to which they refer)?
- ☐ Are words spelled correctly?
- ☐ Have I checked carefully for other types of errors I know I am likely to make (for example, use of articles)?

Level 5 review: Check the document a final time to proofread for any errors.

Treat proofreading as a separate step after all other revisions, including final edits, have been completed. Read the text mechanically word by word in hard copy. Focus on the mechanics listed in Level 4 and look out for new errors, such as accidental deletions that may have been introduced in the final round of typing.

Careful review is the prerequisite for revision. Whatever approach you take in reviewing, your review should focus on one purpose at a time rather than attempt to combine different levels of revision. Few writers can do a thorough job of checking spelling and subject-verb agreement if they're also trying to reorganize the content.

Before starting to revise, you should read through the draft in its entirety to get a sense of the narrative as a whole. That wider perspective, essential to good revision, often gets lost when writers are drafting. Box 7 suggests two techniques writers can apply in reviewing their drafts.

Box 7. Techniques for Reviewing

Below are additional techniques to use in reviewing your work. As noted in Box 7, each level of review has its own focus and provides the basis for your revision at that level. The techniques below are useful in Levels 1 and 2.

Level 1 The first revision of a draft should focus on context, content, and sequence. Before you begin revising, read through the entire draft to see whether the text provides an appropriate context and conveys its message(s) clearly in a narrative sequence that is easy to follow. To focus your eye as you read and keep from getting bogged down, try the following:

1. Highlight the main message and purpose of the document; then highlight the main point of each paragraph.
   - Is the main message of the document stated somewhere other than in the opening section? If so, make a note in the margin.
   - Is the main point of a paragraph stated in a sentence that is not the first sentence? Is there more than one point in a paragraph? If so, make a note in the margin.
2. As you go along, also note in the margin any text that seems misplaced or disconnected.

Level 2 The second revision of a draft should focus on the markers that help the reader follow the narrative. A good way to check their effectiveness is to skim the draft by reading only the headings and topic sentences. Is there any place where the narrative line breaks? If so, make a note in the margin.

Once you have finished your review at Level 1 and Level 2, revise as needed. Do not begin revising until you have finished your review. If you get bogged down revising while you are still reviewing, you risk losing the overall perspective. After this revision, move on to Level 3 (Box 6).

How to Revise Sentences

In addition to reviewing your paragraphs for revision, you will need to apply that same scrutiny to your sentences. The style of much official writing, as you have seen, is ponderous, impersonal, and wordy. The action is often buried in passive constructions ("is" forms), hedges (*it appears that*), and strings of abstract nouns in prepositional phrases. Elaboration and jargon further eviscerate the meaning. Box 8 describes a technique for revising sentences and illustrates how to improve clarity while cutting ponderous sentences down to size.

Box 8. Techniques for Revising Sentences

The average piece of official writing contains twice as many words as it needs, according to Richard Lanham, author of *Revising Prose*. The main factor in much overwriting is that the writers bury the action in abstract nouns instead of putting it in the verbs. To reduce this "lard factor," he recommends the following steps:

1. Circle the prepositions.
2. Circle the "is" forms.
3. Underline the real action.
4. Put the action in a simple verb.
5. Get the sentence moving fast.

Here are some examples of how to do it:

1. Agreement (as to) the need (for) revisions (in) the terms (of) the contract (was) reached (with) the authorities.

   Revision: *The authorities agreed that the contract needed revision.*

2. Notwithstanding the need (for) further relative price adjustments, it (is) expected that the inflation rate will show a significant decline (over) the next five years.

   Revision: *Even if prices are further adjusted, the inflation rate will probably decline significantly over the next five years.*

3. New initiatives (of) possible benefit (to) our client countries should (be) Included (in) our discussions (before) the end (of) the present conference.

   Revision: *We should discuss new initiatives that will benefit our client countries before the conference ends.*

4. There (is) a tendency among bureaucratic writers (toward) the burying of action (in) abstract nouns, the use (of) prepositional phrases, and a preference (for) weak verbs such as *be, do, have, make, etc.*

   Revision: *Bureaucratic writers tend to bury action in abstract nouns, use prepositional phrases, and prefer weak verbs such as* be, do, have, *and* make.

5.

GUIDELINES ON THE MECHANICS OF WRITING AND WORLD BANK STYLE

God does not much mind bad grammar, but He does not take any particular pleasure in it.

—Erasmus

The guidelines presented in this section draw on *The World Bank Style Guide,* prepared by the External Affairs Office of the Publisher (EXTOP); the *Chicago Manual of Style,* 15th edition, on which the EXTOP style guide is based; and the IMF *Correspondence and Documents Guide,* generally known as *The Redbook.* This section is intended to be used as a handbook, providing guidance on questions of style and mechanics most commonly asked by Bank writers and editors. Six areas are covered: capitalization, grammar, numbers and measurements, punctuation and italics, spelling and compounding, and usage.

Capitalization

Proper nouns should always be capitalized, but the trend is to lowercase many associated words. Do not capitalize, for example, *president, state, administration, government, ministry*, and the like when they stand alone or are used generically *(the government budget, the prime minister,* Latin American central banks). Do capitalize them when they are used along with a full name or title, for example, *Japan's Ministry of Industry and Technology*, the *Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador*.

