

those who offered encouragement and office help along the way. Special thanks to Rose Rosina, one special secretary. And much gratitude to my colleague Anne Youngs who cheered me throughout the process and to my department head, Leonard Heldreth, who supported me when I needed extra time to complete this project.

For their assistance and constructive criticism early in the process, thanks must go to Katherine Staples and John Brockmann, two colleagues whose opinion is valued. Other instructors who provided valuable advice during the development of the manuscript are: Carol Barnum, Southern Polytechnic State University; Ray Dumont, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth; Dan Jones, University of Central Florida; and Nancy L. Stegall, DeVry Institute of Technology. Certainly this business of acknowledging would not be complete without the mention of two wonderful friends, Fiona Gibbons and Donna Silta, who were there in good times and bad. And to Max and Olivia, a constant source of inspiration. Thanks also to Joe Opiela and Mary Beth Chesbrough both of Allyn and Bacon.

Finally, Teresa Kynell wishes to acknowledge with great gratitude the contribution of her best friend, Dr. Kurt V. S. Kynell. His support, superb copyediting, technical assistance, and visuals were of incalculable value. And now, *Patrician*.

Wendy Stone gratefully acknowledges and thanks the students of her Technical and Report Writing classes who worked through many of these scenarios and provided invaluable feedback. Thanks also to the colleagues and friends who provided insight, help, and ideas. Thanks go particularly to Daniel Stone, Melissa Borden, Robert Richardson, Sean Hayes, Robert Glenn, Raymond Ventre, Lillian Heldreth, Emily Godec, Amber Storey, Christine Swadley, and the entire Kabe Migezeeug community. Special thanks to Mike Schweigert for the technical and other support. Last but not least, the greatest appreciation to Dr. Teresa Kynell for her years of tireless support and teaching, for her assistance during my thesis research, and for the honor of working with her.

T.C.K.
W.K.S.

CHAPTER 1

Using Scenarios to Learn Technical Communication

WHAT ARE SCENARIOS?

Scenarios, as you will study them, involve making decisions without knowing the outcome—that is, working on problems happening “now” and not knowing if your solution will work. You will also discuss problems with your “colleagues” (other students), draft documents, revise decisions, and defend what you choose to do. The emphasis in this textbook is not on second-guessing what happened to other people in other situations but on making your own decisions (often tough ones) *as if you were really in that particular situation*.

The scenarios in this text are designed to teach the most important aspect of technical writing—how to reach your audience. In other writing courses, you may have created personal stories or essays about thoughts and feelings on specific issues. Perhaps you evaluated the literature of others, finding connections between life as you know it and that presented by the author. Technical writing, though, is primarily concerned with what readers think and feel. Good technical writers navigate the murky waters of personalities, office politics, and ethics to produce clear, concise, effective communications that cause readers to take action in a specific way—the action you, the writer, desire them to take. For example, a technical writer preparing safety manuals for automobile assembly line workers needs to be very clear about what workers should and should not do because mistakes could result in loss of a limb or life if the technical writer does not consider all the issues. Beyond the technical aspects of the assembly line (the machinery involved), the technical writer must take into consideration the workers’ different educational backgrounds, work experiences, and attitudes. This emphasis on readers is *audience analysis*. The scenarios in this text contain dialogue and other important information to help you *understand* readers so that your communication strategies are effective.

WHAT WILL SCENARIOS HELP YOU LEARN?

When you signed up for this course, you probably thought that it involved writing reports, creating a resume, and perhaps spending some time in the library conducting research. While these things certainly will occur, you will be learning much more through the scenarios in each chapter. Scenarios are designed to teach you many different skills—how to write a certain kind of document; evaluate ethical dilemmas; sort through erroneous, conflicting, or vague information; analyze readers' needs; and predict the results of your actions. Because scenarios may be new to you, we will take a look at some techniques for working through each scenario.

Tips for Understanding Scenarios

When reading a scenario, remember that every detail is important. Each scenario begins with a series of questions to help you focus your attention on specific pieces of information. In addition to keeping these questions in mind as you read, be sure to go over each scenario at least twice while doing the following:

