

Philip Vassallo

**HOW TO
WRITE
FAST
UNDER PRESSURE**



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DASH—Getting to the Task

FIGURE 1-1: Writing Myths and Realities

Myth



"I never have enough time to write."

"I'll get around to it sooner or later."

"If I do nothing, maybe it will just go away."

"I need the perfect atmosphere to write."

"I can't write fast enough."

"Writing this is killing me."

"They'll tear it apart."

"I feel like such a waste!"

Reality



"I make every minute count."

"I'll write this now."

"Here's the path to the end."

"I create my own atmosphere."

"It's just a bunch of words."

"I can write!"

"I'll get this done."

"Why stop now?"

FIGURE 1-2: Examples of the Treat and Trick

The Treat	→ The Trick
Andrew went into a meeting with a clear head.	→ He wrote three pressing request e-mails all within five minutes before he had to start a meeting.
Bette had an emergency report ready for her team as soon as she walked into the office.	→ She wrote the report on her laptop during a 20-minute subway ride into work.
Charlie cleaned up his e-mail inbox of 100 messages before leaving the office on Friday afternoon.	→ He didn't take calls, engage in office chat, or write anything but single-sentence response e-mails for 45 minutes so that he could focus purely on filing, forwarding, deleting, and responding to e-mails.
Danielle wrote the working and the revised drafts of a seven-page external proposal on the same day.	→ She wrote the first draft early in the morning—at her most creative time of day—and met with her boss in the early afternoon to give herself the needed revising time directly after the meeting.
Ed wrote three accident reports in the same time that his partner wrote one.	→ He cut-and-pasted most of the text from appropriate sections of previously written files; meanwhile, his partner tends to save few reports on her laptop, so she had to compose all her content from scratch.
Fran wrote 14 reply letters to customer inquiries or complaints while taking a dozen calls and responding to twice as many e-mails all in one morning.	→ She delegated the research on all the customer letters to Robert, a subordinate, who e-mailed the needed information to her, and she crafted the generic openings and closings of each letter while she was waiting for Bob's data.

FIGURE 1-3: Writing with *DASH*

Quality	Chapter	Definition	Elements
Direction	2	Hitting the ground running with the end in mind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the road ahead • Committing idea to writing • Devising a document plan • Using idea generators
Acceleration	3	Moving quickly through any writing assignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answering the 3 Big Questions • Preferring speed to precision • Favoring quantity over quality • Getting into a writing rhythm • Maintaining momentum
Strength	4	Possessing the stamina to get the writing job done.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a writer's world by addressing your environmental, mental, physical, and social domains • Employing the 5-minute, 10-minute, and 20-minute fixes to your drafts
Health	5	Maintaining productivity throughout your writing life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping your direction, acceleration, and strength going • Stoking your creative flame • Dealing with yourself and others in meeting deadlines



