

FIGURE 3.1 The Writing Process



Analyzing, Anticipating, and Adapting

In the prewriting phase you will spend some time analyzing your task. It is amazing how many of us are ready to put our pens or computers into gear before engaging our minds. Before writing, ask yourself these important questions:

- **Do I really need to write this e-mail or memo?** A phone call or a quick visit to a nearby coworker might solve the problem—and save the time and expense of a written message. On the other hand, some written messages are needed to provide a permanent record.
- **Why am I writing?** Know why you are writing and what you hope to achieve. This will help you recognize what the important points are and where to place them.
- **How will the reader react?** Visualize the reader and the effect your message will have. In writing e-mail messages and memos, imagine that you are sitting and talking with your reader. Avoid speaking bluntly, failing to explain, or ignoring your reader's needs. Consider ways to shape the message to benefit the reader. Also be careful about what you say because your message may very well be forwarded to someone else—or may be read by your boss.
- **How can I save my reader's time?** Think of ways to make your message easier to comprehend at a glance. Use bullets, lists, headings, and white space to improve readability.

Researching, Organizing, and Composing

Phase 2, writing, involves gathering documentation, organizing, and actually composing the first draft. Although some of your electronic messages and memos will be short, you can ensure a more effective message by following these steps:

- **Conduct research.** Check the files, talk with your boss, and possibly consult the target audience to collect information before you begin to write. Gather any documentation necessary to support your message.
- **Organize your information.** Make a brief outline of the points you want to cover in your message. For short messages jot down notes on the document you are answering or make a scratch list at your computer.
- **Compose your first draft.** At your computer compose the message from your outline. As you compose, avoid amassing huge blocks of text. No one wants to read endless lines of type.

Gather background information; organize it into an outline; compose your message; and revise for clarity, correctness, and feedback

Revising, Proofreading, and Evaluating

Phase 3, revising, involves putting the final touches on your message. Careful and caring writers will ask a number of questions as they do the following:

- **Revise for clarity and conciseness.** Viewed from the receiver's perspective, are the ideas clear? Do they need more explanation? If the message is passed on to others, will they need further explanation? Consider having a colleague critique your message if it is an important one.
- **Revise for readability.** Did you group related information into paragraphs, preferably short ones? Paragraphs separated by white space look inviting. Does each paragraph begin with the main point, and is that point backed up by details? Can you add paragraph headings to improve readability? Can you form bullet points or lists to make the message easy to skim and comprehend?
- **Proofread for correctness.** Are the sentences complete and punctuated properly? Did you overlook any typos or misspelled words? Remember to use your spell checker and grammar checker to proofread your message before sending it.
- **Plan for feedback.** How will you know whether this message is successful? You can improve feedback by asking questions (such as *Are you comfortable with these suggestions?* or *What do you think?*). Remember to make it easy for the receiver to respond by providing your e-mail address or phone number.