- *Take Notes.* What information did you learn from the scenario? What *kind* of information did you receive (solid, vague, conflicting, suspect)? Who told you what? What are all the possible reasons your sources may have for providing you with the information? For example, a manager, tells you his division does not have enough money to launch a project you are proposing. You later find out that his division has extra money. Why, do you think, he said he had no funds?
- *"Listen."* How did the people in the scenario *seem*? What were their emotions and attitudes? Did someone's demeanor change, and when did that happen? For example, when you start asking questions about an accident at your company, people who were previously very friendly and helpful become cold and won't give you straight answers. Does this possibly reveal anything about the information they are providing?
- *Sketch the Relationships.* Create a drawing showing the relationship structure of the organization in the scenario. To whom do people report? Who has the most authority? The least? Who works together? Who has the power to do what? Which people are friends? Which are in conflict with each other? Sometimes you need to make sure you are not creating new problems, such as recommending that two people who dislike each other work together on a project. Perhaps your recommendation won't be accepted just on the basis of this personality clash.
- *List the Possibilities.* Decide what kind of document(s) you plan to write and then focus on content. What will you say? How will you

say it? How will you organize your information? In what other ways could you write this document? For example, you may have decided you need to write a letter to several employees informing them that their positions have been eliminated. Are you going to "let them down easy"? Will you simply tell them in a "just the facts" manner? Could you say anything that would help them understand the reason for this action? Will you offer assistance, such as a reference or a letter of recommendation?

- *List the Possible Outcomes.* For each possibility you have considered, try to forecast what will happen. How will readers feel about what you've written? What actions do you expect them to take? Could they possibly take other actions that would be counterproductive? For example, when negotiating a contract to provide computer training for a company, you find out that company is in the process of hiring a full-time staff member to train employees in exactly the same subject. If they go through with the hiring, there's really no need for your services, although you think the job is too big for just one person. Can you convince the company to sign a contract with your training group instead of hiring their own trainer?
- *Examine the Ethical Issues.* Did you receive information you promised not to repeat? Are you being asked to do something that may be, if not illegal, morally wrong? (And what do you consider morally wrong?) Would any of your actions result in harm to anyone, professionally or personally? For example, a friend of yours works in the personnel office, and he told you that your boss was recently reprimanded. Your friend tells you that if your boss makes any more mistakes, she will be fired and you will receive a promotion to her position. Just that morning, your boss misplaced some important documents and could not find them. Do you tell your friend about this mistake in hopes of getting the promotion?

HOW DO YOU FIND THE "RIGHT" ANSWER TO A SCENARIO?

Making the Best Possible Choices

The most important skills you use while working through scenarios are critical thinking and logical argumentation. You must have reasons for your decisions, and you must be able to articulate these reasons. "Just because I think so" is not a good argument. Use the information in the scenario and your own knowledge of technical communication to make your decisions. You may not "add" to the scenario, such as making up conversations, events, or facts that do not actually appear in the text.

The most important point to keep in mind is that you must decide what actions to take if you were in the situation described. As a result, expect your solution to be different than your classmates'. Because everyone's decision-making skills are built from years of making choices in many different situations, you have a unique way of looking at each scenario. Based on your personality, experiences, and decisions made during discussions in class and with your peers, you will take certain actions. Do you believe in being conservative in difficult situations? Are you a risk-taker? Are you willing to sacrifice people for profits? Are you more concerned with job satisfaction than position or pay? Your answers to these questions will shape your solutions to each scenario.

You will, therefore, write each document from the vantage point of *yourself in the organization described in the scenario, not as a student in a technical writing class*. For example, if the scenario says, "You are a technical writer for Montcalm Insurance," you would write your documents as "[Your Name], Technical Writer, Montcalm Insurance." Remember that your instructor will be reading the scenario *as the person or people to whom you are writing*. Your instructor will evaluate your response by examining how well you recognized and addressed the various issues in the scenario and will help you learn better decision-making skills with each new scenario. While no one "right" answer exists, understand that this does not mean that all scenario responses are valid—some will be grounded in a stronger critical framework than others. Keep in mind that grammar, mechanics, usage, and format are just as important as your message and *must* be correct—so plan to revise and proofread carefully.

Defending Your Answer to a Scenario

Once you have read a few scenarios and drafted documents in response to them, you are ready to address a second, very important issue. You must be able to explain *why* you made the decisions that resulted in your document or documents. Your explanation, called a **Solution Defense**, determines just how well your answer solves the scenario's problems. A Solution Defense demonstrates your ability to identify the scenario's problems and use the appropriate technical communication skills to solve them. Also, it illustrates your thinking processes—how well you took the information in the scenario and sorted it out. Essentially, a Solution Defense is an argument for *why your answer is the best one*.

Figure 1.1 lists all the typical aspects of a Solution Defense. While providing this basic information for each scenario, you should modify the format as you see fit by adding more information. Remember to write a Solution Defense for each assigned scenario.

AUDIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who requested the document(s)? Who "signs off" on it? Who will read it? Who may read it for another purpose? In my organization, what positions do my readers hold? What relationship do I have to my readers? What information will my readers understand easily? What will I have to explain? In how much detail will I have to explain complex information? What attitude do the readers have toward the document(s)? What objections might they have toward what I'm asking? Why would they have these objections? How do I address those objections in my document(s)?
DOCUMENT TYPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of documents (letter, memo, report, etc.) should I write for my readers? Why use that kind of document?
DOCUMENT PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What, specifically, do I want my readers to do after they receive these documents? When do I want them to take action? What plan for taking action have I provided? For what other purposes could my document be used?
DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did I organize my information? Why did I choose to organize it that way?
SOLUTION EXPLANATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What, briefly, did I decide to do to solve the scenario's problems? What are my reasons behind this solution? What other actions did I consider but reject? Why did I reject those possibilities? What ethical problems did I encounter? How did I work through them?
OUTCOME FORECAST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the most possible reactions to my documents? What would I do to address these possible reactions if given a chance to write another document in response?

FIGURE 1.1 Solution Defense Content

WORKING THROUGH A SCENARIO: A SAMPLE SITUATION

While using scenarios may seem difficult at first, it becomes easier as you become accustomed to the style. Read “The Disappearing Lake” scenario and take notes on your own. Then read the scenario as it was annotated by Amy (a technical writing student), read her notes, and take a look at her solution defense and documents. While Amy’s solution may not be what you would have done, does she provide enough information for you to understand her reasoning?

The Disappearing Lake

CONSIDERATIONS

In this situation, you are a reporter working in a small town near a recently closed Army base. You hear rumors about toxic waste and cleanups and about a possible connection between activities on the base and the water levels of two lakes. As you read this scenario, consider the following:

- What are the possible reasons for Deer Lake’s loss of water?
- What type of evidence is provided for a connection between activities on the Army base and a drop in Deer Lake’s water level?
- How does your status as a home owner and reporter affect the credibility of any documents you produce?

You pull up in front of your new home on the shores of Deer Lake, thankful that the last load from the old house seems to have survived, undamaged, the ride in the back of your truck. You grab the heaviest box first, hoping to get the worst over with before the August morning turns into a scorching afternoon, and head for the garage.

“Hello there!” a voice booms, startling you enough to loosen your grip on the box as it crashes to the ground. Books spill out from the broken cardboard. To your right, a man is standing on the other side of your neighbor’s low wooden fence. Noting his slight build, gray hair and red T-shirt, you wonder if he is the elusive neighbor you haven’t seen during the past week of moving.

“Hello,” you answer, rather flatly, a little frustrated with the mess you’ve made. The man easily hops the fence, walks across the small patch of brown-ing grass between the fence and your driveway, and begins helping you collect the spilled books.

“Sorry I scared you,” he says. “I just wanted to get acquainted with my new neighbor. I’m Don Brayburn, president of the Deer Lake Homeowner’s Association.”

“Nice to meet you, Don,” you respond, and you give your name. Turning to pick up the books, you continue, “I probably would have dropped them anyway. Someday, I should give away all these books. I don’t have time to read them anymore.”

“Hhmmm . . .” Don eyes the covers of the books he’s picked up as the two of you walk toward the garage. “Emerson, Whitman, and Dickens. Good stuff. Well, I heard you were a journalist,” Don says, “so I wondered just what kind you were. Too many liberal journalists around these days.”

You realize that if you say what you’re thinking, a neighborhood feud might commence. You decide to keep your mouth shut and be as accommodating as possible. “I’m a newspaper journalist who likes hard facts and small towns,” you say. “I don’t think you have anything to worry about from me.”

“Good,” Don says. “There’s enough trouble around here, what with the lake disappearing.”

“Deer Lake’s disappearing?” you ask, surprised. The realtor who sold you the house said nothing about this.

“It’s gone down about a foot since last year,” Don says. “Ever since they’ve been dredging a lake at the Army base, all the lakes around here have been shrinking.”

Because this might be a potential story for the *Daily Mirror*, the local newspaper for which you work, you invite Don into the house for a glass of iced tea. He accepts and soon you are sitting on your backyard deck, enjoying the cool breeze blowing off the lake. For the first time, you notice several inches of black mud between your lawn and the water’s edge. You wonder if it’s an indication of how much the water has dropped. Eventually, you find a way to get Don to talk about the lake again after he’d gone on for twenty minutes about his exploits in the military.

“A buddy of mine, a captain, told me that the Army dumped into the small base lake, Lake McCarthy, for years, and now that the base is closing, they’re trying to clean it up,” Don says. “He said they drained the lake and are digging up the muck at the bottom. There’s guys in orange suits working the machinery, and they’re putting the muck in big plastic drums, trucking it out only at night and under tarps, at that. The Army started draining in late May, and I noticed the water level drop in early June.”

“What’s your buddy’s name?” you ask, thinking that this guy could be a good source.

“Sorry,” Don says, smiling. “I told him I’d keep it hush-hush. You want to do a story on this?”

“Sure,” you say. “It sounds like there could be something to this. But I need more information.”

