

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.



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READ ALL ABOUT IT

Reading for Information Resources

Video (31:00)

CD-ROM Study Guide

Instructor's Resource CD-ROM

WebTutor

ExamView Pro Testing CD-ROM

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's careless reading damaged her relationship with her boss, jeopardized her vacation plans, and gave the appearance that she doesn't value her job or pay close attention to her work.

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?

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

Tools of the Trade

This workshop explores the importance of developing good reading skills in the workplace. It also introduces types of reading materials and purposes for gathering information. As a class, review the Key Ideas, definitions, and the guidelines presented in Tools of the Trade.

Encourage learners to discuss why reading is not just an important skill for people in teaching, communication, or journalism careers. Reading is a necessary, lifelong skill. In every workplace, employees must read to gain knowledge, learn skills and procedures, understand information, participate in discussions, and grow in their careers.

Introduction to Reading in the Workplace

View and discuss Segment 1: *Introduction to Reading in the Workplace*. Running time: approx. 6:30.

Read more about Ed Castor and his literacy efforts at www.literacynet.org/value/profiles.



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. Ed was unable to read the bulletin boards, fill out forms, apply for posted job promotions, or read important work-related directions. He was seriously injured as a result.
2. Learning to read enabled Ed to obtain a GED. Today, Ed represents GM and the UAW at public events, where he inspires others to work for literacy.
3. It was a struggle for Ed to learn to read at the age of 45, having dyslexia. The essential skills he acquired while studying for the GED and the effort it took to confess to his boss that he could not read were more important than passing the test.

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.

On the Job

Read to Succeed

Caroline uses her reading skills to communicate with others, perform daily tasks, gather information, and stay on top of industry trends. She reads the business section of an online newspaper, e-mail, regular mail, faxes, memos from her supervisor, and a report with graphics. She also researches relevant topics at the library by scanning a variety of articles and reading some of them in-depth.



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

In this excerpt, Booker T. Washington demonstrates his determination to learn to read and gain an education at any cost. He convinced his mother to secure a copy of a reader (which probably could have provoked severe punishment at the time). He attended the first school for black children in Virginia, even though it was extremely crowded and he had to walk great distances after working all day to get there. He even went so far as to change the clocks at his workplace, so he could get to the school on time.

At the time, reading and education was a skill attainable only by free white men. As slavery was abolished and black Americans gained their freedom, education and reading presented an opportunity to regain freedoms, gain information, communicate, gain employment, and become successful.

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?




Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915) was born a slave in Hale's Ford, Virginia. After emancipation, his family was so poverty stricken that they moved to West Virginia where he was forced to go to work in the coal mines and salt furnaces at a very young age. Even though he was deprived of any early education, he was determined to gain an education later in life. He went on to found the Tuskegee Institute, to advise Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft on race relations. He became America's foremost black educator of the early 20th Century.

The complete text of Washington's autobiography can be found online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/washington/menu.html>.

PRACTICE

Practice

1. Learners should find that there are many different types of reading materials and that purposes for reading vary greatly. Learners may have read newspapers, novels, textbooks, instructions, correspondence, signs, schedules, maps, etc. Purposes will range from learning how to do something, gathering some kind of information, entertainment, fulfilling a job, or keeping up with current events.
2. Learners may say that misreading could be prevented by careful reading, reading additional or different information, verifying the accuracy of information read, or by communicating the information in a more appropriate form.
3. Answers will vary according to individual experiences. This activity is a good opportunity for learners to start assessing their personal reading and information-management skills.

1.  Create a list of everything you have read in the past week. Next to each item on your list, write your purpose for reading it. Compare lists with a partner. Did you read any similar material? Did you read it for similar or different purposes?
2.  Search the Internet for examples of the consequences of misreading information. (A helpful site is <http://www.ncpa.org/~ncpa/pi/enviro/envpd/pdenv79.html>.) How could each example have been prevented?
3.  Describe a situation when you used information to make a decision or to solve a problem. How did you decide where to look for the information you needed? Where did you find your information? How did your ability to gather, organize, and use the information affect the outcome of your decision or the problem?

DID YOU KNOW?

- ◇ National Longitudinal Surveys reports that one in six young children will encounter a problem learning to read during their crucial first three years in school.
- ◇ The average reader reads five times slower than the exceptional reader.
- ◇ After the age of 12, most readers do not substantially improve their efficiency and never reach their full capacity.

