BUS 401: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Bus 401: Business Communication

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This text was compiled on 03/07/2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Introduction to 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 professionals across their lifetimes. You can learn from the lessons they've learned and be a more effective communicator.

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?

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.

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)

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.

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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.

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.

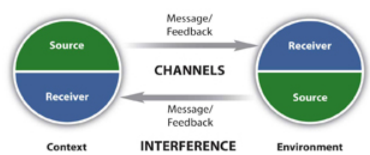

Figure 1.2.2: Transactional Model of Communication

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.

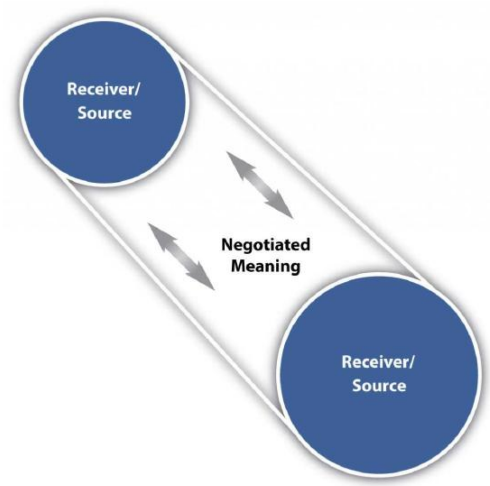

Figure 1.2.3: Constructivist Model of Communication

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.

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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 the 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.

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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.

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."

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

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Communication Principles

2.1: Understanding Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define communication.
2. Understand the communication process.

Communication is vital to organizations—it's how we coordinate actions and achieve goals. It is defined in Webster's dictionary as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior. We know that 50% to 90% of a manager's time is spent communicating (Schnake et al., 1990), and communication ability is related to a manager's performance (Penley et al., 1991). In most work environments, a miscommunication is an annoyance—it can interrupt workflow by causing delays and interpersonal strife. But, in some work arenas, like operating rooms and airplane cockpits, communication can be a matter of life and death.

So, just how prevalent is miscommunication in the workplace? You may not be surprised to learn that the relationship between miscommunication and negative outcomes is very strong. Data suggest that deficient interpersonal communication was a causal factor in approximately 70% to 80% of all accidents over 20 years.[1]

Figure 2.1.2: At NASA, success depends on strong communication. Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Poor communication can also lead to lawsuits. For example, you might think that malpractice suits are filed against doctors based on the outcome of their treatments alone. However, a 1997 study of malpractice suits found that a primary influence on whether or not a doctor is sued is the doctor's communication style. While the combination of a bad outcome and patient unhappiness can quickly lead to litigation, a warm, personal communication style leads to greater patient satisfaction. Simply put, satisfied patients are less likely to sue.[2]

In business, poor communication costs money and wastes time. One study found that 14% of each workweek is wasted on poor communication (Armour, 1998). In contrast, effective communication is an asset for organizations and individuals alike. Effective communication skills, for example, are an asset for job seekers. A recent study of recruiters at 85 business schools ranked communication and interpersonal skills as the highest skills they were looking for, with 89% of the recruiters saying they were important (Alsop, 2006). On the flip side, good communication can help a company retain its star employees. Surveys find that when employees think their organizations do a good job of keeping them informed about matters that affect them and when they have access to the information they need to do their jobs, they are more satisfied with their employers.[3] So can good communication increase a company's market value? The answer seems to be yes. "When you foster ongoing communications internally, you will have more satisfied employees who will be better equipped to effectively communicate with your customers," says Susan Meisinger, president and CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management. Research finds that organizations that are able to improve their communication integrity also increase their market value by as much as 7% (Meisinger, 2003). We will explore the definition and benefits of effective communication in our next section.

The Communication Process

Communication fulfills three main functions within an organization, including coordination, transmission of information, and sharing emotions and feelings. All these functions are vital to a successful organization. The coordination of effort within an organization helps people work toward the same goals. Transmitting information is a vital part of this process. Sharing emotions and feelings bonds teams and unites people in times of celebration and crisis. Effective communication helps people grasp issues, build rapport with coworkers, and achieve consensus. So, how can we communicate effectively? The first step is to understand the communication process.

Figure 2.1.3: Lee Iacocca, past president and CEO of Chrysler until his retirement in 1992, said, "You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere." Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

We all exchange information with others countless times each day by phone, e-mail, printed word, and of course, in person. Let us take a moment to see how a typical communication works using this as a guide.

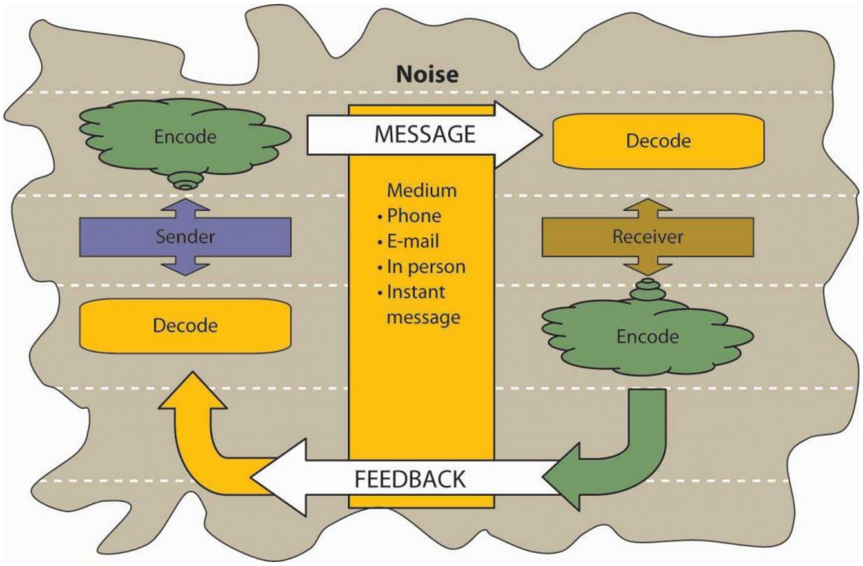

Figure 2.1.4: Process Model of Communication

A sender, such as a boss, coworker, or customer, originates the message with a thought. For example, the boss's thought could be: *"Get more printer toner cartridges!"*

The sender encodes the message, translating the idea into words.

The boss may communicate this thought by saying, *"Hey you guys, let's order more printer toner cartridges*."

The medium of this encoded message may be spoken words, written words, or signs.

The receiver is the person who receives the message.

The receiver decodes the message by assigning meaning to the words.

In this example, our receiver, Bill, has a to-do list a mile long. *"The boss must know how much work I already have*," the receiver thinks. Bill's mind translates his boss's message as, *"Could you order some printer toner cartridges, in addition to everything else I asked you to do this week…if you can find the time*?"

The meaning that the receiver assigns may not be the meaning that the sender intended, because of factors such as noise. Noise is anything that interferes with or distorts the message being transformed. Noise can be external in the environment (such as distractions) or it can be within the receiver. For example, the receiver may be extremely nervous and unable to pay attention to the message. Noise can even occur within the sender: The sender may be unwilling to take the time to convey an accurate message, or the words that are chosen can be ambiguous and prone to misinterpretation.

Picture the next scene. The place: a staff meeting. The time: a few days later. Bill's boss believes the message about printer toner has been received.

"Are the printer toner cartridges here yet?" Bill's boss asks.

"*You never said it was a rush job!*" Bill protests.

"*But!*"

"*But!*"

Miscommunications like these happen in the workplace every day. We've seen that miscommunication does occur in the workplace, but how does a miscommunication happen? It helps to think of the communication process. The series of arrows pointing the way from the sender to the receiver and back again can, and often do, fall short of their target.

Key Takeaways

Communication is vital to organizations. Poor communication is prevalent between senders and receivers. Communication fulfills three functions within organizations, including coordination, the transmission of information, and sharing emotions and feelings. Noise can disrupt or distort communication.

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2.2: Communication Barriers

Learning Objectives

1. Understand different ways that the communication process can be sidetracked.
2. Understand the role poor listening plays in communication problems.
3. Understand what active listening is.
4. Learn strategies to become a more effective listener.

Barriers to Effective Communication

"The biggest single problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

Quote by George Bernard Shaw

Filtering

Filtering is the distortion or withholding of information to manage a person's reactions. Some examples of filtering include a manager's keeping a division's negative sales figures from a superior, in this case, the vice president. The old saying, "Don't shoot the messenger!" illustrates the tendency of receivers to vent their negative response to unwanted messages to the sender. A gatekeeper (the vice president's assistant, perhaps) who doesn't pass along a complete message is also filtering. Additionally, the vice president may delete the e-mail announcing the quarter's sales figures before reading it, blocking the message before it arrives.

As you can see, filtering prevents members of an organization from getting the complete picture of a situation. To maximize your chances of sending and receiving effective communications, it's helpful to deliver a message in multiple ways and to seek information from multiple sources. In this way, the impact of any one person's filtering will be diminished.

Since people tend to filter bad news more during upward communication, it is also helpful to remember that those below you in an organization may be wary of sharing bad news. One way to defuse this tendency to filter is to reward employees who clearly convey information upward, regardless of whether the news is good or bad.