Direction—Hitting the Ground Running

FIGURE 2-1: Understanding the Writing Process

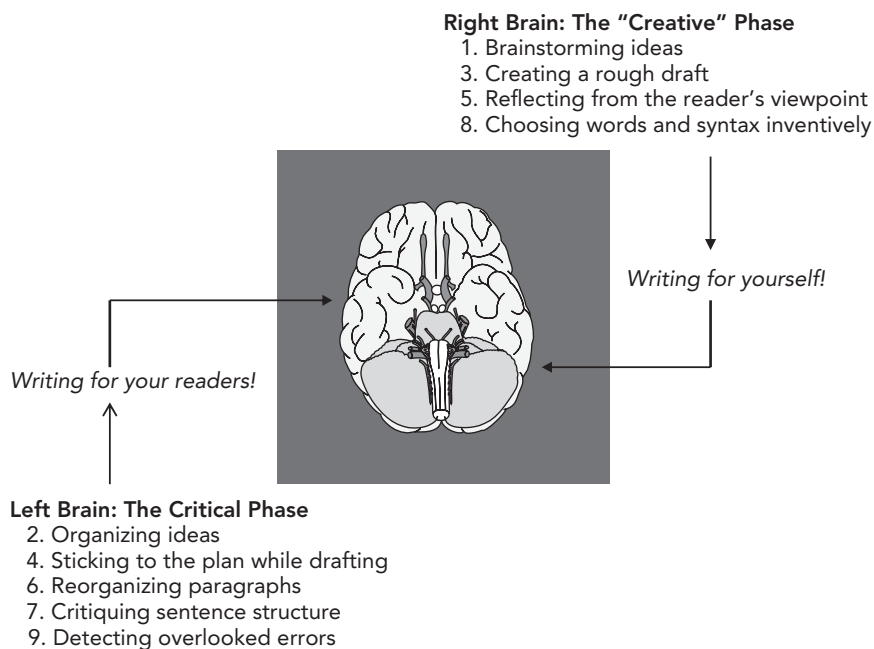


FIGURE 2-2: Using Canned Language

Document	Opening	Closing
Incident Investigation	This report summarizes the accident this morning when the Pillbox, Inc., truck damaged the overhead gate at Dock 3.	We will submit the repair bill to Pillbox for reimbursement and extend by 12 inches all loading dock bumpers on Friday morning.
Lab Analysis	The R&D Group submits its analysis of the enzymes found in the Bound Corporation's tetromimeosis sampling.	Further analysis of in-stock and future tetromimeosis samples from Bound Corporation and Gauge, Inc., is warranted.
Meeting Summary	Below are the minutes of the Quality Assurance Team's meeting on July 2.	The Quality Assurance Team will meet again on July 16 in the conference room.
Procedure	The following are instructions for operating and maintaining the SeeMeNow Model 8185 photocopier.	If you need operating or maintenance information not noted in this procedure, go to www.seemenow.com/8185 .
Proposal	The A Team recommends the purchase of an <i>InYourHand</i> smartphone for each project manager.	For more information, go to www.InYourHand.biz . With your approval, we will process the required requisition.
Request	Please provide the following information.	We'd appreciate your prompt response.
Response to Request	Here is the information you requested.	Please let me know if you need further information.
Staff Recommendation	I strongly recommend Julian Berrios as your product manager because his diligence, creativity, and loyalty would contribute significantly to meeting your departmental objectives.	I am confident that your department will be a better one for selecting Julian, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have about his exceptional qualifications.
Status Report	Here is the update on the Main Street power line rerouting project.	We will issue our completion report on August 21 after installing final line testing.

FIGURE 2-3: Setting Templates in Motion

Document	Description	Contents
Internal Proposal	Proposal or justification to management to accept a change in a work scope, head count, project cost, or production timeline	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. problem 2. history 3. impact 4. cause 5. options 6. solution 7. benefit
External Proposal	Sales proposal to a client describing a proposed business engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. client need 2. scope 3. schedule 4. qualifications 5. budget
Analytical Report	Analytical report on a program or project at the planning, in-progress, or completion stage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. problem 2. history 3. method 4. results 5. conclusion
Trip Report	Report reviewing a business trip tied to the company's objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. purpose 2. facility tour 3. management interview 4. documentation review 5. analysis
Course Review	Course summary report by a participant to help management assess the value of the course in advancing the company's objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. objectives 2. participants 3. facilitator 4. materials 5. activities 6. assessment
Lab Report	Review of a laboratory experiment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. problem 2. method 3. findings 4. conclusion

FIGURE 2-3: Setting Templates in Motion (continued)