“I can give you information, contacts, whatever,” Don says. “But I’ve talked to the *Mirror’s* editor twice, and she says the paper’s not interested.”

You wonder why your editor, Linda Mann, declined to pursue such a potentially big story. There must be something here more than you know. . . .

Don interrupts your train of thought. "Call Colonel Firestein at the base," he says. "Tell him you know me, and maybe he'll give you an official answer to questions about the dredging. I haven't asked him. We're good friends, and I don't want to put him in a funny spot."

You nod, remembering the countless times you'd refrained from asking friends for information, even though you know they had what it would take to make a good story. Small-town journalism is sometimes very difficult. "I'll call him," you assure Don as he gets up to leave.

Later that week, you've worked through the pile of paperwork on your brand new desk at the *Daily Mirror* and find time to tackle the Deer Lake story. You call the information number at Connelly Army Base and are connected to Colonel Firestein's office. After mentioning Brayburn to the secretary, she puts you through to the Colonel.

"Yes!" a loud voice booms into your ear, and you hold the phone further away.

"Colonel Firestein, I'm calling from the *Daily Mirror*," you say. "I have some questions about environmental cleanups going on at the base."

"That's not really my area," the Colonel says. "But since Don told you to call me, I'll try to answer your questions."

"Have you drained Lake McCarthy?" you ask.

"Yes," he answers, and offers nothing more.

"Why?" you ask, matching his monosyllabic answer with a similar question.

"Back in the forties and fifties, we dumped used oil in there. It wasn't really a lake to begin with, more like a swamp the Army dug out to use as a holding area for waste fluids. There weren't regulations on how to do that kind of thing back then. The EPA knows all about this."

"What are you doing with the material you dredge from the lake bottom?" you ask.

"Who says we're dredging?" the Colonel shoots back.

"Well," you respond, "it's only logical, since you drained the lake. And the fact that the lake sediment would be toxic if you dumped waste fuel into it for the last fifty years."

"Humph," the Colonel grunts. "We're trucking the stuff to a soil incineration plant."

"At night?" you ask, thinking that the Colonel knows quite a bit about these issues, despite it not "being his area."

"Regulations," he answers, without questioning how you knew this small fact. "It's safer without all the traffic."

"I understand," you say, preparing to move on to touchier ground. "Did the Army conduct any studies on how draining Lake McCarthy would affect the local water table?"

"I believe so, but don't quote me on that," the Colonel answers. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because Brayburn claims Deer Lake's lost about a foot of water, and that it happened at the same time the Army drained Lake McCarthy."

"Nonsense," the Colonel said. "The lakes around here go up and down all the time, have for years. We're in the middle of a dry summer."

"Could I obtain a copy of the environmental study done before the cleanup began?" you ask.

"Look, I have a meeting to get to. Ask my secretary for the report, and we'll see if it's available to the public. Good-bye."

The Colonel hung up without transferring you to his secretary, so you had to call back and make your request. From her tone of voice, you doubt if you'll ever see the report. You hang up the phone and lean back in your chair, staring out the window at the busy main street below.

"Hey, there!" Linda's voice startles you. "What, not enough work to do?"

"I was thinking," you said, smiling. You like Linda—she's a good, ethical editor concerned more with getting the story right than with circulation numbers.

"About?" she asks. You laugh, wondering how you'll keep any secrets in an office full of reporters.

"I just got off the phone with Colonel Firestein at the Army base," you answer, and then you fill her in on what you've learned so far. You leave out what Don told you about Linda declining to pursue the story.

"You got farther than I did," Linda said. "I think we should run a story on the base's cleanup efforts. It would be good to let the community know everything will be okay out there after the Army leaves. Why don't you call around and write something up on it?"

"Sure," you say. "But what about the lake level issue? Isn't that pertinent to the property owners?"

"Yourself included," she reminds you. "Conflict of interest. Stay away from that angle. Besides, Deer Lake hasn't lost any more water than it normally does on a dry year. And Brayburn's always talking conspiracy."

"Really," you say, sounding not at all surprised. You grab your notepad and pencil.

"Where are you going?" Linda asks.

"Library," you reply. "I'm going to do some research on the deer population story."

"Have fun," Linda says as you leave.

After tracking down deer herd population statistics, you decide to stay at the library for a few more minutes and look up the records on Deer Lake. You find several studies done by the Department of Natural Resources on the lake, mainly dealing with its algae-bloom problem. You find an algae-

bloom report that summarizes lake level data for many years as part of other calculations, so you take down some notes:

Depths are averages of measurements taken in the general vicinity of the lake middle where currents from supply streams should not greatly affect lake bottom contours. Measurements conducted first week in July. Only have data from 1978 on.

