SCENARIO

Glenville, a community of 70,000 people, has just received a tract of undeveloped land, approximately 70 acres, and a small development grant from the estate of a prominent citizen. The city council believes that the site will make a beautiful park. The council discusses several possible ways of using the land to provide recreation facilities while still maintaining the natural beauty of the land.

The council decides to use a landscape design service. The problem they face is how to find and select the best company. The council decides to announce the project in the newspapers of Glenville and surrounding communities.

Helen Costillo notes: “Look, we don’t know all that can be done with this land. We need input from several designers who can give us suggestions.

Paul Zetchen agrees but is concerned about the cost: “The estate has allotted about $40,000 toward development costs, but that won’t begin to cover the work. We need to know how much development will cost.”

Karen Schneider argues for credentials: “We want to know that the companies that we talk to are qualified—what other projects have they done like this? How much did those projects cost? How long did it take to do the job? Mason Valley had to fire one company that worked on their sports park because the company couldn’t get the work done. Poor drainage was also a problem. What a mess!”

Laverne Roth then adds: “I don’t want any trees removed that do not have to be removed. From my perspective, habitat preservation is critical. This land is too beautiful to be leveled by bulldozers!”

City Manager Catharine Cauthen then adds: “Let’s mention these concerns in the notice we write for the newspapers. Let’s also contact Felixville, which developed a new park when they began planning and find out who they talked to. We can then send letters to those companies.

“Let me draft a notice, then we can see if we need to include anything else. We want to target design firms that are environmentally conscious and experienced, as well as creative. What do we want firms to include in their proposals? We need to decide.” The council members nod in agreement.

***chapter* 15**

Proposals and Progress Reports

- ▶ The Relationship between Proposals and Progress Reports

- Proposals
  The Context of Proposal Development
  Effective Argument in Proposal Development
  Standard Sections of Proposals

- Progress Reports

- Physical Appearance of Proposals and Progress Reports

- Style and Tone of Proposals and Progress Reports

- Other Forms of Proposals and Progress Reports

Many times as an employee in an organization, you will generate a variety of documents relating to one particular problem or situation. You may send several e-mail memoranda to colleagues within the organization; you may write letters to individuals outside the organization concerning the problem or situation; you may write memo reports "To File" that document your activities on the problem or situation; you may also write a detailed formal report, such as a formal feasibility study (discussed in Chapter 16, Recommendation Reports) at the conclusion of your work on the situation. In short, you will write various documents to different audiences about one project, problem, or topic. Proposals and progress reports are two additional types of document that are often written in response to a project or problem.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROPOSALS AND PROGRESS REPORTS

The proposal, as its name implies, describes work that is suggested, the reasons it should be done, and the methods proposed to accomplish the work. The progress report, as its name implies, describes and evaluates a project as work is being done. Thus, if an individual or an organization decides to begin a work or research project, particularly one that requires several months or even several years to complete, the individual or organization will usually need to *propose* the project and then *report the progress* on that project at intervals agreed upon when the proposal is accepted and the resulting agreement or contact is being negotiated. The topic of the progress report emanates from the project that is proposed; the content and organization of the progress report are often directed by the content and organization of the written proposal.

In other instances, employees may need to report progress on the full range of projects or problems on which they are working. In situations like these, the employee writes a progress report (or status report, as it may be called) to inform supervisors or other individuals about what has been accomplished in completing a job or solving a problem. By keeping these individuals up-to-date on work activities, the employee uses the status report to document what has been

accomplished and by whom. The progress or status report thus becomes an official and even a legal record of work.

To help you understand how to design and write proposals and progress reports, we first discuss the development of proposals and use a student's research project proposal as an example. We then discuss progress reports in general. To illustrate the progress report, we discuss the student's progress report on her research project. Because progress—or status—reports are often written by employees to communicate and document their activities, we also present an example of a status report written by an employee who needs to update his supervisor on one of his assignments.

In the world of work, proposals are most often used by organizations to solicit work contracts. Thus, we show you a situation in which a communications firm writes a letter proposal to launch a writing workshop in a business organization. We also show you a progress report, written by one of the writing workshop instructors to his supervisor to evaluate the workshop and point out problem areas.

After you study this chapter, you should be able to develop the typical sections included in a proposal as well as in progress reports or status reports. As the examples in the chapter will show you, progress reports and proposals—in fact, any kind of document we discuss in this book—can be submitted in a memo or letter format, as discussed in Chapter 13 or as a longer, formal document, as discussed in Chapter 16. The length of each document as well as the audience and the context in which the document is generated and received will determine which format you use.