Here are some of the criteria that individuals may use when deciding whether to filter a message or pass it on:

1. *Past experience*: Were previous senders rewarded for passing along news of this kind in the past, or were they criticized?
2. *Knowledge and perception of the speaker*: Has the receiver's direct superior made it clear that "no news is good news?"
3. *Emotional state, involvement with the topic, and level of attention*: Does the sender's fear of failure or criticism prevent the message from being conveyed? Is the topic within the sender's realm of expertise, increasing confidence in the ability to decode the message, or is the sender out of a personal comfort zone when it comes to evaluating the message's significance? Are personal concerns impacting the sender's ability to judge the message's value?

Once again, filtering can lead to miscommunications in business. Listeners translate messages into their own words, each creating a unique version of what was said (Alessandra, 1993).

Selective Perception

Small things can command our attention when we're visiting a new place—a new city or a new company. Over time, however, we begin to make assumptions about the environment based on our past experiences. Selective perception refers to filtering what we see and hear to suit our own needs. This process is often unconscious. We are bombarded with too much stimuli every day to pay equal attention to everything, so we pick and choose according to our own needs. Selective perception is a time-saver, a necessary tool in a complex culture. But it can also lead to mistakes.

Think back to the example conversation between the person asked to order more toner cartridges and his boss earlier in this chapter. Since Bill found the to-do list from his boss to be unreasonably demanding, he assumed the request could wait. (How else could he do everything else on the list?) The boss, assuming that Bill had heard the urgency in her request, assumed that Bill would place the order before returning to previously stated tasks. Both members of this organization were using selective perception to evaluate the communication. Bill's perception was that the task could wait. The boss's perception was that a time frame was clear, though unstated. When two selective perceptions collide, a misunderstanding occurs.

Information Overload

Messages reach us in countless ways every day. Some messages are societal—advertisements that we may hear or see in the course of our day. Others are professional—e-mails, memos, and voice mails, as well as conversations with our colleagues. Others are personal—messages from and conversations with our loved ones and friends.

Add these together and it's easy to see how we may be receiving more information than we can take in. This state of imbalance is known as information overload, which occurs "when the information processing demands on an individual's time to perform interactions and internal calculations exceed the supply or capacity of time available for such processing" (Schick, Gordon, & Haka, 1990). Others note that information overload is "a symptom of the high-tech age, which is too much information for one human being to absorb in an expanding world of people and technology. It comes from all sources including TV, newspapers, and magazines as well as wanted and unwanted regular mail, e-mail and faxes. It has been exacerbated enormously because of the formidable number of results obtained from Web search engines."[1] Other research shows that working in such fragmented fashion significantly impacts efficiency, creativity, and mental acuity (Overholt, 2001).

Figure 2.2.5: A field study found that managers can expect, on average, to do only *3 minutes* of uninterrupted work on any one task before being interrupted by an incoming e-mail, instant message, phone call, coworker, or other distraction (González & Gloria, 2004). Kathleen Leavitt Cragun – Swedish Hard Hat Tour – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Going back to our example of Bill, let's say he's in his office on the phone with a supplier. While he's talking, he hears the chime of his e-mail alerting him to an important message from his boss. He's scanning through it quickly while still on the phone when a coworker pokes her head into his office saying Bill's late for a staff meeting. The supplier on the other end of the phone line has just given him a choice among the products and delivery dates he requested. Bill realizes he missed hearing the first two options, but he doesn't have time to ask the supplier to repeat them all or to try reconnecting with him at a later time. He chooses the third option—at least he heard that one, he reasons, and it seemed fair. How good was Bill's decision amidst all the information he was processing at the same time?

Emotional Disconnects

An effective communication requires a sender and a receiver who are open to speaking and listening to one another, despite possible differences in opinion or personality. One or both parties may have to put their emotions aside to achieve the goal of communicating clearly. A receiver who is emotionally upset tends to ignore or distort what the sender is saying. A sender who is emotionally upset may be unable to present ideas or feelings effectively.

Lack of Source Familiarity or Credibility

Have you ever told a joke that fell flat? You and the receiver lacked the common context that could have made it funny. (Or yes, it could have just been a lousy joke.) Sarcasm and irony are subtle and, therefore, they are potentially hurtful commodities in business. It's best to keep these types of communications out of the workplace, as their benefits are limited, and their potential dangers are great. Lack of familiarity with the sender can lead to misinterpreting humor, especially in less-rich information channels such as e-mail. For example, an e-mail from Jill that ends with, "Men should be boiled in vats of oil," could be interpreted as antimale if the receiver didn't know that Jill has a penchant for exaggeration and always jokes to let off steam. Similarly, if the sender lacks credibility or is untrustworthy, the message will not get through. Receivers may be suspicious of the sender's motivations (Why is she telling me this?). Likewise, if the sender has communicated erroneous information in the past or has created false emergencies, the current message may be filtered.

Workplace Gossip

The informal gossip network known as the grapevine is a lifeline for many employees seeking information about their company (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Researchers agree that the grapevine is an inevitable part of organizational life. Research finds that 70% of all organizational communication occurs at the grapevine level (Crampton, 1998). Employees trust their peers as a source of information, but the grapevine's informal structure can be a barrier to effective communication from the managerial point of view. Its grassroots structure gives it greater credibility in the minds of employees than information delivered through official channels, even when that information is false. Some downsides of the office grapevine are that gossip offers politically minded insiders a powerful tool for disseminating communication (and self-promoting miscommunications) within an organization. In addition, the grapevine lacks a specific sender, which can create a sense of distrust among employees: Who is at the root of the gossip network? When the news is volatile, suspicions may arise as to the person or person behind the message. Managers who understand the grapevine's power can use it to send and receive messages of their own. They can also decrease the grapevine's power by sending official messages quickly and accurately, should big news arise.

Semantics

Words can mean different things to different people, or they might not mean anything to another person. This is called semantics. For example, companies often have their own acronyms and buzzwords (called business jargon) that are clear to them but impenetrable to outsiders. For example, at IBM, GBS is focusing on BPTS, using expertise acquired from the PwC purchase (which had to be sold to avoid conflicts of interest in light of SOX) to fend off other BPO providers and inroads by the Bangalore tiger. Does this make sense to you? If not, here's the translation: IBM's Global Business Services (GBS) division is focusing on offering companies Business Process Transformation Services (BPTS), using the expertise it acquired from purchasing the management consulting and technology services arm of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), which had to sell the division due to the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX; enacted in response to the major accounting scandals such as Enron). The added management expertise puts it above business process outsourcing (BPO) vendors who focus more on automating processes rather than transforming and improving them. Chief among these BPO competitors is Wipro, often called the "Bangalore tiger" because of its geographic origin and aggressive growth. Given the amount of messages we send and receive everyday, it makes sense that humans would try to find a shortcut—a way to communicate things in code. In business, this code is known as jargon. Jargon is the language of specialized terms used by a group or profession. It is common shorthand among experts and if used sensibly can be a quick and efficient way of communicating. Most jargon consists of unfamiliar terms, abstract words, nonexistent words, acronyms, and abbreviations, with an occasional euphemism thrown in for good measure. Every profession, trade, and organization has its own specialized terms (Wright, 2008).

At first glance, jargon sounds like a good thing—a quicker way to send an effective communication similar to the way text message abbreviations can send common messages in a shorter, yet understandable way. But that's not always how things happen. Jargon can be an obstacle to effective communication, causing listeners to tune out or fostering ill feelings between partners in a conversation. When jargon rules the day, the message can get obscured. A key question to ask yourself before using a phrase of jargon is, "Who is the receiver of my message?" If you are a specialist speaking to another specialist in your area, jargon may be the best way to send a message while forging a professional bond—similar to the way best friends can communicate in code. For example, an IT technician communicating with another IT technician may use jargon as a way of sharing information in a way that reinforces the pair's shared knowledge. But that same conversation should be held in Standard English, free of jargon, when communicating with staff members outside the IT group.

Online Follow-Up

Eighty buzz words in the business can be found at the following Web site:

http://www.amanet.org/movingahead/editorial2002_2003/nov03_80buzzwords.htm

A discussion of why slang is a problem can be found at the following Web site:

http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/speakforsuccesscourse/a/speechlesson5.htm

In addition, the OB Toolbox below will help you avoid letting business jargon get in your way at work.

OB Toolbox: Tips for Reducing Miscommunication-by-Jargon

- *Know your audience*. If they weren't sitting beside you in law school, medical school, or in that finance or computer class, then assume they don't know what you are talking about. Speak for the other person and not yourself.
- *Decode your acronyms*. If you use an acronym in verbal or written communication, explain what it means after you use it for the first time. Your audience will filter your message otherwise, as they wonder, "Now what does ROI stand for?" (It stands for "return on investment," btw—by the way.)
- *Limit your jargon use*. Jargon doesn't necessarily make you sound smart or business savvy. It can create communication barriers and obstacles and hurts your ability to build relationships and close deals.

Source: Adapted from ideas in Adubato, S. (2005, March 13). Scrap the jargon…Now! Retrieved July 1, 2008, from *The Star-Ledger* Web site: www.stand-deliver.com/star_ledger/050313.asp.

Gender Differences in Communication

Men and women work together every day, but their different styles of communication can sometimes work against them. Generally speaking, women like to ask questions before starting a project, while men tend to "jump right in." A male manager who's unaware of how most women communicate their readiness to work may misperceive a ready employee as not being prepared.