1978—75 ft	88—70 ft
79—76 ft	89—72 ft
80—76 ft	90—72 ft
81—75 ft	91—73 ft
82—75 ft	92—73 ft
83—74 ft	93—72 ft
84—72 ft	94—72 ft
85—71 ft	95—73 ft
86—70 ft	96—74 ft
87—72 ft	97—74 ft

Satisfied that the lake will more than likely rise again once the summer is over, you return to the office. Just as you sit down at your desk, your phone rings. It's Don.

"Firestein just called me," he says. "He was all mad about you asking him so many questions and mad at me for giving you his name."

"Really?" you say. "Did he say anything else?"

"Just that I'm wrong about the lake. But I'm going to force the issue."

"How?" you ask.

"Last night, at the Deer Lake Home Owner's meeting, I announced that you were investigating our problem and that you'd be running a story in the *Mirror* on it!"

"Oh no," you groan. "Don, I can't do the story. I'm automatically a member of the association because I own property on the lake. And what's more, I haven't found anything to suggest the lake is any lower than it normally gets on a dry year."

"Too late," Don says. "And who better to write the story than someone whose home is at stake?"

"You don't understand," you try to explain. "No paper would run a story written by someone with such an obvious bias. Tell them I can't do it."

"Then you tell them you'll get us someone who will," Don answers with a sharpness in his voice. He also hangs up the phone.

You realize that your reputation in this town is on the line. *I could lose people's trust in my professionalism, you think. And the first thing people would hear about the new reporter in town would be this controversy.*

You recall a lesson your favorite journalism professor pounded into your head during your college years: "People remember the first things they hear." You are very upset at Don, and you decide you must put something in writing, go on record, to make your position clear to all involved.

Now evaluate Amy's response to the scenario shown in Figure 1.2. First, look at how she made notes, or annotations, to the case as she read it. "Marking up" a case is important, as it helps you identify key pieces of information that you will need to reference in your Solution Defense.

The Disappearing Lake

CONSIDERATIONS

In this situation, you are a reporter working in a small town near a recently closed Army base. You hear rumors about toxic waste and cleanups and about a possible connection between activities on the base and the water levels of two lakes. As you read this scenario, consider the following:

- What are the possible reasons for Deer Lake's loss of water?
- What type of evidence is provided for a connection between activities on the Army base and a drop in Deer Lake's water level?
- How does your status as a home owner and reporter affect the credibility of any documents you produce?

*Conflict
of interest?*

You pull up in front of your new home on the shores of Deer Lake, thankful that the last load from the old house seems to have survived, undamaged, the ride in the back of your truck. You grab the heaviest box first, hoping to get the worst over with before the August morning turns into a scorching afternoon, and head for the garage.

"Hello there!" a voice booms, startling you enough to loosen your grip on the box as it crashes to the ground. Books spill out from the broken cardboard. To your right, a man is standing on the other side of your neighbor's low wooden fence. Noting his slight build, gray hair and red T-shirt, you wonder if he is the elusive neighbor you haven't seen during the past week of moving.

FIGURE 1.2 Amy's Annotations to the Scenario

dry weather "Hello," you answer, rather flatly, a little frustrated with the mess you've made. The man easily hops the fence, walks across the small patch of browning grass between the fence and your driveway, and begins helping you collect the spilled books.

gives his title? "Sorry I scared you," he says. "I just wanted to get acquainted with my new neighbor. I'm Don Brayburn, president of the Deer Lake Homeowner's Association."

"Nice to meet you, Don," you respond, and you give your name. Turning to pick up the books, you continue, "I probably would have dropped them anyway. Someday, I should give away all these books. I don't have time to read them anymore."

Don is a conservative? "Hhmmm . . ." Don eyes the covers of the books he's picked up as the two of you walk toward the garage. "Emerson, Whitman, and Dickens. Good stuff. Well, I heard you were a journalist," Don says, "so I wondered just what kind you were. Too many liberal journalists around these days."

You realize that if you say what you're thinking, a neighborhood feud might commence. You decide to keep your mouth shut and be as accommodating as possible. "I'm a newspaper journalist who likes hard facts and small towns," you say. "I don't think you have anything to worry about from me."

"Good," Don says. "There's enough trouble around here, what with the lake disappearing."

"Deer Lake's disappearing?" you ask, surprised. The realtor who sold you the house said nothing about this.

Lake level drops "It's gone down about a foot since last year," Don says. "Ever since they've been dredging a lake at the Army base, all the lakes around here have been shrinking."

Because this might be a potential story for the *Daily Mirror*, the local newspaper for which you work, you invite Don into the house for a glass of iced tea. He accepts and soon you are sitting on your backyard deck, enjoying the cool breeze blowing off the lake. For the first time, you notice several inches of black mud between your lawn and the water's edge. You wonder if it's an indication of how much the water has dropped. Eventually, you find a way to get Don to talk about the lake again after he'd gone on for twenty minutes about his exploits in the military.

