

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION FOR SUCCESS



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Business Communication for Success

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

About this Book

1: Effective Business Communication

- 1.1: Why Is It Important to Communicate Well?
- 1.2: What Is Communication?
- 1.3: Communication in Context
- 1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator
- 1.5: Additional Resources

2: Delivering Your Message

- 2.1: What is Language?
- 2.2: Messages
- 2.3: Principles of Verbal Communication
- 2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication
- 2.5: Emphasis Strategies
- 2.6: Improving Verbal Communication
- 2.7: Additional Resources

3: Understanding Your Audience

- 3.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication
- 3.2: Perception
- 3.3: Differences in Perception
- 3.4: Getting to Know Your Audience
- 3.5: Listening and Reading for Understanding
- 3.6: Additional Resources

4: Effective Business Writing

- 4.1: Oral versus Written Communication
- 4.2: How Is Writing Learned?
- 4.3: Good Writing
- 4.4: Style in Written Communication
- 4.5: Principles of Written Communication
- 4.6: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Written Communication
- 4.7: Additional Resources

5: Writing Preparation

- 5.1: Think, Then Write - Writing Preparation
- 5.2: A Planning Checklist for Business Messages
- 5.3: Research and Investigation - Getting Started
- 5.4: Ethics, Plagiarism, and Reliable Sources
- 5.5: Completing Your Research and Investigation
- 5.6: Reading and Analyzing
- 5.7: Additional Resources

6: Writing

- 6.1: Organization
- 6.2: Writing Style
- 6.3: Making an Argument
- 6.4: Paraphrase and Summary versus Plagiarism
- 6.5: Additional Resources

7: Revising and Presenting Your Writing

- 7.1: General Revision Points to Consider
- 7.2: Specific Revision Points to Consider
- 7.3: Style Revisions
- 7.4: Evaluating the Work of Others
- 7.5: Proofreading and Design Evaluation
- 7.6: Additional Resources

8: Feedback in the Writing Process

- 8.1: Diverse Forms of Feedback
- 8.2: Qualitative and Quantitative Research
- 8.3: Feedback as an Opportunity
- 8.4: Additional Resources

9: Business Writing in Action

- 9.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette
- 9.2: Memorandums and Letters
- 9.3: Business Proposal
- 9.4: Report
- 9.5: Résumé
- 9.6: Sales Message
- 9.7: Additional Resources

10: Developing Business Presentations

- 10.1: Before You Choose a Topic
- 10.2: Choosing a Topic
- 10.3: Finding Resources
- 10.4: Myths and Realities of Public Speaking
- 10.5: Overcoming Obstacles in Your Presentation
- 10.6: Additional Resources

11: Nonverbal Delivery

- 11.1: Principles of Nonverbal Communication
- 11.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication
- 11.3: Movement in Your Speech
- 11.4: Visual Aids
- 11.5: Nonverbal Strategies for Success with Your Audience
- 11.6: Additional Resources

12: Organization and Outlines

- 12.1: Rhetorical Situation
- 12.2: Strategies for Success
- 12.3: Building a Sample Speech
- 12.4: Sample Speech Outlines
- 12.5: Organizing Principles for Your Speech
- 12.6: Transitions
- 12.7: Additional Resources

13: Presentations to Inform

- 13.1: Functions of the Presentation to Inform
- 13.2: Types of Presentations to Inform
- 13.3: Adapting Your Presentation to Teach
- 13.4: Diverse Types of Intelligence and Learning Styles
- 13.5: Preparing Your Speech to Inform
- 13.6: Creating an Informative Presentation
- 13.7: Additional Resources

14: Presentations to Persuade

- 14.1: What Is Persuasion?
- 14.2: Principles of Persuasion
- 14.3: Functions of the Presentation to Persuade
- 14.4: Meeting the Listener's Basic Needs
- 14.5: Making an Argument
- 14.6: Speaking Ethically and Avoiding Fallacies
- 14.7: Sample Persuasive Speech
- 14.8: Elevator Speech
- 14.9: Additional Resources

15: Business Presentations in Action

- 15.1: Sound Bites and Quotables
- 15.2: Telephone/VoIP Communication
- 15.3: Meetings
- 15.4: Celebrations - Toasts and Roasts
- 15.5: Media Interviews
- 15.6: Introducing a Speaker
- 15.7: Presenting or Accepting an Award
- 15.8: Serving as Master of Ceremonies
- 15.9: Viral Messages
- 15.10: Additional Resources

16: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Business Communication

- 16.1: Intrapersonal Communication
- 16.2: Self-Concept and Dimensions of Self
- 16.3: Interpersonal Needs
- 16.4: Social Penetration Theory
- 16.5: Rituals of Conversation and Interviews
- 16.6: Conflict in the Work Environment
- 16.7: Additional Resources

17: Negative News and Crisis Communication

- 17.1: Delivering a Negative News Message
- 17.2: Eliciting Negative News
- 17.3: Crisis Communication Plan
- 17.4: Press Conferences
- 17.5: Additional Resources

18: Intercultural and International Business Communication

- 18.1: Intercultural Communication
- 18.2: How to Understand Intercultural Communication
- 18.3: Common Cultural Characteristics
- 18.4: Divergent Cultural Characteristics
- 18.5: International Communication and the Global Marketplace
- 18.6: Styles of Management
- 18.7: The International Assignment
- 18.8: Additional Resources

19: Group Communication, Teamwork, and Leadership

- 19.1: What is a Group?
- 19.2: Group Life Cycles and Member Roles
- 19.3: Group Problem Solving
- 19.4: Business and Professional Meetings
- 19.5: Teamwork and Leadership
- 19.6: Additional Resources

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).

About this Book

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Text History

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This adaptation has reformatted the original text, and replaced some images and figures to make the resulting whole more shareable. This adaptation has not significantly altered or updated the original 2010 text. The text was integrated into the LibreTexts platform in 2019 and topically edited.

Text Details

Business Communication for Success (BCS) provides a comprehensive, integrated approach to the study and application of written and oral business communication to serve both student and professor.

This series features chapters with the following elements:

- Learning Objectives
- Introductory Exercises
- Clear expectations, relevant background, and important theories
- Practical, real-world examples
- Key Takeaways or quick internal summaries
- Key terms that are easily identified
- In-chapter assignments
- Postchapter assessments linked to objectives and skills acquisition

Each chapter is self-contained, allowing for mix-and-match flexibility and custom or course-specific design. Each chapter focuses on clear objectives and skill demonstrations that can be easily linked to your syllabus and state or federal requirements. Supported by internal and external assessments, each chapter features time-saving and learning-enhancement support for instructors and students.

BCS is designed to help students identify important information, reinforce for retention, and demonstrate mastery with a clear outcome product.

The text has three content categories:

1. Foundations
2. Process and products
3. Contexts

The first three chapters form the core foundation for the study of oral and written business communication. The next sequence of chapters focus on the process of writing, then oral performance with an emphasis on results. The final sequence focuses on contexts where business communication occurs, from interpersonal to intercultural, from groups to leadership.

In each of the process and product chapter sequences, the chapters follow a natural flow, from prewriting to revision, from preparation for a presentation to performance. Each sequence comes together in a concluding chapter that focuses on action—where we apply the skills and techniques of written or oral communication in business, from writing a letter to presenting a sales speech. These performances not only serve to reinforce real-world applications but also may serve as course assessments.

This text has been used in classes at: Ohio University, Miami University – Oxford, Kent State University – Salem Campus, Cuyahoga Community College – West, University of Toledo, Cuyahoga Community College – District, Northern Arizona University, Gateway Community College, University of Arizona, Arizona Western College, Boise State University, Western Governors University, Doane College, Mcpherson College, University of Nebraska Med Center, Suny Fredonia, State University of New York Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome, Trinidad State Junior College, University of Delaware, Brenau University,

Brewton-Parker College, Loras College, Kapiolani Community College, Muscatine Community College, Greenville College, University of Illinois – Chicago, Millikin University, Rockland Community College, Cornell University, National-Louis University – Lisle, St. Gregory's University, University of Southern Indiana, Missouri State University – W Plains, Bucks County Community College – Newton, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Pulaski Technical College, Temple University, Dixie State College of Utah, Averett University, Virginia Polytech Institute, Fond Du Lac Tribal Community College, Lipscomb University, Edgewood College, University of Wisconsin – Stout, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Virginia State University, North Georgia Technical College – Blairsville, Paradise Valley Community College, Fordham University – Lincoln Center, New England College of Business/Finance, Eastern New Mexico University, University of Alabama, Albertus Magnus College, Pepperdine University, Fullerton College, Santa Ana College, Miracosta College – Oceanside, San Jose State University, De Anza College, University of The Southwest, Florida Institute of Technology, Florida State University, Dean College, California State University, University of Massachusetts, Suffolk University, Stevenson University, Worcester State College, University of Maryland, Clover Park Technical College, Minnesota State University – Moorhead, College of St. Scholastica, Ferris State University, Concordia University, Southern New Hampshire University, Lower Columbia College, University of North Carolina – Greensboro, Rockingham Community College, Stanly Community College, Wayland Baptist University, Bunker Hill Community College, Salve Regina University, University of The Incarnate Word, St. Mary's University, University of Rhode Island, Texarkana College, Renton Technical College, Tarleton State University, Wayland Baptist University – Plainview, University of Houston, Stephen F. Austin State University, Bates Technical College, Chabot College, Bakersfield College, Azusa Pacific University, University of Houston – Downtown, California Southern University, Miracosta College, American Public University, American Public University System, Huntington Junior College, Flat World Knowledge University, Jackson Senior High School, Holmes High School, Dlielc, Clintondale High School, American University in Kosovo in Conjunction with Rochester Institute of Technology, Southeast Lauderdale High School, Benedict Business Hotel Management School, University of the People, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, New England School of English, Comsats Institute of Information Technology, Wayland Baptist University – Anchorage, Volcano Vista High School, Wayland Baptist University – San Antonio, Morrill High School, North Island College – B Campus, Seneca College, APOU, University of North Carolina – Greensboro, Southern New Hampshire University, University of Maryland University College, Harrisburg High School

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Effective Business Communication

Communication is key to your success—in relationships, in the workplace, as a citizen of your country, and across your lifetime. Your ability to communicate comes from experience, and experience can be an effective teacher, but this text and the related business communication course will offer you a wealth of experiences gathered from professional speakers across their lifetimes. You can learn from the lessons they've learned and be a more effective communicator right out of the gate.

Business communication can be thought of as a problem solving activity in which individuals may address the following questions:

- What is the situation?
- What are some possible communication strategies?
- What is the best course of action?
- What is the best way to design the chosen message?
- What is the best way to deliver the message?

In this book, we will examine this problem solving process and help you learn to apply it in the kinds of situations you are likely to encounter over the course of your career.

[1.1: Why Is It Important to Communicate Well?](#)

[1.2: What Is Communication?](#)

[1.3: Communication in Context](#)

[1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator](#)

[1.5: Additional Resources](#)

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1.1: Why Is It Important to Communicate Well?

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the importance of communication in gaining a better understanding of yourself and others.
- Explain how communication skills help you solve problems, learn new things, and build your career.

Communication Influences Your Thinking about Yourself and Others

We all share a fundamental drive to communicate. Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). You share meaning in what you say and how you say it, both in oral and written forms. If you could not communicate, what would life be like? A series of never-ending frustrations? Not being able to ask for what you need or even to understand the needs of others?

Being unable to communicate might even mean losing a part of yourself, for you communicate your self-concept—your sense of self and awareness of who you are—in many ways. Do you like to write? Do you find it easy to make a phone call to a stranger or to speak to a room full of people? Perhaps someone told you that you don't speak clearly or your grammar needs improvement. Does that make you more or less likely to want to communicate? For some, it may be a positive challenge, while for others it may be discouraging. But in all cases, your ability to communicate is central to your self-concept.

Take a look at your clothes. What are the brands you are wearing? What do you think they say about you? Do you feel that certain styles of shoes, jewelry, tattoos, music, or even automobiles express who you are? Part of your self-concept may be that you express yourself through texting, or through writing longer documents like essays and research papers, or through the way you speak.

On the other side of the coin, your communications skills help you to understand others—not just their words, but also their tone of voice, their nonverbal gestures, or the format of their written documents provide you with clues about who they are and what their values and priorities may be. Active listening and reading are also part of being a successful communicator.

Communication Influences How You Learn

When you were an infant, you learned to talk over a period of many months. When you got older, you didn't learn to ride a bike, drive a car, or even text a message on your cell phone in one brief moment. You need to begin the process of improving your speaking and writing with the frame of mind that it will require effort, persistence, and self-correction.

You learn to speak in public by first having conversations, then by answering questions and expressing your opinions in class, and finally by preparing and delivering a “stand-up” speech. Similarly, you learn to write by first learning to read, then by writing and learning to think critically. Your speaking and writing are reflections of your thoughts, experience, and education. Part of that combination is your level of experience listening to other speakers, reading documents and styles of writing, and studying formats similar to what you aim to produce.

As you study business communication, you may receive suggestions for improvement and clarification from speakers and writers more experienced than yourself. Take their suggestions as challenges to improve; don't give up when your first speech or first draft does not communicate the message you intend. Stick with it until you get it right. Your success in communicating is a skill that applies to almost every field of work, and it makes a difference in your relationships with others.

Remember, luck is simply a combination of preparation and timing. You want to be prepared to communicate well when given the opportunity. Each time you do a good job, your success will bring more success.

Communication Represents You and Your Employer

You want to make a good first impression on your friends and family, instructors, and employer. They all want you to convey a positive image, as it reflects on them. In your career, you will represent your business or company in spoken and written form. Your professionalism and attention to detail will reflect positively on you and set you up for success.

In both oral and written situations, you will benefit from having the ability to communicate clearly. These are skills you will use for the rest of your life. Positive improvements in these skills will have a positive impact on your relationships, your prospects for employment, and your ability to make a difference in the world.

Communication Skills Are Desired by Business and Industry

Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. In fact, high-powered business executives sometimes hire consultants to coach them in sharpening their communication skills. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the following are the top five personal qualities or skills potential employers seek:

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication)
4. Initiative
5. Analytical skills

Knowing this, you can see that one way for you to be successful and increase your promotion potential is to increase your abilities to speak and write effectively.



Figure 1.1.1: Effective communication skills are assets that will get you there. Maryland GovPics – Baltimore Jewish Council Meeting – CC BY 2.0.

In September 2004, the National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges published a study on 120 human resource directors titled *Writing: A Ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out, A Survey of Business Leaders*. The study found that “writing is both a ‘marker’ of high-skill, high-wage, professional work and a ‘gatekeeper’ with clear equity implications,” said Bob Kerrey, president of New School University in New York and chair of the commission. “People unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment.” (The College Board, 2004)

On the other end of the spectrum, it is estimated that over forty million Americans are illiterate, or unable to functionally read or write. If you are reading this book, you may not be part of an at-risk group in need of basic skill development, but you still may need additional training and practice as you raise your skill level.

An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to express yourself professionally in speech and in writing will help you get there.

Key Takeaway

Communication forms a part of your self-concept, and it helps you understand yourself and others, solve problems and learn new things, and build your career.

Exercises

1. Imagine that you have been hired to make “cold calls” to ask people whether they are familiar with a new restaurant that has just opened in your neighborhood. Write a script for the phone call. Ask a classmate to copresent as you deliver the script orally in class, as if you were making a phone call to the classmate. Discuss your experience with the rest of the class.
2. Imagine you have been assigned the task of creating a job description. Identify a job, locate at least two sample job descriptions, and create one. Please present the job description to the class and note to what degree communication skills play a role in the tasks or duties you have included.

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1.2: What Is Communication?

Learning Objectives

- Define communication and describe communication as a process.
- Identify and describe the eight essential components of communication.
- Identify and describe two models of communication.

Many theories have been proposed to describe, predict, and understand the behaviors and phenomena of which communication consists. When it comes to communicating in business, we are often less interested in theory than in making sure our communications generate the desired results. But in order to achieve results, it can be valuable to understand what communication is and how it works.

Defining Communication

The root of the word “communication” in Latin is *communicare*, which means to share, or to make common (Weekley, 1967). Communication is defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

At the center of our study of communication is the relationship that involves interaction between participants. This definition serves us well with its emphasis on the process, which we’ll examine in depth across this text, of coming to understand and share another’s point of view effectively.

The first key word in this definition is process. A process is a dynamic activity that is hard to describe because it changes (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). Imagine you are alone in your kitchen thinking. Someone you know (say, your mother) enters the kitchen and you talk briefly. What has changed? Now, imagine that your mother is joined by someone else, someone you haven’t met before—and this stranger listens intently as you speak, almost as if you were giving a speech. What has changed? Your perspective might change, and you might watch your words more closely. The feedback or response from your mother and the stranger (who are, in essence, your audience) may cause you to reevaluate what you are saying. When we interact, all these factors—and many more—influence the process of communication.

The second key word is understanding: “To understand is to perceive, to interpret, and to relate our perception and interpretation to what we already know.” (McLean, 2003) If a friend tells you a story about falling off a bike, what image comes to mind? Now your friend points out the window and you see a motorcycle lying on the ground. Understanding the words and the concepts or objects they refer to is an important part of the communication process.

Next comes the word sharing. Sharing means doing something together with one or more people. You may share a joint activity, as when you share in compiling a report; or you may benefit jointly from a resource, as when you and several coworkers share a pizza. In communication, sharing occurs when you convey thoughts, feelings, ideas, or insights to others. You can also share with yourself (a process called intrapersonal communication) when you bring ideas to consciousness, ponder how you feel about something, or figure out the solution to a problem and have a classic “Aha!” moment when something becomes clear.

Finally, meaning is what we share through communication. The word “bike” represents both a bicycle and a short name for a motorcycle. By looking at the context the word is used in and by asking questions, we can discover the shared meaning of the word and understand the message.

Eight Essential Components of Communication

In order to better understand the communication process, we can break it down into a series of eight essential components:

1. Source
2. Message
3. Channel
4. Receiver
5. Feedback
6. Environment
7. Context
8. Interference

Each of these eight components serves an integral function in the overall process. Let's explore them one by one.

Source

The source imagines, creates, and sends the message. In a public speaking situation, the source is the person giving the speech. He or she conveys the message by sharing new information with the audience. The speaker also conveys a message through his or her tone of voice, body language, and choice of clothing. The speaker begins by first determining the message—what to say and how to say it. The second step involves encoding the message by choosing just the right order or the perfect words to convey the intended meaning. The third step is to present or send the information to the receiver or audience. Finally, by watching for the audience's reaction, the source perceives how well they received the message and responds with clarification or supporting information.

Message

“The message is the stimulus or meaning produced by the source for the receiver or audience.” (McLean, 2005) When you plan to give a speech or write a report, your message may seem to be only the words you choose that will convey your meaning. But that is just the beginning. The words are brought together with grammar and organization. You may choose to save your most important point for last. The message also consists of the way you say it—in a speech, with your tone of voice, your body language, and your appearance—and in a report, with your writing style, punctuation, and the headings and formatting you choose. In addition, part of the message may be the environment or context you present it in and the noise that might make your message hard to hear or see.

Imagine, for example, that you are addressing a large audience of sales reps and are aware there is a World Series game tonight. Your audience might have a hard time settling down, but you may choose to open with, “I understand there is an important game tonight.” In this way, by expressing verbally something that most people in your audience are aware of and interested in, you might grasp and focus their attention.

Channel

“The channel is the way in which a message or messages travel between source and receiver.” (McLean, 2005) For example, think of your television. How many channels do you have on your television? Each channel takes up some space, even in a digital world, in the cable or in the signal that brings the message of each channel to your home. Television combines an audio signal you hear with a visual signal you see. Together they convey the message to the receiver or audience. Turn off the volume on your television. Can you still understand what is happening? Many times you can, because the body language conveys part of the message of the show. Now turn up the volume but turn around so that you cannot see the television. You can still hear the dialogue and follow the story line.

Similarly, when you speak or write, you are using a channel to convey your message. Spoken channels include face-to-face conversations, speeches, telephone conversations and voice mail messages, radio, public address systems, and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP). Written channels include letters, memorandums, purchase orders, invoices, newspaper and magazine articles, blogs, e-mail, text messages, tweets, and so forth.

Receiver

“The receiver receives the message from the source, analyzing and interpreting the message in ways both intended and unintended by the source.” (McLean, 2005) To better understand this component, think of a receiver on a football team. The quarterback throws the football (message) to a receiver, who must see and interpret where to catch the ball. The quarterback may intend for the receiver to “catch” his message in one way, but the receiver may see things differently and miss the football (the intended meaning) altogether.

As a receiver you listen, see, touch, smell, and/or taste to receive a message. Your audience “sizes you up,” much as you might check them out long before you take the stage or open your mouth. The nonverbal responses of your listeners can serve as clues on how to adjust your opening. By imagining yourself in their place, you anticipate what you would look for if you were them. Just as a quarterback plans where the receiver will be in order to place the ball correctly, you too can recognize the interaction between source and receiver in a business communication context. All of this happens at the same time, illustrating why and how communication is always changing.

Feedback

When you respond to the source, intentionally or unintentionally, you are giving feedback. Feedback is composed of messages the receiver sends back to the source. Verbal or nonverbal, all these feedback signals allow the source to see how well, how accurately (or how poorly and inaccurately) the message was received. Feedback also provides an opportunity for the receiver or audience to ask for clarification, to agree or disagree, or to indicate that the source could make the message more interesting. As the amount of feedback increases, the accuracy of communication also increases (Leavitt & Mueller, 1951).

For example, suppose you are a sales manager participating in a conference call with four sales reps. As the source, you want to tell the reps to take advantage of the fact that it is World Series season to close sales on baseball-related sports gear. You state your message, but you hear no replies from your listeners. You might assume that this means they understood and agreed with you, but later in the month you might be disappointed to find that very few sales were made. If you followed up your message with a request for feedback (“Does this make sense? Do any of you have any questions?”) you might have an opportunity to clarify your message, and to find out whether any of the sales reps believed your suggestion would not work with their customers.

Environment

“The environment is the atmosphere, physical and psychological, where you send and receive messages.” (McLean, 2005) The environment can include the tables, chairs, lighting, and sound equipment that are in the room. The room itself is an example of the environment. The environment can also include factors like formal dress, that may indicate whether a discussion is open and caring or more professional and formal. People may be more likely to have an intimate conversation when they are physically close to each other, and less likely when they can only see each other from across the room. In that case, they may text each other, itself an intimate form of communication. The choice to text is influenced by the environment. As a speaker, your environment will impact and play a role in your speech. It’s always a good idea to go check out where you’ll be speaking before the day of the actual presentation.

Context

“The context of the communication interaction involves the setting, scene, and expectations of the individuals involved.” (McLean, 2005) A professional communication context may involve business suits (environmental cues) that directly or indirectly influence expectations of language and behavior among the participants.

A presentation or discussion does not take place as an isolated event. When you came to class, you came from somewhere. So did the person seated next to you, as did the instructor. The degree to which the environment is formal or informal depends on the contextual expectations for communication held by the participants. The person sitting next to you may be used to informal communication with instructors, but this particular instructor may be used to verbal and nonverbal displays of respect in the academic environment. You may be used to formal interactions with instructors as well, and find your classmate’s question of “Hey Teacher, do we have homework today?” as rude and inconsiderate when they see it as normal. The nonverbal response from the instructor will certainly give you a clue about how they perceive the interaction, both the word choices and how they were said.

Context is all about what people expect from each other, and we often create those expectations out of environmental cues. Traditional gatherings like weddings or quinceañeras are often formal events. There is a time for quiet social greetings, a time for silence as the bride walks down the aisle, or the father may have the first dance with his daughter as she is transformed from a girl to womanhood in the eyes of her community. In either celebration there may come a time for rambunctious celebration and dancing. You may be called upon to give a toast, and the wedding or quinceañera context will influence your presentation, timing, and effectiveness.



Figure 1.2.1: Context is all about what people expect from each other. Toshihiro Gamo – [Marriage Matrix](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In a business meeting, who speaks first? That probably has some relation to the position and role each person has outside the meeting. Context plays a very important role in communication, particularly across cultures.

Interference

Interference, also called noise, can come from any source. “Interference is anything that blocks or changes the source’s intended meaning of the message.” (McLean, 2005) For example, if you drove a car to work or school, chances are you were surrounded by noise. Car horns, billboards, or perhaps the radio in your car interrupted your thoughts, or your conversation with a passenger.

Psychological noise is what happens when your thoughts occupy your attention while you are hearing, or reading, a message. Imagine that it is 4:45 p.m. and your boss, who is at a meeting in another city, e-mails you asking for last month’s sales figures, an analysis of current sales projections, and the sales figures from the same month for the past five years. You may open the e-mail, start to read, and think, “Great—no problem—I have those figures and that analysis right here in my computer.” You fire off a reply with last month’s sales figures and the current projections attached. Then, at five o’clock, you turn off your computer and go home. The next morning, your boss calls on the phone to tell you he was inconvenienced because you neglected to include the sales figures from the previous years. What was the problem? Interference: by thinking about how you wanted to respond to your boss’s message, you prevented yourself from reading attentively enough to understand the whole message.

Interference can come from other sources, too. Perhaps you are hungry, and your attention to your current situation interferes with your ability to listen. Maybe the office is hot and stuffy. If you were a member of an audience listening to an executive speech, how could this impact your ability to listen and participate?

Noise interferes with normal encoding and decoding of the message carried by the channel between source and receiver. Not all noise is bad, but noise interferes with the communication process. For example, your cell phone ringtone may be a welcome noise to you, but it may interrupt the communication process in class and bother your classmates.

Two Models of Communication

Researchers have observed that when communication takes place, the source and the receiver may send messages at the same time, often overlapping. You, as the speaker, will often play both roles, as source and receiver. You’ll focus on the communication and the reception of your messages to the audience. The audience will respond in the form of feedback that will give you important clues. While there are many models of communication, here we will focus on two that offer perspectives and lessons for business communicators.

Rather than looking at the source sending a message and someone receiving it as two distinct acts, researchers often view communication as a transactional process (Figure 1.2.2), with actions often happening at the same time. The distinction between source and receiver is blurred in conversational turn-taking, for example, where both participants play both roles simultaneously.

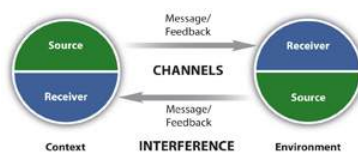


Figure 1.2.2: Transactional Model of Communication

Researchers have also examined the idea that we all construct our own interpretations of the message. As the State Department quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates, what I said and what you heard may be different. In the constructivist model (Figure 1.2.3), we focus on the negotiated meaning, or common ground, when trying to describe communication (Pearce & Cronen, 1980),

Imagine that you are visiting Atlanta, Georgia, and go to a restaurant for dinner. When asked if you want a “Coke,” you may reply, “sure.” The waiter may then ask you again, “what kind?” and you may reply, “Coke is fine.” The waiter then may ask a third time, “what kind of soft drink would you like?” The misunderstanding in this example is that in Atlanta, the home of the Coca-Cola Company, most soft drinks are generically referred to as “Coke.” When you order a soft drink, you need to specify what type, even if you wish to order a beverage that is not a cola or not even made by the Coca-Cola Company. To someone from other regions of the United States, the words “pop,” “soda pop,” or “soda” may be the familiar way to refer to a soft drink; not necessarily the brand “Coke.” In this example, both you and the waiter understand the word “Coke,” but you each understand it to mean something different. In order to communicate, you must each realize what the term means to the other person, and establish common ground, in order to fully understand the request and provide an answer.

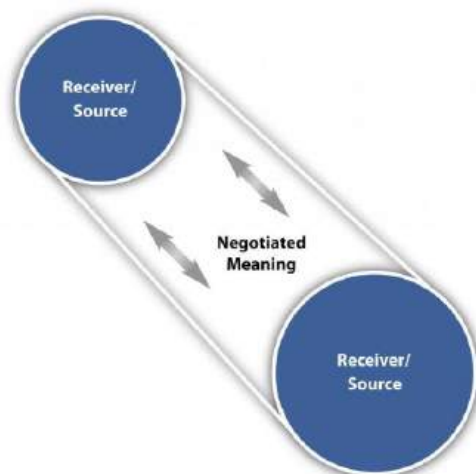


Figure 1.2.3: Constructivist Model of Communication

Because we carry the multiple meanings of words, gestures, and ideas within us, we can use a dictionary to guide us, but we will still need to negotiate meaning.

Key Takeaway

The communication process involves understanding, sharing, and meaning, and it consists of eight essential elements: source, message, channel, receiver, feedback, environment, context, and interference. Among the models of communication are the transactional process, in which actions happen simultaneously, and the constructivist model, which focuses on shared meaning.

Exercises

1. Draw what you think communication looks like. Share your drawing with your classmates.
2. List three environmental cues and indicate how they influence your expectations for communication. Please share your results with your classmates.
3. How does context influence your communication? Consider the language and culture people grew up with, and the role these play in communication styles.
4. If you could design the perfect date, what activities, places, and/or environmental cues would you include to set the mood? Please share your results with your classmates.

5. Observe two people talking. Describe their communication. See if you can find all eight components and provide an example for each one.
6. What assumptions are present in transactional model of communication? Find an example of a model of communication in your workplace or classroom, and provide an example for all eight components.

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1.3: Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe five types of communication contexts.

Now that we have examined the eight components of communication, let's examine this in context. Is a quiet dinner conversation with someone you care about the same experience as a discussion in class or giving a speech? Is sending a text message to a friend the same experience as writing a professional project proposal or a purchase order? Each context has an influence on the communication process. Contexts can overlap, creating an even more dynamic process. You have been communicating in many of these contexts across your lifetime, and you'll be able to apply what you've learned through experience in each context to business communication.

Intrapersonal Communication

Have you ever listened to a speech or lecture and gotten caught up in your thoughts so that, while the speaker continued, you were no longer listening? During a phone conversation, have you ever been thinking about what you are going to say, or what question you might ask, instead of listening to the other person? Finally, have you ever told yourself how you did after you wrote a document or gave a presentation? As you "talk with yourself" you are engaged in intrapersonal communication.

Intrapersonal communication involves one person; it is often called "self-talk." (Wood, 1997) Donna Vocate's book on intrapersonal communication explains how, as we use language to reflect on our own experiences, we talk ourselves through situations. For example, the voice within you that tells you, "Keep on Going! I can DO IT!" when you are putting your all into completing a five-mile race; or that says, "This report I've written is pretty good." Your intrapersonal communication can be positive or negative, and directly influences how you perceive and react to situations and communication with others.

What you perceive in communication with others is also influenced by your culture, native language, and your world view. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas said, "Every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding." (Habermas, 1984)

For example, you may have certain expectations of time and punctuality. You weren't born with them, so where did you learn them? From those around you as you grew up. What was normal for them became normal for you, but not everyone's idea of normal is the same.

When your supervisor invites you to a meeting and says it will start at 7 p.m., does that mean 7:00 sharp, 7-ish, or even 7:30? In the business context, when a meeting is supposed to start at 9 a.m., is it promptly a 9 a.m.? Variations in time expectations depend on regional and national culture as well as individual corporate cultures. In some companies, everyone may be expected to arrive ten to fifteen minutes before the announced start time to take their seats and be ready to commence business at 9:00 sharp. In other companies, "meeting and greeting" from about 9 to 9:05 or even 9:10 is the norm. When you are unfamiliar with the expectations for a business event, it is always wise to err on the side of being punctual, regardless of what your internal assumptions about time and punctuality may be.

Interpersonal Communication

The second major context within the field of communication is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication normally involves two people, and can range from intimate and very personal to formal and impersonal. You may carry on a conversation with a loved one, sharing a serious concern. Later, at work, you may have a brief conversation about plans for the weekend with the security guard on your way home. What's the difference? Both scenarios involve interpersonal communication, but are different in levels of intimacy. The first example implies a trusting relationship established over time between two caring individuals. The second example level implies some previous familiarity, and is really more about acknowledging each other than any actual exchange of information, much like saying hello or goodbye.

Group Communication

Have you ever noticed how a small group of people in class sit near each other? Perhaps they are members of the same sports program, or just friends, but no doubt they often engage in group communication.

“Group communication is a dynamic process where a small number of people engage in a conversation.” (McLean, 2005) Group communication is generally defined as involving three to eight people. The larger the group, the more likely it is to break down into smaller groups.

To take a page from marketing, does your audience have segments or any points of convergence/divergence? We could consider factors like age, education, sex, and location to learn more about groups and their general preferences as well as dislikes. You may find several groups within the larger audience, such as specific areas of education, and use this knowledge to increase your effectiveness as a business communicator.

Public Communication

In public communication, one person speaks to a group of people; the same is true of public written communication, where one person writes a message to be read by a small or large group. The speaker or writer may ask questions, and engage the audience in a discussion (in writing, examples are an e-mail discussion or a point-counter-point series of letters to the editor), but the dynamics of the conversation are distinct from group communication, where different rules apply. In a public speaking situation, the group normally defers to the speaker. For example, the boss speaks to everyone, and the sales team quietly listens without interruption.

This generalization is changing as norms and expectations change, and many cultures have a tradition of “call outs” or interjections that are not to be interpreted as interruptions or competition for the floor, but instead as affirmations. The boss may say, as part of a charged-up motivational speech, “Do you hear me?” and the sales team is expected to call back “Yes Sir!” The boss, as a public speaker, recognizes that intrapersonal communication (thoughts of the individual members) or interpersonal communication (communication between team members) may interfere with this classic public speaking dynamic of all to one, or the audience devoting all its attention to the speaker, and incorporate attention getting and engagement strategies to keep the sales team focused on the message.

Mass Communication

How do you tell everyone on campus where and when all the classes are held? Would a speech from the front steps work? Perhaps it might meet the need if your school is a very small one. A written schedule that lists all classes would be a better alternative. How do you let everyone know there is a sale on in your store, or that your new product will meet their needs, or that your position on a political issue is the same as your constituents? You send a message to as many people as you can through mass communication. Does everyone receive mass communication the same way they might receive a personal phone call? Not likely. Some people who receive mass mailings assume that they are “junk mail” (i.e., that they do not meet the recipients’ needs) and throw them away unopened. People may tune out a television advertisement with a click of the mute button, delete tweets or ignore friend requests on Facebook by the hundreds, or send all unsolicited e-mail straight to the spam folder unread.

Mass media is a powerful force in modern society and our daily lives, and is adapting rapidly to new technologies. Mass communication involves sending a single message to a group. It allows us to communicate our message to a large number of people, but we are limited in our ability to tailor our message to specific audiences, groups, or individuals. As a business communicator, you can use multimedia as a visual aid or reference common programs, films, or other images that your audience finds familiar yet engaging. You can tweet a picture that is worth far more than 140 characters, and you are just as likely to elicit a significant response. By choosing messages or references that many audience members will recognize or can identify with, you can develop common ground and increase the appeal of your message.

Key Takeaway

Communication contexts include intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication. Each context has its advantages and disadvantages, and its appropriate and inappropriate uses.

Exercises

1. Please recall a time when you gave a speech in front of a group. How did you feel? What was your experience? What did you learn from your experience?
2. If you were asked to get the attention of your peers, what image or word would you choose and why?
3. If you were asked to get the attention of someone like yourself, what image or word would you choose and why?
4. Make a list of mass communication messages you observe for a one hour period of time. Share your list with classmates.

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1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss and provide several examples of each of the two main responsibilities of a business communicator.

Whenever you speak or write in a business environment, you have certain responsibilities to your audience, your employer, and your profession. Your audience comes to you with an inherent set of expectations that you will fulfill these responsibilities. The specific expectations may change given the context or environment, but two central ideas will remain: be prepared, and be ethical.

Communicator is Prepared

As the business communicator's first responsibility, preparation includes several facets which we will examine: organization, clarity, and being concise and punctual.

Being prepared means that you have selected a topic appropriate to your audience, gathered enough information to cover the topic well, put your information into a logical sequence, and considered how best to present it. If your communication is a written one, you have written an outline and at least one rough draft, read it over to improve your writing and correct errors, and sought feedback where appropriate. If your communication is oral, you have practiced several times before your actual performance.

The Prepared Communicator is Organized

Part of being prepared is being organized. Aristotle called this *logos*, or logic, and it involves the steps or points that lead your communication to a conclusion. Once you've invested time in researching your topic, you will want to narrow your focus to a few key points and consider how you'll present them. On any given topic there is a wealth of information; your job is to narrow that content down to a manageable level, serving the role of gatekeeper by selecting some information and "de-selecting," or choosing to not include other points or ideas.

You also need to consider how to link your main points together for your audience. Use transitions to provide signposts or cues for your audience to follow along. "Now that we've examined X, let's consider Y" is a transitional statement that provides a cue that you are moving from topic to topic. Your listeners or readers will appreciate your being well organized so that they can follow your message from point to point.

The Prepared Communicator is Clear

You have probably had the unhappy experience of reading or listening to a communication that was vague and wandering. Part of being prepared is being clear. If your message is unclear, the audience will lose interest and tune you out, bringing an end to effective communication.

Interestingly, clarity begins with intrapersonal communication: you need to have a clear idea in your mind of what you want to say before you can say it clearly to someone else. At the interpersonal level, clarity involves considering your audience, as you will want to choose words and phrases they understand and avoid jargon or slang that may be unfamiliar to them.

Clarity also involves presentation. A brilliant message scrawled in illegible handwriting, or in pale gray type on gray paper, will not be clear. When it comes to oral communication, if you mumble your words, speak too quickly or use a monotonous tone of voice, or stumble over certain words or phrases, the clarity of your presentation will suffer.

Technology also plays a part; if you are using a microphone or conducting a teleconference, clarity will depend on this equipment functioning properly—which brings us back to the importance of preparation. In this case, in addition to preparing your speech, you need to prepare by testing the equipment ahead of time.

The Prepared Communicator is Concise and Punctual

Concise means brief and to the point. In most business communications you are expected to "get down to business" right away. Being prepared includes being able to state your points clearly and support them with clear evidence in a relatively straightforward, linear way.

It may be tempting to show how much you know by incorporating additional information into your document or speech, but in so doing you run the risk of boring, confusing, or overloading your audience. Talking in circles or indulging in tangents, where you

get off topic or go too deep, can hinder an audience's ability to grasp your message. Be to the point and concise in your choice of words, organization, and even visual aids.

Being concise also involves being sensitive to time constraints. How many times have you listened to a speaker say “in conclusion” only to continue speaking for what seems like forever? How many meetings and conference calls have you attended that got started late or ran beyond the planned ending time? The solution, of course, is to be prepared to be punctual. If you are asked to give a five-minute presentation at a meeting, your coworkers will not appreciate your taking fifteen minutes, any more than your supervisor would appreciate your submitting a fifteen-page report when you were asked to write five pages. For oral presentations, time yourself when you rehearse and make sure you can deliver your message within the allotted number of minutes.



Figure 1.4.1: Good business communication does not waste words or time. Angelina Earley – [Times! Of! The World!](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

There is one possible exception to this principle. Many non-Western cultures prefer a less direct approach, where business communication often begins with social or general comments that a U.S. audience might consider unnecessary. Some cultures also have a less strict interpretation of time schedules and punctuality. While it is important to recognize that different cultures have different expectations, the general rule holds true that good business communication does not waste words or time.

