before a California Senate Committee on Finance; defines "plagiarism" as a "denial of the integrity of the self"; and sympathizes with citizens, colleagues, and administrators who yearn for simple answers to complex human problems. Developing Successful College Writing Programs is the first book to treat candidly the uncertainties, complexities, and humanistic importance of writing programs. Edward White does not provide his readers with easy answers, but he does give them wise advice and some carefully conceived guidelines for making a successful writing program possible.


Reviewed by John Hagge, Iowa State University

Writing in the Business Professions should interest teachers of advanced composition. I encourage them to peruse the volume for themselves, since I can't analyze its contents at length here. I do, however, feel that I need to warn potential readers about several things that perplexed me when I read the book, especially since this book may help determine the future of business communication instruction in the 1990s.

First, Writing in the Business Professions suffers from a definitional problem. Myra Kogen, its general editor, wishes to define "business communication" broadly, so that it includes "all aspects of professional writing." Since she already has equated "professional writing" with "business communication" ("This book on writing in the business professions is part of a general wave of interest in an exciting new discipline usually called professional writing or business communication" [ix]), this definition is circular. Such circularity allows Kogen to bypass any principled criteria for selection in favor of including whatever she wishes while ignoring the fact that her readers will have been led by the book's title to expect articles dealing with business communication as traditionally conceived.

For example, although Gopen's piece on legal writing is one of the most cogent, literate, and well-documented in the collection, it will be relevant to only a tiny minority of readers. The same might be said for Dieterich's essay on how "academic professionals" write, which argues that we who teach advanced composition should help our colleagues improve their writing skills. Again, this essay has little to do with what we teach in business communication courses. Or with advanced composition in general, for that matter. It also appears based only on the author's opinions, buttressed by a few ad hoc quotations from academic writing; Dieterich mentions no research
methodology or data base that would substantiate his conclusions. I don't see how either the legal profession or the academic profession can be considered a business profession, no matter how widely Kogen stipulates she wishes her definition to range. I would rather Kogen had incorporated more articles dealing with business communication per se; for instance, no contributions treat the history of business communication.

Some of the contributors also play fast and loose with terminology, construing the term "business communication" very broadly, and sometimes conflating it with technical communication. For example, Knoblauch, in what I consider the most challenging article in the collection, refers almost exclusively to "technical writing" and "technical communication." Corbett mentions "the student of business and professional writing" in his title, contradicting Kogen's definition by implying that business and professional writing are two separate areas. Redish uses the results of an analysis of "numerous documents from government agencies and private corporations" in her piece; among these are leaflets about drugs, computer manuals, and appliance manuals. One would be hard-pressed to find any of these types of writing covered in a business communication course. Conversely, the titles of the third and fourth sections refer only to "professional writing," but the majority of articles in these sections refer only to business communication in their titles. Thus, Writing in the Business Professions has an audience problem: it vacillates between addressing teachers of business communication pure and simple, teachers of business and technical communication, and teachers of what we might call "advanced composition" as an umbrella term that includes legal and other sorts of writing.

My remarks may seem mere semantic quibbles; but if the area of advanced composition is to get a modicum of credibility in the academic world, its practitioners should at least be able to define their areas of expertise adequately and differentiate these from contiguous areas. To my way of thinking, the terms "business" and "technical" communication denote two separate but related areas of advanced composition. For the editors and contributors to use the terms "business communication," "technical communication," and "professional writing" indiscriminately leads to needless confusion.

Also puzzling is Kogen's decision to include a number of editors and contributors whose connection with business communication appears rather tangential. To make this judgment more objective, I have relied on the biographical sketches provided for each editor and contributor. In addition, working under the assumption that it seems reasonable for those involved with the book to have displayed their interest in business communication by publishing in the area, I surveyed the Journal of Business Communication from 1974 to the present. My survey suggests that Writing in the Business Professions has been produced by academics as interested in technical as in business communication.
Kogen herself "has published articles on business and technical writing and on literature and composition, and is currently a member of the CCCC Committee on Technical Communication." Of her advisory editors, only Bob Gieselmann has a national reputation in business communication. Amazingly enough, none of the other three editors mentions business communication explicitly in his or her biographical sketch. Virginia Book is "professor of agricultural communications" at Nebraska-Lincoln, "where she has served as coordinator of the technical communication teaching division. She is a past president of the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, a fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing [ATTW], and a fellow of the National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture." She has published "numerous articles on technical communication." Donald Cunningham is "director of technical communication" at Texas Tech. He too is a fellow of ATTW and "an associate fellow of the Society for Technical Communication." Also, "He was editor of The Technical Writing Teacher for ten years." Finally, Nell Ann Pickett's biographical sketch explicitly mentions only credentials in technical communication. As far as I can tell, none of these three associate editors has published an article in the Journal of Business Communication during the fifteen-year period of my survey. In short, it strikes me as strange that a book about business communication co-sponsored by the Association for Business Communication has been produced for the most part by editors whose primary allegiance clearly lies within the area of technical communication.