No real source—unreliable evident "A buddy of mine, a captain, told me that the Army dumped into the small base lake, Lake McCarthy, for years, and now that the base is closing, they're trying to clean it up," Don says. "He said they drained

toxic waste procedures? the lake and are digging up the muck at the bottom. There's guys in orange suits working the machinery, and they're putting the muck in big plastic drums, trucking it out only at night and under tarps, at that. The Army started draining in late May, and I noticed the water level drop in early June."

"What's your buddy's name?" you ask, thinking that this guy could be a good source.

"Sorry," Don says, smiling. "I told him I'd keep it hush-hush. You want to do a story on this?"

"Sure," you say. "It sounds like there could be something to this. But I need more information."

that I can use? "I can give you information, contacts, whatever," Don says. "But I've talked to the *Mirror's* editor twice, and she says the paper's not interested."

You wonder why your editor, Linda Mann, declined to pursue such a potentially big story. There must be something here more than you know. . . .

But doesn't mind you (me) doing it? Don interrupts your train of thought. "Call Colonel Firestein at the base," he says. "Tell him you know me, and maybe he'll give you an official answer to questions about the dredging. I haven't asked him. We're good friends, and I don't want to put him in a funny spot."

You nod, remembering the countless times you'd refrained from asking friends for information, even though you know they had what it would take to make a good story. Small-town journalism is sometimes very difficult. "I'll call him," you assure Don as he gets up to leave.

Later that week, you've worked through the pile of paperwork on your brand new desk at the *Daily Mirror* and find time to tackle the Deer Lake story. You call the information number at Connelly Army Base and are connected to Colonel Firestein's office. After mentioning Brayburn to the secretary, she puts you through to the Colonel.

"Yes!" a loud voice booms into your ear, and you hold the phone further away.

"Colonel Firestein, I'm calling from the *Daily Mirror*," you say. "I have some questions about environmental cleanups going on at the base."

"That's not really my area," the Colonel says. "But since Don told you to call me, I'll try to answer your questions."

"Have you drained Lake McCarthy?" you ask.

"Yes," he answers, and offers nothing more.

"Why?" you ask, matching his monosyllabic answer with a similar question.

FIGURE 1.2 Amy's Annotations to the Scenario *continued*FIGURE 1.2 Amy's Annotations to the Scenario *continued*

—could
get EPA
report?

"Back in the forties and fifties, we dumped used oil in there. It wasn't really a lake to begin with, more like a swamp the Army dug out to use as a holding area for waste fluids. There weren't regulations on how to do that kind of thing back then. The EPA knows all about this."

"What are you doing with the material you dredge from the lake bottom?" you ask.

"Who says we're dredging?" the Colonel shoots back.

"Well," you respond, "it's only logical, since you drained the lake. And the fact that the lake sediment would be toxic if you dumped waste fuel into it for the last fifty years."

"Humph," the Colonel grunts. "We're trucking the stuff to a soil incineration plant."

"At night?" you ask, thinking that the Colonel knows quite a bit about these issues, despite it not "being his area."

"Regulations," he answers, without questioning how you knew this small fact. "It's safer without all the traffic."

"I understand," you say, preparing to move on to touchier ground. "Did the Army conduct any studies on how draining Lake McCarthy would affect the local water table?"

"I believe so, but don't quote me on that," the Colonel answers. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because Brayburn claims Deer Lake's lost about a foot of water, and that it happened at the same time the Army drained Lake McCarthy."

"Nonsense," the Colonel said. "The lakes around here go up and down all the time, have for years. We're in the middle of a dry summer."

"Could I obtain a copy of the environmental study done before the cleanup began?" you ask.

"Look, I have a meeting to get to. Ask my secretary for the report, and we'll see if it's available to the public. Good-bye."

The Colonel hung up without transferring you to his secretary, so you had to call back and make your request. From her tone of voice, you doubt if you'll ever see the report. You hang up the phone and lean back in your chair, staring out the window at the busy main street below.

"Hey, there!" Linda's voice startles you. "What, not enough work to do?"

"I was thinking," you said, smiling. You like Linda—she's a good, ethical editor concerned more with getting the story right than with circulation numbers.

"About?" she asks. You laugh, wondering how you'll keep any secrets in an office full of reporters.

Believable.

No documentation
available
from the
Col.

"I just got off the phone with Colonel Firestein at the Army base," you answer, and then you fill her in on what you've learned so far. You leave out what Don told you about Linda declining to pursue the story.

"You got farther than I did," Linda said. "I think we should run a story on the base's cleanup efforts. It would be good to let the community know everything will be okay out there after the Army leaves. Why don't you call around and write something up on it?"