Another difference that has been noticed is that men often speak in sports metaphors, while many women use their home as a starting place for analogies. Women who believe men are "only talking about the game" may be missing out on a chance to participate in a division's strategy and opportunities for teamwork and "rallying the troops" for success (Krotz).

"It is important to promote the best possible communication between men and women in the workplace," notes gender policy advisor Dee Norton, who provided the above example. "As we move between the male and female cultures, we sometimes have to change how we behave (speak the language of the other gender) to gain the best results from the situation. Clearly, successful organizations of the future are going to have leaders and team members who understand, respect, and apply the rules of gender culture appropriately" (CDR Dee Norton, 2008).

As we have seen, differences in men's and women's communication styles can lead to misunderstandings in the workplace. Being aware of these differences, however, can be the first step in learning to work with them instead of around them. Keep in mind that men tend to focus more on competition, data, and orders in their communications, while women tend to focus more on cooperation, intuition, and requests. Both styles can be effective in the right situations, but understanding the differences is a first step in avoiding misunderstandings.

Differences in Meaning Between the Sender and Receiver

"Mean what you say, and say what you mean." It's an easy thing to say. But in business, what do those words mean? Simply put, different words mean different things to different people. Age, education, and cultural background are all factors that influence how a person interprets words. The less we consider our audience, the greater our chances of miscommunication will be. Eliminating jargon is one way of ensuring our words will convey real-world concepts to others. Speaking to our audience, as opposed to speaking about ourselves, is another.

Managers who speak about "long-term goals and profits" to a staff that has received scant raises may find their core message ("You're doing a great job—and that benefits the folks in charge!") has infuriated the group they hoped to inspire. Instead, managers who recognize the contributions of their staff and confirm that this work is contributing to company goals in ways "that will benefit the source of our success—our employees as well as executives," will find that their core message ("You're doing a great job—we really value your work.") is received as intended, rather than being misinterpreted.

Biased Language

Words and actions that stereotype others on the basis of personal or group affiliation are examples of bias. Below is a list of words that have the potential to be offensive. The column on the right provides alternative words that can be used instead (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003; Miller & Swift, 1980; Procter, 2007).

Figure 8.6

Avoid	Consider Using

black attorney	attorney
businessman	business person
chairman	chair or chairperson
cleaning lady	cleaner or maintenance worker
male nurse	nurse
manpower	staff or personnel
secretary	assistant or associate

Effective communication is clear, factual, and goal-oriented. It is also respectful. Referring to a person by one adjective (a *brain*, a *diabetic*) reduces the person to that one characteristic. Language that inflames or stereotypes a person poisons the communication process. Language that insults an individual or group based on age, ethnicity, sexual preference, or political beliefs violates public and private standards of decency, ranging from civil rights to corporate regulations.

The effort to create a neutral set of terms to refer to heritage and preferences has resulted in a debate over the nature of "political correctness." Proponents of political correctness see it as a way to defuse the volatile nature of words that stereotyped groups and individuals in the past. Critics of political correctness see its vocabulary as stilted and needlessly cautious.

Many companies offer new employees written guides on standards of speech and conduct. These guides, augmented by common sense and courtesy, are solid starting points for effective, respectful workplace communication.

Tips for appropriate workplace speech include, but are not limited to the following:

- Alternating our use of *he* and *she* when referring to people in general
- Relying on human resources–generated guidelines
- Remembering that terms that feel respectful or comfortable to us may not be comfortable or respectful to others

Poor Listening

The greatest compliment that was ever paid to me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer.

Henry David Thoreau

A sender may strive to deliver a message clearly. But the receiver's ability to listen effectively is equally vital to successful communication. The average worker spends 55% of their workdays listening. Managers listen up to 70% each day. Unfortunately, listening doesn't lead to understanding in every case.

From a number of different perspectives, listening matters. Former Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca lamented, "I only wish I could find an institute that teaches people how to listen. After all, a good manager needs to listen at least as much as he needs to talk" (Iacocca & Novak, 1984). Research shows that listening skills were related to promotions (Sypher, Bostrom, & Seibert, 1989).

Listening clearly matters. Listening takes practice, skill, and concentration. Alan Gulick, a Starbucks Corporation spokesperson, believes better listening can improve profits. If every Starbucks employee misheard one $10 order each day, their errors would cost the company a billion dollars annually. To teach its employees to listen, Starbucks created a code that helps employees taking orders hear the size, flavor, and use of milk or decaffeinated coffee. The person making the drink echoes the order aloud.

How Can You Improve Your Listening Skills?

Cicero said, "Silence is one of the great arts of conversation." How often have we been in a conversation with someone else when we are not really listening but itching to convey our portion? This behavior is known as "rehearsing." It suggests the receiver has no intention of considering the sender's message and is actually preparing to respond to an earlier point instead. Effective communication relies on another kind of listening: active listening.

Active listening can be defined as giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as needed, and not interrupting at inappropriate times (O*NET Resource Center). Active listening creates a real-time relationship between the sender and receiver by acknowledging the content and receipt of a message. As we've seen in the Starbucks example above, repeating and confirming a message's content offers a way to confirm that the correct content is flowing between colleagues. The process creates a bond between coworkers while increasing the flow and accuracy of messaging.

How Can We Listen Actively?

Carl Rogers gave five rules for active listening:

1. Listen for message content.
2. Listen for feelings.
3. Respond to feelings.
4. Note all cues.
5. Paraphrase and restate.

The good news is that listening is a skill that can be learned (Brownell, 1990). The first step is to decide that we want to listen. Casting aside distractions, such as by reducing background or internal noise, is critical. The receiver takes in the sender's message silently, without speaking.

Second, throughout the conversation, show the speaker that you're listening. You can do this nonverbally by nodding your head and keeping your attention focused on the speaker. You can also do it verbally, by saying things like, "Yes," "That's interesting," or other such verbal cues. As you're listening, pay attention to the sender's body language for additional cues about how they're feeling. Interestingly, silence has a role in active listening. During active listening, we are trying to understand what has been said, and in silence we can consider the implications. We can't consider information and object to it at the same time. That's where the power of silence comes into play. Finally, if anything is not clear to you, ask questions. Confirm that you've heard the message accurately, by repeating back a crucial piece like, "Great, I'll see you at 2:00 p.m. in my office." At the end of the conversation, a thank you from both parties is an optional but highly effective way of acknowledging each other's teamwork.

Becoming a More Effective Listener

As we've seen above, active listening creates a more dynamic relationship between a receiver and a sender. It strengthens personal investment in the information being shared. It also forges healthy working relationships among colleagues by making speakers and listeners equally valued members of the communication process.

Many companies offer public speaking courses for their staff, but what about "public listening"? Here are some more ways you can build your listening skills by becoming a more effective listener and banishing communication freezers from your discussions.

OB Toolbox: 10 Ways to Improve Your Listening Habits

1. *Start by stopping*. Take a moment to inhale and exhale quietly before you begin to listen. Your job as a listener is to receive information openly and accurately.
2. *Don't worry about what you'll say when the time comes*. Silence can be a beautiful thing.
3. *Join the sender's team*. When the sender pauses, summarize what you believe has been said. "What I'm hearing is that we need to focus on marketing as well as sales. Is that correct?" Be attentive to physical as well as verbal communications. "I hear you saying that we should focus on marketing, but the way you're shaking your head tells me the idea may not really appeal to you—is that right?"
4. *Don't multitask while listening*. Listening is a full-time job. It's tempting to multitask when you and the sender are in different places, but doing that is counterproductive. The human mind can only focus on one thing at a time. Listening with only part of your brain increases the chances that you'll have questions later, ultimately requiring more of the speaker's time. (And when the speaker is in the same room, multitasking signals a disinterest that is considered rude.)
5. *Try to empathize with the sender's point of view*. You don't have to agree, but can you find common ground?
6. *Confused*? *Ask questions*. There's nothing wrong with admitting you haven't understood the sender's point. You may even help the sender clarify the message.
7. *Establish eye contact. Making eye contact* with the speaker (if appropriate for the culture) is important.
8. *What is the goal of this communication*? Ask yourself this question at different points during the communication to keep the information flow on track. Be polite. Differences in opinion can be the starting point of consensus.
9. *It's great to be surprised*. Listen with an open mind, not just for what you *want* to hear.
10. *Pay attention to what is not said*. Does the sender's body language seem to contradict the message? If so, clarification may be in order.

Sources: Adapted from information in Barrett, D. J. (2006). *Leadership communication*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin; Improving verbal skills. (1997). Retrieved July 1, 2008, from the *Institute for Management* Web site: http://www.itstime.com/aug97.htm; Ten tips: Active listening. (2007, June 4). Retrieved July 1, 2008, from the *Communication at Work* Web site: http://communication.atwork-network.com/2007/06/04/ten-tips-active-listening/.

