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Models, formulas, and rhetoric: an engineer's perspective of writing

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Models, formulas, and rhetoric: An engineer's perspective of writing

by

Amanda Rosia Sanders

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Business and Technical Communication)

Major Professor: Helen Rothschild Ewald

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Ames, Iowa

1997
This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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For the Major Program
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For the Graduate College
My thesis is dedicated to God and the three most influential Black women in my life: Mrs. Mildred Katherine Free (my deceased grandmother, "Granny"), Mrs. Cozella Tabb (my Grandma Tabb), and Mrs. Linda Marie Sanders (my mother).

God made me realize that nothing is impossible, and that if I believe in my own potential and Him, all things are possible.

For everything, thank you.

Granny is an always present spirit. She's my inspiration to succeed and to aspire toward great heights. Her voice speaks to me and encourages me to do my best. When I do my best, she's proud of me, and then, I feel her warm, yet strong embrace commending me for a job well done.

For everything, thank you.

Grandma Tabb continues to encourage me to reach for all my goals. She constantly reminds me to say my prayers, count my blessings, and give thanks to the Lord for keeping me in His good graces and in the cradle of His arms.

For everything, thank you.

My mother is a very powerful influence in my life, even though she might not realize it. Had it not been for my mother, I never would have had the willpower to even begin my college education. With my Granny dying only four months prior to my enrollment at ISU, school was a very low priority for me. However, once arriving at ISU, my mother's phone calls of at least three times a week and letters and cards of encouragement gave me the reassurance that I was not alone, even though I felt that was the case. And because of my mother, I made it through.

For everything, thank you.

And a special thank you to The Colberts, for being my family away from home.
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Abstract

This thesis is a study of engineers' perspectives of writing. The study is divided into six main sections: introduction, the study, findings and analysis of the e-mail survey, findings and analysis of the writing sample, conclusions, and references cited.

The thesis opens with a scenario involving an engineer and myself, discussing what I am learning within my English discipline. A dialogue ensues, but quickly deteriorates as my engineering colleague implies that all I am learning within my discipline is to use models and formulas for writing. From this dialogue, two research questions are formulated for my thesis: How do disciplinary practices yield effective writing, and how do computer programs (templates) help, but also hurt in the effort to produce effective writing? My argument is based on a premise that individuals who study writing with the English discipline, specifically business and technical writing, learn how to use rhetoric and the rhetorical situation, not models and templates to create effective business correspondences.

To address my two research questions and argument, I designed and implemented a study that solicited the views of writing from engineers, using an e-mail survey. Also, I designed and administered a writing sample to find out if engineers really understand the concept of how to use rhetoric when writing. The results and findings from both mediums are reported in separate chapters.

The conclusions section serves as a recap of the major issues and findings of the study and outlines areas for further research.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Problem

A colleague from the engineering field asked me, "What does your discipline in technical communication teach you to do, and how does it apply to the real world?" I was speechless for a few seconds—not because I don't know exactly what I'm learning to do, but because I know that there are endless possibilities of what my technical communication expertise allows me to do. I replied with something like, "I'm learning to use rhetoric and discourse as a means to analyze situations, which in turn enables me to effectively communicate with individuals through document writing and design. I think most people are more familiar with the term technical writing, even though there is much more involved than just writing." After my colleague gave me that "blank face" look, I started naming some types of documents I can produce, like proposals and memos. My colleague latched only to the memos part of my statement (not the rhetoric part, mind you). He turned to me and said that he, too, could write a memo because he knew how to fill in the blanks to create one: fill in the "To," "From," Date," and "Subject" lines, write the message, and sign it. Of course I shook my head in disbelief because I know creating technical documents isn't as simple as he had just described it. Our discussion continued, but at a quickly deteriorating rate as he started implying I was being taught formulas to write "technical documents" of which anybody could learn to do from reading a textbook or two.

In theory, I knew my engineering colleague was wrong. In practice, though, I knew he was only adhering to what seems to be a societal and even a disciplinary belief, to some degree, that anybody can be a technical writer, as long as the individual knows how to use formulas for writing. And, this perception of writing seems to be held even more so by those individuals in the physical
sciences, like engineering. Most English and engineering instructors will probably agree that writing is not a hard and fast formulaic discipline, like engineering, at times, where plugging in a few numbers or ideas will produce one correct answer. Surely, though, most people would agree that writing is something that everyone should be able to do, at least in its most basic, minimum sense. Still, there is much more to technical writing than just writing simple paragraphs of content that pertain to the writing task at hand. An understanding of the rhetorical situation of writing is essential for a technical writer: Why do we write; who are we writing for; and, why is it important—what do we need to consider when writing?

**Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, I wish to explain why my engineering colleague’s interpretation of what my disciplinary field is teaching me to do is not well founded by acknowledging his beliefs about using models, but explaining their real relevance in English disciplinary teaching, learning, and praxis. Second, I want to offer examples of how some engineering majors and engineers, some of whom have taken business writing classes, would compose a business correspondence letter that contains bad news, based on a model. The delivery of bad news requires that the sender establish goodwill with the recipient. Establishing or securing goodwill with the recipient of a business correspondence is only one of the many important components used to apply the rhetorical situation to a writing task, and one goodwill strategy will not fit every writing situation.

My argument is that much of the skill and expertise a technical writer uses is based on an understanding of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation. I believe rhetoric and rhetorical situation make up the foundation for effective written
business correspondences and documentation. They are not formulaic and are not always easily understood, or even adequately used by those outside of the English discipline.

An example of how rhetoric is not understood or used properly by those outside of the discipline can be seen through computer programs. Some of them, like Microsoft Office 95 use already written documents for various correspondences, like a cover letter to accompany a resume, a claim denial letter, and even a letter to mom. Some of the letters appear to be set up to be printed and sent as is, although the Microsoft Word User's Guide clearly states that users "can tailor these documents for your [their] own use..." (492). However, I believe users still follow the printed text and style of the template much too closely because they fail to truly understand that the template is nothing more than a skeletal framework. Still, the writer should, instead of can tailor the template correspondence letter based on its rhetorical situation.

Research Questions

The aforementioned problem information and rationale present two main research questions and issues regarding business writing and the English discipline, as discussed below:

Question One: How do disciplinary practices in business writing yield effective business correspondences?

Within the English discipline, business writing is actually taught. Essays, articles, collaborative projects, etc., and especially textbooks are used as teaching aids to foster learning. The yield of the English discipline's learning environment is a knowledge of how to create documents that are actually effective regarding a particular writing situation. The word that needs to be stressed regarding question/issue one is "effective." My background and
expertise in business and technical writing allows me to move past meeting just the minimum requirements of a writing task. In doing so, I must address the rhetorical situation of the writing task, and as an end result, this allows me to create effective business correspondences.

Question Two: How do computer programs help, but also hurt the efforts in the production of effective business correspondences?

Presently, we live in a society where there is a push for individuals to utilize the capabilities of modern technology. Thus, the use of computers and their vast variety of software programs, for the most part, is viewed as positive. And, more and more everyday, people who design software programs are becoming innovative in trying to make their programs easily assessable and user-friendly, so the software programs can produce quick and easy results for their users.

Hence, the easiness and quickness in production, for example in the case of desktop publishing software programs like Microsoft Office 95, makes it seem that more individuals are leaning toward computer programs to help write, and in some instances, "write" their business documents for them. Perhaps these individuals believe these already formatted and already written templates are in and of themselves rhetorically effective documents. Thus, the assumption possibly exists that the template documents are structured quite well, as if someone who has studied writing in the academy for X number of years and earned a degree to do so had written them.

This question/issue is basically the end result of what happens when individuals in society and the academy lean more toward a perception about writing that insinuates a software program can in and of itself produce effective documentation that does not need to be altered in any way. The majority of the
already formatted computer program documents, though, are written in the context of merely "getting the job done" and meeting the "basic/minimum" writing task requirements. Thus, if an individual chooses to use an already written software program to meet the basic requirements of the writing task, the effectiveness of the writing may be compromised, simply because the rhetorical situation of the writing task probably was not considered by the individual using the software program.

Understanding Rhetoric and the Rhetorical Situation

Before one can understand the importance of rhetoric and how it doesn't lend itself to strict modeling and formulas, rhetoric must be defined. Rhetoric has been defined several ways throughout history. For example, classical rhetoric encompasses a period of early fifth century BCE to fifth century CE. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher from this period, defined rhetoric through three types of appeals . . . "logos, the use of logic, which appeals to the audience's reason and intellect; ethos, the speaker's attempts to project his or her own character as wise, ethical, and practical; and pathos, appeals to the emotions or sympathies of the audience (Crusius and Channell 9). And, according to James Berlin, "Rhetoric for Aristotle is first and foremost concerned with discovery—with locating the material of effective argument" (Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American College, 1900-1985 156). Just as important, medieval rhetoric "is often said to have begun in 427 CE, with the completion of Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana, and ended in 1416 with the rediscovery of Quintilian's long-lost complete Institutio Oratoriae (Covino and Jolliffe 65). Also during the eleventh century of the medieval period, ars dictaminis (the art of letter writing), emerges to address the changing political needs of the people as addressed in written correspondences. In addition, modern rhetoric entered the
scene during the last third of the nineteenth century and continues to the present. Scholars such as Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida have paved the way in showing how the "truth in discourse is a rhetorical construction, a set of objects, ideas, and propositions that the rhetor [writer or orator] arranges in collaboration with the prevailing ways of thinking shared by readers or auditors" (Covino and Jolliffe 69).

For all purposes of my thesis, though, rhetoric should be understood as such: a consideration of the audience (who technical writers are communicating with), purpose (the reason for communicating), and context (how the background inherently guides technical writers in communicating) in discourse production and technical writing.

Theoretical Views about Rhetoric, Discourse Production and Business Writing

Within the English discipline, there are many theories that are used to explain rhetoric and the communication process in terms of understanding writing conventions and writing for specific occasions. Many of these theories, though, oppose each others' viewpoints and rationale regarding the overall communication process. Still, whether the communication process is viewed as external or internal, business writing, as a whole, is socially constructed in that the writer must acknowledge the rhetorical situation, namely the audience, purpose, and context for writing.

Hence, social constructionists like Kuhn, Rorty, and Geertz believe that discourse production (communication) is an internal process that takes place within social constructs and conventions. Social constructionist Kenneth Bruffee explains in his article, "Social Construction: Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay" that "social construction understands knowledge and the authority of knowledge as community-generated,
community-maintaining symbolic artifacts" (777). Thus, writing, as described in terms of Bruffee's rationale of communication, is produced through an acknowledgment of the rhetorical situation that is based on the community. To further elaborate, the "community" could be viewed as a participant in the communication process where there is an ongoing "written" dialogue of compromises: what the writer intends the reader to understand and how the writer perceives what is being relayed from the writer.

Externalists, though, believe discourse production and writing can't even be understood in the terms of a structure because all communication would then depend upon codified strategies of which to communicate. These strategies would have to create a framework to follow and would need to fit every given situation. But with situations always changing, there couldn't possibly be a codifiable, standardized framework to follow or to communicate. While I, too, believe that a framework cannot fit every writing task, I do believe, though, that a formula or model of meeting the minimum expectations of a writing task could be utilized by a writer to ensure that all of the basic components of the writing task have been addressed.

As one can see, some of the above mentioned theories actually define constructs for communication, while others argue that communication is not codifiable and formulaic at all. All of the theories, and numerous others I did not mention, possess strong points that are worth taking note of. However, instead of arguing which theories are better than others to use in explaining rhetoric and communication discourse, I've decided to situate my arguments in hermeneutic paralogy, which I believe acknowledges the benefits of formulas and models, yet still stresses the need for using rhetoric and the rhetorical situation in business correspondences.
Hermeneutic paralogy and academic and business discourse

Hermeneutic paralogy is one type of socially constructed theory that takes into account the rhetorical situation in creating business correspondences. In Thomas Kent's book, *Paralogic Rhetoric*, Kent argues that discourse production and technical writing should be understood through paralogic hermeneutics—not through a codifiable process. He defines paralogy to mean "'beyond logic' in that it accounts for the attribute of language-in-use that defies reduction to a codifiable process or to a system of logical relations" (3). Supposedly, when we communicate with each other, we make interpretive guesses about what others are trying to communicate to us. Kent states that this guesswork is "paralogic in nature because no logical framework, process, or system can predict in advance the efficacy of our guesses. The knowledge of a language is necessary, but not sufficient for communicative interaction; we also must know how to make moves with the language games we play, and these moves are thoroughly paralogical in nature" (5).