Similarly, some of the contributors are not known for their expertise in business communication as much as for their contributions in other areas. For instance, Edward P.J. Corbett is a towering eminence in composition and rhetoric; but his credentials in business communication appear rather minimal, as does his eight-page contribution to the volume, which cites a few commonplace notions from the tradition of classical rhetoric and applies them to "business and professional writing" as well as to "technical and scientific writing." To include Corbett in an anthology of articles on business communication, then, presents a credibility problem—or, as Aristotle would have said, a problem with this contributor's ethos. Brereton, Gallagher, and Gopen all appear to have better credentials in areas other than business communication, and Flower and Knoblauch, it seems to me, are much more widely known for their work in composition. Of the fifteen contributors, only four have published articles in JBC during the past fifteen years: Driskill and Rymer (Goldstein), Munter, and Selzer.

I'm not saying that people who don't have a national reputation in business communication can't write intelligent, useful pieces for inclusion in an anthology of articles on the subject. But it seems almost beyond comprehension that Writing in the Business Professions has excluded so many well-known academics in the area—authorities who publish regularly in JBC (the leading journal in the field) and other forums, who are officers in
the Association for Business Communication, and who have otherwise demonstrated their credibility in the area. Kitty Locker, for example, has twice won the Alpha Kappa Psi Award for Distinguished Publication in Business Communication, produced numerous articles and papers on business communication, served long and well in ABC, and published a major business communication textbook. Why was she not included in this anthology? Names of others who consistently publish on business communication and who have gained recognition in the area easily come to mind; that not one of these authorities appears in *Writing in the Business Professions* is astonishing.

A second problem is that a number of contributors recommend that practices observed in the “real” world as part of a naturalistic study be imported into business communication pedagogy without justifying this leap with sufficient argumentation. Since advanced composition research has tended more and more to favor “ethnographic” studies in the past few years, the problem of deriving “ought” from “is” should assume paramount importance in discussions of our field. But by and large in the present volume, contributors simply assume that real-world practices discovered through field work are relevant in the business communication classroom.

Flower wishes to teach students the same high-level rhetorical strategies she has observed actual writers use. In a well-researched article, Couture and Rymer recommend that business communication students be given group writing assignments to prepare them for collaborative writing on the job. Agreeing both with Flower and with Couture and Rymer, Redish acknowledges that “writing in business organizations has many features that are absent from the typical classroom, including collaborative writing, diverse audiences, hierarchical review of materials, and real consequences to the writer of ineffective documents” (119). To make business communication courses more realistic, Redish suggests that “each student find a ‘client’ company for the course and use that company as a case study throughout the course”; this company “must be real” (119-20). Driskill sounds a similar strain: students must be taught “to analyze organizational and rhetorical situations and to develop strategies for achieving greater congruence between them, given the culture, size, and technology of the organization” (143). She advocates the use of rhetorically complex cases to accomplish this goal. In a short article that mainly analyzes one Harvard Business School case, DiGaetani concurs that the case method “usually presents the political realities of a business situation.”

Clearly, *Writing in the Business Professions* is controlled by one overriding programmatic aim: to make business communication courses reflect the way actual writers work on the job. Although this aim is laudable in principle, I don’t believe that it can be achieved in our classrooms, at least as easily as many of the contributors suggest. Students will find it hard to develop “high-level rhetorical strategies” when they compose, as Flower and others ask
them to do, because these strategies depend on schemata derived from long familiarity with text-types that students don’t have. Moreover, the business communication classroom simply can’t build in all the variables of status, power, social distance, and the like that form part of the mutual contextual knowledge that real-world communicators exploit as they produce discourse. Nor can it simulate the multifarious other kinds of knowledge business communicators have acquired through years of interaction with others on the job. An impressive body of work in the philosophy of language and in discourse linguistics over the past thirty years has demonstrated that people need to have such mutual contextual knowledge in order to communicate successfully.

Thus, even when students are able to articulate abstract rhetorical strategies—goals and plans—for their business communication assignments, in my experience they still have problems instantiating these strategic plans with the appropriate verbal choices as they compose. Moreover, because they have little if any involvement with actual full-time jobs in the business world, students find it hard to “role-play” the parts assigned them in the elaborate case assignments that a number of contributors appear to favor (see Marilyn Butler’s article on business communication cases in the ABC Bulletin, September 1985). In short, to my way of thinking it appears philosophically indefensible to expect that students, having been presented with digests of the results of “real-world” writing research, can miraculously begin to compose as actual writers in business professions do when these students lack the extremely complex network of knowledge on which business professionals rely each time they write.