Communicator is Ethical

The business communicator's second fundamental responsibility is to be ethical. Ethics refers to a set of principles or rules for correct conduct. It echoes what Aristotle called *ethos*, the communicator's good character and reputation for doing what is right. Communicating ethically involves being egalitarian, respectful, and trustworthy—overall, practicing the “golden rule” of treating your audience the way you would want to be treated.

Communication can move communities, influence cultures, and change history. It can motivate people to take stand, consider an argument, or purchase a product. The degree to which you consider both the common good and fundamental principles you hold to be true when crafting your message directly relates to how your message will affect others.

The Ethical Communicator is Egalitarian

The word “egalitarian” comes from the root “equal.” To be egalitarian is to believe in basic equality: that all people should share equally in the benefits and burdens of a society. It means that everyone is entitled to the same respect, expectations, access to information, and rewards of participation in a group.

To communicate in an egalitarian manner, speak and write in a way that is comprehensible and relevant to all your listeners or readers, not just those who are “like you” in terms of age, gender, race or ethnicity, or other characteristics.

In business, you will often communicate to people with certain professional qualifications. For example, you may draft a memo addressed to all the nurses in a certain hospital, or give a speech to all the adjusters in a certain branch of an insurance company. Being egalitarian does not mean you have to avoid professional terminology that is understood by nurses or insurance adjusters. But it does mean that your hospital letter should be worded for all the hospital's nurses—not just female nurses, not just nurses working directly with patients, not just nurses under age fifty-five. An egalitarian communicator seeks to unify the audience by using ideas and language that are appropriate for all the message's readers or listeners.

The Ethical Communicator is Respectful

People are influenced by emotions as well as logic. Aristotle named *pathos*, or passion, enthusiasm and energy, as the third of his three important parts of communicating after *logos* and *ethos*.

Most of us have probably seen an audience manipulated by a “cult of personality,” believing whatever the speaker said simply because of how dramatically he or she delivered a speech; by being manipulative, the speaker fails to respect the audience. We may have also seen people hurt by sarcasm, insults, and other disrespectful forms of communication.

This does not mean that passion and enthusiasm are out of place in business communication. Indeed, they are very important. You can hardly expect your audience to care about your message if you don’t show that you care about it yourself. If your topic is worth writing or speaking about, make an effort to show your audience why it is worthwhile by speaking enthusiastically or using a dynamic writing style. Doing so, in fact, shows respect for their time and their intelligence.

However, the ethical communicator will be passionate and enthusiastic without being disrespectful. Losing one’s temper and being abusive are generally regarded as showing a lack of professionalism (and could even involve legal consequences for you or your employer). When you disagree strongly with a coworker, feel deeply annoyed with a difficult customer, or find serious fault with a competitor’s product, it is important to express such sentiments respectfully. For example, instead of telling a customer, “I’ve had it with your complaints!” a respectful business communicator might say, “I’m having trouble seeing how I can fix this situation. Would you explain to me what you want to see happen?”

The Ethical Communicator is Trustworthy

Trust is a key component in communication, and this is especially true in business. As a consumer, would you choose to buy merchandise from a company you did not trust? If you were an employer, would you hire someone you did not trust?

Your goal as a communicator is to build a healthy relationship with your audience, and to do that you must show them why they can trust you and why the information you are about to give them is believable. One way to do this is to begin your message by providing some information about your qualifications and background, your interest in the topic, or your reasons for communicating at this particular time.

Your audience will expect that what you say is the truth as you understand it. This means that you have not intentionally omitted, deleted, or taken information out of context simply to prove your points. They will listen to what you say and how you say it, but also to what you don’t say or do. You may consider more than one perspective on your topic, and then select the perspective you perceive to be correct, giving concrete reasons why you came to this conclusion. People in the audience may have considered or believe in some of the perspectives you consider, and your attention to them will indicate you have done your homework.

Being worthy of trust is something you earn with an audience. Many wise people have observed that trust is hard to build but easy to lose. A communicator may not know something and still be trustworthy, but it’s a violation of trust to pretend you know something when you don’t. Communicate what you know, and if you don’t know something, research it before you speak or write. If you are asked a question to which you don’t know the answer, say “I don’t know the answer but I will research it and get back to you” (and then make sure you follow through later). This will go over much better with the audience than trying to cover by stumbling through an answer or portraying yourself as knowledgeable on an issue that you are not.

The “Golden Rule”

When in doubt, remember the “golden rule,” which says to treat others the way you would like to be treated. In all its many forms, the golden rule incorporates human kindness, cooperation, and reciprocity across cultures, languages, backgrounds and interests. Regardless of where you travel, who you communicate with, or what your audience is like, remember how you would feel if you were on the receiving end of your communication, and act accordingly.

Key Takeaway

As a communicator, you are responsible for being prepared and being ethical. Being prepared includes being organized, clear, concise, and punctual. Being ethical includes being egalitarian, respectful, and trustworthy and overall, practicing the “golden rule.”

Exercises

1. Recall one time you felt offended or insulted in a conversation. What contributed to your perception? Please share your comments with classmates.
2. When someone lost your trust, were they able earn it back? Please share your comments with classmates?
3. Does the communicator have a responsibility to the audience? Does the audience have a responsibility to the speaker? Why or why not? Please share your comments with classmates.

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1.5: Additional Resources

The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) is a global network of communication professionals committed to improving organizational effectiveness through strategic communication. <http://www.iabc.com>

Explore the Web site of the National Communication Association, the largest U.S. organization dedicated to communication. <http://www.natcom.org>

Read The National Commission on Writing's findings about the importance of communication skills in business. www.writingcommission.org/pr/writing_for_employ.html

The National Association of Colleges and Employers offers news about employment prospects for college graduates. <http://www.naceweb.org>

Dale Carnegie, author of the classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, may have been one of the greatest communicators of the twentieth-century business world. The Dale Carnegie Institute focuses on giving people in business the opportunity to sharpen their skills and improve their performance in order to build positive, steady, and profitable results. <http://www.dalecarnegie.com>

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides a wealth of resources for writing projects. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

To communicate ethically, check your facts. FactCheck is a nonpartisan project of the Annenberg Center for Public Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. <http://www.factcheck.org>

To communicate ethically, check your facts. PolitiFact is a nonpartisan project of the St. Petersburg Times; it won a Pulitzer Prize in 2009. <http://www.politifact.com>

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Delivering Your Message

- [2.1: What is Language?](#)
- [2.2: Messages](#)
- [2.3: Principles of Verbal Communication](#)
- [2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)
- [2.5: Emphasis Strategies](#)
- [2.6: Improving Verbal Communication](#)
- [2.7: Additional Resources](#)

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2.1: What is Language?

Learning Objectives

- Describe and define “language.”
- Describe the role of language in perception and the communication process.

Are you reading this sentence? Does it make sense to you? When you read the words I wrote, what do you hear? A voice in your head? Words across the internal screen of your mind? If it makes sense, then you may very well hear the voice of the author as you read along, finding meaning in these arbitrary symbols packaged in discrete units called words. The words themselves have no meaning except that which you give them.

For example, I’ll write the word “home,” placing it in quotation marks to denote its separation from the rest of this sentence. When you read that word, what comes to mind for you? A specific place? Perhaps a building that could also be called a house? Images of people or another time? “Home,” like “love” and many other words, is quite individual and open to interpretation.

Still, even though your mental image of home may be quite distinct from mine, we can communicate effectively. You understand that each sentence has a subject and verb, and a certain pattern of word order, even though you might not be consciously aware of that knowledge. You weren’t born speaking or writing, but you mastered—or, more accurately, are still mastering as we all are—these important skills of self-expression. The family, group, or community wherein you were raised taught you the code. The code came in many forms. When do you say “please” or “thank you,” and when do you remain silent? When is it appropriate to communicate? If it is appropriate, what are the expectations and how do you accomplish it? You know because you understand the code.

We often call this code “language”: a system of symbols, words, and/or gestures used to communicate meaning. Does everyone on earth speak the same language? Obviously, no. People are raised in different cultures, with different values, beliefs, customs, and different languages to express those cultural attributes. Even people who speak the same language, like speakers of English in London, New Delhi, or Cleveland, speak and interact using their own words that are community-defined, self-defined, and have room for interpretation. Within the United States, depending on the context and environment, you may hear colorful sayings that are quite regional, and may notice an accent, pace, or tone of communication that is distinct from your own. This variation in our use of language is a creative way to form relationships and communities, but can also lead to miscommunication.

Words themselves, then, actually hold no meaning. It takes you and me to use them to give them life and purpose. Even if we say that the dictionary is the repository of meaning, the repository itself has no meaning without you or me to read, interpret, and use its contents. Words change meaning over time. “Nice” once meant overly particular or fastidious; today it means pleasant or agreeable. “Gay” once meant happy or carefree; today it refers to homosexuality. The dictionary entry for the meaning of a word changes because we change how, when, and why we use the word, not the other way around. Do you know every word in the dictionary? Does anyone? Even if someone did, there are many possible meanings of the words we exchange, and these multiple meanings can lead to miscommunication.

Business communication veterans often tell the story of a company that received an order of machine parts from a new vendor. When they opened the shipment, they found that it contained a small plastic bag into which the vendor had put several of the parts. When asked what the bag was for, the vendor explained, “Your contract stated a thousand units, with maximum 2 percent defective. We produced the defective units and put them in the bag for you.” If you were the one reading that contract, what would “defective” mean to you? We may use a word intending to communicate one idea only to have a coworker miss our meaning entirely.

Sometimes we want our meaning to be crystal clear, and at other times, less so. We may even want to present an idea from a specific perspective, one that shows our company or business in a positive light. This may reflect our intentional manipulation of language to influence meaning, as in choosing to describe a car as “preowned” or an investment as a “unique value proposition.” We may also influence other’s understanding of our words in unintentional ways, from failing to anticipate their response, to ignoring the possible impact of our word choice.

Languages are living exchange systems of meaning, and are bound by context. If you are assigned to a team that coordinates with suppliers from Shanghai, China, and a sales staff in Dubuque, Iowa, you may encounter terms from both groups that influence your team.

As long as there have been languages and interactions between the people who speak them, languages have borrowed words (or, more accurately, adopted—for they seldom give them back). Think of the words “boomerang,” “limousine,” or “pajama”; do you know which languages they come from? Did you know that “algebra” comes from the Arabic word “al-jabr,” meaning “restoration”?

Does the word “moco” make sense to you? It may not, but perhaps you recognize it as the name chosen by Nissan for one of its cars. “Moco” makes sense to both Japanese and Spanish speakers, but with quite different meanings. The letters come together to form an arbitrary word that refers to the thought or idea of the thing in the semantic triangle (Figure 2.1.1).

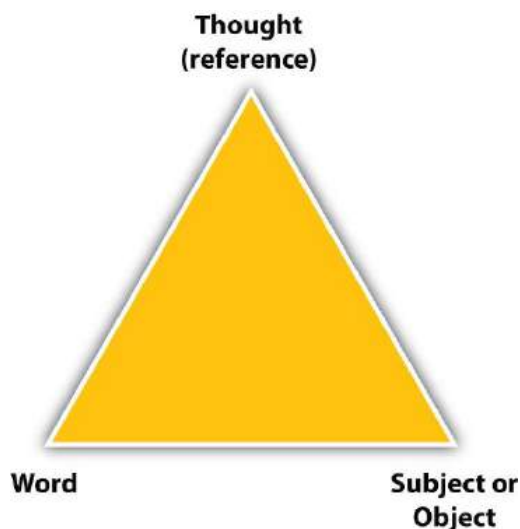


Figure 2.1.1: Semantic Triangle. Source: Adapted from Ogden and Richards.

This triangle illustrates how the word (which is really nothing more than a combination of four letters) refers to the thought, which then refers to the thing itself. Who decides what “moco” means? To the Japanese, it may mean “cool design,” or even “best friend,” and may be an apt name for a small, cute car, but to a Spanish speaker, it means “booger” or “snot”—not a very appealing name for a car.

Each letter stands for a sound, and when they come together in a specific way, the sounds they represent when spoken express the “word” that symbolizes the event (McLean, 2003). For our discussion, the key word we need to address is “symbolizes.” The word stands in for the actual event, but is not the thing itself. The meaning we associate with it may not be what we intended. For example, when Honda was contemplating the introduction of the Honda Fit, another small car, they considered the name “Fitta” for use in Europe. As the story goes, the Swedish Division Office of Honda explained that “fitta” in Swedish is a derogatory term for female reproductive organ. The name was promptly changed to “Jazz.”

The meaning, according to Hayakawa, is within us, and the word serves as a link to meaning. What will your words represent to the listener? Will your use of a professional term enhance your credibility and be more precise with a knowledgeable audience, or will you confuse them?

Key Takeaway

Language is a system of words used as symbols to convey ideas, and it has rules of syntax, semantics, and context. Words have meaning only when interpreted by the receiver of the message.

Exercises

1. Using a dictionary that gives word origins, such as the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, or the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, find at least ten English words borrowed from other languages. Share your findings with your classmates.
2. Visit several English-language Web sites from different countries—for example, Australia, Canada, and the United States. What differences in spelling and word usage do you find? Discuss your results with your classmates.
3. From your viewpoint, how do you think thought influences the use of language? Write a one- to two-page explanation.
4. What is meant by *conditioned* in this statement: “people in Western cultures do not realize the extent to which their racial attitudes have been conditioned since early childhood by the power of words to ennoble or condemn, augment or detract, glorify

or demean?” (Moore, 2003) Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.

5. Translations gone wrong can teach us much about words and meaning. Can you think of a word or phrase that just doesn't sound right when it was translated from English into another language, or vice versa? Share it with the class and discuss what a better translation would be.

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2.2: Messages

Learning Objectives

- Describe three different types of messages and their functions.
- Describe five different parts of a message and their functions.

Before we explore the principles of language, it will be helpful to stop for a moment and examine some characteristics of the messages we send when we communicate. When you write or say something, you not only share the meaning(s) associated with the words you choose, but you also say something about yourself and your relationship to the intended recipient. In addition, you say something about what the relationship means to you as well as your assumed familiarity as you choose formal or informal ways of expressing yourself. Your message may also carry unintended meanings that you cannot completely anticipate. Some words are loaded with meaning for some people, so that by using such words you can “push their buttons” without even realizing what you’ve done. Messages carry far more than the literal meaning of each word, and in this section we explore that complexity.

Primary Message Is Not the Whole Message

When considering how to effectively use verbal communication, keep in mind there are three distinct types of messages you will be communicating: primary, secondary, and auxiliary (Hasling, 1998).

Primary messages refer to the intentional content, both verbal and nonverbal. These are the words or ways you choose to express yourself and communicate your message. For example, if you are sitting at your desk and a coworker stops by to ask you a question, you may say, “Here, have a seat.” These words are your primary message.

Even such a short, seemingly simple and direct message could be misunderstood. It may seem obvious that you are not literally offering to “give” a “seat” to your visitor, but to someone who knows only formal English and is unfamiliar with colloquial expressions, it may be puzzling. “Have a seat” may be much more difficult to understand than “please sit down.”

Secondary messages refer to the unintentional content, both verbal and nonverbal. Your audience will form impressions of your intentional messages, both negative and positive, over which you have no control. Perceptions of physical attractiveness, age, gender, or ethnicity or even simple mannerisms and patterns of speech may unintentionally influence the message.

Perhaps, out of courtesy, you stand up while offering your visitor a seat; or perhaps your visitor has an expectation that you ought to do so. Perhaps a photograph of your family on your desk makes an impression on your visitor. Perhaps a cartoon on your bulletin board sends a message.

Auxiliary messages refer to the intentional and unintentional ways a primary message is communicated. This may include vocal inflection, gestures and posture, or rate of speech that influence the interpretation or perception of your message.

When you say, “Here, have a seat,” do you smile and wave your hand to indicate the empty chair on the other side of your desk? Or do you look flustered and quickly lift a pile of file folders out of the way? Are your eyes on your computer as you finish sending an e-mail before turning your attention to your visitor? Your auxiliary message might be, “I’m glad you came by, I always enjoy exchanging ideas with you” or “I always learn something new when someone asks me a question.” On the other hand, it might be, “I’ll answer your question, but I’m too busy for a long discussion,” or maybe even, “I wish you’d do your work and not bother me with your dumb questions!”

Parts of a Message

When you create a message, it is often helpful to think of it as having five parts:

1. Attention statement
2. Introduction
3. Body
4. Conclusion
5. Residual message

Each of these parts has its own function.

The attention statement, as you may guess, is used to capture the attention of your audience. While it may be used anywhere in your message, it is especially useful at the outset. There are many ways to attract attention from readers or listeners, but one of the most effective is the “what’s in it for me” strategy: telling them how your message can benefit them. An attention statement like, “I’m going to explain how you can save up to \$500 a year on car insurance” is quite likely to hold an audience’s attention.

Once you have your audience’s attention, it is time to move on to the introduction. In your introduction you will make a clear statement your topic; this is also the time to establish a relationship with your audience. One way to do this is to create common ground with the audience, drawing on familiar or shared experiences, or by referring to the person who introduced you. You may also explain why you chose to convey this message at this time, why the topic is important to you, what kind of expertise you have, or how your personal experience has led you to share this message.

After the introduction comes the body of your message. Here you will present your message in detail, using any of a variety of organizational structures. Regardless of the type of organization you choose for your document or speech, it is important to make your main points clear, provide support for each point, and use transitions to guide your readers or listeners from one point to the next.

At the end of the message, your conclusion should provide the audience with a sense of closure by summarizing your main points and relating them to the overall topic. In one sense, it is important to focus on your organizational structure again and incorporate the main elements into your summary, reminding the audience of what you have covered. In another sense, it is important not to merely state your list of main points again, but to convey a sense that you have accomplished what you stated you would do in your introduction, allowing the audience to have psychological closure.

The residual message, a message or thought that stays with your audience well after the communication is finished, is an important part of your message. Ask yourself of the following:

- What do I want my listeners or readers to remember?
- What information do I want to have the audience retain or act upon?
- What do I want the audience to do?

Key Takeaway

Messages are primary, secondary, and auxiliary. A message can be divided into a five-part structure composed of an attention statement, introduction, body, conclusion, and residual message.

Exercises

1. Choose three examples of communication and identify the primary message. Share and compare with classmates.
2. Choose three examples of communication and identify the auxiliary message(s). Share and compare with classmates.
3. Think of a time when someone said something like “please take a seat” and you correctly or incorrectly interpreted the message as indicating that you were in trouble and about to be reprimanded. Share and compare with classmates.
4. How does language affect self-concept? Explore and research your answer, finding examples that can serve as case studies.
5. Choose an article or opinion piece from a major newspaper or news Web site. Analyze the piece according to the five-part structure described here. Does the headline serve as a good attention statement? Does the piece conclude with a sense of closure? How are the main points presented and supported? Share your analysis with your classmates. For a further challenge, watch a television commercial and do the same analysis.

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2.3: Principles of Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe five key principles of verbal communication.
- Explain how the rules of syntax, semantics, and context govern language.
- Describe how language serves to shape our experience of reality.

Verbal communication is based on several basic principles. In this section, we'll examine each principle and explore how it influences everyday communication. Whether it's a simple conversation with a coworker or a formal sales presentation to a board of directors, these principles apply to all contexts of communication.

Language Has Rules

Language is a code, a collection of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meanings that are arranged according to the rules of syntax and are used to communicate (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

In the first of the Note 2.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter, were you able to successfully match the terms to their meanings? Did you find that some of the definitions did not match your understanding of the terms? The words themselves have meaning within their specific context or language community. But without a grasp of that context, “my bad” may have just sounded odd. Your familiarity with the words and phrases may have made the exercise easy for you, but it isn't an easy exercise for everyone. The words themselves only carry meaning if you know the understood meaning and have a grasp of their context to interpret them correctly.

There are three types of rules that govern or control our use of words. You may not be aware that they exist or that they influence you, but from the moment you put a word into text or speak it, these rules govern your communications. Think of a word that is all right to use in certain situations and not in others. Why? And how do you know?

Syntactic rules govern the order of words in a sentence. In some languages, such as German, syntax or word order is strictly prescribed. English syntax, in contrast, is relatively flexible and open to style. Still, there are definite combinations of words that are correct and incorrect in English. It is equally correct to say, “Please come to the meeting in the auditorium at twelve noon on Wednesday” or, “Please come to the meeting on Wednesday at twelve noon in the auditorium.” But it would be incorrect to say, “Please to the auditorium on Wednesday in the meeting at twelve noon come.”

Semantic rules govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them (Martinich, 1996). Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It considers what words mean, or are intended to mean, as opposed to their sound, spelling, grammatical function, and so on. Does a given statement refer to other statements already communicated? Is the statement true or false? Does it carry a certain intent? What does the sender or receiver need to know in order to understand its meaning? These are questions addressed by semantic rules.

Contextual rules govern meaning and word choice according to context and social custom. For example, suppose Greg is talking about his coworker, Carol, and says, “She always meets her deadlines.” This may seem like a straightforward statement that would not vary according to context or social custom. But suppose another coworker asked Greg, “How do you like working with Carol?” and, after a long pause, Greg answered, “She always meets her deadlines.” Are there factors in the context of the question or social customs that would influence the meaning of Greg's statement?

Even when we follow these linguistic rules, miscommunication is possible, for our cultural context or community may hold different meanings for the words used than the source intended. Words attempt to represent the ideas we want to communicate, but they are sometimes limited by factors beyond our control. They often require us to negotiate their meaning, or to explain what we mean in more than one way, in order to create a common vocabulary. You may need to state a word, define it, and provide an example in order to come to an understanding with your audience about the meaning of your message.

Our Reality Is Shaped by Our Language

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Malaysia, for example? Italy? Afghanistan? Or Bolivia? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. Or had been raised in the northeastern United States instead of the Southwest, or the Midwest instead of the Southeast. In any of these cases, you would not

have the same identity you have today. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns, and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicated in different ways.

You didn't choose your birth, customs, values, traditions, or your language. You didn't even choose to learn to read this sentence or to speak with those of your community, but somehow you accomplished this challenging task. As an adult, you can choose to see things from a new or diverse perspective, but what language do you think with? It's not just the words themselves, or even how they are organized, that makes communication such a challenge. Your language itself, ever changing and growing, in many ways determines your reality (Whorf, 1956). You can't escape your language or culture completely, and always see the world through a shade or tint of what you've been taught, learned, or experienced.

Suppose you were raised in a culture that values formality. At work, you pride yourself on being well dressed. It's part of your expectation for yourself and, whether you admit it or not, for others. Many people in your organization, however, come from less formal cultures, and they prefer business casual attire. You may be able to recognize the difference, and because humans are highly adaptable, you may get used to a less formal dress expectation, but it won't change your fundamental values.

Thomas Kuhn makes the point that "paradigms, or a clear point of view involving theories, laws, and/or generalizations that provide a framework for understanding, tend to form and become set around key validity claims, or statements of the way things work." (McLean, 2003) The paradigm, or worldview, may be individual or collective. And paradigm shifts are often painful. New ideas are always suspect, and usually opposed, without any other reason than because they are not already common (Ackerman, 1980).

As an example, consider the earth-heavens paradigm. Medieval Europeans believed that the Earth was flat and that the edge was to be avoided, otherwise you might fall off. For centuries after the acceptance of a "round earth" belief, the earth was still believed to be the center of the universe, with the sun and all planets revolving around it. Eventually, someone challenged the accepted view. Over time, despite considerable resistance to protect the status quo, people came to better understand the earth and its relationship to the heavens.

In the same way, the makers of the Intel microprocessor once thought that a slight calculation error, unlikely to negatively impact 99.9 percent of users, was better left as is and hidden (Emery, 1996). Like many things in the information age, the error was discovered by a user of the product, became publicly known, and damaged Intel's credibility and sales for years. Recalls and prompt, public communication in response to similar issues are now the industry-wide protocol.

Paradigms involve premises that are taken as fact. Of course the Earth is the center of the universe, of course no one will ever be impacted by a mathematical error so far removed from most people's everyday use of computers, and of course you never danced the macarena at a company party. We now can see how those facts, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of "cool" are overturned.

How does this insight lend itself to your understanding of verbal communication? Do all people share the same paradigms, words, or ideas? Will you be presenting ideas outside your audience's frame of reference? Outside their worldview? Just as you look back at your macarena performance, get outside your frame of reference and consider how to best communicate your thoughts, ideas, and points to an audience that may not have your same experiences or understanding of the topic.

By taking into account your audience's background and experience, you can become more "other-oriented," a successful strategy to narrow the gap between you and your audience. Our experiences are like sunglasses, tinting the way we see the world. Our challenge, perhaps, is to avoid letting them function as blinders, like those worn by working horses, which create tunnel vision and limit our perspective.

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

As we have discussed previously, words, by themselves, do not have any inherent meaning. Humans give meaning to them, and their meanings change across time. The arbitrary symbols, including letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, stand for concepts in our experience. We have to negotiate the meaning of the word "home," and define it, through visual images or dialogue, in order to communicate with our audience.

Words have two types of meanings: denotative and connotative. Attention to both is necessary to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation. The denotative meaning is the common meaning, often found in the dictionary. The connotative meaning is often not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself. It can involve an emotional association with a word, positive or negative, and can be individual or collective, but is not universal.

With a common vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms, effective communication becomes a more distinct possibility. But what if we have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? That is essentially what we are doing when we translate a message. In such cases, language and culture can sometimes make for interesting twists. The *New York Times* (Sterngold, 1998) noted that the title of the 1998 film *There's Something About Mary* proved difficult to translate when it was released in foreign markets. The movie was renamed to capture the idea and to adapt to local audiences' frame of reference: In Poland, where blonde jokes are popular and common, the film title (translated back to English for our use) was *For the Love of a Blonde*. In France, *Mary at All Costs* communicated the idea, while in Thailand *My True Love Will Stand All Outrageous Events* dropped the reference to Mary altogether.

Capturing our ideas with words is a challenge when both conversational partners speak the same language, but across languages, cultures, and generations the complexity multiplies exponentially.

Language Is Abstract

Words represent aspects of our environment, and can play an important role in that environment. They may describe an important idea or concept, but the very act of labeling and invoking a word simplifies and distorts our concept of the thing itself. This ability to simplify concepts makes it easier to communicate, but it sometimes makes us lose track of the specific meaning we are trying to convey through abstraction. Let's look at one important part of life in America: transportation.

Take the word "car" and consider what it represents. Freedom, status, or style? Does what you drive say something about you? To describe a car as a form of transportation is to consider one of its most basic and universal aspects. This level of abstraction means we lose individual distinctions between cars until we impose another level of labeling. We could divide cars into sedans (or saloon) and coupe (or coupé) simply by counting the number of doors (i.e., four versus two). We could also examine cost, size, engine displacement, fuel economy, and style. We might arrive at an American classic, the Mustang, and consider it for all these factors and its legacy as an accessible American sports car. To describe it in terms of transportation only is to lose the distinctiveness of what makes a Mustang a desirable American sports car.

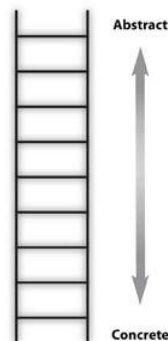


Figure 2.3.1: Abstraction Ladder. Source: Adapted from J. DeVito's Abstraction Ladder (DeVito, 1999).

We can see how, at the extreme level of abstraction, a car is like any other automobile. We can also see how, at the base level, the concept is most concrete. "Mustang," the name given to one of the best-selling American sports cars, is a specific make and model with specific markings; a specific size, shape, and range of available colors; and a relationship with a classic design. By focusing on concrete terms and examples, you help your audience grasp your content.

Language Organizes and Classifies Reality

We use language to create and express some sense of order in our world. We often group words that represent concepts by their physical proximity or their similarity to one another. For example, in biology, animals with similar traits are classified together. An ostrich may be said to be related to an emu and a nandu, but you wouldn't group an ostrich with an elephant or a salamander. Our ability to organize is useful, but artificial. The systems of organization we use are not part of the natural world but an expression of our views about the natural world.

What is a doctor? A nurse? A teacher? If a male came to mind in the case of the word "doctor" and a female came to mind in reference to "nurse" or "teacher," then your habits of mind include a gender bias. There was once a time in the United States where that gender stereotype was more than just a stereotype, it was the general rule, the social custom, the norm. Now it no longer holds true. More and more men are training to serve as nurses. *Business Week* noted in 2008 that one-third of the U.S. physician workforce was female (Arnst, 2005).

We all use systems of classification to navigate through the world. Imagine how confusing life would be if we had no categories such as male/female, young/old, tall/short, doctor/nurse/teacher. These categories only become problematic when we use them to uphold biases and ingrained assumptions that are no longer valid. We may assume, through our biases, that elements are related when they have no relationship at all. As a result, our thinking is limited and our grasp of reality impaired. It is often easier to spot these biases in others, but it behooves us as communicators to become aware of them in ourselves. Holding them unconsciously will limit our thinking, our grasp of reality, and our ability to communicate successfully.

Key Takeaway

Language is a system governed by rules of syntax, semantics, and context; we use paradigms to understand the world and frame our communications.

Exercises

1. Write at least five examples of English sentences with correct syntax. Then rewrite each sentence, using the same words in an order that displays incorrect syntax. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
2. Think of at least five words whose denotative meaning differs from their connotative meaning. Use each word in two sentences, one employing the denotative meaning and the other employing the connotative. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
3. Do you associate meaning with the car someone drives? Does it say something about them? List five cars you observe people you know driving and discuss each one, noting whether you perceive that the car says something about them or not. Share and compare with classmates.

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2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate six ways in which language can be an obstacle or barrier to communication.
2. Explain the differences between clichés, jargon, and slang.
3. Explain the difference between sexist or racist language and legitimate references to gender or race in business communication.

As you use language to make sense of your experiences, as part of our discussion, you no doubt came to see that language and verbal communication can work both for you and against you. Language allows you to communicate, but it also allows you to miscommunicate and misunderstand. The same system we use to express our most intimate thoughts can be frustrating when it fails to capture our thoughts, to represent what we want to express, and to reach our audience. For all its faults, though, it is the best system we have, and part of improving the communication process is the clear identification of where it breaks down. Anticipate where a word or expression may need more clarification and you will be on your way to reducing errors and improving verbal communication.

In an article titled “The Miscommunication Gap,” Susan Washburn lists several undesirable results of poor communication in business:

- Damaged relationships
- Loss of productivity
- Inefficiency and rework
- Conflict
- Missed opportunities
- Schedule slippage (delays, missed deadlines)
- Scope creep...or leap (gradual or sudden changes in an assignment that make it more complex and difficult than it was originally understood to be)
- Wasted resources
- Unclear or unmet requirements

In this section we discuss how words can serve either as a bridge, or a barrier, to understanding and communication of meaning. Our goals of effective and efficient business communication mean an inherent value of words and terms that keeps the bridge clear and free of obstacles.

Cliché

A cliché is a once-clever word or phrase that has lost its impact through overuse. If you spoke or wrote in clichés, how would your audience react? Let’s try it. How do you react when you read this sentence: “A cliché is something to avoid like the plague, for it is nothing but a tired old war horse, and if the shoe were on the other foot you too would have an axe to grind”? As you can see, the problem with clichés is that they often sound silly or boring.

Clichés are sometimes a symptom of lazy communication—the person using the cliché hasn’t bothered to search for original words to convey the intended meaning. Clichés lose their impact because readers and listeners tend to gloss over them, assuming their common meaning while ignoring your specific use of them. As a result, they can be obstacles to successful communication.

Jargon

Let’s pretend you’ve been assigned to the task of preparing a short presentation on your company’s latest product for a group of potential customers. It’s a big responsibility. You only have one opportunity to get it right. You will need to do extensive planning and preparation, and your effort, if done well, will produce a presentation that is smooth and confident, looking simple to the casual audience member.

What words do you use to communicate information about your product? Is your audience familiar with your field and its specialized terms? As potential customers, they are probably somewhat knowledgeable in the field, but not to the extent that you and your coworkers are; even less so compared to the “techies” who developed the product. For your presentation to succeed, your

challenge is to walk a fine line between using too much profession-specific language on the one hand, and “talking down” to your audience on the other hand.

While your potential customers may not understand all the engineering and schematic detail terms involved in the product, they do know what they and their organizations are looking for in considering a purchase. Your solution may be to focus on common ground—what you know of their past history in terms of contracting services or buying products from your company. What can you tell from their historical purchases? If your research shows that they place a high value on saving time, you can focus your presentation on the time-saving aspects of your new product and leave the technical terms to the user’s manual.

Jargon is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Jargon does not necessarily imply formal education, but instead focuses on the language people in a profession use to communicate with each other. Members of the information technology department have a distinct group of terms that refer to common aspects in their field. Members of the marketing department, or advertising, or engineering, research, and development also have sets of terms they use within their professional community. Jargon exists in just about every occupation, independent of how much formal education is involved—from medicine and law; to financial services, banking, and insurance; to animal husbandry, auto repair, and the construction trades.

Whether or not to use jargon is often a judgment call, and one that is easier to make in speaking than in writing. In an oral context, we may be able to use a technical term and instantly know from feedback whether or not the receiver of the message “got it.” If they didn’t, we can define it on the spot. In written language, we lack that immediate response and must attend more to the context of receiver. The more we learn about our audience, the better we can tailor our chosen words. If we lack information or want our document to be understood by a variety of readers, it pays to use common words and avoid jargon.

Slang

Think for a moment about the words and expressions you use when you communicate with your best friends. If a coworker was to hang out with you and your friends, would they understand all the words you use, the music you listen to, the stories you tell and the way you tell them? Probably not, because you and your friends probably use certain words and expressions in ways that have special meaning to you.

This special form of language, which in some ways resembles jargon, is slang. Slang is the use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect. It differs from jargon in that it is used in informal contexts, among friends or members of a certain age group, rather than by professionals in a certain industry.

If you say something is “phat,” you may mean “cool,” which is now a commonly understood slang word, but your coworker may not know this. As word “phat” moves into the mainstream, it will be replaced and adapted by the communities that use it.

Since our emphasis in business communication is on clarity, and a slang word runs the risk of creating misinterpretation, it is generally best to avoid slang. You may see the marketing department use a slang word to target a specific, well-researched audience, but for our purposes of your general presentation introducing a product or service, we will stick to clear, common words that are easily understood.

Sexist and Racist Language

Some forms of slang involve put-downs of people belonging to various groups. This type of slang often crosses the line and becomes offensive, not only to the groups that are being put down, but also to others who may hear it. In today’s workplace there is no place where sexist or racist language is appropriate. In fact, using such language can be a violation of company policies and in some cases antidiscrimination laws.

Sexist language uses gender as a discriminating factor. Referring to adult women as “girls” or using the word “man” to refer to humankind are examples of sexist language. In a more blatant example, several decades ago a woman was the first female sales representative in her company’s sales force. The men resented her and were certain they could outsell her, so they held a “Beat the Broad” sales contest. (By the way, she won.) Today, a contest with a name like that would be out of the question.

Racist language discriminates against members of a given race or ethnic group. While it may be obvious that racial and ethnic slurs have no place in business communication, there can also be issues with more subtle references to “those people” or “you know how they are.” If race or ethnicity genuinely enters into the subject of your communication—in a drugstore, for example, there is often an aisle for black hair care products—then naturally it makes sense to mention customers belonging to that group. The key is that

mentioning racial and ethnic groups should be done with the same respect you would desire if someone else were referring to groups you belong to.

Euphemisms

In seeking to avoid offensive slang, it is important not to assume that a euphemism is the solution. A euphemism involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning. The problem is that the audience still knows what the expression means, and understands that the writer or speaker is choosing a euphemism for the purpose of sounding more educated or genteel.

Euphemisms can also be used sarcastically or humorously—“H-E-double-hockey-sticks,” for example, is a euphemism for “hell” that may be amusing in some contexts. If your friend has just gotten a new job as a janitor, you may jokingly ask, “How’s my favorite sanitation engineer this morning?” But such humor is not always appreciated, and can convey disrespect even when none is intended.

Euphemistic words are not always disrespectful, however. For example, when referring to a death, it is considered polite in many parts of the United States to say that the person “passed” or “passed away,” rather than the relatively insensitive word, “died.” Similarly, people say, “I need to find a bathroom” when it is well understood they are not planning to take a bath.

Still, these polite euphemisms are exceptions to the rule. Euphemisms are generally more of a hindrance than a help to understanding. In business communication the goal is clarity, and the very purpose of euphemism is to be vague. To be clear, choose words that mean what you intend to convey.

Doublespeak

Doublespeak is the deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning. Doublespeak is often present in bureaucratic communication, where it can serve to cast a person or an organization in a less unfavorable light than plain language would do.

When you ask a friend, “How does it feel to be downsized?” you are using a euphemism to convey humor, possibly even dark humor. Your friend’s employer was likely not joking, though, when the action was announced as a “downsizing” rather than as a “layoff” or “dismissal.” In military communications, “collateral damage” is often used to refer to civilian deaths, but no mention of the dead is present. You may recall the “bailout” of the U.S. economy in 2008, which quickly came to be called the “rescue” and finally the “buy in” as the United States bought interests in nine regional and national banks. The meaning changed from saving an economic system or its institutions to investing in them. This change of terms, and the attempt to change the meaning of the actions, became common in comedy routines across the nation.

Doublespeak can be quite dangerous when it is used deliberately to obscure meaning and the listener cannot anticipate or predict consequences based on the (in)effective communication. When a medical insurance company says, “We insure companies with up to twenty thousand lives,” is it possible to forget that those “lives” are people? Ethical issues quickly arise when humans are dehumanized and referred to as “objects” or “subjects.” When genocide is referred to as “ethnic cleansing,” is it any less deadly than when called by its true name?

If the meaning was successfully hidden from the audience, one might argue that the doublespeak was in fact effective. But our goal continues to be clear and concise communication with a minimum of misinterpretation. Learn to recognize doublespeak by what it does not communicate as well as what it communicates.

Each of these six barriers to communication contributes to misunderstanding and miscommunication, intentionally or unintentionally. If you recognize one of them, you can address it right away. You can redirect a question and get to essential meaning, rather than leaving with a misunderstanding that impacts the relationship. In business communication, our goal of clear and concise communication remains constant, but we can never forget that trust is the foundation for effective communication. Part of our effort must include reinforcing the relationship inherent between source and receiver, and one effective step toward that goal is to reduce obstacles to effective communication.

Key Takeaway

To avoid obstacles to communication, avoid clichés, jargon, slang, sexist and racist language, euphemisms, and doublespeak.

Exercises

1. Identify at least five common clichés and look up their origins. Try to understand how and when each phrase became a cliché. Share your findings with your classmates.
2. Using your library's microfilm files or an online database, look through newspaper articles from the 1950s or earlier. Find at least one article that uses sexist or racist language. What makes it racist or sexist? How would a journalist convey the same information today? Share your findings with your class.
3. Identify one slang term and one euphemism you know is used in your community, among your friends, or where you work. Share and compare with classmates.
4. How does language change over time? Interview someone older than you and someone younger than you and identify words that have changed. Pay special attention to jargon and slang words.
5. Is there ever a justifiable use for doublespeak? Why or why not? Explain your response and give some examples.
6. Can people readily identify the barriers to communication? Survey ten individuals and see if they accurately identify at least one barrier, even if they use a different term or word.

References

Washburn, S. (2008, February). The miscommunication gap. *ESI Horizons*, 9(2). Retrieved from www.esi-intl.com/public/Library/html/200802HorizonsArticle1.asp?UnityID=8522516.1290.