Similarly, Kent's paralogic hermeneutics can be applied to understanding how models for writing and rhetoric coexist in producing business correspondences. Hence, the knowledge of what should minimally be addressed in a business correspondence letter can be illustrated through the use of a business writing model. The model itself, though, is not sufficient to create effective business correspondences. Technical writers also must address the rhetorical situation of writing the correspondence, which always changes from one writing task to the next.
Addressing question one: using textbooks and models as a part of the writing foundation

I advocate the use of hermeneutics, the science of text interpretation, according to Kent, as a means of understanding discourse production and technical writing. And building from Kent's idea of paralogic rhetoric (making guesses about the text), I believe academic discourse and instruction within the English discipline provide a meaningful start (e.g. using textbooks and models) in making an effort to help technical writing students understand and eventually participate in business discourse.

The knowledge of writing obtained from the classroom is essential to the success of a technical writer being able to create effective business correspondences for businesses and corporations. Technical writing is a growing/learning experience that builds upon itself. In the beginning stages of instruction in technical writing, textbooks, rhetorical situations, and practice through projects serve as central elements in the learning experience. In the later stages, theory, rhetorical situations, and practice become more important, deliberately addressing real-world applications and cases.

As previously mentioned in issue one, socially constructed disciplinary practices in writing yield effective writing. Thus, textbooks play a crucial role in providing instruction for technical writers to build a solid foundation. They allow the instructor a foundation to explain business writing concepts through theories and models. Textbooks, though, can only go so far in overall instruction towards guiding the learning of business and technical writing. For the most part, as my engineering colleague from the problem section of this thesis pointed out, textbooks show models of technical documents, like memos, application letters, proposals, etc.,—what they look like and their components. However, textbooks also emphasize writing strategies, such as goodwill building
and persuasion tactics, to incorporate into certain types of documents. Still, technical writing extends far beyond those models and strategies, based upon the audience, purpose, and context of the document being produced, or plainly stated, its rhetorical situation.

I examined three of the most commonly used and preferred technical writing textbooks by instructors within the English department at Iowa State University in an effort to evaluate how well and to what extent textbooks address or explain rhetorical situations in document production. Again, it should be understood that textbooks are used as only one means of disciplinary instruction about effective communication discourse and writing through the rhetorical situation. The textbooks I examined are Locker's *Business and Administrative Communication* (2nd ed. 1992), Ober's *Contemporary Business Communication* (2nd ed. 1995), and Bovee and Thill's *Business Communication Today* (4th ed. 1995).

*Business and Administrative Communication* includes one chapter titled "Making and Communicating Meaning" which outlines and explains a model of the communication process and discourse communities (how they shape communication) in approximately four pages. It also includes another chapter titled "Adapting Your Message to Your Audience." The subsection includes topics such as ways of analyzing the audience and writing to multiple audiences with different needs. The chapter ends with a summary of key points and student exercises. All of the information in these chapters, regarding rhetoric, is covered in fourteen pages. Fourteen pages of text about rhetoric represents just enough information to introduce students to the concept of rhetoric, not teach them everything they need to know about rhetoric. This further validates my argument that everything a technical writer learns about creating effective
business correspondence cannot be summed up in so few pages like my engineering colleague in "The Problem" section believes is the case.

Similarly, Contemporary Business Communication uses only one chapter to explain the rhetorical situation. It is titled "The Process of Writing" with a subsection that is an overview of the writing process. The second subsection, titled "Planning" outlines the principles of audience analysis, content, etc., in eight pages. The textbook itself, though, is semi-placed in a real-world context. It incorporates "spotlight" commentary and exercises based on actual real world events, people, issues, etc. in appropriate locations for application in each chapter of the book.

Finally, Business Communication Today addresses the rhetorical situation better than the other two textbooks described above. It, too, uses one chapter, titled "The Writing Process" to directly address the rhetorical situation. The subsections include topics such as defining your purpose and analyzing the audience—all of which are covered in about thirteen pages. Still, the textbook is designed to explain writing and document production in a real-world context. For example, Bovee and Thill explain the foundations of business communication through the world of Disney, General Mills, Turner Broadcasting System, etc. And through these corporations, the rhetorical situations are inadvertently present at all times because knowledge acquired in writing the documents are grounded in real-world context.

These textbooks are designed to acknowledge the importance of the rhetorical situation of writing. However, as I have previously stated, the textbooks alone, along with its models, do not explain all English disciplinary theories and practices of writing. Other teaching aids are used to foster the
learning environment in understanding and applying the rhetorical situation to create effective business correspondences, like industry writing.

**Addressing question two: understanding discourse through the context of business writing**

Business writing provides a real-world context of which students can question, explore, examine, and apply what they are learning from their textbooks. Classroom instruction in technical writing normally allows students to complete their work over increments of "planned" time by, for example, using a syllabus. Business writing within a real corporation, though, won't always afford the technical writer such a pleasure of planned time because "anything could happen," and it normally does. For instance, technical writers quite often are expected to create rhetorically sound and effective documents in "on the spot and ASAP" conditions. In these conditions, a model, or template that outlines the minimum or basic components of the letter the technical writer is expected to create would be extremely useful. However, the technical writer should understand that the model should be used as nothing but a model. The technical writer is still expected to compose the business correspondence based on its rhetorical situation. Deviation from the model is therefore, deemed mandatory.

For example, in an article titled, "Composing Processes for Technical Discourse," Selzer employs the idea that technical writing is a rhetorical and social act. He uses the "tracked" writings of a transportation engineer, as an example, to determine the engineer's composing activities. He found that most of his compositions were based upon rhetorical situations. The engineer actively and deliberately made rhetorical considerations, "by the subject he is concerned with, by the audience he is addressing, by the genre involved, and by his own aims and personal quirks" (45). Selzer argues that technical writing is, too, a
social act in that discourse communities shape the writing/composing process (46). To further elaborate upon his claims, Selzer explains how the writing process of the engineer working for a university might be very different from the writing process of an engineer in an engineering firm.

While real world writing is not overly stressed within the English discipline, it still is not ignored because technical writers are being trained as technical communicators who might eventually go out and work for corporations and industries. And, business writing should be viewed as a type of representation of the rhetorical elements we are taught and encouraged to use in the classroom.

To further illustrate how computer programs can help, but also hurt the efforts in the production of effective business correspondences, I designed a study, as outlined in chapter two, that tasks engineers to write a business correspondence letter, more specifically, a claim denial letter, based on a scenario I designed for them. Inevitably, in the claim denial letter, the engineers had to deliver bad news to a regular customer of a store in which they are employed. The engineers were given a model letter to use, if they chose, to create the claim denial letter from Microsoft Office 95. And while the model letter from Microsoft Office 95 minimally addresses the components of a claim denial letter, it should not have been used "as is" to create the engineer's claim denial letter.

The delivery of bad news requires a special use of rhetoric, since the engineers must deny the customer's request, but maintain goodwill with the customer. Thus, the engineers were expected to move beyond the minimum requirements of a claim denial letter and to implore the use of sophisticated strategies of rhetoric like buffers, positive emphasis, and you-attitude when composing their own letters. Placing the engineers in the context of a business
setting where they are expected to create business correspondences, like a claim denial letter allows me an opportunity to further stress the importance of addressing the rhetorical situation when writing.
CHAPTER 2. THE STUDY

In order to explore my argument that rhetoric and the rhetorical situation, rather than formulas and the strict use of models, yield effective writing, I did a study that required the participants to create a business correspondence letter that delivered a negative message or "bad news" to the recipient. The delivery of a negative message requires that the sender of the bad news maintain goodwill with the recipient of the letter, which is an aspect of technical writing that is taught within the English discipline. Goodwill can be established in various ways, and the delivery of a negative message requires a special use and understanding of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation, which is not formulaic at all.

For example, in the claim denial letter, the writer is expected to realize that the customer asking for a $500 reimbursement is a regular customer of the store. And, since the customer is a regular customer, the writer of the claim denial letter should not bluntly tell the customer "no" to their request. Therefore, the writer should employ the use of a buffer. Also, the writer must understand that the claim denial letter should be situated in a reader-centered context because the reader has implied a response about the claim from the store, as set up in the scenario material. Hence, from these examples, one should be able to see that addressing these rhetorical aspects in writing cannot be reduced to a mere formula for writing.

Methodology

The methodology section of this study is divided into three main sections: the e-mail survey, the writing sample, and the writing sample evaluation. The e-mail survey section includes information such as how the participants were selected to complete the e-mail survey and how the survey questions were used...
in the study. The writing sample section includes information like the overall structure and contents of the writing sample, while the writing sample evaluation section explains why evaluators were used to assess the writing samples and also outlines the criteria used to assess the writing samples.

The e-mail survey

Selecting the participants

I decided to administer an e-mail survey, versus a postal mail survey because I suspected the return rate for e-mail would be greater than that of regular postal mail. Thus, participants could easily scroll through the survey, make comments and answer questions, and send the information back to me without having to feel inconvenienced by returning the survey through the mail.

The return rate of the e-mail survey was 45. The e-mail survey was sent to a total of 174 e-mail addresses from the six e-mail list servers. The actual return rate of the 174 surveys sent was 48. Three of the surveys were eliminated from the total count due to duplication.

I decided to focus on engineers as participants because of the nature of the problem presented in chapter one: that is, the scenario of my engineering colleague believing that all I was being taught within my discipline of English was formulas for writing. In addition, I chose to seek engineers' perspectives regarding writing because I wanted to find out if other engineers, besides my engineering colleague mentioned in "The Problem" section of Chapter 1 held the same beliefs about writing. With many individuals perceiving the engineering discipline as a field of high regard and note worthiness, I felt it was pertinent to gain an engineer's perspective about writing and the English discipline.
Thus, I selected engineering groups to complete the survey that are listed as Iowa State University student organization groups, like the National Society of Black Engineers. Most student organization groups have their own mass e-mail list server accounts. This factor made it easy for me to receive responses from groups that would make up a variety of participants, such as black engineers and engineers who were honor students. With these categories in mind, I sent the e-mail survey to six engineering organization list server addresses: Tau Beta Pi Honorary Society (tbpcabinet@iastate.edu), National Society of Black Engineers (blkengrs@iastate.edu), Institute of Electrical Electronics Engineers (ieee@ee.iastate.edu), Agriculture Engineer Graduate Organization (aego@iastate.edu), Chemical Engineering Graduate Student Organization (cheme_gradlist@iastate.edu), and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (usol@iastate.edu).

I realized that some of the engineers who subscribe to one of e-mail list server addresses named above may also subscribe to yet another of the engineering e-mail lists named above, like Tau Beta Pi and National Society of Black Engineers. Thus, I indicated in the e-mail survey that those engineers who receive more than one copy of the e-mail survey should complete it once and should delete the duplicate(s).

In addition, I realized that some participants might be reluctant to complete the e-mail survey because it would be returned to me with their e-mail addresses and possibly their names, thus creating a problem in remaining anonymous. To rectify this problem, I assured the participants that I would make paper copies of their survey results, then delete their names and e-mail responses from my e-mail files. If they still were not comfortable with this procedure, the participants were asked to print a copy of the survey from their
e-mail and to mail the printed version of the survey to my mailbox address in 206 Ross Hall.