A few contributors manage to find ways around this problem. Although Knoblauch agrees with other contributors that the case approach, albeit artificial, mimics the complexities of actual communicative situations, at least he also suggests that students be encouraged to develop their rhetorical consciousness by exploring and writing about “the richly layered and enveloping social reality of the school and allow it to be what it, in any case, is, namely, the professional context that students best understand, whose discursive practices are already familiar, whose political and rhetorical subtleties are partly known and available to additional analysis” (260). This quotation strikes me as one of the most refreshingly honest statements in the book. It is a far cry from the idealistic programs of so many other contributors, and it suggests an exciting range of pedagogical possibilities for all writing courses. Selzer’s article on arrangement in business prose gives a number of practical suggestions and strikes the same sane balance between overvaluing the practices of the workplace and relying solely on the outmoded prescriptions of traditional textbooks. And Brereton makes the eminently sensible suggestion that more English departments should develop internship programs so that students in “professional writing” courses can get some exposure to text production in naturally occurring settings.
Last, I'll remark briefly on two additional things that mystify me about *Writing in the Business Professions*. For all the glib talk about importing findings about real-world writing into the business communication classroom, several contributors deliberately bash professional writing. Unfortunately, as they do so they commit what I call the Quotation, or Parade of Horribles, Fallacy. This fallacy, a species of Hasty Generalization, consists of asserting that writers in a field (business writers, technical writers, legal writers, governmental writers, academic writers) compose horribly constructed prose riddled with jargon, overused passive and nominalizations, expletives, and so on. Then the author quotes a few samples of this sort of prose to demonstrate what's already been asserted. Redish, Gopen, and Dieterich all fall into this fallacy. Fallacious reasoning aside, I'm puzzled by the rather schizophrenic attitude displayed toward real-world prose in *Writing in the Business Professions*. On the one hand, real-world professional writing is supposed to serve as model practices we should inculcate in our students. On the other, it often gets held up as a bogeyman that prompts "don't-let-this-happen-to-your-students" rhetoric. Let's get our stories straight.

A final and more distressing problem that runs through much of the collection is what I call the Writing-As-Technology motif, a motif that characterizes much composition scholarship and pedagogy as well. Those who sound this motif treat composition as a bundle of discrete techniques that students must learn in order to become truly successful writers. Munter, for instance, repeats the same desiderata enunciated in generations of textbooks when she suggests that business communication courses teach "good writing," which is "unified, emphatic, organized, coherent, and clear." To achieve these aims, students must learn techniques involving "[direct] approach, highlighting, sentence structure, jargon, and word choice." Redish also promotes a techniques-oriented view of writing; although she treats more global issues as well (as does Munter), she provides lots of minutiae about manipulating texts: "Address the reader directly. In procedures, use 'you' or imperative verbs. In reports or rules, name the actors" (111).

Even those who eschew allegedly old-fashioned writing instruction that focuses exclusively on surface features of written products for the more contemporary process-oriented approach to composition often fall into the Writing-As-Technology trap. Flower, for example, strongly argues that to prepare students to do professional writing, we must "teach rhetorical strategies" and develop students' "skills of rhetorical problem solving." Note the use of the word "skills." But writing—any kind of writing—consists of more than a set of skills. Students can do everything from addressing a reader directly to formulating high-level, goal-directed rhetorical plans—and still not write right. Why? For a number of reasons, the most important of which is that writing involves knowing words, their meanings, and how they combine in particular patterns to form connected discourse. Clearly, this knowledge is not a technique, a skill that can be mastered after a day of lecture
in a business communication class and some practice drafting an assignment, perhaps in a collaborative writing group. Rather, such knowledge, and the other sorts of knowledge that linguists claim is necessary for human communication to take place, must be learned experientially through years of reading, writing, and reacting to texts.

Although certain techniques may offer shortcuts to learning about words, their meanings, and their combinatorial possibilities, this knowledge cannot be reduced to a technology. Rather, it comes from a wide-ranging experience of texts: from reading, rereading, contemplating, analyzing, and discussing as well as composing, revising, and editing texts. In essence, writing is an art, not a technology. To produce better writers, we need to produce people who have a "feel" for words and texts. A writing pedagogy that says otherwise is reductive and ultimately doomed to failure. All the talk in the world about adapting to readers, about formulating rhetorical plans, about getting in touch with their own writing processes won't help students to compose effectively if those students don't have a good idea of what texts (and the words that compose them) are all about.

The idea that those who wish to produce effective discourse need to immerse themselves in texts (in the main the best texts that their culture and others have produced, I might add)—an idea that Cicero and Quintilian, among others, wholeheartedly would endorse—nowhere gets emphasized in Writing in the Business Professions. For that reason, and for the curious editorial policies I have discussed above, I consider this anthology less than successful in setting an agenda for the teaching of business communication in the 1990s.


Reviewed by Debra Journet, University of Louisville.

Generally, there have been two basic groups of people who write about technical communication: professional technical writers who work in government or industry, and academics who teach courses and direct programs. Both groups conduct research, but that research often seems to divide into types: practical advice about how to solve particular problems, and theoretical arguments about how scientific and technical language works. As a result, there have long been two common complaints about published research in technical writing: how-to advice, unsubstantiated by theory or research, is untrustworthy; and theoretical speculation, unconnected to real-world situations, is useless.