Institutional Names

World Bank Group

On first occurrence, always use the full formal name of the World Bank and the organizations that constitute the Bank group. On subsequent references, capitalize *Bank* when it refers to the World Bank (and *Fund* when it refers to the International Monetary Fund); use acronyms for the organizations in the group:

- International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)
- International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Some terms specific to World Bank work are always capitalized:

- Annual Meetings
- Board meeting
- Asia Region; the Regional vice president

Note that when *Region* refers to an organizational unit of the Bank, it is capitalized to avoid confusion.

The names of departments, groups, units, and networks, as well as official positions, are capitalized when used with a full name; they are lowercased when used alone.

- the Board of Executive Directors; U.S. Executive Director (*but* executive directors)
- President Robert B. Zoellick (*but* the president of the World Bank, the president)
- Financial Center Network (*but* the network was formed…)
- the Tanzania Country Office (*but* the country office)
- the Policy Research Department (*but* the department)

Project Names

Capitalize the names of specific projects, programs, loans, initiatives, and strategies. Lowercase the names when used generically.

> The Bank's lending program in Afghanistan was revived in 2003 when the Board approved the Emergency Transport Rehabilitation Project.
>
> The Bank supports the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative.
>
> The initiative has raised the profile of education, strengthened government commitment, and focused on outcomes.

Organizations Other than the World Bank

Names of organizations given in foreign languages should be translated, when possible, into English. When foreign names for organizations are used, they are set in regular type and capitalized according to the conventions of the country concerned (for example, Departamento Administrativo National de Estadistica).

Capitalize the names of political parties and religious bodies and of their adherents:

> the Socialist Party; the Catholic Church; Sunni Muslims.

Geographic Names

Capitalize terms that refer to a specific area, region, locality, or geographic feature:

> the Malay Peninsula, the South Pacific, Lakes Victoria and Malawi, the Aral and Black Seas, the Western Hemisphere.

Lowercase terms used to indicate a general area, direction, or position.

> The north side of the river, a suburb southwest of Paris, southern China.

Words That Are Always Capitalized

Names of languages, used as nouns or adjectives.

> She enjoys Japanese films although she doesn't speak Japanese.

Months of the year, but not the seasons.

> The first day of spring is March 21.

Prepositions of five or more letters that appear in a title.

> *A New Agenda for Education Beyond the Primary Level*

Note that articles (*a, an, the*) and the conjunctions *and, but, or* are not capitalized unless they are the first or last word of a title.

Grammar

Agreement of Subject and Verb

A verb must agree in number with its subject.

> Any bank *pays* interest to its depositors.
>
> The banks [plural] *pay* interest to their depositors.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun is notionally plural; that is, it refers to a group of persons or things (jury, committee, staff, audience). American English—on which the Bank's preferences are based—generally uses a singular verb (as well as a singular pronoun) with a collective noun, although collective nouns can sometimes take a plural verb to stress individuality within the group. In this situation it is often preferable to rewrite the sentence—for example, by inserting "members" or "members of" to clarify the sense and readily justify the plural.

Singular (the members are acting as or viewed as a unit):

> The *staff* has agreed to the proposal.
>
> The *government* is seeking an arrangement.
>
> The *committee* has announced its decision.
>
> *Management* is seeking a speedy resolution to the problem.

Plural (the members are acting individually):

> The *committee were* not agreed among themselves. [Or rewrite as: The *committee members* were not agreed among themselves.]
>
> The *jury disagree* on the verdict. [Or rewrite as: The *members of the* jury *disagree* on the verdict.]

Noun Phrases

When the subject consists of a noun followed by a prepositional phrase containing another noun, the verb usually agrees with the noun preceding the prepositional phrase.

> A *conference* of educators from Latin America *was* convened in Chile.
>
> The *delegation* of governors and provincial authorities *is* waiting in the atrium.

However, in certain cases the noun in the prepositional phrase is more important than the preceding noun; in that case, the verb agrees with the noun in the prepositional phrase. One example is phrases with words such as *range, variety,* and *number*, used loosely with the indefinite article *a* to mean *many*.

A range of *services were* available. (Many services were available.)

A variety of tax *measures* have been implemented.

A number of *ministers were* unable to attend.

When the noun phrase begins with the definite article *the*, however, the focus is on the first noun, which calls for a singular verb. For example,

The range of products *has* been expanded.

The variety of goods available *has* grown dramatically.

The new series of computers *was* designed to meet users' needs.

Fractions and Percentages

When a fraction or an expression such as *part, percent, the rest, the remainder, some,* or *most* is modified by a prepositional phrase, the noun or pronoun in the phrase generally determines whether the verb is singular or plural.

Ten percent *of the imports enter* duty free.

The rest *of the coffee crop was* destroyed.

Some *of the meetings have* been postponed.

Five percent *of the desert has* been reclaimed.

Most *of the ministers are* able to attend.

One-third *of the countries have* agreed to participate.

Three-fourths *of the population has* fled the country.

Compound Subjects

Use a plural verb with subjects joined by *and.*

The Managing Director and the First Deputy Managing Director *were* also present.

