

Division of Research  
School of Business Administration

September 1988

**THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT ON MANAGERIAL WRITING:  
MANAGERS CHOOSE NARRATIVE FOR DEALER CONTACT REPORTS**

Working Paper #583

Priscilla S. Rogers  
The University of Michigan

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY

None of this material is to be quoted or  
reproduced without the expressed permission  
of the Division of Research

Copyright 1988  
University of Michigan  
School of Business Administration  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT ON MANAGERIAL WRITING:  
MANAGERS CHOOSE NARRATIVE FOR DEALER CONTACT REPORTS

Priscilla S. Rogers  
The University of Michigan School of Business

ABSTRACT

To explore the impact of context on managerial writing, this study identifies and examines managerial writing choices for a particular document in a specific management situation. Research seeks to account for the disparity between company directives for report writing and actual management practice, and subsequently to identify forces of context which may compel managers to disregard writing prescriptions. Methods of organization for report writing are emphasized. Content analysis of 45 Dealer Contact Reports, examination of company directives and informal interviews suggest that some form of narrative may be appropriate for select documents in some management communication contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies suggest that some current approaches to business writing and writing pedagogy may be inadequate and irrelevant for Management Communication. Researchers at Carnegie-Mellon's Communication Design Center are among those who raise doubt about well-accepted writing maxims which, in Business Communication, are frequently discussed in conjunction with "the seven Cs" (Huckin, Curtin & Graham, 1986; Huckin & Hutz, 1987). Brown and Herndl's 1986 study titled "An Ethnographic Study of Corporate Writing: Job Status as Reflected in Written Text" suggests managers reject important business writing conventions. Managers continue to use "verbose" and "muddy" structures which they know how to recognize and eliminate because they find these structures best suited for their situations. Brown, Herndl and other scholars conclude that unless writing pedagogy is based on contextual criteria it "fights the culture--and always loses" (24).

While general principles for business writing are known, expectations and constraints for managerial writing in particular contexts have yet to be fully explored. We know little about the specific contextual criteria which managers use to make decisions about writing (Battison & Goswami, 1981; Odell & Goswami, 1982). Odell and Goswami are among those who acknowledge this problem. In a 1982 article titled "Writing in a Non-academic Setting" in Research in the Teaching of English, they observe:

We have limited information . . . about the types of stylistic and substantive choices writers make or the reasons that govern a writer's choosing one alternative in preference to another.

This lack seems rather serious since information about these tasks, choices, and reasoning might very well influence the teaching of composition . . . [and provide] a basis for testing theoretical assumptions (202).

### Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of context on managerial writing. The study specifically examines the methods of organization managers choose when they write a particular document for a specific context. Research seeks to account for the disparity between company recommendations for report organization and actual management practice, particularly the use of narrative, and subsequently to suggest forces of context which may compel managers to disregard writing prescriptions. Content analysis of 45 Dealer Contact Reports, examination of manuals on report writing, and informal interviews provide findings which suggest that some form of narrative may be viable for particular documents in some managerial contexts.<sup>1</sup> Three broad questions are addressed:

1. What is the Dealer Contact Report and the nature of the managerial context for which it is written?
2. To what extent do Dealer Contact Reports comply with and differ from company writing directives, particularly structural directives?
3. What contextual expectations and constraints may account for the disparity between actual Dealer Contact Reports and the company directives for structuring them?

### Relevance of Dealer Contact Reports

The Dealer Contact Reports analyzed for this study are particularly well suited for the study of managerial writing. Dealer Contact Reports are widely used in the automotive industry and are vital for successful communication between sales centers (dealerships) and the home office. Dealer Contact Reports are written by managers who are relatively new hires; therefore analyzing Dealer Contact Reports tells us something about writing which is particularly relevant for MBA students.