PROPOSALS

All projects have to begin somewhere and with someone. In universities, in business, and in research organizations, the starting point is often a proposal. In simplest terms, a proposal is an offer to provide a service or a product to someone in exchange for money. Usually, when the organization—frequently a federal, state, or city government or a business enterprise—decides to have some sort of work done, it wants the best job for the best price. To announce its interest, the soliciting organization may advertise the work it wants done and invite interested individuals or organizations to contact the organization. In a university setting, the research and grants office may notify departments that money is available for research projects in a specific area. Faculty members are invited to submit project proposals that explain how much time they will need to complete the project; any financial resources required for equipment, salaries, and release time from regular teaching duties; and the goals and benefits of the research to the individual researcher and the university. Thus, the proposal process usually begins with an organization that is interested in having work or research done in response to a specific need or problem. The proposal is the

written document that launches a proposed solution to this need or problem by individuals or groups qualified to deal with the matter.

When an organization disseminates a description of the work it wants done, this document is usually called a request for a proposal (RFP) or a statement of work (SOW). The soliciting organization may send selected companies an RFP that includes complete specifications of the work desired, or it may describe the needed work in general terms and invite interested firms to submit their qualifications. This type of request is usually called a request for qualifications (RFQ). The responding organization explains its past accomplishments, giving the names of companies for which it performed work, describing the work it did, and giving references who can substantiate the organization's claims. Based on the responses it receives, the soliciting organization will send full descriptions of the work to the groups it believes to be best qualified.

Alternatively, the soliciting organization may describe the kind of work it wants done and invite interested companies to describe briefly what they offer—their experience with similar projects, the qualifications of their personnel, their approach to the project, and the approximate cost. This kind of request is also called a request for qualification (RFQ). These are often published in newspapers. An example appears in Figure 15-1.

Firms that respond with a price that best approximates what the soliciting organization wants to pay will be sent a full description of the work needed and invited to submit full proposals.

To understand some of the many ways that proposals initiate projects, consider the following examples.

1. Professor X of the university's sociology department notes in the *Federal Register* that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is soliciting studies of educational problems experienced by school-age children of single parents. Because Professor X has established a research record in this field and is looking for new projects, she decides to request a copy of the RFP. After studying it carefully, she decides to submit a proposal. In her proposal she describes her planned research and explains its benefits. She states her qualifications to conduct the research and details the costs of the project.
2. A county in Texas decides that it wants to repave a heavily used rural road and extend the paving another five miles beyond the existing pavement. The county public works office runs an advertisement in several county and state newspapers, briefly describing the work. Public works officials also send copies of the advertisement to road construction firms that have reputations for doing quality work at a fair

price. The construction companies interested in submitting bids will notify the county officials and will be invited to attend a bidders' conference at which requirements of the job are discussed further. Public works officials may take potential contractors on a tour of the area. Those who decide to bid on the paving project will have four weeks to submit bids that meet the minimum specifications given in the published RFP and at the bidders' conference.

3. Alvin Cranston, a manager for a local telephone company, is charged with redesigning the operator service facilities for the company. Alvin knows that he will need to consider a number of issues (lighting, furniture, computers, as well as building layout), so he decides to publish a request for qualifications in telephone trade publications. He also asks the company's marketing department to help him locate a list of companies that specialize in ergonomic design. He writes each of the companies on the list and explains, in general terms, what his company wants to do and invites the design firms to submit their qualifications for performing such work.
4. Biotech Corporation is considering the development of a new organic dispersant for combating major oil spills in freshwater lakes. The company wants to know how much containers for transporting this new dispersant would cost, what kinds of containers are currently available to transport the dispersant by rail or air, and whether chemical transport container companies would be interested in providing the containers and shipping the dispersant to purchasers.

In short, each aspect of the solicitation process, the RFP, the RFQ, and the SOW, has an appropriate use, but one or more of them is necessary to initiate action on a project.

The Context of Proposal Development

Because proposals are time-consuming to write—most require substantial research and analysis on the part of the proposing organization—individuals and organizations wishing to respond to an RFP study it carefully. They do not want to submit a proposal that is unlikely to be accepted. Thus, the proposer—whether a university professor seeking research funds or a highway construction firm seeking to win a contract from a county to repave its rural roads—will approach the decision to prepare a proposal carefully.

The individual or the company must first decide whether to respond to the proposal. This decision is based on careful study of the RFP or RFQ with a number of questions in mind: Can we do the work requested? Can we show that we can do this work, based on what we have already done? Can we do it within the time limit given in the RFP? Businesses responding to RFPs are also interested in economic issues: How much will our proposed approach cost? How much money can we make? Who else will be submitting proposals? What price

will they be quoting for the same work? Will we be competitive? What other projects are we currently involved in? Could problems arise that would make us unable to complete the job on time and at the price we quote? Do we have personnel qualified to work on this project?

Many business entities requesting proposals will hold a bidders' conference at which companies interested in submitting a proposal can ask questions about the project or seek clarification of the needs described in the RFP. Most RFPs require that proposals be submitted by a deadline and contain specific information. Proposals that do not contain the information requested may be omitted from consideration. Therefore, once an organization decides to submit a proposal, staff members carefully study the RFP and identify the information requirements. Each information requirement is given to an individual or a group who will be responsible for furnishing necessary material and data.