Document	Description	Contents
Incident Analysis	Description of a business-critical event, actions taken to manage it, and recommended short- and long-term actions to prevent its recurrence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. problem 2. troubleshooting methodology 3. cause 4. immediate preventive measure 5. mitigation plan
Audit Report	Report noting at least three audit points from different organizational or departmental areas (e.g., management, documentation, fiscal controls)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. finding 2. standard 3. observation 4. cause 5. impact 6. conclusion 7. recommendation 8. benefit
Meeting Summary	Description of the key points and action items discussed at a staff meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. meeting purpose, attendees 2. item 1, discussion, action, owner 3. item 2, discussion, action, owner 4. next meeting
Policy	Description of a new policy and the procedure for executing it	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. rationale for policy 2. description of procedure 3. troubleshooting
Procedure	Step-by-step instructional document intended for end users	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. procedure purpose 2. authorized user 3. required tools 4. precautions 5. numbered steps 6. troubleshooting
Self-appraisal	Employee self-evaluation for periodic managerial review describing how an employee's accomplishments align with the company's objectives and help the business	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. personal objectives for period 2. accomplishments, objective 1 3. accomplishments, objective 2 4. new personal objectives 5. plan for achieving objectives

FIGURE 2-3: Setting Templates in Motion (continued)

Document	Description	Contents
Staff Appraisal	Manager's evaluation of a subordinate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. personal objectives for period 2. accomplishment, objective 1 3. accomplishment, objective 2 4. area for improvement 1 5. area for improvement 2 6. action plan for next period
Staff Recommendation	Staff endorsement to another manager within the company or to another employer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. relationship 2. aptitude 3. attitude 4. aspirations
Disciplinary Action	Reprimand of a staff member for violating company policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. infraction 2. history 3. policy 4. expectations 5. consequences
Job Application	Personal statement in application for a position	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. company objectives 2. qualifications fit 3. anticipated results

FIGURE 2-4: Proposal Template

1. Summary	<p>Asking R&D to reassign Jane to Project Now would recover some production time lost since she left the project.¹</p> <p>Problem</p> <p>Project Now is running behind schedule.² Our project plan lists October 1 as the completion date for Phase 1,³ but we have seven tests to run before we can move to Phase 2.⁴ At this rate, we will not complete the project until December 14, two weeks past the projected completion date.⁵</p> <p>6. History 7. Cause</p> <p>We planned the timeline for this project assuming three analysts would conduct the Phase 1 tests.⁶ Once Tom reassigned Jane to R&D on September 9, we were able to complete only three tests a week.⁷</p> <p>Options</p> <p>8. Method</p> <p>I've estimated the time needed to complete the final seven tests and discussed with the remaining analysts three options to get to within a week of the deadline.⁸</p> <p>9. Options</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Allow overtime.</i> Because of the painstaking level of testing, the extended working hours may compromise quality. 2. <i>Assign me to the testing team.</i> In this scenario, I would have to suspend my supervisory responsibilities. 3. <i>Reassign Jane.</i> This option would help us regain continuity and ensure sufficient coverage without sacrificing quality or supervision.⁹ <p>Recommendation</p> <p>10. Solution 11. Benefit 12. Next Step</p> <p>Returning Jane is our best option¹⁰ to gain at least a week of lost time.¹¹</p> <p>Please let me know how to proceed during our next project meeting.¹²</p>
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FIGURE 2-5: Examples of the Scoop

Procedure	Using the procedure detailed below (<i>what's in it for me</i>) will minimize operator error and accidents (<i>what's in it for you</i>).
Proposal	To ensure a continuous production and a smooth transition on moving day (<i>what's in it for you</i>), IT recommends a three-phase course of action (<i>what's in it for me</i>).
Request	Please send the following documents (<i>what's in it for me</i>) so that we can process your application by the due date (<i>what's in it for you</i>).
Response	I understand you are looking for ways to increase your client base (<i>what's in it for you</i>). Calling Jane Wayne, our most successful territory manager, would be beneficial to that end (<i>what's in it for me</i>).