By nature, Dealer Contact Reports provide a wealth of information about the contextual criteria which may impact managerial writing: They are written by a specific group of managers, to describe a select set of problems, for a particular group of readers. Moreover,

-----  
<sup>1</sup> Findings from a preliminary analysis of 66 Dealer Contact Reports are reported in: Rogers, Priscilla S. (1988). Choice-based Writing in Managerial Contexts: Breaking the Company Rules. Working Paper #569, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1234.

company expectations for composing Dealer Contact Reports, particularly structural specifications, are thoroughly outlined. Since Dealer Contact Reports are well-defined documents, written for distinct situations, the researcher is able to analyze them in light of their context.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Dealer Contact Reports analyzed were selected from writing samples submitted for a company training program by district and field managers all over the United States. The managers were given no guidelines for selecting report samples; however, in several instances managers submitted what they felt were good and poor samples.

The 45 Dealer Contact Reports randomly selected for analysis represent hundreds of reports critiqued. They were written by field managers working in 15 States including Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Nebraska, New York, South Dakota and Texas. They represent field managers' interaction with a variety of dealerships. All but four were written in either 1986 or 1987. None were composed before 1982 or after 1987.

Categories for document analysis were developed from company directives for Dealer Contact Reports and pedagogical recommendations for report writing.<sup>2</sup> The author designed and pre-tested forms for coding and tabulation. Using these forms, the author and four trained coders reviewed the reports for various organizational and developmental features. Two reviewers examined the reports for the presence of characteristics complying with company directives; two other reviewers identified the organizational and developmental features of the reports without knowledge of company directives. The author and coders discussed differing conclusions in detail.

## NATURE OF DEALER CONTACT REPORTS

Dealer Contact Reports are written by field managers to describe management, capital, and facility problems at the car dealerships in

-----  
<sup>2</sup> Pedagogical sources consulted to originate categories for analysis included: Golen, Steven P., C. Glenn Pearce, & Ross Figgins (1985). Report writing for business and industry. New York: Wiley; Lesikar, Raymond V., & Mary P. Lyons (1986). Report writing for business (7th ed.). Homewood, IL: Irwin; Murphy, Herta A., & Herbert W. Hildebrandt (1988). Effective business communications (5th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill; Varner, Iris I. (1987). Contemporary business report writing. Chicago: The Dryden Press.

their charge and to recommend specific actions to solve these problems; therefore, Dealer Contact Reports are "recommendation reports" (McNally & Schiff, 1986; Murphy & Hildebrandt, 1988). Sometimes field managers also use Dealer Contact Reports as "status reports" (McNally & Schiff, 1986) describing a dealer's progress toward recommended goals. Less frequently, Dealer Contact Reports are written to commend a dealer for exceptional performance or to describe an unusual situation which the field manager believes should be brought to the attention of the district manager.

The company regards the Dealer Contact Report as a record of their continuing relationship with dealers franchised to sell and service company products. The Dealer Contact Report informs company officials of significant decisions between field managers and dealers. Consequently, Dealer Contact Reports provide a history of company relations with each dealer. In its most basic sense, the Dealer Contact Report records key conversations between field managers and dealers. In this way, Dealer Contact Reports are potential legal documents.

#### WRITING DIRECTIVES AND DEALER CONTACT REPORTS

Company directives for Dealer Contact Report composition are outlined in a company manual for field managers. According to the manual, Dealer Contact Reports usually focus on a single management, capital, or facility problem. The report is to present the "facts of the case," as well as represent the dealers' opinions and decisions about the issue. These goals are to be met in the space of a single page, if possible.

Above all other directives, the company manual stresses the need for Dealer Contact Reports to follow a specific logical sequence of four topics: Problem, Recommendation, Action, and Timetable, or what we might call the PRAT sequence. The PRAT sequence is somewhat like a "problem-solution" organizational pattern (Rasberry & Lemoine, 1986). PRAT begins with a description of a Problem followed by Recommendations and Actions for solving that problem.

To highlight its importance, the PRAT sequence is described in big, bold type and illustrated with before/after examples in the manual as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. PRAT Sequence for Dealer Contact Reports

1. PROBLEM	State what the problem is.
2. RECOMMENDATION	Suggest the steps needed to correct it.
3. ACTIONS TAKEN OR TO BE TAKEN	Obtain the dealer's statement of the specific actions s/he intends to take. Do not seek a commitment or agreement.
4. TIMETABLE	Recommend a time frame for completion and evaluation.

As a reminder, the PRAT sequence is also printed at the top of each Dealer Contact Report form.

