

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

IMPACT: A Guide to Business Communication, Margot Northey, Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., Scarborough, 1986. 173 pp. ISBN 0-13-451717-2.

In **IMPACT: A Guide to Business Communication**, as in her **Making Sense** books, Margot Northey presents sound practical advice for specific writing situations. Designed "to help Canadian business students communicate better," the book simply and concisely outlines the requirements for good professional communication. Her method develops from three basic principles: 1) "Thinking through a communications problem is more effective than simply learning a formula"; 2) "Writing well is less a matter of right and wrong than of making choices between better and worse"; and 3) "Inexperienced writers pay too little attention to planning and editing." From these assumptions it is clear that Northey's intent is to get students to think about how they can create an effective message and achieve the desired result, rather than simply offering quick fixes and clever gimmicks.

Thinking and planning in relation to audience and tone, the "groundwork" of Northey's program, are the first matters to be considered in the book. While there are chapters on oral presentations and on how to find and get a job, the main focus is on writing in various business formats. From simple letters and memos Northey moves to "routine or good-news" letters and "refusals or bad-news" letters, then to informal reports, and finally to formal reports. Through examples she shows how to create the proper visual impression through the use of space, headings, charts, and diagrams. Each chapter concludes with detailed scenario exercises that give students the opportunity to test themselves through business situations and role-playing. The exercises are of two different types and levels of difficulty: A exercises are simple and straightforward; the B exercises demand more analysis and decision-making skills. Also included are "A practical grammar" keyed to basic sentence problems and a "Guide to Punctuation" that illustrates essential usage.

The layout of the book facilitates easy reference and use, and the author's own style and explanations exemplify her principles of clarity and conciseness. However, it does seem a little inconsistent to tell the student to "Avoid newly-formed ize words..." in chapter 3 and then use "personalize" yourself later in the book.

Obviously IMPACT covers the same ground as Ron Blicq's ADMINISTRATIVELY-WRITE! and several other longer, more detailed and more expensive books. It is, however, deliberately sparer than the competition; Northey's aim is to give business students "the least they need to know to do the job well." Though slim, IMPACT is not slight. It is an extremely useful book that would function effectively as either a core text for a business writing course or a reference book for an executive.

David Gates
English Department
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The Canadian Writer's Handbook, William E. Messenger and Jan De Bruyn, 2nd ed., Prentice-Hall, Scarborough, Ontario, 1986. 621 pp.

The first edition of The Canadian Writer's Handbook, published in 1980, was a refreshing change from typical grammar books. Its readable style, generally effective examples and uncluttered presentation rendered its subject accessible to even the most hesitant of readers. Instructors have found the Handbook a valuable reference work in a variety of courses, from composition to technical writing and business communication, and they will probably look forward to using a second edition which builds on the first.

With respect to content, instructors will certainly not be disappointed. The second edition of Canadian Writer's Handbook has more exercises, a new section on argument, and greatly expanded sections on parts of speech, sentences and paragraphs, the latter in particular offering detailed examination of several patterns of development (though the awkward design of this section requires the reader to flip back and forth between example and discussion). More significant for technical writing teachers, perhaps, is the new section on alternative systems of documentation in the research paper; in addition to discussing the new MLA system, the authors outline systems used in the social sciences and physical sciences. Together with another new section on determining audience and purpose for the research paper, the expanded section on documentation shows an increased attention to other forms of writing not considered in the earlier work. Other brief references to technical writing--particularly to the writing of instructions--appear in discussions of imperative sentences, adverbs, abbreviations and numerals.

Despite the improved content, however, the new Canadian Writer's Handbook is less inviting owing to its new format. Its smaller type, busy pages and cluttered appearance overall make this edition look more like a traditional grammar text and it may therefore intimidate rather than encourage the student reader. In an effort to improve its

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usability the publishers have added tabs for easy reference; but to make the work even more usable, they must also consider effective layout. One hopes that any third edition of The Canadian Writer's Handbook will present the improved content in a more appealing format.

-JJC

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