Chapter 4

Choosing Your Project

As you'll recall, in the first three chapters of this book we presented some basic ideas about service-learning and technical and professional communication. We offered you a sense of what service-learning is and how it might be useful to the parties affected by it. We considered some basic rhetorical principles that can help you to be a more purposeful and persuasive writer. In the remaining chapters, we will address the process of completing a service-learning project from the earliest stage—choosing an agency—through the final stages of presenting your work to others.

Throughout this book we emphasize flexibility. We offer a range of approaches and possibilities for dealing with tasks and challenges and invite you to decide what will work best in your particular situation. The remaining chapters present a wide range of possible assignments and activities. As you explore sample student documents throughout these chapters as well as complete projects in the appendixes, you'll see that many students just like you have completed a great deal of impressive work over the course of a semester. Refer to your class syllabus and your instructor's comments to find out which assignments you'll be focusing on in your class.

In this chapter we'll address the first step of a service-learning project—finding a sponsoring organization. Your first reaction to this task might be concern; you may not have a lot of free time to volunteer in the community, or you may not immediately feel deep commitments to any social causes or community issues. As we discussed earlier, however, service-learning is not social activism or volunteer work, but clearly contextualized coursework. And you surely have some connection to community problems or issues, even if they are not obviously political.

In the pages that follow we'll help you to identify causes or concerns that interest you, to locate and investigate local agencies that address those concerns, and to narrow your focus to two or three sites that might work for you. We'll show you how to write a letter or inquiry and a résumé to send to an organization. This will allow you to introduce yourself and your project and to solicit information about possible collaboration. Finally, we'll give you and your class-

mates some suggestions for processing the information you collect through your correspondence. We'll give you ideas for presenting your project to your classmates and for pulling together collaborative groups. This section will describe a pitch day on which you and your classmates can present what you've learned about your agencies and then divide yourselves into writing groups with shared interests and goals.

Identifying Your Interests and Concerns

Most people have significant beliefs, concerns, and contacts that can lead them to a good service-learning project. You can use the heuristics below to help identify some of yours in a kind of self-profile. First, write down any community-related problems you see or encounter in your daily life—whether at work, at home, or with your friends—but haven't had a chance to do anything about. Maybe you are concerned about the homeless people you see walking around the outskirts of campus, or maybe you are worried about the quality of your city's drinking water.

To further generate possibilities, complete the following survey. For each of the community concerns below, rate your level of interest from one (low) to five (high). Keep in mind that you may need to consider several areas of interest before identifying a well-suited agency. The following list is not all inclusive but will offer you a starting point.

1. Children
   a. Early childhood education
   b. Foster care/adoption services
   c. Mentoring programs
   d. Parent education
   e. Drug and alcohol education

2. Civic/Community Concerns
   a. Art and music festivals
   b. Immigrant education programs
   c. Preservation of historical sites
   d. Sports and recreation
   e. Transportation
   f. Volunteer centers or community foundations
   g. Voter education

3. Civil Rights
   a. Capital punishment
   b. Disability concerns
   c. Race relations
   d. Legal assistance
   e. Discrimination
   f. Reproductive rights

4. Education
   a. Adult vocational education
   b. Art and music education
   c. Charter schools
   d. Literacy
   e. School funding
   f. Special education
5. Environment
   a. Domestic animal welfare
   b. Hazardous waste concerns
   c. Land preservation
   d. Recycling
   e. Solid waste disposal
   f. Wild animal conservation
   g. Water safety
6. Medical Issues
   a. AIDS
   b. Cancer
   c. Health education
   d. Immunization drives
   e. Medical research
   f. Mental health
   g. Reproductive health
7. Social and Family Services
   a. Housing/homelessness
   b. Hunger
   c. Services for elderly
   d. Domestic violence
   e. Child abuse
8. Your College Campus
   a. Beautification
   b. Career and placement issues
   c. Community outreach programs
   d. Crime victim services
   e. Health services
   f. Parking availability and transportation
   g. Recycling
   h. Safety/security
9. Your Workplace
   a. Community support programs
   b. Customer education
   c. Drug-testing policies

d. Employee crisis assistance
e. Fairness in hiring and promotion policies
f. Safety concerns
g. Smoking policies

After completing the survey and adding the highest-ranking areas to your growing list of concerns, take an extended break. Then come back, and this time reverse directions and begin to narrow your list of interests. Mark out ideas that seem relatively less interesting; highlight those for which you know you can find a collaborating agency. As you select four or five issues on which to focus your ensuing search, keep in mind the following:

- You may have considered earning potential when you chose your field of study. As you think about your service-learning project, imagine the kind of job you'd love to do if money and job security were not a concern. Maybe you've always wanted to work with children or be an artist. Maybe you'd like to spend all of your time exercising or reading books or fishing. As you identify the activities that give you the most satisfaction, imagine how they might connect to community efforts.
- If you choose to pursue a project that connects with a deep conviction or an interest you have, be sure that you're not selecting something that will be too emotionally painful for you or difficult to work on with others. To illustrate, one student initially thought she'd work with her local organ donor liaison office; she had this interest because her brother died while waiting for an organ transplant. Despite this deep connection, however, she ultimately decided that she wasn't emotionally ready to spend an extended period of time confronting and addressing the issue with others.
- As you think about your values and beliefs, keep in mind that some organizations might participate in activities or promote values that are in conflict with your university's policies. For instance, don't choose a project that promotes hatred for a particular type of people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and the like. It's also generally best not to work for a particular political candidate's campaign.
- Most of you will be working on your projects in collaborative groups, so you'll want to choose something that others in your class will also find interesting. This doesn't mean that you can't bring in creative and unusual ideas—in our experience, fresh and unexpected kinds of projects are among the most popular and successful. Just don't choose something that would require all members and/or peer reviewers to have extensive knowledge about a field or to have certain strong religious or political viewpoints.

Identifying Possible Sponsors

After you've narrowed the field to several community concerns, it's time to start looking for agencies that address them. Use some or all of the techniques below to find organizations whose interests intersect with yours. You can apply these lists to several interest areas.

OTHER VOICES 4.A Andrea Pacini

Andrea Pacini is a recent graduate of the University of Central Florida where she studied creative writing. She is a marketing and public relations associate for Vive *magazine.*

For my service-learning project I chose to work with the yearbook class at a local high school (Trinity Preparatory). I chose this agency because it was a fusion of my interests—I enjoy working with children and am going into the journalism field.

The most important thing I encountered when choosing a service-learning project was finding an agency whose cause I identified with and was interested in promoting. I strongly believe that being committed to and excited about your agency's cause will help waylay any frustrations or obstacles you might encounter along the way.

Another important factor to consider when choosing a project is the availability of your contact person. After many attempts to contact other agencies, our group decided to work with Trinity Prep because of the enthusiasm and prompt reply of its contact person. Chances are that if the contact person at an agency is too busy to accept an offer for free help, she or he will also be too busy to assist you over the course of the project.

Targeting a Few Organizations

Just as you narrowed your list of interests, you must narrow your list of possible sponsoring organizations. After all, you won't have time to further research all of them. At this point, try to narrow the list down to two or three that you will continue researching. These organizations will become the subjects of the agency profile that we discuss in the next section. Because you may subsequently discover that these organizations are not suitable, you should also have a couple of back-up choices.