Some proposals, such as university research proposals, may be written by one person. In complex proposals, however, different sections may be written by individuals in different areas of the organization. An editor or proposal writer will then compile the final document. This writer/editor may be assisted by readers who help check the developing proposal to be sure that all requested information is included and that the information is correct. Once the proposal has been written and submitted, it becomes a legally binding document. The proposing company or individual is legally committed to do what is described in the proposal, at the cost stated and within the time limit stated. For that reason, the proposing organization carefully checks all information for accuracy. Figure 15-2 will help you visualize the proposal process.

When a large number of bidders submit proposals in response to an RFP, the soliciting organization may select several finalists and allow each finalist to give an oral version of the proposal. During this oral presentation, the soliciting group asks questions; representatives of the proposing groups have one more opportunity to argue for the value of what they are proposing, the merits of their organization, and the justification for the cost attached to the proposed work.

Effective Argument in Proposal Development

All writing is persuasive, in that it must convince the reader that the writer has credibility and that the writer's ideas have merit. However, the success of a proposal rests totally on the effectiveness of the argument—how convincingly the writer argues for a plan, an idea, a product, or a service to be rendered and how well the writer convinces the reader that the proposing organization is the best one to do the work or research needed. In planning the content of the proposal, the proposer must harmonize the soliciting company's needs with the proposer's capabilities. The writer must be acutely sensitive to what readers will be looking for but not propose action that is outside the capability of the proposing individual or organization. The proposing individual or organization has an ethical

responsibility to explain accurately and specifically what work can be done and not done so that there is no possibility of deceiving readers by making promises that cannot be fulfilled.

The following questions are useful in analyzing the effectiveness of the argument, whether in a written or an oral proposal:

What does the soliciting organization really want?

What is the problem that needs to be solved?

What approaches to the solution will be viewed most favorably?

What approaches will be viewed unfavorably?

What objections will our plan elicit?

Can we accomplish the goals we propose?

To answer these questions, the proposer may be required to do research on the organization, its problems, its corporate culture and the perspective and attitudes stemming from its corporate culture, and its current financial status, goals, and problems. As each part of the proposal is developed, the writer should examine it from the intended reader's perspective.

What are the weakness of the plan, as we—the writers—perceive them?

How can we counter any weaknesses and reader's potential objections?

How can we make our plan appealing?

How can we show that we understand their needs?

How can we best present our capability to do this project?

What are our strengths?

From our own knowledge of our organization, what are our weaknesses—in personnel, in overall capability to complete this project as proposed?

Do we need to modify our proposed plan to avoid misleading readers about our ability to perform certain tasks on time, as proposed, and at cost?

Can we sell our idea without compromising the accuracy of what we can actually do?

As a proposal writer, you should consider each question and determine what evidence you will need to support the merits of your idea and the arguments needed to refute any objections. Every sentence in your proposal should argue for the merits of your plan and your or your organization's ability to complete it. Although the proposal is designed to be a sales document, you are still ethically obligated to present a plan that meets the soliciting organization's needs and requirements. In considering the ethical issues that confront proposal writers, you will want to review Chapter 6, Writing Ethically.

Standard Sections of Proposals

Proposals generally include three main divisions: a summary, a main body, and attachments. The main body focuses on the three main parts of the proposal: what the proposal's objectives are (technical proposal), how the objectives will be achieved (management proposal), and how much the project will cost (cost proposal). You may find it helpful to visualize the structure in this way:

- Project summary
- Project description (technical proposal)
  - Introduction
  - Rationale and significance
  - Plan of the work
  - Facilities and equipment
- Personnel (management proposal)
- Budget (cost proposal)
- Appendixes

Major proposals are submitted in complete report format, which requires a letter of transmittal, a title page, a submission page (perhaps), a table of contents, and a summary. Shorter proposals may be written in a memo or letter format. Whatever the format, the main elements will be required, although how they appear will vary with each proposal. In most RFPs, the soliciting organization explains what should be included in the proposal (either specific information to be included or major elements), as shown in the RFP in Exercise 1 at the end of this chapter (Figure 15-9). Often, RFPs indicate the maximum number of pages allowed in a proposal. Writers are well advised to follow these instructions carefully to ensure that the proposal is not rejected during the initial screening process because it fails to follow preparation guidelines stipulated by the RFP.

Summary The summary is by far the most important section of the proposal. Many proposal consultants believe that a project will be accepted or rejected based solely on the effectiveness of the summary, which is your readers' first introduction to what you are proposing. The summary should concisely describe the project, particularly how your work meets the requirements of the soliciting

organization, your plan for doing the work, and your or your company's main qualifications. The summary should be a concise version of the detailed plan, but it should be written to convince readers that you understand what the soliciting firm needs and wants, that what you are proposing can be done as you describe, and that your approach is solid because you have the required knowledge and expertise. After reading the summary, readers should want to read more of your proposal.