#### Compliance with Company Directives

The 45 Dealer Contact Reports analyzed comply with the company's written directives in the following ways: 1) Writers cover appropriate topics. The vast majority of the reports describe management, capital or facility problems at car dealerships. Other topics fall within the range of alternative subjects listed in the Dealer Contact Report manual. 2) Dealers' particular views are represented. In the 45 reports examined, field managers attempt to record Dealers' opinions about the issues at hand. Dealer quotations, prefaced with statements such as "Mr. Casper said...", or "Bill Leggett told me...", are typical. 3) Writers present the "facts of the case." As a rule, field managers include specific names, dates, statistics, percentages and dollar amounts, such as: "The dealership delivered 30 vehicles in June and 26 in July," and "The dealership's overall QC-P value of 6.25 falls below the District average of 7.13." Sometimes attachments provide additional data. Reviewers analyzing the Dealer Contact Reports described almost 80% as primarily "factual."

#### Departures from Company Directives

Dealer Contact Reports also depart from the company's written directives. Only 36% focus around a single subject. Another 36% cover so many subjects that reviewers characterized them as "overviews." The fact that a significant number of reports cover more than one major idea may account for the fact that almost 75% exceed one page.

The company's PRAT organizational sequence was obvious in only 20% of the Dealer Contact Reports. While this percentage is low, it was significant enough for the two reviewers unaware of PRAT to identify the "Problem," "Recommendation" and "Action" elements when asked if they noticed any organization trends among the reports. At the same time, all four reviewers observed that frequently writers who use PRAT do not understand the specific purpose of each element. Often the PRAT elements are not distinguished--sometimes the "Problem" is discussed in

the "Recommendation" section, and often the "Timetable" amounts to little more than a vague statement such as "Writer will follow," or "Ongoing." It is as if some writers know the PRAT sequence but do not understand how it is meant to function.

Most of the Dealer Contact Reports employ PRAT to a lesser degree, if at all. The 45 reports analyzed fall into four categories in the extent to which they employ PRAT. These categories are: 1) No PRAT, 2) No Obvious PRAT, 3) Aware of PRAT, and 4) Obvious PRAT. In 18% of the reports, writers seem "Aware of PRAT" but do not use it deliberately. In these reports some PRAT elements appear while others do not. In 22%, "No Obvious PRAT" was apparent--reviewers had to literally hunt for elements resembling PRAT. The largest group of reports, 40%, included "No PRAT." These reports contained no hint of the PRAT sequence. Percentages in Figure 1 illustrate that typically field managers do not comply with the company's PRAT sequence.

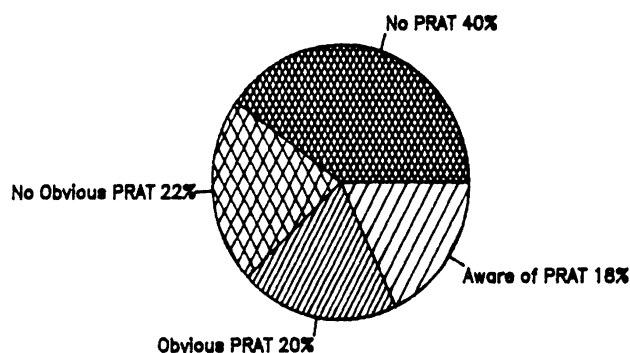


Figure 1. Extent to Which PRAT is Employed in Dealer Contact Reports

The variety of non-PRAT methods of organization employed in the 45 Dealer Contact Reports analyzed is striking. "These reports differ so much," said one of the blind reviewers. "How much training do these writers get? Are they given a structural format?" she queried. Field managers do receive training and are provided with a writing manual which, as we have seen, emphasizes PRAT or a problem-solution organization. Yet, it appears that writers frequently choose other structural approaches including: categorizing, chronological, comparison-contrast, cause-effect, effect-cause, deductive and inductive methods of organization, as shown in Figure 2. The most often used method of organization for Dealer Contact Reports, however, is narrative.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> A number of Dealer Contact Reports employ a combination of organizational structures. Narrative in particular is frequently combined with PRAT (problem-solution), deductive, chronological and categorizing structures as shown in Figure 2.