When narrowing your choices, consider as many of the following questions as you can:

- How much do you already know about the organization?
- How well do the organization's values seem to intersect with yours?
- How physically accessible is the organization? How easily would you be able to get there?
- How well do the types of texts produced by the organization mesh with the texts that you've produced or want to produce?
- What professional benefits might your work with the agency provide you?

Gathering Information about Your Target Organizations: The Agency Profile

After you've identified the two or three organizations that hold the most promise for your service-learning project, you'll need to gather more information about them to determine the one to target in your letter of inquiry. We sometimes have

students write a short memo in which they profile the two organizations that seem most promising and then present this to their classmates and instructor for feedback. The **agency profile** will not only be a selection and reflection tool for you, but will provide your instructor with helpful information about the promising agencies. Below we provide a list of questions your profile might answer. You can probably answer most of these from studying the organization's website and print informational materials. You should also be able to collect the information from a phone conversation with any staff member. We suggest starting with the websites and going from there.

General Information

- phone number, address, URL
- name of agency or department director and email address
- if different from above, name of contact person and email address
- location
- hours of operation
- number of staff members.

Services and Values

- What are the organization's mission and main objectives?
- What community problems does the organization address with its services?
- To what extent do the agency's expressed or enacted values intersect or clash with yours?

Texts

- What kinds of texts does the organization produce? What kinds of texts do they need revised or produced relatively soon?
- Who writes or produces these texts? Who supervises this production?
- Which of these texts seem most interesting? Which do you have experience writing? Which do you need experience writing?
- How would you describe the ethos projected in the agency's texts?

Collecting More Details: The Preliminary Visit and Trip Report

Some organizations do not have websites. Others don't describe the kinds of texts they produce on their sites. As a result, you may need to make a preliminary visit to one or more of your target agencies to gather the information you need. It's best to call ahead of time to make sure that you visit at a good time and that someone will be there to answer your questions. You should explain why you are visiting and why you are interested in the agency.

If you get a chance to have an extended conversation with an agency staff person, you might also get answers to the questions below, answers that you could add to your agency profile. Remember that you will also have an opportunity to request more information at your first major meeting with a contact person.

- Do they have student interns? Have they sponsored student projects from your school or other schools in the past?
- Who is typically the contact person for such projects?
- How equipped is the organization to work with groups of students? Does it have enough staff and space? Does it have regular hours?
- What is the agency's level of need? Are they drowning in work and therefore unlikely to have much time to work with you? Are they in an inactive period and therefore unlikely to need much assistance at this time?
- What kinds of projects interest them? Are they asking for projects that would require expertise or resources you don't have?

If you choose to make a preliminary visit, your instructor may ask you to write a **trip report,** a type of document that many businesspeople write on a regular basis. Even if you don't write one at this point, you will probably write one about your first major meeting with the agency's contact person. A trip report is a short, relatively informal account of a business trip or meeting. Written to an internal audience such as a manager (in this case your instructor and classmates), this report is usually presented in memo form. Many trip reports contain the following parts:

1. A brief overview of the trip's purpose, including the objectives you hoped the trip would accomplish.
2. A summary of the trip. Instead of a play-by-play narrative of the trip, this section should highlight its most important parts. With whom did you meet and what did you discuss? What did you observe? What materials did you see? Which questions were answered?
3. An analysis section. In this section explain what you think about your observations and activities on the trip. You might include reflections about the contact person's apparent attitude toward the collaboration or about the tone and atmosphere in the office. You might discuss previous projects that students have completed with the agency, or you might note specific ideas you have for a major project. You might also elaborate on your list of advantages and disadvantages of working with this agency.
4. A conclusion. In this final section, present a short and concise statement of your bottom-line opinion about working with the organization.

As you move closer to making a decision about which organization you'll address in the letter of inquiry, take some time to review all of the information you've compiled. Consider your lists of concerns alongside your list of promising agencies and your agency profile to ensure that they connect. Talk to your classmates about the agencies that seem the most suitable and interesting. After you decide on one, you are ready to make a more serious inquiry.

OTHER VOICES 4.B Barbara Heifferon

Barbara Heifferon, PhD., is assistant professor of technical writing in the English department of Clemson University in South Carolina.

Because I use problem-based learning, I present my students with a problem within the first week or two of the semester. During a recent semester, for example, I collaborated in writing and received a large USDA grant to help increase the number of applications for Food Stamps in the upstate of South Carolina to address the increasing malnutrition rates being reported among K–12 children and youth. For the first couple of weeks, the students in my Honors Technical Writing course did intensive research and wrote reports and graphed statistics based on the problem itself. We met as a class with the directors of the Department of Social Services (DSS) for the state of South Carolina and received further information. The students and I worked with the resources available in the Multimedia Authoring and Training Lab in which I teach. We have Adobe design products such as PageMaker, PhotoShop and Illustrator, Macromedia products, CD burners, plus video and audio digitizing capability. In addition, we have access to recording and videotaping studios. Part of the project-choosing process, therefore, involves familiarizing the students with the lab and the tools available to them.

Following presentations and discussions of our preliminary research, our class discussed and debated various ways to approach the problem and get the word out to people who needed to consider their possible eligibility for food stamps. We brainstormed via dry-erase boards and overhead computer projectors until we had five projects that addressed the problem using different media and conceptual approaches. Five teams then each chose one of the projects and prepared an eleven-page proposal to argue for their project's viability. To be a viable project, it would need to be completed in one semester and effectively address at least one aspect of the problem. Students completed two very different types of brochures, wrote newspaper stories, prepared advertisements, and designed, produced, and delivered radio and television public service announcements. Because all of our data is tracked by DSS, even before the class ended, we already received confirmation that student efforts had increased applications in the communities we targeted.

What seems to work best for students, communities, and me as facilitator in choosing projects is beginning with a problem that has many possible approaches, conducting shared preliminary research, introducing the tools available, brainstorming projects collaboratively, and having teams argue for and explore through collaboratively written proposals the viability of the projects they choose.

Letter of Inquiry—Rhetorical Situation

After selecting the most promising organization and doing some preliminary research about that organization and the kinds of documents they produce, the next step is formally contacting the organization regarding your interest. This brings

us to the **letter of inquiry**, a common type of correspondence in technical and professional communication. As we noted in a previous section, you'll generally write print correspondence to readers outside of your organization as letters and write correspondence to readers within your organization as memos; that is, letters are for external audiences, and memos are for internal ones. Although your instructor may allow you to send the initial correspondence as email (which is already set up to resemble memo format), you will more likely contact the prospective organization through the more formal print genre of a letter.

If you are hoping to work with a nonprofit agency, your primary audience for this letter of inquiry will likely be the volunteer coordinator. In most agencies this person handles initial contacts with people who are interested in providing services. If you're not sure whom to address, you could write the letter to the head of the organization or the head of the department that produces the texts with which you want to help. In any case, be sure you direct the letter to a particular person, preferably someone who is a decision maker. Secondary audiences include other staff or board members who might read the letter, your classmates, and your instructor. Because your readers may not know you, and because they are likely busy and overworked, assume that they will give your letter a quick read rather than a careful perusal. Concision and accessibility will therefore be crucial.

The primary purpose of the letter is persuasive—to persuade the organization to respond to your inquiry and, ultimately, to sponsor a project for you. To accomplish this you will need to persuade them that you are qualified to help them produce texts and that they, like you, will benefit from the project. (You may enclose your résumé to help accomplish the former.) Because this letter may be the first piece of communication the readers receive from you, it may be used to assess your strengths as a writer. Your letter should persuade a staff person to respond, to answer your questions, to help you develop a project, and to function as your contact person and supervisor for the project. Your letter also has an informative purpose: to explain how the project fits into your course and what its parameters are.