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2.5: Emphasis Strategies

Learning Objectives

1. Describe and define four strategies that can give emphasis to your message.
2. Demonstrate the effective use of visuals in an oral or written presentation.
3. Demonstrate the effective use of signposts, internal summaries and foreshadowing, and repetition in an oral or written presentation.


One key to communication is capturing and holding the audience's attention. No one likes to be bored, and no communicator likes to send boring messages. To keep your communications dynamic and interesting, it often helps to use specific strategies for emphasis. Let's examine some of these strategies and how to use them to strengthen your message.

Visual Communication

Adding the visual dimension to a document or speech can be an excellent way to hold your audience's interest and make your meaning clear. But be careful not to get carried away. Perhaps the most important rule to remember in using visuals is this: the visuals are to support your document or presentation, not to take the place of it. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it is the words that really count. Make sure that your communication is researched, organized, and presented well enough to stand on its own. Whatever visuals you choose should be clearly associated with your verbal content, repeating, reinforcing, or extending the scope of your message.

Table 2.5.1 lists some common types of visuals and gives examples of their strategic uses.

Table 2.5.1 Strategic Use of Visuals

Type	Purpose	Example(s)
<p>Photograph, Video Clip, or Video Still</p>	<p>Show an actual person, event, or work of art.</p>	 <p>Figure 2.5.3: Historic photo of U.S. troops raising the flag on Iwo Jima. USMC Archives – Flag Raising on Iwo Jima – CC BY 2.0.</p>

Video Trailer, Video Still Show the visual relationships among two or more things; a shape, a contrast in size, a process or how something works.

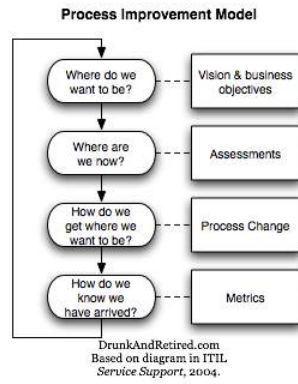


Figure 2.5.4: Michael Coté – Process Improvement Model – CC BY 2.0.

Bar Chart Show the amount of one or more variables at different time intervals.

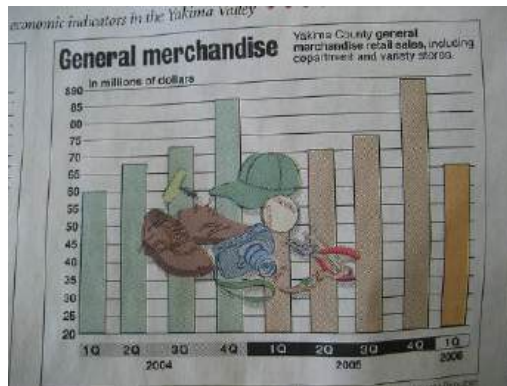


Figure 2.5.5: Jason Tester Guerrilla Future – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Pie Chart Show the percentages of the whole occupied by various segments.



Figure 2.5.6: Chris Potter – 3D Budget Pie Chart – CC BY 2.0.

Line Graph Show the change in one or more variables progressively across time.

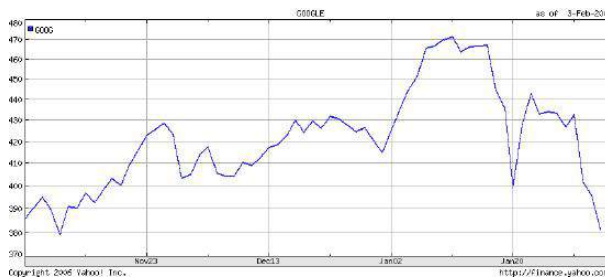


Figure 2.5.7: Michael Coté – GOOG at \$381.55 – CC BY 2.0.

Actual Object Show the audience an item crucial to the discussion.



Figure 2.5.8: jessica wilson – masky – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Body Motion Use your body as a visual to demonstrate an event.

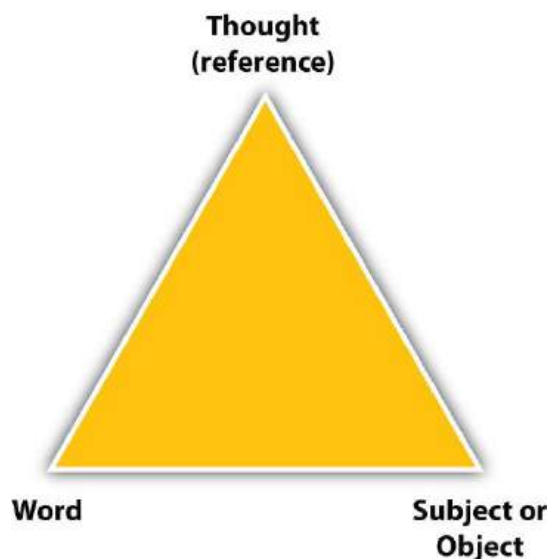


Figure 2.5.9: Sit in a chair, pretend to buckle up, look at the audience, pretend to drive, and then have a mock accident, turning your chair on its side.

Signposts

Signposts (or indicators), are key words that alert the audience to a change in topic, a tangential explanation, an example, or a conclusion. Readers and listeners can sometimes be lulled into “losing their place”—forgetting what point is being made or how far along in the discussion the writer or speaker has gotten. You can help your audience avoid this by signaling to them when a change is coming.

Common signposts include “on the one hand,” “on the other hand,” “the solution to this problem is,” “the reason for this is,” “for example,” “to illustrate,” and “in conclusion” or “in summary.”

Internal Summaries and Foreshadowing

Like signposts, internal summaries and foreshadowing help the audience to keep track of where they are in the message. These strategies work by reviewing what has been covered and by highlighting what is coming next.

As a simple example, suppose you are writing or presenting information on how to assemble a home emergency preparedness kit. If you begin by stating that there are four main items needed for the kit, you are foreshadowing your message and helping your audience to watch or listen for four items. As you cover each of the items, you can say, “The first item,” “The second item,” “Now we’ve got X and Y in our kit; what else do we need? Our third item is,” and so forth. These internal summaries help your audience keep track of progress as your message continues. (The four items, by the way, are water, nonperishable food, first aid supplies, and a dust mask.) (Federal Emergency Management Administration, 2009)

With this strategy, you reinforce relationships between points, examples, and ideas in your message. This can be an effective strategy to encourage selective retention of your content.

Repetition

Saying the same word over and over may not seem like an effective strategy, but when used artfully, repetition can be an effective way to drive home your meaning and help your audience retain it in their memory. Many of history's greatest speakers have used repetition in speeches that have stood the test of time. For example, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave a speech in 1940 that is remembered as his "We Shall Fight" speech; in it he repeats the phrase "we shall fight" no fewer than six times. Similarly, in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King Jr. repeated the phrases "I have a dream" and "let freedom ring" with unforgettable effect.

Another form of repetition is indirect repetition: finding alternative ways of saying the same point or idea. Suppose your main point was, "global warming is raising ocean levels." You might go on to offer several examples, citing the level in each of the major oceans and seas while showing them on a map. You might use photographs or video to illustrate the fact that beaches and entire islands are going underwater. Indirect repetition can underscore and support your points, helping them stand out in the memory of your audience.

Key Takeaway

Emphasize your message by using visuals, signposts, internal summaries and foreshadowing, and repetition.

Exercises

1. Find a news article online or in a newspaper or magazine that uses several visuals. What do the visuals illustrate? Would the article be equally effective without them? Why or why not? Share your findings with your class.
2. Find an article or listen to a presentation that uses signposts. Identify the signposts and explain how they help the audience follow the article or presentation. Share your findings with your class.
3. Find the legend on a map. Pick one symbol and describe its use. Share and compare with the class.

References

Federal Emergency Management Administration. (2009). Get a kit. Retrieved from <http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit>.

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2.6: Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- List and explain the use of six strategies for improving verbal communication.
- Demonstrate the appropriate use of definitions in an oral or written presentation.
- Understand how to assess the audience, choose an appropriate tone, and check for understanding and results in an oral or written presentation.

Throughout the chapter we have visited examples and stories that highlight the importance of verbal communication. To end the chapter, we need to consider how language can be used to enlighten or deceive, encourage or discourage, empower or destroy. By defining the terms we use and choosing precise words, we will maximize our audience’s understanding of our message. In addition, it is important to consider the audience, control your tone, check for understanding, and focus on results. Recognizing the power of verbal communication is the first step to understanding its role and impact on the communication process.

Define Your Terms

Even when you are careful to craft your message clearly and concisely, not everyone will understand every word you say or write. As an effective business communicator, you know it is your responsibility to give your audience every advantage in understanding your meaning. Yet your presentation would fall flat if you tried to define each and every term—you would end up sounding like a dictionary.

The solution is to be aware of any words you are using that may be unfamiliar to your audience. When you identify an unfamiliar word, your first decision is whether to use it or to substitute a more common, easily understood word. If you choose to use the unfamiliar word, then you need to decide how to convey its meaning to those in your audience who are not familiar with it. You may do this in a variety of ways. The most obvious, of course, is to state the meaning directly or to rephrase the term in different words. But you may also convey the meaning in the process of making and supporting your points. Another way is to give examples to illustrate each concept, or use parallels from everyday life.

Overall, keep your audience in mind and imagine yourself in their place. This will help you to adjust your writing level and style to their needs, maximizing the likelihood that your message will be understood.

Choose Precise Words

To increase understanding, choose precise words that paint as vivid and accurate a mental picture as possible for your audience. If you use language that is vague or abstract, your meaning may be lost or misinterpreted. Your document or presentation will also be less dynamic and interesting than it could be.

Table 2.6.2 lists some examples of phrases that are imprecise and precise. Which one evokes a more dynamic image in your imagination?

Table 2.6.1: Precisely What Are You Saying?

The famous writer William Safire died in 2009; he was over seventy.	The former Nixon speech writer, language authority, and <i>New York Times</i> columnist William Safire died of pancreatic cancer in 2009; he was seventy-nine.
Clumber spaniels are large dogs.	The Clumber Spaniel Club of America describes the breed as a “long, low, substantial dog,” standing 17 to 20 inches high and weighing 55 to 80 pounds.
It is important to eat a healthy diet during pregnancy.	Eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy products can improve your health during pregnancy and boost your chances of having a healthy baby.
We are making good progress on the project.	In the two weeks since inception, our four-member team has achieved three of the six objectives we identified for project completion; we are on track to complete the project in another three to four weeks.

For the same amount spent, we expected more value added.	We have examined several proposals in the \$10,000 range, and they all offer more features than what we see in the \$12,500 system ABC Corp. is offering.
Officers were called to the scene.	Responding to a 911 call, State Police Officers Arellano and Chavez sped to the intersection of County Route 53 and State Highway 21.
The victim went down the street.	The victim ran screaming to the home of a neighbor, Mary Lee of 31 Orchard Street.
Several different colorways are available.	The silk jacquard fabric is available in ivory, moss, cinnamon, and topaz colorways.
This smartphone has more applications than customers can imagine.	At last count, the BlackBerry Tempest has more than 500 applications, many costing 99 cents or less; users can get real-time sports scores, upload videos to TwitVid, browse commuter train schedules, edit e-mails before forwarding, and find recipes—but so far, it doesn't do the cooking for you.
A woman was heckled when she spoke at a health care event.	On August 25, 2009, Rep. Frank Pallone (Democrat of New Jersey's 6th congressional district) hosted a "town hall" meeting on health care reform where many audience members heckled and booed a woman in a wheelchair as she spoke about the need for affordable health insurance and her fears that she might lose her home.

Consider Your Audience

In addition to precise words and clear definitions, contextual clues are important to guide your audience as they read. If you are speaking to a general audience and choose to use a word in professional jargon that may be understood by many—but not all—of the people in your audience, follow it by a common reference that clearly relates its essential meaning. With this positive strategy you will be able to forge relationships with audience members from diverse backgrounds. Internal summaries tell us what we've heard and forecast what is to come. It's not just the words, but also how people hear them that counts.

If you say the magic words "in conclusion," you set in motion a set of expectations that you are about to wrap it up. If, however, you introduce a new point and continue to speak, the audience will perceive an expectancy violation and hold you accountable. You said the magic words but didn't honor them. One of the best ways to display respect for your audience is to not exceed the expected time in a presentation or length in a document. Your careful attention to contextual clues will demonstrate that you are clearly considering your audience.

Take Control of Your Tone

Does your writing or speech sound pleasant and agreeable? Simple or sophisticated? Or does it come across as stuffy, formal, bloated, ironic, sarcastic, flowery, rude, or inconsiderate? Recognizing our own tone is not always easy, as we tend to read or listen from our own viewpoint and make allowances accordingly.

Once we have characterized our tone, we need to decide whether and how it can be improved. Getting a handle on how to influence tone and to make your voice match your intentions takes time and skill.

One useful tip is to read your document out loud before you deliver it, just as you would practice a speech before you present it to an audience. Sometimes hearing your own words can reveal their tone, helping you decide whether it is correct or appropriate for the situation.

Another way is to listen or watch others' presentations that have been described with terms associated with tone. Martin Luther King Jr. had one style while President Barack Obama has another. The writing in *The Atlantic* is far more sophisticated than the simpler writing in *USA Today*, yet both are very successful with their respective audiences. What kind of tone is best for your intended audience?

Finally, seek out and be receptive to feedback from teachers, classmates, and coworkers. Don't just take the word of one critic, but if several critics point to a speech as an example of pompous eloquence, and you don't want to come across in your presentation as pompous, you may learn from that example speech what to avoid.

Check for Understanding

When we talk to each other face-to-face, seeing if someone understood you isn't all that difficult. Even if they really didn't get it, you can see, ask questions, and clarify right away. That gives oral communication, particularly live interaction, a distinct advantage. Use this immediacy for feedback to your advantage. Make time for feedback and plan for it. Ask clarifying questions. Share your presentation with more than one person, and choose people that have similar characteristics to your anticipated audience.

If you were going to present to a group that you knew in advance was of a certain age, sex, or professional background, it would only make sense to connect with someone from that group prior to your actual performance to check and see if what you have created and what they expect are similar. In oral communication, feedback is core component of the communication model and we can often see it, hear it, and it takes less effort to assess it.

Be Results Oriented

At the end of the day, the assignment has to be complete. It can be a challenge to balance the need for attention to detail with the need to arrive at the end product—and its due date. Stephen Covey suggests beginning with the end in mind as one strategy for success. If you have done your preparation, know your assignment goals, desired results, have learned about your audience and tailored the message to their expectations, then you are well on your way to completing the task. No document or presentation is perfect, but the goal itself is worthy of your continued effort for improvement.

Here the key is to know when further revision will not benefit the presentation and to shift the focus to test marketing, asking for feedback, or simply sharing it with a mentor or coworker for a quick review. Finding balance while engaging in an activity that requires a high level of attention to detail can be challenge for any business communicator, but it is helpful to keep the end in mind.

Key Takeaway

To improve communication, define your terms, choose precise words, consider your audience, control your tone, check for understanding, and aim for results.

Exercises

1. Choose a piece of writing from a profession you are unfamiliar with. For example, if you are studying biology, choose an excerpt from a book on fashion design. Identify several terms you are unfamiliar with, terms that may be considered jargon. How does the writer help you understand the meaning of these terms? Could the writer make them easier to understand? Share your findings with your class.
2. In your chosen career field or your college major, identify ten jargon words, define them, and share them with the class.
3. Describe a simple process, from brushing your teeth to opening the top of a bottle, in as precise terms as possible. Present to the class.

References

- Covey, S. (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

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2.7: Additional Resources

Benjamin Lee Whorf was one of the twentieth century's foremost linguists. Learn more about his theories of speech behavior by visiting this site. https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Lee_Whorf

Visit Infoplease to learn more about the eminent linguist (and U.S. senator) S. I. Hayakawa. <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0880739.html>

Harvard psychology professor Steven Pinker is one of today's most innovative authorities on language. Explore reviews of books about language Pinker has published. stevenpinker.com/taxonomy/term/4265

Reference.com offers a wealth of definitions, synonym finders, and other guides to choosing the right words. <http://dictionary.reference.com>

Visit Goodreads and learn about one of the best word usage guides, Bryan Garner's *Modern American Usage*. http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/344643.Garner_s_Modern_American_Usage

Visit Goodreads and learn about one of the most widely used style manuals, *The Chicago Manual of Style*. http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/103362.The_Chicago_Manual_of_Style

For in-depth information on how to present visuals effectively, visit the Web site of Edward Tufte, a Professor Emeritus at Yale University, where he taught courses in statistical evidence, information design, and interface design. <http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/index>

The "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the most famous speeches of all time. View it on video and read the text. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>

The Religious Communication Association, an interfaith organization, seeks to promote honest, respectful dialogue reflecting diversity of religious beliefs. www.relcomm.org/

To learn more about being results oriented, visit the Web site of Stephen Covey, author of the best seller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. www.stephencovey.com

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Understanding Your Audience

[3.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication](#)

[3.2: Perception](#)

[3.3: Differences in Perception](#)

[3.4: Getting to Know Your Audience](#)

[3.5: Listening and Reading for Understanding](#)

[3.6: Additional Resources](#)

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3.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the factors that contribute to self-concept.
2. Describe how the self-fulfilling prophecy works.

In the first of the Note 3.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter, you listed terms to describe yourself. This exercise focuses on your knowledge, skills, experience, interests, and relationships. Your sense of self comes through in your oral and written presentations. Public communication starts with intrapersonal communication, or communication with yourself. You need to know what you want to say before you can say it to an audience.

Understanding your perspective can lend insight to your awareness, the ability to be conscious of events and stimuli. Awareness determines what you pay attention to, how you carry out your intentions, and what you remember of your activities and experiences each day. Awareness is a complicated and fascinating area of study. The way we take in information, give it order, and assign it meaning has long interested researchers from disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Your perspective is a major factor in this dynamic process. Whether you are aware of it or not, you bring to the act of reading this sentence a frame of mind formed from experiences and education across your lifetime. Imagine that you see a presentation about snorkeling in beautiful Hawaii as part of a travel campaign. If you have never been snorkeling but love to swim, how will your perspective lead you to pay attention to the presentation? If, however, you had a traumatic experience as a child in a pool and are now afraid of being under water, how will your perspective influence your reaction?



Figure 3.1.1: Peaceful or dangerous? Your perception influences your response. sandwich – bryan and jason, diving a wall – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Learning to recognize how your perspective influences your thoughts is a key step in understanding yourself and preparing to communicate with others.

The communication process itself is the foundation for oral and written communication. Whether we express ourselves in terms of a live, face-to-face conversation or across a voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) chat via audio and visual channels, emoticons (:)), and abbreviations (IMHO [In My Humble Opinion]), the communication process remains the same. Imagine that you are at work and your Skype program makes the familiar noise indicating that someone wants to talk. Your caller ID tells you that it is a friend.

You also know that you have the report right in front of you to get done before 5:00 p.m. Your friend is quite a talker, and for him everything tends to have a “gotta talk about it right now” sense of urgency. You know a little bit about your potential audience or conversational partner. Do you take the call? Perhaps you chat back “Busy, after 5,” only to have him call again. You interpret the ring as his insistent need for attention, but you have priorities. You can choose to close the Skype program, stop the ringing, and get on with your report, but do you? Communication occurs on many levels in several ways.

Self-Concept

When we communicate, we are full of expectations, doubts, fears, and hopes. Where we place emphasis, what we focus on, and how we view our potential has a direct impact on our communication interactions. You gather a sense of self as you grow, age, and experience others and the world. At various times in your life, you have probably been praised for some of your abilities and talents, and criticized for doing some things poorly. These compliments and criticisms probably had a deep impact on you. Much of what we know about ourselves we’ve learned through interaction with others. Not everyone has had positive influences in their lives, and not every critic knows what they are talking about, but criticism and praise still influence how and what we expect from ourselves.

Carol Dweck, a psychology researcher at Stanford University, states that “something that seems like a small intervention can have cascading effects on things we think of as stable or fixed, including extroversion, openness to new experience, and resilience.” (Begley, 2008) Your personality and expressions of it, like oral and written communication, were long thought to have a genetic component. But, says Dweck, “More and more research is suggesting that, far from being simply encoded in the genes, much of personality is a flexible and dynamic thing that changes over the life span and is shaped by experience.” (Begley, 2008) If you were told by someone that you were not a good speaker, know this: You can change. You can shape your performance through experience, and a business communication course, a mentor at work, or even reading effective business communication authors can result in positive change.

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

When you consider what makes you *you*, the answers multiply as do the questions. As a baby, you learned to recognize that the face in the mirror was your face. But as an adult, you begin to wonder what and who you are. While we could discuss the concept of self endlessly and philosophers have wrestled and will continue to wrestle with it, for our purposes, let’s focus on self, which is defined as one’s own sense of individuality, motivations, and personal characteristics (McLean, 2003). We also must keep in mind that this concept is not fixed or absolute; instead it changes as we grow and change across our lifetimes.

One point of discussion useful for our study about ourselves as communicators is to examine our attitudes, beliefs, and values. These are all interrelated, and researchers have varying theories as to which comes first and which springs from another. We learn our values, beliefs, and attitudes through interaction with others. Table 3.1.1 defines these terms and provides an example of each.

Table 3.1.1 Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

	Definition	Changeable?	Example
Attitudes	Learned predispositions to a concept or object	Subject to change	I enjoyed the writing exercise in class today.
Beliefs	Convictions or expressions of confidence	Can change over time	This course is important because I may use the communication skills I am learning in my career.
Values	Ideals that guide our behavior	Generally long lasting	Effective communication is important.

An attitude is your immediate disposition toward a concept or an object. Attitudes can change easily and frequently. You may prefer vanilla while someone else prefers peppermint, but if someone tries to persuade you of how delicious peppermint is, you may be willing to try it and find that you like it better than vanilla.

Beliefs are ideas based on our previous experiences and convictions and may not necessarily be based on logic or fact. You no doubt have beliefs on political, economic, and religious issues. These beliefs may not have been formed through rigorous study, but you nevertheless hold them as important aspects of self. Beliefs often serve as a frame of reference through which we interpret our world. Although they can be changed, it often takes time or strong evidence to persuade someone to change a belief.

Values are core concepts and ideas of what we consider good or bad, right or wrong, or what is worth the sacrifice. Our values are central to our self-image, what makes us who we are. Like beliefs, our values may not be based on empirical research or rational thinking, but they are even more resistant to change than are beliefs. To undergo a change in values, a person may need to undergo a transformative life experience.

For example, suppose you highly value the freedom to make personal decisions, including the freedom to choose whether or not to wear a helmet while driving a motorcycle. This value of individual choice is central to your way of thinking and you are unlikely to change this value. However, if your brother was driving a motorcycle without a helmet and suffered an accident that fractured his skull and left him with permanent brain damage, you might reconsider this value. While you might still value freedom of choice in many areas of life, you might become an advocate for helmet laws—and perhaps also for other forms of highway safety, such as stiffer penalties for cell-phone talking and texting while driving.

Self-Image and Self-Esteem

Your self-concept is composed of two main elements: self-image and self-esteem.

Your self-image is how you see yourself, how you would describe yourself to others. It includes your physical characteristics—your eye color, hair length, height, and so forth. It also includes your knowledge, experience, interests, and relationships. If these sound familiar, go back and look at the first of the Note 3.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter. In creating the personal inventory in this exercise, you identified many characteristics that contribute to your self-image. In addition, image involves not just how you look but also your expectations of yourself—what you can be.

What is your image of yourself as a communicator? How do you feel about your ability to communicate? While the two responses may be similar, they indicate different things. Your self-esteem is how you feel about yourself; your feelings of self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-respect. Healthy self-esteem can be particularly important when you experience a setback or a failure. Instead of blaming yourself or thinking, “I’m just no good,” high self-esteem will enable you to persevere and give yourself positive messages like “If I prepare well and try harder, I can do better next time.”

Putting your self-image and self-esteem together yields your self-concept: your central identity and set of beliefs about who you are and what you are capable of accomplishing. When it comes to communicating, your self-concept can play an important part. You may find that communicating is a struggle, or the thought of communicating may make you feel talented and successful. Either way, if you view yourself as someone capable of learning new skills and improving as you go, you will have an easier time learning to be an effective communicator. Whether positive or negative, your self-concept influences your performance and the expression of that essential ability: communication.

Looking-Glass Self

In addition to how we view ourselves and feel about ourselves, of course, we often take into consideration the opinions and behavior of others. Charles Cooley’s looking-glass self reinforces how we look to others and how they view us, treat us, and interact with us to gain insight of our identity. We place an extra emphasis on parents, supervisors, and on those who have some degree of control over us when we look at others. Developing a sense of self as a communicator involves balance between constructive feedback from others and constructive self-affirmation. You judge yourself, as others do, and both views count.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Now, suppose that you are treated in an especially encouraging manner in one of your classes. Imagine that you have an instructor who continually “catches you doing something right” and praises you for your efforts and achievements. Would you be likely to do well in this class and perhaps go on to take more advanced courses in this subject?

In a psychology experiment that has become famous through repeated trials, several public school teachers were told that specific students in their classes were expected to do quite well because of their intelligence (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). These students were identified as having special potential that had not yet “bloomed.” What the teachers didn’t know was that these “special potential” students were randomly selected. That’s right: as a group, they had no more special potential than any other students.

Can you anticipate the outcome? As you may guess, the students lived up to their teachers’ level of expectation. Even though the teachers were supposed to give appropriate attention and encouragement to all students, in fact they unconsciously communicated special encouragement verbally and nonverbally to the special potential students. And these students, who were actually no more gifted than their peers, showed significant improvement by the end of the school year. This phenomenon came to be called the “Pygmalion effect” after the myth of a Greek sculptor named Pygmalion, who carved a marble statue of a woman so lifelike that he

fell in love with her—and in response to his love she did in fact come to life and marry him (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Insel & Jacobson, 1975).

In more recent studies, researchers have observed that the opposite effect can also happen: when students are seen as lacking potential, teachers tend to discourage them or, at a minimum, fail to give them adequate encouragement. As a result, the students do poorly (Schugurensky, 2009; Anyon, 1980; Oakes, 1985; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

When people encourage you, it affects the way you see yourself and your potential. Seek encouragement for your writing and speaking. Actively choose positive reinforcement as you develop your communication skills. You will make mistakes, but the important thing is to learn from them. Keep in mind that criticism should be constructive, with specific points you can address, correct, and improve.

The concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which someone's behavior comes to match and mirror others' expectations, is not new. Robert Rosenthal, a professor of social psychology at Harvard, has observed four principles while studying this interaction between expectations and performance:

1. We form certain expectations of people or events.
2. We communicate those expectations with various cues, verbal and nonverbal.
3. People tend to respond to these cues by adjusting their behavior to match the expectations.
4. The outcome is that the original expectation becomes true.

Key Takeaway

You can become a more effective communicator by understanding yourself and how others view you: your attitudes, beliefs, and values; your self-concept; and how the self-fulfilling prophecy may influence your decisions.

Exercises

1. How would you describe yourself as a public speaker? Now, five, and ten years ago? Is your description the same or does it change across time? This business communication text and course can make a difference in what you might write for the category “one year from today.”
2. How does your self-concept influence your writing? Write a one- to two-page essay on this topic and discuss it with a classmate.
3. Make a list of at least three of your strongly held beliefs. What are those beliefs based on? List some facts, respected authorities, or other evidence that support them. Share your results with your class.
4. What are some of the values held by people you know? Identify a target sample size (twenty is a good number) and ask members of your family, friends, and peers about their values. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
5. Make a list of traits you share with your family members. Interview them and see if anyone else in your family has shared them. Share and compare with your classmates.
6. What does the field of psychology offer concerning the self-fulfilling prophecy? Investigate the topic and share your findings.

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3.2: Perception

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the concept of perception.
2. Describe the process of selection and the factors that influence it.
3. Describe several principles of organization.
4. Explain how interpretation influences our perceptions.

Look at the fourth of the Note 3.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter. If you deciphered the hidden message, how did you do it? You may have tried looking for words that were diagonal or backwards, using skills you learned solving similar puzzles in the past. While there are many ways to solve this puzzle, there is only one right answer (McLean, 2003). Reading from right to left (not left to right), and bottom to top (not top to bottom), the hidden message reads: *Your perspective influences how you perceive your world.*

Where did you start reading on this page? The top left corner. Why not the bottom right corner, or the top right one? In English we read left to right, from the top of the page to the bottom. But not everyone reads the same. If you read and write Arabic or Hebrew, you will proceed from right to left. Neither is right or wrong, simply different. You may find it hard to drive on the *other* side of the road while visiting England, but for people in the United Kingdom, it is normal and natural.

We can extend this concept in many ways. Imagine that you are doing a sales presentation to a group where the average age is much older or younger than you. In terms of words to use to communicate ideas, references to music or movies, even expectations for behaviors when dating, their mental “road map” may be quite different from yours. Even though your sales message might focus on a product like a car, or a service like car washing, preconceived ideas about both will need to be addressed.

For example, how many advertisements have you seen on television that have a song from specific time period, like the 1980s, or perhaps the 1960s? The music is a clear example of targeting a specific audience with something distinctive, like a familiar song. When speaking or writing, your style, tone, and word choice all influence the reader. The degree to which you can tailor your message to their needs will be associated with an increase in the overall effectiveness of your message. These differences in perspective influence communication and your ability to recognize not only your point of view but theirs will help you become “other-oriented” and improve communication.

Look at the puzzle again and see if you can *avoid* seeing the solution. It’ll be hard because now that you know where it is, you have a mental road map that leads you to the solution. The mental state where you could not see it, or perceive it, is gone. Your audience has a mental road map that includes values, experiences, beliefs, strategies to deal with challenges, even scripts for behavioral expectations. You need to read the maps as closely as possibly in order to be able to communicate from common ground.

This discussion illustrates what the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas calls preunderstanding, a set of expectations and assumptions from previous experience that we apply to a new problem or situation. We draw from our experiences to help guide us to our goal, even when the situations may be completely different. We “understand” before we experience because we predict or apply our mental template to what we think is coming.

Expectations affect our perceptions. If the teacher says, “I need to see you after class” your perception might involve thoughts like, “What have I done? Why me? What does he or she want?” and you may even think back to other times in similar situations. This may contribute to a negative perception of the meeting, and then you might be surprised to learn the teacher only wanted to tell you about a scholarship opportunity. The same idea applies to your audience. They will have certain expectations of you as a speaker.

“The customary forms and configurations (of communication) that members expect” are called conventions (Kostelnick, 1998). You’ve probably heard the terms “conventional,” perhaps in relation to a “conventional oven.” This use means a standard type oven with a heat source as opposed a microwave oven. Who decided that a stove, for example, would have burners on top and a front-opening door to the oven? Why four burners and not three, or two? Many modern stoves have ceramic burners that are integrated in to the top of the oven, or even into the top of a counter, separate from the oven. These new applications “stretch” the notion of what is the standard for a stove.

People use conventions to guide them every day. On which side of the plate will you find the spoon? In a formal place setting, the answer is “right.” If, however, you are at a potluck supper, you may be handed a plate with all your utensils, including the spoon, just sitting on top. Or you might find a pile of spoons next to the plates and have to get one for yourself. In each case there are a set

of conventions in place that we use to guide behavior and establish expectations. At a formal dinner, eating with your fingers might be unconventional or even rude. The same actions at a potluck might be the dominant convention, as in everyone is doing it.

In business communication, conventions are always in place. The audience will have a set of expectations you need to consider, and you need to keep an open mind about the importance of those expectations; but you also need to achieve your goal of informing, persuading, or motivating them. If you are presenting a sales message and the results are zero sales, you'll have to take a long look at what you presented and develop alternative strategies. Providing a different perspective to your audience while adapting to their expectations and finding common ground is a good first step in gaining and maintaining their attention.

We often make assumptions about what others are communicating and connect the dots in ways that were not intended by the speaker. As a business communicator, your goal is to help the audience connect the dots in the way you intend while limiting alternative solutions that may confuse and divide the audience.

Taking care to make sure you understand before connecting your dots and creating false expectations is a positive way to prepare yourself for the writing process. Do you know what the assignment is? Are the goals and results clear? Do you know your audience? All these points reinforce the central theme that clear and concise communication is critical in business and industry.

Selection

Can you imagine what life would be like if you heard, saw, and felt every stimulus or activity in your environment all day long? It would be overwhelming. It is impossible to perceive, remember, process, and respond to every action, smell, sound, picture, or word that we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. We would be lost paying attention to everything, being distracted by everything, and lack focus on anything.

In the same way, a cluttered message, with no clear format or way of discerning where the important information is located, can overwhelm the listener. It is handy, therefore, that we as humans can choose to pay attention to a specific stimulus while ignoring or tuning out others. This raises the question, however, of why we choose to pay attention to one thing over another. Since we cannot pay attention to everything at once, we choose to pay attention to what appears to be the most relevant for us.

This action of sorting competing messages, or choosing stimuli, is called selection. Selection is one very important part of perception and awareness. You select what to pay attention to based on what is important to you, or what you value, and that is different for each person. Let's pretend you're reading an article for class, or perhaps you're not as much reading but skimming or half-listening to the author's voice in your head, and only following along enough to get the main idea, as you do when you scan rather than read something word for word.

At the same time you are thinking about the attractive classmate who sits in the third row, wondering when it will be noon, and starting to think about what to eat for lunch. In this real-world example, we can quickly count the four stimuli you've selected to pay attention to, but not all of them receive equal attention at every moment. Perhaps your stomach starts to growl; while the mental image of the attractive classmate is indeed attractive, your stomach demands the center stage of your attention.

A stage is a useful way to think about your focus or attention. There are times when you see everything on the stage, the literal stage in terms of theater or the page you are reading now, in print or online. The stage refers to the setting, scene, and context of the communication interaction, and can be equally applied to written or oral communication. This page can be a stage, where objects, symbols, and words are placed to guide your attention in the same way an actor striding across a theater stage will compel you.

You may perceive everything happening at once—while your attention is divided, you still have a larger perspective. Suppose you have just come home from work and are standing by your kitchen table opening the day's mail. At the same time, you are planning what to cook for dinner and trying to get your dog leashed up to take a quick walk outside. You open a letter in a preprinted envelope whose return address is unfamiliar. The relationships between the words or characters are readily apparent. With one glance you can see that the letter is an introduction letter with a sales message, you assess that it doesn't interest you, and into the round file (garbage can) it goes.

If you were the author of that letter, you might be quite disappointed. How do you grasp a reader's attention? Part of the solution lies in your ability to help the reader select the key point or bit of information that will lead to "what else?" instead of "no, thanks."

The same lesson applies to public speaking, but the cues will be distinct. The audience won't throw you into the round file, but mentally they may ignore you and start planning what's for dinner, tuning you out. They may fidget, avoid eye contact, or even get up and walk out—all signs that your sales message was not well received.

There are other times where you are so focused on one character or part of the stage that you miss something going on the other side. In the same way, as you sit in your late-morning class and focus on your growling stomach, the instructor's voice becomes less of a focus until you hear laughter from your classmates. You look up to see and hear a friend say, "We can clearly see the power and the importance of nutrition and its impact on attention span," as he or she gestures in your direction. You notice that everyone is looking back at you and realize they too heard your stomach. Your focus and attention are important and constantly challenged.

As we follow the bouncing ball of attention, we see how selection involves focusing on one stimulus while limiting our attention on another, or ignoring it altogether. We do this as a matter of course.

The process of selection and ignoring has been discussed in both contexts of a learned behavior as well as something we are born with, as in instinct or preprogrammed behavioral patterns. Regardless of whether this process is instinctive or learned, we can easily see from the previous example how the speaker, to a degree, competes with internal and external stimuli.

Internal stimuli are those that arise from within one's self, such as being hungry. External stimuli involve stimulation from outside one's self, such as the image of the attractive classmate or the sound of the instructor's voice. As a communicator, your awareness of both of these sources of stimuli will help you recognize the importance or preparation, practice, and persistence as you prepare your message with them in mind. How will you help guide the audience's thoughts about your topic? How will you build attention-getting features throughout your written work? How will you address issues like sleepiness when you cannot change the designated time of your speech, scheduled right after lunch? All these issues relate to the selection process, and to a degree the speaker can influence the perception of both internal and external stimuli.

Selection has three main parts: exposure, attention, and retention (Klopf, 1995). Selective exposure is both information we choose to pay attention to and information that we choose to ignore, or that is unavailable to us. For example, in a class you may have been required to view a student-created YouTube video presentation on which is better for you, Gatorade or water. As your levels of exposure to stimuli influence your decisions, you may think, "Oh, I've heard this before," and tune the speaker out. Selective attention involves focusing on one stimulus, like the image of an attractive classmate, and tuning out a competing stimulus, like the instructor's voice. Selective retention involves choosing to remember one stimulus over another.

You may be out walking and spot a friend from the same class. Your friend may say, "The program we had to watch for class said Gatorade has trans fat in it. Do you think that's true?" and you may be at a loss, having no memory of hearing any such thing because, while you were present in your room, you were paying attention to other stimuli. Furthermore, you may not be a nutrition major like your friend so that the term "trans fat" may not mean anything to you. To someone majoring in nutrition, it might be a common term used across their classes, but if you are an accounting major, you may not be familiar with the term. This illustrates how one aspect of selection, like exposure, can influence another aspect, like retention.

You might then think to yourself that the point in which you tuned out in the Gatorade program has something to do with this term and realize that as the speaker became technical about the nutritional and metabolic properties of Gatorade, you lost interest because you were unfamiliar with the terms being used. This highlights one aspect of a presentation that a speaker can focus on to influence the perception process. Not everyone in the audience will understand all the terminology, so by defining terms, providing visual aid cues, or speaking in common terms, you can make your topic and its presentation more accessible to a larger percentage of your audience.

Now, if you were asked to recall the basic properties of Gatorade after watching the program, could you? Even if you recall the general idea of the program, you may have a hard time remembering any specific property because you were focused on your hunger. Although you may have *heard* the words, you may not have chosen to *listen* to them. Hearing means you heard words, but listening implies you actively chose to listen to the program, processing the sounds, following the thread of discussion, making it easier for you to recall. This again illustrates the point that you chose one stimuli over another, in effect selecting what to pay attention to, and if the speaker was competing for your attention with more attractive, interesting or distracting stimuli, you probably just tuned him or her out, in effect deselecting them.

Organization

Organization is the process of sorting information into logical categories or series. We often take things we perceive and organize them into categories based on what we have perceived previously. Think back to the Gatorade video. Suppose the speaker started out with an attention statement and quickly moved to highlight three main points in the introduction. While the attention statement got you, by the second main point you were already starting to think, "This is going to be just another speech on how great

Gatorade is for my body.” You may think this because you have already heard other speakers presented similar information and you classify what you think this presentation is going to be in relation to your previous experiences.

But this speaker may have given some thought to the presentation and how to make it unique and interesting, and prepared their discussion on the nutritional aspects in more depth. As a result, the information may have been organized into categories like ingredients, how your body uses the ingredients, and what the net result is. The final conclusion might be that if you exercise and burn off the calories present in Gatorade, it might be a positive choice, but if you drink it just to drink it, then it will only provide you with empty calories just like any other soft drink.

Organization Schemes

The organization scheme used to create three categories focuses on nutrition and the process by which Gatorade’s ingredients are used by the body. The conclusion creates two categories of consumers. This organization scheme can promote active listening and allow the audience to follow, but the speaker must take into account the possibility that an audience member might think, “Oh no, not again.” To set this presentation apart from others the audience might have heard, the speaker could include a phrase like, “Is Gatorade always for you? Not necessarily. Let’s look at...” which gains attention and penetrates a stereotype.

