you can always provide relevant background information before stating your main point. But don't keep your readers in suspense. As soon as possible, get it out: Is the project on schedule, or must we take special action to meet the deadline? Will the proposed design for our product work, or must it be modified?

To some writers, it seems illogical to put the most important information first. They reason that the most important information is generally some conclusion they reached fairly late in their thinking about their subject. Consequently, they think, it is logical to describe the process by which they arrived at the conclusion before presenting the conclusion itself. However, such a view is writer-centered. It assumes that information should be presented in the order in which the writer acquired it. In most workplace situations such an organization runs counter to the sequence that readers would find most helpful.

Focus on use, not logic, when you organize.

There are, nevertheless, some situations in which it really is best to withhold the bottom line until later in a communication. You will find a discussion of such situations in the fifth guideline of Chapter 5. As a general rule, however, you can increase your readers' satisfaction and reading efficiency by creating a task-oriented organization in which you give the bottom line first.

Guideline 3 | Identify ways to help readers quickly find what they want

At work, readers often want to find a particular piece of information without reading the entire document that contains it. Perhaps they are reading a communication with many kinds of information, only some of which are relevant to their responsibilities. Perhaps they previously read the entire document and now want to refresh their memories concerning certain facts. In these and similar situations, one of the reading tasks they perform is to locate the desired information.

To devise your accessibility strategies, turn once again to your mental portrait of your readers. Picture the various circumstances under which they would want to locate some particular subpart of your overall message. What will they be looking for? How will they search for it? With the answers to these two questions, you can plan the pathways that will guide your readers through your communication to the information they want.

For memos, letters, reports, proposals, instructions, and other printed documents, you can construct these pathways with headings, topic sentences, tables of contents, and other devices. If your communication has a complex audience, one that includes readers whose responsibilities and interests differ, you can also increase accessibility by planning a modular design. In a modular communication, different parts are addressed to different readers or groups of readers.

Chapter 3 provided an example. To request reimbursement for repairs that his company made to faulty systems for sampling toxic gases emitted from industrial smokestacks, Thomas McKay created a communication that had four parts: a letter that contained general information for all readers, two attachments for engineers and lawyers, and one attachment for readers in a repair shop.

Try This

How usable are the syllabuses for your courses? Why not evaluate one?. How easily can you find each day's assignment? Due dates for papers? Instructions for assignments? Other information you want? What features increase the syllabus's usability for students? What revisions would you recommend?

Learn More

To learn more about McKay's reason for creating a modular design and to see the letter he wrote, go to page 88.

Learn More

For more on modular designs, turn to Chapter 3's Guideline 8 (page 89), including Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

The standard organization for long reports and proposals is also a modular design. For example, many reports and proposals are written for both decision makers and advisers. Usually such reports have two parts: (1) a very brief summary—called an *executive summary* or *abstract*—at the beginning of the report, designed for decision makers who want only the key information; and (2) the body of the report, designed for advisers, who need the details. Typically, the executive summary is only a page or a few pages long, whereas the body may exceed a hundred pages. The body of the report might be divided into still other modules, one addressed to technical experts, one to accountants, and so on. Reports and proposals often include appendixes that present technical details.

You can use similar strategies for helping users quickly locate the information they want when you are designing a website. Menus, links within the text, and clickable images and icons provide the same kind of assistance that headings provide in print communications. A site map serves the same purpose as a table of contents. If your site will be visited by persons wanting different kinds of information, you can also use a modular design to help readers find the information they want. For example, the Epilepsy Project knew that its website would be visited by several distinct groups of people: adults with epilepsy, their family members, kids and teens with epilepsy, and professionals who treat persons with epilepsy, among others. For each of these groups, the Project created a special area with appropriate information. All of these areas can be accessed from links on the home page (see Figure 4.3).

Learn More

For advice about creating site maps, see Chapter 20.

All of these strategies for helping readers and website users quickly locate information are discussed in detail elsewhere in this book. The important point now is that when planning your communication, even before you begin drafting, you should begin devising ways to make your communication accessible to your readers.

WWW

To view other websites that illustrate good use of the guidelines in this chapter, go to **www.cengage.com/english/anderson7e** and click on Chapter 4.

TECHNIQUES FOR PLANNING FOR USABILITY

The next five guidelines suggest techniques that people in the workplace often find helpful as they plan the content and organization of their communications along with their strategies for making the information in them accessible to their readers.

Guideline 4 | Look for a technical writing superstructure you can adapt

At work, you will often write in a situation that closely resembles circumstances encountered by other people many times before. Like other people, you may need to report on a business trip, tell someone how to operate a piece of equipment, or request funds for a project you would like to conduct. For many of these recurring situations, writers employ conventional patterns for constructing their communications. These patterns are sometimes called *genres.* Here, they are named *superstructures* (van Dijk, 1980).

At work, you will encounter many superstructures: the business proposal, budget report, computer manual, feasibility report, project proposal, and environmental