FIGURE 2-6: Charting It—Getting from Here to There

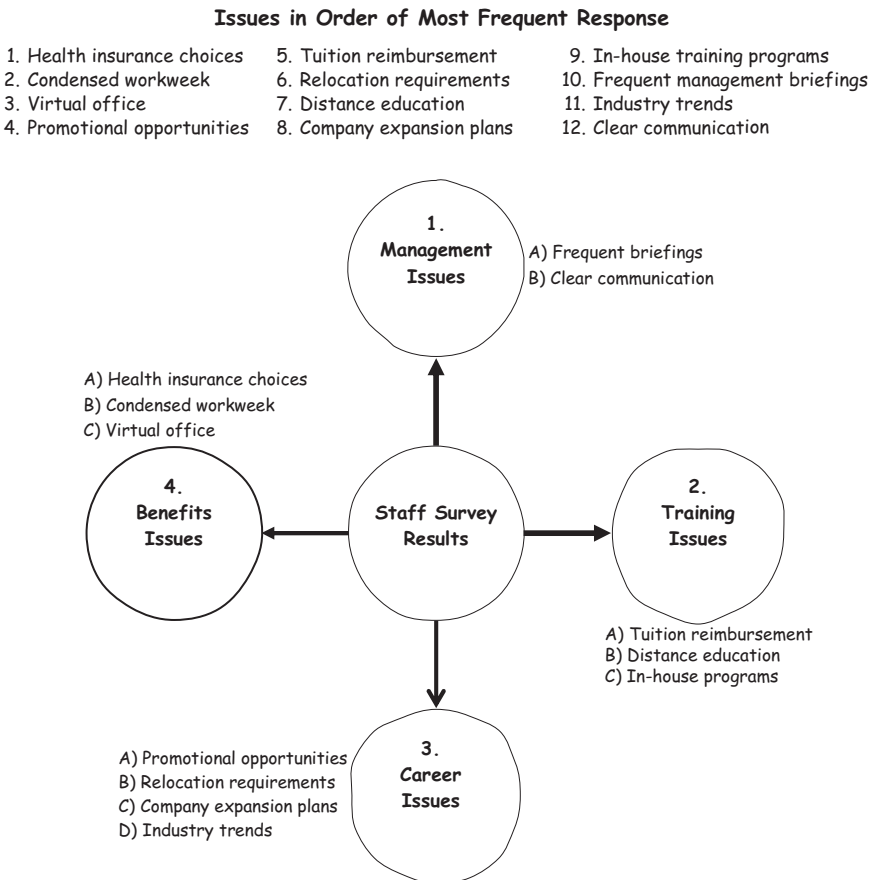


FIGURE 2-7: Posting

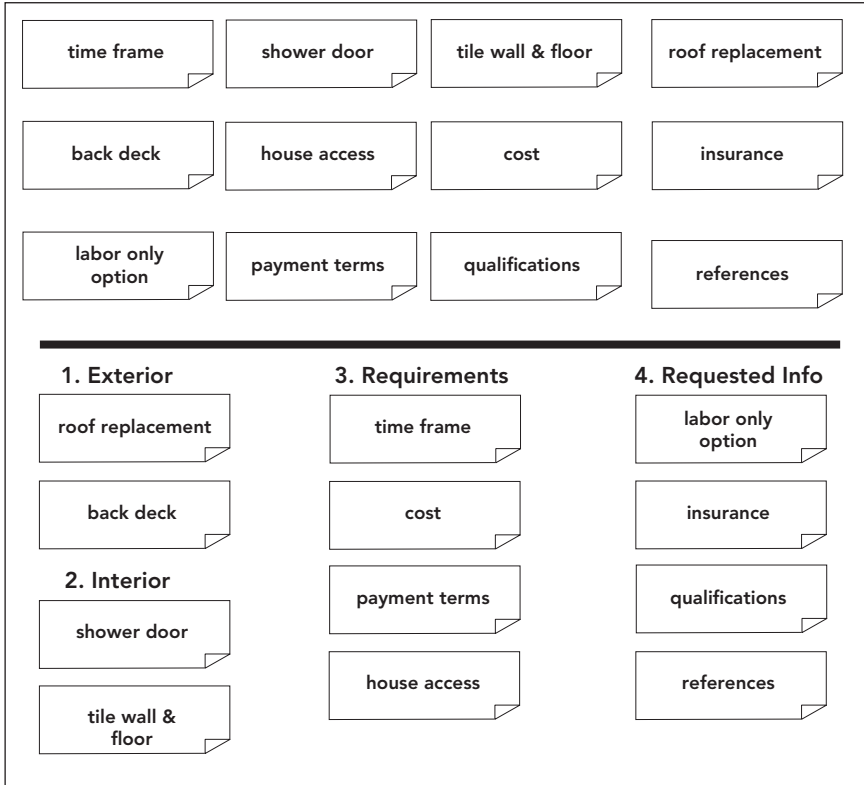


FIGURE 2-8: Listing

PART 1: Moe lists ideas as they occur to him during the workshop sessions he attends.

Session 1: Widgetry Industry Trends

1. ISO certification changes
2. Outsourcing

Session 2: Creating a Need in Overseas Widget Markets

1. Latin America—economic standards
2. Southeast Asia—cultural differences
3. Middle East—political stability

Session 3: New Safeguards by the National Widgetry Regulatory Commission

1. Audit expectations
2. Retooling costs
3. Management accountability
4. Safety engineering

Session 4: Moving from Just-in-Time Widget Inventorying

1. More orders, smaller shipments
2. New demands on warehousing

Session 5: Research and Development: Connecting the Widget Industry with the University

1. Shrinking talent supply
2. Prohibitive in-house R&D costs
3. Greater need for production and warehousing space
4. Federal and state tax advantages to university outreach

Session 6: The Diminishing Widget Supplier Base

1. India shifting from widgets to IT
2. Indonesia price hikes
3. Possible solution: Persuade China to retool
4. Possible solution: Upgrade and partner with ill-equipped African suppliers

FIGURE 2-8: Listing (continued)

PART 2: Moe reorganizes the ideas, deleting and adding as he goes along, according to what he believes to be the points of greatest interest to his readers. The deleted items are crossed out and the added items appear in a different font.

Session 6: The Diminishing Widget Supplier Base