Conventions of Document Design

Most of you are probably already familiar with conventional letter design and parts. As a reminder, Figure 4.1 illustrates the following parts, from top to bottom.

- the return address and date, the former usually designed as letterhead
- the inside address, or the address of the recipient
- the subject line, which is optional and used mainly in letters that function as short reports
- the salutation or greeting
- the body of the letter, which can include headings or lists
- The complimentary close and signature block
- Notations regarding enclosures or copies sent to others.

This letter is written in block format, which means that all items are flush left. Notice in Figure 4.1 that the writer takes care to use the reader's professional title in

Professor Melody A. Bowdon
Department of English
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32816

December 1, 2000

Professor Blake Scott
Department of English
University of Florida
PO Box 117310
Gainesville, FL 32611

RE: Current Textbook Project

Dear Professor Scott,

Paragraph one starts here _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Paragraph two starts here _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Paragraph three starts here _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Sincerely,

Melody A. Bowdon

Enclosure (1)

Figure 4.1 Letter format, block style

the inside address and salutation. Never use sexist titles such as Miss or Mrs., and avoid antiquated ones such as Sir or Madam. Don't begin a letter like this with the phrase "To Whom It May Concern." The tone should be friendly but professional.

Keep the letter to one page if possible. At the same time, remember that most readers prefer a document with a generous amount of blank space to one that looks crowded. Although Figure 4.1 shows a certain number of skipped lines between each element of the letter, you can adjust these, to some extent, to create a balanced page design; for example, you can skip extra lines between the first few elements to move the main text of the letter down further. Ideally, a one-page letter should fit like a picture in a frame.

Letter Parts

Introduction

The introduction of the letter should be short but must accomplish several things. First, it should tell the reader who you are and why you're writing. Your explanation of the latter should mention the course assignment as well as your specific interest in the organization. Perhaps you have a personal connection to the organization, share some of the organization's goals and values, and/or have skills that would be particularly useful to the organization. If you have already met the reader or someone else from the organization, mention this up front as well. If you've had a telephone conversation with the person, mention that contact, including the date.

Figure 4.2 shows a sample letter written by a student at the University of Central Florida. The student, Kristianna, is inquiring about the possibility of pursuing a project for the local Habitat for Humanity chapter. Notice how Kristianna establishes an early connection with her reader in the third sentence. Notice, too, how she ends the opening paragraph by emphasizing what she could do for the organization, couching her major qualifications in a reader-centered way.

This approach is a crucial part of a successful letter of inquiry. Many job application letter and résumé writers make the mistake of emphasizing themselves and their needs rather than the interests and expectations of the reader. One indication of such a problem is that numerous sentences start with *I*. Although the subject of the letter is partially you, it is also your readers, their needs, and their potential benefits from the project. Note Kristianna's primary emphasis on what she and her classmates have to offer the agency rather than on what they hope to gain from it.

Explanation

The body of the letter should explain more about the assignment and its parameters, explain the role of the organization in the project, and suggest a possible project idea. Your readers will need to know the scope and type of work you hope to do, the number of students (e.g., a group of three), and the time frame for your assignment. These parameters will depend on your course; the assignment may call for a group project or an individual one, a unit-long project or a semester-long one.

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Winter Park, FL 32792
407-677-8888
khf2@pegasus.ucf.edu

September 7, 1999

Mr. Chris Jepson, Executive Director
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Orlando Area, Inc.
808 West Central Boulevard
Orlando, FL 32805

Dear Director Jepson,

My name is Kristianna Fallows and I am a Communications major at the University of Central Florida. As part of a Business Communication course, my classmates and I have been directed to assist a local community service organization with a major writing project. I am especially interested in working with your organization, as I very much share your goal or mission of helping struggling families in need. It is this shared commitment as well as my writing, design, and project management skills that would enable me to help you meet your communication needs (the enclose resume will give you a betters sense of these skills).

There are lots of options for our writing project, including the writing, document design, and/or editing of a number of genres, such as a newsletter, annual report, fundraising materials, website, or a set of office procedures. Most projects include one major text and perhaps a couple of related shorter ones as well. I noticed from your website that you were seeking a volunteer to produce your quarterly newsletter; this job along with editing your website would be ideal in scope. Another possible course project could involve producing promotional materials for your upcoming Hometown Heroes fundraising campaign.

There are two or three other students who would also assist you with the project. Not only would we work with you weekly on site, but we would implement strategies for producing and refining the project in our Business Communication course. While part of the project can involve research and other preparatory work, most of it should be dedicated to writing and designing the document(s). We can begin working in about a week. Our assignment must be completed by November 15. We would need a contact person at the agency who would serve along with our instructor as a co-supervisor.

Although each student in the course is sending out a letter like this one, we will only be able to work with a few organizations. If you think you could benefit from such a project, please contact me at your earliest convenience at the phone number or email address above. The next step in the project would be to meet with the contact person to develop a more specific proposal about what the project would entail. I will contact you in a few days to follow up on this letter. My classmates and I are quite excited and eager to help

(continued)

Figure 4.2 Letter of inquiry

Figure 4.2 *(continued)*

facilitate your efforts to improve substandard housing for working families. I look forward to talking with you about possible communication projects. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristianna Fallows
Enclosure (1)

Perhaps the best way to explain scope and type of work is through examples of possible projects. In Kristianna's letter, for example, she not only mentions several examples of possible texts, but also impressively suggests two possible projects based on specific texts the organization produces. This move strengthens her ethos in two ways: It shows that she has done her homework and has given some thought to the project, and it displays her goodwill toward her audience and its needs.

After giving examples of projects, Kristianna describes some of the assignment's other parameters, including its collaborative nature and time frame. Her purpose here is to give the reader a general sense of how the project would work, not to overwhelm her with details that can be worked out later.

Call to Action

The final paragraph should call for some kind of response and perhaps inform the reader of when you plan to make contact again. Because Kristianna and her classmates are writing to more organizations than the class will actually work with, she suggests that the reader, if interested, should contact her soon. Kristianna wisely explains what the next step will be and tells the readers that she will contact them again as a follow up. The trick to writing a persuasive call to action in letters of inquiry, job application letters, and other similar correspondence is to sound energetic and confident but not conceited or overconfident. The clause "I look forward to talking with you, . . ." confidently assumes that another contact will be made but doesn't assume anything about the reader's reaction.

Once again, the point is to elicit the reader's response, not to overwhelm her or him with requests. You can work out the date and time of the next meeting and ask the reader about other possible projects during the next contact.

Style Focus: Concision

A concise letter will not only garner the appreciation of your busy readers, but it will also showcase your writing skills. If you exhaust your readers with a wordy letter or come across as a windy, ineffective communicator, they may not respond

or even read the entire letter. In this subsection we will go over six techniques for making your technical or professional communication more concise.

1. Delete empty modifiers.
2. Replace redundant pairs with single, more precise words.
3. Replace phrases with single words.
4. Delete words that the reader can easily infer or doesn't otherwise need.
5. Combine two closely related simple sentences into a complex or a compound sentence (this may also help you create a more varied rhythm in your prose).
6. Replace expletive constructions with more direct, active constructions (this will also make your prose more active).

The first three techniques are adapted from Joseph Williams' *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace,* one of our favorite style handbooks. If your course requires this book, you might study the lesson on concision before reading the examples below.

