

Reading for Information



WORKSHOP 1 READING ON THE JOB

GOALS

- ▶ Identify the types of materials read in the workplace.
- ▶ Understand the purposes of information in the workplace.
- ▶ Explore skills needed to handle information effectively.



©CORBIS

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Today's reader will find more information in one issue of the *New York Times* than someone in the 1800s would have read during his or her entire lifetime. Along with the growing amount of information available is the need for improved reading skills in the workplace. Success on the job is strongly linked to reading ability. This workshop demonstrates the importance of developing good reading skills, explores the materials read in the workplace, discusses the purposes of information, and explains how to use information effectively.

Cover Yourself

Lia, a bookkeeper for Got You Covered Insurance, had spent the last month planning a vacation to the Caribbean with two close friends. She made the airline reservations and reserved a beachside hotel room. A week before her trip, she told her supervisor about her vacation plans.

Her supervisor was furious. Not only had Lia failed to inform him at least two

weeks in advance as clearly stated in the employee handbook, she had obviously not bothered to read the lengthy memo he had sent out last month, asking that employees not take vacation time in May. Still steaming, her supervisor began to rethink Lia's ability to pay attention to detail on the job.

 **How did careless reading affect Lia's personal and professional plans?**

Instructor:
Refer to pages 2–7 in the Facilitator Guide for "Reading for Information."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Types of Workplace Reading

You might have thought that your reading days would be over once school ended. In most occupations, however, your career will depend on the reading skills you bring to the workplace. The following list is a sample of the never-ending variety of materials you will be expected to read and understand on the job.

- Memos
- Letters
- Faxes
- Graphs and charts
- E-mail
- Employee handbooks
- Instructions/operating manuals/maintenance manuals
- Business reports and proposals

Purpose of Workplace Information

Knowing why you are reading a particular document before you begin to read is the first step in skillfully managing information. Before you can “read with a purpose,” you must know your purpose for reading! Take a minute to consider the information you want to gain. Some typical purposes for reading information on the job follow.

- To learn something new
- To apply instructions
- To solve problems
- To understand what the writer wants or needs

Handling Information Effectively

The amount of letters, e-mails, and faxes that must be read at work every day can be overwhelming. Follow the steps below to ensure you don’t misread, lose, or misinterpret important information.

1. **Gather the information.** To effectively collect information, you must know what you’re looking for and where to find it.
2. **Organize the information.** Sort or label the information in a way that will help you use it effectively.
3. **Communicate or use the information.** Communicate the information clearly to the people who need it in the appropriate form (e.g., a memo, chart, diagram, or e-mail).

Key Ideas

- ★ **purpose**—intention
- ★ **misread**—to read wrongly; to make a mistake in reading something, for example, reading aloud inaccurately, mistaking one word for another, or misunderstanding the sense of what is written
- ★ **reading with a purpose**—knowing why you are reading a particular document before you begin to read



INTRODUCTION TO READING IN THE WORKPLACE

Segment 1

Want to know about the newest innovations in your field? Learn how to master your office tools? Find opportunities for promotion? To be successful in almost any occupation, you'll need to be a skillful reader. In this program, you will meet Ed Castor. For the 25 years that Ed worked at General Motors, he kept a terrible secret—Ed did not know how to read. As you watch the video, ask yourself how Ed's inability to read affected his job performance.



Ed Castor struggled with illiteracy for years.

Post-Viewing Questions

1. How did Ed Castor's inability to read affect his working life?

2. How did learning to read affect his life?

3. What do you think Ed meant when he said that getting his GED meant a lot, but "what it took to get it means a lot more"?

ON THE JOB

Read to Succeed

Caroline Reed is a Worker's Compensation claims administrator. After seven years of helping people who have been injured on the job, she now manages the paperwork side of the claims.

She begins her workday by reading the business section of an online national newspaper. She then reads her e-mail, regular mail, and any faxes that arrived since the night before. Throughout the day, she will receive numerous memos from her supervisor, updating her on the status of several claims.

Today, Caroline will review and edit a report written by an associate. The report conveys the findings of a workplace safety study that Caroline's business conducted. Although it is a lengthy report, her associate has effectively used graphs and tables to discuss important data about workplace accidents and injuries. When Caroline finishes editing the report, she compliments the associate for her ability to organize the information into an understandable format.