1. India shifting from widgets to IT
2. Indonesia price hikes
- ~~3. Possible solution: Persuade China to retool~~
4. Possible solution: Upgrade and partner with ill-equipped African suppliers
 - Reasons that China and Africa are not options for us
 - Suggestion: Create an in-house taskforce to study the situation

Session 3: New Safeguards by the National Widgetry Regulatory Commission

- Suggestion: 3. Management accountability and 4. Safety engineering will be needed because of 1. Audit expectations and 2. Retooling costs

Session 4: Moving from Just-in-Time Widget Inventorying

1. More orders, smaller shipments result in 2. New demands on warehousing
- Suggestion: Rethink how we use space

Session 1: Widgetry Industry Trends

- Suggestion: Hire a consulting engineer to develop ISO conversion plan
- 1. ISO certification changes—huge impact on our industry standing

Session 5: Research and Development: Connecting the Widget Industry with the University

- Suggestion: may be a great recruiting mechanism because of 1. Shrinking talent supply
- 4. Federal and state tax advantages to university outreach
- ~~2. Prohibitive in-house R&D costs~~
- ~~3. Greater need for production and warehousing space~~

Session 2: Creating a Need in Overseas Widget Markets Just an Overview

1. Latin America—economic standards, 2. Southeast Asia—cultural differences, 3. Middle East—political stability



CHAPTER
3



Acceleration—Writing on the Fly

FIGURE 3-1: Using the Writing Process Wisely

Situation	1. Planning	2. Drafting	3. Rewriting
1. Free		✓	
2. Formulaic		✓	✓
3. Fresh	✓	✓	✓