Figure 4.3 shows an earlier draft of Kristianna's letter with revisions for concision noted. The changes are documented with the "track changes" function in Microsoft Word; additions are underlined and deletions are crossed through.

Delete Empty Modifiers

Probably the most common empty modifier that plagues student writing is *very.* Look for the following types of words to determine whether or not the emphasis or qualification is needed (most of the time it is not or it could be conveyed less amorphously):

- very
- definitely
- certain
- quite
- basically
- various
- really
- generally
- actually
- practically

Williams aptly describes these words as "verbal tics that we use as unconsciously as we clear our throats" (141). As you can see, Kristianna's earlier draft contains two such unnecessary "tics," a *very much* in the first paragraph and a *quite* in the last one.

Replace Redundant Pairs

Redundant pairs of modifiers or other words, common in novice and expert writing alike, are sometimes created when writers haven't thought through the precise ideas they want to express. When such pairs are pointlessly redundant (i.e., the redundancy isn't an intentional strategy to create emphasis), they should either be replaced with a more appropriate and precise word or deleted altogether. Here are some examples of redundant pairs:

- each and every
- happy and excited
- any and all
- certain and particular
- first and foremost
- future plans

The pairs in the first row are also mentioned in Williams (140–142). In the first paragraph of her letter, Kristianna uses the words *goal* and *mission* to convey the

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September 7, 1999

Mr. Chris Jepson, Executive Director
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Orlando Area, Inc.
808 West Central Boulevard
Orlando, FL 32805

Dear Director Jepson,

My name is Kristianna Fallows and I am a Communications major at the University of Central Florida. As part of a Business Communication course, my classmates and I have been directed to assist a local community service organization with a major writing project. I am especially interested in working with your organization, as I ~~very much~~ share your goal ~~or mission~~ of helping struggling families in need. ~~It is t~~This shared commitment as well as my writing, design, and project management skills ~~that~~ would enable me to help you meet your communication needs (the enclose resume will give you a betters sense of these skills).

~~There are lots of options for our writing project, including~~ The course project can involve the writing, document design, and/or editing of a number of genres, such as a newsletter, annual report, fundraising materials, website, or a set of office procedures. Most projects include one major text and perhaps a couple of related shorter ones ~~as well~~. I noticed from your website that you were seeking a volunteer to produce your quarterly newsletter; this job along with editing your website would be ideal in scope. Another possible course project could involve producing ~~promotional~~ materials for your upcoming Hometown Heroes fundraising campaign.

There are two or three other students who would also assist you with the project. Not only would we work with you weekly on site, we would implement strategies for producing and refining the project in our Business Communication course. While part of the project can involve research and other preparatory work, most of it should be dedicated to writing and designing the document(s). ~~We can begin working in about a week. Our assignment must be completed by~~ Our time frame is from next week to November 15. We would need a contact person at the agency who would serve along with our instructor as a co-supervisor.

Although each student in the course is sending out a letter like this one, we will only be able to work with a few organizations. If you think you could benefit from such a project, please contact me at your earliest convenience at the phone number or email address above. The next step in the project would be to meet with the contact person to develop a more specific proposal ~~about what~~ for the project ~~would entail~~. I will contact you in a

(continued)

Figure 4.3 Revised letter of inquiry

Figure 4.3 *(continued)*

few days to follow up on this letter. My classmates and I are ~~quite excited and~~ eager to help facilitate your efforts to improve substandard housing for working families. I look forward to talking with you, ~~about possible communication projects. T~~and I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristianna Fallows
Enclosure (1)

same meaning. Although either word would work, *goal* is probably closer to what she means, as mission statements are somewhat general. We see another redundant pair in the last paragraph when Kristianna conveys her excitement and eagerness. *Excited* is the less precise and persuasive word of the pair and could easily be deleted.

Replace Phrases with Words

Writers sometimes use wordy phrases, such as *due to the fact that*, to sound formal. Regardless of whether this formality is appropriate, however, readers of technical and professional writing will appreciate concision more. Therefore, you should replace the phrase with a single word whenever possible. Some such phrases function as transitional elements and others as modifiers. Here is a list of some common wordy phrases and the words they might be replaced with:

- due to the fact that → because
- in order to → to
- the reason for → why
- in regard to → regarding
- despite the fact that → although
- it is possible that → may
- in the event that → if
- take into consideration → consider

The two phrases in the last row contain nominalizations or nouns that have been formed from verbs; notice how the single-word replacement is simply the nominalization turned back into a verb.

In her earlier draft, Kristianna uses the phrase *it is important that* in the third paragraph, partially to emphasize the information that follows. Yet she can achieve this same emphasis by replacing the phrase with the word *must*, a move that also enables her to more easily combine the sentence with the previous one.

Delete Inferable Words

As part of perusing your prose for unnecessary words, look for words that other words in the sentence already imply. For example, the word *promotional* in the last sentence of Kristianna's second paragraph is already implied by the words *fundraising campaign*—fundraising campaigns are necessarily promotional. The

deleted *as well* in the second paragraph and the deleted words in the third paragraph are also implied or otherwise unnecessary.

Combine Simple Sentences

Although combining sentences won't automatically trim your prose, it can have that effect by eliminating the need to repeat subjects or other words. Note how Kristianna combined the two closely related sentences in the third paragraph. Although she could have combined them with a comma and an *and*, she further condensed them into one simple sentence. Kristianna also combined the last two sentences of the letter, this time leaving the second sentence as an independent clause. This seems appropriate because both sentences are closing lines that point to future action in a way that creates goodwill.

Combining sentences can offer the bonus of making relationships among ideas in sentences clearer. If the function of one sentence is to modify another, more important one, for example, this relationship can be better conveyed by making the former sentence a dependent clause of the latter one. Consider the following two sentences: "My classmates and I have been directed to assist a community agency with a writing project. This is part of our Business Comm-unication course." The second sentence essentially supplements the first and is not important enough to be a separate sentence. We could better capture its function and significance by making it an opening dependent clause as in the following sentence: "As part of our Business Communication course, my classmates and I have been directed to assist a community agency with a writing project."

Replace Expletives with More Direct Constructions

Unless used to announce a topic or otherwise convey emphasis, expletive constructions are best avoided as they rely on weak verbs and create unnecessarily wordy sentences. Expletives—the most common of which are *There are/is . . .* and *It is . . .*—are sometimes used by writers when they aren't sure how to begin sentences or introduce ideas. To revise an expletive, determine what the sentence's main subject is, and then begin the sentence with this subject and the action it is taking.

Kristianna, in her earlier draft, begins the second paragraph with the expletive *There are . . .* After deleting this construction, she refigures the sentence into a basic subject–verb–object construction in which the subject and action are slightly more specific. This pattern enables Kristianna to simplify and shorten the sentence while leaving the important information at the end where it will receive more attention from the reader. We find another expletive—an *It is . . .*—at the end of the first paragraph. In this case the expletive can simply be deleted along with the word *that*. This eliminates the need for the "to be" verb.

Writing Workshops

We now turn to the first of our writing workshop guides. These guides not only help you critique your own and classmates' texts, but also highlight the criteria your instructor will use to evaluate your work.