KEY

**IND:** Inductive--Explanation before main ideas/result  
Facts/analysis before conclusion or recommendation

**DED:** Deductive--Main ideas/result before explanation  
Conclusion/recommendations before facts/analysis

**CHRN:** Chronological--Order of occurrence/time  
Findings as they occurred in time  
Sequence of occurrences as they developed in time

**NAR:** Narrative--Chronological relating of writer's experience  
Includes "characters" (pronouns & names)

**CAT:** Categorizing--Placing like things together  
"Functional" order based on company divisions, departments, etc.

**C/C:** Compare/Contrast--Matching/opposing 2 or more alternatives

**C-E:** Cause-Effect--Facts/options followed by possible outcomes  
Moves from present to future

**E-C:** Effect-Cause--Known results followed by possible reasons why  
Moves from present to past

**Oth:** Other

ID#	IND	DED	CHRN	NAR	CAT	C/C	C-E	E-C	Oth
1				*	*				
2				*	*				
3		*					*		
4		*			*				
5					*				
6		*							
7		*			*				
8				*					
9		*							
10			*	*					
11									*
12	*								
13	*								*
14					*				
15	*								
16					*				
17			*	*					
18				*	*				
19	*								
20				*	*				
21				*					
22				*					
23				*					
24	*								
25		*		*					
26	*			*					
27			*	*	*				
28			*	*					
29				*	*				
30									*
31		*							
32			*	*					
33				*	*				
34		*		*	*				
35	*			*	*				
36				*	*				*
37				*					
38				*	*				
39				*	*				
40				*					
41				*					*
42				*	*				
43				*	*				
44				*					
45				*					
TOTAL	16%	18%	9%	56%	42%	0	2%	0	11%

Figure 2. Organizational Approaches Used for Dealer Contact Reports



## BUSINESS NARRATIVE AND DEALER CONTACT REPORTS

That 42% of the Dealer Contact Reports employ a categorizing organizational scheme is not surprising--topics appropriate for Dealer Contact Reports lend themselves to categorical distinctions. On the other hand, the extensive use of narrative does surprise for it departs markedly from stated expectations, particularly PRAT. Moreover,

narrative is not a widely accepted mode of business writing. Typically narrative is associated with fiction and dismissed for business. "Avoid continuous narrative," writes John Morris in Make Yourself Clear! Improving Business Communication (1980, 17). "Leave [narrative] to the novelist; it is seldom appropriate for business writing (or speaking)." Morris finds narrative wordy, rambling, polysyllabic and cumbersome. It encourages long sentences and paragraphs which consume the readers' time. "Continuous narrative makes the reader's job difficult," Morris writes, "because it inadequately expresses the complex relationships between ideas and because it contains many conditional or qualifying clauses . . . [leaving the reader to] decide what is important and what is not" (94). In other words, narrative makes the reader work harder.

Curiously, although it is not encouraged, findings from this study indicate that managers frequently use narrative. Why did so many field managers choose narrative for Dealer Contact Reports? Are their narrative reports effective or ineffective? To explore these questions, consider the nature of narrative and its potential for written business communication.

### Nature of Narrative

According to The Business Writers' Handbook (Brusaw, Alred and Oliu, 1982), narrative presents events as they occur both in order and in time--sequentially from start to finish, and chronologically from beginning to end. In this way, narrative tells a story (Brusaw, Alred & Oliu; Himstreet & Baty, 1987). Although narratives develop chronologically and sequentially, this author suggests that they center around the actions of specific individuals or "characters" rather than order or time. This focus on "characters" as the instigators of events distinguishes narrative from chronological or sequential patterns.

Karls and Szymanski (1975) briefly introduce two kinds of narrative which suggest the centrality of "characters": personal narrative and objective narrative. Personal narratives, they suggest, describe writer reactions to events and employ personal pronouns such as: "I did this..." and "We did that...." Objective narratives place someone else in the center of the description and subordinate or omit the writer's personal reactions; therefore objective narratives employ references such as "She did this..." and "They did that...."