**Using descriptive analysis**

The focus of my study is based on contemporary perspectives of writing. The e-mail survey provided me with some insight as to how engineers might view writing from a variety of perspectives. Some of these perspectives include references to how they learn writing, and if, overall they value writing as a skill, or expertise. This insight would be used to find out how engineers, other than my colleague mentioned in the chapter one, used and viewed writing overall.

Likewise, the e-mail survey gave me a chance to find out if and how much the participating engineers used computer programs for writing. We live in time where computers and a variety of desktop publishing software products are used on an everyday basis to carry out various writing tasks. And, many of those desktop publishing software packages, like Microsoft Office 95 contain templates that many users might follow as a regimen for writing. Thus, addressing the issue of writing and using software packages provided me the foundation to set up the second part of my study. The second part of my study asked the engineers who had already completed the e-mail survey to complete a writing sample and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of an already formatted and written bad news business correspondence letter found in Microsoft Office 95. Later, in Chapters 3 and 4, I will make comments on the e-mail survey responses in relation to the writing sample results.

**Structuring the e-mail survey**

The e-mail survey consisted of a brief introduction and 11 questions (see Figure 2.1).
Hello,

My name is Amanda Sanders, and I am a second year M.A. student in the Department of English. Currently, I am working on my thesis, and I am investigating contemporary views about English and writing, from an engineer's perspective.

My survey consists of 11 short questions. Even though I am requesting your comments through e-mail, your name will not be revealed to anyone. I am deleting names from my files as I receive your responses. Still, if you are not comfortable that your identity will not be compromised, but would like to respond, print a copy of the survey, fill it out, and send it through campus mail to my address: Room 206, Ross Hall. Please submit all survey responses by Friday, May 16, 5:00 p.m.

Also, this survey has been sent to various engineering e-mail server lists. Thus, if you receive more than one copy of this survey, please submit only one copy of the survey and delete the others.

Thank you, in advance for your time and cooperation.

1. Please place an X in the spaces that apply to you:

   ____ Student
   ____ Faculty
   ____ Male
   ____ Female

2. What is your area of emphasis or job occupation in the engineering field?

3. What computer programs do you use on a regular basis (e.g. Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, etc.)?

4. Have you taken or are you taking courses in writing? If so, name the courses in writing you have taken or are taking.

5. Of the courses named in question four, which courses do you consider the most valuable, and why?

6. What types of documents or correspondences do you write (e.g. papers for a class, letters or recommendation, articles for publication, etc.)?

7. Of the documents and correspondences listed in question six, which of these do you write on a regular or frequent basis?

Figure 2.1. E-mail survey
8. In terms of the communication skills you possess, how would you rate writing as a skill: 
(1=lowest; 6=highest)

Least essential 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Essential

Please explain your rating.

9. In terms of learning writing skills, which of the following would be/is the most valuable, in your 
opinion? Rate each option on a scale from one to six by placing an X on the appropriate line.

(1=lowest; 6=highest)

Models 1 2 3 4 5 6
Teacher lecture 1 2 3 4 5 6
Readings 1 2 3 4 5 6
Practice 1 2 3 4 5 6
Group work 1 2 3 4 5 6
Grammar instruction 1 2 3 4 5 6
Computer skills 1 2 3 4 5 6
Tutoring 1 2 3 4 5 6
Other___________ 1 2 3 4 5 6

10. Will you be available (on campus) this summer?

11. If so, are you willing to complete a short writing task that might be included in the date section of my thesis? (The identities of participants will remain anonymous).

If you are willing to be a participant, please type below where I can contact you between May 19 and May 30.

-----------------------------------------------
Amanda R. Sanders
-----------------------------------------------
Offices: Landscape Architecture Room 108/51
418 Ross Hall (The Writing Center)
Ph: (515)-294-8367
Ph: (515) 294-5411

Mailing Address and Mailbox:
206 Ross Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011

E-mail Address: amanda@iastate.edu

-----------------------------------------------

Figure 2.1. (continued)
Question 1 was used to formulate the population group of the engineers completing the e-mail survey portion of the study. Similarly, question 2 was used to formulate the population group by asking the engineers to identify their job occupation or area of interest.

Question 3 was used to identify which software programs are used by the engineers on a regular basis. Later, in Chapters 3 and 4, these findings will be discussed in terms of how users of these software programs expect quick and easy results from their software programs. Hence, the easiness of use of a software program can be seen in templates and macros, like the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter, described later in this chapter, which are commonly used in desktop publishing software programs.

Questions 4 and 5 asked the engineers to list the writing courses they have taken, and of those taken, to list and explain why the courses are or were valuable to them. Asking questions 4 and 5 allowed me an opportunity to gain an engineer's perspective and value of writing.

Question 6 asked the engineers to list the types of documents they write, and question 7 asked them to identify the documents they write on a regular basis. Questions 6 and 7 gave me sense of the engineers' familiarity with certain types of written documents, like memorandums and application cover letters.

Question 8 asked the engineers to rate writing as a skill, using a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 being least essential and 6 being most essential. This question, as with questions 4 and 5, gave me an engineer's perspective and value of writing. Question 9 asked the engineers to rate various tools for learning writing, with one being the lowest rating and six being the highest rating. This question was essential to my study because it allowed to make connections with the engineers'
perspectives about writing, if writing is valuable to them, and how they learn writing.

Questions 10 and 11 were used as prompts to solicit engineers to complete the second portion of my study, which is the writing sample. In the process of deleting the names from my files of the participants of the e-mail survey to preserve anonymity for them, I presented myself with a problem in that I had no way to contact e-mail survey participants who were willing to complete the second part of my study, which is a writing sample. Thus, to assure the participants of confidentiality and to have a way to contact those who were willing to complete the writing sample portion of the study, I asked the participants to indicate how I could contact them at a later date, provided they were willing to complete the writing sample. After printing a copy of their survey responses, along with the information indicating how I could contact them at a later date, I deleted their e-mail addresses and e-mail responses from my files.

The writing sample

In order to more adequately address the question, "How does disciplinary practices in writing yield effective writing?" and the question, "How do computer programs help, but also hurt the efforts in the production of effective documents?" as outlined in the "Research Questions" section of Chapter one, I implemented the second part of my study, namely the writing sample. I planned to use the writing sample to test my hypothesis that engineers might not be able to effectively apply principles of the rhetorical situation to a business correspondence letter that required them to deliver bad news to the receiver of a letter, based on the given scenario, while maintaining goodwill and a good rapport. Furthermore, I wanted to use the writing sample to assess how closely
the users would follow the same formulaic/model letter from Microsoft Office 95 they assessed for strengths and weaknesses to complete the writing task.

Selecting the participants

The writing sample participants were selected from the engineers who had already completed the e-mail survey and who had specified in questions 10 and 11 that they were willing to complete the writing sample.

The total return rate of the writing samples sent to the engineers was nine. Fifteen engineers included contact information in their surveys, indicating they were willing to complete the writing sample. I sent 15 writing samples to the potential participants. Of the 15 writing samples sent, 10 were returned to my mailbox in 206 Ross Hall. One writing sample was omitted from the study because the participant asked that the writing sample be removed.

Structuring the writing sample

The writing sample packet consisted of: a self addressed campus mail return envelope or a self addressed postage stamped return envelope for those participants who live off campus, writing sample instructions, a writing sample task page, and copy of a business letter template from Microsoft Office 95. Each of the envelopes sent to participants were numbered because the numbers served as identifiers for the participants' writing samples that will be matched with their corresponding e-mail survey responses. The writing sample instructions were included in the packet because I wanted to make sure the participants understood the task at hand and to emphasize that participants shouldn't use any outside sources to help them compose their writing sample (see Figure 2.2). I wanted to avoid the possibility of the outside sources altering the participants' responses in any way. The writing task page included a scenario for which the users needed to compose a denial letter to the recipient (see Figure 2.3). Also, I stressed in the
writing task page that the participants should assess first, the strengths and weaknesses of the Microsoft Office 95 business correspondence letter, mainly because I wanted the engineers to get a sense of the letter, and possibly use it to complete the writing task of composing the denial letter (see Figure 2.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Sample Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>While composing the writing sample, please:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compose the writing sample using a computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand that there is no single right or wrong way to compose the writing sample.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not collaborate with others when composing the writing sample, since I'm interested in only your perspectives about writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not consult any books about writing, other than possibly a dictionary, while completing the writing sample since, again, I'm interested only in the nature of your writing expertise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| After composing the writing sample, please: |
| • Return your writing sample in paper form, not by e-mail or on computer disk. |
| • Omit your name from the writing sample and from the return mail envelope, unless you want your work to appear in my thesis with your name on it. In general, I will not include the names associated with the writing sample in my thesis. |
| • Either type or write the number from the envelope on your writing sample. This is my only means of keeping track of who has submitted a writing sample. |
| • Return your writing sample by June 20, 1997 only to the address listed on the return envelope, which is: Amanda Sanders, Dept. of English, 206 Ross Hall. |

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Figure 2.2. Writing sample instructions
Writing Sample

Please return by: June 20, 1997.

Adapted from:


Scenario

You're a new manager at a local video supply store. One of the store's regular customers has written the store owner (your boss) a letter complaining that the videotape she purchased from the store and used to record her daughter's wedding is faulty; it broke while playing in her VCR. Because of the sentimental value of the tape, the customer wants your boss to reimburse her $500. Your boss is not willing to reimburse her $500, and he wants you to handle the situation by writing her a response letter, denying her request.

Before you compose the letter, though, your boss advises you to take a look at some of the software programs loaded on your computer that show already-written computer program business correspondence letters—to give you an idea of how to compose the letter. After searching through the software, you find only one already-written computer program letter that is remotely close to the type of letter you might consider writing to the customer. [See page three].

Writing Sample Tasks

1. List what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the already-written computer program letter on page three. (The example on page three is a model for writing bad new messages found in Microsoft Office 95.)

2. Then, compose a denial letter to the customer, based on the scenario above.

(Note: The length and content of your letter is up to you. Again, there is no one right or wrong way to compose the denial letter.)

Figure 2.3. Writing sample
Company Name
Address
City, State/Province Zip/Postal Code
Telephone • Fax

June 7, 1993

Rocky Larson
InfoBus Data Corporation
4200 Third Avenue, Suite 100
Anytown, WA 98999

Dear Rocky Larson:

Please cancel our order number 9999, dated May 6, 1993, for three laser printers. We regret that we are unable to wait for the delayed shipment from the manufacturer.

We understand that this delay was not your fault. We will keep you in mind for similar requirements that we may have in the future.

Sincerely,

Lou Picard

Figure 2.4. Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter

The writing sample evaluation

Selecting the evaluators

Five evaluators, two males and three females, including myself, assessed the effectiveness of the engineers' writing samples. I felt that other perspectives about the effectiveness of the writing samples were necessary because my assessment, alone, might be perceived as biased. And unlike myself, the other
four evaluators have taught business and technical writing courses at Iowa State University, like English 302, where students learn how to write application letters, resumes, etc. and English 314, where students learn to perform audience analyses, which is a rhetorical act, and pay close attention to components used to create effective documents. Because they are instructors of business and technical writing courses, I assumed that they possess a firm grasp and knowledge of many of the components that are deemed necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the denial claim letter (bad news letter) the engineers completed for this study.

To ensure the evaluators understood their task, they were first given to read the same writing sample packet as the engineers who completed the packet. Then, they were given an evaluation sheet to complete for each writing sample. The evaluators were also told they were only to assess the writing sample, and not the responses to the engineers' assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the Microsoft Office 95 template letter. After receiving the evaluators' ratings, I was able to address issues in chapter four, such as if the already formatted and written regimen of the Microsoft Office 95 bad news business correspondence letter was followed much too closely, thus being a-rhetorical. And, if this is the case, I will be able to further validate my argument that without a user's understanding of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation, the effectiveness of a business correspondence letter may be lost, no matter how well the software package may have formatted and written the letter for the user.

Formulating the evaluation questions

Based on the information in the "Factors Explored in Determining the Effectiveness of the Writing Samples" section of this chapter, I designed an
evaluation sheet of four general questions for the evaluators to use to assess the effectiveness of the writing samples (see Figure 2.5).