When you write a document or give a presentation, you may not be able to anticipate all the ways an audience might organize the information you present or how they might use it, but by investing time in seeing it from their perspective, you can improve your organization and be a more effective communicator.

For example, suppose you are assigned the task of writing a cost-benefit analysis report on a specific product currently in development. Do you already know the essential points you need to include and the common industry standards for this type of report? You may not know, but you have written an essay before and appreciate the need for organization. Your ability to organize information, taking something that you know or have experienced and applying it to new information, helps you make sense of your world.

Gestalt Principles of Organization

In the early twentieth century, some psychologists thought we could examine parts of things, much as a scientist would examine an atom, and make a whole and complete picture regardless of context. Their theory was that the setting and scene would not influence the picture or perspective. In response to this view, other psychologists developed what they called Gestalt principles—the German word “Gestalt” referring to the unified whole. According to Gestalt theory, context matters, and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. What you see and how you see it matters, and you yourself play a role in that perception of organization.

In the fifth of the Note 3.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter, you were asked to connect nine dots with four straight lines, without retracing any line. Did you find a solution? (A common solution appears at the end of this chapter.) The key to solving this puzzle is finding a way to “think outside the box”—in this case, to take your pencil outside the implied square, or box, formed by the three rows of dots. The physical configuration of the dots contributed to the illusion of the “box.” But in fact there is no box, and our tendency to see one where one does not exist creates barriers to solving the puzzle. Gestalt theory states that we will perceive the nine dots as belonging to a whole—a group or set having a certain shape—whether or not that whole actually exists.

Gestalt principles apply not only to images or objects, but also to ideas and concepts. You can associate two or more bits of information in predictable ways, but your perspective can influence your view of the overall idea. We don’t always have all the information we need to draw a conclusion, literally drawing a series of relationships to form a whole picture in our minds, so we often fill in the gaps. We guess and make logical leaps, even suspend disbelief, all in an effort to make sense of our experiences.

In your presentations, if you jump from topic to topic or go off on a tangent, what happens to the listener’s ability to listen and follow you effectively? Why make barriers for your audience when you’ve worked so hard to get their attention? How does this relate to Gestalt principles? By failing to recognize our natural tendency to want ideas, shapes, or words to make sense, the author is confusing the reader. What happens when the reader is confused? He or she moves on to something else, and leaves your writing behind. The opposite of clear and concise, confused, and poorly organized writing can distract and defeat even the most motivated of readers. Table 3.2.2 lists some of the Gestalt organization principles.

Table 3.2.1: Gestalt Principles of Organization

Principle	Definition	Example

Principle	Definition	Example
Proximity	Organization based on relationship of space to objects	Next to me on the beach, I see my daughter playing with her pail and shovel; in the middle distance, a trio of kayakers paddle by; farther away, I see several power boats, and in the far distance, the green shore of Long Island.
Continuity	Drawing connections between things that occur in sequence	I am beginning to notice a pattern in the absentee rate in our department. For the past year, more workers have been absent on the first Friday of the month than on other days. I expect we will again have many absences next Friday, as it is the first Friday of the month.
Similarity	Grouping things or concepts by properties they share	To make appliquéed candles, (Ruffman, 2007) you will need the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decorative material to appliqué: floral (fresh flowers, pine needles, or leaves), homey (dried beans or grains) or folksy (small nuts and bolts) 2. Candle body: fat candles (at least 4" diameter to keep dried flowers away from flame), natural colored wax (sheets or chunks of beeswax or paraffin) 3. Tools: a microwave flower press, a ½-inch paintbrush, a tin pie plate, a chip carving knife or v-tool
Uniformity/Homogeneity	Noting ways in which concepts or objects are alike	Armored personnel carriers include the Stryker, LAV, Pandur, M113 Armored Personnel Carrier, Amphibious Assault Vehicle, Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, Grizzly APC, Rhino Runner, Bison (armored personnel carrier), and Mamba APC.
Figure and Ground	Emphasis on a single item that stands out from its surroundings	On a rock in Copenhagen Harbor stands the small statue of The Little Mermaid, a memorial to one of Denmark's most beloved citizens, Hans Christian Andersen.
Symmetry	Balancing objects or ideas equally from one side to the other	Representing the conservative viewpoint was <i>Wall Street Journal</i> correspondent John Emshwiller; the liberal viewpoint was argued by <i>New York Times</i> columnist Paul Krugman.
Closure	Tendency to use previous knowledge to fill in the gaps in an incomplete idea or picture	The wording of the memo was, "It is important for all employees to submit their health insurance enrollment selections no than November 1," but everyone understood that it should have said, "no later than November 1."

Let's examine some of the commonly used Gestalt principles: proximity, continuation, similarity, and closure.

It makes sense that we would focus first on things around us and the degree to which they are close to us and to each other. Proximity is the perceptual organization of information based on physical relationship of space to objects. In creating a scene for a play or movie, a stage designer knows that the audience will tend to pay attention to objects in the foreground, unless special emphasis is added to objects farther away. This principle extends to people and daily life. Just because someone is walking down the street next to someone else, this does not necessarily mean they have a connection to each other—they are simply in close proximity.

We also see a similar tendency in the principle of continuity. We like things to be orderly, and our brain will see lines and movement where none exist. Examine Figure 3.2.1. What you see? Do you perceive two lines crossing one another? Or an X? The principle of continuity predicts that you would demonstrate a tendency to perceive continuous figures. The two lines cross one another, and you might even say from top to bottom or the reverse, when there is no motion indicated.

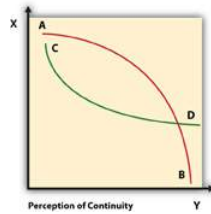


Figure 3.2.1 Continuity

Continuity can also lead to a well-known logical fallacy, or false belief, involving sequence and cause-effect relationships. If something happens after something else, does that mean that the first event caused the second event? You wish for rain and it rains. Connected? Logic and common sense would say no. You have a dream about a plane crash, and the next day there is a major airline crash. Did your dream cause the crash? Obviously not.

When objects or events are similar, we tend to group them together in our minds, again making the assumption that they are related by their common characteristics. Similarity is the perceptual organization of information based on perceived points of common characteristics across distinct items. For example, a horse, a mule, and a donkey are distinct, but we perceive them as being similar to one another.

The principle of closure underscores our tendency to use previous knowledge to fill in the gaps in an incomplete idea or picture. If you are talking to a friend on your cell phone and the connection breaks up for a few seconds, you may miss some words, but you can grasp the main idea by automatically guessing what was said. You do this based on your previous history of communicating with your friend on similar topics. Do you always guess correctly? Of course not. Look at Figure 3.2.2.



Figure 3.2.2: Do you see a ring of Pac-Man-like circles?

When we say we see a star, we don't really see one because there is no star. The five Pac-Man shapes in that arrangement, however, allow our mind to say, "If this was connected to this and that was connected to that, there would be a star." Sometimes the sense we make does not match reality, and we see a star where there is no star.

Sometimes we "fill in the blanks" without even being aware of it. When we speak on a topic and fail to clearly articulate a point or substantiate an assertion, we leave a "hole" in our presentation that the listener may or may not be aware of, but will predictably fill. This tendency to jump to conclusions may seem like a disadvantage, but it is only a disadvantage if you are unaware of it. In fact, it's a positive ability that allows us to infer and guess correctly, often in times of crisis when time is limited. But we don't always guess correctly. If your goal is to communicate your message to the audience, then by definition you don't want a "pothole" to interrupt, distract, or create a barrier that leads to misinterpretation.

Interpretation

After selection and organization, interpretation is the third step in the perception process. From your past experiences combined with your current expectations, you assign meaning to the current stimuli. If the word "college" for you has meaning, then what comes to mind? If a high school student has to take the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) in the morning, what does that word mean to him? Will his state of anxiety and anticipation over the importance of the exam and the unknown word of college influence how he responds to that word? If his parents ask, "Where are you planning on going to college?" when he is simply focused on the test that may influence his options, the word itself may take on a whole new meaning. It may invite issues of control

(“Which college? You are going to the college we went to, right?”) or of self-esteem (“Am I good enough to go to college?”) to become associated with the word “college.”

The word itself may shift in terms of meaning across time. Let’s say the high school student did well on the PSAT and went to the same college as his parents. Is it the same college, or just the same location and buildings? It may have a tradition, but it is at the same time new and ever-changing, just like the students that arrive each year. Fast forward a couple of years and the college may represent a place where you studied, made friends, and came to know yourself. In a few more years, you may choose to become a member of the alumni association. The meaning of the word “college” can shift intrapersonally across time, and can mean different things to different groups.

Let’s rewind and look back at a test gone bad, taken by a less than adequately prepared student from a household where there may not be sufficient resources to make the dream of college come true. The image of college may remain an image instead of a reality; a goal not attained. Structural barriers like socioeconomic status, parental and peer influences, and the need to work to support yourself or your family can all influence your decisions and perspective.

Key Takeaway

Perceptions are influenced by how we select, organize, and interpret words and ideas.

Exercises

1. Do a search on “M. C. Escher” or “tessellation art.” How does Escher’s work manipulate your perception? Share your opinions with your classmates.
2. Think of ways to describe something you know, such as what your home looks like. Organize the information using one of the Gestalt principles (e.g., proximity, similarity, continuity, or closure). Present the organized information to a classmate. Can your classmate tell which Gestalt principle you have used?
3. How does the process of perception limit our view, or expand it? Can we choose how to perceive things? Write a one- to two-page essay on this topic and discuss it with a classmate.
4. Think of a time when you jumped to a conclusion and later learned that it was incorrect. Write a brief summary of the experience. Share and compare with classmates.

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3.3: Differences in Perception

Learning Objectives

- Determine how perception differs between people.

Someone may say what you consider to be a simple exclamatory sentence—“Earn college credit while studying abroad!”—but a thought may come to mind: “How will I fit in as an outsider in a foreign country?” What makes you a member of a group? How you distinguish between those who belong in our family, group, or community and those who do not is central to our study of communication. Learning to see issues and experiences from multiple perspective can be a challenging task, but the effort is worth it. Increased understanding about each other can positively impact our communication and improve the degree to which we can share and understand meaning across languages, cultures, and divergent perspectives.

Why Don't We All See Eye to Eye?

People perceive things differently. We choose to select different aspects of a message to focus our attention based on what interests us, what is familiar to us, or what we consider important. Often, our listening skills could use improvement. Listening and thinking are directly related. When you are reading, what do you hear? When you are talking with someone, what do you hear? If the sound of your thoughts or voice is at least one of your answers, then communication is not occurring. Try to read this paragraph again without interruption. Your tendency might be to skim over the words, or to focus on key vocabulary, but if you allow your thoughts to stray from the text you are reading, even for a moment, you are interrupting your processing of the written word, or reading. Interruptions will impair your ability to understand and retain information, and make studying even harder.

In order to better understand perception, we will examine how you choose to pay attention, remember, and interpret messages within the communication process.

Individual Differences in Perception

Why do people perceive things in different ways? To answer the question, recall that we all engage in selection, or choosing some stimuli while ignoring others. We exist as individuals within a community, regardless of whether we are conscious of it. Do you like 80s music? Prefer the Beatles? Nothing before 2005? Your tastes in music involve the senses, and what you choose to experience is influenced by your context and environment. Your habits, values, and outlook on life are influenced by where you come from and where you are.

The attributes that cause people to perceive things differently are known as individual differences. Let's examine several of the most important ones.

Physical characteristics influence how we perceive and respond to information. You may be asked to design a sign that says, “Watch your head,” which will be placed next to a six foot six inch overhang that is above floor level. While a few very tall people will have to worry about hitting their heads on the overhang, most people in the world are not that tall. Tall and short individuals will perceive this sign differently.

Your psychological state can also influence what you read and listen to, and why you do so. The emergency procedures binder on the wall next to the first aid kit doesn't mean much to you until a coworker falls and suffers some bad cuts and bruises. If you were asked to design the binder and its contents, could you anticipate a psychological state of anxiety that would likely be present when someone needed the information? If so, then you might use clear bullet lists, concise, declarative sentences, and diagrams to communicate clearly.

Your cultural background plays a significant role in what and how you perceive your world. You may be from a culture that values community. For example, the message across the advertisement reads: *Stand out from the crowd*. Given your cultural background, it may not be a very effective slogan to get your attention.

Our perceptual set involves our attitudes, beliefs, and values about the world. Perhaps you've heard the phrase, “Looking at the world through rose-colored glasses” and can even think of someone as an example. We experience the world through mediated images and mass communication. We also come to know one another interpersonally in groups. All these experiences help form our mental expectations of what is happening and what will happen.

Think about your brand preferences, your choice of transportation, your self-expression through your clothing, haircut, and jewelry—all these external symbols represent in some way how you view yourself within your community and the world. We can extend this perspective in many ways, both positive and negative, and see that understanding the perspective of the audience takes on new levels of importance.

Key Takeaway

Our perceptions are influenced by our individual differences and preconceived notions.

Exercises

1. When you watch a film with friends, make a point of talking about it afterward and listen to how each person perceived aspects of the film. Ask them each to describe it in ten words or less. Did they use the same words? Did you see it the same way, or differently? Did you catch all the points, frames of reference, values, or miss any information? What does this say about perception?
2. Think of a time when you misunderstood a message. What was your psychological state at the time? Do you think you would have understood the message differently if you had been in a different psychological state?
3. Think of a time when someone misunderstood your message. What happened and why? Share and compare with classmates.

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3.4: Getting to Know Your Audience

Learning Objectives

1. Describe three ways to better understand and reach your audience.

Writing to your audience's expectations is key to your success, but how do you get a sense of your readers? Research, time, and effort. At first glance you may think you know your audience, but if you dig a little deeper you will learn more about them and become a better speaker.

Examine Figure 3.4.1, often called the iceberg model. When you see an iceberg on the ocean, the great majority of its size and depth lie below your level of awareness. When you write a document or give a presentation, each person in your reading or listening audience is like the tip of an iceberg. You may perceive people of different ages, races, ethnicities, and genders, but those are only surface characteristics. This is your challenge. When you communicate with a diverse audience, you are engaging in intercultural communication. The more you learn about the audience, the better you will be able to navigate the waters, and your communication interactions, safely and effectively.



Figure 3.4.1 Iceberg Model

Theodore Roosevelt pointed out that “the most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.” Knowing your audience well before you speak is essential. Here are a few questions to help guide you in learning more about your audience:

- How big is the audience?
- What are their backgrounds, gender, age, jobs, education, and/or interests?
- Do they already know about your topic? If so, how much?

- Will other materials be presented or available? If so, what are they, what do they cover, and how do they relate to your message?
- How much time is allotted for your presentation, or how much space do you have for your written document? Will your document or presentation stand alone or do you have the option of adding visuals, audio-visual aids, or links?

Demographic Traits

Demographic traits refer to the characteristics that make someone an individual, but that he or she has in common with others. For example, if you were born female, then your view of the world may be different from that of a male, and may be similar to that of many other females. Being female means that you share this “femaleness” trait with roughly half the world’s population.

How does this demographic trait of being female apply to communication? For example, we might find that women tend to be more aware than the typical male of what it means to be capable of becoming pregnant, or to go through menopause. If you were giving a presentation on nutrition to a female audience, you would likely include more information about nutrition during pregnancy and during menopause than you would if your audience were male.

We can explore other traits by considering your audience’s age, level of education, employment or career status, and various other groups they may belong to. Imagine that you are writing a report on the health risks associated with smoking. To get your message across to an audience of twelve-year-olds, clearly you would use different language and different examples than what you would use for an audience of adults age fifty-five and older. If you were writing for a highly educated audience—say, engineering school graduates—you would use much more scholarly language and rigorous research documentation than if you were writing for first-year college students.



Figure 3.4.2: Tailor your message to your audience. Todd Lappin – [David Byrne’s “PowerPoint as art” lecture](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Writing for readers in the insurance industry, you would likely choose examples of how insurance claims are affected by whether or not a policyholder smokes, whereas if you were writing for readers who are athletes, you would focus on how the human body reacts to tobacco. Similarly, if you were writing for a community newsletter, you would choose local examples, whereas if your venue was a Web site for parents, you might choose examples that are more universal.

Audiences tend to be interested in messages that relate to their interests, needs, goals, and motivations. Demographic traits can give us insight into our audience and allow for an audience-centered approach to your assignment that will make you a more effective communicator (Beebe, 1997).

Improving Your Perceptions of Your Audience

The better you can understand your audience, the better you can tailor your communications to reach them. To understand them, a key step is to perceive clearly who they are, what they are interested in, what they need, and what motivates them. This ability to perceive is important with audience members from distinct groups, generations, and even cultures. William Seiler and Melissa

Beall offer us six ways to improve our perceptions, and therefore improve our communication, particularly in public speaking; they are listed in Table 3.4.1.

Table 3.4.1 Perceptual Strategies for Success

Perceptual Strategy	Explanation
Become an active perceiver	We need to actively seek out as much information as possible. Placing yourself in the new culture, group, or co-culture can often expand your understanding.
Recognize each person's unique frame of reference	We all perceive the world differently. Recognize that even though you may interact with two people from the same culture, they are individuals with their own set of experiences, values, and interests.
Recognize that people, objects, and situations change	The world is changing and so are we. Recognizing that people and cultures, like communication process itself, are dynamic and ever changing can improve your intercultural communication.
Become aware of the role perceptions play in communication	As we explored in Chapter 2, perception is an important aspect of the communication process. By understanding that our perceptions are not the only ones possible can limit ethnocentrism and improve intercultural communication.
Keep an open mind	The adage "A mind is like a parachute—it works best when open" holds true. Being open to differences can improve intercultural communication.
Check your perceptions	By learning to observe, and acknowledging our own perceptions, we can avoid assumptions, expand our understanding, and improve our ability to communicate across cultures.

Fairness in Communication

Finally, consider that your audience has several expectations of you. No doubt you have sat through a speech or classroom lecture where you asked yourself, "Why should I listen?" You have probably been assigned to read a document or chapter and found yourself wondering, "What does this have to do with me?" These questions are normal and natural for audiences, but people seldom actually state these questions in so many words or say them out loud.

In a report on intercultural communication, V. Lynn Tyler offers us some insight into these audience expectations, which can be summarized as the need to be fair to your audience. One key fairness principle is reciprocity, or a relationship of mutual exchange and interdependence. Reciprocity has four main components: mutuality, nonjudgmentalism, honesty, and respect.

Mutuality means that the speaker searches for common ground and understanding with his or her audience, establishing this space and building on it throughout the speech. This involves examining viewpoints other than your own and taking steps to insure the speech integrates an inclusive, accessible format rather than an ethnocentric one.

Nonjudgmentalism involves willingness to examine diverse ideas and viewpoints. A nonjudgmental communicator is open-minded, and able to accept ideas that may be strongly opposed to his or her own beliefs and values.

Another aspect of fairness in communication is honesty: stating the truth as you perceive it. When you communicate honestly, you provide supporting and clarifying information and give credit to the sources where you obtained the information. In addition, if there is significant evidence opposing your viewpoint, you acknowledge this and avoid concealing it from your audience.

Finally, fairness involves respect for the audience and individual members—recognizing that each person has basic rights and is worthy of courtesy. Consider these expectations of fairness when designing your message and you will more thoroughly engage your audience.

Key Takeaway

To better understand your audience, learn about their demographic traits, such as age, gender, and employment status, as these help determine their interests, needs, and goals. In addition, become aware of your perceptions and theirs, and practice fairness in your communications.

Exercises

1. List at least three demographic traits that apply to you. How does belonging to these demographic groups influence your perceptions and priorities? Share your thoughts with your classmates.
2. Think of two ways to learn more about your audience. Investigate them and share your findings with your classmates.
3. Think of a new group you have joined, or a new activity you have become involved in. Did the activity or group have an influence on your perceptions? Explain the effects to your classmates.
4. When you started a new job or joined a new group, to some extent you learned a new language. Please think of at least three words that outsiders would not know and share them with the class and provide examples.

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3.5: Listening and Reading for Understanding

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of becoming an active listener and reader.

As the popular author and Hollywood entrepreneur Wilson Mizner said, “A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something.” Learning to listen to your conversational partner, customer, supplier, or supervisor is an important part of business communication. Too often, instead of listening we mentally rehearse what we want to say. Similarly, when we read, we are often trying to multitask and therefore cannot read with full attention. Inattentive listening or reading can cause us to miss much of what the speaker is sharing with us.

Communication involves the sharing and understanding of meaning. To fully share and understand, practice active listening and reading so that you are fully attentive, fully present in the moment of interaction. Pay attention to both the actual words and for other clues to meaning, such as tone of voice or writing style. Look for opportunities for clarification and feedback when the time comes for you to respond, not before.

Active Listening and Reading

You’ve probably experienced the odd sensation of driving somewhere and, having arrived, have realized you don’t remember driving. Your mind may have been filled with other issues and you drove on autopilot. It’s dangerous when you drive like that, and it is dangerous in communication. Choosing to listen or read attentively takes effort. People communicate with words, expressions, and even in silence, and your attention to them will make you a better communicator. From discussions on improving customer service to retaining customers in challenging economic times, the importance of listening comes up frequently as a success strategy.

Here are some tips to facilitate active listening and reading:

- Maintain eye contact with the speaker; if reading, keep your eyes on the page.
- Don’t interrupt; if reading, don’t multitask.
- Focus your attention on the message, not your internal monologue.
- Restate the message in your own words and ask if you understood correctly.
- Ask clarifying questions to communicate interest and gain insight.

When the Going Gets Tough

Our previous tips will serve you well in daily interactions, but suppose you have an especially difficult subject to discuss, or you receive a written document delivering bad news. In a difficult situation like this, it is worth taking extra effort to create an environment and context that will facilitate positive communication.

Here are some tips that may be helpful:

- **Set aside a special time.** To have a difficult conversation or read bad news, set aside a special time when you will not be disturbed. Close the door and turn off the TV, music player, and instant messaging client.
- **Don’t interrupt.** Keep silent while you let the other person “speak his piece.” If you are reading, make an effort to understand and digest the news without mental interruptions.
- **Be nonjudgmental.** Receive the message without judgment or criticism. Set aside your opinions, attitudes, and beliefs.
- **Be accepting.** Be open to the message being communicated, realizing that acceptance does not necessarily mean you agree with what is being said.
- **Take turns.** Wait until it is your turn to respond, and then measure your response in proportion to the message that was delivered to you. Reciprocal turn-taking allows each person have his say.
- **Acknowledge.** Let the other person know that you have listened to the message or read it attentively.
- **Understand.** Be certain that you understand what your partner is saying. If you don’t understand, ask for clarification. Restate the message in your own words.
- **Keep your cool.** Speak your truth without blaming. A calm tone will help prevent the conflict from escalating. Use “I” statements (e.g., “I felt concerned when I learned that my department is going to have a layoff”) rather than “you” statements (e.g., “you want to get rid of some of our best people”).

Finally, recognize that mutual respect and understanding are built one conversation at a time. Trust is difficult to gain and easy to lose. Be patient and keep the channels of communication open, as a solution may develop slowly over the course of many small interactions. Recognize that it is more valuable to maintain the relationship over the long term than to “win” in an individual transaction.

Key Takeaway

Part of being an effective communicator is learning to receive messages from others through active listening and reading.

Exercises

1. Pair up with a classmate and do a role-play exercise in which one person tries to deliver a message while the other person multitasks and interrupts. Then try it again while the listener practices active listening. How do the two communication experiences compare? Discuss your findings.
2. Select a news article and practice active reading by reading the article and summarizing each of its main points in your own words. Write a letter to the editor commenting on the article—you don’t have to send it, but you may if you wish.
3. In a half-hour period of time, see if you can count how many times you are interrupted. Share and compare with your classmates.

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3.6: Additional Resources

Explore the Web site of the National Association for Self-Esteem. www.self-esteem-nase.org

Forum Network offers a wealth of audio and video files of speeches on various topics. Listen to a lecture titled “Selective Attention: Neuroscience and the Art Museum” by Barbara Stafford, professor of art history, University of Chicago. <http://forum-network.org/lectures/selective-attention-neuroscience-and-art-museum/>

Explore the Web site of the journal *Perception*. www.perceptionweb.com

Visit this About.com site to learn more about the Gestalt principles of perception. http://psychology.about.com/od/sensationandperception/ss/gestaltlaws_4.htm

Visit About.com to read an article by Kendra Van Wagner on the Gestalt laws of perceptual organization. <http://psychology.about.com/od/sensationandperception/ss/gestaltlaws.htm>

Visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s site to read about demographic traits and their relationship to environmental issues. www.epa.gov/greenkit/traits.htm

Philosophe.com offers a collection of articles about understanding your audience when you design a Web site. http://philosophe.com/understanding_users

Read more about active listening on this MindTools page. <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

Consider these academic survival tips provided by Chicago State University. www.csu.edu/cas/chemistryphysicsengineering/engineeringstudies/acadsurvivaltips.htm

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Effective Business Writing

[4.1: Oral versus Written Communication](#)

[4.2: How Is Writing Learned?](#)

[4.3: Good Writing](#)

[4.4: Style in Written Communication](#)

[4.5: Principles of Written Communication](#)

[4.6: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Written Communication](#)

[4.7: Additional Resources](#)

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4.1: Oral versus Written Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how written communication is similar to oral communication, and how it is different.

The written word often stands in place of the spoken word. People often say “it was good to hear from you” when they receive an e-mail or a letter, when in fact they didn’t *hear* the message, they *read* it. Still, if they know you well, they may mentally “hear” your voice in your written words. Writing a message to friends or colleagues can be as natural as talking to them. Yet when we are asked to write something, we often feel anxious and view writing as a more effortful, exacting process than talking would be.

Oral and written forms of communication are similar in many ways. They both rely on the basic communication process, which consists of eight essential elements: source, receiver, message, channel, receiver, feedback, environment, context, and interference. Table 4.1.1 summarizes these elements and provides examples of how each element might be applied in oral and written communication.

Table 4.1.1: Eight Essential Elements of Communication

Element of Communication	Definition	Oral Application	Written Application
1. Source	A source creates and communicates a message.	Jay makes a telephone call to Heather.	Jay writes an e-mail to Heather.
2. Receiver	A receiver receives the message from the source.	Heather listens to Jay.	Heather reads Jay’s e-mail.
3. Message	The message is the stimulus or meaning produced by the source for the receiver.	Jay asks Heather to participate in a conference call at 3:15.	Jay’s e-mail asks Heather to participate in a conference call at 3:15.
4. Channel	A channel is the way a message travels between source and receiver.	The channel is the telephone.	The channel is e-mail.
5. Feedback	Feedback is the message the receiver sends in response to the source.	Heather says yes.	Heather replies with an e-mail saying yes.
6. Environment	The environment is the physical atmosphere where the communication occurs.	Heather is traveling by train on a business trip when she receives Jay’s phone call.	Heather is at her desk when she receives Jay’s e-mail.
7. Context	The context involves the psychological expectations of the source and receiver.	Heather expects Jay to send an e-mail with the call-in information for the call. Jay expects to do so, and does.	Heather expects Jay to dial and connect the call. Jay expects Heather to check her e-mail for the call-in information so that she can join the call.
8. Interference	Also known as noise, interference is anything that blocks or distorts the communication process.	Heather calls in at 3:15, but she has missed the call because she forgot that she is in a different time zone from Jay.	Heather waits for a phone call from Jay at 3:15, but he doesn’t call.

As you can see from the applications in this example, at least two different kinds of interference have the potential to ruin a conference call, and the interference can exist regardless of whether the communication to plan the call is oral or written. Try switching the “Context” and “Interference” examples from Oral to Written, and you will see that mismatched expectations and time zone confusion can happen by phone or by e-mail. While this example has an unfavorable outcome, it points out a way in which oral and written communication processes are similar.

Another way in which oral and written forms of communication are similar is that they can be divided into verbal and nonverbal categories. Verbal communication involves the words you say, and nonverbal communication involves how you say them—your tone of voice, your facial expression, body language, and so forth. Written communication also involves verbal and nonverbal

dimensions. The words you choose are the verbal dimension. How you portray or display them is the nonverbal dimension, which can include the medium (e-mail or a printed document), the typeface or font, or the appearance of your signature on a letter. In this sense, oral and written communication are similar in their approach even as they are quite different in their application.

The written word allows for a dynamic communication process between source and receiver, but is often asynchronous, meaning that it occurs at different times. When we communicate face-to-face, we get immediate feedback, but our written words stand in place of that interpersonal interaction and we lack that immediate response. Since we are often not physically present when someone reads what we have written, it is important that we anticipate the reader's needs, interpretation, and likely response to our written messages.

Suppose you are asked to write a message telling clients about a new product or service your company is about to offer. If you were speaking to one of them in a relaxed setting over coffee, what would you say? What words would you choose to describe the product or service, and how it may fulfill the client's needs? As the business communicator, you must focus on the words you use and how you use them. Short, simple sentences, in themselves composed of words, also communicate a business style. In your previous English classes you may have learned to write eloquently, but in a business context, your goal is clear, direct communication. One strategy to achieve this goal is to write with the same words and phrases you use when you talk. However, since written communication lacks the immediate feedback that is present in an oral conversation, you need to choose words and phrases even more carefully to promote accuracy, clarity, and understanding.

Key Takeaway

Written communication involves the same eight basic elements as oral communication, but it is often asynchronous.

Exercises

1. Review the oral and written applications in Table 4.1.1 and construct a different scenario for each. What could Jay and Heather do differently to make the conference call a success?
2. Visit a business Web site that has an "About Us" page. Read the "About Us" message and write a summary in your own words of what it tells you about the company. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
3. You are your own company. What words describe you? Design a logo, create a name, and present your descriptive words in a way that gets attention. Share and compare with classmates.

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4.2: How Is Writing Learned?

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how reading, writing, and critical thinking contribute to becoming a good writer.

You may think that some people are simply born better writers than others, but in fact writing is a reflection of experience and effort. If you think about your successes as a writer, you may come up with a couple of favorite books, authors, or teachers that inspired you to express yourself. You may also recall a sense of frustration with your previous writing experiences. It is normal and natural to experience a sense of frustration at the *perceived* inability to express oneself. The emphasis here is on your perception of yourself as a writer as one aspect of how you communicate. Most people use oral communication for much of their self-expression, from daily interactions to formal business meetings. You have a lifetime of experience in that arena that you can leverage to your benefit in your writing. Reading out loud what you have written is a positive technique we'll address later in more depth.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement, "Violence is the language of the unheard" emphasizes the importance of finding one's voice, of being able to express one's ideas. Violence comes in many forms, but is often associated with frustration born of the lack of opportunity to communicate. You may read King's words and think of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, or perhaps of the violence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, or of wars happening in the world today. Public demonstrations and fighting are expressions of voice, from individual to collective. Finding your voice, and learning to listen to others, is part of learning to communicate.

You are your own best ally when it comes to your writing. Keeping a positive frame of mind about your journey as a writer is not a cliché or simple, hollow advice. Your attitude toward writing can and does influence your written products. Even if writing has been a challenge for you, the fact that you are reading this sentence means you perceive the importance of this essential skill. This text and our discussions will help you improve your writing, and your positive attitude is part of your success strategy.

There is no underestimating the power of effort when combined with inspiration and motivation. The catch then is to get inspired and motivated. That's not all it takes, but it is a great place to start. You were not born with a key pad in front of you, but when you want to share something with friends and text them, the words (or abbreviations) come almost naturally. So you recognize you have the skills necessary to begin the process of improving and harnessing your writing abilities for business success. It will take time and effort, and the proverbial journey starts with a single step, but don't lose sight of the fact that your skillful ability to craft words will make a significant difference in your career.

Reading

Reading is one step many writers point to as an integral step in learning to write effectively. You may like Harry Potter books or be a Twilight fan, but if you want to write effectively in business, you need to read business-related documents. These can include letters, reports, business proposals, and business plans. You may find these where you work or in your school's writing center, business department, or library; there are also many Web sites that provide sample business documents of all kinds. Your reading should also include publications in the industry where you work or plan to work, such as *Aviation Week*, *InfoWorld*, *Journal of Hospitality*, *International Real Estate Digest*, or *Women's Wear Daily*, to name just a few. You can also gain an advantage by reading publications in fields other than your chosen one; often reading outside your niche can enhance your versatility and help you learn how other people express similar concepts. Finally, don't neglect general media like the business section of your local newspaper, and national publications like the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, and the *Harvard Business Review*. Reading is one of the most useful lifelong habits you can practice to boost your business communication skills.



Figure 4.2.1: Reading is one of the most useful lifelong habits you can practice to boost your business communication skills. Julie Falk – [Emily Reading at Wagner Falls](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

In the “real world” when you are under a deadline and production is paramount, you’ll be rushed and may lack the time to do adequate background reading for a particular assignment. For now, take advantage of your business communication course by exploring common business documents you may be called on to write, contribute to, or play a role in drafting. Some documents have a degree of formula to them, and your familiarity with them will reduce your preparation and production time while increasing your effectiveness. As you read similar documents, take notes on what you observe. As you read several sales letters, you may observe several patterns that can serve you well later on when it’s your turn. These patterns are often called conventions, or conventional language patterns for a specific genre.

Writing

Never lose sight of one key measure of the effectiveness of your writing: the degree to which it fulfills readers’ expectations. If you are in a law office, you know the purpose of a court brief is to convince the judge that certain points of law apply to the given case. If you are at a newspaper, you know that an editorial opinion article is supposed to convince readers of the merits of a certain viewpoint, whereas a news article is supposed to report facts without bias. If you are writing ad copy, the goal is to motivate consumers to make a purchase decision. In each case, you are writing to a specific purpose, and a great place to start when considering what to write is to answer the following question: what are the readers’ expectations?

When you are a junior member of the team, you may be given clerical tasks like filling in forms, populating a database, or coordinating appointments. Or you may be assigned to do research that involves reading, interviewing, and note taking. Don’t underestimate these facets of the writing process; instead, embrace the fact that writing for business often involves tasks that a novelist might not even recognize as “writing.” Your contribution is quite important and in itself is an on-the-job learning opportunity that shouldn’t be taken for granted.

When given a writing assignment, it is important to make sure you understand what you are being asked to do. You may read the directions and try to put them in your own words to make sense of the assignment. Be careful, however, not to lose sight of what the directions say versus what you think they say. Just as an audience’s expectations should be part of your consideration of how, what, and why to write, the instructions given by your instructor, or in a work situation by your supervisor, establish expectations. Just as you might ask a mentor more about a business writing assignment at work, you need to use the resources available to you to maximize your learning opportunity. Ask the professor to clarify any points you find confusing, or perceive more than one way to interpret, in order to better meet the expectations.

Before you write an opening paragraph, or even the first sentence, it is important to consider the overall goal of the assignment. The word *assignment* can apply equally to a written product for class or for your employer. You might make a list of the main points and see how those points may become the topic sentences in a series of paragraphs. You may also give considerable thought to whether your word choice, your tone, your language, and what you want to say is in line with your understanding of your audience. We briefly introduced the writing process previously, and will visit it in depth later in our discussion, but for now writing

should about exploring your options. Authors rarely have a finished product in mind when they start, but once you know what your goal is and how to reach it, your writing process will become easier and more effective.

Constructive Criticism and Targeted Practice

Mentors can also be important in your growth as a writer. Your instructor can serve as a mentor, offering constructive criticism, insights on what he or she has written, and life lessons about writing for a purpose. Never underestimate the mentors that surround you in the workplace, even if you are currently working in a position unrelated to your desired career. They can read your rough draft and spot errors, as well as provide useful insights. Friends and family can also be helpful mentors—if your document’s meaning is clear to someone not working in your business, it will likely also be clear to your audience.

The key is to be open to criticism, keeping in mind that no one ever improved by repeating bad habits over and over. Only when you know what your errors are—errors of grammar or sentence structure, logic, format, and so on—can you correct your document and do a better job next time. Writing can be a solitary activity, but more often in business settings it is a collective, group, or team effort. Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities to seek outside assistance before you finalize your document.

Learning to be a successful business writer comes with practice. Targeted practice, which involves identifying your weak areas and specifically working to improve them, is especially valuable. In addition to reading, make it a habit to write, even if it is not a specific assignment. The more you practice writing the kinds of materials that are used in your line of work, the more writing will come naturally and become an easier task—even on occasions when you need to work under pressure.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking means becoming aware of your thinking process. It’s a human trait that allows us to step outside what we read or write and ask ourselves, “Does this really make sense?” “Are there other, perhaps better, ways to explain this idea?” Sometimes our thinking is very abstract and becomes clear only through the process of getting thoughts down in words. As a character in E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* said, “How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?” (Forster, 1976) Did you really write what you meant to, and will it be easily understood by the reader? Successful writing forms a relationship with the audience, reaching the reader on a deep level that can be dynamic and motivating. In contrast, when writing fails to meet the audience’s expectations, you already know the consequences: they’ll move on.



Figure 4.2.2: Excellence in writing comes from effort. Ramunas Geciauskas – [Effort II](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Learning to write effectively involves reading, writing, critical thinking, and hard work. You may have seen *The Wizard of Oz* and recall the scene when Dorothy discovers what is behind the curtain. Up until that moment, she believed the Wizard’s powers were needed to change her situation, but now she discovers that the power is her own. Like Dorothy, you can discover that the power to write successfully rests in your hands. Excellent business writing can be inspiring, and it is important to not lose that sense of inspiration as we deconstruct the process of writing to its elemental components.

You may be amazed by the performance of Tony Hawk on a skateboard ramp, Mia Hamm on the soccer field, or Michael Phelps in the water. Those who demonstrate excellence often make it look easy, but nothing could be further from the truth. Effort, targeted practice, and persistence will win the day every time. When it comes to writing, you need to learn to recognize clear and concise writing while looking behind the curtain at how it is created. This is not to say we are going to lose the magic associated with the best writers in the field. Instead, we'll appreciate what we are reading as we examine how it was written and how the writer achieved success.

Key Takeaway

Success in writing comes from good habits: reading, writing (especially targeted practice), and critical thinking.

Exercises

1. Interview one person whose job involves writing. This can include writing e-mails, reports, proposals, invoices, or any other form of business document. Where did this person learn to write? What would they include as essential steps to learning to write for success in business? Share your results with a classmate.
2. For five consecutive days, read the business section of your local newspaper or another daily paper. Write a one-page summary of the news that makes the most impression on you. Review your summaries and compare them with those of your classmates.
3. Practice filling out an online form that requires writing sentences, such as a job application for a company that receives applications online. How does this kind of writing compare with the writing you have done for other courses in the past? Discuss your thoughts with your classmates.

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4.3: Good Writing

Learning Objectives

1. Identify six basic qualities that characterize good business writing.
2. Identify and explain the rhetorical elements and cognate strategies that contribute to good writing.

One common concern is to simply address the question, what is good writing? As we progress through our study of written business communication we'll try to answer it. But recognize that while the question may be simple, the answer is complex. Edward P. Bailey offers several key points to remember.

Good business writing

- follows the rules,
- is easy to read, and
- attracts the reader.

Let's examine these qualities in more depth.