Expanding Karls and Szymanski's notion, the author suggests that narratives include at least three kinds of "character references":

1. references indicating character dialogue, such as "Mr. Warshaw stated that....," or "The writer then asked....,"
2. references indicating character feelings, such as "Mr. Fletcher expressed his dissatisfaction....," or "Mr. Fletcher alleged that he was being treated unfairly....," and
3. references indicating character actions, such as "On this date I met with Mr. Fletcher..." or "The following week the dealer ordered...."

Dealer Contact Reports contain numerous examples of all three kinds of character references (see Appendixes A and B). In fact, the reports categorized as primarily "narrative" include an average of 16 character references per document, a significant number.

#### Potential of Narrative for Business

Some pedagogical sources indicate the appropriateness of narrative for business writing. Suggested uses include: narrative memoranda which may inform, instruct, explain or request (Himstreet & Baty, 1987; Lord & Dawe, 1983; Karls & Szymanski, 1975); narrative reports including meeting minutes and trip reports (Brusaw, Alred & Oliu; Andrews & Andrews, 1988);<sup>5</sup> and narrative appraisals describing employee strengths, weaknesses and potential (Stout & Perkins, 1987). Annual reports, letters and scripts for audio visual presentations may employ narrative as well.

Narrative may also have merit when combined with other organizational approaches. One finds samples of narrative-categorizing, narrative-deductive and other organizational combinations in 38% of the Dealer Contact Reports analyzed, as indicated in Figure 2. In addition, when other organizational schemes dominate, sometimes narrative may be used in a portion of a document. For example, in some Dealer Contact Reports narrative introduces and concludes the document; in others narrative describes a dealer's response in the Action section. Other uses may become apparent as we consider the potential value of narrative for business writing.

While some suggest its usefulness, narrative as presently understood has drawbacks which do not recommend it for business. Some of the weaknesses and strengths of narrative are suggested in Table II.

-----

<sup>4</sup> The average number of character references per document only drops to 13 when the entire sample of 45 Dealer Contact Reports are considered.

<sup>5</sup> Himstreet and Baty (1982, 251) propose narrative memoranda but suggest narrative may be inappropriate for formal reports.

Table II. Possible Strengths and Weaknesses of Narrative

<u>Weaknesses of Narrative</u>	<u>Strengths of Narrative</u>
May be difficult to read	May be easy to write
May be longer, less efficient	May provide necessary detail
May inhibit comparative analysis	May foster thorough analysis
Ideas undistinguished by level of importance	Emphasizes time or sequence
Time order not suitable for all situations	Time order suits some situations

All these weak and strong characteristics appear among the Dealer Contact Reports analyzed for this study. In fact, when reviewers were asked to select the least and most effective Dealer Contact Reports, they chose narrative reports for each category. (Appendixes A and B are generic versions of Dealer Contact Reports which were selected as least and most effective respectively.)

That some of the Dealer Contact Reports selected as "most effective management documents" employ narrative, suggests it might be well to explore the usefulness of narrative for business writing. We might even develop "business narrative" as a writing genre. Features of the narrative Dealer Contact Reports which were categorized as "most effective," coupled with notions of good narration from English sources suggest that effective "business narrative" is: 1) meaningful, 2) organized, 3) selective, 4) concrete, and 5) concise.

A meaningful narrative has a point, a purpose, a specific reason for being. "Whenever an event of any impact occurs, people give it a meaning or point," writes West (1973, 33). "Whenever you narrate an event or incident, you, too, must give it meaning or point, if it is to seem significant enough for a reader to bother reading" (33). The inexperienced writer may begin writing before s/he determines the relevance of the events. The result, according to Kane and Peters, is like "a poorly mixed cake, lumpy with unrelated details and without the flavor of meaning" (1964, 264).

An organized narrative has a recognizable beginning, middle and end. According to Kane and Peters, organization is "the essence of good narration" (263). "Good narrative has a definite shape," they write (284). The beginning establishes a connection with the reader and provides expository information; the middle presents, explains, comments on and interprets select events, usually in their natural order; the end brings closure, reaffirms or clarifies the meaning of the events (West; Kane & Peters). In other words, narrative details are arranged.

A selective narrative includes only relevant events and details. As with other methods of organization, so with narrative the writer chooses to include that information which best suits his/her purpose. Extraneous details are eliminated (Decker, 1966; West).