In the afternoon, Caroline visits the business library of a local university. The library subscribes to a number of different magazines and journals related to workplace safety. She scans many of the articles, and photocopies articles that are especially relevant to her job. If she has time, she reads several articles thoroughly and takes notes for future reference.

Caroline can't imagine a single workday when she wouldn't spend some time reading. Her ability to read and process information has made her a success on the job.



How does Caroline use her reading skills in the workplace?

To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting.

—Edmund Burke,
British statesman and
political philosopher

Literature Connection

Boyhood Days

by Booker T. Washington

From the time that I can remember having any thoughts about anything, I recall that I had an intense longing to learn to read. I determined, when quite a small child, that, if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to enable me to read common books and newspapers. Soon after we got settled in some manner in our new cabin in West Virginia, I induced my mother to get hold of a book for me. How or where she got it I do not know, but in some way she procured an old copy of Webster's "blue-back" spelling-book, which contained the alphabet, followed by such meaningless words as "ab," "ba," "ca," "da." I began at once to devour this book, and I think that it was the first one I ever had in my hands. I had learned from somebody that the way to begin to read was to learn the alphabet, so I tried in all the ways I could think of to learn it—all of course without a teacher, for I could find no one to teach me. At that time there was not a single member of my race anywhere near us who could read, and I was too timid to approach any of the white people. In some way, within a few weeks, I mastered the greater portion of the alphabet. In all my efforts to learn to read my mother shared full my ambition, and sympathized with me and aided me in every way that she could. Though she was totally ignorant, so far as mere book knowledge was concerned, she had high ambitions for her children, and a large fund of good hard, common sense which seemed to enable her to meet and master every situation. If I have done anything in life worth attention, I feel sure that I inherited the disposition from my mother . . .

About this time the question of having some kind of a school opened for the coloured children in the village began to be discussed by members of the race. As it would be the first school for Negro children that had ever been opened in that part of Virginia, it was, of course, to be a great event, and the discussion excited the widest interest . . .

This experience of a whole race beginning to go to school for the first time, presents one of the most interesting studies that has ever occurred in connection with the development of any race. Few people who were not right in the midst of the scenes can form any exact idea of the intense desire which the people of my race showed for an education. As I have stated, it was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old, to make the attempt to learn. As fast as any kind of teachers could be secured, not only were day-schools filled, but night-schools as well. The great ambition of the older people was to try to learn to read the Bible before they died. With this end in view, men and women who were fifty or seventy-five years old would often be found in the night-school. Sunday-schools were formed soon after freedom, but the principal book studied in the Sunday-school was the spelling-book. Day-school, night-school, Sunday-school, were always crowded, and often many had to be turned away for want of room . . .

The schoolhouse was some distance from the furnace, and as I had to work till nine o'clock, and the school opened at nine, I found myself in a difficulty. School would always be begun before I reached it, and sometimes my class had recited. To get around this difficulty I yielded to a temptation for which most people, I suppose, will condemn me; but since it is a fact, I might as well state it. I have great faith in the power and influence of facts. It is seldom that anything is permanently gained by holding back a fact. There was a large clock in a little office in the furnace. This clock, of course, all the hundred or more workmen depended upon to regulate their hours of beginning and ending the day's work. I got the idea that the way for me to reach school on time was to move the clock hands from half-past eight up to the nine o'clock mark. This I found myself doing morning after morning, till the furnace "boss" discovered that something was wrong, and locked the clock in a case. I did not mean to inconvenience anybody. I simply meant to reach that schoolhouse in time . . .

The time that I was permitted to attend school during the day was short, and my attendance was irregular. It was not long before I had to stop attending day-school altogether, and devote all of my time again to work. I resorted to the night-school again. In fact, the greater part of the education I secured in my boyhood was gathered through the night-school after my day's work was done. I had difficulty often in securing a satisfactory teacher. Sometimes, after I had secured some one to teach me at night, I would find, much to my disappointment, that the teacher knew but little more than I did. Often I would have to walk several miles at night in order to recite my night-school lessons. There was never a time in my youth, no matter how dark and discouraging the days might be, when one resolve did not continually remain with me, and that was a determination to secure an education at any cost.

What steps did the author take to learn to read and gain an education? Why did he have such an intense desire for reading and knowledge?

Excerpts from *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*, "Chapter II Boyhood Days," by Booker T. Washington. Copyright ©1901, Doubleday & Company, Inc.

