

**Writing & Speaking at Work: A Practical Guide for Business Communication.** 2nd Edition  
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Book Reviews

Writing & Speaking at Work: A Practical Guide for Business Communication. 2nd Edition Edward P. Bailey. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002. 264 pages.

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSPEOPLE have two traits in common: they write well and they speak well. Honing both skills should be a priority in any business curriculum, which is why I recommend Writing & Speaking at Work. The book is an excellent reference text, with only one significant shortcoming: the omission of a section on composing that shows students how to generate ideas and produce a final draft of a document or presentation.

Writing Well

Writing is often boiled down to a two-step process: produce a draft and then proof it to clean up the mechanics. Obviously, it's not that clean and simple. Writing is a struggle to impose form on chaos. The editing half of the process usually includes local and sometimes even global revisions-fine-tuning the argument never ends-and while composing, many writers can't stop themselves from correcting grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. But in general, a tenet of writing theory is to keep the art (composition) and science (mechanics) sides of the process separate. Editing while writing generally leads to trouble.

Karen Gocsik (1997) notes that "perhaps the most influential development in composition theory and practice in this century took place in the late sixties and early seventies with the emergence of process pedagogy... to shift attention away from the text and towards the processes that created it.... These include invention (brainstorming, freewriting, etc.), organization (nutshelling, outlining, etc.), drafting, and revision." Instruction in these areas-invention, organization, drafting, and revision-is precisely what's missing in Writing & Speaking at Work. But teachers can use other texts to cover that information. What Bailey's text does very well is show students the stylistic, layout, and mechanical guidelines that will help them make business correspondence and presentations look and sound polished and professional.

The majority of the writing rules presented in the first part of the book are the standard but proven ones found in The Elements of Style and other references: use common words, prefer active voice, vary sentence length, and other tips that help students write in plain English, which is Bailey's overall theme. One concern is that some students may read these prescriptive mechanical rules as composing rules, that is, they may infer that the path to good writing begins with mastering parallelism and the comma, not invention and revision. However, that's a risk any writing guide takes. Bailey leaves no stone unturned when it comes to providing sound advice and solutions to common problems that students run into when working on their drafts. He also practices what he preaches by writing in plain English with a friendly, engaging style.

I especially like Bailey's readability index. He shows how to use a computer's spelling and grammar checker to evaluate the style and readability of any document, from letters written by Fortune 10 chairmen of the board, to government regulations, and chapters from his own book. His exercises are well thought out, applicable in the real business world, and provide valuable learning experiences in the classroom. The chapters on resumes, e-mail, and documenting sources add up to an eclectic but essential mix of information that all students must know to start and succeed in their business careers.

### Speaking Well

In the second half of the book, Bailey provides enough public speaking tips to make a terrified first-timer or a veteran feel comfortable in front of a large audience, covering everything from delivery techniques and visual aids to choosing a sans serif typeface that a person can read from 50 feet away. His explanation of how to develop a clear structure gives students an effective outline to follow when composing their presentations, and his discussion of how to use slides and visuals as mnemonics will help students avoid reading their presentations, a common "rookie" mistake. *Writing & Speaking at Work* is also filled with useful techniques that many experienced presenters often overlook, like how to move around a room and keep the audience involved.

It would have been helpful to see a sample document, like a financial report, composed in Part I and then converted into a speech in Part II. Nearly all business presentations begin as text--whether it's a bullet list of ideas or a 30-page annual report--so watching an expert like Bailey make this transition would have been a real learning experience as well as a nice application of the two-part approach he takes with his book, write it then speak it. There's a practiced art to choosing which key passages to cut from a report or other document and paste into a computer slide show. Deciding the order to place them in also takes experience. The sequence in which they appeared in the report may not be the most logical order when building a presentation.

### Conclusion

The keys to writing and speaking well have been known for centuries. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle instructs speakers to use the language of ordinary conversation and points out the dangers in using foreign words and inappropriate metaphors--the same issues that Bailey and other writing and speech teachers warn their students about today. The problem is not agreeing on what good writing or plain English looks like, but getting students, business and science textbook authors, and working businesspeople to follow the timeless and excellent advice found in texts like *Writing & Speaking at Work*.

While I feel *Writing & Speaking at Work* could be improved by adding a section on the composing process, it's clearly an invaluable textbook. It's so comprehensive and flexible that teachers can use it in a variety of ways to design just about any type of class that deals with writing and/or speaking. Students will want to hang on to this book throughout their careers, so they can refer to it while editing their business letters and memos and when putting a slide show together for the boss. You would have to buy three or four books on style, mechanics, and building and delivering effective presentations to get all the information Bailey packs into one.

ocsik, K. (1997). Process pedagogy: A brief explanation. Available: [www.dartmouth.edu/~compose/faculty/pedagogies/process.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~compose/faculty/pedagogies/process.html). (Accessed 10 October 2002).

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