"Sure," you say. "But what about the lake level issue? Isn't that pertinent to the property owners?"

"Yourself included," she reminds you. Conflict of interest. Stay away from that angle. Besides, Deer Lake hasn't lost any more water than it normally does on a dry year. And Brayburn's always talking conspiracy."

"Really," you say, sounding not at all surprised. You grab your notepad and pencil.

"Where are you going?" Linda asks.

"Library," you reply. "I'm going to do some research on the deer population story."

"Have fun," Linda says as you leave.

After tracking down deer herd population statistics, you decide to stay at the library for a few more minutes and look up the records on Deer Lake. You find several studies done by the Department of Natural Resources on the lake, mainly dealing with its algae-bloom problem. You find an algae-bloom report that summarizes lake level data for many years as part of other calculations, so you take down some notes:

Depths are averages of measurements taken in the general vicinity of the lake middle where currents from supply streams should not greatly affect lake bottom contours. Measurements conducted first week in July. Only have data from 1978 on.

No story

Don's
reliability
is in
question.

focus of
study was
not lake
level.

No lake
level
problem.
it seems...

1978—75 ft	88—70 ft
79—76 ft	89—72 ft
80—76 ft	90—72 ft
81—75 ft	91—73 ft
82—75 ft	92—73 ft
83—74 ft	93—72 ft
84—72 ft	94—72 ft
85—71 ft	95—73 ft
86—70 ft	96—74 ft
87—72 ft	97—74 ft

FIGURE 1.2 Amy's Annotations to the Scenario *continued*

FIGURE 1.2 Amy's Annotations to the Scenario *continued*

*Trying to
make him-
self credi-
ble through
my
"interest"?*

Satisfied that the lake will more than likely rise again once the summer is over, you return to the office. Just as you sit down at your desk, your phone rings. It's Don.

"Firestein just called me," he says. "He was all mad about you asking him so many questions and mad at me for giving you his name."

"Really?" you say. "Did he say anything else?"

"Just that I'm wrong about the lake. But I'm going to force the issue."

"How?" you ask.

"Last night, at the Deer Lake Home Owner's meeting, I announced that you were investigating our problem and that you'd be running a story in the *Mirror* on it!"

"Oh no," you groan. "Don, I can't do the story. I'm automatically a member of the association because I own property on the lake. And what's more, I haven't found anything to suggest the lake is any lower than it normally gets on a dry year."

"Too late," Don says. "And who better to write the story than someone whose home is at stake?"

"You don't understand," you try to explain. "No paper would run a story written by someone with such an obvious bias. Tell them I can't do it."

"Then you tell them you'll get us someone who will," Don answers with a sharpness in his voice. He also hangs up the phone.

You realize that your reputation in this town is on the line. *I could lose people's trust in my professionalism, you think. And the first thing people would hear about the new reporter in town would be this controversy.*

You recall a lesson your favorite journalism professor pounded into your head during your college years: "People remember the first things they hear." You are very upset at Don, and you decide you must put something in writing, go on record, to make your position clear to all involved.

Don = unreliable

Col. Firestein = no documentation available

Linda = discourages me writing on this

*me = found no real evidence of a problem
but am now in a somewhat controversy*

FIGURE 1.2 Amy's Annotations to the Scenario *continued*

Examine Amy's solution defense shown in Figure 1.3. Notice how she identifies her readers and indicates what she believes are their motivations and needs concerning the Deer Lake situation. She then discusses the documents she created, provides reasons for her decisions, and evaluates the possible outcomes of her actions.

The Disappearing Lake Scenario Solution Defense

Amy Smith

Readers

My readers are the Deer Lake Homeowner's Association (DLHA) members, including Don Brayburn. Another reader is my editor, Linda Mann. Don will not want to hear what I have to say and neither will the other members of the DLHA. Linda needs to read this letter so she will know I'm not going after the story, contrary to popular rumor. She must be able to defend the paper against anyone saying we're being unethical by having me do a story about a lake on which I live. Linda won't be happy about the situation. It's possible that my letter could be read by people at the Army base (including Colonel Firestein) if someone from the DLHA gives it to them.

Document

I'm writing a letter to the DLHA and copying Linda on the letter. I'll write a short cover memo for Linda and attach the letter to it. I chose the letter format because I'm writing an official communication from the paper to the DLHA, so I'll use *Daily Mirror* letterhead. I'm writing a memo to Linda because of a purely internal purpose for that communication—to let her know what Don did and what I did to correct his mistake.