Question 1 corresponds to an overall rating of the effectiveness of the writing sample. This rating somewhat corresponds to the prescription writing section where Markel offers a minimum formula of what to include in a bad news letter.

Question 2 asks the evaluators to comment on the paragraphs in the body of the letter and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of them. Question 2 corresponds to any of the information listed in the situation-centered writing section or in the writer-reader-message-centered writing section. Minimally, the first paragraph of the engineers' writing samples should establish grounds for denying the claim and use a buffer. One of the other body paragraphs could possibly establish or maintain goodwill by offering an alternative to the claim.

Question 3 asks the evaluators how they would respond to the writing sample letter if they received it, thus, getting at the heart of if goodwill was established or maintained.

Finally, question 4 corresponds to the closing paragraph or lines of the writing sample. The last lines of writing sample should establish closure, but should not alienate or offend the recipient.

Establishing criteria to rate the effectiveness of the writing samples

Establishing and maintaining goodwill, especially regarding the writing sample in which the engineers must deliver of bad news, requires a special use of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation that is not formulaic. According to Helen Ewald and Rebecca Burnett in Business Communication, "Goodwill itself is important to all business communication and is an aspect of you-attitude" (234).
**Writing Sample Evaluation Sheet**

writing sample #________

1. In terms of overall effectiveness, please rate the writing sample on a scale from one to six by placing an X on the appropriate line.

   (1=lowest; 6=highest)

   1___  2___  3___  4___  5___  6___

   Please explain your rating.

2. Comment on the content of the writing sample by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each paragraph. Please offer thorough explanations.

3. Comment on how you would respond if you received the writing sample letter you are now evaluating.

4. Comment in terms of the ending of the writing sample letter.

**Figure 2.5. Writing sample evaluation sheet**
Prescription writing

An abundance of information and reference sources exist that attempt to prescribe how goodwill can be incorporated into business correspondence letters. A streamlined prescription of how to address goodwill is found in the second edition of *Technical Writing: Situations and Strategies*. In this book, Michael Markel outlines a four part structure, or formula for addressing and including bad news in a letter that

a. meet[s] the reader on neutral ground, expressing regret but not apologizing
b. explain[s] why the company is not at fault
c. clearly den[ies] the reader's request
d. attempt[s] to create goodwill (501).

The problem with Markel's prescription, likewise with the Microsoft Office 95 already written and formatted bad news letter is that it does not explain how to create or maintain goodwill with the recipient, which is truly a rhetorical act and is not formulaic.

Situation-centered writing

Older documents, like the *Rationes Dictandi (The Principles of Letter Writing)* written in 1135 CE, explain how to establish and maintain goodwill from a medieval perspective. Letters were highly regarded documents, especially during the medieval period, because they took on legal and political importance. For example, letters written by scribes that were to be delivered to monarchs followed guidelines which clearly outlined the nature and context of the letter
because they became official records of governmental transactions, as do many business correspondence letters that are written today.

In *The Principles of Letter Writing*, the author describes how goodwill can be secured from the effect of circumstances and special situations where the delivery of bad news may be necessary and what the writer might consider when composing the letter for the recipient, primarily based on rhetorical situations. The author states, "Goodwill will be secured also from the effect of circumstances if something is added which would be appropriate to both persons involved, or which would be in the purpose of things . . ." (Bizzell and Hertzberg 437).

Still, in our contemporary, practical use of letter writing, I believe we use the author's part about adding something appropriate for both parties involved. For example, if a technical communicator had to write a bad news letter indicating he or she couldn't deliver the agreed upon product, it is often wise to offer something else as an alternative (possibly something better) for what couldn't originally be delivered. This way, the professional communicator can "save face" with the client, thus keeping the client's business, and the client will still have good feelings toward the communicator (and company) because the client was compensated with something else. This dual consensus places a positive emphasis upon the goodwill.

**Establishing or maintaining goodwill by offering alternatives**

Similar ideas continue to be expressed about establishing goodwill in *Business and Administrative Communication*, where Locker states

Giving the reader an alternative or compromise, if one is available, is a good idea for several reasons:
• It offers the reader another way to get what he or she wants.
• It suggests that you really care about the reader and about helping to meet his or her needs.
• It enables the reader to reestablish the psychological freedom you limited when you said no.
• It allows you to end on a positive note and to present yourself and your organization as positive, friendly, and helpful (235,236).

Similarly, two of The Principles of Letter Writing’s special cases are based on the fundamentals of rhetoric and require the use of goodwill:

• "If however the situation arises for a combative letter to be written, that is, for enemies or opponents, the goodwill could in fact be sought in it according to the persons of the adversaries . . ." (Bizzell and Hertzberg 437).

The author then states that this notion follows the same logic as in Cicero’s Books on Rhetoric, which deals with countering prejudice or hostility in an audience. This process involves an analysis of what the writer is up against, based on what the recipient's adversaries say about that particular individual. This process might work like an audience analysis, but the writer would find out information about the recipient before composing the letter, just so he would know how to compose the letter and what to include in it. More than likely, the writer will try to persuade the recipient to follow his line of thinking. This may
not be easy, especially since the recipient might not be responsive to what the writer has written.

- "If the auditor is known to be friendly, we should seek goodwill immediately and clearly; if it is not honorable, we should use indirection and dissimulation" (Bizzell and Hertzberg 437).

This is a statement of news based upon the context of the audience: use straightforward and to the point language if the person is friendly or about to receive good news; use a buffer if you're conveying bad news. In the case of the writing sample scenario, the customer is friendly, but is about to receive bad news from the store manager in a claim denial letter. The use of a buffer in the engineers' writing sample is pertinent because it helps eliminate the possibility of ill-will before receiving the bad news, and also prepares the customer for the forthcoming bad news.

**Writer-reader-message-centered writing**

Moreover, other professional writing textbooks that are used as a part of disciplinary practice in English, like *Business Communication*, offer technical writers explanations, not formulas, on how to establish and maintain goodwill through the use of rhetoric. For example, in this book, Ewald and Burnett suggest three general categories for occasions for writing negative messages, all of which are centered around the audience, purpose, or context for writing:
1. writer-centered situations when a writer must give a negative response to a routine request that often requires his or her personal attention or participation

2. reader-centered occurrences when a reader's direct request for information, goods, or services or persuasive request for action, adjustment, or funding meets with a negative reply

3. message-centered occasions when negative information must be conveyed about an organization's operations, performance, or products (259).

**Establishing or maintaining goodwill by using buffers**

Buffers can prove to be quite effective because they can soften the blow of a bad news letter rather than stress the negative parts of the letter. Locker states the writer can maintain goodwill in this type of situation if he or she, "Consider[s] using a buffer. A buffer is a neutral or positive statement designed to allow you to bury, or buffer, the negative message. A good buffer makes the reader more receptive to your message" *(Business and Administrative Communication 227)*. Technical writers can use buffers in such forms as stressing *positive emphasis* and the *you-attitude*.

Reiterated, buffers are useful for technical writers to establish or maintain goodwill. However, technical writers should use buffers cautiously. According to Ewald and Burnett, the follow list offers the "don'ts" of constructing buffers for negative messages:
• Don't apologize. If you have valid reasons for disappointing the reader, apology is not only unnecessary, but also distracting.

• Don't say no. If you say no at the beginning, the reader might not read your reasons for saying no with an open mind. By the same token, don't put the negative news in the subject line of a memo.

• Don't waste time. If you spend time with irrelevant phrases or unnecessary detail, your reader may lose patience at the outset.

• Don't mislead the reader. Even though you are using an indirect plan for presenting your information, remember that indirection (starting with something other than the bad news) is not the same as misdirection (using positive or neutral information in the opening to mislead the reader about the primary purpose of the message) (261).

Furthermore, Ewald and Burnett explain how negative messages can be presented indirectly or directly, and how to use one or the other based on the rhetorical situation. An indirect or inductive approach contains an opening that "buffers" the bad news, a body that explains the reasons for the bad news, with the bad news following, and a close that includes a positive attitude (259). A direct or deductive approach follows many of the components of the indirect approach for buffering bad news, but states, "the bad news at the outset" (263).
Establishing grounds for denying a claim

Even more so, the delivery of bad news through a negative adjustment claim letter, which is the task of the engineers completing the writing sample, inevitably requires the denial of the request, but also "show[s] the connection between what happened and what the reader expects to happen as a result" (Business Communication 269). It is a rhetorically challenging task for a writer to accomplish, and these challenges can:

- redefine the situation so that the connection between the reader's problem and the writer's responsibilities (the warrant) is denied and the claim is invalid.
- also question the claim itself, showing that grounds or evidence, although sound, does not logically support the claim.
- also deny the grounds for the claim by showing how the evidence given as supporting the claim, although it may be sound, does not support the claim being made (Business Communication 270).
CHAPTER 3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSES OF THE E-MAIL SURVEY

Chapter 3 discusses the findings of the e-mail survey. It is divided into sections that address and discuss the results from survey questions numbers 1 through 9. The findings of the e-mail survey also will be more thoroughly discussed in relation to the results of the writing sample in chapter four.

Demographics

Total e-mail survey responses

I received a total of 47 e-mail survey responses. After checking for possible duplicate e-mail copies, of which I found two, the final total of e-mail surveys used for my study totaled 45.

Student/faculty/male/female divisions

Question number one of the survey asked the engineers to identify themselves as students or faculty, male or female. Of those engineers who completed the e-mail survey, 44 were students, and one was faculty. Additionally, of the 45 engineers who completed the survey, 22 were males and 23 were females (see Table 3.1). I omitted any comments in regard to the e-mail survey returned from the faculty member because there were not enough faculty member surveys to count. Furthermore, I assumed that an engineering student's perspective of writing might be very different from an engineering faculty member's perspective because students might not understand the importance of writing from a professional point of view, simply because they are merely students in training to become engineering professionals.

Area of emphasis or job occupation

Question 2 of the survey asked the engineers to list their area of emphasis or job occupation (see Table 3.1).
Table 3.1. Demographics of the e-mail survey population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Emphasis</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aerospace Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biotechnology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramic Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Engineering</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical/Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemometrics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Engineering</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy Analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials Science Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical/ Material Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process/ Manufacturing Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Computer Skills**

Question 3 asked the engineers to list the computer programs they use on a regular basis. This question gave me an opportunity to address the fact that various computer programs and software products play a big role in the dissemination of information process. Additionally, question 3 is linked to the writing sample material in Chapter 4, where the engineers are asked to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter. Having the engineers assess the strengths and weaknesses of the claim denial
letter gave me some insight as to what aspects of the letter the engineers viewed as effective and possibly usable for designing their own claim denial letters.

Most users grasp and use these computer aids, as I hypothesize will be the case of the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter because they allow them to formulate information quickly and easily—based on an already formatted template. In these cases, computer programs can actually help in the production of effective documentation. As expected, some of the programs the engineers listed, like Minitab, Borland, SAS and Mathcad are those used primarily within their engineering discipline. The aforementioned software products tend to be used as "functional" programs, like creating and displaying mathematical derivatives on the computer screen.

However, a vast majority of the engineers also listed Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel as programs they use on a frequent basis. Twenty-eight out of 45 listed Microsoft Excel as a frequently used program, and forty out of 45 listed Microsoft Word as a frequently used program. Because Microsoft Word is a desktop publishing program used, for the most part, to create written documentation, not to create and solve mathematical equations, I concluded that if the engineers listed Microsoft Word, a desktop publishing program, as a frequently used program, then they must be regularly involved in creating various types of written documentation.

Types of Correspondences Written

Question 6 asked the engineers to list the types of documents they write. By asking question 6, I was able to start establishing the link between formulas and models used for writing and the types of documents that could be perceived as formulaic. For example, 13 of the 45 engineers indicated they write lab reports. And of those 13 engineers, nine indicated they write lab reports on a regular
basis. Also, the frequency of writing specific types of documents, as posed in
question seven, can possibly make the writer think they are using a formula for
writing. This can especially be true if the writer, for instance, is expected to
created lab reports on a weekly basis. The routine writing can signal a formula,
for some.

