

### **Instructional Unit Module 3**

#### **Lesson: “Bottom Line Up Front” Report Writing**

Cindy Richard

Department of Teaching and Learning, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

EDTC 6321: Instructional Design

Dr. Maria Elena Corbeil

May 29, 2025

## Introduction

This document contains (1) an overview of the **instructional strategy** for the “Bottom Line Up Front” Report Writing Instructional Unit, (2) an explanation of **media selections and delivery system**, and (3) the **first draft materials** needed to finish developing the unit. The lesson itself encompasses nine steps, which are referenced throughout this document and are arranged sequentially in the First Draft Materials section. Please note: **Student-facing materials are highlighted.** All other documentation is intended for the design and production team.

## Instructional Goal

Learners will implement the writing strategy known as “Bottom Line Up Front,” or BLUF, thereby shifting their approach to report writing from an inductive to a deductive presentation of information.

## Instructional Strategy

<b>Pre-Instructional Activity</b>	<b>Step 1.</b> Introductory video, approx. 2 minutes. No demo available. Storyboard description included in First Draft Materials. Purposes of video: Gain attention, motivate learners, recall prerequisite skills, preview objectives.
<b>Content Presentation</b>	<p><b>Step 2.</b> Video explaining BLUF, 4.5 minutes. Demo available in First Draft Materials.</p> <p><b>Step 4.</b> Google Slides comparing alternative report openings – one non-example and one BLUF-aligned example. Student-facing slides are drafted. Design team should add interactive, pop up text where indicated.</p> <p><b>Step 7.</b> Single-page handout/ digital flyer. Checklist for organizing the body of the report following the BLUF-aligned opening. Student-facing pdf is in the First Draft Materials.</p>
<b>Learner Participation</b>	<b>Step 4.</b> (Note: Step 4 is also Content Presentation, described above. Adding interactive text to the slides will engage learner participation.)

	<p><b>Step 5.</b> (Note: Step 5 is also formative assessment, described below. It provides a practice opportunity and immediate feedback as the learner submits a Google Form.)</p> <p><b>Step 6:</b> (Note: Step 6 is a writing activity that provides practice composing a BLUF opening for a report. It also serves as a summative assessment and is described below.)</p>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p><b>Step 3.</b> Comprehension Check to demonstrate understanding of key concepts in the content video. Student-facing Google Form and answer key are in First Draft Materials. Meets Performance Objective #1.</p> <p><b>Step 5:</b> Comprehension Check to demonstrate understanding of a BLUF-aligned report opening. Learner must compare alternative report openings for two hypothetical engineering scenarios and select the BLUF opening for each. Student-facing Google Form and answer key are in the First Draft Materials. Meets Performance Objective #2.</p> <p><b>Step 6:</b> Writing assignment/ summative assessment. Given a new hypothetical engineering scenario, the learner must compose a BLUF-aligned report opening. Student-facing Google Doc and grading rubric are in the First Draft Materials. Meets Performance Objective #3.</p>
<b>Follow-Through Activities</b>	<p><b>Step 7.</b> (Note: Step 7 is also Content Presentation and is described above. After the learner has demonstrated how to compose a BLUF-aligned report opening, the takeaway checklist of pointers for organizing the body of the report will assist learners in applying new knowledge and skills to their report-writing in the workplace.) Meets Performance Objective #4.</p> <p><b>Step 8.</b> Closing video, approx. 1.5 minutes. No demo available. Storyboard description included in First Draft Materials. Purposes of video: Provides closure and symmetry from the introductory video, reviews concepts learned, motivates learners to apply their new report-writing skills in the workplace.</p>

## Media Selections and Delivery System

Type of Media	Lesson Steps	Justification
Mp4 video files	1, 2, 9	Mp4 files are standard for videos – easy to upload into any LMS and playable on learners' devices.
Google Forms	3, 5, 8	Google Forms are easy to submit for quick assessments and have flexible settings that can optionally record learners' emails, offer learners automatic feedback, and allow learners to edit their responses or submit more than once. Posting a Google Form as an assignment in G-Classroom allows the scores to populate automatically, which is helpful if an instructor is tracking and recording learners' scores.
Google Slides	4	A slide deck is a visually appealing way to chunk content and avoid cognitive overload. Note: the design team may want to convert or copy the slides into a different app to facilitate adding interactive pop-up text, as indicated in the First Draft Materials.
Google Doc	6	Detailing the writing assignment on a Google Doc facilitates learners submitting work and receiving feedback digitally.
Pdf document file	7	Pdfs are a standard file type – easy to upload into any LMS and viewable on learners' devices.