Bailey's first point is one that generates a fair amount of debate. What are the rules? Do "the rules" depend on audience expectations or industry standards, what your English teacher taught you, or are they reflected in the amazing writing of authors you might point to as positive examples? The answer is "all of the above," with a point of clarification. You may find it necessary to balance audience expectations with industry standards for a document, and may need to find a balance or compromise. Bailey points to common sense as one basic criterion of good writing, but common sense is a product of experience. When searching for balance, reader understanding is the deciding factor. The correct use of a semicolon may not be what is needed to make a sentence work. Your reading audience should carry extra attention in everything you write because, without them, you won't have many more writing assignments.

When we say that good writing follows the rules, we don't mean that a writer cannot be creative. Just as an art student needs to know how to draw a scene in correct perspective before he can "break the rules" by "bending" perspective, so a writer needs to know the rules of language. Being well versed in how to use words correctly, form sentences with proper grammar, and build logical paragraphs are skills the writer can use no matter what the assignment. Even though some business settings may call for conservative writing, there are other areas where creativity is not only allowed but mandated. Imagine working for an advertising agency or a software development firm; in such situations success comes from expressing new, untried ideas. By following the rules of language and correct writing, a writer can express those creative ideas in a form that comes through clearly and promotes understanding.

Similarly, writing that is easy to read is not the same as "dumbed down" or simplistic writing. What is easy to read? For a young audience, you may need to use straightforward, simple terms, but to ignore their use of the language is to create an artificial and unnecessary barrier. An example referring to Miley Cyrus may work with one reading audience and fall flat with another. Profession-specific terms can serve a valuable purpose as we write about precise concepts. Not everyone will understand all the terms in a profession, but if your audience is largely literate in the terms of the field, using industry terms will help you establish a relationship with your readers.

The truly excellent writer is one who can explain complex ideas in a way that the reader can understand. Sometimes ease of reading can come from the writer's choice of a brilliant illustrative example to get a point across. In other situations, it can be the writer's incorporation of definitions into the text so that the meaning of unfamiliar words is clear. It may also be a matter of choosing dynamic, specific verbs that make it clear what is happening and who is carrying out the action.

Bailey's third point concerns the interest of the reader. Will they want to read it? This question should guide much of what you write. We increasingly gain information from our environment through visual, auditory, and multimedia channels, from YouTube to streaming audio, and to watching the news online. Some argue that this has led to a decreased attention span for reading, meaning that writers need to appeal to readers with short, punchy sentences and catchy phrases. However, there are still plenty of people who love to immerse themselves in reading an interesting article, proposal, or marketing piece.

Perhaps the most universally useful strategy in capturing your reader's attention is to state how your writing can meet the reader's needs. If your document provides information to answer a question, solve a problem, or explain how to increase profits or cut costs,

you may want to state this in the beginning. By opening with a “what’s in it for me” strategy, you give your audience a reason to be interested in what you’ve written.

More Qualities of Good Writing

To the above list from Bailey, let’s add some additional qualities that define good writing. Good writing

- meets the reader’s expectations,
- is clear and concise,
- is efficient and effective.

To meet the reader’s expectations, the writer needs to understand who the intended reader is. In some business situations, you are writing just to one person: your boss, a coworker in another department, or an individual customer or vendor. If you know the person well, it may be as easy for you to write to him or her as it is to write a note to your parent or roommate. If you don’t know the person, you can at least make some reasonable assumptions about his or her expectations, based on the position he or she holds and its relation to your job.

In other situations, you may be writing a document to be read by a group or team, an entire department, or even a large number of total strangers. How can you anticipate their expectations and tailor your writing accordingly? Naturally you want to learn as much as you can about your likely audience. How much you can learn and what kinds of information will vary with the situation. If you are writing Web site content, for example, you may never meet the people who will visit the site, but you can predict why they would be drawn to the site and what they would expect to read there. Beyond learning about your audience, your clear understanding of the writing assignment and its purpose will help you to meet reader expectations.

Our addition of the fifth point concerning clear and concise writing reflects the increasing tendency in business writing to eliminate error. Errors can include those associated with production, from writing to editing, and reader response. Your twin goals of clear and concise writing point to a central goal across communication: fidelity. This concept involves our goal of accurately communicating all the intended information with a minimum of signal or message breakdown or misinterpretation. Designing your documents, including writing and presentation, to reduce message breakdown is an important part of effective business communication.

This leads our discussion to efficiency. There are only twenty-four hours in a day and we are increasingly asked to do more with less, with shorter deadlines almost guaranteed. As a writer, how do you meet ever-increasing expectations? Each writing assignment requires a clear understanding of the goals and desired results, and when either of these two aspects is unclear, the efficiency of your writing can be compromised. Rewrites require time that you may not have, but will have to make if the assignment was not done correctly the first time.

As we have discussed previously, making a habit of reading similar documents prior to beginning your process of writing can help establish a mental template of your desired product. If you can see in your mind’s eye what you want to write, and have the perspective of similar documents combined with audience’s needs, you can write more efficiently. Your written documents are products and will be required on a schedule that impacts your coworkers and business. Your ability to produce effective documents efficiently is a skill set that will contribute to your success.

Our sixth point reinforces this idea with an emphasis on effectiveness. What is effective writing? It is writing that succeeds in accomplishing its purpose. Understanding the purpose, goals, and desired results of your writing assignment will help you achieve this success. Your employer may want an introductory sales letter to result in an increase in sales leads, or potential contacts for follow-up leading to sales. Your audience may not see the document from that perspective, but will instead read with the mindset of, “How does this help me solve X problem?” If you meet both goals, your writing is approaching effectiveness. Here, effectiveness is qualified with the word “approaching” to point out that writing is both a process and a product, and your writing will continually require effort and attention to revision and improvement.

Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies

Another approach to defining good writing is to look at how it fulfills the goals of two well-known systems in communication. One of these systems comprises the three classical elements of rhetoric, or the art of presenting an argument. These elements are **logos** (logic), **ethos** (ethics and credibility), and **pathos** (emotional appeal), first proposed by the ancient Greek teacher Aristotle. Although rhetoric is often applied to oral communication, especially public speaking, it is also fundamental to good writing.

A second set of goals involves what are called cognate strategies, or ways of promoting understanding (Kostelnick & Roberts, 1998), developed in recent decades by Charles Kostelnick and David Rogers. Like rhetorical elements, cognate strategies can be applied to public speaking, but they are also useful in developing good writing. Table 4.3.1 describes these goals, their purposes, and examples of how they may be carried out in business writing.

Table 4.3.1: Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies

Aristotle's Rhetorical Elements	Cognate Strategies	Focus	Example in Business Writing
Logos	Clarity	Clear understanding	An announcement will be made to the company later in the week, but I wanted to tell you personally that as of the first of next month, I will be leaving my position to accept a three-year assignment in our Singapore office. As soon as further details about the management of your account are available, I will share them with you.
	Conciseness	Key points	In tomorrow's conference call Sean wants to introduce the new team members, outline the schedule and budget for the project, and clarify each person's responsibilities in meeting our goals.
	Arrangement	Order, hierarchy, placement	Our department has matrix structure. We have three product development groups, one for each category of product. We also have a manufacturing group, a finance group, and a sales group; different group members are assigned to each of the three product categories. Within the matrix, our structure is flat, meaning that we have no group leaders. Everyone reports to Beth, the department manager.
Ethos	Credibility	Character, trust	Having known and worked with Jesse for more than five years, I can highly recommend him to take my place as your advisor. In addition to having superb qualifications, Jesse is known for his dedication, honesty, and caring attitude. He will always go the extra mile for his clients.
	Expectation	Norms and anticipated outcomes	As is typical in our industry, we ship all merchandise FOB our warehouse. Prices are exclusive of any federal, state, or local taxes. Payment terms are net 30 days from date of invoice.

Aristotle's Rhetorical Elements	Cognate Strategies	Focus	Example in Business Writing
	Reference	Sources and frames of reference	According to an article in <i>Business Week</i> dated October 15, 2009, Doosan is one of the largest business conglomerates in South Korea.
Pathos	Tone	Expression	I really don't have words to express how grateful I am for all the support you've extended to me and my family in this hour of need. You guys are the best.
	Emphasis	Relevance	It was unconscionable for a member of our organization to shout an interruption while the president was speaking. What needs to happen now—and let me be clear about this—is an immediate apology.
	Engagement	Relationship	Faithful soldiers pledge never to leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield.

Key Takeaway

Good writing is characterized by correctness, ease of reading, and attractiveness; it also meets reader expectations and is clear, concise, efficient, and effective. Rhetorical elements (*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*) and cognate strategies (clarity, conciseness, arrangement, credibility, expectation, reference, tone, emphasis, and engagement) are goals that are achieved in good business writing.

Exercises

1. Choose a piece of business writing that attracts your interest. What made you want to read it? Share your thoughts with your classmates.
2. Choose a piece of business writing and evaluate it according to the qualities of good writing presented in this section. Do you think the writing qualifies as “good”? Why or why not? Discuss your opinion with your classmates.
3. Identify the *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in a document. Share and compare with classmates.

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4.4: Style in Written Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Describe and identify three styles of writing.
2. Demonstrate the appropriate use of colloquial, casual, and formal writing in at least one document of each style.

One way to examine written communication is from a structural perspective. Words are a series of symbols that communicate meaning, strung together in specific patterns that are combined to communicate complex and compound meanings. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and articles are the building blocks you will use when composing written documents. Misspellings of individual words or grammatical errors involving misplacement or incorrect word choices in a sentence, can create confusion, lose meaning, and have a negative impact on the reception of your document. Errors themselves are not inherently bad, but failure to recognize and fix them will reflect on you, your company, and limit your success. Self-correction is part of the writing process.

Another way to examine written communication is from a goals perspective, where specific documents address stated (or unstated) goals and have rules, customs, and formats that are anticipated and expected. Violations of these rules, customs, or formats—whether intentional or unintentional—can also have a negative impact on the way your document is received.

Colloquial, casual, and formal writing are three common styles that carry their own particular sets of expectations. Which style you use will depend on your audience, and often whether your communication is going to be read only by those in your company (internal communications) or by those outside the organization, such as vendors, customers or clients (external communications). As a general rule, external communications tend to be more formal, just as corporate letterhead and business cards—designed for presentation to the “outside world”—are more formal than the e-mail and text messages that are used for everyday writing within the organization.

Style also depends on the purpose of the document and its audience. If your writing assignment is for Web page content, clear and concise use of the written word is essential. If your writing assignment is a feature interest article for an online magazine, you may have the luxury of additional space and word count combined with graphics, pictures, embedded video or audio clips, and links to related topics. If your writing assignment involves an introductory letter represented on a printed page delivered in an envelope to a potential customer, you won’t have the interactivity to enhance your writing, placing an additional burden on your writing and how you represent it.

Colloquial

Colloquial language is an informal, conversational style of writing. It differs from standard business English in that it often makes use of colorful expressions, slang, and regional phrases. As a result, it can be difficult to understand for an English learner or a person from a different region of the country. Sometimes colloquialism takes the form of a word difference; for example, the difference between a “Coke,” a “tonic,” a “pop, and a “soda pop” primarily depends on where you live. It can also take the form of a saying, as Roy Wilder Jr. discusses in his book *You All Spoken Here: Southern Talk at Its Down-Home Best* (Wilde, 2003). Colloquial sayings like “He could mess up a rainstorm” or “He couldn’t hit the ground if he fell” communicate the person is inept in a colorful, but not universal way. In the Pacific Northwest someone might “mosey,” or walk slowly, over to the “café,” or bakery, to pick up a “maple bar”—a confection known as a “Long John doughnut” to people in other parts of the United States.

Colloquial language can be reflected in texting:

“ok fwiw i did my part n put it in where you asked but my ? is if the group does not participate do i still get credit for my part of what i did n also how much do we all have to do i mean i put in my opinion of the items in order do i also have to reply to the other team members or what? Thxs”

We may be able to grasp the meaning of the message, and understand some of the abbreviations and codes, but when it comes to business, this style of colloquial text writing is generally suitable only for one-on-one internal communications between coworkers who know each other well (and those who do not judge each other on spelling or grammar). For external communications, and even for group communications within the organization, it is not normally suitable, as some of the codes are not standard, and may even be unfamiliar to the larger audience.

Colloquial writing may be permissible, and even preferable, in some business contexts. For example, a marketing letter describing a folksy product such as a wood stove or an old-fashioned popcorn popper might use a colloquial style to create a feeling of relaxing at home with loved ones. Still, it is important to consider how colloquial language will appear to the audience. Will the meaning of your chosen words be clear to a reader who is from a different part of the country? Will a folksy tone sound like you are “talking down” to your audience, assuming that they are not intelligent or educated enough to appreciate standard English? A final point to remember is that colloquial style is not an excuse for using expressions that are sexist, racist, profane, or otherwise offensive.

Casual

Casual language involves everyday words and expressions in a familiar group context, such as conversations with family or close friends. The emphasis is on the communication interaction itself, and less about the hierarchy, power, control, or social rank of the individuals communicating. When you are at home, at times you probably dress in casual clothing that you wouldn’t wear in public—pajamas or underwear, for example. Casual communication is the written equivalent of this kind of casual attire. Have you ever had a family member say something to you that a stranger or coworker would never say? Or have you said something to a family member that you would never say in front of your boss? In both cases, casual language is being used. When you write for business, a casual style is usually out of place. Instead, a respectful, professional tone represents you well in your absence.

Formal

In business writing, the appropriate style will have a degree of formality. Formal language is communication that focuses on professional expression with attention to roles, protocol, and appearance. It is characterized by its vocabulary and syntax, or the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence. That is, writers using a formal style tend to use a more sophisticated vocabulary—a greater variety of words, and more words with multiple syllables—not for the purpose of throwing big words around, but to enhance the formal mood of the document. They also tend to use more complex syntax, resulting in sentences that are longer and contain more subordinate clauses.

The appropriate style for a particular business document may be very formal, or less so. If your supervisor writes you an e-mail and you reply, the exchange may be informal in that it is fluid and relaxed, without much forethought or fanfare, but it will still reflect the formality of the business environment. Chances are you will be careful to use an informative subject line, a salutation (“Hi [supervisor’s name]” is typical in e-mails), a word of thanks for whatever information or suggestion she provided you, and an indication that you stand ready to help further if need be. You will probably also check your grammar and spelling before you click “send.”

A formal document such as a proposal or an annual report will involve a great deal of planning and preparation, and its style may not be fluid or relaxed. Instead, it may use distinct language to emphasize the prestige and professionalism of your company. Let’s say you are going to write a marketing letter that will be printed on company letterhead and mailed to a hundred sales prospects. Naturally you want to represent your company in a positive light. In a letter of this nature you might write a sentence like “The Widget 300 is our premium offering in the line; we have designed it for ease of movement and efficiency of use, with your success foremost in our mind.” But in an e-mail or a tweet, you might use an informal sentence instead, reading “W300—good stapler.”

Writing for business often involves choosing the appropriate level of formality for the company and industry, the particular document and situation, and the audience.

Key Takeaway

The best style for a document may be colloquial, casual, informal, or formal, depending on the audience and the situation.

Exercises

1. Refer back to the e-mail or text message example in this section. Would you send that message to your professor? Why or why not? What normative expectations concerning professor-student communication are there and where did you learn them? Discuss your thoughts with your classmates.
2. Select a business document and describe its style. Is it formal, informal, or colloquial? Can you rewrite it in a different style? Share your results with a classmate.
3. List three words or phrases that you would say to your friends. List three words or phrases that communicate similar meanings that you would say to an authority figure. Share and compare with classmates.

4. When is it appropriate to write in a casual tone? In a formal tone? Write a one- to two-page essay on this topic and discuss it with a classmate.
5. How does the intended audience influence the choice of words and use of language in a document? Think of a specific topic and two specific kinds of audiences. Then write a short example (250–500 words) of how this topic might be presented to each of the two audiences.

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4.5: Principles of Written Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the rules that govern written language.
2. Understand the legal implications of business writing.

You may not recall when or where you learned all about nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, articles, and phrases, but if you understand this sentence we'll take for granted that you have a firm grasp of the basics. But even professional writers and editors, who have spent a lifetime navigating the ins and outs of crafting correct sentences, have to use reference books to look up answers to questions of grammar and usage that arise in the course of their work. Let's examine how the simple collection of symbols called a word can be such a puzzle.

Words Are Inherently Abstract

There is no universally accepted definition for love, there are many ways to describe desire, and there are countless ways to draw patience. Each of these terms is a noun, but it's an abstract noun, referring to an intangible concept.

While there are many ways to define a chair, describe a table, or draw a window, they each have a few common characteristics. A chair may be made from wood, crafted in a Mission style, or made from plastic resin in one solid piece in nondescript style, but each has four legs and serves a common function. A table and a window also have common characteristics that in themselves form a basis for understanding between source and receiver. The words "chair," "table," and "window" are concrete terms, as they describe something we can see and touch.

Concrete terms are often easier to agree on, understand, or at least define the common characteristics of. Abstract terms can easily become even more abstract with extended discussions, and the conversational partners may never agree on a common definition or even a range of understanding.

In business communication, where the goal is to be clear and concise, limiting the range of misinterpretation, which type of word do you think is preferred? Concrete terms serve to clarify your writing and more accurately communicate your intended meaning to the receiver. While all words are abstractions, some are more so than others. To promote effective communication, choose words that can be easily referenced and understood.

Words Are Governed by Rules

Perhaps you like to think of yourself as a free spirit, but did you know that all your communication is governed by rules? You weren't born knowing how to talk, but learned to form words and sentences as you developed from infancy. As you learned language, you learned rules. You learned not only what a word means in a given context, and how to pronounce it; you also learned the social protocol of when to use it and when not to. When you write, your words represent you in your absence. The context may change from reader to reader, and your goal as an effective business communicator is to get your message across (and some feedback) regardless of the situation.

The better you know your audience and context, the better you can anticipate and incorporate the rules of how, what, and when to use specific words and terms. And here lies a paradox. You may think that, ideally, the best writing is writing that is universally appealing and understood. Yet the more you design a specific message to a specific audience or context, the less universal the message becomes. Actually, this is neither a good or bad thing in itself. In fact, if you didn't target your messages, they wouldn't be nearly as effective. By understanding this relationship of a universal or specific appeal to an audience or context, you can look beyond vocabulary and syntax and focus on the reader. When considering a communication assignment like a sales letter, knowing the intended audience gives you insight to the explicit and implicit rules.

All words are governed by rules, and the rules are vastly different from one language and culture to another. A famous example is the decision by Chevrolet to give the name "Nova" to one of its cars. In English, nova is recognized as coming from Latin meaning "new"; for those who have studied astronomy, it also refers to a type of star. When the Chevy Nova was introduced in Latin America, however, it was immediately ridiculed as the "car that doesn't go." Why? Because "*no va*" literally means "doesn't go" in Spanish.

By investigating sample names in a range of markets, you can quickly learn the rules surrounding words and their multiple meaning, much as you learned about subjects and objects, verbs and nouns, adjectives and adverbs when you were learning

language. Long before you knew formal grammar terms, you observed how others communicate and learned by trial and error. In business, error equals inefficiency, loss of resources, and is to be avoided. For Chevrolet, a little market research in Latin America would have gone a long way.

Words Shape Our Reality

Aristotle is famous for many things, including his questioning of whether the table you can see, feel, or use is real (Aristotle, 1941). This may strike you as strange, but imagine that we are looking at a collection of antique hand tools. What are they? They are made of metal and wood, but what are they used for? The words we use help us to make sense of our reality, and we often use what we know to figure out what we don't know. Perhaps we have a hard time describing the color of the tool, or the table, as we walk around it. The light itself may influence our perception of its color. We may lack the vocabulary to accurately describe to the color, and instead say it is "like a" color, but not directly describe the color itself (Russell, 1962). The color, or use of the tool, or style of the table are all independent of the person perceiving them, but also a reflection of the person perceiving the object.



Figure 4.5.3: Meaning is a reflection of the person perceiving the object or word. Leland Francisco – [The Meaning to Life](#) – CC BY 2.0.

In business communication, our goal of clear and concise communication involves anticipation of this inability to label a color or describe the function of an antique tool by constructing meaning. Anticipating the language that the reader may reasonably be expected to know, as well as unfamiliar terms, enables the writer to communicate in a way that describes with common reference points while illustrating the new, interesting, or unusual. Promoting understanding and limiting misinterpretations are key goals of the effective business communicator.

Your letter introducing a new product or service relies, to an extent, on your preconceived notions of the intended audience and their preconceived notions of your organization and its products or services. By referencing common ground, you form a connection between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the new. People are more likely to be open to a new product or service if they can reasonably relate it to one they are familiar with, or with which they have had good experience in the past. Your initial measure of success is effective communication, and your long term success may be measured in the sale or new contract for services.

Words and Your Legal Responsibility

Your writing in a business context means that you represent yourself and your company. What you write and how you write it can be part of your company's success, but can also expose it to unintended consequences and legal responsibility. When you write, keep in mind that your words will keep on existing long after you have moved on to other projects. They can become an issue if they exaggerate, state false claims, or defame a person or legal entity such as a competing company. Another issue is plagiarism, using someone else's writing without giving credit to the source. Whether the "cribbed" material is taken from a printed book, a Web site, or a blog, plagiarism is a violation of copyright law and may also violate your company policies. Industry standards often have legal aspects that must be respected and cannot be ignored. For the writer this can be a challenge, but it can be a fun challenge with rewarding results.

The rapid pace of technology means that the law cannot always stay current with the realities of business communication. Computers had been in use for more than twenty years before Congress passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, the

first federal legislation to “move the nation’s copyright law into the digital age” (United States Copyright Office, 1998). Think for a moment about the changes in computer use that have taken place since 1998, and you will realize how many new laws are needed to clarify what is fair and ethical, what should be prohibited, and who owns the rights to what.

For example, suppose your supervisor asks you to use your Facebook page or Twitter account to give an occasional “plug” to your company’s products. Are you obligated to comply? If you later change jobs, who owns your posts or tweets—are they yours, or does your now-former employer have a right to them? And what about your network of “friends”? Can your employer use their contact information to send marketing messages? These and many other questions remain to be answered as technology, industry practices, and legislation evolve (Tahmincioglu, 2009).

“Our product is better than X company’s product. Their product is dangerous and you would be a wise customer to choose us for your product solutions.”

What’s wrong with these two sentences? They may land you and your company in court. You made a generalized claim of one product being better than another, and you stated it as if it were a fact. The next sentence claims that your competitor’s product is dangerous. Even if this is true, your ability to prove your claim beyond a reasonable doubt may be limited. Your claim is stated as fact again, and from the other company’s perspective, your sentences may be considered libel or defamation.

Libel is the written form of defamation, or a false statement that damages a reputation. If a false statement of fact that concerns and harms the person defamed is published—including publication in a digital or online environment—the author of that statement may be sued for libel. If the person defamed is a public figure, they must prove malice or the intention to do harm, but if the victim is a private person, libel applies even if the offense cannot be proven to be malicious. Under the First Amendment you have a right to express your opinion, but the words you use and how you use them, including the context, are relevant to their interpretation as opinion versus fact. Always be careful to qualify what you write and to do no harm.

Key Takeaway

Words are governed by rules and shape our reality. Writers have a legal responsibility to avoid plagiarism and libel.

Exercises

1. Define the word “chair.” Describe what a table is. Draw a window. Share, compare, and contrast results with classmates
2. Define love. Describe desire. Draw patience.
3. Identify a target audience and indicate at least three words that you perceive would be appropriate and effective for that audience. Identify a second audience (distinct from the first) and indicate three words that you perceive would be appropriate and effective. How are the audiences and their words similar or different? Compare your results with those of your classmates.
4. Create a sales letter for an audience that comes from a culture other than your own. Identify the culture and articulate how your message is tailored to your perception of your intended audience. Share and compare with classmates.
5. Do an online search on “online libel cases” and see what you find. Discuss your results with your classmates.
6. In other examples beyond the grammar rules that guide our use of words, consider the online environment. Conduct a search on the word “netiquette” and share your findings.

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4.6: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Written Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Describe some common barriers to written communication and how to overcome them.

In almost any career or area of business, written communication is a key to success. Effective writing can prevent wasted time, wasted effort, aggravation, and frustration. The way we communicate with others both inside of our business and on the outside goes a long way toward shaping the organization's image. If people feel they are listened to and able to get answers from the firm and its representatives, their opinion will be favorable. Skillful writing and an understanding of how people respond to words are central to accomplishing this goal.

How do we display skillful writing and a good understanding of how people respond to words? Following are some suggestions.

Do Sweat the Small Stuff

Let us begin with a college student's e-mail to a professor:

"i am confused as to why they are not due until 11/10 i mean the calendar said that they was due then so that's i did them do i still get credit for them or do i need to due them over on one tape? please let me know thanks. also when are you grading the stuff that we have done?"

What's wrong with this e-mail? What do you observe that may act as a barrier to communication? Let's start with the lack of formality, including the fact that the student neglected to tell the professor his or her name, or which specific class the question referred to. Then there is the lack of adherence to basic vocabulary and syntax rules. And how about the lower case "i's" and the misspellings?

One significant barrier to effective written communication is failure to sweat the small stuff. Spelling errors and incorrect grammar may be considered details, but they reflect poorly on you and, in a business context, on your company. They imply either that you are not educated enough to know you've made mistakes or that you are too careless to bother correcting them. Making errors is human, but making a habit of producing error-filled written documents makes negative consequences far more likely to occur. When you write, you have a responsibility to self-edit and pay attention to detail. In the long run, correcting your mistakes before others see them will take less time and effort than trying to make up for mistakes after the fact.

Get the Target Meaning

How would you interpret this message?

"You must not let inventory build up. You must monitor carrying costs and keep them under control. Ship any job lots of more than 25 to us at once."

Bypassing involves the misunderstanding that occurs when the receiver completely misses the source's intended meaning. Words mean different things to different people in different contexts. All that difference allows for both source and receiver to completely miss one another's intended goal.

Did you understand the message in the example? Let's find out. Jerry Sullivan, in his article *Bypassing in Managerial Communication* (Sullivan, Kameda, & Nobu, 1991), relates the story of Mr. Sato, a manager from Japan who is new to the United States. The message came from his superiors at Kunitomo America, a firm involved with printing machinery for the publishing business in Japan. Mr. Sato delegated the instructions (in English as shown above) to Ms. Brady, who quickly identified there were three lots in excess of twenty-five and arranged for prompt shipment.

Six weeks later Mr. Sato received a second message:

"Why didn't you do what we told you? Your quarterly inventory report indicates you are carrying 40 lots which you were supposed to ship to Japan. You must not violate our instructions."

What's the problem? As Sullivan relates, it is an example of one word, or set of words, having more than one meaning (Sullivan, Kameda, & Nobu, 1991). According to Sullivan, in Japanese “more than x” includes the reference number twenty-five. In other words, Kunitomo wanted all lots with twenty-five or more to be shipped to Japan. Forty lots fit that description. Ms. Brady interpreted the words as written, but the cultural context had a direct impact on the meaning and outcome.

You might want to defend Ms. Brady and understand the interpretation, but the lesson remains clear. Moreover, cultural expectations differ not only internationally, but also on many different dimensions from regional to interpersonal.

Someone raised in a rural environment in the Pacific Northwest may have a very different interpretation of meaning from someone from New York City. Take, for example, the word “downtown.” To the rural resident, downtown refers to the center or urban area of any big city. To a New Yorker, however, downtown may be a direction, not a place. One can go uptown or downtown, but when asked, “Where are you from?” the answer may refer to a borough (“I grew up in Manhattan”) or a neighborhood (“I’m from the East Village”).

This example involves two individuals who differ by geography, but we can further subdivide between people raised in the same state from two regions, two people of the opposite sex, or two people from different generations. The combinations are endless, as are the possibilities for bypassing. While you might think you understand, requesting feedback and asking for confirmation and clarification can help ensure that you get the target meaning.

Sullivan also notes that in stressful situations we often think in terms of either/or relationships, failing to recognize the stress itself. This kind of thinking can contribute to source/receiver error. In business, he notes that managers often incorrectly assume communication is easier than it is, and fail to anticipate miscommunication (Sullivan, Kameda, & Nobu, 1991).

As writers, we need to keep in mind that words are simply a means of communication, and that meanings are in people, not the words themselves. Knowing which words your audience understands and anticipating how they will interpret them will help you prevent bypassing.

Consider the Nonverbal Aspects of Your Message

Let's return to the example at the beginning of this section of an e-mail from a student to an instructor. As we noted, the student neglected to identify himself or herself and tell the instructor which class the question referred to. Format is important, including headers, contact information, and an informative subject line.

This is just one example of how the nonverbal aspects of a message can get in the way of understanding. Other nonverbal expressions in your writing may include symbols, design, font, and the timing of delivering your message.

Suppose your supervisor has asked you to write to a group of clients announcing a new service or product that directly relates to a service or product that these clients have used over the years. What kind of communication will your document be? Will it be sent as an e-mail or will it be a formal letter printed on quality paper and sent by postal mail? Or will it be a tweet, or a targeted online ad that pops up when these particular clients access your company's Web site? Each of these choices involves an aspect of written communication that is nonverbal. While the words may communicate a formal tone, *the font may not*. The paper chosen to represent your company influences the perception of it. An e-mail may indicate that it is less than formal and be easily deleted.

As another example, suppose you are a small business owner and have hired a new worker named Bryan. You need to provide written documentation of asking Bryan to fill out a set of forms that are required by law. Should you send an e-mail to Bryan's home the night before he starts work, welcoming him aboard and attaching links to IRS form W-4 and Homeland Security form I-9? Or should you wait until he has been at work for a couple of hours, then bring him the forms in hard copy along with a printed memo stating that he needs to fill them out? There are no right or wrong answers, but you will use your judgment, being aware that these nonverbal expressions are part of the message that gets communicated along with your words.

Review, Reflect, and Revise

Do you review what you write? Do you reflect on whether it serves its purpose? Where does it miss the mark? If you can recognize it, then you have the opportunity to revise.

Writers are often under deadlines, and that can mean a rush job where not every last detail is reviewed. This means more mistakes, and there is always time to do it right the second time. Rather than go through the experience of seeing all the mistakes in your “final” product and rushing off to the next job, you may need to focus more on the task at hand and get it done correctly the first time. Go over each step in detail as you review.

A mental review of the task and your performance is often called reflection. Reflection is not procrastination. It involves looking at the available information and, as you review the key points in your mind, making sure each detail is present and perfect. Reflection also allows for another opportunity to consider the key elements and their relationship to each other.

When you revise your document, you change one word for another, make subtle changes, and improve it. Don't revise simply to change the good work you've completed, but instead look at it from the perspective of the reader—for example, how could this be clearer to them? What would make it visually attractive while continuing to communicate the message? If you are limited to words only, then does each word serve the article or letter? No extras, but just about right.

Key Takeaway

To overcome barriers to communication, pay attention to details; strive to understand the target meaning; consider your nonverbal expressions; and review, reflect, and revise.

Exercises

1. Review the example of a student's e-mail to a professor in this section, and rewrite it to communicate the message more clearly.
2. Write a paragraph of 150–200 words on a subject of your choice. Experiment with different formats and fonts to display it and, if you wish, print it. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
3. How does the purpose of a document define its format and content? Think of a specific kind of document with a specific purpose and audience. Then create a format or template suitable to that document, purpose, and audience. Show your template to the class or post it on a class bulletin board.
4. Write one message of at least three sentences with at least three descriptive terms and present it to at least three people. Record notes about how they understand the message, and to what degree their interpretations are the same or different. Share and compare with classmates.

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4.7: Additional Resources

Visit AllYouCanRead.com for a list of the top ten business magazines. <http://www.allyoucanread.com/top-10-business-magazines>

The Wall Street Executive Library presents a comprehensive menu of business Web sites, publications, and other resources. <http://www.executivelibrary.com>

The Web site 4hb.com (For Home Business) provides many sample business documents, as well as other resources for the small business owner. www.4hb.com/index.html

The Business Owner's Toolkit provides sample documents in more than a dozen categories from finance to marketing to worker safety. www.toolkit.com/tools/index.aspx

Words mean different things to different people—especially when translated from one language to another. Visit this site for a list of car names “*que no va*” (that won't go) in foreign languages. <http://www.autoblog.com/2008/04/30/nissan-360-the-otti-and-the-moco>

Visit “Questions and Quandaries,” the *Writer's Digest* blog by Brian Klems, for a potpourri of information about writing. www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/questions-and-quandaries

Appearance counts. Read an article by communications expert Fran Lebo on enhancing the nonverbal aspects of your document. <http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Second-Law-of-Business-Writing—Appearance-Counts&id=3039288>

Visit this site to access the Sullivan article on bypassing in managerial communication. http://econpapers.repec.org/article/eeebushor/v_3a34_3ay_3a1991_3ai_3a1_3ap_3a71-80.htm

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Writing Preparation

“How do I prepare myself for writing?” is a common question and one that has no single correct answer. When do you do your best work? Whatever your work or task may be, it doesn’t have to be writing. Some people work best in the morning, others only after their daily dose of coffee. Still others burn the midnight oil and work well late into the night while their colleagues lose their productive edge as the sun sets. “To thine own self be true,” is a great idea when you have the freedom to choose when you work, but increasingly our lives are governed by schedules and deadlines that we do not control. You may have a deadline that requires you to work late at night when you recognize that you are far more productive early in the morning. If you can, consider one important step to writing success: know when you are most productive. If you cannot choose your timing, then dedication and perseverance are required. The job must be completed and the show must go on. Your effort demonstrates self-control and forbearance (as opposed to impatience and procrastination) and implies professionalism.

[5.1: Think, Then Write - Writing Preparation](#)

[5.2: A Planning Checklist for Business Messages](#)

[5.3: Research and Investigation - Getting Started](#)

[5.4: Ethics, Plagiarism, and Reliable Sources](#)

[5.5: Completing Your Research and Investigation](#)

[5.6: Reading and Analyzing](#)

[5.7: Additional Resources](#)

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5.1: Think, Then Write - Writing Preparation

Learning Objectives

1. Explain why preparation is important in business writing.
2. Think critically and employ strategies to overcome common fears of writing.

To be productive, you have to be alert, ready to work, and can accomplish tasks with relative ease. You will no doubt recognize that sometimes tasks take a lot longer, the solution is much harder to find, and you may find work more frustrating at other times. If you have the option, try to adjust your schedule so the writing tasks before you can be tackled at times when you are most productive, where your ability to concentrate is best, and when you are your most productive. If you don't have the option, focus clearly on the task before you.

Every individual is different, and what works for one person may be ineffective for someone else. One thing that professional writers agree on, however, is that you don't need to be in the "right mood" to write—and that, in fact, if you wait for the right mood to strike, you will probably never get started at all. Ernest Hemingway, who wrote some of the most famous novels of the twentieth century as well as hundreds of essays, articles, and short stories, advised writers to "work every day. No matter what has happened the day or night before, get up and bite on the nail" (Hemingway, 1999).

In order for your work to be productive, you will need to focus your attention on your writing. The stereotype of the writer tucked away in an attic room or a cabin in the woods, lost in the imaginary world created by the words as they flow onto the page, is only a stereotype. Our busy lives involve constant interruption. In a distraction-prone business environment, much of your writing will be done while colleagues are talking on the phone, having face-to-face conversations as they walk by, and possibly stopping at your desk to say hello or ask a question. Your phone may ring or you may have incoming instant messages (IMs) that need to be answered quickly. These unavoidable interruptions make it even more important to develop a habit of concentrating when you write.

The mind has been likened to a brace of wild horses; if you have ever worked with horses, you know they each have a mind of their own. Taken individually they can be somewhat manageable, but together they can prove to be quite a challenge. Our minds can multitask and perform several tasks simultaneously, but we can also get easily distracted. We can get sidetracked and lose valuable time away from our designated task. Our ability to concentrate is central to our ability to write effectively, whether we work alone or as part of a team.

In many business situations, you may not be writing solo but instead collaborating on a document with various coworkers, vendors, or customers. The ability to concentrate is perhaps even more important in these group writing situations (Nickerson, Perkins, & Smith, 1985). In this discussion, we'll consider the writing process from a singular perspective, where you are personally responsible for planning, researching, and producing a product of writing. In other areas of this text we also consider the collaborative process, its strengths and weaknesses, and how to negotiate and navigate the group writing process.

Thinking Critically

As you approach your writing project, it is important to practice the habit of thinking critically. Critical thinking can be defined as "self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking" (Paul & Elder, 2007). It is the difference between watching television in a daze versus analyzing a movie with attention to its use of lighting, camera angles, and music to influence the audience. One activity requires very little mental effort, while the other requires attention to detail, the ability to compare and contrast, and sharp senses to receive all the stimuli.

As a habit of mind, critical thinking requires established standards and attention to their use, effective communication, problem solving, and a willingness to acknowledge and address our own tendency for confirmation bias, egocentrism, and sociocentrism. We'll use the phrase "habit of mind" because clear, critical thinking is a habit that requires effort and persistence. People do not start an exercise program, a food and nutrition program, or a stop-smoking program with 100 percent success the first time. In the same way, it is easy to fall back into lazy mental short cuts, such as "If it costs a lot, it must be good," when in fact the statement may very well be false. You won't know until you gather information that supports (or contradicts) the assertion.

As we discuss getting into the right frame of mind for writing, keep in mind that the same recommendations apply to reading and research. If you only pay attention to information that reinforces your existing beliefs and ignore or discredit information that contradicts your beliefs, you are guilty of confirmation bias (Gilovich, 1993). As you read, research, and prepare for writing, make

an effort to gather information from a range of reliable sources, whether or not this information leads to conclusions you didn't expect. Remember that those who read your writing will be aware of, or have access to, this universe of data as well and will have their own confirmation bias. Reading and writing from an audience-centered view means acknowledging your confirmation bias and moving beyond it to consider multiple frames of references, points of view, and perspectives as you read, research, and write.

Egocentrism and sociocentrism are related concepts to confirmation bias. Egocentrism can be defined as the use of self-centered standards to determine what to believe and what to reject. Similarly, sociocentrism involves the use of society-centered standards (Paul & Elder, 2007). Both ways of thinking create an “us versus them” relationship that can undermine your credibility and alienate readers who don't share your viewpoint.

This leads to confirmation bias and groupthink, resulting in false conclusions with little or no factual support for a belief. If a person believes the earth is flat and never questions that belief, it serves as an example of egocentric thinking. The person believes it is true even though he has never questioned why he believes it. If the person decides to look for information but only finds information that supports his pre-existing belief, ignoring or discrediting information that contradicts that belief, he is guilty of confirmation bias. If he believes the earth is flat because everyone in his group or community believes it, even though he himself has never questioned or confirmed the belief, he is guilty of sociocentrism.

In each case, the false thinking strategy leads to poor conclusions. Watch out for your tendency to read, write, and believe that which reflects only what you think you know without solid research and clear, critical thinking.

Overcoming Fear of Writing

For many people, one of the most frightening things in life is public speaking. For similar reasons, whether rational or irrational, writing often generates similar fears. There is something about exposing one's words to possible criticism that can be truly terrifying. In this chapter, we are going to break down the writing process into small, manageable steps that, in turn, will provide you with a platform for success. To take advantage of these steps, you need to acknowledge any reluctance or fear that may be holding you back, and bring your interests and enthusiasm to this discussion on writing.