As you'll see when you look at the guide in this section, we like to give our students a lot of specific direction for revision. Your instructor may not expect you to follow all of our suggestions explicitly, but we encourage you to at least consider each of the issues we raise. Feel free to address concerns not in the guides and to spend more time on questions that address the main weaknesses of your classmates' texts. More importantly, read skeptically, and don't hold back negative comments. Generic positive comments such as *looks good* do not help writers improve their drafts, although you do want to indicate the texts' strengths so that they aren't diluted. Whenever possible, comments should include specific suggestions for improvement. Provide both line-specific and summary comments on your copy of the writer's draft. You might list summary comments and suggestions from the most to the least important at the end of the text. If you have time after critiquing the drafts, discuss your reactions and notes with the writer, giving her or him a chance to ask questions.

One last note: In our experience, the more complete and polished the draft a student brings to a writing workshop, the more helpful the comments she or he will receive (and the better grade she or he will ultimately earn). Drafts for writing workshops should not be "rough," but should be as finished as possible.

Writing Workshop Guide for Letter of Inquiry

1. Glance over the letter's delivery or physical presentation; make suggestions for creating a more balanced page design, for improving the clarity of the font, and for creating a more professional impression. Check the letter against the conventional format displayed in Figure 4.1.
2. Taking the role of the writer's busy and overworked audience, quickly read the letter, underlining places that seem persuasive and writing question marks where you become confused or have questions.
3. Go to the places beside which you wrote question marks, and give specific suggestions for clarifying or further explaining those sections. Where could the writer better anticipate and answer your questions as a potential service-learning sponsor? Then identify places where the writer begins to overwhelm you with too many details for an initial inquiry.
4. Put stars by sentences in which the writer points to a connection with the organization, shows knowledge about the organization, shows concern for the organization's needs, or suggests possible projects. Which sentences in the letter could be recast as more reader centered and persuasive? If the writer begins several sentences with *I*, suggest alternate sentence structures and emphases for those sentences.
5. After making a brief outline of the letter, check the sequence of information against the sequence suggested earlier in this chapter. Draw wavy lines under information that seems out of order, and draw arrows showing where it should be moved. Which paragraphs seem to cover too many topics? Where could the writer better connect one sentence to the next?

6. Which information in the letter should the writer emphasize or make more accessible for the reader, and how might the writer do this?
7. Where does the writer's tone seem too casual or overly formal? Suggest word changes in these places.
8. Go through the letter sentence by sentence and word by word, identifying elements that seem verbose or unnecessary. Make sure each element contributes something new or does rhetorical work. Apply the six techniques for creating more concision. This is especially important if the letter is longer than one page.

Résumé—Rhetorical Situation

As your résumé will accompany and be read in conjunction with your letter of inquiry, its rhetorical situation is basically the same. The audience will be the letter's addressee and anyone else this person asks to review the two texts or passes them along to. As with the letter of inquiry, your main purposes for writing the résumé are to persuade the audience to respond to your inquiry with information and, ultimately, to agree to sponsor a service-learning writing project with you.

Although both the letter of inquiry and résumé have informative purposes, the résumé is less concerned with informing readers about the course, assignment, and possible projects and more concerned with informing them about you—your educational background, your relevant job experience, your achievements and qualifications. In addition to these purposes, the résumé has the more persuasive purpose of convincing readers that you are qualified to help them produce a professional and effective set of texts.

In the more typical context of a job search, résumés usually have two types of audiences—a human resources staff person or manager who does the initial screening, and a manager or decision maker in the more specific area of the job. Both audiences will be busy and will likely be evaluating numerous résumés; this is a highly competitive situation. The human resources staff member will likely serve a screening function, eliminating irrelevant or unqualified résumés based on a specific set of criteria. These criteria can include whether the résumé has a specific objective statement, whether the résumé contains particular qualifications, and whether the résumé is polished and error free. Sometimes résumés are scanned and searched for keywords as a screening technique (we explain design strategies for electronic, scannable résumés below). By sheer necessity, the person screening résumés will likely only spend a minute or less on each one before putting it into either a "reject" or an "accept for further consideration" pile. Because this reader will be looking for specific pieces of information and will be reading only to determine in a general sense whether or not you're qualified, he or she will scan rather than peruse the résumé. If your résumé is passed to the manager or committee supervising the specific job search, it may receive more attention but will still be read and assessed quickly. At this stage the evaluation might be more comparative; your résumé might be measured against other résumés and more specific criteria.

Because your situation is a little different from applying for a job, and because you may be writing to a relatively small organization, you may be able to send your letter and résumé directly to the appropriate decision maker. In addition, your situation in this class is not as competitive as in a job search, although you are competing for the reader's time and energy.

Because of the way your audience will read and assess your résumé, it must be accessible and memorable. Readers must be able to find the information (e.g., qualifications) they're looking for quickly and easily, and this information should be specific and impressive enough to help readers remember you. You don't want to run the risk of blending in with other applicants in the job search. The following sections recommend specific strategies for achieving both of these qualities.

Résumé Parts and Formats

Most résumés by college students contain most of the following basic parts, often in this order from top to bottom.

- name and contact information (be sure to include an email address)
- objective
- education
- work experience
- relevant skills
- honors and awards
- activities.

The major headings of Kristianna's résumé, Figure 4.4, show a variation of this sequence. To keep her résumé to one page, she doesn't include honors and awards (as they seem less relevant than the other information).

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 are variations of two common types of résumés. The former, Kristianna's résumé, follows a more traditional, *chronological* format. After the objective and education section, she overviews her work experience, complete with dates, in reverse chronological order. This type of résumé, used by many professionals, highlights the writer's work history.

A second type of résumé, called a *functional* résumé, is designed to highlight relevant work experience and skills (Lay et al. 609). In this way it is more specifically tailored to the job at hand. In Figure 4.5, Heather, a Penn State student, focuses on two of her work experiences that most vividly show her qualifications and on her related skills from coursework. Some functional résumés revolve around headings about specific skills such as client service, sales, and writing and editing. This approach is often used by applicants who do not have a consistent work history or who have gained much of their relevant experience in unpaid positions.

For this assignment and to apply for most jobs, we recommend that you use a combination of these two types of approaches, as both Kristianna and Heather do. Along with overviewing her recent work history, Kristianna includes special sections on computer skills and community service experience. Although Heather's

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Objective

To apply my writing, computer, and office skills to a collaborative service-learning project that meets a local community service organizationís communication needs.

Education

B.A., English (specialization in Technical Writing), expected Spring 2002
University of Central Florida Orlando, FL

- Coordinated three major small-group writing projects, including a set of technical instructions for a mechanical engineering lab.
- Wrote and designed several common genres of professional communication, such as memos, letters, instructions, progress reports, a feasibility report, and a proposal.

Work Experience

Administrative Assistant for Audit Services, Sun Banks Orlando, FL 1999-00

- Prepared several audit reports per week
- Organized several department functions such as the annual Christmas celebration
- Ordered supplies, electronically filed audits, and performed other general office duties

Insurance Clerk, ABC Life Insurance Company Heathrow, FL 1997-98

- Maintained and improved configuration of company database
- Helped train more than 15 new employees
- Produced numerous informational reports using Microsoft Word and Excel

Data Entry Assistant, Northwood Staffing Services Maitland, FL 1997

- Entered client information and other data into databases for several companies, including ABC Life Insurance

Computer Skills

- Word Perfect, Microsoft Word
- PageMaker, Microsoft Publisher
- Data Entry: 11,000 kph
- Microsoft Exel
- Adobe Photoshop
- HTML

Community Volunteer Experience

- Race for the Cure and Adopt-a-Mile Benefits for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Zeta Tau Alpha Sorority
- MS Walk, Walk America, March of Dimes Walk-a-Thon

Figure 4.4 Traditional résumé

Heather Pierce
333 W. Nittany Ave. #3
State College, PA 16801
(814) 867-3333
hp3@psu.edu

Objective

To apply my strong communication and design skills in aiding a local community service organization produce a needed document or set of documents.