Communication Freezers

Communication freezers put an end to effective communication by making the receiver feel judged or defensive. Typical communication stoppers include criticizing, blaming, ordering, judging, or shaming the other person. Some examples of things to avoid saying include the following:

1. Telling the other person what to do:
   - "You must…"
   - "You cannot…"
2. Threatening with "or else" implied:
   - "You had better…"
   - "If you don't…"
3. Making suggestions or telling the other person what they ought to do:
   - "You should…"
   - "It's your responsibility to…"
4. Attempting to educate the other person:
   - "Let me give you the facts."
   - "Experience tells us that…"
5. Judging the other person negatively:
   - "You're not thinking straight."
   - "You're wrong."
6. Giving insincere praise:
   - "You have so much potential."
   - "I know you can do better than this."
7. Psychoanalyzing the other person:
   - "You're jealous."
   - "You have problems with authority."
8. Making light of the other person's problems by generalizing:
   - "Things will get better."
   - "Behind every cloud is a silver lining."
9. Asking excessive or inappropriate questions:
   - "Why did you do that?"
   - "Who has influenced you?"
10. Making light of the problem by kidding:
    - "Think about the positive side."
    - "You think *you've* got problems!"

Sources: Adapted from information in Tramel, M., & Reynolds, H. (1981). *Executive leadership*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; Saltman, D., & O'Dea, N. Conflict management workshop PowerPoint presentation. Retrieved July 1, 2008, from http://www.nswrdn.com.au/client_images/6806.PDF; Communication stoppers. Retrieved July 1, 2008, from *Mental Health Today* Web site: http://www.mental-health-today.com/Healing/communicationstop.htm.

Key Takeaways

Many barriers to effective communication exist. Examples include filtering, selective perception, information overload, emotional disconnects, lack of source credibility, workplace gossip, gender differences, and semantics. The receiver can enhance the probability of effective communication by engaging in active listening.

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2.3: Different Types of Communication and Channels

Learning Objectives

1. Understand different types of communication.
2. Understand how communication channels affect communication.
3. Recognize different communication directions within organizations.

Types of Communication

There are three types of communication, including: verbal communication involving listening to a person to understand the meaning of a message, written communication in which a message is read, and nonverbal communication involving observing a person and inferring meaning. Let's start with verbal communication, which is the most common form of communication.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communications in business take place over the phone or in person. The medium of the message is oral. Let's return to our printer cartridge example. This time, the message is being conveyed from the sender (the manager) to the receiver (an employee named Bill) by telephone. We've already seen how the manager's request to Bill ("Buy more printer toner cartridges!") can go awry. Now let's look at how the same message can travel successfully from sender to receiver.

Manager (speaking on the phone): "Good morning Bill!"

(*By using the employee's name, the manager is establishing a clear, personal link to the receiver*.)

Manager: "Your division's numbers are looking great."

(*The manager's recognition of Bill's role in a winning team further personalizes and emotionalizes the conversation*.)

Manager: "Our next step is to order more printer toner cartridges. Would you place an order for 1,000 printer toner cartridges with Jones Computer Supplies? Our budget for this purchase is $30,000, and the printer toner cartridges need to be here by Wednesday afternoon."

(*The manager breaks down the task into several steps. Each step consists of a specific task, time frame, quantity, or goal*.)

Bill: "Sure thing! I'll call Jones Computer Supplies and order 1,000 more printer toner cartridges, not exceeding a total of $30,000, to be here by Wednesday afternoon."

(*Bill, a model employee, repeats what he has heard. This is the feedback portion of the communication. Feedback helps him recognize any confusion he may have had hearing the manager's message. Feedback also helps the manager hear if she has communicated the message correctly*.)

Storytelling has been shown to be an effective form of verbal communication that serves an important organizational function by helping to construct common meanings for individuals within the organization. Stories can help clarify key values and also help demonstrate how certain tasks are performed within an organization. Story frequency, strength, and tone are related to higher organizational commitment (McCarthy, 2008). The quality of the stories is related to the ability of entrepreneurs to secure capital for their firms (Martens, Jennings, & Devereaux, 2007).

While the process may be the same, high stakes communications require more planning, reflection, and skill than normal day-to-day interactions at work. Examples of high stakes communication events include asking for a raise or presenting a business plan to a venture capitalist. In addition to these events, there are also many times in our professional lives when we have crucial conversations, which are defined as discussions in which not only are the stakes high, but also the opinions vary and emotions run strong (Patterson et al., 2002). One of the most consistent recommendations from communications experts is to work toward using *"and"* instead of *"but"* when communicating under these circumstances. In addition, be aware of your communication style and practice being flexible; it is under stressful situations that communication styles can become the most rigid.

OB Toolbox: 10 Recommendations for Improving the Quality of Your Conversations

1. *Be the first to say hello*. Use your name in your introduction, in case others have forgotten it.
2. *Think before you speak*. Our impulse is often to imitate movies by offering fast, witty replies in conversation. In the real world, a careful silence can make us sound more intelligent and prevent mistakes.

3. *Be receptive to new ideas*. If you disagree with another person's opinion, saying, "Tell me more," can be a more useful way of moving forward than saying, "That's stupid!"
4. *Repeat someone's name to yourself and then aloud, when being introduced*. The form of the name you use may vary. First names work with peers. Mr. or Ms. is common when meeting superiors in business.
5. *Ask questions*. This establishes your interest in another person.
6. *Listen as much, if not more, than you speak*. This allows you to learn new information.
7. *Use eye contact*. Eye contact shows that you are engaged. Also, be sure to smile and make sure your body language matches your message.
8. *Mirror the other person*. Occasionally repeat what they've said in your own words. "You mean… ?"
9. *Have an exit strategy ready*. Ideal conversations are brief, leaving others wanting more.
10. *Be prepared*. Before beginning a conversation, have three simple facts about yourself and four questions about someone else in mind.

Source: Adapted from information contained in Gabor, D. (1983). *How to start a conversation and make friends*. New York: Legacy; Post, E. (2005). *Emily Post's etiquette advantage in business*. New York: Collins Living; Fine, D. (2005). *The fine art of small talk*. New York: Hyperion.

Written Communication

In contrast to verbal communications, which are oral, written business communications are *printed messages*. Examples of written communications include memos, proposals, e-mails, letters, training manuals, and operating policies. They may be printed on paper or appear on the screen. Written communication is often asynchronous. That is, the sender can write a message that the receiver can read at any time, unlike a conversation that is carried on in real time. A written communication can also be read by many people (such as all employees in a department or all customers). It's a "one-to-many" communication, as opposed to a one-to-one conversation. There are exceptions, of course: A voice mail is an oral message that is asynchronous. Conference calls and speeches are oral one-to-many communications, and e-mails can have only one recipient or many.

Normally, a verbal communication takes place in real time. Written communication, by contrast, can be constructed over a longer period of time. It also can be collaborative. Multiple people can contribute to the content on one document before that document is sent to the intended audience.

Verbal and written communications have different strengths and weaknesses. In business, the decision to communicate verbally or in written form can be a powerful one. As we'll see below, each style of communication has particular strengths and pitfalls. When determining whether to communicate verbally or in writing, ask yourself: *Do I want to convey facts or feelings*? Verbal communications are a better way to convey feelings. Written communications do a better job of conveying facts.

Picture a manager making a speech to a team of 20 employees. The manager is speaking at a normal pace. The employees appear interested. But how much information is being transmitted? Probably not as much as the speaker believes. The fact is that humans listen much faster than they speak. The average public speaker communicates at a speed of about 125 words a minute, and that pace sounds fine to the audience. (In fact, anything faster than that probably would sound unusual. To put that figure in perspective, someone having an excited conversation speaks at about 150 words a minute.) Based on these numbers, we could assume that the audience has more than enough time to take in each word the speaker delivers, which actually creates a problem. The average person in the audience can hear 400 to 500 words a minute (Lee & Hatesohl, 2008). The audience has *more than enough time* to hear. As a result, their minds may wander.

As you can see, oral communication is the most often used form of communication, but it is also an inherently flawed medium for conveying specific facts. Listeners' minds wander. It's nothing personal—in fact, it's a completely normal psychological occurrence. In business, once we understand this fact, we can make more intelligent communication choices based on the kind of information we want to convey.

Figure 2.3.7: Communication mediums have come a long way since Alexander Graham Bell's original telephone. Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Most jobs involve some degree of writing. According to the National Commission on Writing, 67% of salaried employees in large American companies and professional state employees have some kind of writing responsibility. Half of responding companies reported that they take writing into consideration when hiring professional employees, and 91% always take writing into account when hiring (Flink, 2007). Luckily, it is possible to learn to write clearly.

Here are some tips on writing well. Thomas Jefferson summed up the rules of writing well with this idea: "Don't use two words when one will do." Put another way, half the words can have twice the impact. One of the oldest myths in business is that writing more will make us sound more important. The opposite is true. Leaders who can communicate simply and clearly project a stronger image than those who write a lot but say nothing.

Putting Jefferson's Rules Into Action: Five Ways to Communicate More With Fewer Words

1. *Picture the receiver in your mind before you begin to write*. After all, a written communication is a link between people.
2. *Choose simple words*. When in doubt, choose the shorter word ("Automobile or car? Car!")
3. *Be polite and clear*. Your message will make a strong, clear impact.
4. *Make your message brief and direct by trimming redundant words or phrases*. "Having thus explored our first option, I would now like to begin to explore the second option that may be open to us." versus "After considering Option 1, I would like to look at Option 2."
5. *Choose strong, active verbs*. "I suggest…" instead of "It would seem to me that we might…"

Remember, concise writing equals effective communication.