Predicting inflation and adjusting policies to combat it *are* considered important.

A compound subject takes a singular verb when the subject is preceded by such words as *each* or *every*.

Each manager and unit supervisor *is* expected to attend the seminar.

Every summary and memorandum *is* checked for accuracy.

When a compound subject is joined by *or*, *either*…*or*, or *neither*…*nor*, the verb should agree with the subject nearest to it.

The manager or his *assistants* have scheduled the meeting for tomorrow.

Either the director or his *alternate* has to attend the meeting.

Neither the president nor the *members* of the board *were* available for comment.

Neither the members of the board nor the *president was* available for comment.

When determining singular or plural verb forms, disregard word groups such as *including*, *as well as*, *no less than*, *in addition to*, *together with*, or *with*. These are technically not part of the subject, and they should be set off by commas.

The income *tax*, with the value added tax, *yields* high revenue.

The *group*, including the non-oil-developing countries, *meets* once a year.

The *manager*, as well as a number of her assistants, *is* attending the conference.

Units of Measurement

Units of measurement, such as money, time, weight, and quantity, generally represent a fixed amount and not its individual parts. Some expressions may be interpreted either way.

The authorities said that $55 million *was* required to complete the project.

Twenty years *is* too long to wait for results.

Ten pounds of sugar *is* more than enough.

Agreement of Pronouns and Their Antecedents

The word or group of words a pronoun refers to is called an antecedent. The pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent.

The paper will be distributed Friday, and the Board will discuss *it* on Wednesday.

[The antecedent is the *paper*.]

The authorities said that some new controls would be implemented soon, and the staff asked what *they* might be.

[The antecedent is *controls*.]

When a pronoun could be interpreted to refer to more than one possible antecedent, ambiguity may result. Also, using “this” as a pronoun to replace a phrase is often ambiguous. In such cases, rewrite the sentence to make the antecedent clear.

Incorrect	Correct
The full decision was just published in the quarterly review, and a copy of *it* is attached. [The antecedent may be the review or the decision.]	The quarterly review, which is attached, just published a copy of the full decision. or The full decision, which is attached, was just published in the quarterly review.
The minister announced a relaxation of controls; this caused a sharp drop on the foreign exchange market. [Antecedent may be the announcement or the relaxation of controls.]	The minister announced a relaxation of controls; the announcement caused… or The relaxation of controls announced by the minister caused…

Articles

In a series of items, include all articles to ensure parallel structure and completeness.

> The governors called for more coordination between *the* Fund, *the* Bank, and *the* country authorities.
>
> A decline in growth and an increase . . .

Exception: In general, omit articles from headings.

> Use of Fund Resources
>
> Summary of Tax System

In American English—on which Bank preferences are based—the choice between the indefinite article *a* or the indefinite article *an* depends on the pronunciation of the noun that follows it. Use the indefinite article *a* before words beginning with a consonant sound. Use the indefinite article *an* before words beginning with a vowel sound including the silent *h* (as in honor).

Regular nouns

a historical analysis	an honor
a hypothesis	an analysis
a European country	an hour

Acronyms

a BIS report	an OECD report
a UN program	an SDR conversion
a UNICEF calendar	an EFTA country

Numbers

a $10 million deficit	an $11 million expenditure
a one-year program	an 85 percent majority

Note: Articles pose a special challenge to nonnative English speakers whose native language does not use them. The main guidelines to keep in mind are these:

- If the noun is singular and countable (a number can be put with it), then it must have an article.

  a brief, an executive, the staff member

- If the noun is not countable, it does not take an article unless it is has a modifier that makes it specific.

  Inflation is at a three-year high. The country's inflation in 2001 was the highest in three years.

Gerund with Possessive

A gerund is a verb form that ends in -ing and functions as a noun. When a noun or pronoun precedes a gerund, use the possessive case. If the resulting sentence appears awkward, recast the sentence or do not use the possessive form.

This action results in the *member's having* a reserve position in the Fund.

The staff member recalled *his having mentioned* the matter at an earlier meeting.

Nouns Used as Adjectives

When a noun is used as an adjective, it is generally used in the singular unless it is part of a technical term.

import restrictions [*meaning* restrictions on imports]

profit transfers [*meaning* transfers of profits]

but

communications satellite

Parallel Construction

Create a parallel construction for elements in a sentence that are grammatically similar. The principle is this: Elements that are similar in function should be similar in form.

Not Parallel	**Parallel**
We decided *to hold the meeting* in Washington and *that it would be* a two-day session.	We decided *that the meeting would be held* in Washington and *that it would be* a two-day session. or We decided *to hold the meeting in Washington* and *to make it a two-day session*.
Either they obey the manager or receive a reprimand.	*Either they* obey the manager *or they* receive a reprimand. or They *either obey* the manager *or receive* a reprimand.

Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect tense is used to denote three kinds of past actions: those that have just recently occurred; those that continue to the present; and those that occurred at an indefinite time in the past.

Recent past: I *have* already *spoken* with the team leader about the change in schedule.

Continuing: Since April 2002, our policy *has been* to outsource this type of work.

Indefinite past: She *has traveled* extensively in Latin America.

Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive is used in formal writing in two situations:

Use the subjunctive to express recommendations, commands, advice, and resolutions (in clauses introduced by *that*). Sentences of this type use the subjunctive to stress the importance of the recommendation or command. The subjunctive verb is used only in its simple (infinitive) form; it does not change to show tense or number.

> The mission recommended that the finance ministry *strengthen* its relations with the central bank.
>
> It is important that the ministry's relations with the central bank *be* strengthened.
>
> We suggest that the committee *complete* its work by the end of this month.
>
> The chairman specified that everyone *be* given copies of the draft before the meeting.

Other common verbs and expressions that take the subjunctive in a *that* clause include the following:

advise	ask	demand	insist	it is imperative
mandate	propose	recommend	request	it is essential
require	resolve	specify	it is important	it is vital

Use the subjunctive to state a hypothetical condition, i.e., something that perhaps might be possible but clearly is not true. This condition is commonly expressed with an *if* clause plus *were*.

> He spoke as if he were the president.
>
> If the case were that simple, no problem would exist.
>
> The Executive Director said that even if the report were ready, he would prefer to postpone the discussion to a later date.
>
> If the federal government were to institute the proposed tax reform measures, the effect would be to widen economic disparities.

Note: Not all *if* clauses introduce a hypothetical condition; they may also introduce an actual event that occurred in the past. In the following sentence, for example, the verb is correctly in the past tense, not the subjunctive.

> If *she was* at the conference last week, then she must have heard the president's speech.

Numbers and Measurements

General Guidelines

In text material, spell out cardinal numbers from zero to nine. Use figures for numbers 10 and above, unless the number begins a sentence or is listed in the Summary Table below under "Exception."

Ordinal numbers (*first, second, etc.*) should, with few exceptions, be spelled out.

When any of the numbers one through nine occurs with higher numbers in the same category, use figures for all the numbers in the same context in that category. The context may range from one sentence to a full paragraph.

> Of the ships, 15 were built in Greece, 14 in the United States, and 6 in Italy.
>
> The deficit, which was only $8.4 million for the 9 months ended October 20XX, was nearly $17 million for the 18 months ended April 20XX.

Weights and Measurements

Express physical quantities (weights, pressures, temperatures, distances, lengths, widths, areas, volumes, and so on) in figures.

5 liters	180 degrees
3 million tons	5.7 meters by 9.3 meters

In a measurement of less than one, express the unit of measurement in the singular; if more than one, express it in the plural.

⅜ mile	1⅔ inches
0.25 percentage point	1.5 percentage points
⅔ inch	12⅜ inches

Express index numbers, ratios, and percentages in figures.

price index of 121	a 4:1 ratio
1999 = 100	5 percent

Abbreviate weights and measures only in tables and figures. Write them out in running text unless their frequency creates awkwardness, in which case use abbreviations.

If it is necessary to abbreviate weights or measures, use the same form for the singular and the plural.

Box 10. Summary Table: Numbers and Measurements			
Category	**Method of Expressions**		**Exception**
Ordinal numbers (*first, second*)		words	Use figures for bibliographical citations, tables, charts, and lists with limited space.
Cardinal number as first word of sentence		words	No exceptions
Cardinal numbers zero to nine		words	Use figures to express the categories indicated in the left column
Except:			
Age	figures		
Dates and time of day	figures		
Decimals	figures		
Exact amounts of money	figures		
Indices	figures		
Items within a text	figures		
Market quotations	figures		
Negative amounts	figures		
Page numbers	figures		
Parts of written works	figures		
Percentages	figures		
Physical quantities	figures		
Proportions, ratios, and coefficients	figures		
Round numbers (approximations and inexact measurements)	figures		
Serial numbers	figures		
Time	figures		Use words when writing *o'clock* or *noon*, or such phrases *as in the morning, at night.*
Voting	figures		
Weights and measures	figures		
Cardinal numbers greater than nine	figures		Use words when beginning a sentence and for fractions.
Except: Fractions		words	Use figures to express physical measurements, decimal fractions and percentages

Punctuation and Italics

Comma

1. Use a comma to separate words, phrases, clauses, figures, or letters in a series, including before the final item.

   The Bank continues to maintain resident staff in India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

   The data were given for 15, 20, 25, and 30 years.

   Tomorrow we will discuss the terms of reference of the mission, the length of the mission, and travel arrangements.

2. If a series ending in *etc.* occurs within a sentence, place a comma before and after *etc*. If *etc*. is the last word in the sentence, do not use the comma after *etc.* Do not use *and* before the final item in a series if it is followed by *etc*. (However, avoid using *etc.* whenever possible.)

   Stationery, pencils, pens, etc., are available.

   We requested stationery, pencils, pens, etc.

3. Also use a comma as follows:

   a. before a conjunction (*and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so*) in a compound sentence.

      All are poor, but many more are very poor.

      We have not received the data, nor have we entered them into the computer.

   b. before and after introductory words and terms such as namely, i.e., e.g., if you must use them at all.

      Reports are available to those concerned, e.g., staff members, executive directors, and certain governments.

      The proposal has been endorsed by several managers, namely, Mr. Edwards, Ms. Bhatia, and Mr. Orloff.

   c. after introductory phrases or clauses.