I categorized the types of documents the engineers write into four broad
categories: reports, letters, papers, and others (see Table 3.2). This categorization
helped me address the notion that written documents possibly could be created
according to a formula, as described by my engineering colleague in the scenario
from chapter one. Having categorized the documents listed as being written by
the engineers, I noticed that almost all of the written documents listed under
each category possess certain components that make them specific types of
documents. For example, a lab report would somehow explain and "include"
almost all the contents of what pertained to the lab: materials, the methodology,
results, a conclusion, etc. Possibly, this is where the misconception of learning
models for writing emerges. It seems as though my engineering colleague might
have made a logical error by merging "inclusiveness" of content with
"modeling." The content of what should be included in a written document can
indeed be transformed into a model. The model, though, is never an absolute. It
should be used only as a reference for writing, not a formula for writing. For
instance, the contents of a lab report as previously listed is all inclusive:
everything that "can" be put into a lab report. However, dependent upon the lab
situation (the rhetorical situation) the lab report may need to deviate from the
standard inclusive model. Hence, the writer of the lab report cannot follow the
model as an absolute. The deviation, again, is based on a rhetorical stance: the
audience, purpose, and context for writing the report.
Table 3.2. Types of correspondences written by the engineers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total of written correspondence types</th>
<th>Total in frequency of writing correspondence types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reports</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab reports</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress reports</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility reports</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project reports</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical reports</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letters</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you letters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to friends/family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation letters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters of recommendation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover letters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application letters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Papers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers written for classes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Articles) for publication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summaries of articles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project descriptions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays for scholarships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorandums</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Total" out of 45 engineers who completed the survey
The information I obtained from the engineers' surveys about the types of correspondences they write and the frequency of writing those correspondences caused me to question how genre writing is related to prescription writing. Genre writing can be expressed through numerous factors, like the ideas and principles of the discipline studied. Within a given discipline, specific styles, tones, and characteristics of the discipline must be expressed and adequately explained within the context of the discipline's genre. Thus, the writing for a given discipline would reflect the principles, styles, etc. for the discipline. Hence, lab report writing could be perceived as genre driven because it is inclusive of specific components and principles that form the overall structure of the lab report. Perhaps this is yet another reason why my engineering colleague believes that all I am learning within the English discipline is formulas for writing.

Writing as a Skill: Least to Most Essential

Question 8 asked the engineers to rate writing as a skill, using a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 being least essential and 6 being most essential. This question really gets at the heart of how writing is perceived as an overall communication skill. Most of the engineers rated writing as an essential skill as either a 4, 5, or 6. With 1 being low, and 6 being high, of all the 45 responses, the majority of the engineers, 18 out of 45, rated writing as an essential skill as a 5; ten out of 45 rated writing as an essential skill as a 6; nine out of 45 rated writing as an essential skill as a 4. This rating disproves my hypothesis that engineers perceive writing as a low communication skill.

However, one of the more interesting findings regarding question 8 is that 12 out of 45 engineers emphasized first the importance of good verbal communication skills, then the importance of good written communication skills in comments such as the following:
"I think that being able to speak to people is the most important communication skill. Writing can only get you so far, but you'll have to eventually meet a person, and if you can't speak, your writing kind of becomes forgotten."

"I think writing is very important, but it is secondary to good verbal communication. My priority in the workplace is to design high quality analog circuits. In order for me to do so, I rely on other engineers for input and guidance. I need other engineers to have good verbal skills, and I feel I should have the same. Also, good verbal communication helps everyone get along in the workplace. Good writing skills are necessary for relaying information to customers and to employees not at your site, in addition to standard progress reports, etc. So, I think writing is very important, but second to good verbal skills."

"I do not believe it is as important as the ability to communicate effectively face-to-face, but an extremely important skill nonetheless."

"While writing is important to present ideas, verbal communication is the most important."

"After verbal communication, writing is the next most important communications skill."

None of the questions I posed to the engineers in my survey addressed the importance of verbal communication skills, especially compared to written communication skills. However, I believe verbal communication is secondary to written communication because sometimes, the only way for people to retain
and understand large portions of information is to receive the information in writing. Additionally, written documentation becomes a part of a permanent record, something that a person can go back and read again without it changing. This may not be the case with verbal communication.

Even more so, good written communication skills can sometimes make all the difference in being hired into a position. Some of the engineers did comment on the aforementioned aspects of writing:

"Written communication is usually a final and permanent reference. People can go back to it, read again for further understanding. It is the meat behind oral presentations etc. In many cases, without written documentation, it didn't happen."

"Now days with being able to talk to anybody, anywhere (telephones, video conferencing, etc.) the ability to communicate verbally is probably the most important form of communication. Writing is probably real close because it tends to be that the written word is the final word."

"I have seen through talking to different people in industry that a person's writing skills can make the difference in the positions they would qualify for. You can have all the technical skill you want, but if you can't write well, you will no be qualified to be in a managerial position where the written word can determine hiring, law suits, effectiveness of reports, etc."

"If you are unable to write, you cannot communicate even the greatest idea. It is essential for surviving in the business world."
Based on the information in this section, it seems that the engineers perceive writing as a valuable skill to possess. As it is revealed in the last three sections of this chapter, though, the engineers' perspectives about the value of writing is conditional. Even more so, it seems as though the engineers express their value of writing in terms of writing as a function, like in workplace communication.

**English Courses Taken and the Value of Them**

Question numbers 4 and 5 ask the engineers to list the writing courses they have taken, and of those taken, to list and explain why the courses were valuable to them. Questions 4 and 5 were used for two main purposes: to find out whether or not the engineers felt they had learned anything from the classes they had taken, and to find out if the engineers had taken a business or technical writing course, particularly to gain a sense of what they felt they had learned from the business and technical writing class. I assumed that I would receive very few comments about addressing a specific audience, purpose, and context for writing. I did, however, expect to receive many comments about formulas, strategies, and styles for writing, especially in reference to the business and technical writing courses. My engineering colleague from chapter one really feels as though technical writing classes teach formulas and use strict models for writing. Thus, I used questions 4 and 5 to determine if other engineers felt this way as well and why this is the case.

Questions 4 and 5 revealed that the majority of the 45 engineers who completed the e-mail survey had taken English 104 and English 105, the freshman composition courses, and English 314, a business and technical writing (see Table 3.3).
Table 3.3. English courses taken by the engineers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Course</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Total Number Taken Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 101D</td>
<td>English for Native Speakers of Other Languages</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Advanced-level Composition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 104</td>
<td>Introduction/Freshman Composition I</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 105</td>
<td>Introduction/Freshman Composition II</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 105H</td>
<td>Honors Introduction/Freshman Composition II</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 220</td>
<td>Applied English Grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 240</td>
<td>Science Fiction Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 309</td>
<td>Report and Proposal Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 314</td>
<td>Technical Communication</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 376</td>
<td>British Literature: The Romantic Period</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 414</td>
<td>Business and Technical Editing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>Technical Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Course taken at other universities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Total Number"= total of engineers taken courses out of 45 engineers surveyed

It is important to note that in English 314, as well as in English 104 and English 105, students are taught to perform audience analyses, which is a rhetorical act, and to pay close attention to components used to create effective written documents.

Business and technical writing, though, is much more genre driven than English 104 and English 105, in that business and technical writing is more model-oriented—just as my engineering colleague believes is the case. In terms of my research question, "How do disciplinary practices in business writing yield effective business correspondences?" technical communicators are taught to use
models only as springboards for writing. A model should never be used as an absolute for writing. Hence, I hypothesized that if the engineering students placed emphasis on following formulas and models for writing, rather than placing emphasis on the overall rhetorical act of writing, then the engineers might indeed believe that following formulas and models as absolutes will produce effective documents.

Perspectives of English 314

English 314 is primarily a technical communication course in which students learn the theories and principles of creating effective written communication. Much emphasis is placed on rhetorical analysis and information organization. However, some English 314 courses are taught with a correspondence component, whereas students get writing practice in composing business letters (memorandums, application letters, etc.). Thus, English 314 can be correlated to the writing sample task of composing a business correspondence letter, namely writing a claim denial letter.

I had hypothesized that the engineers would place the value of writing on models and formulas. My findings, however, were inconclusive because the engineers chose to comment on other aspects of writing they learned or didn't learn from English 314. Most of the engineers' comments were centered around issues such as styles for writing and workplace communication. Thus, I categorized the engineers' perspectives of English 314 into four broad categories: style and techniques for writing, no value in English 314, workplace communication, and models or formulas for writing.

Styles and techniques for writing

In terms of styles and techniques for writing, four of the engineers made the following comments about English 314:
"It is important to be able to express yourself professionally. This class taught the proper techniques."
"... the course gave me ideas on how to write in a technical style. The assignments were meaningful."
"Learned many new techniques of communication."
"I learned good organizational skills and writing styles."

Based on the above mentioned comments, it seems as though these four engineers place great emphasis on style and technique, rather than the overall rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation addresses style and technique, but in terms of audience, purpose, and context. Thus, it seems that the engineers, in this case, fail to realize that the style and technique of writing changes all the time, based on the rhetorical situation. With this in mind, it is impossible to teach an all inclusive style and technique for writing.

No value in English 314

Moreover, five of the engineers expressed comments about English 314 not being valuable at all. Three of their comments are listed as follows:

"314 was a waste of time. Everything we learned in 314 was common sense and anyone with half a brain could figure it out."
"I did not really gain a whole lot from either one [English 105 and English 314]. The only thing I learned in 314 is how to write a good memo."
"English 105 - English 314 isn't taken really taken seriously (in my opinion) by the students participating. Much of what is taught is
stuff I (and other student[s] that have had coops and intern[ships])
have had [to] do during my work experience."

The engineers' perspectives of English 314 and writing from the stance of not
finding it valuable at all is viewed as such for the reasons listed above. Attitude,
too, probably plays a significant role in why the engineers feel there is no value
in English 314, even though none of the engineers expressed attitude as a factor.
As an aside, the engineers at Iowa State University must take a business or
technical writing course to meet graduation requirements for the engineering
discipline. Perhaps the engineers who made the comments listed in this section
just didn't want to take the course; thus, they found no real value in English 314.

However, it is inconceivable to really think that "anyone with half a brain
could figure it out." Clearly, if the bigger picture of learning the concepts of
English 314 and writing were considered from a rhetorical stance, then the
analyzing and reasoning process of writing would be put to the test. The attempt
to create effective documentation requires a bit more than just relaying
information through common sense. The common sense aspects of writing
definitely need to be considered when writing, but organizing and
communicating that common sense content and other important content
material requires an understanding of the rhetorical situation. And, considering
the audience, purpose, and content for writing and creating effective
documentation is not a waste of time; it is pertinent and necessary.

Workplace communication

Also, six of the engineers expressed that English 314 is useful for
workplace communication. Three of the engineers made the following
comments:
"It [English 314] is a technical communication class that teaches you how to write documents you might need to prepare in the workplace."

"Engl. 314 was the most valuable because it covered issues that I felt were important. The material covered was applicable to real world situations."

"English 314 helps with workplace communication."

The comments in this section seem to establish a link between writing as an essential communication skill as discussed in "Writing as a Skill: Least to Essential" section of this chapter and why the engineers perceive writing as such. Granted, it is true that good writing skills are essential in the workplace. Still, it is difficult to tell from the engineers' comments if the necessity of workplace communication is being placed on written or oral communication skills. For example, it is vague as to what "material" is a reference to in, "The material covered was applicable to real world situation." Additionally, this same vagueness applies to, "English 314 helps with workplace communication." In both cases, there is no real reference to the essence of effective written communication skills. Perhaps the vagueness of what is perceived as essential for effective written documentation, as applied to the workplace, also explains why my engineering colleague and other engineers don't place value in writing as a skill of its own accord. And, from this information, I have gathered that writing, according to the engineers, must be compared to other means of communication, like speaking, and it must be situated in terms of functionality in order for it to be perceived as valuable.
Formulas for writing

As previously mentioned, only three of the 45 engineers mentioned formulas or formats for writing by making comments as those listed below:

"Also, the style of writing we learned in 314 does not match the style I read in papers by my professors, etc."
"314 was not helpful for lab reports either!"
"The formats taught in [English] 314 can change with time. . . ."

