

## BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

**The Canadian Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing**, The Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, Dundurn Press, Hamilton, Ontario, Catalogue No. S2-158, 1985. 256 pp. \$11.95\*

### Applicable to Training

The Canadian Style is a "how to" reference manual for people who write as part of their jobs, or their hobbies. Since training depends heavily on written material, anything that may help us improve the clarity of our handouts, joining instructions, etc. is important and needs to be looked at.

### Fills a Real Need

Early style manuals were published specifically for professional authors, editors, copywriters, etc. The Chicago Manual of Style by the University of Chicago Press is one of North America's oldest (first published in 1906) and most detailed (700+ pages). In Britain, Fowler's A Dictionary of Modern English Usage from Oxford University Press has almost biblical authority. But Canadian English is not exactly like either British English or American English. As a result, organizations as diverse as the Auditor General of Canada and The Globe and Mail newspaper have published style manuals that cover Canadian English usage. The depth of coverage varies considerably and often includes technical information specific to a profession. To meet current public service needs, the people at Secretary of State have developed The Canadian Style for anyone who produces correspondence, reports, or practically any other written material--and they have done it very well.

### Something for Everyone

In a concise, easy-to-use guide, the authors have covered everything from abbreviations to verbs ending in sede, ceed and cede. I found the section on Reports and Minutes and the Section on Elimination of Sexual, Racial and Ethnic Stereotyping particularly useful. I also noticed that the our spelling as in Department of Labour is recommended although most Canadian publications use or. A footnote tells us that an order-in-council dated June 12, 1880 makes the our ending mandatory in all official documents. This puts government writers a little out of step with common usage, a usage that is continually changing in our living language. For other Canadian spelling, the guide recommends following the Gage Canadian Dictionary (1983) and that makes sense, particularly since Gage is so easy to use.

### Effort Required to Use it

The Canadian Style has the potential to help us to improve our writing, if we use it. The problem is that like many reference books the guide may be bought, skimmed and put on the shelf to do no more than collect dust. It all comes down to the question "Do we really want to improve our written communications?" If the answer is yes, this guide can be a big help--with a little effort.

Congratulations to Malcolm Williams, Frank Bayerl and the unnamed others at Secretary of State for breaking the bureaucratic language barrier with The Canadian Style.

- Stewart Malcolm  
Public Service Commission

\* Reprinted from Training News, the publication of the Staff Development Branch of the Public Service Commission, November 1986, p. 7.

**Business Communication: Strategies and Skills**, Canadian Edition, by Richard Huseman, Dixie Stockmayer, James Lahiff, and John Hatfield, Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Toronto, 1984. 422pp.

The communications department faculty at Fraser Valley College have been requiring Business Communication: Strategies and Skills in our communications courses for the past three years, even though we look at several new texts each year. Obviously, there are a number of reasons why we keep using this book in spite of the plethora of new texts crossing our desks. These reasons are varied, and not all instructors agree with all the reasons, but still we order the Huseman, Stockmayer text.

The text's advantages are many. It is a concise, soft-cover book in a well-designed format, easily read and understood, and reasonably priced. The contents are clearly organized into four parts: Part 1, Theoretical Considerations, introduces communication theory; Part 2, Written Strategies, covers letters, memo and report writing; Part 3, Oral Strategies, discusses both listening and public speaking; and Part 4, Strategies in the Job Search, presents skills for writing resumes and letters of application, and for taking part in interviews. Two appendices add information about the electronic office, and writing mechanics. The Canadianized text makes examples and problems seem more relevant to us and our students, as compared with texts in which all references are American. Particularly good is the well-planned and thorough section on business correspondence, Chapters 5-8, which includes much information on, and many examples of, each type of letter--routine, refusal, and persuasive--as well as a great variety of

### Effort Required to Use it

The Canadian Style has the potential to help us to improve our writing, if we use it. The problem is that like many reference books the guide may be bought, skimmed and put on the shelf to do no more than collect dust. It all comes down to the question "Do we really want to improve our written communications?" If the answer is yes, this guide can be a big help--with a little effort.