      After reading the report, the committee decided to release it to the public.
      Although the committee met, it did not reach a conclusion.

   d. before and after words, phrases, and clauses that are used to explain or to give additional information but that may be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence.

      The World Bank, which is located in Washington, has been in operation for more than 40 years.

Mr. McMillan, Chief of the Investment Division, reviewed the recommendations.

The plane landed in Kampala, Uganda, that evening.

e. between adjectives if each modifies the noun alone and if you could insert the word "and" between them.

The committee recommended swift, extensive changes.

f. to separate words or figures that might otherwise be misunderstood.

On July 18, 19 loans were signed.

At the Bank, group participation is necessary.

g. to separate numbers of four or more digits.

1,449

Do *not* use a comma in serial numbers, e.g., Law 11449, page 1011.

h. before titles that follow proper names.

Jeremy Thistlewaite, Ph.D.

David Martin, M.D.

i. before a direct quotation.

The lead article proclaimed, "This year's World Development Report provides significant new data on environmental issues."

j. between the day and year but not between the month and year.

The first section of the new road was opened on May 2, 20XX.

The loans scheduled for June 20XX have already been signed.

Do *not* use a comma after a date unless it is needed in the sentence for some other reason.

The conference will be held July 8-12, 20XX and will include at least seven heads of state.

k. between the title of a person and the name of an organizational unit.

Juan Ramos, Chief, Security Division, was present.

l. to enclose a transitional word, such as *however, therefore, moreover, nevertheless, finally,* when the transitional word is used to indicate a contrast, a break in the continuity of thought, or a summary of what has preceded it; also, after a transitional word when a semicolon is used before it.

Effective local coordination, however, is a matter for which each government must assume responsibility; therefore, let us coordinate.

Do *not* use commas to enclose a transitional word when the connection is logically close and structurally smooth enough not to call for a pause.

It is therefore a public document.

m. to set off an antithetical phrase or clause.

The action was taken to reduce imports, not to restrict payments.

Semicolon

4. Use a semicolon as follows:

a. between two independent clauses (each has a subject and a verb) that are related but not connected by a conjunction.

In 20XX, disbursements exceeded payments by $943 million; in 20XY, the excess was $999 million.

b. to separate independent clauses in a compound sentence when joined by a conjunctive adverb (*however, thus, hence, etc.*).

There was a small wheat surplus in the second half of the year; however, this was more than offset by the deficit in the first half.

c. to separate contrasting statements.

This is right; that is wrong.

d. to separate items in a series if commas appear within any one of the items, and to separate phrases containing commas.

The meeting will be attended by Louise Martin, Minister of Agriculture; Peter Guestier, Minister of Labor; and the project director.

Colon

5. Use a colon as follows:

a. to introduce a list, an explanatory statement, or a long quotation if and only if a complete sentence precedes the colon. Capitalize the first word following the colon if the colon introduces more than one sentence, a quotation, a formal statement, or a speech in dialogue.

Many of the members of the committee were at the ministerial level: 10 were ministers of finance, and 3 were ministers of economy.

In the end, development is like life itself: complex.

The president concluded his speech with the following statement: “A step in this direction would be to abolish the import surcharge imposed by the United States.”

Do *not* use a colon between a verb or preposition and its objects.

Incorrect	Correct
The delegation included: two ministers, and three cabinet members.	The delegation included two ministers and three cabinet members.

b. to introduce a displayed list of items following a complete sentence or the words "the following" or "as follows."

The process involves three steps:
- reviewing the existing materials,
- deciding what to keep and what to replace, and
- finding or creating replacements.

We are compiling year-end reports as follows:
- domestic sales revenues,
- total operating costs, and
- net operating income.

If the items following the introductory sentence are complete sentences themselves, capitalize each item and put a period at the end.

Writers need to know a few simple rules about sentence construction:
- Focus on one idea per sentence.
- Keep all words that describe things as close as possible to the things they describe.
- Make sure nouns and verbs agree in number.

c. to indicate time.

9:00 to 5:30

d. after a salutation in a formal business letter.

Gentlemen:

Dear Madam Governor:

e. in proportions and ratios.

6:3:2 6:1

Period

6. Use a period as follows:

   a. after a declarative or imperative sentence.

      Technical assistance activities have continued to grow in both volume and variety.

      Press the ENTER key after logging on.

   b. after an indirect question.

      Will you please let me know whether this is agreeable to you.

   c. after a letter or number denoting a series, but not if the letter or number is enclosed in parentheses.

      1. Transportation
         (a) Railways

   d. inside the parentheses when the matter enclosed is an independent sentence forming no part of the preceding sentence; otherwise, place it outside.

      The consultants received full support from members of the staff. (The previous consultants worked independently.)

      The Board of Directors approved the investment of $9 million ($7 million loan and $2 million equity).

Ellipsis

7. Use an ellipsis to indicate the omission of one or more words in a quotation. For an omission of words within a sentence, use three periods to form the ellipsis. At the Bank, ellipses are generally not necessary if words are omitted at the beginning or end of a quotation. However, if the omitted words occur at the end of one sentence and the beginning of another within the quotation, indicate the omission by using an ellipsis of four periods and capitalize the first word following the periods.