Solution

For the letter, I stated up front that Don was mistaken in reporting that I would be investigating and writing on the Deer Lake water level matter. I then gave my reasons in order of importance: the conflict of interest, the data that doesn't support his contention that water levels

FIGURE 1.3 Amy's Solution Defense

are dropping more than normal, and then the lack of hard evidence. I then referred them to Linda if they had any further things to discuss about the issue. For the memo to Linda, I started by reminding her about my investigation into the Deer Lake water level (because we had only talked about it briefly). I told her what Don did (problem), and then I mention the letter and my intention to direct all questions about Deer Lake to her (solution). I ask her to handle the situation and apologize for any negative effect the whole situation could have on the paper's reputation. I'm new, and I don't want to be known as a trouble-maker right off.

Considerations

I want the DLHA members to not tell anyone that I am investigating the water level issue. I want Linda to be very happy with how I handled the situation so that there's no appearance of conflict of interest. I want Don to read the letter and get off my back about this issue, but I don't want him to get angry with me, because I have to live next to him for a very long time. I really don't care if Army personnel read my letter to Don, because there's no evidence that the base lake and Deer Lake are physically connected.

Outcomes

As for outcomes, I believe the letter will have varied effects on the DLHA members, depending on how prone to suspicion they are. I think most will understand why I can't pursue the story; however, I do believe some will think I'm now part of the cover up. I believe that's what Don might think. I'm hoping that my offering up Linda as a contact for this issue will fulfill Don's request for an investigator. Perhaps she can convince him that the lake level is fluctuating normally. I'm hoping that Don or other DLHA members tackle the items I listed as unknowns. Ultimately, I just want to save my reputation, my job, and not make my neighbors unhappy with me in the process. I am not concerned about any environmental problems with Deer Lake.

FIGURE 1.3 Amy's Solution Defense *continued*

Now that you've read her solution defense, read Amy's documents (Figs. 1.4 and 1.5) and determine whether or not her writing accomplished the goals she defined in her defense.

The Daily Mirror
202 Front Street
Anytown, USA 55555

August 10, 1999

Deer Lake Homeowner's Association
c/o Don Brayburn, Chair
204 Deer Lake Road
Anytown, USA 55555

Dear fellow members:

Although I am a very new member of the DLHA, I have recently become involved in a complex situation regarding the alleged reduction in water level in Deer Lake. Chair Don Brayburn asked me to investigate this matter as a possible story for the *Daily Mirror*, for which I am an employee (writer).

I began investigating this matter and spoke to Colonel Firestein at the Army base, and while he confirmed the Army is cleaning up waste in a small lake, he denies any connection between this activity and possible reduction in Deer Lake's water level. According to the Colonel, the Army conducted a geological study of the area's water table before commencing with the cleanup; however, I have not received a copy of this study. The Department of Natural Resources has been measuring the lake level since the late 1970s; after reviewing their data, I believe Deer Lake's water level is fluctuating normally.

As a writer for the paper, I must be unbiased, and my personal interests in Deer Lake, as a property owner, could be perceived as a conflict of interest. You may contact Linda Mann, my editor, with any new information. At this time, the *Daily Mirror's* position is that there is no story here.

I hope you understand the difficult position I am in as both a professional and a concerned Deer Lake homeowner. While I cannot assist you with your investigation, I look forward to becoming an active member of the association.

Sincerely,

Amy Smith

FIGURE 1.4 Amy's Letter to the DLHA

MEMORANDUM

TO: Linda Mann, Editor

FROM: Amy Smith

RE: Deer Lake Water Level Investigation

As requested, I have dropped my investigation into the Deer Lake water level/Army base cleanup connection. Unfortunately, the chair of the DLHA told members I was investigating the issue and writing a story on it.

Attached is a copy of the letter I wrote to the DLHA members. It should effectively detach me, and thus the paper, from any perception of conflict of interest. I provided the members with your name as the contact person should they acquire any new information.

Linda, I am truly sorry that one of my first investigations could tarnish the ethical image of the paper. I apologize for not using enough foresight to anticipate this turn of events. If you wish to discuss the matter further, please contact me.

FIGURE 1.5 Amy's Memo to Her Editor**Exercises for Classroom Discussion**

1. Write a memo to your instructor, evaluating the effectiveness of Amy's scenario solution documents. Discuss what you would have done differently and why.
2. Write your own solution defense to the Disappearing Lake Scenario.
3. Write your own documents for the scenario.
4. Assume that Linda is unhappy with how you handled this matter. She wants you to write to Colonel Firestein to make sure he understands the paper's position on this issue. Write that document.
5. You decide to write a personal letter to Don, thinking that might help your status as neighbors. Write that document.

Now that you have evaluated one person's response to a scenario, you need to begin this critical thinking process. In Chapter 2, you will learn about the most common types of workplace communication—memorandums and letters. After you've mastered the format and content requirements for these types of documents, you will put them to use in one or more scenarios.

Until you become accustomed to working through scenarios, refer back to this chapter for assistance on forming your Solution Defense.