Having a positive attitude about writing in general, and your effort, is also a key ingredient to your success. If you approach a writing assignment with trepidation and fear, you will spend your valuable time and attention in ways that do not contribute positively to your writing. People often fear the writing process because of three main reasons:

1. Negative orientation
2. Risk of failure
3. Fear of the unknown

Let's take each reason in turn. Negative orientation means the writer has a pre-existing negative association or view of the task or activity. We tend to like people who like us (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), tend to pursue activities where we perceive rewards and appreciation for our efforts, and are more likely to engage in activities where we perceive we are successful. Conversely, we tend to not like people who we perceive as not like us, tend to ignore or avoid activities where we perceive we are not appreciated or are not rewarded, and are less likely to engage in activities where we perceive we are not successful. For some writers, previous experiences have led to a pre-existing association with writing. That association may be positive if they have been encouraged, affirmed, or rewarded as they demonstrated measurable gain. That association may also be negative if efforts have been met with discouraging feedback, a lack of affirmation, or negative reinforcement.

Effective business writing is a highly valued skill, and regardless of the degree to which writing will be a significant aspect of your designated job duties, your ability to do it well will be a boost to your career. If you have a negative orientation toward writing, admitting this fact is an important first step. Next, we need to actively seek ways to develop your skills in ways that will demonstrate measurable gain and lead to positive affirmation. Not everyone develops in the same way on the same schedule, and measurable gain means that from one writing assignment to the next you can demonstrate positive progress. In an academic setting, measurable gain is one of your clear goals as a writer. In a business or industry setting, you may lack the time to revise and improve, meaning that you will need to get it right the first time. Take advantage of the academic setting to set positive, realistic goals to improve your writing. Surround yourself with resources, including people who will help you reach your goal. If your college or university has a writing center, take advantage of it. If it does not, seek out assistance from those whose writing has been effective and well received.

It is a given that you do not want to fail. Risk of failure is a common fear across public speaking and writing situations, producing predictable behavioral patterns we can recognize, address, and resolve. In public speaking, our minds may go blank at the start of a

presentation as we confront our fear of failure. In writing, we may experience a form of blankness often referred to as “writer’s block”—the overwhelming feeling of not knowing what to write or where to start—and sit helplessly waiting for our situation to change.

But we have the power to change our circumstances and to overcome our risk of failure. You may be familiar with the concept of a rough draft, but it may compete in your mind with a desire for perfection. Writing is a dynamic process, a reflection of the communication process itself. It won’t be perfect the first time you attempt it. Awareness that your rough draft serves a purpose, but doesn’t represent your final product, should serve in the same way a rehearsal for a speech serves a speaker. You get a second (or third) chance to get it right. Use this process to reduce your fear of failure and let go of your perfectionist tendencies, if only for a moment. Your desire for perfection will serve you well when it comes to polishing your finished document, but everything has its time and place. Learning where and when to place your effort is part of writing preparation.

Finally, we often fear the unknown. It is part of being human, and is reflected across all contexts, including public speaking and writing. If you have never given a speech before, your first time on stage can be quite an ordeal. If you have never written a formal business report, your fear of the unknown is understandable. How can you address this fear? Make the unknown known. If we take the mystery out of the process and product, we can see it for its essential components, its organizational pattern, and start to see how our product may look before we even start to produce it. In many organizations, you can ask your supervisor or coworkers for copies of similar documents to the one you have been assigned, even if the content is quite different. If this is not an option, simply consider the way most documents in your company are written—even something as basic as an interoffice e-mail will provide some clues. Your goal is to become familiar with the type of document and to examine several successful examples. Once you see a couple of reports, you will have a better feel for what you have to produce and the unknown will be far less mysterious.

Key Takeaway

There are several reasons why people fear writing, but there are also several strategies to reduce or eliminate those fears.

Exercises

1. How would you describe your orientation to writing? Where does this orientation come from? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.
2. If you could identify one aspect of your writing you would like to improve, what would it be and why? Write a one- two-page essay on this subject.
3. What kinds of writing do you like? Dislike? Explain why and provide an example of each. Share and compare with the class.
4. Who is your favorite author? What do you like about her or his writing? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.

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5.2: A Planning Checklist for Business Messages

Learning Objectives

1. Understand who, what, where, when, why, and how as features of writing purpose.
2. Describe the planning process and essential elements of a business document.

John Thill and Courtland Bovee (Thill, J. V., & Bovee, C. L., 2004), two leading authors in the field of business communication, have created a checklist for planning business messages. The following twelve-item checklist, adapted here, serves as a useful reminder of the importance of preparation in the writing process:

1. Determine your general purpose: are you trying to inform, persuade, entertain, facilitate interaction, or motivate a reader?
2. Determine your specific purpose (the desired outcome).
3. Make sure your purpose is realistic.
4. Make sure your timing is appropriate.
5. Make sure your sources are credible.
6. Make sure the message reflects positively on your business.
7. Determine audience size.
8. Determine audience composition.
9. Determine audience knowledge and awareness of topic.
10. Anticipate probable responses.
11. Select the correct channel.
12. Make sure the information provided is accurate, ethical, and pertinent.

Throughout this chapter we will examine these various steps in greater detail.

Determining Your Purpose

Preparation for the writing process involves purpose, research and investigation, reading and analyzing, and adaptation. In the first section we consider how to determine the purpose of a document, and how that awareness guides the writer to effective product.

While you may be free to create documents that represent yourself or your organization, your employer will often have direct input into their purpose. All acts of communication have general and specific purposes, and the degree to which you can identify these purposes will influence how effective your writing is. General purposes involve the overall goal of the communication interaction: to inform, persuade, entertain, facilitate interaction, or motivate a reader. The general purpose influences the presentation and expectation for feedback. In an informative message—the most common type of writing in business—you will need to cover several predictable elements:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- How
- Why (optional)

Some elements may receive more attention than others, and they do not necessarily have to be addressed in the order you see here. Depending on the nature of your project, as a writer you will have a degree of input over how you organize them.

Note that the last item, *Why*, is designated as optional. This is because business writing sometimes needs to report facts and data objectively, without making any interpretation or pointing to any cause-effect relationship. In other business situations, of course, identifying why something happened or why a certain decision is advantageous will be the essence of the communication.

In addition to its general purpose (e.g., to inform, persuade, entertain, or motivate), every piece of writing also has at least one specific purpose, which is the intended outcome; the result that will happen once your written communication has been read.

For example, imagine that you are an employee in a small city's housing authority and have been asked to draft a letter to city residents about radon. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that has been classified by the United States Environmental Protection Agency as a health hazard. In the course of a routine test, radon was detected in minimal levels in an apartment building

operated by the housing authority. It presents a relatively low level of risk, but because the incident was reported in the local newspaper, the mayor has asked the housing authority director to be proactive in informing all the city residents of the situation.

The general purpose of your letter is to inform, and the specific purpose is to have a written record of informing all city residents about how much radon was found, when, and where; where they can get more information on radon; and the date, time, and place of the meeting. Residents may read the information and attend or they may not even read the letter. But once the letter has been written, signed, and distributed, your general and specific purposes have been accomplished.

Now imagine that you begin to plan your letter by applying the above list of elements. Recall that the letter informs residents on three counts: (1) the radon finding, (2) where to get information about radon, and (3) the upcoming meeting. For each of these pieces of information, the elements may look like the following:

1. Radon Finding

- Who: The manager of the apartment building (give name)
- What: Discovered a radon concentration of 4.1 picocuries per liter (pCi/L) and reported it to the housing authority director, who informed the city health inspector, environmental compliance office, and mayor
- When: During the week of December 15
- Where: In the basement of the apartment building located at (give address)
- How: In the course of performing a routine annual test with a commercially available do-it-yourself radon test kit

2. Information about radon

- Who: According to the city health inspector and environmental compliance officer
- What: Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that results from the breakdown of uranium in soil; a radon test level above 4.0 pCi/L may be cause for concern
- When: Radon levels fluctuate from time to time, so further testing will be done; in past years, test results were below 4.0 pCi/L
- Where: More information is available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the state radon office
- How: By phone, mail, or on the Internet (provide full contact information for both sources)
- Why: To become better informed and avoid misunderstandings about radon, its health risks, and the meaning of radon test results

3. City meeting about radon

- Who: All city residents are welcome
- What: Attend an informational meeting where the mayor, director of the housing authority, city health inspector, and city environmental compliance officer will speak and answer questions
- When: Monday, January 7, at 7 p.m.
- Where: City hall community room
- Why: To become better informed and avoid misunderstandings about radon, its health risks, and the meaning of radon test results

Once you have laid out these elements of your informative letter, you have an outline from which it will be easy to write the actual letter.



Figure 5.2.1: Communication about health care concerns requires careful planning and preparation. Nicolas Raymond – [Biohazard Grunge Sign](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Your effort serves as a written record of correspondence informing them that radon was detected, which may be one of the specific or primary purposes. A secondary purpose may be to increase attendance at the town hall meeting, but you will need feedback from that event to determine the effectiveness of your effort.

Now imagine that instead of being a housing authority employee, you are a city resident who receives that informative letter, and you happen to operate a business as a certified radon mitigation contractor. You may decide to build on this information and develop a persuasive message. You may draft a letter to the homeowners and landlords in the neighborhood near the building in question. To make your message persuasive, you may focus on the perception that radiation is inherently dangerous and that no amount of radon has been declared safe. You may cite external authorities that indicate radon is a contributing factor to several health ailments, and even appeal to emotions with phrases like “protect your children” and “peace of mind.” Your letter will probably encourage readers to check with the state radon office to verify that you are a certified contractor, describe the services you provide, and indicate that friendly payment terms can be arranged.

Credibility, Timing, and Audience

At this point in the discussion, we need to visit the concept of credibility. Credibility, or the perception of integrity of the message based on an association with the source, is central to any communication act. If the audience perceives the letter as having presented the information in an impartial and objective way, perceives the health inspector’s and environmental compliance officer’s expertise in the field as relevant to the topic, and generally regards the housing authority in a positive light, they will be likely to accept your information as accurate. If, however, the audience does not associate trust and reliability with your message in particular and the city government in general, you may anticipate a lively discussion at the city hall meeting.

In the same way, if the reading audience perceives the radon mitigation contractor’s letter as a poor sales pitch without their best interest or safety in mind, they may not respond positively to its message and be unlikely to contact him about any possible radon problems in their homes. If, however, the sales letter squarely addresses the needs of the audience and effectively persuades them, the contractor may look forward to a busy season.

Returning to the original housing authority scenario, did you consider how your letter might be received, or the fear it may have generated in the audience? In real life you don’t get a second chance, but in our academic setting, we can go back and take more time on our assignment, using the twelve-item checklist we presented earlier. Imagine that you are the mayor or the housing authority director. Before you assign an employee to send a letter to inform residents about the radon finding, take a moment to consider how realistic your purpose is. As a city official, you may want the letter to serve as a record that residents were informed of the radon finding, but will that be the only outcome? Will people be even more concerned in response to the letter than they were when the item was published in the newspaper? Would a persuasive letter serve the city’s purposes better than an informative one?

Another consideration is the timing. On the one hand, it may be important to get the letter sent as quickly as possible, as the newspaper report may have already aroused concerns that the letter will help calm. On the other hand, given that the radon was discovered in mid-December, many people are probably caught up in holiday celebrations. If the letter is mailed during the week of

Christmas, it may not get the attention it deserves. After January 1, everyone will be paying more attention to their mail as they anticipate the arrival of tax-related documents or even the dreaded credit card statement. If the mayor has scheduled the city hall meeting for January 7, people may be unhappy if they only learn about the meeting at the last minute. Also consider your staff; if many of them will be gone over the holidays, there may not be enough staff in place to respond to phone calls that will likely come in response to the letter, even though the letter advises residents to contact the state radon office and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Next, how credible are the sources cited in the letter? If you as a housing authority employee have been asked to draft it, to whom should it go once you have it written? The city health inspector and environmental compliance officer are mentioned as sources; will they each read and approve the letter before it is sent? Is there someone at the county, state, or even the federal level who can, or should, check the information before it is sent?

The next item on the checklist is to make sure the message reflects positively on your business. In our hypothetical case, the “business” is city government. The letter should acknowledge that city officials and employees are servants of the taxpayers. “We are here to serve you” should be expressed, if not in so many words, in the tone of the letter.

The next three items on the checklist are associated with the audience profile: audience size, composition, knowledge, and awareness of the topic. Since your letter is being sent to all city residents, you likely have a database from which you can easily tell how many readers constitute your audience. What about audience composition? What else do you know about the city’s residents? What percentage of households includes children? What is the education level of most of the residents? Are there many residents whose first language is not English; if so, should your letter be translated into any other languages? What is the range of income levels in the city? How well informed are city residents about radon? Has radon been an issue in any other buildings in the city in recent years? The answers to these questions will help determine how detailed the information in your letter should be.

Finally, anticipate probable responses. Although the letter is intended to inform, could it be misinterpreted as an attempt to “cover up” an unacceptable condition in city housing? If the local newspaper were to reprint the letter, would the mayor be upset? Is there someone in public relations who will be doing media interviews at the same time the letter goes out? Will the release of information be coordinated, and if so by whom?

One additional point that deserves mention is the notion of decision makers. Even if your overall goal is to inform or persuade, the basic mission is to simply communicate. Establishing a connection is a fundamental aspect of the communication audience, and if you can correctly target key decision makers you increase your odds for making the connection with those you intend to inform or persuade. Who will open the mail, or e-mail? Who will act upon it? The better you can answer those questions, the more precise you can be in your writing efforts.

In some ways this is similar to asking your professor to write a letter of recommendation for you, but to address it to “to whom it may concern.” If you can provide a primary contact name for the letter of recommendation it will increase its probable impact on the evaluation process. If your goal is to get a scholarship or a job offer, you want to take the necessary steps to increase your positive impact on the audience.

Communication Channels

Purpose is closely associated with channel. We need to consider the purpose when choosing a channel. From source to receiver, message to channel, feedback to context, environment, and interference, all eight components play a role in the dynamic process. While writing often focuses on an understanding of the receiver (as we’ve discussed) and defining the purpose of the message, the channel—or the “how” in the communication process—deserves special mention.

So far, we have discussed a simple and traditional channel of written communication: the hardcopy letter mailed in a standard business envelope and sent by postal mail. But in today’s business environment, this channel is becoming increasingly rare as electronic channels become more widely available and accepted.

When is it appropriate to send an instant message (IM) or text message versus a conventional e-mail or fax? What is the difference between a letter and a memo? Between a report and a proposal? Writing itself is the communication medium, but each of these specific channels has its own strengths, weaknesses, and understood expectations that are summarized in Table 5.2.1.

Table 5.2.1: Written Communication Channels

Channel	Strengths	Weaknesses	Expectations	When to Choose

Channel	Strengths	Weaknesses	Expectations	When to Choose
IM or Text Message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very fast • Good for rapid exchanges of small amounts of information • Inexpensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal • Not suitable for large amounts of information • Abbreviations lead to misunderstandings 	Quick response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal use among peers at similar levels within an organization • You need a fast, inexpensive connection with a colleague over a small issue and limited amount of information

Channel	Strengths	Weaknesses	Expectations	When to Choose
E-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast • Good for relatively fast exchanges of information • “Subject” line allows compilation of many messages on one subject or project • Easy to distribute to multiple recipients • Inexpensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May hit “send” prematurely • May be overlooked or deleted without being read • “Reply to all” error • “Forward” error • Large attachments may cause the e-mail to be caught in recipient’s spam filter 	Normally a response is expected within 24 hours, although norms vary by situation and organizational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need to communicate but time is not the most important consideration • You need to send attachments (provided their file size is not too big)
Fax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast • Provides documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving issues (e.g., the receiving machine may be out of paper or toner) • Long distance telephone charges apply • Transitional telephone-based technology losing popularity to online information exchange 	Normally, a long (multiple page) fax is not expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You want to send a document whose format must remain intact as presented, such as a medical prescription or a signed work order • Allows use of letterhead to represent your company
Memo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official but less formal than a letter • Clearly shows who sent it, when, and to whom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memos sent through e-mails can get deleted without review • Attachments can get removed by spam filters 	Normally used internally in an organization to communicate directives from management on policy and procedure, or documentation	You need to communicate a general message within an organization
Letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal • Letterhead represents your company and adds credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May get filed or thrown away unread • Cost and time involved in printing, stuffing, sealing, affixing postage, and travel through the postal system 	Specific formats associated with specific purposes	You need to inform, persuade, deliver bad news or negative message, and document the communication

Channel	Strengths	Weaknesses	Expectations	When to Choose
Report	Significant time for preparation and production	Requires extensive research and documentation	Specific formats for specific purposes; generally reports are to inform	You need to document the relationship(s) between large amounts of data to inform an internal or external audience
Proposal	Significant time for preparation and production	Requires extensive research and documentation	Specific formats for specific purposes; generally proposals are to persuade	You need to persuade an audience with complex arguments and data

By choosing the correct channel for a message, you can save yourself many headaches and increase the likelihood that your writing will be read, understood, and acted upon in the manner you intended.

Our discussion of communication channels would not be complete without mentioning the issues of privacy and security in electronic communications. The American Management Association estimates that about two thirds of employers monitor their employees' electronic communications or Internet use. When you call and leave a voice message for a friend or colleague at work, do you know where your message is stored? There was a time when the message may have been stored on an analog cassette in an answering machine, or even on a small pink handwritten note which a secretary deposited in your friend's in-box. Today the "where" is irrelevant, as the in-box is digital and can be accessed from almost anywhere on the planet. That also means the message you left, with the representation of your voice, can be forwarded via e-mail as an attachment to anyone. Any time you send an IM, text, or e-mail or leave a voice message, your message is stored on more than one server, and it can be intercepted or forwarded to persons other than the intended receiver. Are you ready for your message to be broadcast to the world? Do your words represent you and your business in a positive light?

Newsweek columnist Jennifer Ordoñez raises this question when she writes, "For desk jockeys everywhere, it has become as routine as a tour of the office-supply closet: the consent form attesting that you understand and accept that any e-mails you write, Internet sites you visit or business you conduct on your employer's computer network are subject to inspection" (Ordoñez, J., 2008). As you use MySpace, update your Facebook page, get LinkedIn, Twitter, text, and IM, you leave an electronic trail of "bread crumbs" that merge personal and professional spheres, opening up significant issues of privacy. In our discussion we address research for specific business document production, and all the electronic research conducted is subject to review. While the case law is evolving as the technology we use to interface expands, it is wise to consider that anything you write or record can and will be stored for later retrieval by people for whom your message was not initially intended.

In terms of writing preparation, you should review any electronic communication before you send it. Spelling and grammatical errors will negatively impact your credibility. With written documents we often take time and care to get it right the first time, but the speed of IM, text, or e-mail often deletes this important review cycle of written works. Just because the document you prepare in IM is only one sentence long doesn't mean it can't be misunderstood or expose you to liability. Take time when preparing your written messages, regardless of their intended presentation, and review your work before you click "send."

Key Takeaway

Choose the most effective channel for your document and consider the possible ramifications of what you have written before you send it.

Exercises

1. Write a one-page letter to a new customer introducing a new product or service. Compare your result to the letters your classmates wrote. What do the letters have in common? How do they differ from one another?
2. Write a memo that addresses a new norm or protocol, such as the need to register with a new company that will be handling all the organization's business-related travel, with specific expectations including what information is needed, when, and to whom.
3. Make a list of the written communication that you read, skim, or produce in a one day. Please share your results with the class.

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5.3: Research and Investigation - Getting Started

Learning Objectives

1. Compare and contrast ways of knowing your reading audience.
2. Conduct research and investigation to gather information.

Clearly, not every piece of business writing requires research or investigation. If you receive an e-mail asking for the correct spelling of your boss's name and her official title, you will probably be able to answer without having to look anything up. But what if the sender of the e-mail wants to know who in your company is the decision maker for purchasing a certain supply item? Unless you work for a very small company, you will likely have to look through the organizational chart, and possibly make a phone call or two, before you are able to write an e-mail answering this question. There—you have just done the research for a piece of business writing.

Even if you need to write something much more complex than an e-mail, such as a report or proposal, research does not have to be all about long hours at a library. Instead, start by consulting with business colleagues who have written similar documents and ask what worked, what didn't work, what was well received by management and the target audience. Your efforts will need to meet similar needs. Your document will not stand alone but will exist within a larger agenda. How does your proposed document fit within this agenda at your place of work, within the larger community, or with the target audience? It's worth noting that the word "investigation" contains the word "invest." You will need to invest your time and effort to understand the purpose and goal of your proposed document.

Before you go to the library, look over the information sources you already have in hand. Do you regularly read a magazine that relates to the topic? Was there an article in the newspaper you read that might work? Is there a book, CD-ROM or mp3 that has information you can use? Think of what you want the audience to know and how you could show it to them. Perhaps a famous quote or a line from a poem may make an important contribution to your document. You might even know someone that has experience in the area you want to research, someone who has been involved with skydiving locally for his or her whole life. Consider how you are going to tell and show your audience what your document is all about.

Once you have an assignment or topic, know your general and specific purposes, and have good idea of your reader's expectations, it's time to gather information. Your best sources may be all around you, within your business or organization. Information may come from reports from the marketing department or even from a trusted and well-versed colleague, but you will still need to do your homework. After you have written several similar documents for your organization, you may have your collection of sample documents, but don't be tempted to take shortcuts and "repurpose" existing documents to meet a tight deadline. Creating an original work specifically tailored to the issue and audience at hand is the best approach to establish credibility, produce a more effective document, and make sure no important aspect of your topic is left out.

Narrowing Your Topic

By now you have developed an idea of your topic, but even with a general and specific purpose, you may still have a broad subject that will be a challenge to cover within the allotted time before the deadline. You might want to revisit your purpose and ask yourself, how specific is my topic?

Imagine that you work for a local skydiving training facility. Your boss has assembled a list of people who might be candidates for skydiving and asks you to write a letter to them. Your general purpose is to persuade, and your specific purpose is to increase the number of students enrolled in classes. You've decided that skydiving is your topic area and you are going to tell your audience how exhilarating the experience is, discuss the history and basic equipment, cover the basic requirements necessary to go on a first jump, and provide reference information on where your audience could go to learn more (links and Web sites, for example).

But at this point you might find that a one-page letter simply is not enough space for the required content. Rather than expand the letter to two pages and risk losing the reader, consider your audience and what they might want to learn. How can you narrow your topic to better consider their needs? As you edit your topic, considering what the essential information is and what can be cut, you'll come to focus on the key points naturally and reduce the pressure on yourself to cover too much information in a limited space environment.

Perhaps starting with a testimony about a client's first jump, followed by basic equipment and training needed, and finally a reference to your organization may help you define your document. While the history may be fascinating, and may serve as a topic

in itself for another day, it may add too much information in this persuasive letter. Your specific purpose may be to increase enrollment, but your general goal will be to communicate goodwill and establish communication. If you can get your audience to view skydiving in a positive light and consider the experience for themselves, or people they know, you have accomplished your general purpose.

Focus on Key Points

As a different example, let's imagine that you are the office manager for a pet boarding facility that cares for dogs and cats while their owners are away. The general manager has asked you to draft a memo to remind employees about safety practices. Your general purpose is twofold: to inform employees about safety concerns and to motivate them to engage in safe work practices. Your specific purpose is also twofold: to prevent employees from being injured or infected with diseases on the job, and to reduce the risk of the animal patients being injured or becoming sick while in your care.

You are an office manager, not a veterinary or medical professional, and clearly there are volumes written about animal injuries and illnesses, not to mention entire schools devoted to teaching medicine to doctors who care for human patients. In a short memo you cannot hope to cover all possible examples of injury or illness. Instead, focus on the following behaviors and situations you observe:

- Do employees wash their hands thoroughly before and after contact with each animal?
- Are hand-washing facilities kept clean and supplied with soap and paper towels?
- When cleaning the animals' cages, do employees wear appropriate protection such as gloves?
- What is the procedure for disposing of animal waste, and do all employees know and follow the procedure?
- When an animal is being transferred from one cage to another, are there enough staff members present to provide backup assistance in case the animal becomes unruly?
- What should an employee do if he or she is bitten or scratched?
- What if an animal exhibits signs of being ill?
- Have there been any recent incidents that raised concerns about safety?

Once you have posed and answered questions like these, it should be easier to narrow down the information so that the result is a reasonably brief, easy to read memo that will get employees' attention and persuade them to adopt safe work practices.

Planning Your Investigation for Information

Now let's imagine that you work for a small accounting firm whose president would like to start sending a monthly newsletter to clients and prospective clients. He is aware of newsletter production service vendors that provide newsletters to represent a particular accounting firm. He has asked you to compile a list of such services, their prices and practices, so that the firm can choose one to employ.

If you are alert, you will begin your planning immediately, while your conversation with the president is still going on, as you will need more information before you can gauge the scope of the assignment. Approximately how many newsletter vendors does your president want to know about—is three or four enough? Would twenty be too many? Is there a set budget figure that the newsletter cost must not exceed? How soon does your report need to be done?

Once you have these details, you will be able to plan when and where to gather the needed information. The smartest place to begin is right in your office. If the president has any examples of newsletters he has seen from other businesses, you can examine them and note the contact information of the companies that produced them. You may also have an opportunity to ask coworkers if they know or even have copies of any such newsletters.

Assuming that your president wants to consider more than just a couple of vendors, you will need to expand your search. The next logical place to look is the Internet. In some companies, employees have full Internet access from their office computers; other companies provide only a few terminals with Internet access. Some workplaces allow no Internet access; if this is the case, you can visit your nearest public library.

As anyone who has spent an entire evening aimlessly Web surfing can attest, the Internet is a great place to find loads and loads of interesting but irrelevant information. Knowing what questions you are seeking to answer will help you stay focused on your report's topic, and knowing the scope of the report will help you to decide how much research time to plan in your schedule.

Staying Organized

Once you open up a Web browser such as Google and type in a search parameter like “newsletter production,” you will have a wealth of information to look at. Much of it may be irrelevant, but even the information that fits with your project will be so much that you will be challenged to keep track of it.

Perhaps the most vital strategy for staying organized while doing online research is to open a blank page in your word processor and title it “Sources.” Each time you find a Web page that contains what you believe may be useful and relevant information, copy the URL and paste it on this Sources page. Under the URL, copy and paste a paragraph or two as an example of the information you found on this Web page. Err on the side of listing too many sources; if in doubt about a source, list it for the time being—you can always discard it later. Having these source URLs and snippets of information all in one place will save you a great deal of time and many headaches later on.

As you explore various Web sites of companies that provide newsletter production services, you will no doubt encounter new questions that your president did not answer in the original conversation:

- Does the newsletter need to be printed on paper and mailed? Or would an e-mail newsletter be acceptable, or even preferable?
- Does your firm want the newsletter vendor to write all of the content customized to your firm, provide a menu of pre-existing articles for your firm to choose from, or let your firm provide some—or even all—of the content?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of these various options?

You also realize that in order to get any cost estimates, even when the above questions are settled, you will need to know the desired length of the newsletter (in pages or in words), and how many recipients are on your firm’s mailing list. At this point in your research and investigation, it may make sense to give your president an informal interim report, summarizing what you have found out and what additional questions need to be answered.

Having a well-organized list of the information you have assembled, the new questions that have arisen, and the sources where you found your information will allow you to continue researching effectively as soon as you have gotten answers and more specific direction from your president.

Key Takeaway

To make a writing project manageable, narrow your topic, focus on key points, plan your investigation for information, and stay organized as you go along.

Exercises

1. Think of a time when someone asked you to gather information to make a decision, whether for work, school, or in your personal life. How specific was the request? What did you need to know before you could determine how much and what kind of information to gather? Discuss your answer with those of your classmates.
2. Make a list of all the ways you procrastinate, noting how much time is associated with each activity or distraction. Share and compare your results with a classmate.
3. You are the manager. Write an e-mail requesting an employee to gather specific information on a topic. Give clear directions and due date(s). Please share your results with the class.
4. How do you prepare yourself for a writing project? How do others? What strategies work best for you? Survey ten colleagues or coworkers and compare your results with your classmates.

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5.4: Ethics, Plagiarism, and Reliable Sources

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to be ethical, avoid plagiarism, and use reputable sources in your writing.

Unlike writing for personal or academic purposes, your business writing will help determine how well your performance is evaluated in your job. Whether you are writing for colleagues within your workplace or outside vendors or customers, you will want to build a solid, well-earned favorable reputation for yourself with your writing. Your goal is to maintain and enhance your credibility, and that of your organization, at all times.

Make sure as you start your investigation that you always question the credibility of the information. Sources may have no reviews by peers or editor, and the information may be misleading, biased, or even false. Be a wise information consumer.

Business Ethics

Many employers have a corporate code of ethics; even if your employer does not, it goes without saying that there are laws governing how the company can and cannot conduct business. Some of these laws apply to business writing. As an example, it would be not only unethical but also illegal to send out a promotional letter announcing a special sale on an item that ordinarily costs \$500, offering it for \$100, if in fact you have only one of this item in inventory. When a retailer does this, the unannounced purpose of the letter is to draw customers into the store, apologize for running out of the sale item, and urge them to buy a similar item for \$400. Known as “bait and switch,” this is a form of fraud and is punishable by law.

Let’s return to our previous newsletter scenario to examine some less clear-cut issues of business ethics. Suppose that, as you confer with your president and continue your research on newsletter vendors, you remember that you have a cousin who recently graduated from college with a journalism degree. You decide to talk to her about your project. In the course of the conversation, you learn that she now has a job working for a newsletter vendor. She is very excited to hear about your firm’s plans and asks you to make her company “look good” in your report.

You are now in a situation that involves at least two ethical questions:

1. Did you breach your firm’s confidentiality by telling your cousin about the plan to start sending a monthly newsletter?
2. Is there any ethical way you can comply with your cousin’s request to show her company in an especially favorable light?

On the question of confidentiality, the answer may depend on whether you signed a confidentiality agreement as a condition of your employment at the accounting firm, or whether your president specifically told you to keep the newsletter plan confidential. If neither of these safeguards existed, then your conversation with your cousin would be an innocent, unintentional and coincidental sharing of information in which she turned out to have a vested interest.

As for representing her company in an especially favorable light—you are ethically obligated to describe all the candidate vendors according to whatever criteria your president asked to see. The fact that your cousin works for a certain vendor may be an asset or a liability in your firm’s view, but it would probably be best to inform them of it and let them make that judgment.

As another example of ethics in presenting material, let’s return to the skydiving scenario we mentioned earlier. Because you are writing a promotional letter whose goal is to increase enrollment in your skydiving instruction, you may be tempted to avoid mentioning information that could be perceived as negative. If issues of personal health condition or accident rates in skydiving appear to discourage rather than encourage your audience to consider skydiving, you may be tempted to omit them. But in so doing, you are not presenting an accurate picture and may mislead your audience.

Even if your purpose is to persuade, deleting the opposing points presents a one-sided presentation. The audience will naturally consider not only what you tell them but also what you are not telling them, and will raise questions. Instead, consider your responsibility as a writer to present information you understand to be complete, honest, and ethical. Lying by omission can also expose your organization to liability. Instead of making a claim that skydiving is completely safe, you may want to state that your school complies with the safety guidelines of the United States Parachute Association. You might also state how many jumps your school has completed in the past year without an accident.

Giving Credit to Your Sources

You have photos of yourself jumping but they aren't very exciting. Since you are wearing goggles to protect your eyes and the image is at a distance, who can really tell if the person in the picture is you or not? Why not find a more exciting photo on the Internet and use it as an illustration for your letter? You can download it from a free site and the "fine print" at the bottom of the Web page states that the photos can be copied for personal use.

Not so fast—do you realize that a company's promotional letter does not qualify as personal use? The fact is that using the photo for a commercial purpose without permission from the photographer constitutes an infringement of copyright law; your employer could be sued because you decided to liven up your letter by taking a shortcut. Furthermore, falsely representing the more exciting photo as being your parachute jump will undermine your company's credibility if your readers happen to find the photo on the Internet and realize it is not yours.

Just as you wouldn't want to include an image more exciting than yours and falsely state that it is your jump, you wouldn't want to take information from sources and fail to give them credit. Whether the material is a photograph, text, a chart or graph, or any other form of media, taking someone else's work and representing it as your own is plagiarism. Plagiarism is committed whether you copy material verbatim, paraphrase its wording, or even merely take its ideas—if you do any of these things—without giving credit to the source.

This does not mean you are forbidden to quote from your sources. It's entirely likely that in the course of research you may find a perfect turn of phrase or a way of communicating ideas that fits your needs perfectly. Using it in your writing is fine, provided that you credit the source fully enough that your readers can find it on their own. If you fail to take careful notes, or the sentence is present in your writing but later fails to get accurate attribution, it can have a negative impact on you and your organization. That is why it is important that when you find an element you would like to incorporate in your document, in the same moment as you copy and paste or make a note of it in your research file, you need to note the source in a complete enough form to find it again.

Giving credit where credit is due will build your credibility and enhance your document. Moreover, when your writing is authentically yours, your audience will catch your enthusiasm, and you will feel more confident in the material you produce. Just as you have a responsibility in business to be honest in selling your product of service and avoid cheating your customers, so you have a responsibility in business writing to be honest in presenting your idea, and the ideas of others, and to avoid cheating your readers with plagiarized material.

Challenges of Online Research

Earlier in the chapter we have touched on the fact that the Internet is an amazing source of information, but for that very reason, it is a difficult place to get information you actually need. In the early years of the Internet, there was a sharp distinction between a search engine and a Web site. There were many search engines competing with one another, and their home pages were generally fairly blank except for a search field where the user would enter the desired search keywords or parameters. There are still many search sites, but today, a few search engines have come to dominate the field, including Google and Yahoo! Moreover, most search engines' home pages offer a wide range of options beyond an overall Web search; buttons for options such as news, maps, images, and videos are typical. Another type of search engine performs a metasearch, returning search results from several search engines at once.

When you are looking for a specific kind of information, these relatively general searches can still lead you far away from your desired results. In that case, you may be better served by an online dictionary, encyclopedia, business directory, or phone directory. There are also specialized online databases for almost every industry, profession, and area of scholarship; some are available to anyone, others are free but require opening an account, and some require paying a subscription fee. For example, www.zillow.com allows for in-depth search and collation of information concerning real estate and evaluation, including the integration of public databases that feature tax assessments and ownership transfers. Table 5.4.2 provides a few examples of different kinds of search sites.

Table 5.4.2: Some Examples of Internet Search Sites

Description	URL

Description	URL
General Web searches that can also be customized according to categories like news, maps, images, video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://altavista.com • http://www.google.com • http://go.com • http://www.itools.com/research-it • www.live.com • http://www.yahoo.com
Metasearch engines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.dogpile.com • www.info.com • www.metacrawler.com • http://www.search.com • www.webcrawler.com
Dictionaries and encyclopedias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.britannica.com • http://dictionary.reference.com • encarta.msn.com • http://www.encyclopedia.com • http://www.merriam-webster.com • http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page
Very basic information on a wide range of topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.about.com • http://www.answers.com • http://wiki.answers.com
To find people or businesses in white pages or yellow pages listings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.anywho.com • www.peoplelookup.com • www.switchboard.com • www.whitepages.com • http://www.yellowpages.com
Specialized databases—may be free, require registration, or require a paid subscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.apa.org/psycinfo • http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct/screen/AdvancedSearch • medline.cos.com • http://www.northernlight.com • www.zillow.com

At the end of this chapter, under “Additional Resources,” you will find a list of many Web sites that may be useful for business research.

Evaluating Your Sources

One aspect of Internet research that cannot be emphasized enough is the abundance of online information that is incomplete, outdated, misleading, or downright false. Anyone can put up a Web site; once it is up, the owner may or may not enter updates or corrections on a regular basis. Anyone can write a blog on any subject, whether or not that person actually has any expertise on that subject. Anyone who wishes to contribute to a Wikipedia article can do so—although the postings are moderated by editors who have to register and submit their qualifications. In the United States, the First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression. This freedom is restricted by laws prohibiting libel (false accusations against a person) and indecency, especially child pornography, but those laws are limited in scope and sometimes difficult to enforce. Therefore, it is always important to look beyond the surface of a site to assess who sponsors it, where the information displayed came from, and whether the site owner has a certain agenda.

When you write for business and industry you will want to draw on reputable, reliable sources—printed as well as electronic ones—because they reflect on the credibility of the message and the messenger. Analyzing and assessing information is an important skill in the preparation of writing, and here are six main points to consider when evaluating a document, presentation, or similar source of information¹. In general, documents that represent quality reasoning have the following traits:

- A clearly articulated purpose and goal
- A question, problem, or issue to address
- Information, data, and evidence that is clearly relevant to the stated purpose and goals
- Inferences or interpretations that lead to conclusions based on the presented information, data, and evidence
- A frame of reference or point of view that is clearly articulated
- Assumptions, concepts, and ideas that are clearly articulated

An additional question that is central to your assessment of your sources is how credible the source is. This question is difficult to address even with years of training and expertise. You may have heard of academic fields called “disciplines,” but may not have heard of each field’s professors called “disciples.” Believers, keepers of wisdom, and teachers of tomorrow’s teachers have long played a valuable role establishing, maintaining, and perpetuating credibility. Academics have long cultivated an understood acceptance of the role of objective, impartial use of the scientific method to determine validity and reliability. But as research is increasingly dependent on funding, and funding often brings specific points of view and agendas with it, pure research can be—and has been—compromised. You can no longer simply assume that “studies show” something without awareness of who conducted the study, how was it conducted, and who funded the effort. This may sound like a lot of investigation and present quite a challenge, but again it is worth the effort.

Information literacy is an essential skill set in the process of writing. As you learn to spot key signs of information that will not serve to enhance your credibility and contribute to your document, you can increase your effectiveness as you research and analyze your resources. For example, if you were researching electronic monitoring in the workplace, you might come upon a site owned by a company that sells workplace electronic monitoring systems. The site might give many statistics illustrating what percentage of employers use electronic monitoring, what percentage of employees use the Internet for nonwork purposes during work hours, what percentage of employees use company e-mail for personal messages, and so on. But the sources of these percentage figures may not be credited. As an intelligent researcher, you need to ask yourself, did the company that owns the site perform its own research to get these numbers? Most likely it did not—so why are the sources not cited? Moreover, such a site would be unlikely to mention any court rulings about electronic monitoring being unnecessarily invasive of employees’ privacy. Less biased sources of information would be the American Management Association, the U.S. Department of Labor, and other not-for-profit organizations that study workplace issues.