   "The agency…maintains four regional bureaus…. Its new headquarters will open in Toronto in June."

Question Mark

8. Use a question mark to express a direct query. Do not use a question mark at the end of an indirect question or a command put as a request for the sake of courtesy; use a period instead.

Direct query: When can we meet to discuss this?

Indirect query: Will you please let me know when we can meet to discuss this.

Apostrophe

9. Use an apostrophe and s to form the possessive. If the last letter of the noun is s or z, add an apostrophe and an s. Do not use an apostrophe in the possessive form of personal pronouns (*its*, *theirs*, *yours*, etc.).

   We will want to discuss it with the governors at next year's meeting.

   This has played an increasingly prominent role in Cyprus's economy in recent years.

   The Board's decision is final; its report will be ready next week.

10. Use an apostrophe and s for expressions of duration.

    One year's experience

    12 years' experience

    Seven years of experience

    Do *not* use an apostrophe when the expression of duration uses the word *of*.

11. Do not use an apostrophe in plurals of dates, abbreviations, and figures.

    The program did not effectively meet the needs of the 1990s.

    TORs are prepared by the staff.

    Cross out all the 6s and 7s.

    However, use an apostrophe with lowercase letters if necessary to avoid confusion.

    The children were learning their abc's.

12. Do not use contractions (apostrophes to indicate missing letters).

Unacceptable	Acceptable
I'm writing to inform you that the Bank can't send a mission this month.	I am writing to inform you that the Bank cannot send a mission this month.

Contractions are acceptable in informal writing, such as most internal e-mail.

Quotation Marks

13. Use double quotations marks before and after quotations. Use single quotation marks before and after a quotation within a quotation. Place the comma and the period inside all quotation marks; place colons and semicolons outside. Place question marks and exclamation marks inside the quotation marks only if they are part of the matter quoted; otherwise, place them outside.

    "I have no idea what that means," she said, "but I like the sound of it."

    Have you read the article "A Decade of Change"?

    The sentence should read, "The institution participating with the World Bank is referred to throughout as the 'co-lender.'"

14. Place quotation marks around a word or phrase accompanied by a definition or singled out for special emphasis. Once a term has been defined, the quotation marks can, in most cases, be omitted in the remainder of the text.

    The new publication suggests how the "opportunity cost of capital" should be identified and interpreted.

    FAO estimates that more than 300 million children from these groups suffer "grossly retarded physical growth."

15. Do *not* use quotation marks around a word or phrase following *so-called*.

    In Kenya, so-called settlement roads will be improved.

16. Use quotation marks around titles of journal articles and book chapters. Do not put them in italics.

Parentheses

17. Use parentheses to enclose a word, phrase, or sentence that is inserted for purposes of explanation, translation, etc.

    The World Bank Institute (WBI) provides training for middle-level and senior government officials.

    IFC publishes stock market data (see page 73).

    Onchocerciasis (river blindness) is found in tropical Africa.

18. Use parentheses to enclose numbers or letters setting off items in a list (place a parenthesis before and after each number or letter).

    Foreign investors want (a) assurance that their capital will not be expropriated, (b) the possibility of re-exporting their assets, and (c) reasonable profits.

Brackets

19. Use square brackets to enclose editorial insertions, corrections, explanations, or comments within quoted material. Also use brackets as parentheses within parentheses.

    "The Interim Committee [of the Board of Governors on the International Monetary System] met in Washington, D.C., in 20XX."

    "But the General Manager [sic] of the Fund sounded a more optimistic note," the article went on to say.

    These data are set out in standard series reports (Staff Appraisal Reports [SARs] and Memoranda of the President [MOPs]).

Hyphens and Dashes

20. Use a hyphen to connect the parts of compound words, to indicate the separations of a word at the end of a line, and to indicate ratio components expressed in words. Do not leave a space before or after a hyphen.

    The teacher-pupil ratio was almost 1 to 40.

    Long-term loans provide working capital to small businesses in the area.

21. Use an en dash, not a hyphen, to indicate a range of numbers or dates. Microsoft Word will automatically insert an en dash if you hold down the Control key and hit the minus sign on the numbers keypad.

    The projections call for an increase of 15–18 percentage points.

    The July–September statistics are not yet available.

22. Use an em dash to note an abrupt break or pause in a sentence and to begin and end an amplifying or explanatory word, phrase, or clause. To indicate a dash in typed material, type two hyphens without any space before, after, or between them, and Microsoft Word will automatically convert them to an em dash.

    Everyone at the meeting—both higher-level and support staff—agreed on the need to study the issues.

    The total volume of such exports would still remain a very small part—approximately 7 percent—of the expected manufactured imports.

23. Use a slash to indicate crop years, seasons that extend over a part of two successive calendar years, and seasons within a calendar year.

    during the crop year (October/September)

    the 2007/08 concert season

    the spring/summer of 20XX

24. Use a slash between two words to indicate that either word applies. Also use a slash in fractions expressed in figures and for *per* where space is limited, for example, in tables.

    Bank/Fund

    km/hr

    7/8

Italics

25. Use italics for emphasis. Keep in mind, however, that excessive use is distracting.

    Form 999 must be submitted *at least three weeks* prior to departure.