A concrete narrative includes exact words, meaningful modifiers and specific comparisons (West). Written from either the writer's perspective or from an objective perspective, concrete narrative has a clear point of view (Karls & Szymanski).

A concise narrative is not long winded. As it is envisioned for business writing narrative employs formatting devices: headings, lists, enumeration, boldface, underlining, indentation, bullet points and capital letters. Transitions are crisp. The typical "and-then-we...and-then-she..." transitions may be replaced with dialogue identifiers as in play scripts.

#### IMPACT OF CONTEXT AND USE OF NARRATIVE FOR DEALER CONTACT REPORTS

Why did over half of the field managers choose narrative as their overall organizational scheme and less than one-fourth comply with the company's PRAT directive? What contextual constraints and expectations may account for the disregard for company directives? Several suggestions are offered.

Initially one might posit that field managers simply do not know the company's PRAT sequence. However, interviews with field managers at district offices and the company's training institute suggest otherwise.<sup>6</sup> At district offices field managers readily repeat the PRAT sequence and at the company's training institute many management trainees know PRAT.

A number of field managers admit they prefer narrative because it is easier and faster to use than PRAT. In fact, in company writing seminars managers resisted PRAT because, as one participant put it, "I don't have time to use the outline." Field managers' preference for narrative is understandable considering the many hours they spend driving from dealership to dealership and the amount of paper work they must complete, only a fraction of which is the composition of Dealer Contact Reports. This finding coincides with Brown and Herndl's report that corporate writers seem to employ narrative when they write under pressure because "eidetic memory organizes the text" (21).

Discussions also indicate field managers prefer narrative because it documents their efforts on behalf of the company. Whereas PRAT highlights a particular problem or issue, narrative highlights personal activity. Unlike PRAT, a narrative records the details of a particular contact--its initiation, conclusion and key events. Field

-----  
<sup>6</sup> As a company trainer I discussed the composition of Dealer Contact Reports with field managers in Indianapolis, IN, Omaha, NE and Detroit, MI. I also discussed the reports with management trainees at the company's marketing institute in Dearborn, MI. Groups consisted of 12 to 25 members and discussions lasted from two to four hours.

managers, who are typically young, with only limited experience as professionals, may feel the need to document their efforts for their superiors much as they did for their professors.

In addition to these reasons, field managers find that in some respects PRAT actually counters company goals for the Dealer Contact Report. As the report title indicates, Dealer Contact Reports describe a "contact." In writing them, field managers are instructed to recall the details of that contact and accurately record the interaction so that if it ever became necessary the report would stand up as a legal document. To insure accuracy, the manual suggests that if the Dealer Contact Report cannot be written immediately, the field manager should quickly summarize, outline, or record information to facilitate later recall. Narrative is particularly suited for recording the details of dealer contacts as the company requires.

Field managers' wide use of narrative has merit given the demands of the communication context. Narrative is easy to write for managers on the move, it documents personal efforts and provides details of interpersonal contacts. These goals are difficult to achieve with the company's PRAT organizational sequence.

#### CONCLUSION

Findings from the analysis of 45 Dealer Contact Reports have implications both broad and specific. Broadly, the analysis indicates that writers do not comply with writing recommendations when those recommendations clash with contextual constraints and expectations. Rather than employing the company's PRAT organizational sequence field managers, facing time constraints and company expectations, choose narrative.

More specifically, this analysis suggests several conclusions regarding the use of narrative for business writing. Among them are the following:

- Narrative is more widely used in managerial writing than generally believed. Field managers who wrote Dealer Contact Reports for which the company expected a PRAT (problem-solution) structure, employed narrative as the dominant method of organization 56% of the time. Narrative was employed as a subordinate structure in many more documents.
- Narrative is a useful method of organization for some business documents in select managerial contexts. Narrative documents personal activity and the details of interpersonal interactions. In the case of Dealer Contact Reports, narrative allows field managers to display their efforts and, more importantly, to document a dealer's specific responses to recommendations, much as the company requires.