For these engineers, it seems that writing follows a formula that should be transferable from one type of document to the next. However, one of the engineers who feels he or she is being taught formats for writing, realizes that the formats "can change with time." Besides failing to realize that he or she is not being taught formats for writing, this engineer does realize that some aspects of writing change. This change, even though this engineer does not directly state it, is based on the use of the rhetorical situation. When the audience, purpose, and context for writing change, inevitably the content and "format", as this engineering student phrased it, changes.

Thus, in terms of my research question, "How do disciplinary practices in business writing yield effective business correspondences?" it seems as though some of the engineers don't understand that formulas and formats for writing should be used only when the rhetorical situation has been addressed. And, too, some of the engineers don't seem to understand that the formula, format, or model for writing documentation will definitely change according to the rhetoric of the correspondence being written.
Tools Used to Learn Writing Skills and Their Value

Question 9 asked the engineers to rate various tools they use to learn writing skills on a scale of one to six, with one being the lowest rating and six being the highest rating. After tallying the results from the engineers, I found that teacher lecture, tutoring, and practice ranked extremely high on the scale as tools used to learn writing skills. I divided the results into two bar graphs (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Figure 3.1 shows the results for teacher lecture, readings, group work, grammar instruction, and tutoring. Figure 3.2 shows the results for models and practice as tools used to learn writing skills. I decided to split the results of models and practice into categories of their own because they both are linked to my research questions: How do disciplinary practices in business programs help, but also hurt the efforts in the production of effective business correspondences? From the e-mail survey results, I found that practice ranks
writing yield effective business correspondences; and, how do computer extremely high on the scale. Thirty-three out of 45 engineers rated practice as a 5 on a scale of 1 to 6 as a valuable tool used to learn writing skills. Thus, it seems that the engineers understand that practice is one of the most essential and valuable tools that writers have in trying to create effective documentation.

However, as in the case of models used as a tool for learning writing skills, seven of the engineers rated models as three; eleven rated models as a 4; five rated models as a 5, and nine rated models as a 6. Some of these variations in ratings, for example, are associated to how closely each engineer chose to follow the Microsoft Office Claim Denial Letter. By discussing these variations, as well as connections between the e-mail survey results, assessment of the strengths
and weaknesses of the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter, and the writing sample results, I will make some conclusions about the way the engineers responded to various questions in the e-mail survey in reference to how they designed and composed their own writing samples in Chapter 4. It should be noted, though, that the engineers could follow the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter, but should do so only in reference to minimally including the components of a claim denial letter into their own letters. Thus, they were to use the model only as a model and compose their letters based on the rhetorical situation.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS, ANALYSES, RATINGS, AND DISCUSSION OF THE WRITING SAMPLES

All of the writing samples, for the most part, minimally met the requirements of the writing task, which was to decline the customer's reimbursement request of $500. Writing effectiveness, especially in the cases of having to deliver bad news, though, is based on an understanding and addressing of the rhetorical situation. Possibly attempting to do so, most of the engineers who submitted writing samples, met the minimum requirements of composing a claim denial letter, but failed in overall effectiveness. Overall effectiveness required the engineers to more than minimally include the components of a claim denial letter and to address the rhetorical situation and maintain goodwill with the customer for which they were writing the letter (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Evaluator ratings of engineers' writing samples
Discussion of the Writing Sample Results

The evaluation results in this chapter are discussed in broad terms of overall effectiveness rating, strengths and weaknesses of content of each paragraph, based on the rhetorical situation (the scenario material), the establishment of goodwill, and closure of the writing sample letter. To further address the aforementioned components used to rate the writing sample effectiveness, I will discuss writing sample numbers one, six, and eight in terms of the following factors: including the minimum components of the claim denial letter, using buffers, centering the writing in relation to the customer's point of view, and offering alternatives to the customer. It is important to reiterate that writing cannot be formulated and reduced to the use of absolute models, as it will be seen in the writing samples.

Of the nine out of 15 writing samples returned, I chose to discuss thoroughly three of the nine of the writing samples, numbers one, six, and eight, because they were representative of low, average, and high overall effectiveness ratings as indicated from question number one of the evaluation rating sheet. Thus, I'll discuss some of the stronger and weaker points of these three writing samples that were submitted. It is important to understand, though, that the writing sample that was rated as low in effectiveness still possessed some of the content that is necessary to create effective documentation. Similarly, the writing sample that was rated as high in effectiveness might have eliminated pertinent content, or may not have stated content as well as it could have been stated to the customer.

Addressing the Minimum Components of a Claim Denial Letter

To establish whether or not the engineers who composed writing sample numbers one, six, and eight met the minimum requirements of composing a
claim denial letter, I used Michael Markel's prescription writing, as described in
*Technical Writing: Situations and Strategies*. There, he outlines a four part
structure of what should minimally be addressed in the delivery of a bad news
letter. Minimally, the content of each writing sample should:

- meet the reader on neutral ground, expressing regret, but not
  apologizing
- explain why the company is not at fault
- clearly deny the reader's request
- attempt to create goodwill (501).

Writing sample number one met the minimum requirements of
incorporating the components of a claim denial letter, with the exception of
meeting the customer on neutral ground. Words such as "authorized me" and
"deal with" indicate dominance and assertion on the behalf of the writer;
"friendly" words that should be bestowed on a regular customer are not indicated
in this letter. The writer exudes an overall distance from the customer.

Additionally, writing sample number one does indicate regret, but not in
terms of not being able to reimburse $500. Instead, the emphasis of the regret is
placed in terms of regretting having to deliver the bad news to the person. Also,
writing sample number one indicates why the company is not at fault, as
indicated by a federal law act. However, the denial of the request is implied
through the company's compliance with the federal law act. A clear denial of
$500 is never stated by the writer (see Figure 4.2).

Writing sample number six minimally met the requirements of the four
part structure of the claim denial letter. In writing sample number six, the writer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The writer does not meet the customer on neutral ground.</th>
<th>Local Video Store manager Mr. Good Tape only authorized me to deal with your request for $500 reimbursement for the damage of your video tape you purchased from our store.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The writer attempts to deny the customer's request.</td>
<td>I regret to inform you that our store policy prohibits us from reimbursing customers for damages exceeding the purchasing price of the product obtained from our store. This policy comply with Federal Law 1313 Act 17. In your case the purchasing price for the video tape was $10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer indicates why the company is not at fault: in compliance with a federal law.</td>
<td>We understand the importance of the tape for you and your family and therefore intangible more then material loss you suffer. Unfortunately, we are unable to fully compensate you for the required amount. Local Video Store will instead reimburse you for the price of the videotape $10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer attempts to create goodwill by offering a reimbursement of $10.</td>
<td>Once again we regret that we could not fully compensate you for the damage. We hope however, you will still remain our regular customer. Please let me know if you need any more assistance regarding this issue. Included is a check for $10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

John Goodstore
Local Video Store shop assistant

Figure 4.2. Writing sample number one
does meet the recipient on neutral ground through apologies. However, the person should express regret, not apologizes for what has happened, according to Markel in *Technical Writing: Situations and Strategies*.

Additionally, the writer of sample number six clearly denies the reader's request. However, stating that the customer will not be reimbursed "your" $500 is somewhat of a misdirection. It implies that the customer is actually at a loss of $500, as if the customer paid $500 for the video tape. In reality, the customer merely suggested a reimbursement of $500. This type of misclarification can lead the customer to think that she can be reimbursed $500 if she pursues the issue because it was identified as "her" $500. Also, writing sample number six attempts to create goodwill by offering the customer a service (see Figure 4.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The writer meets the customer on neutral ground by offering apologies.</th>
<th>We are sorry to hear about what happened to your video recording. Unfortunately, we can not reimburse your $500. It is our store policy not to refund any item that has already been taken our and used by our customers. Furthermore, we do not take responsibility for any damage that may not have been caused directly by us.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The writer denies the customer's request.</td>
<td>We have always maintained high quality standards in the products we sell and we would be happy to provide you with free testing of the products you would like to buy from us in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer indicates why the company is not at fault.</td>
<td>Thank you and we hope you would continue doing business with us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer attempts to establish goodwill by offering a service.</td>
<td>Sincerely,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.3. Writing sample number six**
Similarly, writing sample number eight met the minimum requirements of a four part structure of a claim denial letter. In writing sample number eight, the writer meets the customer on neutral ground by expressing regret about the problem with the video tape, but not out rightly apologizing for the act happening. The problem with this type of regret is the same problem as identified in writing sample number one, where the writer is placing the emphasis on the regret of having to inform the person of the bad news, not expressing regret in learning that the problem happened to the customer.

Additionally, the writer does attempt to explain why the company is not at fault, but indirectly. The writer included the information that the customer had written in her claim letter—only to revert the fault back on the customer. Justifying why the company will not reimburse the customer $500, based on her possibly being the cause of the problem, is not a correct response to the problem.

The writer does clearly deny the customer's request for a reimbursement of $500 in the first paragraph of the letter. And, the writer does attempt to establish goodwill by offering to have the tape spliced back together at no cost to the customer. This attempt at goodwill would probably prove to be effective because not only would the customer not be out the money originally spent for the tape, but the customer might be able to salvage the wedding footage, which is really what she wants. The $500 price tag the customer attached to the tape was for sentimental value purposes only. More than likely, if the company can repair the tape, she will continue to do business with the company and feel that the wrong she had experienced had been made right (see Figure 4.4).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The writer does not meet the customer on neutral ground.</th>
<th>I regret to inform you that we will not be able to reimburse you the $500 you are requesting for the video cassette which you claim to be faulty and purchased from our store.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The writer denies the customer's request.</td>
<td>Given the information in your previous letter, we cannot conclude that it was indeed a faulty videotape. The problem did not occur until the tape was being viewed; therefore, the video recorder or operator could have caused damage to the tape. Furthermore, the videotape player may not been in proper working order, and we suggest you try other tapes in the machine as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer uses the entire second paragraph to explain why the company is not at fault.</td>
<td>We understand, though, that this tape is not replaceable. In order to reconcile the situation, we would like to offer to send the tape in and have the tape spliced back together at no cost to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer attempts to create goodwill by offering a service.</td>
<td>We are sorry for the inconvenience you've had to suffer; however, we hope you will continue to do business with us. Please contact me as to when you would like to have the tape sent in for repair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writer expresses apologies for what has happened to the customer.</td>
<td>Sincerely,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person's Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4. Writing sample number eight
Moving Beyond the Minimum: Rhetorical Attempts to Establish Goodwill

Just addressing the minimum components of a claim denial letter is not sufficient in ensuring its overall effectiveness. For example, it should be noted that Markel indicates that the writer should attempt to create goodwill with the recipient of the letter. However, he fails to indicate how the writer can accomplish such a feat. This is where rhetoric and the rhetorical situation become extremely important. And, in this case, there is no real recipe to follow.

Writing situatedness, buffers, and product alternatives are some of aspects of goodwill building that should have been incorporated into the engineers' writing samples. With this being the case, it should be extremely difficult for my engineering colleague to believe that it is possible to reduce writing to a strict formula, seeing as that the buffers the writers used could be placed in various paragraphs of the writing sample. Additionally, offering an alternative for the broken product is not a mandatory component of goodwill building, but is sometimes expected by customers, especially regular customers of a company. And, if the person responding to the claim is in a position to offer an alternative, by all means, the person should do so. In considering the rhetorical situation, the writer should realize that offering an alternative may make the difference in the regular customer remaining a customer of the store at all.