Project Description (Technical Proposal) The technical proposal describes what you or your company proposes to do. The description must be as specific as possible. The technical proposal has a number of elements, described below.

Introduction The proposal introduction should explain what you are proposing, why you are proposing this idea, and what you plan to accomplish. The introduction contains the same elements as any introduction. In short proposals, the summary and introduction can be combined.

Rationale and Significance Much of your success in convincing readers that you should be granted a contract to do the work you propose rests on your success in convincing them that you understand the project. In the section on rationale and significance, you need to make it clear that you understand readers' needs—as stated in the summary or introduction—and that you have designed your goals by analyzing and defining their needs. Although you will clearly be selling your idea, you should recognize and answer any questions your readers may have as you argue the merits of your project. Convincing your readers that you fully understand what they are looking for is critical in establishing your credibility. In short,

- You may want to define the problem, to show that you understand it.
- You may want to explain the background of the problem, how it evolved, by providing a historical review of the problem.
- If you are proposing a research project, you may want to explain why your research needs to be done and what results can be expected from your research.
- You may want to describe your solution and the benefits of your proposed solution.

Of greatest importance, however, is the *feasibility* of the work you propose. Is your proposed work doable? Is it suitable, appropriate, economical, and practicable? Have you given your readers an accurate view of what you can and will do?

Plan of the Work The section on the work plan is also critical, particularly to expert readers who will attempt to determine whether you understand the breadth of the work you are proposing. In this section, you will describe how you will go about achieving the goals you have stated. You will specify what you will

do in what order, explaining and perhaps justifying your approach as you believe necessary. A realistic approach is crucial in that a knowledgeable reader will sense immediately if your plan omits major steps. A flawed work plan can destroy your credibility as well as the merits of the goals or the solution you are proposing.

Scope The work plan section may need to describe the scope of the proposed work. What will you do and not do? What topics will your study or your work cover and not cover? What are the limits of what you are proposing? What topics will be outside the scope of your project? As the writer of the proposal, you have both an ethical and a legal obligation to make clear to your readers the limits of your responsibility.

Methods A work plan may also require a statement of the methods you will use. If you are going to do on-site research, how will you do this research? If you plan to collect data, how will you analyze it? How will you guarantee the validity of the analysis? If you are going to conduct surveys, how will you develop them? If you plan to do historical research or a literature review of a topic, how will you approach such a review to ensure that your findings are representative of what is currently known about a subject area? A precise, carefully detailed description of your work methods can add to your credibility as one who is competent to perform the proposed work.

Task Breakdown Almost all proposals require you to divide your work into specific tasks and to state the amount of time allotted to each task. This information may be given in a milestone chart, as illustrated in the third main section of the student research report shown shortly (Situation 1, Figure 15-3). The task breakdown indicates how much time you plan to devote to each task. A realistic time schedule also becomes an effective argument. It suggests to readers that you understand how much time your project will take and that you are not promising miracles just to win approval of your proposal or business plan.

If a project must be completed by a deadline, the task breakdown and work schedule should indicate exactly how you plan to fit every job into the allotted time. However, do not make time commitments that will be impossible to meet. Readers who sense that your work plan is artificial will immediately question your credibility. Remember, too, that a proposal is a binding commitment. If you cannot do what you propose, what the soliciting organization requires within the required time, you can destroy your professional credibility and leave yourself open to litigation.

Problem Analysis Few projects can be completed without problems. If you have carefully analyzed the problem or work you intend to do, you should anticipate where difficulties could arise. Problems that may be encountered can often be discussed in the rationale section. However, if you discover major obstacles that you believe will occur during the course of the project, you may

wish to isolate and discuss these in a separate section. Many organizations that request work or solicit research proposals are aware of problems that may arise. Reviewers in these organizations look carefully at the problem analysis section, wherever it occurs, to see whether the proposer has anticipated these problems and explained the course of action that will be followed in dealing with them. Anticipating and designing solutions to problems can further build your credibility with readers, who will not be impressed if you fail to diagnose points in your work plan that could be troublesome and even hinder your completion of the project as proposed.

Facilities The facilities section of the proposal is important if you need to convince the reader that your company has the equipment, plant, and physical capability to do the proposed work. Facilities descriptions are particularly crucial if hardware is to be built at a plant site owned by your organization. Even in study proposals, your readers may want to know what research resources you will use. Sometimes existing facilities are not adequate for a particular job and your company must purchase specific equipment. The facilities section enables you to explain this purchase and how it will be included in the cost proposal.

Researchers may need to travel to visit special libraries or research sites. The amount of money needed for this travel will be part of the cost proposal. Thus, the nature of any extra research support, its importance, and its cost to the project should be explained here.

Personnel (Management Proposal) Any technical proposal or project is only as good as the management strategy that directs it. The management proposal should explain how you plan to manage the project: who will be in charge and what qualifications that person or team has for this kind of work. Management procedures should harmonize with the methods of pursuing the work described in the technical proposal.