- Narrative might be developed as a business writing genre. As here proposed on a preliminary basis, "business narrative" would be:  
1) meaningful, 2) organized, 3) selective, 4) concrete, and  
5) concise.
- Narrative, its uses, strengths and weaknesses, should be discussed in Management Communication classes. Such discussions will help students explore the potential usefulness of narrative in particular management contexts. Instruction in "business narrative" will expand the writing choices of future managers.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> This research was supported by The University of Michigan School of Business. Thanks to six individuals who offered special help with this project. Research Assistants Rajiv Gogia, Joan Penner-Hahn and Jasmine Singh, and Senior Writing Consultant Leslie Southwick, reviewed and coded the Dealer Contact Reports. Carol Mohr prepared the manuscript and visuals. Rick Rogers critiqued the manuscript which strengthened the presentation.

APPENDIX A

GENERIC SAMPLE OF INEFFECTIVE NARRATIVE

<b>DEALER CONTACT REPORT</b>			
<b>Dealership Name</b>	<b>City and State</b>	<b>ROUTING</b>	<b>Init.</b>
Warshaw Motors	Thomastown, PA	Zone Mgr.	<u>  x  </u>
<b>Contacted by:</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Date</b>	
T.J. Mack	T	8/20/88	
<b>Reason for Contact:</b>		New/Used Car Mgr.	<u>  x  </u>
Unsatisfactory Sales		New/Used Truck Mgr.	<u>      </u>
<b>Individual Contacted:</b>		Fleet & Lease Mgr.	<u>      </u>
T.O. Warshaw, Owner		Lease & Rent Mgr.	<u>      </u>
		Business Mgr.	<u>  x  </u>
			<u>      </u>

**Detail (1)Problem, (2)Recommendation, (3)Actions, (4)Timetable**

I, accompanied by Ms. J.N. Williams, Sales Manager and Mr. S.L. Wonser, Field Manager, met with Mr. T.O. Warshaw on this date for the purpose of reviewing the attached August 1987 Dealer Quality Report and the attached Sales Volume Analysis.

I reviewed the following concerns that had previously been reviewed with Mr. Warshaw on a 4/10/88 contact... [10 concerns listed]

I also reviewed with Mr. Warshaw that while his car sales volume had improved since our March contact his percent of sales within the Thomastown area actually declined from March levels of 25.26% to 14.10% and that Truck sales had marginally improved to 20.22% from its March level of 18.02%. Also of note was that dealership car sales thru May 1988 are 12 units less than 1987's monthly averages, and average month truck sales thru May 1988 are up only 3 units over 1987 performance.

I also reviewed with Mr. Warshaw that his responsibilities to the Sales and Service Agreement were to aggressively merchandise and maintain representation within the parameters of his percent responsibility of Thomastown. I also advised Mr. Warshaw that as he is not fulfilling his responsibilities to the Sales and Service Agreement that, unless immediate corrective actions are taken and improvement shown, the District would consider forwarding a file recommending the termination of his Sales and Service Agreement.

Mr. Warshaw stated that he is committed to improving the dealership's performance and will evaluate my recommendations. No specific timetable was set by Mr. Warshaw to accomplish any of the recommendations.

Due to a previously scheduled management meeting, Mr. Warshaw was unable to adequately respond to all recommendations but again stated that the dealership will endeavor to improve its new vehicle sales.

I will follow for progress. **Signature**

APPENDIX B

GENERIC SAMPLE OF SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE NARRATIVE

DEALER CONTACT REPORT			
Dealership Name	City and State	ROUTING	Init.
Fletcher Auto	Ann Arbor, IL	Zone Mgr.	x
<b>Contacted by:</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Date</b>	
S. Mann		3/20/88	
<b>Reason for Contact:</b>	<b>Dealer Relations:</b>		
1988 Q-Series Allocation & Scheduling		New/Used Car Mgr.	x
		New/Used Truck Mgr.	
<b>Individual Contacted:</b>		Fleet & Lease Mgr.	
G. Fletcher, Owner		Lease & Rent Mgr.	
		Business Mgr.	

**Detail (1)Problem, (2)Recommendation, (3)Actions, (4)Timetable**

On this date I met with Mr. Fletcher at his request to discuss his perceived inequities in the distribution of vehicles by myself or the district sales office, particularly in the case of Q-Series. During a telephone conversation the previous week Mr. Fletcher alleged that he was being treated unfairly and indicated he would like to meet to examine his complaint.