**Delivery System:** Google Classroom would be the default, as I've primarily used Google education apps to create the lesson materials. An instructor could efficiently post all lesson components to a unit in G-Classroom, syncing the Google Form scores for ease of recording and allowing learners to submit the writing assignment and view feedback digitally. However, G-Classroom is primarily used in K12 education and is unlikely to be the LMS of choice in a professional setting. The materials could be uploaded to Canvas or other preferred LMS prior to the implementation phase.

## First Draft Materials

Lesson Steps 1-9 included.

Student-facing materials are highlighted.

Step 1: Introductory Video
----------------------------

Storyboards/ Design Notes:

- Video duration approx. two minutes.
- Begin with approx. three brief clips from TV shows or movies in which an over-explaining character (such as a scientist or engineer) is cut off by another character (such as superior officer or executive) who wants the bottom line. Examples: (1) A Star Trek captain interrupting a long-winded explanation from an officer, such as Picard/Data or Sisko/O'Brien; (2) General Hammond or Jack O'Neill in Stargate SG-1 interrupting someone and asking for the bottom line; (3) Weir or Sheppard in Stargate Atlantis telling McKay to get to the point. There are many other examples across genres, but sci fi examples will work well as a lead in for our topic. Editing the clips together in quick succession will begin the lesson with a humorous attention-getter while inviting learners to notice the pattern.
- Transition from the clips to an in-house talking head or an animated figure with voice-over. Add motion text and graphics to hold the viewers' attention.

Narration:

"Hey, what's the deal? Why are these smart characters always getting interrupted mid-explanation? For dramatic effect, sure, but also because decisions have to be made, and the people *making* the decisions want to know the bottom line. Yeah, yeah, the scientist-types went through a whole process to arrive at their recommendations, but the decision-makers are often under too much pressure for the details and want their colleagues to get to the point right away.

“While the clips were from fictional shows, the same principle holds true in the workplace. As an engineer, *you* might relate to the scientist characters who were being prompted for the bottom line.

“Today you’re going to learn how to organize your report-writing in the style that supervisors and project managers want to see from the engineers on their teams.

“Is this really necessary? You’re already writing reports on a regular basis, and before you were hired, you did your fair share of academic writing. You *know* you’re good at explaining your process logically, step by step, with plenty of detail. But believe it or not, that’s *not* what your manager wants. Fortunately, it’s easy to make the shift to the writing style they *DO* want... Easy to impress them not *only* with your problem-solving process, but with your professionalism and communication skills, every time.

“In the next 30 minutes, you’ll learn how to write a report introduction in the style known as *Bottom Line Up Front*. The right kind of opening will set the tone for the body of the report, and the rest is just follow-through.

“Ready?”

Step 2: Content Video
-----------------------

**Demo video** (4.5 minutes) – [Click here to watch](#).

Key information communicated in the video:

- BLUF is for individuals who are thorough, detailed, have a lot of information to share, highly analytical, inquisitive, curious – and they have a tendency or need to share all of that information when communicating with an audience or executive. Oversharing can lose your audience or risk talking over their heads.
- BLUF allows you to quickly get the attention of a busy executive.
- Put your action statement, your premise, your answer right up front, supported by a couple of ideas, and indicate that you have more details if needed.
- BLUF originated as a military communications principle designed to enforce speed and clarity in delivering reports and emails.
- BLUF goes by other names, including top-down communication and the pyramid principle.

- BLUF is “a style of communication that prioritizes results and outcomes over the process and the steps you took to get there.”
- BLUF features prominently a “what” and “so what.”
- Employers have consistently rated effective communication as the #1 soft skill they look for in their employees.
- When a colleague provides you with the exact information you need with just enough background to act upon, and leaves out the fluff, it shows that they are respectful of your time.

#### Design Notes:

- The excerpted YouTube videos and Wikipedia article screenshots are credited in the References section at the end of this document. Use these YouTube excerpts in the final product if we can obtain permission; otherwise we'll need to draft replacement segments with in-house talking heads discussing similar information.
- Recommend adding closed captions.
- Add motion text where there are still slides in the demo.
- Add simple animation for the closing message.
- Improve the graphic overlays and transitions between segments.
- Replace my demo narration with a voice actor and edit/mix the audio.
- Background music not recommended if we're using the YouTube clips.

