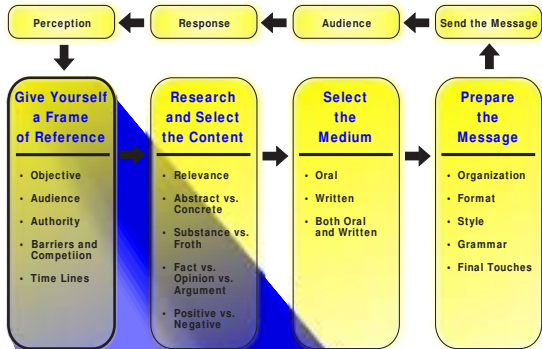


Writing for Results

A Step-by-Step Model for Executive Documents



Time Lines

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TIME LINES

Communication is an imprecise art that will never lend itself to time-and-motion studies. Even so, it is valuable to plan time lines for your message as best you can. To do this, you will need to look ahead to make some tentative decisions about the message you expect to prepare. For example, your time lines for a memo to your minister might be entirely different from the time lines for a deck presentation to the minister.

You may also have to consider your time lines in the context of a larger process. A simple [example](#) of this is found in [How to Use the Step-by-Step Model](#).

The elements of your time frames are:

- a deadline;
- a schedule; and
- a personal time budget.

DEADLINE

The deadline is the time when your message must be received by your audience in order for you to be able to achieve your objective.

Requests from your minister or deputy minister usually have deadlines already set. If for any reason you feel you are unable to meet a set deadline, immediately contact your supervisor or your executive documents coordinator. It might not be the end of the world to miss a deadline. With enough advance notice, other people may be able to adjust their plans accordingly. But if you don't tell people until the last minute that you can't make the deadline, you put them in a bind and make yourself look unorganized.



PERSONAL TIME BUDGET

A time budget is the number of hours of your time that will be required to prepare the message. Unless you regularly prepare messages such as one at hand, it can be very difficult to accurately predict your personal time budget. Even so, it is useful to at least take a stab at forecasting how much of your time will be needed.

SCHEDULE

A schedule is an allocation of deadlines on the calendar for each step in the communication process — research, writing, editing, cooling off and third-party review, approvals from others, translation, graphics, printing, mailing, etc.

The time needed for approvals is often underestimated. You cannot expect others to drop everything and review your message the moment it lands on their desk.

An important element of your schedule will be the allocation of your personal time budget to calendar days. Six hours spread over four days will be much more effective than six hours crammed into a single day. Good ideas often take time to bubble to the surface, and only if you spread out your time can you allow that to happen. You might also find that what would take six hours in a single day would only take five hours if you spread the time over four days.

If you know some parts of the writing will be hard and some easy, start with the hard. Then take a break from it. Work on the easy part for a while. Meanwhile, your brain will continue to work on the hard part subconsciously, and you will be able to go back to the hard part with a fresh perspective. This is a free bonus. It costs you nothing to leave the hard part aside and work on something else for a while. And then, like magic, when you return you will find that you have made progress with it.

Similarly, it also pays tremendous dividends if you allow enough time to:

- run a near-final draft by a colleague for comments before finalizing it; and
- let the near-final draft **cool off** for a while before you review it one last time.

Finally, it is good practice to schedule **follow-up activities** after the message has been sent. This will entail:

- checking to see whether your audience has received the message;
- assessing whether the message achieved its objective;
- deciding — regardless of whether the message succeeded or not — what further action needs to be taken; and
- asking yourself what lessons you have learned from the present message that you could apply for future messages.

APPROACH

There are two ways to develop these time lines.

One way is to start at the end and work back to the present:

- First, decide when your message must be received by your audience.
- Then, allocate the time left between now and then to the stages required to develop and convey your message.

The second way is to start from now and work forward:

- First, decide how much time is needed for each stage of the process.
- Then, define the deadline as the date at which all those stages will be complete.

In practice, you will find that there is often interplay between the two approaches, and that you must modify your time lines as you proceed.