SUMMARY

- Good reading skills are crucial for workplace success.
- Consider your purpose, or what you wish to gain, before reading.
- Gathering, organizing, and using information effectively are necessary skills in today's workplace.

REVIEW QUESTIONS



1. Why are good reading skills important in the workplace?

2. List several different documents you might read in the workplace.

3. Describe how to handle information effectively in the workplace.

Review Questions

1. In the workplace, you read to acquire information—to learn a task, to follow instructions, to solve problems, and to understand others. If you don't read carefully, then you won't get the information you need.
2. Workplace documents include employee handbooks, e-mail, invoices, letters, proposals, instructions, operating manuals, maintenance manuals, and reports.
3. To handle information effectively, collect information from the appropriate sources, organize and label the information in a useful way, and communicate the information in the appropriate form.

"I would sooner read a timetable or a catalog than nothing at all."

—W. Somerset Maugham,
writer

 **Not Quite**

Bianca was recently appointed the project manager of the building construction of BJ Turner & Associates. The building would consist of eight offices for a team of attorneys. It was Bianca's responsibility to coordinate the construction tasks, make sure all the contractors worked together in a timely fashion, and ensure the deadlines were met.

Bianca knew how to read blueprints well, but had not made time to look at and completely understand the rolls of blueprints for BJ Turner & Associates. With the mounds of other work on her desk, she decided she would glance at the blueprints, but would leave it up to the other hired contractors to read and follow their instructions.

On Monday morning, Bianca received a call from a representative of the electrical contractor. He explained that the electrician's blueprints were not clear. His workers did not know how high or low to set the outlets on the walls. They also couldn't make out what type of lights went into each restroom. Unfortunately, Bianca had not carefully read the blueprints and didn't know where she had put them. She told the contractor she thought she remembered the outlets needing to be 18 inches from the center and she believed incandescent lights needed to go in the restrooms.

Bianca's heart sank when her supervisor, Maria, called her a few days later asking why the outlets had been installed at 18 inches from the center when they should have been 10 inches from the bottom. The lower outlets now were too high and the desks covered them. She was also curious as to why there were incandescent lights in the restrooms when the blueprints called for four-foot fluorescent lights. "Who told the electrical contractor to design the electrical work this way?" Maria asked.

 **Got It Right**


Terra was not nervous about starting her job as a receptionist at Proud Mary Publishing. She had worked as a receptionist at various other companies over the years and was very confident about her abilities in this line of work. During her initial interview for the receptionist position, Terra was told she might need to help out in other areas such as editing, proofreading, or even sorting subscriptions or general mail. Terra had also done these sorts of things in her previous jobs.

As Terra approached her desk on her first day, she noticed mounds of paperwork, policy manuals, and various employee handbooks stacked in her tray. Her supervisor explained that Proud Mary Publishing had fairly strict policies and regulations pertaining to day-to-day office duties. The paperwork would help Terra familiarize herself with phone scripts, editing styles, and mail distribution. Once Terra read through the materials, she would be ready to start her duties as a receptionist.

Terra was glad she took the time to read the company information. The policies at Proud Mary Publishing were much different than what she was accustomed to. The company had particular style rules for editing, a complex system for sorting and delivering mail, and several different phone scripts for handling various customer needs.

After reading all day, Terra was confident she was ready to begin. Throughout the next morning, she placed tabs in her policy manuals so that she could easily find important information.

PROJECTS

1.  Sitting in a public space, make a list of all the signs and notices you observe. Then, choose one or two signs or notices that contain important information. Describe the purpose for each sign or notice. What might be some consequences of misreading or ignoring the signs? Present your reasoning to the class in a two-page oral report.
2. Choose a job or career that interests you. Use Internet or library resources to find magazines or journals dedicated to the job you have chosen. Read at least three articles, and write a one-page summary of each article, describing something new you discovered in your reading.

*“Reading is a basic tool
in the living of a good
life.”*

—Mortimer J. Adler,
philosopher and writer



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*In most occupations, your career
will depend on the reading skills
you bring to the workplace.*

Projects

Ask learners to complete one or both of these projects as homework or out-of-class assignments. Encourage them to work in pairs or small groups.

1. Reports should explore the dangers of misunderstanding or disregarding important information. Consequences can range from inconvenience and loss of productivity, to punishment for breaking rules, to posing a danger to oneself and others.
2. Encourage learners to choose articles from a variety of print and online sources. Accept any summary that indicates a thorough reading of at least three articles, provides quotes and sources from the articles, and clearly explains what was learned.