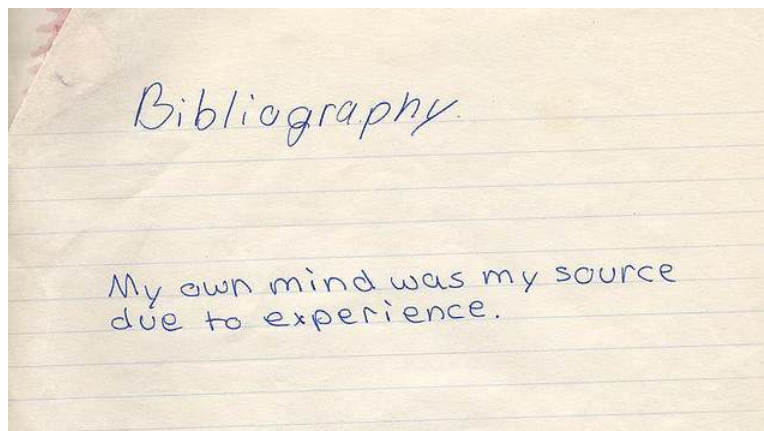


Figure 5.4.2: Discover something new as you research, but always evaluate the source. papertrix – [bibliography](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

The Internet also encompasses thousands of interactive sites where readers can ask and answer questions. Some sites, like Askville by Amazon.com, WikiAnswers, and Yahoo! Answers, are open to almost any topic. Others, like ParentingQuestions and WebMD, deal with specific topics. Chat rooms on bridal Web sites allow couples who are planning a wedding to share advice and compare prices for gowns, florists, caterers, and so on. Reader comment sites like Newsvine facilitate discussions about current events. Customer reviews are available for just about everything imaginable, from hotels and restaurants to personal care products, home improvement products, and sports equipment. The writers of these customer reviews, the chat room participants, and the people who ask and answer questions on many of these interactive sites are not experts, nor do they pretend to be. Some may have extreme opinions that are not based in reality. Then, too, it is always possible for a vendor to “plant” favorable customer reviews on the Internet to make its product look good. Although the “terms of use” which everyone registering for interactive sites must agree to usually forbid the posting of advertisements, profanity, or personal attacks, some sites do a better job than others in monitoring and deleting such material. Nevertheless, if your business writing project involves finding out how the “average person” feels about an

issue in the news, or whether a new type of home exercise device really works as advertised, these comment and customer review sites can be very useful indeed.

It may seem like it's hard work to assess your sources, to make sure your information is accurate and truthful, but the effort is worth it. Business and industry rely on reputation and trust (just as we individuals do) in order to maintain healthy relationships. Your document, regardless of how small it may appear in the larger picture, is an important part of that reputation and interaction.

Key Takeaway

Evaluating your sources is a key element of the preparation process in business writing. To avoid plagiarism, always record your sources so that you can credit them in your writing.

Exercises

1. Before the Internet improved information access, how did people find information? Are the strategies they used still valid and how might they serve you as a business writer? Interview several people who are old enough to have done research in the “old days” and report your findings.
2. Visit the Web site of the United States Copyright Office at <http://www.copyright.gov>. Find something on the Web site that you did not know before reviewing it and share it with your classmates.
3. On the United States Copyright Office Web site at <http://www.copyright.gov> view the multimedia presentation for students and teachers, “Taking the Mystery out of Copyright.” Download the “Copyright Basics” document and discuss it with your class.
4. Look over the syllabus for your business communication course and assess the writing assignments you will be completing. Is all the information you are going to need for these assignments available in electronic form? Why or why not?
5. Does the fact that Internet search results are often associated with advertising influence your research and investigation? Why or why not? Discuss with a classmate.
6. Find an example of a bogus or less than credible Web site. Indicate why you perceive it to be untrustworthy, and share it with your classmates.
7. Visit the parody Web site The Onion at <http://www.theonion.com> and find one story that you think has plausible or believable elements. Share your findings with the class.

¹Adapted from Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2007). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools*. Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.

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5.5: Completing Your Research and Investigation

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate your ability to manage your time and successfully conduct research and investigation for a writing assignment.

Once you become immersed in your sources, it can be easy to get carried away in the pursuit of information and lose sight of why you are doing all this research and investigation. As a responsible writer, you will need to plan not only how you will begin your information gathering, but also how you will bring it to a conclusion.

Managing Your Time

Given the limited time for research involved in most business writing, how can you make the most of your information-gathering efforts? Part of learning to write effectively involves learning to read quickly and efficiently while conducting research. You are not required to read each word, and if you did, you would slow yourself down greatly. At the same time, if you routinely skip large sections of print and only focus on the bullet lists, you may miss valuable examples that could inspire you in your writing.

How can you tell when to skim and when to pay attention to detail? One strategy is to look for abstracts (or brief summaries of information) before you commit time to reading an article all the way through. Look for indexes to identify key terms you might want to cover before eliminating them as you narrow your topic.

As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is smart to make a list of your sources as you search; you may also want to bookmark pages with your Web browser. Sometimes a source that does not look very promising may turn out to offer key information that will drive home an important point in your document. If you have done a good job of recording your sources, it will be easy to go back to a site or source that at first you passed over, but now think may make a relevant contribution.

Compiling Your Information

Patricia Andrews, James Andrews, and Glen Williams provide a useful outline of a process to consider when compiling your information. **Compiling** involves composing your document out of materials from other documents or sources. This process has seven major steps, adapted from the Andrews, Andrews, and Williams model, which we will consider: sensitivity, exposure, assimilation and accommodation, incubation, incorporation, production and revision.

Let's say your letter introducing skydiving to a new audience was relatively successful and the regional association asks you to write a report on the status of skydiving services in your region, with the hope that the comprehensive guide may serve to direct and enhance class enrollment across the region. Your task has considerably expanded and involves more research, but given the opportunity this assignment presents, you are excited at the challenge. As you begin to research, plan, and design the document, you will touch on the process of compiling information. If you are aware of each step, your task can be accomplished effectively and efficiently.

Sensitivity refers to your capacity to respond to stimulation, being excited, responsive or susceptible to new information. This starts with a self-inventory of your current or past interests and activities. If you are intrigued by a topic or area of interest, your enthusiasm will carry through to your document and make it more stimulating for your reading audience. You may not have considered, or even noticed elements or ideas associated with your topic, but now that you have begun the process of investigation, you see them everywhere. For example, have you ever heard someone say a word or phrase that you never heard before, but now that you are familiar with it, you hear it everywhere? This same principle applies to your sensitivity to ideas related to your topic. You'll notice information and it will help you as you develop your awareness of your topic and the many directions you could take the speech. Cognitive psychologists use the term **priming** to refer to this excited state of awareness (Yaniv, I. & Meyer, D., 1987).

Exposure involves your condition of being presented views, ideas, or experiences made known to you through direct experience. If you are going to select a topic on flying but have never flown before, your level of exposure may be low. Your level of awareness may be high, however, in terms of the importance of security on airplanes after reading about, watching on television, or hearing on the radio stories after the events of September 11, 2001. You may decide to expose yourself to more information through a range of sources as you investigate the topic of airline security. And the more you become exposed to the issues, processes, and goals of your topic, the more likely you are to see areas of interest, new ideas that might fit in your speech, and form patterns of awareness you did not perceive earlier. We have previously discussed at length the importance of selection as a stage in the perceptual process,

and selective exposure is one way you gain awareness. You may want to revisit this chapter as you develop your topic or choose where to look for information or decide what kinds of information to expose yourself to as you research your topic.

Assimilation and **accommodation** refer to the processes by which you assimilate (or integrate) new ideas into your thinking patterns and accommodate (or adopt, adapt, or filter out) new sources of information as they relate to your goal. You may have had preconceived notions or ideas about airline security before you began your investigation, but new information has changed the way you view your topic. You might also find issues (e.g., right to privacy) that may be points of conflict with your beliefs as you review information. This stage is important to the overall process of developing your topic, and it takes time. You need time to be able to contemplate, review, and reflect on how the new information fits or fails to connect clearly to your chosen topic.

Incubation is the process by which you cause an idea or ideas to develop in your mind. This might not happen all at once, and you might spend time thinking about the new information, directions, or ways you might develop or focus your topic. Consider the meaning of the word as it relates to chickens and eggs. An egg may be produced, but it needs time and a warm environment to develop. You might have an idea, but you need to create an environment for it to develop. This might involve further investigation and exploration, or it may involve removing yourself from active research to “digest” or “incubate” what you have already learned. You may feel stuck on an idea or perceive an inability to move on in the development of your ideas or topic, and giving it a rest may be the best course of action. You may also find that just when you least expect it, an idea, fully formed, flashes in your mind and you think, “Why didn’t I see that before?” Before the idea escapes you, write it down and make sure you can refer to it later.

Incorporation refers to the process by which you bring the information into a whole or complete topic. By now you have investigated, chosen some information over others, and have started to see how the pieces will come together. Your perceptions of how the elements come together will form the basis for your development of the organization of your document. It will contribute to the *logos*, or logic, of your thought and its representation in your document, and help you produce a coherent, organized message that your audience can follow clearly.

Production involves the act of creating your document from the elements you have gathered. You may start to consider what comes first, what goes last, and how you will link your ideas and examples together. You may find that you need additional information and need to go back to your notes that you have taken to find the source quickly and easily. You may also start to communicate with friends, sharing some of the elements or even practicing the first drafts of your document, learning where the connections are clear and where they need work.

Revision is the process by which you look over again in order to correct or improve your message. You will notice elements that need further investigation, development, or additional examples and visual aids as you produce your document. This is an important step to the overall production of your message, much like revising an essay for an English course. The first time you said, thought, or wrote something it may have made sense to you, but upon reflection and after trying an idea out, you need it to be revised in order to work effectively as part of your document. You may revisit the place in which you started (and start all speeches) by reconsidering the rhetorical situation and see if what you have produces is in line with the expectations of the audience. Your awareness of the content, audience, and purpose of the rhetorical situation will guide you through the revision process and contribute to the production of a more effective document.

Once you have gathered what you think is enough material—or, perhaps, once your eyes begin to glaze over—take a step back and return to the general and specific purpose of the document you set out to write. Look again at the basic elements (i.e., who, what, when, etc.) and fill in the “answers” based on what you have found. It is not unusual at this stage to have some “holes” in the information that require more research to fill. You may also realize that your research findings have disproved part or even all of your original agenda, making it necessary to change your message significantly.

Leave enough time before your deadline so that you can sketch out a detailed outline and rough draft of your document and leave it alone for at least a day. When you look at it again, it will probably be clear which additional details need more support, and you can perform targeted research to fill in those gaps.

Key Takeaway

Be mindful of your result and your time frame as you conduct your research and investigation. Allow enough time to let the writing rest before you return to it and make revisions.

Exercises

1. Choose a topic related to a career that interests you and think about how you would research that topic on the Internet. Set a timer for fifteen minutes. Ready, set, go! At the end of fifteen minutes, review the sources you have recorded in your list and think about the information you have found. How well did you use your limited time? Could you do better next time? Try it again.
2. Complete an Internet search of your name and report your findings to the class.
3. Complete an Internet search of your favorite product or service and report your findings to the class.
4. You've been assigned to a marketing team tasked to engage an audience just like you. Make a list of what services or products your target audience would find attractive. Pick one and develop a slogan that is sure to get attention. Share your results with the class.

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5.6: Reading and Analyzing

Learning Objectives

1. Understand different types of reading and analyzing that business documents encounter.
2. Demonstrate how to write for skimming and for analytical reading in at least one written document of each kind.

When you read, do you read each and every word? Do you skim over the document and try to identify key terms and themes? Do you focus on numbers and statistics, or ignore the text and go straight to the pictures or embedded video? Because people read in many diverse ways, you as a writer will want to consider how your audience may read and analyze your document.

Ever since Benjamin Franklin said that “time is money,” (Franklin, 1748) business managers have placed a high value on getting work done quickly. Many times, as a result, a document will be skimmed rather than read in detail. This is true whether the communication is a one-paragraph e-mail or a twenty-page proposal. If you anticipate that your document will be skimmed, it behooves you to make your main points stand out for the reader.

In an e-mail, use a “subject” line that tells the reader the gist of your message before he or she opens it. For example, the subject line “3 p.m. meeting postponed to 4 p.m.” conveys the most important piece of information; in the body of the e-mail you may explain that Wednesday’s status meeting for the XYZ project needs to be postponed to 4 p.m. because of a conflict with an offsite luncheon meeting involving several XYZ project team members. If you used the subject line “Wednesday meeting” instead, recipients might glance at their in-box, think, “Oh, I already know I’m supposed to attend that meeting,” and not read the body of the message. As a result, they will not find out that the meeting is postponed.

For a longer piece of writing such as a report or proposal, here are some techniques you can use to help the reader grasp key points.

- Present a quick overview, or “executive summary,” at the beginning of the document.
- Use boldface headings as signposts for the main sections and their subsections.
- Where possible, make your headings informative; for example, a heading like “Problem Began in 1992” is more informative than one that says “Background.”
- Within each section, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that indicates what the paragraph discusses.
- When you have a list of points, questions, or considerations, format them with bullets rather than listing them in sentences.
- The “bottom line,” generally understood to mean the total cost of a given expenditure or project, can also refer to the conclusions that the information in the report leads to. As the expression indicates, these conclusions should be clearly presented at the end of the document, which is the place where the time-pressed reader will often turn immediately after reading the first page.

Imagine how unhappy you would be if you submitted a report and your audience came away with a message completely different from what you had intended. For example, suppose your manager is considering adopting a specific new billing system in your office and has asked you to report on the pros and cons of this system. You worked hard, gathered plenty of information, and wrote a detailed report which, in your opinion, gave strong support for adopting the new system.

However, the first few pages of your report described systems other than the one under consideration. Next, you presented the reasons not to implement the new system. Throughout the report, embedded in the body of several different paragraphs, you mentioned the advantages offered by the new system; but they were not grouped together so that you could emphasize them with a heading or other signpost for the reader. At the end of the report, you reviewed the current billing system and stated that few problems were encountered with it.

When you delivered your report, the manager and colleagues who received it missed your most important information and decided not to consider the new system any further. Worse, your manager later criticized you for spending too much time on the report, saying it was not very informative. Situations like this can be avoided if you provide a clear organizational framework to draw your reader’s attention to your main points.

Analyzing is distinct from reading. When you read, you attempt to grasp the author’s meaning via words and symbols, and you may come away with a general emotional feeling about what the writer has written instead of an arsenal of facts. When you analyze a document, you pay more attention to how the author assembled the information to present a coherent message. Business writing often involves communication via words and symbols in ways that meet audience expectations; in many cases, the audience needs

to be able to analyze the content, and reading is secondary. For this reason, a solid organizational pattern will greatly enhance your document's effectiveness.

Key Takeaway

Logical organization is important to promote reader understanding and analysis.

Exercises

1. Take a news article and mark it up to reveal its organizational structure. Does it have an informative opening paragraph? Does each additional paragraph begin with a topic sentence? Does it use subheadings? Is there a conclusion that follows logically from the information presented?
2. Find an article that you do not like and review it. State specific reasons why you dislike it and share your opinion with your classmates.
3. Find an article that you do like and review it. State specific reasons why you like it and share your opinion with your classmates.
4. You've been assigned to a sales team that has not been performing at optimal levels. Develop an incentive program to improve the team's performance. Present your idea to the class.

References

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5.7: Additional Resources

The Library of Congress is the nation's oldest federal cultural institution and serves as the research arm of the U.S. Congress. It is also the largest library in the world, with millions of books, recordings, photographs, maps, and manuscripts in its collections. <http://www.loc.gov/index.html>

The Copyright Office of the Library of Congress offers a wide variety of resources for understanding copyright law and how to avoid plagiarism. <http://www.copyright.gov>

The Learning Center is designed to help educators and students develop a better sense of what plagiarism means in the information age, and to teach the planning, organizational, and citation skills essential for producing quality writing and research. www.plagiarism.org/learning_center/home.html

The New York Public Library's Science, Industry, and Business Library (SIBL) is the nation's largest public information center devoted solely to science and business. www.nypl.org/research/sibl

The Lippincott Library serves the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, one of the world's top business schools. <http://www.library.upenn.edu/lippincott>

Thunderbird School of Global Management operates Thunderbird Knowledge Network, an interactive forum on contemporary business issues delivered in stories, columns, videos, podcasts, and blogs. <https://thunderbird.asu.edu/>

The *Wall Street Journal* is one of the most widely read sources of business news. <http://online.wsj.com/home-page>

Personalize your business news and analysis with *Business Week's* member service, Business Exchange. bx.businessweek.com

INSEAD: The Business School for the World, one of the largest and most highly regarded schools for MBA, Executive MBA, and PhD degrees in business, makes its library resources available online. www.insead.edu/library/index.cfm

As an example of an industry trade association, the Association of Construction Project Managers (ACPM) is a voluntary association of specialist project management professionals working in the built environment. <http://www.acpm.co.za>

The United States Government's Small Business Administration has a mandate to aid, counsel, assist and protect the interests of small business concerns, to preserve free competitive enterprise, and to maintain and strengthen the overall economy of our nation. <http://www.sba.gov>

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) sets the standards and conducts inspections to ensure safety and prevent accidents in the workplace. www.osha.gov

The Society for Human Resource Management is a key source of news and information on HR topics. <http://www.shrm.org/Pages/default.aspx>

The Chicago Board of Trade, the world's oldest futures and options exchange, trades treasury bonds, corn, soybean, wheat, gold, silver, and other commodities. www.cbot.com

Yahoo! Finance is a useful site for tracking the Dow, S&P 500, and other major stock indices in the United States and abroad; it also has areas for financial news, investing, and personal finance. finance.yahoo.com

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published every two years by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, describes hundreds of different types of jobs, the training and education each job requires, the typical earnings in that job, and more. www.bls.gov/OCO

CareerBuilder.com, which describes itself as the largest online job search site, offers a vast online and print network to help job seekers connect with employers. www.careerbuilder.com

According to its Web site, *Fast Company* "sets the agenda, charting the evolution of business through a unique focus on the most creative individuals sparking change in the marketplace." www.fastcompany.com

LinkedIn, which has been described as the professional counterpart to social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, is an interconnected network of experienced professionals from around the world, representing 170 industries and 200 countries. <http://www.linkedin.com>

Intuit, maker of QuickBooks, Quicken, TurboTax, and other accounting software, provides a small business information center on its Web site. What would you expect to find here that is different from the resources a noncommercial source would offer? <http://smallbusiness.intuit.com>

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Writing

The purpose of business writing is to communicate facts and ideas. In order to accomplish that purpose, each document has key components that need to be present in order for your reading audience to understand the message. These elements may seem simple to the point that you may question how any writer could neglect them. But if you take note of how often miscommunication and misunderstanding happen, particularly in written communications, you will realize that it happens all the time. Omission or neglect may be intentional, but it is often unintentional; the writer assumes (wrongly) that the reader will easily understand a concept, idea, or the meaning of the message.

[6.1: Organization](#)

[6.2: Writing Style](#)

[6.3: Making an Argument](#)

[6.4: Paraphrase and Summary versus Plagiarism](#)

[6.5: Additional Resources](#)

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6.1: Organization

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to develop and organize content in patterns that are appropriate for your document and audience.
2. Demonstrate your ability to order, outline, and emphasize main points in one or more written assignments.
3. Demonstrate how to compose logically organized paragraphs, sentences, and transitions in one or more written assignments.

The purpose of business writing is to communicate facts and ideas. In order to accomplish that purpose, each document has key components that need to be present in order for your reading audience to understand the message. These elements may seem simple to the point that you may question how any writer could neglect them. But if you take note of how often miscommunication and misunderstanding happen, particularly in written communications, you will realize that it happens all the time. Omission or neglect may be intentional, but it is often unintentional; the writer assumes (wrongly) that the reader will easily understand a concept, idea, or the meaning of the message. From background to language, culture to education, there are many variables that come into play and make effective communication a challenge. The degree to which you address these basic elements will increase the effectiveness of your documents. Each document must address the following:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- How
- (and sometimes) Why

If you have these elements in mind as you prepare your document, it will be easier to decide what to write and in what order. They will also be useful when you are reviewing your document before delivering it. If your draft omits any one of these elements or addresses it in an unclear fashion, you will know what you need to do to fix it.

Another way to approach organizing your document is with the classical proofs known as *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. *Ethos*, or your credibility, will come through with your choice of sources and authority on the subject(s). Your *logos*, or the logic of your thoughts represented across the document, will allow the reader to come to understand the relationships among who, what, where, when, and so forth. If your readers cannot follow your logic they will lose interest, fail to understand your message, and possibly not even read it at all. Finally, your *pathos*, or passion and enthusiasm, will be reflected in your design and word choices. If your document fails to convey enthusiasm for the subject, how can you expect the reader to be interested? Every document, indeed every communication, represents aspects of these classical elements.

General Purpose and Thesis Statements

No matter what your business writing project involves, it needs to convey some central idea. To clarify the idea in your mind and make sure it comes through to your audience, write a thesis statement. A thesis statement, or central idea, should be short, specific, and to the point. Steven Beebe and Susan Beebe recommend five guiding principles when considering your thesis statement. The thesis statement should

1. be a declarative statement;
2. be a complete sentence;
3. use specific language, not vague generalities;
4. be a single idea;
5. reflect consideration of the audience.



Figure 6.1.1: Begin with a clear purpose statement. Pixabay – CC0 Public Domain.

This statement is key to the success of your document. If your audience has to work to find out what exactly you are talking about, or what your stated purpose or goal is, they will be less likely to read, be influenced, or recall what you have written. By stating your point clearly in your introduction, and then referring back to it in the body of the document and at the end, you will help your readers to understand and remember your message.

Organizing Principles

Once you know the basic elements of your message, you need to decide in what order to present them to your audience. A central organizing principle will help you determine a logical order for your information. One common organizing principle is chronology, or time: the writer tells what happened first, then what happened next, then what is happening now, and, finally, what is expected to happen in the future. Another common organizing principle is comparison: the writer describes one product, an argument on one side of an issue, or one possible course of action; and then compares it with another product, argument, or course of action.

As an example, let’s imagine that you are a business writer within the transportation industry and you have been assigned to write a series of informative pieces about an international initiative called the “TransAmerica Transportation System Study.” Just as the First Transcontinental Railroad once unified the United States from east to west, which was further reinforced by the Interstate Highway System, the proposed TransAmerica Transportation System will facilitate integrating the markets of Mexico, the United States, and Canada from north to south. Rail transportation has long been an integral part of the transportation and distribution system for goods across the Americas, and its role will be important in this new system.

In deciding how to organize your report, you have several challenges and many possibilities of different organizing principles to use. Part of your introduction will involve a historical perspective, and a discussion of the events that led from the First Transcontinental Railroad to the TransAmerica Transportation System proposal. Other aspects will include comparing the old railroad and highway systems to the new ones, and the transformative effect this will have on business and industry. You will need to acknowledge the complex relationships and challenges that collaboration has overcome, and highlight the common benefits. You will be called on to write informative documents as part of a public relations initiative, persuasive essays to underscore the benefits for those who prefer the status quo, and even write speeches for celebrations and awards.

Table 6.1.1 lists seventeen different organizing principles and how they might be applied to various pieces you would write about the TransAmerican Transportation System. The left column provides the name of the organizing principle. The center column explains the process of organizing a document according to each principle, and the third column provides an example.

Table 6.1.1: Organizing Principles

Organizing Principle	Explanation of Process	Example

Organizing Principle	Explanation of Process	Example
1. Time (Chronological)	Structuring your document by time shows a series of events or steps in a process, which typically has a beginning, middle, and end. “Once upon a time stories” follow a chronological pattern.	Before the First Transcontinental Railroad, the events that led to its construction, and its impact on early America. Additional examples may include the national highway projects and the development of reliable air freight. Now we can consider the TransAmerica Transportation System and the similar and distinct events that led us to today.
2. Comparison	Structuring your document by comparison focuses on the similarities and/or differences between points or concepts.	A comparison of pre– and post–First Transcontinental Railroad America, showing how health and life expectancy improved with the increased access to goods and services. Another example could be drawn from air freight, noting that organ donation in one part of the country can now save a life in another state or on the opposite coast. In a similar way, the TransAmerica Transportation System will improve the lives of the citizens of Mexico, the United States, and Canada.
3. Contrast	Structuring your document by using contrasting points highlights the differences between items and concepts.	A contrast of pre– and post–First Transcontinental Railroad America showing how much time it took to communicate via letter, or how long it took to move out West. Just in time delivery and the modern highway system and trucking may serve as an example for contrast. The TransAmerica Transportation System will reduce customs clearing time while increasing border security along the distribution network.
4. Cause and Effect	Structuring your document by cause and effect structuring establishes a relationship between two events or situations, making the connection clear.	The movement of people and goods out West grew considerably from 1750 to 1850. With the availability of a new and faster way to go West, people generally supported its construction. Both the modern highway and air transportation systems may serve as examples, noting how people, goods, and services can be delivered in drastically reduced time frames. Citizens of all three countries involved have increasingly been involved in trade, and movement across common borders through the TransAmerica Transportation System will enable the movement of goods and services with great efficiency.
5. Problem and Solution	Structuring your document by problem and solution means you state the problem and detail how it was solved. This approach is effective for persuasive speeches.	Manufacturers were producing better goods for less money at the start of the Industrial Revolution, but they lacked a fast and effective method of getting their goods to growing markets. The First Transcontinental Railroad gave them speed, economy, and access to new markets. Highways and air routes have dramatically increased this trend. In a similar way, this new system is the next evolutionary step in the integration and growth of our common marketplaces.

Organizing Principle	Explanation of Process	Example
6. Classification (Categorical)	Structuring your document by classification establishes categories.	<p>At the time the United States considered the First Transcontinental Railroad, there were three main types of transportation: by water, by horse, and by foot.</p> <p>Now rail, road, and air transportation are the norm across business and industry.</p>
7. Biographical	Structuring your document by biography means examining specific people as they relate to the central topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1804: Lewis and Clark travel 4,000 miles in over two years across America • 1862: President Lincoln signs the Pacific Railroad Act • 1876: The Transcontinental Express from New York arrives in San Francisco with a record-breaking time of 83 hours and 39 minutes • 2009: President Obama can cross America by plane in less than 5 hours • So why shouldn't the ratio of time from import to consumer be reduced?
8. Space (Spatial)	Structuring your document by space involves the parts of something and how they fit to form the whole.	A train uses a heat source to heat water, create steam, and turn a turbine, which moves a lever, causing a wheel to move on a track. A package picked up from an office in New York in the morning is delivered to another in Los Angeles in the afternoon. From a Pacific port in Northern Mexico to a market in Chicago or Canada, this system unifies the movement of goods and services.
9. Ascending and Descending	Structuring your document by ascending or descending order involves focusing on quantity and quality. One good story (quality) leads to the larger picture, or the reverse.	A day in the life of a traveler in 1800. Incremental developments in transportation to the present, expressed through statistics, graphs, maps, and charts. A day in the life of a traveler in 1960, 1980, or even 2000, with visual examples of changes and trends may also contribute to the document. A day in the life of a traveler in 2009 compared to the relatively slow movement of goods and services, constrained by an antiquated transportation network that negatively impacts efficiency.
10. Psychological	It is also called "Monroe's Motivated Sequence" (Ayres, 1994). Structuring your document on the psychological aspects of the audience involves focusing on their inherent needs and wants. See Maslow and Schutz. The author calls <i>attention</i> to a <i>need</i> , then focuses on the satisfaction of the need, <i>visualization</i> of the solution, and ends with a proposed or historical <i>action</i> . Useful for a persuasive message.	When families in the year 1800 went out West, they rarely returned to see family and friends. The country as a whole was an extension of this distended family, separated by time and distance. The railroad, the highways, and air travel brought families and the country together. In the same way, common markets already exist across the three countries, but remain separated by time, distance, and an antiquated system scheduled for significant improvement.

Organizing Principle	Explanation of Process	Example
11. Elimination	Structuring your document using the process of elimination involves outlining all the possibilities.	<p>The First Transcontinental Railroad helped pave the way for the destruction of the Native American way of life in 1870. After examining treaties, relocation and reservations, loss of the buffalo, disease, and war, the railroad can be accurately considered the catalyst for the end of an era.</p> <p>From the lessons of history we can learn to protect and preserve our distinct cultures, languages, and sovereign territories as we integrate a common transportation system for our mutual benefit and security.</p>
12. Example	Structuring your document by example involves providing vivid, specific examples (as opposed to abstract representations of data) to support main points.	<p>Just as it once took weeks, even months, for a simple letter to move from coast to coast, goods and services have had a long and arduous process from importation to market. For example, the popular Christmas toy X, imported to Mexico from China in September, may well not be on store shelves by December 25 under the old system. Now it can move from importation to market in under two weeks.</p>
13. Process and Procedure	Structuring your document by process and procedure is similar to the time (chronological) organizational pattern with the distinction of steps or phases that lead to a complete end goal. This is often referred to as the “how-to” organizational pattern.	<p>From conception to design, manufacturing to packaging, to transportation and inspection, to sales and sales support, let’s examine how the new transportation system facilitates increased efficiency in delivery to market and product support.</p>
14. Point Pattern	Structuring your document in a series of points allows for the presentation of diverse assertions to be aligned in a cohesive argument with clear support.	<p>The TransAmerica Transportation System offers several advantages: security, speed, efficiency, and cost reduction.</p>
15. Definition	Structuring your document with a guiding definition allows for a clear introduction of terms and concepts while reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation.	<p>The TransAmerica Transportation System can be defined by its purpose, its integrated components, and its impact on the secure movement of goods and services across common borders.</p>
16. Testimonial	Structuring your document around a testimony, or first person account of an experience, can be an effective way to make an abstract concept clearer to an audience.	<p>According to Ms. X, owner of InterCountry Trading Company, it previously took 12 weeks to import, clear, and deliver a product from Mexico to the United States, and an additional four weeks to take delivery in Canada. Now the process takes less than two weeks.</p>
17. Ceremonial (Events, Ceremonies, or Celebrations)	<p>Structuring your document by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thanking dignitaries and representatives 2. The importance of the event 3. The relationship of the event to the audience 4. Thanking the audience for participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration 	<p>Thanking the representatives, builders, and everyone involved with the construction of the TransAmerica Transportation System. The railroad will unite America, and bring us closer in terms of trade, communication, and family. Thank you for participating in today’s dedication.</p>

Outlines

Chances are you have learned the basic principles of outlining in English writing courses: an outline is a framework that organizes main ideas and subordinate ideas in a hierarchical series of roman numerals and alphabetical letters. The right column of Table 6.1.1 presents a generic outline in a classical style. In the left column, the three main structural elements of an informative document are tied to the outline. Your task is to fill in the right column outline with the actual ideas and points you are making in your writing project. Feel free to adapt and tailor it to your needs, depending on the specifics of your report, letter, or other document.

Table 6.1.2: Outline 1

Introduction	Main Idea
Body	I. Main idea: Point 1 Subpoint 1 A.1 specific information 1 A.2 specific information 2
Body	II. Main idea: Point 2 Subpoint 1 B.1 specific information 1 B.2 specific information 2
Body	III. Main idea: Point 3 Subpoint 1 C.1 specific information 1 C.2 specific information 2
Conclusion	Summary: Main points 1–3

Table 6.1.3 presents an alternate outline form that may be more suitable for brief documents like letters and e-mails. You can use this format as a model or modify it as needed.

Table 6.1.3: Outline 2

1	Introduction	General purpose, statement, or thesis statement
2	Body	Point 1: Point 2: Point 3:
3	Conclusion	Summarize main points

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are how we package information in business communication, and the more efficient the package, the easier the meaning can be delivered.

You may wish to think of each paragraph as a small essay within a larger information platform, defined by a guiding thesis and an organizing principle. The standard five-paragraph essay format used on college term papers is mirrored in individual paragraphs. Often college essays have minimum or maximum word counts, but paragraphs hardly ever have established limits. Each paragraph focuses on one central idea. It can be as long or as short as it needs to be to get the message across, but remember your audience and avoid long, drawn-out paragraphs that may lose your reader's attention.

Just as a document generally has an introduction, body, and conclusion, so does a paragraph. Each paragraph has one idea, thought, or purpose that is stated in an introductory sentence. This is followed by one or more supporting sentences and concluded with a summary statement and transition or link to the next idea, or paragraph. Let's address each in turn:

- The topic sentence states the main thesis, purpose, or topic of the paragraph; it defines the subject matter to be addressed in that paragraph.
- Body sentences support the topic sentence and relate clearly to the subject matter of the paragraph and overall document. They may use an organizing principle similar to that of the document itself (chronology, contrast, spatial) or introduce a related organizing principle (point by point, process or procedure).

- The conclusion sentence brings the paragraph to a close; it may do this in any of several ways. It may reinforce the paragraph's main point, summarize the relationships among the body sentences, and/or serve as a transition to the next paragraph.

Effective Sentences

We have talked about the organization of documents and paragraphs, but what about the organization of sentences? You have probably learned in English courses that each sentence needs to have a subject and a verb; most sentences also have an object. There are four basic types of sentences: declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory. Here are some examples:

- **Declarative** – You are invited to join us for lunch.
- **Imperative** – Please join us for lunch.
- **Interrogative** – Would you like to join us for lunch?
- **Exclamatory** – I'm so glad you can join us!

Declarative sentences make a statement, whereas interrogative sentences ask a question. Imperative sentences convey a command, and exclamatory sentences express a strong emotion. Interrogative and exclamatory sentences are easy to identify by their final punctuation, a question mark and an exclamation point, respectively. In business writing, declarative and imperative sentences are more frequently used.

There are also compound and complex sentences, which may use two or more of the four basic types in combination:

1. *Simple sentence.* Sales have increased.
2. *Compound sentence.* Sales have increased and profits continue to grow.
3. *Complex sentence.* Sales have increased and we have the sales staff to thank for it.
4. *Compound complex sentence.* Although the economy has been in recession, sales have increased, and we have sales staff to thank for it.

In our simple sentence, “sales” serves as the subject and “have increased” serves as the verb. The sentence can stand alone because it has the two basic parts that constitute a sentence. In our compound sentence we have two independent clauses that could stand alone; they are joined by the conjunction “and.” In our complex sentence, we have an independent clause, which can stand on its own, combined with a fragment (not a sentence) or dependent clause which, if it were not joined to the independent clause, would not make any sense. The fragment “and we have the sales staff to thank” on its own would have us asking “for what?” as the subject is absent. Complex compound sentences combine a mix of independent and dependent clauses, and at least one of the clauses must be dependent.

The ability to write complete, correct sentences is like any other skill—it comes with practice. The more writing you do, as you make an effort to use correct grammar, the easier it will become. Reading audiences, particularly in a business context, will not waste their time on poor writing and will move on. Your challenge as an effective business writer is to know what you are going to write and then to make it come across, via words, symbols, and images, in a clear and concise manner.

Sentences should avoid being vague and focus on specific content. Each sentence should convey a complete thought; a vague sentence fails to meet this criteria. The reader is left wondering what the sentence was supposed to convey.

- **Vague** – We can facilitate solutions in pursuit of success by leveraging our core strengths.
- **Specific** – By using our knowledge, experience, and capabilities, we can achieve the production targets for the coming quarter.

Effective sentences also limit the range and scope of each complete thought, avoiding needless complexity. Sometimes writers mistakenly equate long, complex sentences with excellence and skill. Clear, concise, and often brief sentences serve to communicate ideas and concepts in effective and efficient ways that complex, hard-to-follow sentences do not.

- **Complex.** Air transportation features speed of delivery in ways few other forms of transportation can match, including tractor-trailer and rail, and is readily available to the individual consumer and the corporate client alike.
- **Clear.** Air transportation is accessible and faster than railroad or trucking.

Effective sentences are complete, containing a subject and a verb. Incomplete sentences—also known as sentence fragments—demonstrate a failure to pay attention to detail. They often invite misunderstanding, which is the opposite of our goal in business communication.

- **Fragments** – Although air transportation is fast. Costs more than trucking.
- **Complete** – Although air transportation is fast, it costs more than trucking.

Effective business writing avoids bureaucratic language and phrase that are the hallmark of decoration. Decoration is a reflection of ritual, and ritual has its role. If you are the governor of a state, and want to make a resolution declaring today as HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, you are allowed to start the document with “Whereas” because of its ritual importance. Similarly, if you are writing a legal document, tradition calls for certain standard phrases such as “know all men by these presents.” However, in standard business writing, it is best to refrain from using bureaucratic phrases and ritualistic words that decorate and distract the reader from your clear, essential meaning. If the customer, client, or supplier does not understand the message the first time, each follow-up attempt to clarify the meaning through interaction is a cost. Table 6.1.4 presents a few examples of common bureaucratic phrases and standard English alternatives.

Table 6.1.4: Bureaucratic Phrases and Standard Alternatives

Bureaucratic Phrase	Standard English Alternatives
At the present time	Now, today
Concerning the matter of	Regarding, about
Despite the fact that	Although, while, even though
Due to the fact that	Because, since, as
Implement an investigation of	Find out, investigate
Inasmuch as	Because, since, as
It has been suggested	[name of person or organization] has suggested, said, or stated
It is believed that	[name of person or organization] believes, thinks, or says that
It is the opinion of the author	I believe, I think, in my opinion
Until such time as	Until, when
With the exception of	Except, apart from

In oral communication, repetition can be an effective strategy to reinforce a message, but in written communication it adds needless length to a document and impairs clarity.

- Redundant – In this day and age air transportation by air carrier is the clear winner over alternative modes of conveyance for speed and meeting tight deadlines.
- Clear – Today air transportation is faster than other methods.

When a writer states that something is a “true fact,” a group achieved a “consensus of opinion,” or that the “final outcome” was declared, the word choices reflect an unnecessary redundancy. A fact, consensus, or outcome need not be qualified with words that state similar concepts. If it is fact, it is true. A consensus, by definition, is formed in a group from diverse opinions. An outcome is the final result, so adding the word “final” repeats the fact unnecessarily.

In business writing we seek clear and concise writing that speaks for itself with little or no misinterpretation. The more complex a sentence becomes, the easier it is to lose track of its meaning. When we consider that it may read by someone for whom English is a second language, the complex sentence becomes even more problematic. If we consider its translation, we add another layer of complexity that can lead to miscommunication. Finally, effective sentences follow the KISS formula for success: Keep It Simple—Simplify!

Transitions

If you were going to build a house, you would need a strong foundation. Could you put the beams to hold your roof in place without anything to keep them in place? Of course not; they would fall down right away. In the same way, the columns or beams are like the main ideas of your document. They need to have connections to each other so that they become interdependent and stay where you want them so that your house, or your writing, doesn’t come crashing down.

Transitions involve words or visual devices that help the audience follow the author’s ideas, connect the main points to each other, and see the relationships you’ve created in the information you are presenting. They are often described as bridges between ideas, thought or concepts, providing some sense of where you’ve been and where you are going with your document. Transitions guide the audience in the progression from one significant idea, concept, or point to the next. They can also show the relationships

between the main point and the support you are using to illustrate your point, provide examples for it, or refer to outside sources. Table 6.1.5 is a summary of fourteen different types of transitions. Consider them as you contemplate how to bring together your information and make notes on your outline.