Descriptions of your management philosophy and hierarchy should clearly reflect your company's management philosophy and culture. Readers should see the same kind of management applied to the proposed work as to the company and other projects it manages. Any testimony to or evidence of the effectiveness of the management approach will lend credibility to the technical proposal. Proposal reviewers must be convinced that you and your organization have a sound approach supported by good management of that approach.

In research proposals, the researcher who is soliciting funds will want to explain his or her expertise in the subject area proposed. This explanation may focus on educational background, previous projects successfully undertaken, published research on the topic, and general experience.

Cost (Cost Proposal) The cost proposal is usually the final item in the body of the proposal, even though cost may ultimately be the most crucial factor in

industrial proposals. Cost is usually given last and appears as a budget for the length of the proposal period. The technical and management sections of the proposal, with their descriptions of methods, tasks, facilities, required travel, and personnel, should help justify the cost. They should have already explained the rationale for items that will produce the greatest cost. However, any items not previously discussed in the technical and management sections—such as administrative expenses, additional insurance benefits costs, and unexpected legal costs—should be explained. An itemized budget is often submitted as a separate document. It includes items such as the proposing organization's liability for not meeting project deadlines, for cost overruns, and for unforeseen strikes and work stoppages. Many budget sections include standard statements such as descriptions of union contracts with labor costs, insurance benefits costs, nonstrike costs, and statements of existing corporate liability for other projects—any existing arrangements that affect the cost of the proposed contract. Clearly, the goal is to explain exactly how much the project will cost and how the cost is determined. How extensive the budget is depends on the magnitude of the project.

Conclusion The proposal includes a final section that repeats what the proposal offers the potential client or the soliciting agency, why you or your company should be selected to perform the work, and the benefits that the project, when completed, will yield for the client. The conclusion presents the final restatement of your central argument.

Appendixes As in any report, the appendix section includes materials to support information you give in the main body of the proposal—in the technical, management, or cost proposal. For example, the appendix might include résumés of principal investigators, managers, or researchers. These résumés should highlight their qualifications as they pertain to the specific project.

To help you understand proposals written by students, study the following situation and the corresponding student research proposal (Figure 15-3).

Situation 1 (Figure 15-3)

Anessa Jones is a senior agricultural engineering major. As part of her senior design project, Anessa has been asked by the Lombardy Irrigation Company to design a plan to restore the Lombardy Irrigation Ditch, which was dug in 1866, the year the company was founded. The ditch is no longer operational. Anessa presented the following proposal to the president of Lombardy, Harold R. Cole, to explain how she proposes to design a plan to restore the ditch for irrigation use. Anessa has to be finished with this project by the end of the fall semester. Thus, she describes her work plan, time line for completing the project by December 14, and project report schedule.

PROGRESS REPORTS

When a soliciting organization requests a proposal, it often states that a specific number of progress reports will be required, particularly if the project covers a long time period. As their name suggests, progress reports, sometimes known as status reports, tell readers how work is progressing on a project. They are usually submitted at specific intervals that are agreed upon at the beginning of a project. Their immediate purpose is to inform the authorizing person of the activities completed on a project, but their long-range purpose should be to show the proposing organization's or the individual's competence in pursuing a task and completing it.

As we mention at the beginning of this chapter, as an employee you may write progress reports routinely to report the status of the range of projects you are working on. These progress reports explain what you have done so that others interested in the progress are kept informed. They also help you or your work group provide evidence of your activities. Whether a progress report is written to describe work on a particular project or to report general employee activity, it has three main purposes that provide *documentation* of work accomplished:

- To explain to the reader what has been accomplished and by whom, the status of the work performed, and problems that may have arisen that need attention.
- To explain to your client how time and money have been spent, what work remains to be done, and how any problems encountered are being handled.
- To enable the organization or individual doing the work to assess the work and plan future work.

Writers use several different strategies in designing progress reports. The report should begin with an introduction and a project description to familiarize the reader with the project. A summary of work completed follows. The middle section then explains what has been accomplished on specific tasks as well as what work remains, followed by a statement of work planned for the next progress report period. The final section assesses the work done thus far. Any problems that are encountered are also presented, along with methods of addressing those problems in the form of conclusions and recommendations. Cost can be dealt with in either the middle or the final section.

Structure by Work Performed The structure of a progress report might follow one of the two basic plans portrayed below. The middle section can be organized around work completed and work remaining, as shown in the left-hand column, or around tasks, as shown in the right-hand column. The beginning and the end have the same structure in both plans:

Beginning

- Introduction/project description
- Summary

Middle

	or	
• Work completed Task 1 Task 2, etc.		• Task 1 Work completed Work remaining
• Work remaining Task 3 Task 4		• Task 2 Work completed Work remaining
• Cost		• Cost

End

- Overall appraisal of progress to date
- Conclusion and recommendations

In this general plan, you emphasize what has been done and what remains to be done and supply enough introduction to be sure that the reader knows what project is being discussed.

