

REVIEW:
TEACHING BUSINESS WRITING

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Like many collections of essays on professional topics, Jeanne W. Halpern's *Teaching Business Writing*¹ contains articles ranging from the trivial to the eminently helpful. Generally, though, the text is a worthwhile contribution, especially for those with little experience in teaching business writing.

The book is divided into four sections. The first, "Approaches," contains chapters by Halpern and Jack Selzer, both arguing for increased integration of "writing process" pedagogy into the teaching of business writing. The Selzer essay, one of the best in the anthology, is an indictment of current business writing textbooks. Selzer complains, and with good reason, that most standard texts are product oriented and fail to make use of current advances in the teaching of writing. He makes a cogent plea for texts that emphasize invention, arrangement, style, and revision. Halpern makes a similar case for integrating a process approach into the business writing classroom. She uses a case illustration to show how to teach six processes that all business writers should master. These two chapters establish the dominant theme of the book: that business writing pedagogy is lagging far behind that of other writing fields in that it has yet to embrace the process approach. This long overdue appeal, emphasized by many of the chapters, is the principal strength of the text.

The second section, "Plans," contains four essays directed at designing business writing courses and programs. This section is clearly the weakest in the text. The work by Jane Harred is the

strongest of the four. She provides strategies for constructing practical, workable exercises and assignments that help to *involve* students in the process of writing for business. The remaining three chapters, however, provide no new insight or interesting information; they merely rehash information that is common sense and common knowledge to most business writing teachers. For example, Melissa Barth, in an essay entitled “Selecting a Textbook: A Structural Approach,” simply outlines the steps involved in choosing a textbook for a business writing program. Her steps are familiar to anyone who has ever sat on a textbook committee, and her entire essay is premised on the belief (she provides no rationale) that a common textbook is desirable. It is unfortunate that these three chapters are not more substantive, since they cover extremely important topics in a time when new business writing programs are emerging rapidly.

The third section, “Pedagogy,” addresses several concerns directly relevant to classroom teaching it contains some of the most practical essays in the text. Linda Flower contributes an excellent article on “Teaching a Rhetorical Case,” in which she discusses the necessity of fashioning a business writing course around realistic rhetorical situations which emphasize a clear sense of audience and purpose. Janet Callaway discusses strategies for coordinating the general objectives of a business writing course with assignment-making, classroom methodology, and evaluation procedures. Her essay is a fine discussion of practical methods of teaching business writing as a process. A chapter by Marie Flatley and Gretchen Vik discusses how to incorporate oral communication and dictation skills in business writing classes. The weakest of the four essays, written by Judith Kilborn, describes how to create a business writing lab. This article seems particularly out of place among the many chapters which emphasize the writing “process.” Not only is it thoroughly “product” oriented, but it exhibits a clear lack of awareness of current trends in writing center pedagogy.

The final section, “Research,” is composed of three chapters concerned with the state of research in business writing. Robert Gieselmann surveys articles published in *Technical Communication*, *The Technical Writing Teacher*, and *The Journal of Business Communication* in order to determine the direction of current research. His investigation provides an informal, impressionistic sense of recent research interests. He also speculates about what research is needed in the field. David Paul Ewing also discusses “Needed Research in Business

Writing.” He names several general areas of research, especially those related to writing process pedagogy, but fails to provide the specificity necessary to make this essay as helpful as it could have been. The final chapter, written by Herbert Hildebrandt, discusses the impact of social accountability on communication, the effect of technological environment on business writing, and the implications of these two forces for research and pedagogy. Like Ewing, Hildebrandt presents some interesting speculation but fails to provide the kind of in-depth detail that would make such an article most valuable.

The anthology includes a scanty Selected Bibliography; it contains only thirty-two entries. Most of them are books, and some are not directly applicable to business writing. An extensive bibliography would have been a great asset to this text.

Teaching Business Writing is clearly not consistent. It has several shortcomings. Nevertheless, its strengths—chapters such as those by Seizer and Flower and the overall appeal for a process-oriented pedagogy, for example—certainly help to counterbalance them. Generally, this text is worth buying, especially for those new to business writing and for those who have not considered integrating writing process techniques into their business writing classes.

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Note

¹ **TEACHING BUSINESS WRITING**, ed. Jeanne W. Halpern (Urbana: American Business Communication Association, 1983, vii & 224 pages). ISBN 0-913-874-13-0.