Nonverbal Communication

What you say is a vital part of any communication. Surprisingly, what you *don't say* can be even more important. Research shows that nonverbal cues can also affect whether or not you get a job offer. Judges examining videotapes of actual applicants were able to assess the social skills of job candidates with the sound turned off. They watched the rate of gesturing, time spent talking, and formality of dress to determine which candidates would be the most socially successful on the job (Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985). Research also shows that 55% of in-person communication comes from nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body stance, and tone of voice. According to one study, only 7% of a receiver's comprehension of a message is based on the sender's actual words, 38% is based on paralanguage (the tone, pace, and volume of speech), and 55% is based on *nonverbal cues* (body language) (Mehrabian, 1981). To be effective communicators, our body language, appearance, and tone must align with the words we're trying to convey. Research shows that when individuals are lying, they are more likely to blink more frequently, shift their weight, and shrug (Siegman, 1985).

Listen Up and Learn More!

To learn more about facial language from facial recognition expert Patrician McCarthy as she speaks with Senior Editor Suzanne Woolley at *Business Week*, view the online interview at feedroom.businessweek.com/ind...41fa625f5b0744

A different tone can change the perceived meaning of a message. See the table below for how clearly this can be true. If we only read these words, we would be left to wonder, but during a conversation, the tone conveys a great deal of information.

Don't Use That Tone With Me!

Changing your tone can dramatically change your meaning.

Table 2.3.1:

Placement of the emphasis	What it means
I did not tell John you were late.	Someone else told John you were late.
I did **not** tell John you were late.	This did not happen.
I did not **tell** John you were late.	I may have implied it.
I did not tell **John** you were late.	But maybe I told Sharon and José.
I did not tell John **you** were late.	I was talking about someone else.
I did not tell John you **were** late.	I told him you still are late.
I did not tell John you were **late**.	I told him you were attending another meeting.

Source: Based on ideas in Kiely, M. (October, 1993). When "no" means "yes." *Marketing*, 7–9.

Now you can see how changing the tone of voice in a conversation can incite or diffuse a misunderstanding. For another example, imagine that you're a customer interested in opening a new bank account. At one bank, the bank officer is dressed neatly. She looks you in the eye when she speaks. Her tone is friendly. Her words are easy to understand, yet professional sounding. "Thank you for considering Bank of the East Coast. We appreciate this opportunity and would love to explore ways that we can work together to help your business grow," she says with a friendly smile. At the second bank, the bank officer's tie is stained. He looks over your head and down at his desk as he speaks. He shifts in his seat and fidgets with his hands. His words say, "Thank you for considering Bank of the West Coast. We appreciate this opportunity and would love to explore ways that we can work together to help you business grow," but he mumbles his words, and his voice conveys no enthusiasm or warmth. Which bank would you choose? The speaker's body language must match his or her words. If a sender's words and body language don't match—if a sender smiles while telling a sad tale, for example—the mismatch between verbal and nonverbal cues can cause a receiver to actively dislike the sender.

Following are a few examples of nonverbal cues that can support or detract from a sender's message.

Body Language

A simple rule of thumb is that simplicity, directness, and warmth conveys sincerity. Sincerity is vital for effective communication. In some cultures, a firm handshake, given with a warm, dry hand, is a great way to establish trust. A weak, clammy handshake might convey a lack of trustworthiness. Gnawing one's lip conveys uncertainty. A direct smile conveys confidence.

Eye Contact

In business, the style and duration of eye contact varies greatly across cultures. In the United States, looking someone in the eye (for about a second) is considered a sign of trustworthiness.

Facial Expressions

The human face can produce thousands of different expressions. These expressions have been decoded by experts as corresponding to hundreds of different emotional states (Ekman, Friesen, & Hager, 2008). Our faces convey basic information to the outside world. Happiness is associated with an upturned mouth and slightly closed eyes; fear with an open mouth and wide-eyed stare.

Shifty eyes and pursed lips convey a lack of trustworthiness. The impact of facial expressions in conversation is instantaneous. Our brains may register them as "a feeling" about someone's character. For this reason, it is important to consider how we appear in business as well as what we say. The muscles of our faces convey our emotions. We can send a silent message without saying a word. A change in facial expression can change our emotional state. Before an interview, for example, if we focus on feeling confident, our face will convey that confidence to an interviewer. Adopting a smile (even if we're feeling stressed) can reduce the body's stress levels.

Posture

The position of our body relative to a chair or other person is another powerful silent messenger that conveys interest, aloofness, professionalism, or lack thereof. Head up, back straight (but not rigid) implies an upright character. In interview situations, experts advise mirroring an interviewer's tendency to lean in and settle back in a seat. The subtle repetition of the other person's posture conveys that we are listening and responding.

Touch

The meaning of a simple touch differs between individuals, genders, and cultures. In Mexico, when doing business, men may find themselves being grasped on the arm by another man. To pull away is seen as rude. In Indonesia, to touch anyone on the head or to touch anything with one's foot is considered highly offensive. In the Far East and some parts of Asia, according to business etiquette writer Nazir Daud, "It is considered impolite for a woman to shake a man's hand" (Daud, 2008). Americans, as we have noted above, place great value in a firm handshake. But handshaking as a competitive sport ("the bone-crusher") can come off as needlessly aggressive both at home and abroad.

Space

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall coined the term *proxemics* to denote the different kinds of distance that occur between people. These distances vary among cultures. The chart below outlines the basic proxemics of everyday life and their associated meaning (Hall, 1966).

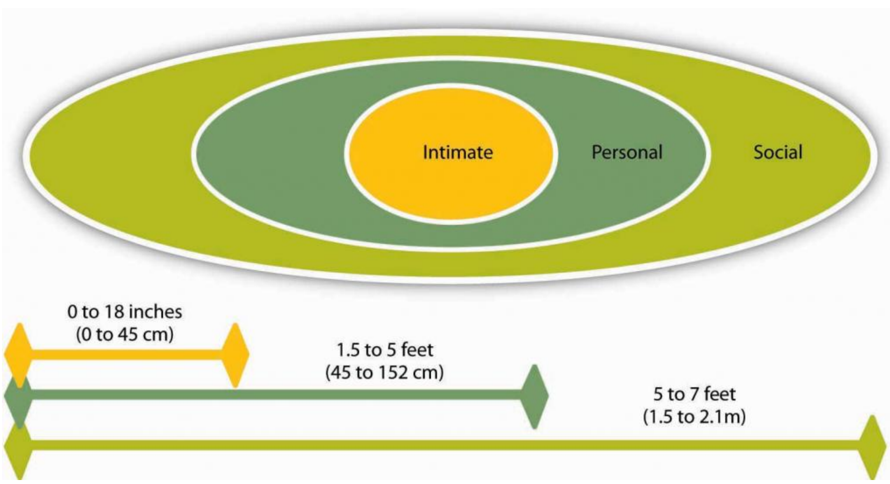

Figure 2.3.9: Distance between speakers is partially determined by their intimacy level. Source: Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York: Doubleday.

Standing too far away from a colleague (public speaking distance) or too close to a colleague (intimate distance for embracing) can thwart an effective verbal communication in business.

Communication Channels

The channel, or medium, used to communicate a message affects how accurately the message will be received. Channels vary in their "information-richness." Information-rich channels convey more nonverbal information. Research shows that effective managers tend to use more information-rich communication channels than less effective managers (Allen & Griffeth, 1997′ Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). The figure below illustrates the information richness of different channels.

Figure 8.10

Information Channel	Information Richness
Face-to-face conversation	High
Videoconferencing	High
Telephone conversation	High
E-mails	Medium
Handheld devices	Medium
Blogs	Medium
Written letters and memos	Medium
Formal written documents	Low
Spreadsheets	Low

Information channels differ in their richness.

Sources: Adapted from information in Daft, R. L., & Lenge, R. H. (1984). Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organizational design. In B. Staw & L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior, vol. 6* (pp. 191–233). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press; Lengel, R. H., & Daft, D. L. (1988). The selection of communication media as an executive skill. *Academy of Management Executive*, *11*, 225–232.

The key to effective communication is to match the communication channel with the goal of the message (Barry & Fulmer, 2004). For example, written media may be a better choice when the sender wants a record of the content, has less urgency for a response, is physically separated from the receiver, and doesn't require a lot of feedback from the receiver, or when the message is complicated and may take some time to understand.

Oral communication, on the other hand, makes more sense when the sender is conveying a sensitive or emotional message, needs feedback immediately, and does not need a permanent record of the conversation.