Step 3: Comprehension Check
-----------------------------

**Quiz** – [Click here to try it.](#)

#### Answer Key:

1. BLUF is for individuals who are thorough, detailed, highly analytical, inquisitive – and they have a tendency or need to share a lot of information when communicating with an audience or executive. The **problem** with oversharing details, though, is that:

(Select all that apply.)

Answer: Oversharing can lose your audience's attention.

(and) Oversharing risks talking over their heads.

2. True or False: BLUF allows you to quickly get the attention of a busy executive.

Answer: True

3. Which of the following report elements does NOT belong up front?

Answer: The background details of what led you to the solution

4. In what sector did the Bottom Line Up Front strategy originate?

Answer: Military

5. BLUF originated as a communications principle designed to \_\_\_\_\_.

Answer: enforce speed and clarity in delivering reports and emails.

6. BLUF also goes by other names, such as \_\_\_\_\_.

(Select all that apply.)

Answer: Top-down communication

(and) Pyramid principle

7. True or False: BLUF is “a style of communication that prioritizes results and outcomes over the process and the steps you took to get there.”

Answer: True

8. BLUF features prominently \_\_\_\_\_.

Answer: a "what" and "so what."

9. Employers have consistently rated \_\_\_\_\_ as the #1 soft skill they look for in their employees.

Answer: effective communication

10. When a colleague provides you with the exact information you need with just enough background to act upon, and leaves out the fluff, it shows that they are \_\_\_\_\_.

Answer: respectful of your time.

#### Step 4: Content Slides

**Demo slides** – [Click here to view](#).

#### Design Notes:

- Make the presentation interactive with click-to-reveal pop up text. Pop up elements are shown as blue text boxes in the demo.



## Step 5: Comprehension Check

**Quiz** – [Click here to try it.](#)

Answer Key:

Which of the following report openings for Scenario 1 best models the BLUF style?

Answer: The inconsistent sensor data was caused by electromagnetic interference from unshielded power cables running parallel to the sensor lines. Shielding the power cables and rerouting them perpendicular to sensor lines resolved the issue entirely. This report provides signal strength logs, interference zone mapping, and wiring layout diagrams to support the findings and proposed cable revisions.

Which of the following report openings for Scenario 2 best models the BLUF style?

Answer: The battery drain was caused by continuous GPS polling during idle mode. Disabling background location tracking reduced power usage by 38% during standby. This report includes battery profiling data, code snippets from the updated firmware, and test results comparing previous and current power consumption levels.

How did you identify the BLUF report opening for Scenario 2?

Answer: The BLUF opening clearly states GPS polling as the root cause and describes the fix immediately.

## Step 6: Writing Assignment

**Assignment** – [Click here to view.](#)

Grading Rubric for Instructor or Scorer:

Criteria	Points	Description
<b>1. Clear Statement of Root Cause</b>	25%	States the design flaw (gusset geometry) as the cause of failure in the opening sentence.

<b>2. Concise Description of the Solution</b>	25%	Clearly identifies the revised gusset design as the fix and confirms it resolved the issue.
<b>3. Inclusion of 3 Key Supporting Details</b>	20%	Selects and briefly mentions 3 relevant elements to include later in the report (e.g., test results, CAD diagrams, analyst validation).
<b>4. Organization &amp; Style</b>	15%	Paragraph uses the BLUF structure (conclusion first), is logically sequenced, and avoids unnecessary background or fluff.
<b>5. Clarity, Grammar, and Mechanics</b>	15%	Writing is free of grammar or punctuation errors; tone is professional and precise.

SAMPLE REPORT OPENING (Learner writing will vary.)

**The premature deformation was caused by a design flaw in the gusset that created a stress concentration point.** Revising the gusset with a thicker web and smoother transitions eliminated the issue, and the updated component passed all load tests under expected stress conditions. This report includes side-by-side stress plot comparisons, CAD diagrams of both designs, and validation notes from the structural analyst confirming the revised part meets performance standards.

Step 7: Content Handout
-------------------------

Handout/ digital flyer – [Click here to view.](#)

Step 8: Extending the Lesson
------------------------------

Google Form activity/ quiz – [Click here to try it.](#)

Answer Key:

Which of the alternative outlines above models the best organization for the body of the report following your BLUF opening?

