CHAPTER 4—REVISING AND PROOFREADING BUSINESS MESSAGES

Synopsis
This chapter presents the final stage of the writing process, revising and proofreading. Revision of business writing includes looking for ways to achieve concise wording. Students learn techniques for eliminating wordy prepositional phrases, outdated expressions, long lead-ins, and needless adverbs. To further improve their revision expertise, they learn to eliminate fillers, repetitious words, redundancies, jargon, slang, and clichés. They practice using precise verbs, concrete nouns, and vivid adjectives. Finally, they learn effective techniques for proofreading routine and complex documents.

Critical Thinking Discussion Guide
1. “A real writer can sit down at a computer and create a perfect document the first time.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
   Real writers are usually professionals, and they know that the best writing is rewriting. Nothing is perfect the first time. Often, it’s never perfect. Real writers can see many ways to express an idea, and many writers find it difficult to let go of a document because they continually want to make it better. Rarely, if ever, can one write a perfect message the first time. Revision is always necessary to produce clear and concise documents.

2. Carefully written short messages often take longer to write than longer messages. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
   Carefully crafted messages generally become shorter with revision. It’s much easier to write a long, diffuse message than a short, focused one. Blaise Pascal, the philosopher, apologized for a long letter to a friend, saying “If I had had more time, my message would have been shorter.” How true!

3. Because clichés are familiar and have stood the test of time, do they help clarify writing?
   Clichés are so tired that they have lost their capacity to communicate any specific meaning. What does once in a blue moon really mean? Clichés do not help clarify writing. They muddy thought and sound worn out. Strive to replace them with more concrete expressions.

4. If your boss writes in a flowery, formal tone and relies on outdated expressions, should you follow that style also?
   You should not emulate any writing style that is ineffective. Using outdated expressions (Pursuant to your request) does not produce concise or clear writing. Your job is not to write exactly as your boss writes. Develop your own coherent, concise style, and distinguish yourself as a good writer.

5. Is it unethical to help a friend revise a report when you know that the friend will be turning that report in for a grade?
   It is unethical for you to write a report that a friend is turning in for a grade. However, helping to revise could be instructive for both of you. Instead of striking out and writing in corrections, you should strive to understand what is wrong and explain the fault to your friend. If it is an individual project, your friend should do the actual rewriting with comments from you, the reviser.
Communication Workshop
Grammar and Spell Checkers

Students are asked to key a set of test sentences at a computer that has grammar and spell checking software. After analyzing the errors that are highlighted, students are to write a memo report discussing their findings. Here is a possible report:

**TO:** Serena Johnson
**FROM:** Student’s Name
**DATE:** Current
**SUBJECT:** Effectiveness of Grammar and Spell Checkers

In response to your request, here is my brief analysis of the grammar and spell checkers currently available in our office word processing equipment. In a test of four sentences, the software showed these results:

Sentence 1—Found four errors (*company’s, New York City*); missed three errors (*Riverside Drive*, ending question mark)
Sentence 2—Found two errors (*advised, conscientious*); missed one error (*manager*).
Sentence 3—Found three errors (*its, already, Miami*); missed two errors (*Their, were*).
Sentence 4—Found three errors (*were, June, too*); missed two errors (*my friend and I and comma after June*).

The spell checker seems to be quite reliable so long as the misspelled or misused word does not form another acceptable word, such as *manger* for *manager*. The grammar checker found 12 errors while missing 8.

Despite their limitations, grammar and spell checkers can definitely help employees in proofreading their documents. In my test, the software marked nothing that was not truly an error. When I checked to see why a word was flagged, I was shown a valid correction. Anyone with a reasonable command of English grammar should be able to understand why a word was flagged.

My advice to new employees is to make full use of our grammar and spell checking software. However, do not depend on it to be foolproof. Employees will still have to do their own proofreading, but the job is easier with the help of spelling and grammar checkers.