Situation 1 Continued (Figure 15-4)

Anessa Jones's first e-mail progress report (Figure 15-4) shows how she used progress by main tasks to report the status of her restoration design for the Lombardy irrigation ditch. Her report follows the main elements of her work plan given in the proposal.

In her proposal that, Anessa has said she will send Harold Cole e-mail progress reports on two dates. Cole will want to know what Anessa has accomplished. These reports will be brief because each will cover 3–4 weeks of the project. Anessa will send e-mail copies of the reports to the faculty member in her department who is monitoring the project. The faculty director wants to know whether the work is on schedule to ensure that it is completed within one semester, the time allowed for the senior research project.

Beginning

Anessa begins the first report with a clearly worded subject line, followed by a brief introduction.

Because Lombardy is funding the project, Anessa explains how much she has spent on the project and notes that she is under budget on the cost of surveying equipment and engineering services.

Middle

In the Work Completed and Work Remaining sections, Anessa says that she has completed the site inspection, field survey, ditch design, and the literature review but has not begun to develop the restoration plan.

End

She provides an overall appraisal of her work and mentions the one problem she has experienced—the need to make an extra trip to Real County. While this trip has increased the proposed cost of travel, the overall cost remains as projected because costs of surveying equipment and engineering services are under budget.

As we note early in the chapter, employees often need to write progress reports to document their activities. These types of reports simply explain major accomplishments. Because business and technical organizations frequently stipulate a time frame for a project, status reports may emphasize completion dates as well as deadlines. Sometimes status reports indicate “action required” notices to keep the project on schedule. Figure 15-5, featured in situation 2, illustrates a status report written by an employee who is in charge of a project that must be completed according to a schedule.

Situation 2 (Figure 15-5)

Dean Smith, a training manager for a software development company, is responsible for developing training sessions for sales personnel. His main responsibilities are to provide all training to employees, to decide what training should be conducted, and then to develop the training courses. Dean routinely writes progress reports to the director of personnel, Sharon Sanchez, to keep her informed of his activities—training he thinks will need to be offered, training programs he is currently developing or planning to develop, and training programs he and other training staff are currently teaching or directing.

Response to Situation 2

Dean writes status reports to Sharon about once a month (or whenever he has something he wants her to know about). Because she is familiar with what Dean does, he does not need to include an elaborate introduction. He begins with a concise summary and then proceeds to describe pertinent activities. In this particular report, he is asking for increased funding for a training program. Thus he includes an action required statement in the heading.

For this routine progress report, Dean modifies the general plan as follows:

- **Beginning:** Introduction

    Purpose of the report—to report the status of a project
    Purpose of the work being performed
    Summary of current status

- **Middle:** Work completed on the project

    Task A
    Task B
    Task C

- **End:** Conclusion and perhaps recommendations

For progress reports that cover more than one period, the basic design can be expanded as follows:

Beginning

- Introduction
- Project description
- Summary of work to date
- Summary of work in this period

Middle

- Work accomplished by tasks (this period)
- Work remaining on specific tasks
- Work planned for the next reporting period
- Work planned for periods thereafter
- Cost to date
- Cost in this period

End

- Overall appraisal of work to date
- Conclusions and recommendations concerning problems

Structure by Chronological Order If your project or research is broken into time periods, your progress report can be structured to emphasize the periods.

Beginning

- Introduction/project description
- Summary of work completed

Middle

- Work completed
  Period 1 (beginning and ending dates)
    Description
    Cost
    Period 2 (beginning and ending dates)
    Description
    Cost
- Work remaining
  Period 3 (or remaining periods)
    Description of work to be done
    Expected cost

End

- Evaluation of work in this period
- Conclusions and recommendations

Structure by Main Project Goals Many research projects are pursued by grouping specific tasks into major groups. Then, the writer describes progress according to work done in each major group and perhaps the amount of time spent on that group of tasks. Alternatively, a researcher may decide to present a project by research goals—what will be accomplished during the project. Thus, progress reports will explain activities performed to achieve those goals. In the middle of the plans below, the left-hand column is organized by work completed and remaining, and the right-hand column by goals.

Beginning

- Introduction/project description
- Summary of progress to date

Middle

- Work completed
  Goal 1
  Goal 2
  Goal 3, etc.
- Work remaining
  Goal 1
  Goal 2

or

- Goal 1
  Work completed
  Work remaining
  Cost
- Goal 2
  Work completed
  Work remaining

Goal 3, etc. Cost

- Cost

End

- Evaluation of work to date
- Conclusions and recommendations

Situation 3 (Figure 15-6)

Linbeth Consulting Company was founded to help U.S. businesses gain the knowledge and expertise necessary to do business abroad, either in specific countries or in specific market areas. When approached by companies interested in these company's, services, Linbeth provides letter proposals explaining the services and how the client's specific situation might be approached. While working on a project, Linbeth consultants will frequently use an oral PowerPoint presentation to the client to explain the status on the research.