Using buffers to ensure writing effectiveness

Without a doubt, the use of buffers is extremely necessary when delivering bad news to the customer, especially when the writer must totally deny a customer's claim, as was deemed the task of the engineers. However, it is important not to misuse buffers. Buffers should not be apologetic, and they
should not mislead readers. They should dampen the blow of the forthcoming bad news, and should be limited to comments that pertain to the situation and lead into the denial of the claim.

The writer uses a buffer by stating, "Local Video Store manager Mr. Good Tapeonly authorized me to deal with your request for $500 reimbursement for the damage of your video tape you purchased from our store." Even though the statement serves as a buffer, it's tone is abrupt and curt, especially in stating that the writer was authorized "to deal with" the request.

The denial of the customer's claim immediately follows in the second paragraph. The phrase, "I regret to inform you . . ." is somewhat a buffer, but it renders itself ineffective because it violates one of the criteria of using a buffer, namely offering an apology when one is not necessary. Expressing sincere regrets for what has happened to the customer would have been the proper use of a buffer.

Writing sample number six also tries to incorporate the use of a buffer by stating, "We are sorry to hear about what happened to your video recording." Again, as in the case of writing sample number one, the buffer is not used properly because the writer attempts to use it as an apology, not as a means to express sincere regrets for customer's mishap.

Additionally, the writer should have constructed a buffer with more content pertaining to the customer's claim in the letter she wrote to the manager. By doing so, the customer may have felt as though the manager read the letter and understood why she felt she was entitled to $500. As the claim denial letter now stands, the customer would have a right to feel as though the manager overlooked the value of tape because it contained wedding footage, as
the manager did not bring up any aspects of the wedding in his claim denial letter.

In writing sample number eight, the writer uses a small phrase of, "I regret to inform you that we will not be able to reimburse you the $500 you are requesting for the video cassette . . . " to dampen the bad news of the claim denial letter. While the buffer is very short, and somewhat curt, it is used correctly in offering regret, and not offering an apology. However, the regret is written in the context of having to deliver bad news, not in feeling some remorse for what has happened to the customer.

Overall, though, the buffer is ineffective because of its curtness and lack of sensitivity to the underlying problem: the loss of the wedding footage, which was not mentioned in the letter at all.

**Adhering to reader-centered writing expectations**

Overall, the responses to the customer's claim should be reader-centered in that a "reader's direct request for information, goods, or services or persuasive request for action, adjustment, or funding meets with a negative reply" *(Business Communication 259)*. This should be the case because writing-centered situations require personal attention. But, the problem is set forth by the customer. She has established the grounds for which she feels she should receive a $500 reimbursement. So, the reply should be based upon the terms and conditions set forth in the customer's letter, which is an aspect of rhetoric that is taught within the English discipline. Additionally, the writer's letter to the customer should not be message-centered, even though the customer is questioning the company's products of the video company. Seeing as that the writer is denying the request of the customer, it should clearly focus on what the customer has stated in the claim. It wouldn't make much sense to place a great
deal of emphasis on the product because the customer already feels as though the product was faulty.

However, various parts of the letter to the customer could justifiably contain some of the elements of situation-centered writing in that the customer has situated the problem with the faulty tape in the context of the footage for her daughter's wedding. Clearly, she had identified why she feels she should be reimbursed $500: sentimental value of a tape that she feels can never be replaced. Still, the letter that writer composes for the customer should be reader-centered, but can contain elements addressing why the customer feels as though she should be reimbursed $500.

Writing sample number one is writer-centered, not reader centered, because it focuses too much on "I" and "we" instead of "you." For example, the writer states, "... Mr. Good Tape only authorized me ...," "I regret to inform. . .," and "We understand the importance . . ." in an attempt to relay information to the customer—none of which emphasizes "you" attitude from a positive perspective. This emphasis of the writer seemingly trying to assert his position in this issue is causing the overall tone and effectiveness of the letter to deteriorate.

The writer of sample number six is, too, very much writer-centered because of the focus on "we" phrases. For example, the writer makes statements such as, "We are sorry . . .," "Unfortunately, we cannot . . .," and "We have always maintained . . ." in an effort to establish the company's outlook of the problem as identified by the customer. In doing so, it is hard to see that the letter is meant to even go out to the customer. Very little "you" attitude is displayed in this letter that would make it reader-centered.
Again, writing sample eight is writer-centered. The writer begins the letter to the customer with "I" emphasis by stating, "I regret to inform you . . ." The "I" emphasis then moves toward "we" emphasis, namely the writer and the company by making statements like, " . . . we cannot conclude," and " . . . we hope you . . ." Very little positive "you" attitude can be found in this letter.

In addition, in the few locations where "you" attitude is present, as in, "Furthermore, the videotape player may not [have] been in proper working order, and we suggest you try other tapes in the machine as well" it seems as though the writer is attempting to blame the customer for wrongdoing. If this is the case, overall effectiveness of the letter has been compromised. The suggestion of trying other tapes in the customer's VCR is valid, but it is buried within the content of denying the claim of $500. Thus, the customer, more than likely, won't perceive the suggestion as an actual friendly suggestion in trying to rectify the problem.

Hence, effectively addressing and carrying out "you" attitude in business correspondences is an aspect of rhetoric that is taught within the English discipline. Furthermore, a model cannot "formulate" "you" attitude for a writer; the writer is expected to exhibit "you" attitude based on the rhetorical situation. **Offering alternatives in the place of a claim denial**

Offering alternatives is good to do if the writer or person in charge is in a position to do so, because alternatives at least offer the customers "something." Alternatives offer customers options and somewhat dismiss the notion that all has been lost. Additionally, alternatives, as outlined in chapter three, indicate that the writer cares about the reader and allow the writer to end a denial on a much more positive note (Business and Administrative Communication 235,
Also, it is wise to offer alternatives to long standing customers, as is the case with the customer as outlined in the scenario material of the writing sample content.

Even more important, if the writer chooses to offer an alternative to the customer, it must be clear how the customer can obtain the alternative. The writer should make obtaining the alternative easy for the customer because the customer should not experience any more inconveniences than they already have experienced.

In writing sample number one, the writer did choose to offer the customer an alternative of $10, the purchase price of the videotape, instead of the claim of $500. The alternative of $10 is not as substantial as the $500 request, but at least it gives the customer her money back at the original price. So, in a sense, she did gain "something" out of the alternative. In addition, the alternative of $10 has been included in the customer's letter. Thus, the customer does not experience any inconvenience in making arrangements to obtain the writer's alternative.

The writer of writing sample number six chose not to reimburse the customer any monetary alternatives. Instead the writer decided to provide the customer with free testing of the products they might choose to purchase from the store in the future. This is a seemingly nice gesture, however, I don't believe the writer realizes that he or she has set himself or herself up for the customer to further doubt the quality standards of the products in the store. The customer may take the stance that if the products must be tested before they are purchased, then perhaps the products aren't worth purchasing at all. Additionally, the customer may be offended that they weren't even offered the original purchase price of the videotape. Thus, the customer may turn away from the experience disgusted, especially so for being mistreated as a regular customer of the store.
The writer of writing sample number eight offers the best alternative of all the other writing samples submitted for this study. Instead of offering a monetary alternative, the writer offers to send the customer's tape in to have it spliced back together at no cost to the customer. If the tape is salvageable, then there is no need for the customer to feel she should be reimbursed $500 for the faulty tape. She would then possess what she thought she had originally possessed, a tape of her daughter's wedding that could be viewed by herself and others for years to come.

Also, the offer to perform the service at no charge to the customer shows that the company sincerely cares about the loss she has experienced and wants to help rectify the real problem at hand, namely the loss of the wedding footage. This alternative definitely would establish goodwill with the customer. And if the tape is not salvageable, perhaps the customer will be willing to drop the claim of $500 because she knows the store really tried to rectify the problem. The writer also identifies that the customer should contact him or her if they would like to have the tape sent in for repair. This should be easy for the customer to do because the company's phone number is listed in the letter, along with the company's fax number.

Establishing Relationships Between Tools Utilized in this Study

The purpose of this section is to make connections between the e-mail survey responses, the writing sample results, and the writing sample ratings. By addressing these three aspects of the study, I will discuss effective writing based on rhetoric, and address my two research questions as outlined in chapter one. From the e-mail portion of the tools used for this study, I am primarily focusing on the following: courses the engineers have taken and why they are valuable or not valuable to them, writing rated as least to most essential skill to possess, an
explanation that rating, and the rating of models and practice as valuable tools used to learn writing skills. I chose these aspects from the e-mail survey as a focus because they get at the heart of the courses the engineers have taken and if they learned anything from the courses.

From the writing samples, I will focus on writing sample numbers one, six, and eight, primarily because they have already been introduced to my study and discussed in terms of low, average, and high overall effectiveness ratings. Further discussion of these writing samples in reference to other tools utilized in this study adds cohesion to my arguments and helps me draw conclusions about various aspects of writing.

The ratings of how writing is rated as an essential communication skill and the explanation of that, and how models and practice are rated, give me a sense of how and writing is situated for the engineers and how they use and value practice and models as important tools to possess in order to produce effective documentation. Additionally, I will discuss the overall effectiveness rating of the writing samples in terms of the evaluator's comments from the evaluation sheets they completed for each writing sample.

Writing sample number one

E-mail survey comments

Writing sample number one received a low overall effectiveness rating from the evaluators, with scores of 2, 2, 1, 2, and 2, on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being low and 6 being high. The engineer who wrote this writing sample stated that he or she had taken English 101D and found the course to be very valuable. This engineer made the statement that "It improved my technical writing and help[ed] [a] lot with my theses." In terms of the communication skills that this engineer possesses, writing was rated as a 5 as a most essential communication
skill, which is high. The engineer's explanation for the rating is "Articles and e-mail communication is almost the only way how to stay in touch with other scientists and engineers. On the other side, my field is based mainly on precise predetermined scientific terms that does not allow too much of a freedom."

Additionally, this engineer rated models as a 6 and practice as a 5 as valuable tools used to learn writing skills, which too, is extremely high. From these high ratings of writing overall and skills used to learn writing, I believe this engineer understands writing as an important communication skill.

**Microsoft Office 95 comments**

Similarly, the engineer's assessment of the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter's strengths and weaknesses are as follows:

**Strengths**

"At the end of the letter author indicated that the supplier is still counted on for the future requirements. I think, this is a good point that helps build or keep on good business relationship."

**Weaknesses**

"The author of the letter omitted to mention why they are no longer able to wait for the laser printers shipment. The reason or motivation of customer cancellation should be based on the legislative (contract with specified conditions such as: quality, time, scale ...) or otherwise reasonable evidence."

"If the company is no longer able to wait on the printers, shipment, and therefore are willing to cancel the order they should specifically state so. I found words such: 'we are unable to wait for the delayed shipment ... not explanatory enough.'"
"In my opinion, without stating the reasons and specifically saying that the order is being canceled the Info Bus Data Corporation is not bound to not deliver the printers."

"[The] author of the letter should state his position within the company."

From the above mentioned comments, this engineer seems to have a clear understanding of the components of a claim denial letter, especially regarding the comment about the company not stating specifically that they do not want the printers delivered. One of the key components of a rhetorically effective claim denial letter is making sure that the customer understands that the claim is being denied and why it is being denied.

**The engineer's claim denial letter contents**

In composing his or her own claim denial letter, this engineer seems to have tried to compose his or her letter based on the corrections, aforementioned, to the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter, but still following the general model of the Microsoft Office 95 letter. Reasons for the denial of $500 were given to the customer, and the customer was given the position or title of the person who wrote the letter.

Based on the criteria used to evaluate each of the writing samples, like the using buffers, offering reasons for denying a request, and ending the claim denial letter on a positive note, I speculate that writing sample number one received a low overall effectiveness rating because the writer chose to hide behind a policy or law as grounds for denying the claim. All five evaluators made comments about this particular error in the claim denial letter. Two evaluators, not including myself, made statements such as, "Citing legal liability doesn't solve the customer's problem," and "Reference to federal law is a cop out and
rhetorically insensitive." These types of statements from the evaluators help validate my argument that an understanding and addressing of the rhetorical situation is crucial in creating effective documentation.