Related Work Experiences

Earth Day Coordinator, Penn State Earth Day Celebration 1998

- Designed and wrote more than 10 newspaper ads, flyers, and press releases publicizing the event
- Designed a comprehensive website promoting the event and explaining its goals
- Wrote proposals resulting in more than $4,000 of funding from various local businesses and university departments
- Coordinated the information tables, children's activities, dance and musical performances, and the sound system during the celebration
- Supervised more than 50 volunteers

Assistant to Education Director, Stroud Water Research Center 1996-97
(field station of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia)

- Created more than 20 flash cards and posters to be used in educational programs and the White Clay Watershed Association's Stream Watch
- Helped administer summer programs focusing on stream ecology and the importance of trees to a healthy stream ecosystem
- Collected and analyzed seedling data for a tree shelter restoration project

Education and Related Skills

B.S. in Environmental Resource Management 2000
Minors in International Agriculture and Science, Technology, and Society
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
GPA: 3.81
Courses: Technical Writing, Argumentative Writing, Speech Communication
Computer Skills: Microsoft Office Suite (including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Publisher), Dreamweaver (web publishing)

Other Awards and Activities

Dean's List (5 semesters)
University Scholars Program
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture Conference
Sierra Club

Figure 4.5 Functional, skills-based résumé

résumé focuses on relevant skills, these are conveyed under subheadings of specific jobs (with dates). This résumé also includes a more traditional *awards and activities* section. Most college students do not have extended work experience and don't apply to jobs for which this is a qualification; therefore, showing a continuous record of employment is not crucial. We recommend that you focus, instead, on your most relevant jobs and arrange them in hierarchical order from the most to the least relevant and impressive. To conform to readers' expectations, you should probably overview your education before work experience unless the latter is particularly relevant. If your work experience is scant, you may want to focus on any work positions you held (e.g., lab assistant) or major projects you completed in college; this would require an extended education section. Now we turn to a more detailed discussion of each of the sections of the résumé.

Objective

Some résumé screeners look for this first. The objective statement should be concise yet informative. It should tell your readers the type of position (including level of permanency) and type of company you are targeting. Instead of saying that you want this job to give you experience or expand your skills, tell the reader what you will bring to the job. Kristianna's résumé illustrates this reader-centered move. For this assignment, the description of the position can be more general, as you aren't applying for a designated job. Keep in mind that this can be a tricky part of your résumé. We have seen many student résumés that include problematic objectives. Some are very vague, along the lines of "to acquire an entry-level position in a growing company." Others are far too specific, as in "to become assistant director of advertising at Acme Products, Inc." As you identify your job search goals, strike a careful balance between giving your reader a sense of the kind of job you'd like and showing flexibility about possible positions and duties. Many professionals consider objectives to be passé, as so many of them say so little. Discuss this concern with your instructor as you work on your résumé.

Education

This section should include the name of your college or university, your degree and major, any minors or areas of specialization (especially if relevant to the job), and your expected date of graduation. Lead with information that will be most important to your readers—in most cases your degree and major but in some cases the university. Provide your cumulative and/or major GPA if it's impressive or if it's specifically mentioned in the ad to which you're responding. You may also want to include a short list of relevant coursework. Because Kristianna hadn't yet taken many upper-division courses in her major, her résumé instead briefly describes some coursework-related skills under "education." The length of the education section should depend, in part, on how much work experience you have; if you have a substantial amount of relevant work experience, this section can be shorter. If, on the other hand, you don't have much work experience, you

can expand your education section to include descriptions of major projects and coursework-related skills.

Work Experience

Sometimes labeled *related* or *relevant* work experience, this section should list your skills and achievements under subsections for the jobs you include. Bulleted lists will make your achievement statements more accessible. Lead with your position and company rather than the place or date (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5). Kristianna and Heather emphasize their previous job titles as subheadings using italics and boldface, respectively. As we stated before, you will probably be more persuasive if you list these subjects in hierarchical rather than reverse chronological order; remember that your readers will be scanning your résumé from top to bottom.

Skills Section

This section, which could alternatively be placed after education depending on its importance, is your chance to reinforce especially relevant and impressive skills, some of which you also show in your achievement statements. Remember that some résumé evaluators look for particular keywords or qualifications. In addition to computer skills (see Kristianna's résumé), you could emphasize foreign language, lab, or other relevant technical skills. Use a descriptive heading for this section.

Honors and Awards/Activities

These sections, which could be combined, are usually included to display in list format the job candidate's quest for excellence and well roundedness. Few employers want to hire one-dimensional or seemingly uninvolved employees; sometimes employers look to this section for interview questions. With this said, it has been our experience that many students include too much information in this section, listing every award and activity they can remember. Include only a sample of the most relevant and impressive ones, as Heather does in her résumé. In most cases you don't need to include dates with this information, though you may want to mention the number of semesters you made the honor roll.

Keywords

Résumés designed to be scanned electronically rather than read by a person generally include a keywords section that lists terms indicating key qualifications for the job. You don't want your résumé overlooked because the computer couldn't find enough relevant qualifications captured in keywords. Keywords (usually nouns) can include *HTML* and other computer skills, technical skills, communication skills, and previous positions held. Take care to use the terms of your audience, particularly those mentioned in the job ad. Only include terms that capture your qualifications, of course.

Invention—Relevancy

Make sure the information you include is as impressive and relevant as possible. This is not to say that only technical skills are relevant. Think, too, of what we call transferable skills and qualities. Review a list of all of the paid and volunteer positions you've held, and think carefully about what responsibilities they involved. Think about what you learned from each one and how each experience shaped you as an employee. Then review the list of words below to see how they match up with your experiences. Applicable to almost every job, these include the following:

- supervisory skills
- client service skills
- organizational skills
- enthusiasm
- strong work ethic
- teamwork skills
- project management skills
- initiative
- trustworthiness
- communication skills

Rather than listing these skills and qualities as you would computer or language skills, try to show them in action through your descriptions of educational and work-related achievements. The statements in Kristianna's second bulleted list, for example, convey her organizational skills. In the next list she highlights her supervisory experience. The fact that she was promoted from a part-time to a full-time job at ABC Life Insurance Company demonstrates her initiative and trustworthiness. In addition to her communication skills, Heather's bulleted statements show her ability to raise money, to supervise a complex event with numerous volunteers, and to communicate with different publics through different media.

For this assignment, of course, you will want to focus as much as possible on writing and communication skills such as speaking, designing, editing, and supervising others' writing. You should also include more specific elements of your writing experience such as the types and genres of texts you have written, the media and programs with which you have written, and the audiences to whom you have written. Because Kristianna is a technical writing major, she includes a list of genres in the education section. Heather's work experience section is persuasively focused on communication skills and achievements, such as designing a website, writing proposals, and creating posters. In addition, Heather wisely conveys the range of the texts she has produced.

Perhaps this is your first upper-division writing course and you haven't done much writing in your job. In this case, first determine the types of writing, speaking, and electronic communication you have done for other types of courses. Along the same lines, think through the daily activities you have performed at work, however small or informal; you might be surprised how many of them involve communication with coworkers or clients. Short press releases and memos are examples of professional writing. Often seemingly unrelated jobs such as those in the service industry require transferable skills. Although working as an insurance clerk doesn't seem all that related to writing for a nonprofit community

service organization, Kristianna tapped into that experience to show her project management, writing, and supervisory skills.