FIGURE 3-2: The Four Ds of Managing Writing Tasks

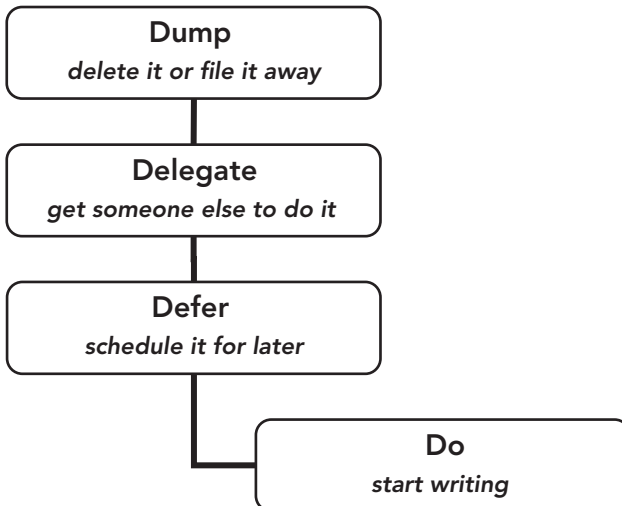


FIGURE 3-3: Free-Writing Exercises

Note: If two different readers you've chosen are actually the same person (e.g., your manager is your chief executive, your manager is your friend, or your friend is your coworker on the same level), write to that person the way you normally would.

#	Topic	Reader	Time	Words
1	a description of your past (personal, academic, professional, or any other side of you)	yourself	3 mins.	
2	a description of your present (personal, academic, professional, or any other side of you)	yourself	4 mins.	
3	a description of your future plans (personal, academic, professional, or any other side of you)	yourself	5 mins.	
4	a description of your office	a friend	5 mins.	
5	a book or movie you'd recommend	a friend	5 mins.	
6	a day trip or activity you'd recommend	a friend	5 mins.	
7	a description of a detailed procedure you perform	a coworker on your level	4 mins.	
8	a report on what you accomplished your last workday	your manager	4 mins.	
9	a course or seminar you wish to take	a coworker on your level	6 mins.	
10	an analysis of the state of your business	your manager	6 mins.	
11	an ideal location for a staff retreat	your chief executive	6 mins.	
12	a suggestion for a new employee benefit	your chief executive	6 mins.	



CHAPTER
4



Strength—Standing Fast in the Midst of Chaos

FIGURE 4-1: Tips for Creating and Building a Writer's World

Environmental	Mental	Physical	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check lighting, temperature, ventilation, and noise levels.• Make ergonomic improvements.• Reduce clutter.• Surround yourself with beauty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep good reference books nearby.• Bookmark electronic resources.• Believe in yourself.• Count the number of words you produce.• Use the writing process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep a log.• Consider time of day.• Determine duration.• Improve typing speed.• Practice planning and drafting.• Eat, sleep, and exercise well.• Create a writing ritual.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hang around writers.• Talk about writing.• “Steal” ideas.• Make writing a lifelong activity.

FIGURE 4-2: The Three Document Fixes that Will Dramatically Improve Your Writing

The Fix	The Task
5-Minute Fix: <i>Purposefulness and Completeness</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assert your purpose statement in the opening sentence. 2. Separate the purpose from the rest of the document. 3. Check your closing for logical, useful next steps that connect to your purpose in the opening. 4. Review your supporting details against your plan. Add or delete ideas as you see fit based on your purpose and readers' concerns.
10-Minute Fix: <i>5-Minute Fix + Structure</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Limit paragraphs to one focused idea. 6. Lead each paragraph with the centralized point. 7. Employ a familiar organizational pattern for sentences following the lead sentence (e.g., most-to-least important, least-to-most important, general-to-specific, specific-to-general, chronology, cause-effect, advantages-disadvantages, or similarities-differences). 8. Use headings to separate big sections. 9. Use bullets or numbers to itemize points within a section. 10. Insert transitions to guide the reader from one idea to the next.
20-Minute Fix: <i>10-Minute Fix + Style</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Ensure that your tone is reader-sensitive. 12. Read the document aloud for correct sentence structure. 13. Edit sentences for clarity. 14. Eliminate verbiage. 15. Check grammar, punctuation, and mechanics (e.g., capitalization, abbreviation, number usage). 16. Check diction and spelling.