However, writing sample number one does attempt to create goodwill by asking the customer to remain a regular customer and by offering an alternative for the reimbursement sought by the customer. This goodwill sentiment was acknowledged by four of the five evaluators as a positive aspect of the claim denial letter.

**Writing sample number six**

**E-mail survey comments**

Writing sample number six received an average overall effectiveness rating from the evaluators, with scores of 3, 3, 2, 3, and 3, on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being low and 6 being high. The engineer who composed writing sample number six stated that he or she had taken just one technical writing course during his or her undergraduate years. This engineer also stated, "My writing skills have been essentially developed through actual practice and through reading great writings." The high regard of developing writing skills through practice is duly noted in this engineer's rating of practice as a valuable tool used to learn writing skills as a 6, which is the highest rating on the scale.

Even more so, this engineer rated writing as an essential communication skill as high 6, on a scale of 1 to 6. This engineer stated, "... writing skills are simply indispensable especially in the science and technology fields where new ideas produced by research results are best communicated through publications .. ." From this comment, I speculate that writing serves as a function for this engineer, like writing publications and reports. Still, I believe this engineer has a high regard for writing.
Models, as a valuable tool used to learn writing skills, however, were rated as a 3, on a scale of 1 to 6 by this engineer. This rating is somewhat related to the way this engineer chose to compose his or her own claim denial letter, as will be discussed in the next two sub-sections.

**Microsoft Office 95 comments**

The engineer's assessment of the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter's strengths and weaknesses are as follows:

**Strengths**

"The intent of the writer is written clearly and direct to the point."

"It shows courtesy by stating that the delay of the shipment was not the corporation's fault."

"[It] shows further respect by expressing willingness to keep future business deals with the corporation open."

**Weaknesses**

"Though it may be none of the corporation's business, the letter could have been more effective had the writer stated their company was unable to wait for their order.

"[It] lacks some personal or human touch."

As is the same case with writing sample number one, the writer tried to compose his or her claim denial letter by following Microsoft Office 95, but by changing rhetorically those components he or she felt needed to be addressed and were not, and by including the components that he or she felt were adequate. For example, this engineer wanted reasons why the company couldn't wait for the shipment. In his or her own letter, this engineer told the customer why the claim was being denied.
The engineer's claim denial letter contents

Again, based on the criteria used to judge the overall effectiveness rating of each writing sample, I speculate writing sample number one received an average rating because the writer chose to hide behind a store policy, but also chose to create a setting of empathy for the customer. Again, all five evaluators made negative comments about using a store policy as a front for saying no to a claim denial. Reiterated, policies don't give customers the real answers they are seeking. Additionally, all five evaluators positively responded to the writer's attempt to empathize with the customer's loss. For example, one evaluator commented, "Paragraph one begins well with [an] apology. However, the writer invokes store policy too quickly and sends [a] negative message with 'Furthermore'." Empathizing with the customer was truly a rhetorical act. Thus, I have a sense that the writer knows what should be included in a claim denial letter, but does not quite have the caliber of clarity and style for composing an overall effective letter.

Writing sample number eight

E-mail survey comments

Writing sample number eight received a high overall effectiveness rating from the evaluators, with scores of 5, 2, 2, 5, and 4, on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being low and 6 being high. This engineer stated in the e-mail survey that he or she had taken English 104 and English 105. English 105 was listed as the most valuable course taken by the engineer because "Engl. 105 gave me the best writing experience probably because it was a little more advanced and not so much on the basics of writing as sentence or paragraph." From this engineer's comment, I believe that he or she understands that writing is not always about the basic structures, and that those who do write, probably find that moving
beyond the basics requires an understanding of what it takes to do so. Quite often, moving beyond the basics requires an understanding and addressing of the rhetorical situation.

While this engineer inadvertently did not rate writing as a least or most essential communication skill, he or she did rate models and practice as valuable tools used to learn writing skills as a high 6, on a scale of 1 to 6. This engineer offered the following reasons for the ratings: "Models help to give me an idea as to what type of document I am expected to write and what style I am to write with. I think practicing your writing skills is the only way to really perfect them." Overall, it seems as though this engineer's outlook of writing is positive and on track as to what models should be used for; they give writers ideas or springboards for writing.

**Microsoft Office 95 comments**

The engineer's assessment of the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter's strengths and weaknesses are as follows:

**Strengths**

"For the most part, the content of the letter is fine. An order is canceled, with specifics, and a reason is given for the action."

**Weaknesses**

"A title should have been given as to who Lou Picard is in the company."

From these comments, this engineer seems to acknowledge that the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter does exactly what it is supposed to do. However, in composing his or her own letter, the engineer deviated from the model.
The engineer's claim denial letter contents

This engineer's claim denial letter did follow the Microsoft Office 95 Claim Denial Letter as a model, but other factors were incorporated into the letter that definitely caused the writer to deviate from the model. Aside from the title given to Lou Picard, this engineer acknowledged that the tape held a sentimental value for the customer, offered reasons why the store would not reimburse her $500, and offered her a free service to help fix the tape—not just offer monetary returns. I speculate this is why the evaluator's gave writing sample number eight high ratings. One evaluator stated, "It speaks to [the] customer's situation and attempts to solve the problem. A customer who wouldn't respond favorably would simply want to extort money."

Still, the letter could stand some improvement, which is more than likely why it received some lower ratings as well. For example, three evaluators made comments about the non-use of a buffer at the beginning of the letter. An opening sentence that states an outright no is not a very good way to establish goodwill with a customer. However, overall, the attention to rhetorical aspects of writing can be seen in this letter.

In addressing rhetoric, I have decided that writing samples one, six, and eight minimally and somewhat awkwardly try to incorporate goodwill strategies in each claim denial letter. However, the overall effectiveness of each letter is poor because the claim denial letters are not what I would term as "finished quality material." And, this finished quality material leads to my two research questions: "How do disciplinary practices in business writing yield effective business correspondences, and how do computer programs help, but also hurt the efforts in the production of effective business correspondences?"
As a technical writer, I understand that computer programs of already formatted text should be used only as templates—models of the types of correspondences that I am trying to create. However, I also understand that the models themselves are only rhetorically sound and possibly effective for the information that it is trying to relay for that "specific" situation. Thus, as the situation changes, so should the writer's rhetorical understanding and stance of the writing situation change.

Additionally, in order for a writer to create "finished quality material," as previously mentioned, he or she must understand that moving beyond the minimum is a must and that clarity and style of writing must be taken into serious consideration. The writing samples discussed in this study and others that were not used specifically as a part of the study accomplished the task of telling the customer "no" to her claim of $500—but sacrificed many of the "other" rhetorical concepts of writing, like appropriate tone to the customer. Also, at the sake of minimally getting the job done, some of the engineers didn't pay attention to "the basics" of writing, like subject/verb agreement and correct punctuation. All of these concepts, and others not mentioned, help create finished quality and effective writing. A computer program might be able to help with the basics of writing (i.e. spell check, grammar check), but it cannot make rhetorical decisions for a writer.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Answering the Research Questions

In my thesis, I have attempted to address two primary research questions. The first question is, "How do disciplinary practices in business writing yield effective business correspondences?". My argument has been based on the premise that individuals who study writing within the English discipline, specifically business and technical writing, learn how to use rhetoric and the rhetorical situation to create effective business correspondences. These disciplinary practices teach writers how to create finished quality material that not only addresses and adheres to the minimum components of a type of correspondence, but also moves beyond the minimum by perhaps using Kent's idea of paralogic guesswork as outlined in the "Hermeneutic paralogy and academic and business discourse" section of Chapter 1. Paralogic guesswork recognizes the importance of using rhetoric when composing documentation. And, with the rhetorical situation always changing, it only makes sense that the writer make interpretative guesses about reader expectations.

The second research question is, "How do computer programs help, but also hurt the efforts in the production of effective business correspondences?". Many computer programs now exist that offer templates for creating business documents. Those templates only address the minimum components for writing; they don't necessarily take into account the rhetorical situation for writing. From this perspective, models can hurt the efforts in the production of effective business correspondences. The templates should serve only as springboards for writing—never absolutes for writing. It is evident from the data I gathered from the writing samples and e-mail survey that the engineers tend to follow models for writing, although they might deviate from them in order to
address their own writer needs and reader expectations. From this perspective, models can be viewed as positive and help in the production of effective writing. The writer, though, should try to create a balance between addressing rhetorical aspects of writing and using a model to help "design" or format the appropriate correspondence.

**Using Format as Evaluation Criteria**

Formatting of the claim denial letters composed by the engineers was not taken into consideration for my study. In hindsight, it should have been taken into consideration because page layout and formatting is very important in overall writing effectiveness. Block paragraphs and double spacing between those paragraphs represents appearance, presentation, and not to mention--professionalism. And, this aspect of creating effective documentation can be handled well, for the most part, by computer programs and models in reference to page layout and design. However, by studying writing within the English discipline, I understand why the models are structured that way, and I also know how and when to deviate from them.

**Using Clarity and Style of Writing as Evaluation Criteria**

In addition, clarity and style of writing should have been an evaluation factor used to determine writing effectiveness of the writing samples. Also, what I am being taught within my English discipline is how to pay attention to detail—the technical aspects of writing and how to create and carry an idea from one thought to the next. The engineers who completed writing samples had the idea of what it would take to tell the customer no to claim. They could not, however, express the idea as coherently and stylistically as possible. The style and finesse of the writing was many times, less than adequate.
Future Research

Overall, I have learned that engineers might actually value writing as an essential communication skill, as long as it's secondary to verbal communication skills. Also, I have learned that some engineers will admit that to create effective documentation, it takes practice, but some engineers may not want to put forth that time and effort to practice writing to get better at it. For future research, I think it would be beneficial to further explore the following aspects of writing involving engineers:

- genre writing
- writer/evaluator interpretation
- hostility toward writing

Genre writing

Out of my thesis defense came an in-depth discussion about and understanding of genre writing that is more loosely defined than my definition as outlined in "The Types of Correspondences Written" section of Chapter 3. In order to be a contributing and active participant of the discourse community, the participant (in this case, the engineers) must understand the communicative interaction and interpretative guesswork of the participants involved. Thus, the English discipline and writing as a genre, for the engineers, may be foreign. They just don't know the proper genre of writing in order to be an active participant of the discourse community.

Writer/evaluator interpretation

Additionally, writer/evaluator interpretation of writing is an excellent area to explore because it questions the real meaning of effective writing.
Repeatedly, it is said that writing is subjective, and to a certain extent, it is. And, in the case of trying to evaluate what is effective—from a student's perspective, or from an instructor's perspective, or based on a real writing situation, or based on a writing exercise in class, etc., there is no one right or wrong answer. This is clear from the variation in evaluator ratings of the same writing samples. Perhaps it would be interesting to explore why writers, instructors, recipients of letters, etc. all view overall effectiveness differently, even though we may follow "the prescription" guidelines of writing for specific business correspondences.

How do we know effective writing when we see it?

**Hostility toward writing**

I believe I should have asked the engineers to rate "good attitude," additionally, as a valuable tool to learn writing skills. Simply put, if individuals don't want to learn anything about writing, and their attitude is bad, then, more than likely, English 105, 105, 314, etc. will never have any value to those individuals. Perhaps further research about hostility and attitudes of engineers regarding writing would help address the issue of effective writing and why it might not come to pass if engineers have negative attitudes.

As an aside, I am quite satisfied, overall, with the results of my study. However, if I were to change the methodology and format of the study, I would like to view written documentation of engineers through a before and after process of composing a writing sample. The engineers would be given a rhetorical situation to write a business correspondence before taking one of the business writing courses, and then given that same rhetorical situation to write a business correspondence after taking a business writing course. This would be a good way to assess if they acquired any of the rhetorical skills necessary to compose effective documentation.
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