Memorableness

Given that your résumé will, in most cases, be compared against many others that list similar qualifications, the memorableness of your résumé is crucial to its success. One way to make your résumé memorable is to include short sections describing major projects from coursework, jobs, or community service. A brief description of an individual or collaborative honors thesis or a senior design or research project may be more impressive than a list of relevant courses. Such a description—including a title, purpose, main tasks, and main findings—would be an effective way to show rather than tell your qualifications as well as give your audience something concrete to associate with you. Kristianna might have replaced her two bulleted items under education with a more detailed description of the set of technical instructions she designed and wrote. The first major section of Heather's résumé constitutes an excellent example of what we're suggesting; she describes in detail her roles and accomplishments around a single major project or event—the Penn State Earth Day Celebration. Through her thick description of this event, we get a strong sense of several of her qualifications.

Another way to create a more memorable résumé is to turn your short, bulleted statements of duties into what we call achievement statements. Sometimes, you can do this by quantifying your work. Instead of the statement "Wrote several fundraising proposals," you could tell readers that you wrote four comprehensive proposals that generated more than $4,000. Instead of saying that you assisted in new employee training, you could say that you helped train more than 15 new employees. Kristianna could have been more specific in her first statement in the work experience section of her résumé. Another way to pitch your duties as achievements is to present them in terms of specific projects or major tasks you completed or helped complete. Emphasize any special responsibilities you were given.

Effective achievement statements include other kinds of detail as well. As the sample résumés show, such statements typically begin with parallel verbs, often in past tense. Instead of using general, somewhat passive verbs such as *performed* or *worked*, use more specific and dynamic action verbs. The list below gives some examples of more powerful verbs.

- analyzed
- coordinated
- designed
- developed
- edited
- evaluated
- installed
- managed
- organized
- planned
- presented
- programmed
- sold
- trained
- wrote

For the most part Kristianna and Heather use such words in their statements. They might replace *created* and *produced* with more precise verbs, however. The rest of your achievement statements should also be concrete and specific.

Rather than stating that you worked with clients daily, for example, tell readers the specific things you did for clients. Heather's achievement statements do a particularly good job of providing details. Notice that she lists the activities she coordinated at the Earth Day Celebration and gives the name of the water protection program for which she created materials. A reader is more likely to remember a candidate who "produced flash cards and posters for Stream Watch" than a candidate who "produced educational materials for an environmental program."

Document Design and Delivery

As we discussed in Chapter Three, accessibility and retrievability are crucial elements of a technical or professional document's arrangement. This is especially true of résumés, given the speed at which they are assessed. Three elements that can increase your résumé's accessibility are bulleted lists, informative and prominent headings and subheadings, and easily discernable blocks and columns of information.

We have already discussed the major sections of a résumé—objective, education, work experience, awards and activities, and so on—and most major headings correspond to these. If you include a major section that describes more specific qualifications, make its heading more specific, as Kristianna does with *Computer Skills* and *Community Volunteer Experience*. You can ensure the prominence of your major headings by putting them in a larger and different font, boldfacing them, and/or separating them with blank space. Take a look at the two sample résumés: Kristianna makes her headings stand out by boldfacing them and designing blank space above them; Heather separates them from the rest of the résumé by putting them in a separate column. Both writers use a larger font size and a sans serif font that differs from the serif font of the main text.

Sans serif fonts, or fonts that do not have horizontal lines on the letters, are commonly used in professional documents for headings and text accompanying visual displays. Examples of sans serif fonts include Arial, Helvetica, and Tahoma. Because the serifs may help guide the reader across the page, serif fonts—for example, Times New Roman, Palatino, and Garamond—are typically used for the main text in printed documents. Kristianna uses Helvetica for major headings and Times New Roman for the rest of the résumé. Heather uses a Helvetica–Times New Roman combination.

You should visually emphasize your name at least as much as major headings. In addition to a larger font size, Kristianna and Heather use horizontal lines across the page to make their names stand out.

Your subheadings will probably be even more specific than your major headings, as they convey specific education and work experiences, such as the different job titles you've had. Notice how both Kristianna and Heather use their specific job titles as subheadings in their work experience sections. Many résumé writers make the mistake of beginning these subheadings with the names or locations of their employers or the dates of their employment, information that is probably not as important as what they did there. Your subheadings should also be easy to find and therefore might require boldfacing, italicizing, or some other

variation in typography. We suggest that you only emphasize the most important part of the subheading, as Kristianna and Heather do in their résumés.

Whatever design decisions you make about the typography of the headings, subheadings, and the rest of the text, make sure you implement them *purposefully* and *consistently*. Using too many variations in typography can make your résumé look like a direct-mail advertisement and create an inelegant ethos. Major headings don't need to be in all caps, bolded, italicized, and in a larger font size, for example. Additionally, overusing typographic cues can detract from the emphasis such cues will have for readers.

If the person assessing your résumé cannot tell where parts of the text begin and end, she or he is less likely to find and remember specific pieces of information. Therefore it is important to manipulate spacing (along with headings) to designate sections visually. You can begin by creating space between sections. We also recommend that you begin the text of a section immediately after the heading for that section and that you use indentions sparingly (see Kristianna's résumé). In addition to creating blocks of information, align like items whenever possible. Heather's résumé, for example, aligns headings, the main text, and then the dates. Kristianna's résumé similarly aligns places of employment and dates of employment in columns.

The physical presentation of your résumé will play a crucial role in creating your ethos for the audience. In most cases your audience is meeting you for the first time through this document. Just as evaluators sometimes screen résumés by looking for mechanical mistakes, they may also screen using elements of delivery such as paper quality, print quality, font, and spacing. After all, if a candidate doesn't show attention to detail in her or his own job application materials, how can the employer expect her or him to do so on the job? Make sure you use high-quality bond paper and a laser printer. Most readers prefer white paper, but very light grey and beige may also be acceptable. In addition, use generous margins, as some readers will be turned off by a résumé that looks cramped; not only is a cramped résumé aesthetically unappealing, it also shows poor organizational skills.

Electronic Résumés and Web Résumés

More and more job searchers and employers are shifting from traditional to electronic résumés. As Mike Markel explains in *Technical Communication*, many organizations can't read the sheer number of résumés they receive and therefore scan electronic résumés into databases that they can later search for particular skills (thus the importance of a keywords section). The job searcher has the advantage of more quickly transmitting the résumé to an employer; electronic résumés are often sent in email messages or as email attachments. Print versions must be completely scannable.

Although electronic résumés require a more careful attention to keywords, their design must be much simpler to facilitate electronic transmission and scannability. Figure 4.6 shows an electronic version of Kristianna's résumé. You'll

notice how much plainer it looks. Instead of using multiple design elements such as columns, rules, boldface, italics, and multiple font types and sizes, electronic résumés should be written in ASCII text, that is, using only basic letters, numbers, and punctuation marks.

This résumé illustrates some of the other design requirements Markel points out as well (467).

- Use a sans serif font such as Arial or Helvetica for better text clarity.
- Use the space bar instead of tabs for moving text (as tabs may convert to the settings on the reader's program).
- Put text in a single column, and make the margins extra wide.