26. Italicize the titles of published works, such as books, and periodicals, such as journals and newspapers.

27. Italicize foreign words, phrases, and abbreviations that are infrequently used in the English language. Do not enclose such words in quotation marks. Overall, limit the use of foreign words because readers may not understand them.

Foreign Words That Are Italicized

a fortiori	*prima facie*
pari passu	*pro forma*
passim	*sic*

28. Do not italicize foreign words or abbreviations that, through continued use, have been incorporated into the English language. When in doubt, consult Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, latest edition. If the word is there, consider it an English word.

Foreign Words That Are Not Italicized

a priori	charge d'affaires	per capita
ad hoc	de facto	per diem
ad infinitum	et al.	per se
ad interim	etc.	persona non grata
ad valorem	ex officio circa	pro rata
addenda	ibid.	quid pro quo
addendum	inter alia	status quo
bona fide	laissez-faire	vis-à-vis
cf.	per annum	viz.

Spelling and Compounding

General Guidelines

The World Bank follows American usage in spelling, compounding, and dividing words at the ends of lines. The spelling guide used by the Bank is *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (As of December 2008, the latest edition was the Eleventh.) It is available on line at *http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/ collegiate.htm.*

The Spelling Reference List at the end of this chapter contains words frequently used in Bank writing that do not follow the guidelines or that have a preferred spelling. For all other spellings, use the first choice listed in *Webster's.*

Compounds

A compound is a single idea expressed by two or more words, a word plus a prefix or suffix, or a combination form. Compounds are either hyphenated, written as one word (solid compound), or written as separate words (open compound). Solid and hyphenated compounds are generally found in the dictionary.

Adjective Compounds

A compound adjective consists of two or more words that function as a unit and express a single thought; these one-thought modifiers are derived from (and take the place of) adjective phrases and clauses. Hyphenate adjective compounds when they precede the noun they modify.

> Bank-Fund committee
>
> long-term trend
>
> far-reaching proposal
>
> up-to-date report
>
> well-planned conference

Generally, adjective compounds are not hyphenated when they follow the noun.

> The report was up to date.
>
> The trend for the long term is expected to continue downward.

Noun Compounds

Most noun compounds are either open (policy maker) or closed (turnaround), but some are hyphenated (follow-up). When in doubt, consult Webster's.

Prefixes

In most cases, do not hyphenate a word with a prefix; write the combination as one word. However, there are exceptions that should be hyphenated. Observe the rules outlined below. When in doubt, consult Webster's.

Use a hyphen to

- join a prefix and a word beginning with a capital letter:

  non-European; pan-American

- join a prefix and a figure:

  mid-2005; pre-1900; post-1970

- clarify the meaning:

  re-cover (cover again) does not mean recover

  re-form (form again) does not mean reform

- join a prefix and a two-word element:

  euro-Swiss franc bonds; non-oil-exporting countries

- indicate that one word has alternative prefixes (i.e., the prefix standing alone takes a hyphen):

  over- and underused

Suffixes

Do not use a hyphen to attach a suffix to a noun unless the result would be unwieldy or the noun is a proper noun.

worldwide but university-wide

Bank-wide

Spelling Reference List

The World Bank follows American spelling practices. Consult *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* latest edition (as of May 2008, the Eleventh edition), for correct spelling and usage. The following reference list contains words frequently used in World Bank writing that do not appear in *Webster's* or that have a preferred spelling according to the Office of the Publisher.

The list uses the following abbreviations: adj (adjective), n (noun), v (verb).

acknowledgment

adviser

anti-money-laundering (adj)

appendixes

balance of payments (adj; n)

birthrate (n)

by-product

capacity building (n); capacity-building (adj)

contracting-out (n)

cost of living (n); cost-of-living (adj)

cross-section (n)

database (n)

debt reduction equivalent (DRE)

decision making, decision maker (n); decision-making (adj)

distance-learning (adj); distance learning centers (exception)

e-mail

fieldwork; fieldworker

fine-tune (v); fine tuning (n)

follow-up (n, adj); follow up (v)

for-profit

forums (**not** fora)

layoff (n); lay off (v)

Muslim (**not** Moslem)

non-oil-exporting

policy making, policy maker (n); policy-making (adj)

problem solving (n); problem-solving (adj)

pro-development

pro-poor

rain-forest

-size (suffix; **not -**sized)

terms of trade (n); terms-of-trade (adj)

time frame

turnaround (n); turn around (v)

value added tax (VAT)

workday

workforce

workload

Usage

The following glossary explains words that Bank writers often misuse or confuse with other words.

Among, between

Use *among* to express a relationship of an item to many surrounding items collectively. Use *between* for one-to-one relationships, regardless of the number of items.

> The funds will be divided *among* all the cooperatives in the region.
>
> The trade *between* country A and its two neighbors is substantial.

Around, about

Use *around* in reference to place. Do not use it as a synonym for *approximately*. Use *about* instead.

> The rate of inflation increased by *about* 25 percent.
>
> The team members traveled *around* the province meeting local officials.

As (causal)

Avoid using *as* in the sense of *since* or because if it could be misread to mean *while*.