FIGURE 4-3: Moe's Proposal, First Draft

The purpose of this message is to propose what I think to be a sound approach to completing Project Now on time and within budget. We could ask R&D to reassign Jane to recover some production time lost since she left the project. As you know, the problem is that Project Now is running behind schedule. Our project plan lists October 1 as the completion date for Phase 1. I believe that we have seven tests to run before we can move to Phase 2. We will not complete the project until December 14, two weeks past the projected completion date. Everyone involved in the project was planning the timeline for this project under the faulty assumption that at least three analysts would conduct the Phase 1 tests. Tom reassigned Jane to R&D on September 9. We have been able to complete only three tests a week. I spent some time coming up with some viable options. To complete the final seven tests, the remaining analysts told me some options, and I've come up with some ideas of my own, to get to within a week of the deadline. First, we could allow overtime. There's a lot of tough testing, and the extended working hours may compromise quality. Another option is to assign me to the testing team. I would have to suspend all my supervisory responsibilities if called upon to do so. Another thing we could do is reassign Jane to Project Now. This option would go a long way toward helping us to regain continuity and ensure that we've got enough coverage without ever sacrificing quality or supervision. I think we should return Jane to our group, which is our best option to gain at least a week of lost time. I would really appreciate your letting me know which way you want to go on this.

FIGURE 4-4: Moe's Proposal, Final Draft

Asking R&D to reassign Jane to Project Now would recover some production time lost since she left the project.

Problem

Project Now is running behind schedule. Our project plan lists October 1 as the completion date for Phase 1, but we have seven tests to run before we can move to Phase 2. At this rate, we will not complete the project until December 14, two weeks past the projected completion date.

We planned the timeline for this project assuming three analysts would conduct the Phase 1 tests. Once Tom reassigned Jane to R&D on September 9, we were able to complete only three tests a week.

Options

I've estimated the time needed to complete the final seven tests and discussed with the remaining analysts three options to get to within a week of the deadline:

1. *Allow overtime.* Because of the painstaking level of testing, the extended working hours may compromise quality.
2. *Assign me to the testing team.* In this scenario, I would have to suspend all my supervisory responsibilities.
3. *Reassign Jane.* This option would help us regain continuity and ensure sufficient coverage without sacrificing quality or supervision.

Recommendation

Returning Jane is our best option to gain at least a week of lost time.

Please let me know how to proceed during our next project meeting.



CHAPTER
5



Health—Planning for the Unexpected

FIGURE 5-1: Letter for Critiquing, First Draft

Dear Representative:

I am writing for three reasons:

1. to inform you of my intention not to pay the late charge of \$25.00 and finance charges of \$17.39 noted on your recent bill because I did not receive a copy of your original bill
2. to authorize my husband, Frank Vella, to speak on my behalf about your bill since my job precludes me from calling you during the unreasonably limited hours that your customer service center is available
3. to express my disappointment that I had to wait 22 minutes (from 11:55 A.M. to 12:17 P.M.) today and make four calls during that time (I was disconnected the first three times) before finally reaching Vickie Towson, one of your representatives

Please resolve this matter with him expeditiously because I want to pay the final bill and end my patronage of a business that does little to keep its customers happy.

Sincerely,

Carmen Vella

FIGURE 5-2: Letter for Critiquing, Second Draft

Dear Representative:

I have been having a difficult time trying to resolve some basic account management issues, so I hope that you can resolve them for me:

1. Reverse the late charge of \$25.00 and finance charge of \$17.39 noted on your recent bill because I did not receive a copy of your original bill.
2. Authorize my husband, Frank Vella, to speak on my behalf about future bills.

In addition, I would suggest that you extend the available hours to speak with a live representative in your customer service center as a way of backing your advertised commitment to quality customer care for those customers who work during your business hours. I had to wait 22 minutes (from 11:55 A.M. to 12:17 P.M.) today and make four calls during that time (I was disconnected the first three times), before finally reaching Vickie Towson, one of your representatives.

I look forward to your response and appreciate your efforts at resolving these issues.

Sincerely,

Carmen Vella