Figure 8.11 Guide for When to Use Written versus Verbal Communication

Use Written Communication When:	Use Verbal Communication When:
conveying facts	conveying emotion and feelings
the message needs to become part of a permanent file	the message does not need to be permanent
there is little time urgency	there is time urgency
you do not need immediate feedback	you need immediate feedback
the ideas are complicated	the ideas are simple or can be made simple with explanations

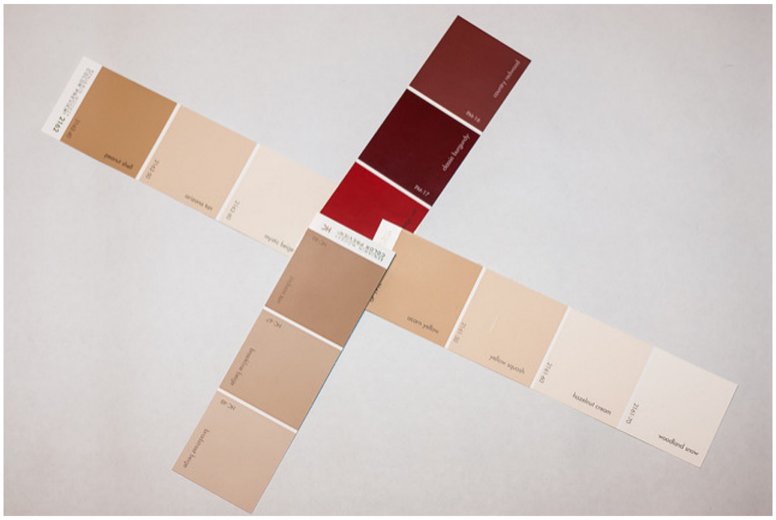

Figure 2.3.12: Make sure to match the medium to the task. Trying to accomplish a visual task such as choosing colors is more challenging on the phone versus in person. Mike – Choosing Colors – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Like face-to-face and telephone conversations, videoconferencing has high information richness, because receivers and senders can see or hear beyond just the words that are used—they can see the sender's body language or hear the tone of their voice. Handheld devices, blogs, and written letters and memos offer medium-rich channels, because they convey words and pictures or photos. Formal written documents, such as legal documents and budget spreadsheets, convey the least richness, because the format is often rigid and standardized. As a result, the tone of the message is often lost.

The growth of e-mail has been spectacular, but it has also created challenges in managing information and increasing the speed of doing businesses. Over 100 million adults in the United States use e-mail at least once a day (Taylor, 2002). Internet users around the world send an estimated 60 billion e-mails each day, and a large portion of these are spam or scam attempts (60 Billion emails sent daily worldwide, 2006). That makes e-mail the second most popular medium of communication worldwide, second only to voice. Less than 1% of all written human communications even reaches paper these days (Isom, 2008). To combat the overuse of e-mail, companies such as Intel have even instituted "no e-mail Fridays." During these times, all communication is done via other communication channels. Learning to be more effective in your e-mail communications is an important skill. To learn more, check out the OB Toolbox on business e-mail do's and don'ts.

OB Toolbox: Business E-mail Do's and Don'ts

1. DON'T send or forward chain e-mails.
2. DON'T put anything in an e-mail that you don't want the world to see.
3. DON'T write a message in capital letters—this is the equivalent of SHOUTING.
4. DON'T routinely CC everyone. Reducing inbox clutter is a great way to increase communication.
5. DON'T hit send until you've spell-checked your e-mail.
6. DO use a subject line that summarizes your message, adjusting it as the message changes over time.
7. DO make your request in the first line of your e-mail. (And if that's all you need to say, stop there!)
8. DO end your e-mail with a brief sign-off such as, "Thank you," followed by your name and contact information.
9. DO think of a work e-mail as a binding communication.
10. DO let others know if you've received an e-mail in error.

Sources: Adapted from information in Leland, K., & Bailey, K. (2000). *Customer service for dummies*. New York: Wiley; Information Technology Services. (1997). Top 10 email dos and top ten email don'ts. Retrieved July 1, 2008, from the University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center Web site: www.uic.edu/hsc/uicmc/its/cus...email-tips.htm; Kawasaki, G. (2006, February 3). The effective emailer. Retrieved July 1, 2008, from *How to Change the World* Web site: blog.guykawasaki.com/2006/02/...fective_e.html.

An important although often ignored rule when communicating emotional information is that e-mail's lack of richness can be your loss. As we saw in the chart above, e-mail is a medium-rich channel. It can convey facts quickly. But when it comes to emotion, e-mail's flaws make it a far less desirable choice than oral communication—the 55% of nonverbal cues that make a conversation comprehensible to a listener are missing. Researchers also note that e-mail readers don't pick up on sarcasm and other tonal aspects of writing as much as the writer believes they will (Kruger, 2005).

The sender may believe that certain emotional signifiers have been included in a message. But, with written words alone, those signifiers are not there. This gap between the form and content of e-mail inspired the rise of emoticons—symbols that offer clues to the emotional side of the words in each message. Generally speaking, however, emoticons are not considered professional in business communication.

You might feel uncomfortable conveying an emotionally laden message verbally, especially when the message contains unwanted news. Sending an e-mail to your staff that there will be no bonuses this year may seem easier than breaking the bad news face-to-face, but that doesn't mean that e-mail is an effective or appropriate way to break this kind of news. When the message is emotional, the sender should use verbal communication. Indeed, a good rule of thumb is that more emotionally laden messages require more thought in the choice of channel and how they are communicated.

Career Advice

Communication can occur without you even realizing it. Consider the following: Is your e-mail name professional? The typical convention for business e-mail contains some form of your name. While an e-mail name like "LazyGirl" or "DeathMonkey" may be fine for chatting online with your friends, they may send the wrong signal to individuals you e-mail such as professors and prospective employers.

Is your outgoing voice mail greeting professional? If not, change it. Faculty and prospective recruiters will draw certain conclusions if, upon calling you, they get a message that screams, "Party, party, party!"

Do you have a "private" social networking Web site on MySpace.com, Facebook.com, or Xanga.com? If so, consider what it says about you to employers or clients. If it is information you wouldn't share at work, it probably shouldn't be there.

Googled yourself lately? If not, you probably should. Potential employers have begun searching the Web as part of background checking, and you should be aware of what's out there about you.

Direction of Communication Within Organizations

Information can move horizontally, from a sender to a receiver, as we've seen. It can also move vertically, down from top management, or up from the front line. Information can also move diagonally between and among levels of an organization, such as a message from a customer service rep to a manager in the manufacturing department or a message from the chief financial officer sent down to all department heads.

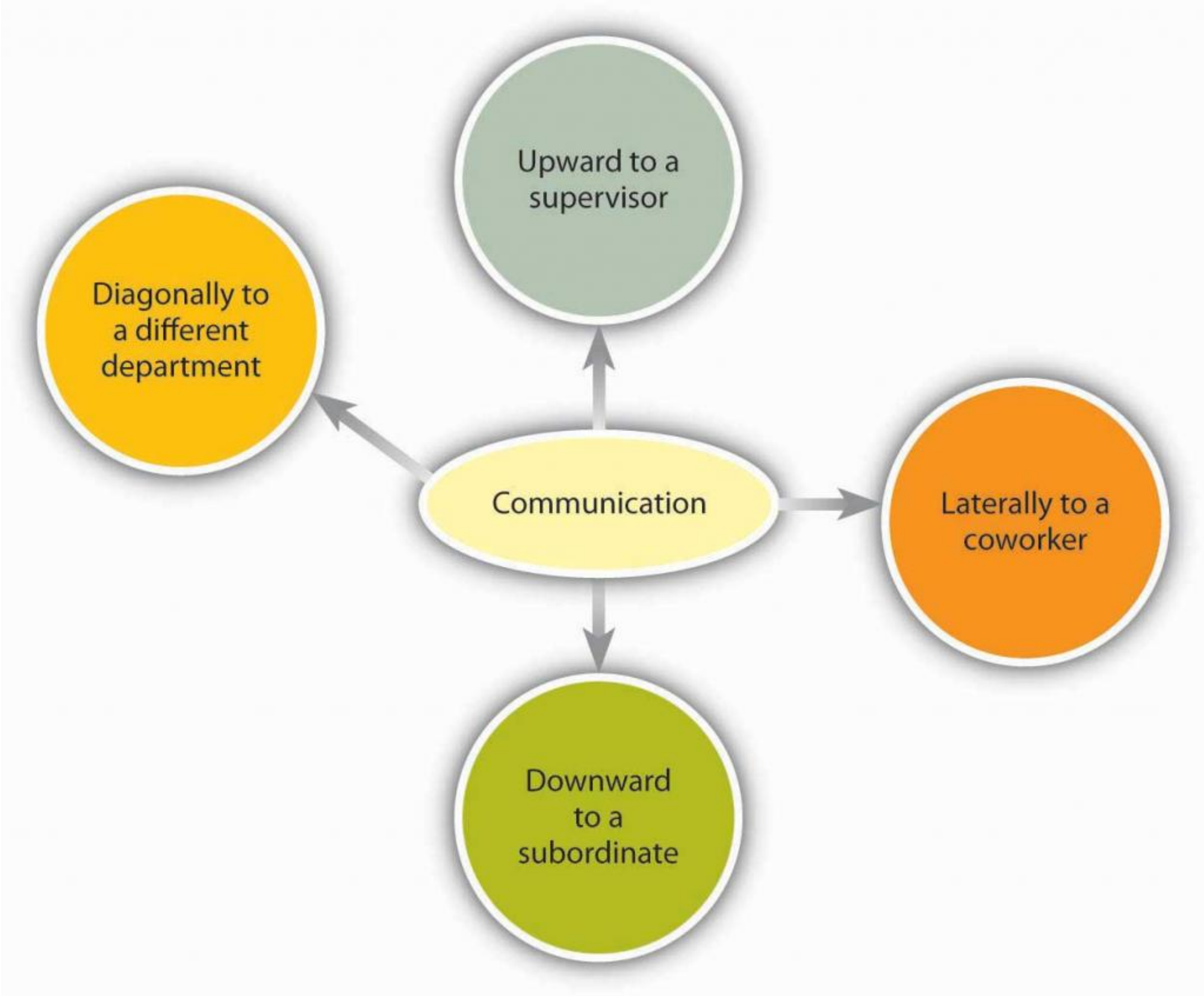

Figure 2.3.13: Organizational communication travels in many different directions.