During our March 20 meeting, Mr. Fletcher expressed his dissatisfaction with 1988 Q-Series allocations, claiming that unfair distribution by district personnel threatened his ability to penetrate the Ann Arbor market area and to earn a reasonable profit. Citing our previous discussions on the subject, he also complained that I had attempted to force an unreasonable quantity of manual transmissions on him.

To address these concerns Mr. Fletcher and I reviewed the attached charts which were prepared for the meeting. Attachment A shows that Fletcher Auto received an 81% mix of automatic transmissions compared to 52% for the district and 54% for Zone X. The chart also illustrated...

We also reviewed Attachment B, which contradicted the dealer's claim that Q-Series significantly exceeded all other vehicle lines in his market area...

After presenting these charts I advised Mr. Fletcher that they were only intended to illustrate that he was not being cheated out of Q-Series automatics and that he may be missing greater sales opportunities with other vehicle sales. I informed him that I was willing to assist him in maintaining profitability and market penetration but added that his current situation did not appear to justify giving him additional automatics at the expense of other dealers. Mr. Fletcher accepted this position as reasonable, saying the charts and our discussion gave him a better understanding of the district's predicament on short supply commodities....

I assured Mr. Fletcher that I would continue to work with him to maintain a reasonable mix. The dealer indicated he would consider my recommendation and advise me of his decision. He also thanked me for my time in coming out to discuss his problem.

The following week the dealer ordered four additional manual Q-170s for stock and I submitted requests for five additional automatics to ensure a reasonable inventory mix.

Signature



## REFERENCES

- Andrews, Deborah C., & William D. Andrews (1978). Business Communication. New York: Macmillan.
- Battison, R., & D. L. Goswami (1981). Clear writing today. Journal of Business Communication, 18(4), 5-16.
- Brown, Robert L., & Carl G. Herndl (1986). An ethnographic study of corporate writing: Job status as reflected in written text. In B. Couture (Ed.), Functional approaches to writing: Research perspectives. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Brusaw, Charles T., Gerald J. Alred, & Walter E. Oliu (1982). The business writer's handbook (2nd ed.). New York: St. Martin's.
- Golen, Steven P., C. Glenn Pearce, & Ross Figgins (1985). Report writing for business and industry. New York: Wiley.
- Himstreet, William C., & Wayne M. Baty (1987). Business communications (8th ed.). Boston: Kent.
- Huckin, Thomas N., Elizabeth H. Curtin, & Debra Graham (1986). Prescriptive linguistics and plain English: The Case of "whiz-deletions." Visible Language, 20, 174-187.
- Huckin, T. N., & L. Hutz (1987). Existential "there". (CDC Technical Report No. 36). Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie-Mellon University.
- Janis, J. Harold (1978). Writing and communicating in business (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Kane, Thomas S., & Leonard J. Peters (1964). Writing prose: Techniques and purposes (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Karls, John B., & Ronald Szymanski (1975). The writer's handbook. River Forest, IL: Doubleday.
- Lesikar, Raymond V., & Mary P. Lyons (1986). Report writing for business (7th ed.). Homewood, IL: Irwin.
- Lord, William J., Jr., & Jessamon Dawe (1983). Functional business communication (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- McNally, Terry, & Peter Schiff (1986). Contemporary business writing: A problem-solving approach. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Morris, John O. (1980). Make yourself clear; Improving business communication. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Murphy, Herta A., & Herbert W. Hildebrandt (1988). Effective business communications (5th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

- Odell, Lee, & Dixie Goswami (1982). Writing in a non-academic setting. Research in the Teaching of English, 16, 201-223.
- Rasberry, Robert W., & Laura F. Lemoine (1986). Effective management communication. Boston: Kent.
- Rogers, Priscilla S. (1988). Choice-based Writing in Managerial Contexts: Breaking the Company Rules. Working Paper #569, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1234.
- Sigband, Norman B., & Arthur H. Bell (1986). Communication for management and business (4th ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Stout, Vickie J., & Edward A. Perkins, Jr. (1987). Practical management communication. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western.
- Varner, Iris I. (1987). Contemporary business report writing. Chicago: The Dryden Press.
- West, William W. (1973). Developing writing skills (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.