Answer: Outline B

Step 9: Closure Video
-----------------------

### Storyboards/ Design Notes:

- One minute closure video that mirrors the attention-getter video from Step 1.
- Bring the talking head or animated figure back in with similar motion text and graphics.

#### Narration:

“Excellent work! You’ve learned how to begin a report with the Bottom Line Up Front – clearly stating the solution to the problem, your recommendations moving forward, and a brief preview of the elements contained in the rest of the report.

“You also have a checklist for organizing the body of the report in a concise, summative way that delivers the important elements previewed in the introduction and avoids unnecessary fluff.

“Your audience will appreciate the clarity and your respect for their time. Your boss already knows you’re a great problem-solver. It never hurts to be a top-notch communicator, too!”

- Try to end with a brief continuation of the same sci fi TV clips used in Step 1. Ideally, you want to repeat the commanding officer’s line demanding the bottom line, continue through the scientist-type character delivering the bottom line, and the commanding officer thanking them, looking relieved, or immediately acting on the recommendation. You’re going for symmetry, closure, and an amusing finish.

### References

- Allyson, M. (n.d.). Leadership and Military Writing. *Military Review*, 101(1), 121–128.  
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2491992549?sourcetype=Trade%20Journals>
- BLUF. (2018). TheFreeDictionary.com. <https://acronyms.thefreedictionary.com/BLUF>
- BLUF (*communication*). (2024, January 15). Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BLUF\\_\(communication\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BLUF_(communication))
- BLUF: *The Military Standard That Can Make Your Writing More Powerful*. (2019, September 9). Animalz. <https://www.animalz.co/blog/bottom-line-up-front/>
- Brusaw, C. T., Oliu, W. E., & Alred, G. J. (1997). *The business writer’s handbook*. St. Martin’s Press.

- Eight Essential Writing Skills For Techies\**. (2024). Archive.org.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20080620124344/http://www.ewriteonline.com/ht/display/ArticleDetails/i/1439/pid/1016>
- Giombetti Associates. (2020, December 23). *Ross explains: BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)*. YouTube.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdDX7PJ1Q2c&list=PL8D\\_LT-P3\\_VyoNfl\\_1cmEJZ8-dZXbulU9&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdDX7PJ1Q2c&list=PL8D_LT-P3_VyoNfl_1cmEJZ8-dZXbulU9&index=3)
- Jeff Su. (2021, May 25). *The 1 Tip to Improve Your Communication Skills at Work*. YouTube.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bZGi3yz4qg&list=PL8D\\_LT-P3\\_VyoNfl\\_1cmEJZ8-dZXbulU9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bZGi3yz4qg&list=PL8D_LT-P3_VyoNfl_1cmEJZ8-dZXbulU9)
- Karangiya, S. (2025, May 10). *Feedback communicated via email* [Letter to Cindy Richard].
- LEADERS Professional Recruiting - Interview Preparation*. (2025). Archive.org.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20080420182541/http://leadersinc.com/default2.asp?active\\_page\\_id=920](https://web.archive.org/web/20080420182541/http://leadersinc.com/default2.asp?active_page_id=920)
- OpenAI. (2025, May 28). *Conversation with ChatGPT [Large language model]*.  
<https://chat.openai.com/>
- Reddit - The heart of the internet*. (2023). Reddit.com.  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/civilengineering/comments/141xg1y/engineers\\_with\\_po\\_or\\_technical\\_writing\\_skills/](https://www.reddit.com/r/civilengineering/comments/141xg1y/engineers_with_po_or_technical_writing_skills/)
- Richard, L. (2025, May 7). *Interview: Performance Gap Witnessed Among Engineers* (C. Richard, Interviewer) [Personal communication].
- Sehgal, K. (2016, November 22). *How to Write Email with Military Precision*. Harvard Business Review.  
<https://hbr.org/2016/11/how-to-write-email-with-military-precision>
- Ström, M. (2020, May). *Bottom Line Up Front*. @Ilikescience.  
<https://matthewstrom.com/writing/bluf/>
- The Persimmon Group. (2019, September 26). *BLUF: The Four Letters That Transform Executive Communication*. The Persimmon Group.  
<https://thepersimmongroup.com/bluf-how-these-4-letters-simplify-communication/>