There is a chance for these arrows to go awry, of course. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of best-selling books such as *Flow*, has noted, “In large organizations the dilution of information as it passes up and down the hierarchy, and horizontally across departments, can undermine the effort to focus on common goals.”[1]

The organizational status of the sender can impact the receiver’s attentiveness to the message. For example, consider the following: A senior manager sends a memo to a production supervisor. The supervisor, who has a lower status within the organization, is likely to pay close attention to the message. The same information conveyed in the opposite direction, however, might not get the attention it deserves. The message would be filtered by the senior manager’s perception of priorities and urgencies.

Requests are just one kind of communication in business. Other communications, either verbal or written, may seek, give, or exchange information. Research shows that frequent communications with one’s supervisor is related to better job performance ratings and overall organizational performance (Snyder & Morris, 1984; Kacmar et al., 2003). Research also shows that lateral communication done between peers can influence important organizational outcomes such as turnover (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986).

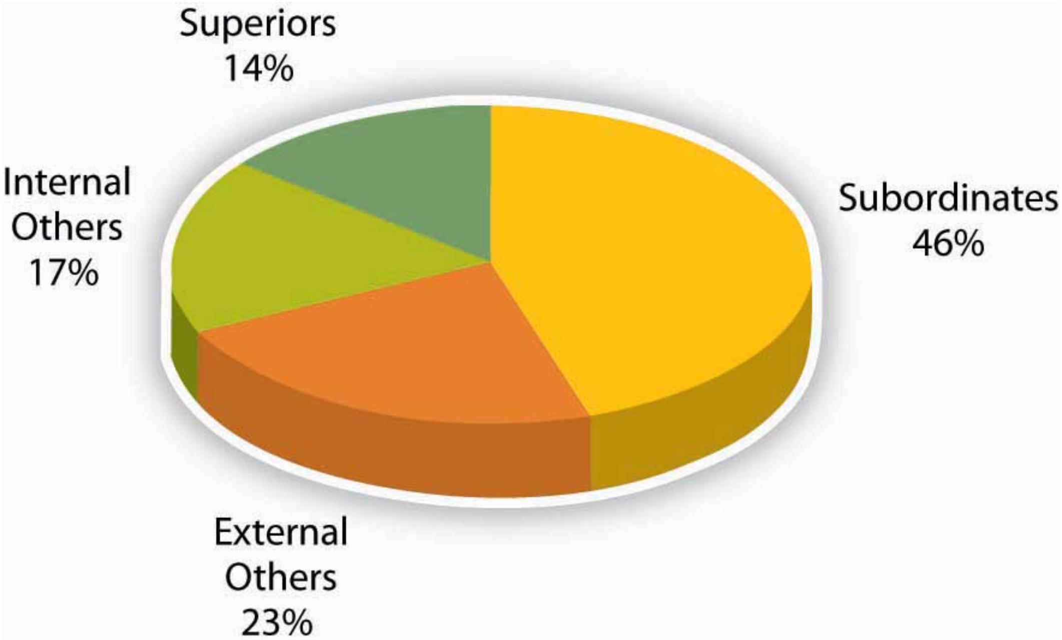

Figure 2.3.14: How Managers Spend Time Communicating at Work Source: Adapted from information in Luthans, F., & Larsen, J. K. (1986). How managers really communicate. *Human Relations*, *39*, 161–178.

External Communications

External communications deliver specific businesses messages to individuals outside an organization. They may announce changes in staff or strategy, earnings, and more. The goal of an external communication is to create a specific message that the receiver will understand and share with others. Examples of external communications include the following.

Press Releases

Public relations professionals create external communications about a client's product, services, or practices for specific receivers. These receivers, it is hoped, will share the message with others. In time, as the message is passed along, it should *appear* to be independent of the sender, creating the illusion of an independently generated consumer trend, public opinion, and so on.

The message of a public relations effort may be *b2b* (business to business), *b2c* (business to consumer), or media related. The message can take different forms. Press releases try to convey a newsworthy message, real or manufactured. It may be constructed like a news item, inviting editors or reporters to reprint the message in part or as a whole, with or without acknowledgement of the sender's identity. Public relations campaigns create messages over time through contests, special events, trade shows, and media interviews in addition to press releases.

Ads

Advertising places external business messages before target receivers through media buys. A media buy is a fee that is paid to a television network, Web site, magazine, and so on by an advertiser to insert an advertisement. The fee is based on the perceived value of the audience who watches, reads, listens to, or frequents the space where the ad will appear.

In recent years, receivers have begun to filter advertiser's messages. This phenomenon is perceived to be a result of the large amount of ads the average person sees each day and a growing level of consumer wariness of paid messaging. Advertisers, in turn, are trying to create alternative forms of advertising that receivers won't filter. The *advertorial* is one example of an external communication that combines the look of an article with the focused message of an ad. Product placements in videos, movies, and games are other ways that advertisers strive to reach receivers with commercial messages.

Web Pages

A Web page's external communication can combine elements of public relations, advertising, and editorial content, reaching receivers on multiple levels and in multiple ways. Banner ads, blogs, and advertiser-driven "click-through" areas are just a few of the elements that allow a business to deliver a message to a receiver online. The perceived flexibility of online communications can impart a less formal (and therefore, more believable) quality to an external communication. A message relayed in a daily blog post, for example, will reach a receiver differently than if it is delivered in an annual report. The popularity and power of blogs is growing, with 11% of *Fortune* 500 companies having official blogs (up from 4% in 2005). In fact, blogs have become so important to companies such as Coca-Cola Company, Eastman Kodak Company, and Marriott International Inc. that they have created official positions within their organizations titled "chief blogging officer" (Chief blogging officer, 2008). The "real-time" quality of Web communications may appeal to receivers who might filter out traditional ads and public relations messages because of their "prefab" quality. Despite a "spontaneous" feel, many online pages can be revisited many times in a single day. For this reason, clear and accurate external communications are as vital for online use as they are in traditional media.

Customer Communications

Customer communications can include letters, catalogs, direct mail, e-mails, text messages, and telemarketing messages. Some receivers automatically filter these types of bulk messages. Others will be receptive. The key to a successful external communication to customers is to convey a business message in a personally compelling way—dramatic news, a money-saving coupon, and so forth.

Key Takeaways

Types of communication include verbal, written, and nonverbal. Surprisingly, 55% of face-to-face communication comes from nonverbal cues such as tone or body language. Different communication channels are more or less effective at transmitting different kinds of information. In addition, communication flows in different directions within organizations.

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2.4: The Role of Ethics and National Culture

Learning Objectives

1. Consider the role of ethics in communication.
2. Consider the role of national culture on communication.

Ethics and Communication

“People aren’t happy when the unexpected happens, but they are even unhappier if they find out you tried to hide it,” says Bruce Patton, a partner at Boston-based Vantage Partners LLC (Michelman, 2004). To speak or not to speak? One of the most challenging areas of effective business communication occurs in moments of crisis management. But in an age of instant information, the burden on business to speak out quickly and clearly in times of crisis has never been greater.

The alternative to a clear message is seen as a communication blocker, in addition to being guilty of the misdeed, disaster, or infraction at hand. The Exxon Valdez disaster is a classic example of ineffective crisis management and communication. When millions of barrels of oil spilled into Prince William Sound, the company’s poor response only added to the damage. Exxon Mobil Corporation executives refused to acknowledge the extent of the problem and declined to comment on the accident for almost a week. Exxon also sent a succession of lower level spokespeople to deal with the media (Holusha, 1989).

Instead, a more effective method of crisis communication is to have the company’s highest ranking official become the spokesperson who communicates the situation. This is the approach that James Burke, the chairman of Johnson & Johnson Services, Inc., took when tampering was discovered with Tylenol bottles. He became the face of the crisis, communicating with the public and explaining what J & J would do. His forthrightness built trust and allayed customer fears.

Ethical, forthright communication applies inside the company as well as externally with the public. “When the truth is missing, people feel demoralized, less confident, and ultimately are less loyal,” write leadership experts Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans. “Research overwhelmingly supports the notion that engaged employees are ‘in the know.’ They want to be trusted with the truth about the business, including its challenges and downturns” (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2008).

Cross-Cultural Communication

Culture is a shared set of beliefs and experiences common to people in a specific setting. The setting that creates a culture can be geographic, religious, or professional. As you might guess, the same individual can be a member of many cultures, all of which may play a part in the interpretation of certain words.

The different and often “multicultural” identity of individuals in the same organization can lead to some unexpected and potentially large miscommunications. For example, during the Cold War, Soviet leader Nikita Khruschev told the American delegation at the United Nations, “We will bury you!” His words were interpreted as a threat of nuclear annihilation. However, a more accurate reading of Khruschev’s words would have been, “We will overtake you!” meaning economic superiority. The words, as well as the fear and suspicion that the West had of the Soviet Union at the time, led to the more alarmist and sinister interpretation (Garner, 2007).