Kristianna's electronic résumé is written in 12-point Arial font. Because she can't set off headings with bold text and a larger font size, she uses all caps for the major headings. The bullets have been deleted, the text has been taken out of columns and flush left, and the margins have been slightly expanded. As a result, the text is slightly longer, running more than a page, but this doesn't matter in electronic format. Kristianna has also added a keywords section, reinforcing communication, computer, and genre-related terms for which her employer will likely be looking.

More job searchers are also creating web versions of their résumés and posting them on Monster.com and other web job boards. Like print résumés and unlike electronic résumés, web résumés can include multiple design elements. You'll still need to transform the design elements of your print résumé, however, to conform to web conventions (which we overview in Chapter Seven). These include using mostly sans serif font, using different font sizes more than bold or italics and using tables and rules. A web résumé can also include some additional design features such as color (though your color scheme should be simple and high contrast), figures, links, and navigational tools. Unlike print résumés and like electronic résumés, precise length is not really an issue. You don't want the résumé to require too much vertical scrolling or any horizontal scrolling, however. Design with a fairly small screen size in mind. Here are some more specific design suggestions.

- Include links very selectively, as most links will take the user out of your site (thereby increasing the chance that they won't return); common links include your email, a university, a current or past employer, and a website showing some of your work.
- Limit the figures you include to icons or other small, simple elements; these should have clear rhetorical functions and not break up the résumé's design.
- Use tables to create columns.
- If your résumé requires some vertical scrolling, include anchors that enable the user to jump up and down from section to section.
- Avoid including a picture of yourself or irrelevant personal information, such as your age or marital status, as this may cause you to be discriminated against and may detract from the professional ethos of your text.

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Objective: To apply my writing, computer, and office skills to a collaborative service-learning project that meets a local community service organization's communication needs.

EDUCATION
B.A., English (specialization in Technical Writing), expected Spring 2002
University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL
Coordinated three major small-group writing projects, including a set of technical instructions for a mechanical engineering lab.
Wrote and designed several common genres of professional communication, such as memos, letters, instructions, progress reports, a feasibility report, and a proposal.

WORK EXPERIENCE
Administrative Assistant for Audit Services, Sun Banks
Orlando, FL, 1999-00
Prepared several audit reports per week
Organized several department functions such as the annual Christmas celebration
Ordered supplies, electronically filed audits, and performed other general office duties

Insurance Clerk, ABC Life Insurance Company
Heathrow, FL, 1997-98
Maintained and improved configuration of company database
Helped train more than 15 new employees
Produced numerous informational reports using Microsoft Word and Excel

Data Entry Assistant, Northwood Staffing Services
Maitland, FL, 1997
Entered client information and other data into databases for several companies, including ABC Life Insurance

COMPUTER SKILLS
Word Perfect, Microsoft Word
Microsoft Exel
PageMaker, Microsoft Publisher
Adobe Photoshop
HTML
Data Entry: 11,000 kph

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
Race for the Cure and Adopt-a-Mile Benefits for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Zeta Tau Alpha Sorority
MS Walk, Walk America, March of Dimes Walk-a-Thon

KEYWORDS
Writing, professional communication, document design, collaboration, computer database, report, instructions, proposal, Excel, HTML

Figure 4.6 Electronic, scannable résumé

Writing Workshop Guide for Résumé

In this writing workshop, as in the first, base your responses on the interests and needs of the writer's audience—a representative of an organization deciding whether or not to approve a service-learning project. Remember that the following questions may capture the criteria your instructor will use to evaluate your résumé.

1. Putting yourself in the place of a busy agency staffperson, do a one-minute scan of the résumé. Then turn it over and write down both your general impressions and what you can remember about the writer. Ask the writer if you remembered everything he or she wanted you to recall. What could the writer do to make her or his main qualifications more immediately apparent and memorable?
2. Critique the résumé's arrangement, including the order and accessibility of information. What information should be moved around so that the items move from the most to the least relevant and impressive? How could the writer create more easily identifiable chunks of information with blank space? How could the headings and subheadings be more prominent and informative?
3. What font types would be best for clarity and for distinguishing headings from the main text? Where could the writer use boldface or other font variations to emphasize crucial pieces of information? If the writer uses too many visual cues (in number and type), suggest a way to simplify this. Where could the writer be more consistent with spacing and fonts?
4. Scan the résumé again, this time focusing on the relevance of the information to the job and the rhetorical situation. Write question marks beside places that seem to convey information unconnected to the qualifications for the job.
5. Focus now on any descriptive statements in the résumé. Draw wavy lines under statements that could sound more like achievements and could convey qualifications (writing or work related) more specifically and actively. Give suggestions for improving these statements. Where could the writer quantify or more specifically describe?

Making the Final Selection

When you have completed your letter of inquiry and your résumé and have sent them out to your target agency, you will move into the next phase of choosing a project. We recommend that you follow up with a phone call to your contact person a couple of days after you expect the materials to arrive. Let your contact person know that you are serious about working on a project with the agency and that you are willing to follow through on your commitments. Learn as much detail as possible about the exact types of writing the agency needs. Develop a sense of deadlines and due dates. Do as much as you can to assess the agency's level of enthusiasm for working with you.

If your instructor expects you to work in collaborative groups for this project, you'll need to convince some of your classmates to join in on the project with you. To facilitate this process, we recommend something we call *pitch day*. This is a predetermined class period during which each student has a brief amount of time to pitch her or his project and ideas to the class. While this is happening, someone should record the names of the agencies under consideration so that they are visible to the entire class. After all the pitches have been made, you can begin to shift around, talking to others about common interests, exciting possibilities, and projects that sound especially viable.

As you begin to form groups, compare your schedule with those of the other possible teammates. You might have one person write down each person's weekly days and times available to meet outside of class and/or visit the agency. Although at this point you're just checking for basic compatibility of schedules, you may need to find another group if you won't be able to meet with the others on a regular basis.

We have used the pitch day approach for several years and have found it to be an effective way for students to group themselves. In case your project is not chosen by other students, be on the lookout for other projects that mesh with your background, values, interests, and skills. Come prepared to negotiate and collaborate. This is a class period you don't want to miss.

Activities

1. Check your mail to find examples of correspondence—invitations to apply for credit cards, requests for contributions to nonprofit agencies, and the like. Apply the criteria listed in the letter of inquiry workshop guide to one or two. Think about the aspects of these letters that you find persuasive, offensive, engaging, or dull. Develop your own checklist for effective correspondence based on this analysis.
2. Visit job search websites online. Find several sample résumés produced by professionals in your field. Evaluate them in terms of the criteria in your workshop guide. Based on your analysis, make lists of effective and ineffective résumé-writing strategies specific to your own area of expertise. Think about such details as the order of sections, the amount of detail included in discussions of job experience, education, and so on. Also, make some notes about effective and ineffective attributes for electronic scannability. Write a memo to your instructor and classmates listing strategies you have learned about résumé design from this activity.
3. In a memo or a post to the class listserve, reflect on how you adapted your letter of inquiry and résumé to conform to the organization's interests and values. Describe additional revisions you would make to the document if you were targeting a similar job in the corporate world.
4. Find a letter of application and/or résumé you have written in the past, perhaps when you applied to your current employer or university or for a scholarship or award. Analyze ways in which you would improve that text based

on what you've learned in this chapter. Make notes about these improvements, and share them with the other members of your group. (You might also keep these notes to refer to the next time you are called upon to write such a document.)

Works Cited

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Markel, Mike. *Technical Communication.* 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001.

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