> The negotiations were suspended *because* the protests were too noisy. [not *as* the protests were too noisy]

Between, among (see among, between)

Comprise, consist of, constitute

A whole *comprises* or *consists of* its parts. The parts *constitute* the whole.

> The package *comprises (consists of)* job training and subsidized housing. [not *is comprised of*]

Continual, continuous

Continual means recurring often or at intervals and refers only to time. *Continuous* means uninterrupted or unbroken and can refer to time or space.

> His *continual* requests for transfer finally got results.
>
> The *continuous* hum of the computer lulled him to sleep.

Criteria, criterion

Criteria is a plural form only; *criterion* is the singular.

Data

Data is a plural form of the Latin word *datum* and takes a plural verb. The singular form *datum* is rarely used.

Different from, different than

Different from is used to make a direct comparison between two persons or things. *Different than* is used when the object of comparison is expressed by a clause.

> The final report was *different from* the draft.
>
> The final report was *different than* we had expected.

Note: *Different* is often used incorrectly when it used alone to modify a noun. It is correct to say "The mission visited three countries last week and three different countries this week." It is not correct to say, "The mission visited three different countries." Different from what? If the answer is "each other," then omit the word.

Due to

Due to is synonymous with *attributable to;* use it only as an adjective after some form of the verb *to be.* Otherwise use *owing to, because of,* or *as a result of.* Do not begin a sentence or a clause with *due to.*

> The failure of the program was *due to* a lack of funds.
>
> *Because* of a lack of funds, the program failed.

E.g. versus i.e.

Avoid using either of these abbreviations for Latin terms because readers often confuse them. Instead of *e.g. (exempli gratia)* use *for example,* followed by a comma. Instead of *i.e. (id est)* use *that is* or *namely,* followed by a comma.

Etc.

Etc. is the abbreviation for *et cetera,* meaning "and so forth." Using it to end a series beginning with *such as, for example,* or *including* is redundant. In general, avoid using it.

Fewer, less

Fewer means not as many; *less* means not as much. Use *fewer* for items that can be counted. Use *less* for collective quantities.

> *Fewer* loans were made last year than this year.
>
> Three of the loans were for *less* money than requested.

First, firstly

Use *first, second, third,* not firstly, secondly, thirdly.

I.e. (see "e.g. versus i.e.")

Like, such as

Use *like* for expressing similarity; *such as,* for giving examples.

> The new procedure is *like* the old one in many respects.
>
> The contract modifications will impose significant burdens, *such as* longer work hours and more off-site work.

That, which

Determining whether to use *that* or *which* to introduce an adjective clause depends on how essential the clause is to the meaning of the sentence. An essential clause (also called a restrictive clause) limits or defines the noun it modifies and is therefore essential to meaning. Use *that* to introduce it and do not enclose it in commas. A nonessential clause (also called a nonrestrictive clause) contains information that is nice to know but could be omitted without materially changing the meaning of the sentence. It is introduced by *which* and enclosed in commas.

Essential	Nonessential
I read the article on HIV/AIDS *that* you just sent me.	I just read the latest WHO report on HIV/AIDs, *which* a colleague sent me.

Utilize, use

Avoid writing *utilize* when *use* will suffice.

> The authorities will *use* the revenues to complete the port project.

Vis-à-vis

Change to *compared with* or *in relation to.*

Which (see "that, which")

6.

RESOURCES FOR WRITERS

Knowledge is of two kinds: We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.

—Samuel Johnson

World Bank staff have many writing resources available to them through the Joint Bank-Fund Library, the World Bank Group libraries and resource centers, and the Bank intranet. In addition, many excellent resources are available on external websites. The list below includes the core reference resources used by Bank editors as well as a sample of other materials and workbooks available in the libraries and online.

Dictionaries

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, latest edition. (As of December 2008, the latest edition was the Eleventh.) The spelling guide used by the World Bank. Also available online at http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/collegiate.htm.

Oxford Desk Thesaurus, American edition.

Style Guides

Chicago Manual of Style, latest edition. (As of December 2008, the latest edition was the Fifteenth.) Also available online at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html.

Correspondence and Documents Guide (also known as *The Redbook*). The official style guide for the International Monetary Fund, based on Chicago.

Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White. A classic. Readily available from retailers.

World Bank Publications Style Guide. The official style guide for World Bank editors, based on *Chicago*. Use the intranet search function to find *EXTOP* style.

Gregg Reference Manual, latest edition. (As of December 2008, the latest edition was the Tenth.) Offers companion worksheets. The Writing and Speaking Skills Program offers a half-day class devoted to mastering *Gregg*: "Writing Correctly and Precisely." See the LMS for schedule.

Books on Usage and Writing

Economical Writing by D. McCloskey.
Effective Writing: Stunning Sentences, Powerful Paragraphs, & Riveting Reports by Bruce Ross-Larson, a consultant who has worked with Bank documents.
In and Outs of Prepositions by Jean Yates.
Revising Prose by Richard Lanham.

Internet and World Bank Intranet Sites

To access a wide range of online writing, grammar, and editing resources, type in the friendly url writingandspeaking on the Bank intranet. Links are provided for many internal and external sites that offer online study and reference resources, as well as for all of the courses offered by the Writing and Speaking Skills Program.