The segment of a PowerPoint progress report illustrated in Figure 15-6 was submitted to a company considering doing business in Mexico. We have included only eight slides from the presentation, but you can see how the narrative of the progress report surfaces in the presentation. Linbeth consultants provided copies of the presentation with space for notes. Copies would be available to other company employees. Note that the main segments of the progress report are clearly evident, even in this excerpt. In any kind of presentation software, such as PowerPoint, you can develop graphics and then paste them into the presentation, as exemplified in Figure 15-6.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF PROPOSALS AND PROGRESS REPORTS

The importance of the appearance of any proposal or progress report cannot be overestimated. A report that is neat and effectively formatted suggests the competence of the proposing organization or individual. Proposals and progress reports longer than letter or memorandum length should have a protective cover. The title page should be tasteful. The type or print should be of high quality. Colored paper and covers should convey a professional attitude. A professional appearance is the first argument for the merits of the proposal.

STYLE AND TONE OF PROPOSALS AND PROGRESS REPORTS

The proposal and its related report documents are, in effect, sales documents, but writers have an ethical commitment to present information about a project in a clear and accurate manner. Proposals, once accepted, become legally binding documents. Because contracts are based on proposals, organizations must be prepared to stand behind their proposals. Thus, the style should be authoritative,

vigorous, and positive, suggesting the competence of the proposer. Generalizations must be bolstered by detailed factual accomplishments. Problems should be discussed honestly, but positive solutions to problems should be stressed. Neither the proposal nor the progress report should resort to vague, obfuscatory language.

OTHER FORMS OF PROPOSALS AND PROGRESS REPORTS

Proposals and progress reports can be prepared in a variety of formats: as memo reports, as formal reports, and as letters. Yet, no matter what the format, proposals and progress reports will incorporate the same elements described above and illustrated in the reports written by Anessa Jones the senior engineering student, and Dean Smith, the software development company training manager. To see how proposals and progress reports might appear in another format and another context, examine Situation 4, which describes an internal proposal and a letter progress report.

Situation 4 (Figures 15-7 and 15-8)

You are employed by Scruggs and Pate, a local accounting firm in Plano, Texas. S&P employs twenty accountants. Recently, the senior managing partner, Jared Hastings, tells you that the Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with the American Accounting Association, has decided to launch a community education program to help people who own and or manage small businesses in Plano understand more about accounting. The two groups want to have a year of educational sessions, one each week for 40 weeks, which will be available to the public. Jared Hastings tells you that he thinks that the presentations directed to local people provide a wonderful opportunity to educate the general public about accounting and to advertise Scruggs and Pate’s expertise and its ability to make accounting concepts clear to potential clients.

Hastings asks the tax team to prepare a memo proposal. He will convey this document, attached to a letter, to Elizabeth Hartnett, project chair of the Chamber of Commerce, who is planning the workshops. Thus, the tax team has two audiences: Jared Hastings, their senior manager at Scruggs and Pate, and Elizabeth Hartnett.

Response to Situation 4

Proposal

This is a team proposal that clearly indicates that it is written to the two readers just described. The team explains (for Elizabeth Hartnett) why the topic is important (Project Description and Rationale) and (for Jared Hastings) how the firm will complete the project, which must be done

during tax season. By presenting the milestone chart, they convey their planning and schedule. For Elizabeth Hartnett, the team describes the plan of the presentation, all proposed handouts, and the bibliography for those attending the presentation. See Figure 15-7 for the proposal to Jared Hastings. Note that this proposal gives only the work plan.

Status Report

Two weeks before the presentation, Jan Gharantz, writing for the tax group, sends Elizabeth Hartnet a letter progress report (Figure 15-8) to assure her that the project is developing as proposed and that the S&P tax team will be ready for the presentation April 29. She also states what equipment the team will bring and what equipment is to be available on site.

PLANNING AND REVISION CHECKLISTS

You will find the Planning and Revision Checklists that follow Chapter 2, Composing, and Chapter 4, Writing for Your Readers, valuable in planning and revising any presentation of technical information. The following questions specifically apply to proposals and progress reports. They summarize the key points in this chapter and provide a checklist for planning and revising.

PROPOSALS

Planning

- Have you studied the RFP carefully?
- Have you made a list of all requirements given in the RFP?
- Who are your readers? Do they have technical competence in the field of the proposal? Is it a mixed audience, some technically educated, some not?
- What problem is the proposed work designed to remedy? What is the immediate background of the problem? Why does the problem need to be solved?
- What is your proposed solution to the problem? What benefits will come from the solution? Is the solution feasible (both practical and applicable)?
- How will you carry out the work proposed? Scope? Methods to be used? Task breakdown? Time and work schedule?
- Do you want to make statements concerning the likelihood of success or failure and the products of the project?
- What facilities and equipment will you need to carry out the project?
- Who will do the work? What are their qualifications for doing the work? Can you obtain references for past work accomplished?
- How much will the work cost? Consider such things as materials, labor, test equipment, travel, administrative expenses, and fees. Who will pay for what?