Congratulations to Malcolm Williams, Frank Bayerl and the unnamed others at Secretary of State for breaking the bureaucratic language barrier with The Canadian Style.

- Stewart Malcolm  
Public Service Commission

\* Reprinted from Training News, the publication of the Staff Development Branch of the Public Service Commission, November 1986, p. 7.

**Business Communication: Strategies and Skills**, Canadian Edition, by Richard Huseman, Dixie Stockmayer, James Lahiff, and John Hatfield, Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Toronto, 1984. 422pp.

The communications department faculty at Fraser Valley College have been requiring Business Communication: Strategies and Skills in our communications courses for the past three years, even though we look at several new texts each year. Obviously, there are a number of reasons why we keep using this book in spite of the plethora of new texts crossing our desks. These reasons are varied, and not all instructors agree with all the reasons, but still we order the Huseman, Stockmayer text.

The text's advantages are many. It is a concise, soft-cover book in a well-designed format, easily read and understood, and reasonably priced. The contents are clearly organized into four parts: Part 1, Theoretical Considerations, introduces communication theory; Part 2, Written Strategies, covers letters, memo and report writing; Part 3, Oral Strategies, discusses both listening and public speaking; and Part 4, Strategies in the Job Search, presents skills for writing resumes and letters of application, and for taking part in interviews. Two appendices add information about the electronic office, and writing mechanics. The Canadianized text makes examples and problems seem more relevant to us and our students, as compared with texts in which all references are American. Particularly good is the well-planned and thorough section on business correspondence, Chapters 5-8, which includes much information on, and many examples of, each type of letter--routine, refusal, and persuasive--as well as a great variety of

letter-writing problems. In fact, at the end of each chapter are review questions, exercises, and in Part 2, several pages of problems for each chapter, giving instructors a good selection to choose from. Finally, the text is accompanied by an instructor's manual, which for every chapter includes a short, point-form summary of the material, answers to the review questions, and an objective-type quiz.

Of course, as in any text, there are some drawbacks. The chapter on basic communication theory is extremely brief, and there is almost nothing on group communication. Chapter 3, on non-verbal communication, contains some outdated (colour and dress) and somewhat silly (facial meaning sensitivity test) information, while non-verbal behaviour in job situations is almost ignored except in the case study at the end of the chapter. Examples of letter formatting in Chapter 5 show too little variety; all are on the same letterhead, and addressed to the same person: a professor. Also, the text sometimes seems to contradict itself. For example, in an early chapter explaining that one of the characteristics of business communication is tact, the authors use the following as an example of tactless demeaning of the reader:

"People such as you like a bargain. That's why we're offering you these fantastic discounts ..." (pg. 53)

But in Chapter 7, Letters of Refusal, their example of a good letter starts this way:

"As a smart shopper, you know that taking advantage of sales makes sense." (pg. 131).

Another shortcoming (at least from our department's point of view) is the thinness of the section on reports. Since two of our second-term courses require a formal research report, we need to supplement the report section with either a second text, or a great many handouts. For example, the text material on informal reports takes only 10 pages, including examples. The formal report chapter contains very little on secondary research (3 pages) and nothing at all on the computer search. As well, there is a shortage of examples of tables and graphics for the report. A final disadvantage is that the end-of-chapter quizzes contain some ambiguously worded questions, often causing heated class discussion about the meaning of statements to be marked "true" or "false".

Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, communication faculty at Fraser Valley College have continued to assign this text for the past 3 years. After all, no text is likely to be exactly right unless it has been written specifically for a particular course. Therefore, our negative criticisms should be taken against that background. Instructors who may be considering adopting this text should focus instead on the positive aspects of the book such as cost, design, readability and comprehensiveness. For those who want a Canadian edition of a text whose format and style make its information accessible and understandable to the student, Business Communications: Strategies and Skills is recommended.

- Betty Urquhart  
Fraser Valley College