Table 6.1.5: Types of Transitions in Writing

Type	Definition	Examples
1. Internal Previews	An internal preview is a brief statement referring to a point you are going to make. It can forecast or foreshadow a main point in your document.	If we look ahead to, next we'll examine, now we can focus our attention on, first we'll look at, then we'll examine
2. Signposts	A signpost alerts the audience you are moving from one topic to the next. Sign posts or signal words draw attention to themselves and focus the audience's attention.	Stop and consider, we can now address, turning from/to, another, this reminds me of, I would like to emphasize
3. Internal Summaries	An internal summary briefly covers information or alludes to information introduced previously. It can remind an audience of a previous point and reinforce information covered in your document.	As I have said, as we have seen, as mentioned earlier, in any event, in conclusion, in other words, in short, on the whole, therefore, to summarize, as a result, as has been noted previously,
4. Sequence	A sequence transition outlines a hierarchical order or series of steps in your document. It can illustrate order or steps in a logical process.	First...second...third, furthermore, next, last, still, also, and then, besides, finally
5. Time	A time transition focuses on the chronological aspects of your order. Particularly useful in an article utilizing a story, this transition can illustrate for the audience progression of time.	Before, earlier, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, then, until, afterward
6. Addition	An addition or additive transition contributes to a previous point. This transition can build on a previous point and extend the discussion.	Additionally, not to mention, in addition to, furthermore, either, neither, besides, on, in fact, as a matter of fact, actually, not only, but also, as well as
7. Similarity	A transition by similarity draws a parallel between two ideas, concepts or examples. It can indicate a common area between points for the audience.	In the same way, by the same token, equally, similarly, just as we have seen, in the same vein
8. Comparison	A transition by comparison draws a distinction between two ideas, concepts or examples. It can indicate a common or divergent area between points for the audience.	Like, in relation to, bigger than, the fastest, larger than, than any other, is bigger than, both, either...or, likewise
9. Contrast	A transition by contrast draws a distinction of difference, opposition, or irregularity between two ideas, concepts or examples. This transition can indicate a key distinction between points for the audience.	But, neither...nor, however on the other hand, although, despite, even though, in contrast, in spite of, on the contrary conversely, unlike, while instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, regardless, still, though, yet, although
10. Cause and Effect, Result	A transition by cause and effect or result illustrates a relationship between two ideas, concepts or examples and may focus on the outcome or result. It can illustrate a relationship between points for the audience.	As a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, accordingly, so, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end, for this reason, as a result, because, therefore, consequently, as a consequence, and the outcome was

Type	Definition	Examples
11. Examples	A transition by example illustrates a connection between a point and an example or examples. You may find visual aids work well with this type of transition.	In fact, as we can see, after all, even, for example, for instance, of course, specifically, such as, in the following example, to illustrate my point
12. Place	A place transition refers to a location, often in a spatially organized essay, of one point of emphasis to another. Again, visual aids work well when discussing physical location with the reading audience.	opposite to, there, to the left, to the right, above, adjacent to, elsewhere, far, farther on, below, beyond, closer to, here, near, nearby, next to
13. Clarification	A clarification transition restates or further develops a main idea or point. It can also serve as a signal to a key point.	To clarify, that is, I mean, in other words, to put it another way that is to say, to rephrase it, in order to explain, this means
14. Concession	A concession transition indicates knowledge of contrary information. It can address a perception the audience may hold and allow for clarification.	We can see that while, although it is true that, granted that, while it may appear that, naturally, of course, I can see that, I admit that while

Key Takeaway

Organization is the key to clear writing. Organize your document using key elements, an organizing principle, and an outline. Organize your paragraphs and sentences so that your audience can understand them, and use transitions to move from one point to the next.

Exercises

1. What functions does organization serve in a document? Can they be positive or negative? Explain and discuss with a classmate.
2. Create an outline from a sample article or document. Do you notice an organizational pattern? Explain and discuss with a classmate.
3. Which of the following sentences are good examples of correct and clear business English? For sentences needing improvement, describe what is wrong and write a sentence that corrects the problem. Discuss your answers with your classmates.
 1. Marlys has been chosen to receive a promotion next month.
 2. Because her work is exemplary.
 3. At such time as it becomes feasible, it is the intention of our department to facilitate a lunch meeting to congratulate Marlys
 4. As a result of budget allocation analysis and examination of our financial condition, it is indicated that salary compensation for Marlys can be increased to a limited degree.
 5. When will Marlys's promotion be official?
 6. I am so envious!
 7. Among those receiving promotions, Marlys, Bob, Germaine, Terry, and Akiko.
 8. The president asked all those receiving promotions come to the meeting.
 9. Please attend a meeting for all employees who will be promoted next month.
 10. Marlys intends to use her new position to mentor employees joining the firm, which will encourage commitment and good work habits.
4. Find an example of a poor sentence or a spelling or grammar error that was published online or in print and share your finding with the class.

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6.2: Writing Style

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate your ability to prepare and present information using a writing style that will increase understanding, retention, and motivation to act.

You are invited to a business dinner at an expensive restaurant that has been the top-rated dining establishment in your town for decades. You are aware of the restaurant’s dress code, which forbids casual attire such as jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers. What will you wear? If you want to fit in with the other guests and make a favorable impression on your hosts, you will choose a good quality suit or dress (and appropriately dressy shoes and accessories). You will avoid calling undue attention to yourself with clothing that is overly formal—an evening gown or a tuxedo, for example—or that would distract from the business purpose of the occasion by being overly revealing or provocative. You may feel that your freedom to express yourself by dressing as you please is being restricted, or you may appreciate the opportunity to look your best. Either way, adhering to these style conventions will serve you well in a business context.



Figure 6.2.1: Your writing style reflects on you when you are not there to represent yourself. Make sure your style is professional. Pixabay – CC0 Public Domain.

The same is true in business writing. Unlike some other kinds of writing such as poetry or fiction, business writing is not an opportunity for self-expression. Instead it calls for a fairly conservative and unadorned style. Writing style, also known as voice or tone, is the manner in which a writer addresses the reader. It involves qualities of writing such as vocabulary and figures of speech, phrasing, rhythm, sentence structure, and paragraph length. Developing an appropriate business writing style will reflect well on you and increase your success in any career.

Formal versus Informal

There was a time when many business documents were written in third person to give them the impression of objectivity. This formal style was often passive and wordy. Today it has given way to active, clear, concise writing, sometimes known as “Plain English” (Bailey, 2008). As business and industry increasingly trade across borders and languages, writing techniques that obscure meaning or impede understanding can cause serious problems. Efficient writing styles have become the norm. Still, you will experience in your own writing efforts this “old school versus new school” writing debate over abbreviations, contractions, and the use of informal language in what was once considered a formal business context. Consider the following comparison of informal versus formal and bureaucratic styles.

Bureaucratic: Attached is the latest delivery data represented in topographical forms pursuant to the directive ABC123 of the air transportation guide supplied by the Federal Aviation Administration in September of 2008.

- Formal – Please note the attached delivery data for July 2009.
- Informal – Here’s the delivery data for last month.

While it is generally agreed that bureaucratic forms can obscure meaning, there is a debate on the use of formal versus informal styles in business communication. Formal styles often require more detail, adhere to rules of etiquette, and avoid shortcuts like contractions and folksy expressions. Informal styles reflect everyday speech patterns and may include contractions and colloquial expressions. Many managers prefer not to see contractions in a formal business context. Others will point out that a comma preceding the last item in a series (known as the “serial comma”) is the standard, not the exception. Some will make a general recommendation that you should always “keep it professional.” Here lies the heart of the debate: what *is* professional writing in a business context? If you answered “it depends,” you are correct.

Keep in mind that audiences have expectations and your job is to meet them. Some business audiences prefer a fairly formal tone. If you include contractions or use a style that is too casual, you may lose their interest and attention; you may also give them a negative impression of your level of expertise. If, however, you are writing for an audience that expects informal language, you may lose their interest and attention by writing too formally; your writing may also come across as arrogant or pompous. It is not that one style is better than the other, but simply that styles of writing vary across a range of options. Business writing may need to meet legal standards and include references, as we see in the bureaucratic example above, but that is generally not the norm for communications within an organization. The skilled business writer will know his or her audience and will adapt the message to best facilitate communication. Choosing the right style can make a significant impact on how your writing is received.

You may hear reference to a conversational tone in writing as one option in business communication. A conversational tone, as the name implies, resembles oral communication in style, tone, and word choice. It can be appropriate for some audiences, and may serve you well in specific contexts, but it can easily come across as less than professional.

If you use expressions that imply a relationship or a special awareness of information such as “you know,” or “as we discussed,” without explaining the necessary background, your writing may be seen as overly familiar, intimate, or even secretive. Trust is the foundation for all communication interactions and a careless word or phrase can impair trust.

If you want to use humor, think carefully about how your audience will interpret it. Humor is a fragile form of communication that requires an awareness of irony, of juxtaposition, or a shared sense of attitudes, beliefs, and values. Different people find humor in different situations, and what is funny to one person may be dull, or even hurtful, to someone else.

Although there are business situations such as an interview or a performance self-evaluation where you need to state your accomplishments, in general business writing it is best to avoid self-referential comments that allude to your previous successes. These can come across as selfish or arrogant. Instead, be generous in giving credit where credit is due. Take every opportunity to thank your colleagues for their efforts and to acknowledge those who contributed good ideas.

Jargon is a vocabulary that has been developed by people in a particular group, discipline, or industry, and it can be a useful shorthand as long as the audience knows its meaning. For example, when writing for bank customers, you could refer to “ATM transactions” and feel confident that your readers would know what you meant. It would be unnecessary and inappropriate to write “Automated Teller Machine transactions.” Similarly, if you were working in a hospital, you would probably use many medical terms in your interactions with other medical professionals. However, if you were a hospital employee writing to a patient, using medical jargon would be inappropriate, as it would not contribute to the patient’s understanding.



Figure 6.2.2: Sewing, like many other fields of expertise, has its own jargon. plaisanter~ – Sewing – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Finally, in a business context, remember that conversational style is not an excuse to use poor grammar, disrespectful or offensive slang, or profanity. Communication serves as the bridge between minds and your written words will represent you in your absence. One strategy when trying to use a conversation tone is to ask yourself, “Would I say it in this way to their face?” A follow-up question to consider is, “Would I say it in this way in front of everyone?” Your professional use of language is one the hallmark skills in business, and the degree to which you master its use will reflect itself in your success. Take care, take time, and make sure what you write communicates a professional tone that positively represents you and your organization.

Introductions: Direct and Indirect

Sometimes the first sentence is the hardest to write. When you know the two main opening strategies it may not make it any easier, but it will give a plan and form a framework. Business documents often incorporate one of two opening strategies regardless of their organizational pattern. The direct pattern states the main purpose directly, at the beginning, and leaves little room for misinterpretation. The indirect pattern, where you introduce your main idea after the opening paragraph, can be useful if you need a strong opening to get the attention of what you perceive may be an uninterested audience. Normally, if you expect a positive response from the reader you will choose a direct opening, being clear from the first sentence about your purpose and goal. If you do not expect a positive reception, or have to deliver bad news, you may want to be less direct. Each style has its purpose and use; the skilled business writer will learn to be direct and be able to present bad news with a positive opening paragraph.

Adding Emphasis

There are times when you will want to add emphasis to a word, phrase, or statistic so that it stands out from the surrounding text. The use of visual aids in your writing can be an excellent option, and can reinforce the written discussion. For example, if you write that sales are up 4 percent over this time last year, the number alone may not get the attention it deserves. If, however, near the text section you feature a bar graph demonstrating the sales growth figures, the representation of the information in textual and graphical way may reinforce its importance.

As you look across the top of your word processing program you may notice **bold**, *italics*, underline, highlights, your choice of colors, and a host of interesting fonts. Although it can be entertaining to experiment with these visual effects, do not use them just for the sake of decoration. Consistency and branding are important features of your firm’s public image, so you will want the visual aspects of your writing to support that image. Still, when you need to highlight an important fact or emphasize a key question in a report, your readers will appreciate your use of visual effects to draw their attention. Consider the following examples:

- Bullets can be effective when used with discretion.

Take care when using the following:

1. Numbers
2. With subheadings

3. In serial lists
4. As they can get
5. A bit overwhelming to the point where
6. The reader loses his or her interest

Emphasis can be influenced by your choice of font. Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman and Garamond, have decorative ends that make the font easy to read. Sans serif fonts, like Arial, lack these visual cues and often serve better as headers.

You can also vary the emphasis according to where you place information within a sentence:

- *Maximum emphasis.* Sales have increased across the United States because of our latest promotion efforts in our largest and most successful market.
- *Medium emphasis.* Because of our latest promotion efforts in our largest and most successful market, sales have increased across the United States.
- *Minimum emphasis.* The United States, which has experienced a sales increase, is our largest and most successful market.

The information at end of the sentence is what people often recall, and is therefore normally considered the location of maximum emphasis. The second best position for recall is the beginning of the sentence, while the middle of the sentence is the area with the least recall. If you want to highlight a point, place it at the beginning or end of the sentence, and if you want to deemphasize a point, the middle is your best option (McLean, 2003).

Active versus Passive Voice

You want your writing to be engaging. Which sentence would you rather read?

- A – All sales orders are processed daily by Mackenzie.
- B – Mackenzie processes all sales orders daily.

Most readers prefer sentence B, but why? You’ll recall that all sentences have a subject and a verb, but you may not have paid much attention to their functions. Let’s look at how the subject and verb function in these two sentences. In sentence A, the subject is “Mackenzie,” and the subject is the doer of the action expressed by the verb (processes). In sentence B, the subject is “sales orders,” and the subject is the receiver of the action expressed by the verb (are processed). Sentence A is written in active voice—a sentence structure in which the subject carries out the action. Sentence B is written in passive voice—a sentence structure in which the subject receives the action.

Active sentences tend to be shorter, more precise, and easier to understand. This is especially true because passive sentences can be written in ways that do not tell the reader who the doer of the action is. For example, “All sales orders are processed daily” is a complete and correct sentence in passive voice.

Active voice is the clear choice for a variety of contexts, but not all. When you want to deemphasize the doer of the action, you may write, “Ten late arrivals were recorded this month” and not even mention who was late. The passive form doesn’t place blame or credit, so it can be more diplomatic in some contexts. Passive voice allows the writer to avoid personal references or personal pronouns (he, she, they) to create a more objective tone. There are also situations where the doer of the action is unknown, as in “graffiti was painted on the side of our building last night.”

Overall, business communication resources tend to recommend active voice as the preferred style. Still, the styles themselves are not the problem or challenge, but it is how we use them that matters. A skilled business writer will see both styles as options within a range of choices and learn to distinguish when each style is most appropriate to facilitate communication.

Commonly Confused Words

The sentences in Table 6.2.6 focus on some of the most common errors in English. You may recall this exercise from the introduction of this chapter. How did you do? Visit the “Additional Resources” section at the end of the chapter for some resources on English grammar and usage.

Table 6.2.1 Common Errors in English

1. <i>accept</i> or <i>except</i>	The office will _____ applications until 5 p.m. on the 31st.	accept	Attendance is required for all employees _____ supervisors.	except
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2. <i>affect</i> or <i>effect</i>	To _____ the growth of plants, we can regulate the water supply.	affect	A lack of water has a predictable _____ on most plants.	effect
3. <i>e.g.</i> or <i>i.e.</i>	Please order 2,000 imprinted giveaways (_____, pens or coffee mugs)	e.g.	Charge them to my account (_____, account #98765).	i.e.
4. <i>its</i> or <i>it's</i>	The department surpassed _____ previous sales record this quarter.	its	_____ my opinion that we reached peak oil in 2008.	It's
5. <i>lay</i> or <i>lie</i>	Please _____ the report on the desk.	lay	The doctor asked him to _____ down on the examination table.	lie
6. <i>pressure</i> or <i>pressurize</i>	We need to _____ the liquid nitrogen tanks.	pressurize	It might be possible to _____ him to resign.	pressure
7. <i>principle</i> or <i>principal</i>	It's the basic _____ of farming: no water, no food.	principle	The _____ reason for the trip is to attend the sales meeting.	principal
8. <i>regardless</i> or <i>irregardless</i>	_____ of what we do, gas prices are unlikely to go back down.	Regardless	_____ of your beliefs, please try to listen with an open mind.	Regardless (<i>Irregardless</i> is not a standard word; see your dictionary)
9. <i>than</i> or <i>then</i>	This year's losses were worse _____ last year's.	than	If we can cut our costs, _____ it might be possible to break even.	then
10. <i>that</i> or <i>which</i>	_____ type of marketing data did you need?	Which	Karen misplaced the report, _____ caused a delay in making a decision.	which
	There are several kinds of data _____ could be useful.	that		
11. <i>there</i> <i>their</i> , or <i>they're</i>	The report is _____, in the top file drawer.	there	_____ strategic advantage depends on a wide distribution network.	Their
	_____ planning to attend the sales meeting in Pittsburgh.	They're		
12. <i>to</i> , <i>too</i> , or <i>two</i>	Customers need _____ drive slower if they want to save gas.	to	After sales meeting, you should visit customers in the Pittsburgh area _____.	too
	In fact, the _____ of you should make some customer visits together.	two		
13. <i>uninterested</i> or <i>disinterested</i>	He would be the best person to make a decision, since he isn't biased and is relatively _____ in the outcome.	disinterested	The sales manager tried to speak dynamically, but the sales reps were simply _____ in what he had to say.	uninterested
14. <i>who</i> , <i>whom</i> , <i>who's</i> , or <i>whose</i>	_____ truck is that?	Whose	_____ going to pay for the repairs?	Who's

	_____ will go to the interview?	Who	To _____ should we address the thank-you note?	whom
15 <i>your</i> or <i>you're</i>	My office is bigger than _____ cubicle.	your	_____ going to learn how to avoid making these common mistakes in English.	You're

Making Errors at the Speed of Light

In business and industry there is increasing pressure to produce under deadlines that in some respects have been artificially accelerated by the immediacy inherent in technological communication devices. If you receive an e-mail or text message while you are in the middle of studying a complex problem, you may be tempted to “get it out of the way” by typing out a quick reply, but in your haste you may fail to qualify, include important information, or even check to make sure you have hit “Reply” and not “Reply to All” or even “Delete.” Take care to pause and review your text message, e-mail, or document before you consider it complete. Here is a quick electronic communication do/don’t list to keep in mind before you click “send.”

Do remember the following:

- Everything you access via an employer’s system is subject to inspection.
- Everything you write or record reflects you and your business or organization, even if it is stored in a Google or Yahoo! account.
- Respect personal space by not forwarding every e-mail you think is funny.
- Use a concise but relevant and informative phrase for the subject line.
- E-mail the receiver before sending large attachments, as they may exceed the limit of the receiver’s in-box.
- Attach your intended attachments.

Key Takeaway

An appropriate business writing style can be formal or informal, depending on the context, but it should always reflect favorably on the writer and the organization.

Exercises

1. Select at least three examples of writing from different kinds of sources, such as a government Web site, a textbook, a popular magazine, and a novel. According to the style characteristics discussed in this section, how would you characterize the style of each? Select a paragraph to rewrite in a different style—for example, if the style is formal, make it informal; if the selection is written in active voice, make it passive. Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. What are some qualities of a good business writing style? What makes certain styles more appropriate for business than others? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.
3. Find an example of formal writing and write an informal version. Please share with your classmates.
4. Find an example of informal writing and write a formal version. Please share with your classmates.
5. You are assigned to a work team that has to come up with a formal declaration and an informal explanation for the declaration. The declaration could be a memo indicating that your business will be observing a holiday (each team should have a different holiday).
6. How would you characterize your writing style? Do you need to make modifications to make your style suitable for business writing? Write a one- to two-page essay on this subject.

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6.3: Making an Argument

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate how to form a clear argument with appropriate support to persuade your audience.
2. Recognize and understand inherent weaknesses in fallacies.

According to the famous satirist Jonathan Swift, “Argument is the worst sort of conversation.” You may be inclined to agree. When people argue, they are engaged in conflict and it’s usually not pretty. It sometimes appears that way because people resort to fallacious arguments or false statements, or they simply do not treat each other with respect. They get defensive, try to prove their own points, and fail to listen to each other.

But this should not be what happens in written argument. Instead, when you make an argument in your writing, you will want to present your position with logical points, supporting each point with appropriate sources. You will want to give your audience every reason to perceive you as ethical and trustworthy. Your audience will expect you to treat them with respect, and to present your argument in a way that does not make them defensive. Contribute to your credibility by building sound arguments and using strategic arguments with skill and planning.

In this section we will briefly discuss the classic form of an argument, a more modern interpretation, and finally seven basic arguments you may choose to use. Imagine that these are tools in your toolbox and that you want to know how each is effectively used. Know that the people who try to persuade you—from telemarketers to politicians—usually have these tools at hand.

Let’s start with a classical rhetorical strategy. It asks the rhetorician, speaker, or author to frame arguments in the following steps:

Table 6.3.1L Classical Rhetorical Strategy

1. Exordium	Prepares the audience to consider your argument
2. Narration	Provides the audience with the necessary background or context for your argument
3. Proposition	Introduces your claim being argued in the document
4. Confirmation	Offers the audience evidence to support your argument
5. Refutation	Introduces to the audience and then discounts or refutes the counterarguments or objections
6. Peroration	Your conclusion of your argument

This is a standard pattern in rhetoric and you will probably see it in both speech and English courses. The pattern is useful to guide you in preparing your document and can serve as a valuable checklist to insure you are prepared. While this formal pattern has distinct advantages, you may not see it used exactly as indicated here on a daily basis. What may be more familiar to you is Stephen Toulmin’s rhetorical strategy, which focuses on three main elements (Table 6.3.2).

Table 6.3.2 Toulmin’s Three-Part Rhetorical Strategy

Element	Description	Example
1. Claim	Your statement of belief or truth	It is important to spay or neuter your pet.
2. Data	Your supporting reasons for the claim	Millions of unwanted pets are euthanized every year.
3. Warrant	You create the connection between the claim and the supporting reasons	Pets that are spayed or neutered do not reproduce, preventing the production of unwanted animals.

Toulmin’s rhetorical strategy is useful in that it makes the claim explicit, clearly illustrates the relationship between the claim and the data, and allows the reader to follow the writer’s reasoning. You may have a good idea or point, but your audience will want to know how you arrived at that claim or viewpoint. The warrant addresses the inherent and often unsaid question, “Why is this data so important to your topic?” In so doing, it helps you to illustrate relationships between information for your audience.

Effective Argumentation Strategies: GASCAP/T

Here is a useful way of organizing and remembering seven key argumentative strategies:

1. Argument by **Generalization**
2. Argument by **Analogy**
3. Argument by **Sign**
4. Argument by **Consequence**
5. Argument by **Authority**
6. Argument by **Principle**
7. Argument by **Testimony**

Richard Fulkerson notes that a single strategy is sufficient to make an argument some of the time, but it is often better to combine several strategies to make an effective argument (Fulkerson, 1996). He organized the argumentative strategies in this way to compare the differences, highlight the similarities, and allow for their discussion. This model, often called by its acronym GASCAP, is a useful strategy to summarize six key arguments and is easy to remember. Here we have adapted it, adding one argument that is often used in today's speeches and presentations, the argument by testimony. Table 6.3.3 presents each argument, provides a definition of the strategy and an example, and examines ways to evaluate each approach.

Table 6.3.3: GASCAP/T Strategies

	Argument by	Claim	Example	Evaluation
G	Generalization	Whatever is true of a good example or sample will be true of everything like it or the population it came from.	If you can vote, drive, and die for your country, you should also be allowed to buy alcohol.	STAR System: For it to be reliable, we need a (S) sufficient number of (T) typical, (A) accurate, and (R) reliable examples.
A	Analogy	Two situations, things or ideas are alike in observable ways and will tend to be alike in many other ways	Alcohol is a drug. So is tobacco. They alter perceptions, have an impact physiological and psychological systems, and are federally regulated substances.	Watch for adverbs that end in "ly," as they qualify, or lessen the relationship between the examples. Words like "probably," "maybe," "could," "may," or "usually" all weaken the relationship.
S	Sign	Statistics, facts, or cases indicate meaning, much like a stop sign means "stop."	Motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol occur at significant rates among adults of all ages in the United States.	Evaluate the relationship between the sign and look for correlation, where the presenter says what the facts "mean." Does the sign say that? Does it say more? What is not said? Is it relevant?
C	Cause	If two conditions always appear together, they are causally related.	The U.S. insurance industry has been significantly involved in state and national legislation requiring proof of insurance, changes in graduated driver's licenses, and the national change in the drinking age from age 18 to age 21.	Watch out for "after the fact, therefore because of the fact" (<i>post hoc, ergo propter hoc</i>) thinking. There might not be a clear connection, and it might not be the whole picture. Mothers Against Drunk Driving might have also been involved with each example of legislation.

	Argument by	Claim	Example	Evaluation
A	Authority	What a credible source indicates is probably true.	According to the National Transportation Safety Board, older drivers are increasingly involved in motor vehicle accidents.	Is the source legitimate and is their information trustworthy? Institutes, boards, and people often have agendas and distinct points of view.
P	Principle	An accepted or proper truth	The change in the drinking age was never put to a vote. It's not about alcohol, it's about our freedom of speech in a democratic society.	Is the principle being invoked generally accepted? Is the claim, data or warrant actually related to the principle stated? Are there common exceptions to the principle? What are the practical consequences of following the principle in this case?
T	Testimony	Personal experience	I've lost friends from age 18 to 67 to alcohol. It impacts all ages, and its effects are cumulative. Let me tell you about two friends in particular.	Is the testimony authentic? Is it relevant? Is it representative of other's experiences? Use the STAR system to help evaluate the use of testimony.

Evidence

Now that we've clearly outlined several argument strategies, how do you support your position with evidence or warrants? If your premise or the background from which you start is valid, and your claim is clear and clearly related, the audience will naturally turn their attention to "prove it." This is where the relevance of evidence becomes particularly important. Here are three guidelines to consider in order to insure your evidence passes the "so what?" test of relevance in relation to your claim. Make sure your evidence has the following traits:

1. *Supportive*. Examples are clearly representative, statistics are accurate, testimony is authoritative, and information is reliable.
2. *Relevant*. Examples clearly relate to the claim or topic, and you are not comparing "apples to oranges."
3. *Effective*. Examples are clearly the best available to support the claim, quality is preferred to quantity, there are only a few well-chosen statistics, facts, or data.

Appealing to Emotions

While we've highlighted several points to consider when selecting information to support your claim, know that Aristotle strongly preferred an argument based in logic over emotion. Can the same be said for your audience, and to what degree is emotion and your appeal to it in your audience a part of modern life?

Emotions are a psychological and physical reaction, such as fear or anger, to stimuli that we experience as a feeling. Our feelings or emotions directly impact our own point of view and readiness to communicate, but also influence how, why, and when we say things. Emotions influence not only how you say or what you say, but also how you hear or what you hear. At times, emotions can be challenging to control. Emotions will move your audience, and possibly even move you, to change or act in certain ways.

Aristotle thought the best and most preferable way to persuade an audience was through the use of logic, free of emotion. He also recognized that people are often motivated, even manipulated, by the exploitation of their emotions. In a business context, we still engage in this debate, demanding to know the facts separate from personal opinion or agenda, but see the use of emotional appeal to sell products.

Marketing experts are famous for creating a need or associating an emotion with a brand or label in order to sell it. You will speak the language of your audience in your document, and may choose to appeal to emotion, but you need to consider how the strategy works, as it may be considered a tool that has two edges.

If we think of the appeal to emotion as a knife, we can see it has two edges. One edge can cut your audience, and the other can cut you. If you advance an appeal to emotion in your document on spaying and neutering pets, and discuss the millions of unwanted pets that are killed each year, you may elicit an emotional response. If you use this approach repeatedly, your audience may grow weary of this approach, and it will lose its effectiveness. If you change your topic to the use of animals in research, the same strategy may apply, but repeated attempts to elicit an emotional response may backfire (i.e., in essence “cutting” you) and produce a negative response called “emotional resistance.”

Emotional resistance involves getting tired, often to the point of rejection, of hearing messages that attempt to elicit an emotional response. Emotional appeals can wear out the audience’s capacity to receive the message. As Aristotle outlined, ethos (credibility), logos (logic), and pathos (passion, enthusiasm, and emotional response) constitute the building blocks of any document. It’s up to you to create a balanced document, where you may appeal to emotion, but choose to use it judiciously.

On a related point, the use of an emotional appeal may also impair your ability to write persuasively or effectively. For example, if you choose to present an article about suicide to persuade people against committing it and you start showing a photo of your brother or sister that you lost to suicide, your emotional response may cloud your judgment and get in the way of your thinking. Never use a personal story, or even a story of someone you do not know, if the inclusion of that story causes you to lose control. While it’s important to discuss relevant topics, you need to assess your relationship to the message. Your documents should not be an exercise in therapy. Otherwise, you will sacrifice ethos and credibility, even your effectiveness, if you “lose it” because you are really not ready to discuss the issue.

Recognizing Fallacies

“Fallacy” is another way of saying false logic. Fallacies or rhetorical tricks deceive your audience with their style, drama, or pattern, but add little to your document in terms of substance. They are best avoided because they can actually detract from your effectiveness. There are several techniques or “tricks” that allow the writer to rely on style without offering substantive argument, to obscure the central message, or twist the facts to their own gain. Table 6.3.4 examines the eight classical fallacies. Learn to recognize them so they can’t be used against you, and learn to avoid using them with your audience.

Table 6.3.4 Fallacies

Fallacy	Definition	Example
1. Red Herring	Any diversion intended to distract attention from the main issue, particularly by relating the issue to a common fear.	It’s not just about the death penalty; it’s about the victims and their rights. You wouldn’t want to be a victim, but if you were, you’d want justice.
2. Straw Man	A weak argument set up to easily refute and distract attention from stronger arguments.	Look at the idea that criminals who commit murder should be released after a few years of rehabilitation. Think of how unsafe our streets would be then!
3. Begging the Question	Claiming the truth of the very matter in question, as if it were already an obvious conclusion.	We know that they will be released and unleashed on society to repeat their crimes again and again.
4. Circular Argument	The proposition is used to prove itself. Assumes the very thing it aims to prove. Related to begging the question.	Once a killer, always a killer.
5. Ad Populum	Appeals to a common belief of some people, often prejudicial, and states everyone holds this belief. Also called the bandwagon fallacy, as people “jump on the bandwagon” of a perceived popular view.	Most people would prefer to get rid of a few “bad apples” and keep our streets safe.
6. Ad Hominem or “Argument against the Man”	Argument against the man instead of his message. Stating that someone’s argument is wrong solely because of something about the person rather than about the argument itself.	Our representative is a drunk and philanderer. How can we trust him on the issues of safety and family?
7. Non Sequitur or “It Does Not Follow”	The conclusion does not follow from the premises. They are not related.	Since the liberal 1960s, we’ve seen an increase in convicts who got let off death row.

Fallacy	Definition	Example
8. Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc or “After This, Therefore because of This”	It is also called a coincidental correlation.	Violent death rates went down once they started publicizing executions.

Ethical Considerations in Persuasion

In his book *Ethics in Human Communication*, Richard Johannesen offers eleven points to consider when communicating. Although they are related to public speaking, they are also useful in business writing. You may note that many of his cautions are clearly related to the fallacies we’ve discussed. His main points reiterate many of the points across this chapter and should be kept in mind as you prepare, and present, your persuasive message Johannesen, 1996).

Do not

- use false, fabricated, misrepresented, distorted, or irrelevant evidence to support arguments or claims;
- intentionally use unsupported, misleading, or illogical reasoning;
- represent yourself as informed or an “expert” on a subject when you are not;
- use irrelevant appeals to divert attention from the issue at hand;
- ask your audience to link your idea or proposal to emotion-laden values, motives, or goals to which it is actually not related;
- deceive your audience by concealing your real purpose, your self-interest, the group you represent, or your position as an advocate of a viewpoint;
- distort, hide, or misrepresent the number, scope, intensity, or undesirable features of consequences or effects;
- use emotional appeals that lack a supporting basis of evidence or reasoning;
- oversimplify complex, gradation-laden situations into simplistic, two-valued, either-or, polar views or choices;
- pretend certainty where tentativeness and degrees of probability would be more accurate;
- advocate something that you yourself do not believe in.

Aristotle said the mark of a good person, well spoken, was a clear command of the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. He discussed the idea of perceiving the various points of view related to a topic and their thoughtful consideration. While it’s important to be able to perceive the complexity of a case, you are not asked to be a lawyer and defend a client.

In your message to persuade, consider honesty and integrity as you assemble your arguments. Your audience will appreciate your thoughtful consideration of more than one view and your understanding of the complexity of the issue, thus building your ethos, or credibility, as you present your document. Be careful not to stretch the facts, or assemble them only to prove your point; instead, prove the argument on its own merits. Deception, coercion, intentional bias, manipulation and bribery should have no place in your message to persuade.

Key Takeaway

The art of argument in writing involves presenting supportive, relevant, effective evidence for each point and doing it in a respectful and ethical manner.

Exercises

1. Select a piece of persuasive writing such as a newspaper op-ed essay, a magazine article, or a blog post. Examine the argument, the main points, and how the writer supports them. Which strategies from the foregoing section does the writer use? Does the writer use any fallacies or violate any ethical principles? Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. Find one slogan or logo that you perceive as persuasive and share it with your classmates.
3. Find an example of a piece of writing that appears to want to be persuasive, but doesn’t get the job done. Write a brief review and share it with classmates.
4. In what ways might the choice of how to organize a document involve ethics? Explain your response and discuss it with your class.

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6.4: Paraphrase and Summary versus Plagiarism

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the difference between paraphrasing or summarizing and plagiarism.
2. Demonstrate how to give proper credit to sources that are quoted verbatim, and sources whose ideas are paraphrased or summarized.
3. Demonstrate your ability to paraphrase in one or more written assignments.

Even if you are writing on a subject you know well, you will usually get additional information from other sources. How you represent others' ideas, concepts, and words is critical to your credibility and the effectiveness of your document. Let's say you are reading a section of a document and find a point that relates well to your current writing assignment. How do you represent what you have read in your work? You have several choices.

One choice is simply to reproduce the quote **verbatim**, or word for word, making sure that you have copied all words and punctuation accurately. In this case, you will put quotation marks around the quoted passage (or, if it is more than about fifty words long, inset it with wider margins than the body of your document) and give credit to the source. The format you use for your source citation will vary according to the discipline or industry of your audience; common formats include APA (American Psychological Association), MLA (Modern Language Association), and CMS (Chicago Manual of Style).

Another common strategy in business writing is to **paraphrase**, or rewrite the information in your own words. You will relate the main point, but need to take care not to copy the original. You will give credit where credit is due, but your citation will be more informal, such as "A *Wall Street Journal* article dated July 8, 2009, described some of the disagreements among G-8 nations about climate change." Here are several steps that can help you paraphrase a passage while respecting its original author:

1. Read the passage out loud, paying attention to the complete thought rather than the individual words.
2. Explain the concept in your own words to a friend or colleague, out loud, face-to-face.
3. Write the concept in your own words, and add one or more illustrative examples of the concept that are meaningful to you.
4. Reread the original passage and see how your version compares with it in terms of grammar, word choice, example, and conveyance of meaning.
5. If your writing parrots the original passage or merely substitutes synonyms for words in the original, return to step one and start over, remembering that your goal is to express the central concepts, not to "translate" one word into another.
6. When you are satisfied that your expression of the concept can stand on its own merit, include it in your document and cite the original author as the source of the idea.

Summarizing information is another common way of integrating information into your original work that requires care and attention to detail. To **summarize** is to reduce a concept, idea, or data set to its most basic point or element. You may have a literature survey to summarize related information in the field under consideration, or a section on background to serve a similar purpose. Suppose you are reporting on a business situation and it occurs to you that one of Shakespeare's plays has a plot that resembles your situation. You may wish to summarize the Shakespeare play in a few sentences before drawing parallels between it and your current situation. This may help readers to remember and understand your report. Regardless of how or where you incorporate a summary within your document, give attention to its original context and retain its essential meaning free of distortion in the new context of your writing.

Because summarizing is an act of reductionism, some of the original richness in detail that surrounds the original will be necessarily lost. Think of a photograph you have taken in the past that featured several people you know. Using a software program that allows you to modify and manipulate the image, draw a box around only one face. Delete the rest of the contents of the photo so only the information in the box remains. Part of the photo is intact, and one person has become the focal point for the image, but the context has been lost. In the same way, if you focus on one statistic, one quote, or one idea and fail to capture its background you will take the information out of context. Context is one of the eight components of communication, and without it, the process breaks down. While you cannot retain all the definition and detail of the original context in a brief summary, effort to represent the essential point within its context is essential or you risk distortion of the original meaning.

Unlike quoting or paraphrasing, summarizing is something you can—and will—also do to the material you have written. You may start your document with a summary of the background that gives the document purpose. Formal business reports often begin with an executive summary, and scientific articles usually begin with an abstract; both of these serve as a brief preview of the

information in the full document. You may write a brief internal summary after each main discussion point in a lengthy document; this will serve to remind your reader of the discussion to date and to establish the context for the upcoming point. Finally, a summary is a very common, and often effective, way to conclude a document. Ending your writing with a summary helps your reader to remember your main points.

Plagiarism is neither paraphrasing nor summarizing information from other works. **Plagiarism** is representing another's work as your own. Professional standards, which are upheld in all fields from architecture to banking to zoology, all involve the elements of authenticity and credibility. Credit is given where credit is due, authorities in the field are appropriately cited or referenced, and original writing is expected to be exactly that. **Patch writing**, or the verbatim cut-and-paste insertion of fragments, snippets, or small sections of other publications into your own writing without crediting the sources, is plagiarism. Wholesale copying of other works is also plagiarism. Both destroy your professional credibility, and fail to uphold common professional standards.

Colleges and universities have policies against plagiarism, and within business and industry, the negative impact on credibility and careers often exceeds any academic punishment. There is no shame in quoting someone else's work while giving credit, nor in paraphrasing a point correctly or summarizing the research results of a study you did not perform; but there are significant consequences to representing other's ideas as your own.

Aside from the fear of punishment, a skilled business writer should recognize that intellectual theft is wrong. You may be tempted to borrow a sentence; however, know your document will be represented in many ways across time, and more than one career has been destroyed by plagiarism discovered years after the fact. The accomplished business writer should take as a compliment the correct citation and reference of their work. The novice business writer should learn by example but refrain from cut and paste strategies to complete a document.

In a world where most modern documents are accessible in some form online, the ability to cross-reference information with a couple of key strokes makes plagiarism a self-defeating solution when better alternatives exist. Quote and give credit, link to related documents with permission, paraphrase and summarize with citation, but do not plagiarize.

Key Takeaway

There is nothing wrong with quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing with credit to your original source, but presenting someone else's work as if it were your own is plagiarism.

Exercises

1. Select a piece of writing such as an essay from a Web site, a book chapter, or a newspaper or magazine article. Write a paraphrase of a portion of it. Write a brief summary of the entire piece. Note the difference between the two techniques. Giving credit to the original piece, discuss your paraphrase and summary with your classmates.
2. Find an example of an advertisement you perceive as particularly effective and write a one-sentence summary. Share the advertisement and your one-sentence summary with the class.
3. Find an example of an advertisement you perceive as particularly ineffective and write a one-sentence summary. Share the advertisement and your one sentence review with the class.
4. Find a case where plagiarism or misrepresentation had consequences in the business world. Share your findings and discuss with classmates.

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6.5: Additional Resources

Read an informative article about outlines and get a sample outline template. <http://www.essaywritinghelp.com/outline.htm>

This Writing Tutorials site from John Jay College of Criminal Justice offers a menu of tools for composing a thesis statement, an outline, well-constructed paragraphs, and more. resources.jjay.cuny.edu/erc/writing/index.php.

This RefDesk.com page offers a compendium of different resources for English grammar and usage. <http://www.refdesk.com/factgram.html>

Read an article on avoiding bureaucratic language by marketing strategist David Meerman Scott. <http://www.econtentmag.com/Articles/ArticleReader.aspx?ArticleID=14538&ContextSubtypeID=12>

Garbl's Wordy Phrases presents a list of bureaucratic phrases to avoid and their standard English alternatives. home.comcast.net/~garbl/stylemanual/phrases.htm

This University of North Carolina site provides a handout on writing arguments. <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/argument/>

Read about logic in argumentative writing on Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL). <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/659/01>

The College Board Web site provides a robust guide for how to avoid plagiarism. www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/college-success/10314.html

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