- Will you need to include an appendix? Consider including biographical sketches, descriptions of earlier projects, and employment practices.
- Will the proposal be better presented in a report format or in a letter or memo format?
- Do you have a student report to propose? Consider including the following in your proposal:
  Subject, purpose, and scope of report
  Task and time breakdown
  Resources available
  Your qualifications for doing the report

Revision

- Does your proposal have a good design and layout? Does its appearance suggest the high quality of the work you propose to do?
- Does the project summary succinctly state the objectives and plan of the proposed work? Does it show how the proposed work is relevant to the readers' interest?
- Does the introduction make the subject and the purpose of the work clear? Does it briefly point out the so-whats of the proposed work?
- Have you defined the problem thoroughly?
- Is your solution well described? Have you made its benefits and feasibility clear?
- Will your readers be able to follow your plan of work easily? Have you protected yourself by making clear what you will do and what you will not do? Have you been careful not to promise more results than you can deliver?
- Have you carefully considered all the facilities and equipment you will need?
- Have you presented the qualifications of project personnel in an attractive but honest way? Have you asked permission from everyone you plan to use as a reference?
- Is your budget realistic? Will it be easy for the readers to follow and understand?
- Do all the items in the appendix lend credibility to the proposal?
- Have you included a few sentences somewhere that urge the readers to accept the proposal?
- Have you satisfied the needs of your readers? Will they be able to comprehend your proposal? Do they have all the information they need to make a decision?

PROGRESS REPORTS

Planning

- Do you have a clear description of your project available, perhaps in your proposal?

- Do you have all the project tasks clearly defined? Do all the tasks run in sequence, or do some run concurrently? In general, are the tasks going well or badly?
- What items need to be highlighted in your summary and appraisal?
- Are there any problems to be discussed?
- Can you suggest solutions for the problems?
- Is your work ahead of schedule, right on schedule, or behind schedule?
- Are costs running as expected?
- Do you have some unexpected good news you can report?

Revision

- Does your report have an attractive appearance?
- Does the plan you have chosen show off your progress to its best advantage?
- Is your tone authoritative, with an accent on the positive?
- Have you supported your generalizations with facts?
- Does your approach seem fresh or tired?
- Do you have a good balance between work accomplished and work to be done?
- Can your summary and appraisal stand alone? Would they satisfy an executive reader?

EXERCISES

1. Examine the RFP from the Department of Health and Human Services Figure 15-9 and answer these questions:

    - According to the RFP, what work does HHS want done or what product does it want? What problem does the RFP present to be solved?
    - Does the RFP specify a length for the proposal?
    - Does the RFP make clear the information the proposal must contain?
    - Does the RFP furnish an outline to follow? If so, what does the outline require?
    - Does the RFP require a specific format for the proposal? What is it?
    - Does the RFP make clear the criteria by which submitted proposals will be evaluated and who will do the evaluation?

2. Write an information report to your professor based on Figure 15-9, summarizing what content items the proposal should emphasize and what criteria will be used to evaluate the proposals.

3. You will probably be instructed to write a complete technical report as part of the requirements for your course in technical writing.

- Choose two or three topics you would consider to be suitable for a one-semester project.
- Write a feasibility report to your instructor examining each topic in terms of availability of information, suitability of the topic for the amount of time available during the semester, and the significance of each topic to your discipline or to your career goals. Decide which topic seems most feasible.
- Once your instructor has approved your choice of topic, write a proposal to your instructor, using memo format. In your proposal, include all elements commonly found in proposals.
- Write a progress report to describe the status of your semester report project. Design the progress report to reflect the tasks or project goals you used in developing your project proposal.

4. The progress report in Figure 15-10 is poorly organized and formatted. Reorganize it and rewrite it. Use a letter format, but furnish a subject line and the headings readers need to find their way through the report.

Oral Exercises

Before doing these exercises, see Chapter 19, Oral Reports.

5. Prepare an oral version of the proposal you wrote for Exercise 3, and plan on delivering it to your class. You will be allowed eight minutes maximum. Enhance your presentation with computer graphics or overhead transparencies to show anticipated costs, your project schedule, and any visuals that will help explain the significance of your project or the methods you propose to use.

6. Prepare an oral progress report to deliver to your class. You will be allowed five minutes maximum. Enhance your presentation with graphics to show work completed, work remaining, project costs to date, and status of your project.

FIGURE 15-1 • Example Request for Qualifications in a Local Newspaper

FIGURE 15-2 • Proposal Cycle in an Organization

FIGURE 15-3 • Proposal

FIGURE 15-4 • E-Mail Progress Report

FIGURE 15-5 • Routine Progress Report

FIGURE 15-6 • Excerpt from a PowerPoint Progress Report

FIGURE 15-7 • Internal Proposal

FIGURE 15-8 • Letter Progress Report

FIGURE 15-9 • Request for Proposal

FIGURE 15-10 • Progress Report