Miscommunications can arise between individuals of the same culture as well. Many words in the English language mean different things to different people. Words can be misunderstood if the sender and receiver do not share common experiences. A sender’s words cannot communicate the desired meaning if the receiver has not had some experience with the objects or concepts the words describe (Effective communication, 2004).

It is particularly important to keep this fact in mind when you are communicating with individuals who may not speak English as a first language. For example, when speaking with nonnative English-speaking colleagues, avoid “isn’t it?” questions. This sentence construction does not exist in many other languages and can be confusing for nonnative English speakers. For example, to the question, “You are coming, aren’t you?” they may answer, “Yes” (I am coming) or “No” (I am coming), depending on how they interpret the question (Lifland, 2006).

Cultures also vary in terms of the desired amount of situational context related to interpreting situations. People in very high context cultures put a high value on establishing relationships prior to working with others and tend to take longer to negotiate deals. Examples of high context cultures include China, Korea, and Japan. Conversely, people in low context cultures “get down to business” and tend to negotiate quickly. Examples of low context cultures include Germany, Scandinavia, and the United States (Hall, 1976; Munter, 1993).

Finally, don’t forget the role of nonverbal communication. As we learned in the nonverbal communication section, in the United States, looking someone in the eye when talking is considered a sign of trustworthiness. In China, by contrast, a lack of eye contact conveys respect. A recruiting agency that places English teachers warns prospective teachers that something that works well in one culture can offend in another: “In Western countries, one expects to maintain eye contact when we talk with people. This is a norm we consider basic and essential. This is not the case among the Chinese. On the contrary, because of the more authoritarian nature of the Chinese society, steady eye contact is viewed as inappropriate, especially when subordinates talk with their superiors” (Chinese culture-differences and taboos, 2009).

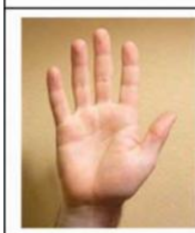
	*“V” for victory*. Use this gesture with caution! While in North America it signs victory or peace, in England and Australia it means something closer to “take this!”
	*The “OK” gesture*. While in North America it means things are going well, in France it means a person is thought to be worthless, in Japan it refers to money, and in Brazil, Russia, and Germany it means something really not appropriate for the workplace.
	The *“thumbs up”* means one in Germany, five in Japan, but good job in North America. This can lead to confusion.
	*“Hook ‘em horns.”* In Texas this is the University of Texas rallying call because it looks like the horns of a bull. However, in Italy it means you are being tricked, while in Brazil and Venezuela it means you are warding off evil.
	*Waving your hand.* In much of Europe waving your hand indicates a disagreement. However, in North America it is routinely used as a way to signal greetings or to get someone’s attention.

Figure 2.4.15: Gestures Around the Globe Adapted from information in Axtell, R. E. (1998). *Gestures: The do’s and taboos of body language around the world*. New York: John Wiley.

It’s easy to see how meaning could become confused, depending on how and when these signals are used. When in doubt, experts recommend that you ask someone around you to help you interpret the meaning of different gestures, that you be sensitive, and that you remain observant when dealing with a culture different from your own.

Key Takeaways

Ethical, forthright communication applies inside a company as well as externally with the public. Trying to cover up or ignore problems has been the downfall of many organizational members. There are differences in word meanings and nonverbal communication. For example, in North America, the nonverbal V means victory or peace, but in Australia means something closer to “take this,” which could still fit if your team wins a championship but probably isn’t exactly what was meant.

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2.5: Conclusion

In this chapter we have reviewed why effective communication matters to organizations. Communication may break down as a result of many communication barriers that may be attributed to the sender or receiver. Therefore, effective communication requires familiarity with the barriers. Choosing the right channel for communication is also important, because choosing the wrong medium undermines the message. When communication occurs in the cross-cultural context, extra caution is needed, given that different cultures have different norms regarding nonverbal communication, and different words will be interpreted differently across cultures. By being sensitive to the errors outlined in this chapter and adopting active listening skills, you may increase your communication effectiveness.

3: Intercultural and International Communication

> **Chapter Objectives**
>
> The purpose of this chapter is to:
>
> - Define high-context and low-context cultures
> - Explain the differences between globalization and global reach
> - Understand how business writing can bridge cultural differences
> - Define culture and intercultural communication
> - Define monochromic and polychronic time factors
> - Understand how business writing can foster community peacebuilding

WET Design Company and Its Corporate Culture

Employees at WET Design ("Wet and Wild") created the Fountains of Bellagio in Las Vegas, Nevada. What business communication significance does the Fountains of Bellagio hold? The answer is collaboration and innovation. Mark W. Fuller is the founder and CEO of WET Design. He has implemented a collaborative corporate culture model in which every employee is immersed in the company's structure.

When employees begin employment at WET, they spend two weeks working in all departments and experiencing a variety of tasks in each department. Throughout their tenure, employees are offered training opportunities pertaining to the company, in addition to creative classes on a variety of subjects such as meditation, woodworking, comedy improvisation, and fitness. Mr. Fuller believes this structure sparks creativity, innovation, collaboration, communication, and versatility, which are characteristics of strong teams. The goal is to give clients the best product and to give employees the opportunity for professional and personal development and growth.

Types of Cultural Communication

Culture is a learned system of behaviors and meanings that is shared amongst groups within a family, a community, or a nation. It is a set of common values, ideas, and actions that are passed from one generation to the next. Culture is multifaceted; therefore, it influences communication. It requires thinking beyond tolerance to learning about and embracing cultural differences.

Diversity recognizes individual differences and lived experiences. Subculture represents the ideas and ways of life of people within a diverse group. The range of human differences include but not limited to:

- Religious and spiritual beliefs
- Race
- Ancestry
- Nationality or ethnic origin
- Sex or gender
- Gender identity and/or gender expression
- Sexual orientation
- Ability
- Health
- Age and generation
- Military or veteran status
- Socioeconomic status and background
- Personal life experience
- Learning style and personality

The lived experiences of individuals in a subculture may differ from individuals within a larger culture.

Inclusive Language

Business communities and stakeholders are diverse. To ensure your writing promotes inclusion, justice, and equity, it is essential to use nondiscriminatory language.

Gender identification is an individual's personal choice. Stakeholders may not fit traditional gender categories; therefore, to presume gender is an act of exclusion. In business writing it is acceptable to use the plural pronoun *they/their* as a singular nongendered pronoun.

Example:

Each associate uploaded the performance training questionnaire to their evaluation folder.

You may add your preferred gender pronouns to your signature block closing.

Example:

Sincerely,

Valerie A. Gray, Professor of English

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

When you are communicating the same message to several receivers, for example a letter to employees regarding additional health care coverage, use plural pronouns or plural titles (associates, coordinators, facilitators, supervisors, trainers, etc).

Example:

All coordinators were invited to the debriefing meeting.

To learn more about gender cultural aspects and the history of inclusive pronouns, visit the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) Resource Center

Ethical Consideration

It is important to learn about cultures and subcultures. However, it is equally as important to avoid stereotyping individuals within a culture and subculture. A stereotype is an oversimplified opinion of a group and applying that opinion to everyone in that group. Stereotyping can lead to prejudice, bias, racism, and discrimination.

Understanding International Communication

International communication, also referred to as **global communication**, is the verbal, nonverbal, and oral communication that occurs between individuals from different international locations.

Global reach refers to the ability of a company to have customers worldwide.

Globalization refers to a company from one country agreeing to conduct business with a company in another country.

This video explains the complexities of globalization and its impact on various segments in business. As you view the video, consider the ways in which it is easy to hinder written business communication in global situations.

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Ethical Considerations for Cultural Global Advantage

In order to understand why businesses are willing to operate in a complex global environment, it is important to understand two fundamental concepts that drive almost all business decisions: absolute and comparative advantage. Countries and companies are willing to assume the risk of engaging in global trade because they believe that they have an advantage over the competition that they can turn into profits. Not all countries have the same natural resources, infrastructure, labor force, or technology. These differences create advantages that can be exploited in global trade, to a country's (or company's) benefit. As you analyze the audience and explain advantages and benefits, it is necessary to acknowledge concerns that citizens of the country have regarding their community in order to avoid damage to it.

Absolute Advantage

An entity (country, region, company, or individual) is considered to have an **absolute advantage** if either of the following conditions exists:

1. It is the only source of a particular product, good, or service. This kind of absolute advantage is very rare and usually depends on a particular natural resource being available only within a certain region or country.
2. An entity is also considered to have an absolute advantage if it is able to produce more of something than another entity while using the same amount of resources (factors of production).

Comparative Advantage

An entity (country, region, company, or individual) is considered to have a **comparative advantage** over another in producing a particular good or service if it can produce the good or service at a lower relative opportunity cost. (The section Ethical Considerations for Cultural Global Advantage is a derivative of *Absolute and Comparative Advantage*. **Authored by**: Linda Williams. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*)

The following videos explain the role globalization plays in international businesses.

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Cultural Competence

This video will assistance you with understanding how the formation of cultural competency will improve your international communication skills.

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Understanding Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is the ability to communicate sensitively, authenticity, and clearly with people from other cultures and countries. In order to be successful in cultural communication, intercultural awareness is a necessity. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall's cultural awareness led to the development of the types of culture: high-context and low-context.

In **high-context cultures**, interpersonal nonverbal communication is the primary way in which meaning is interpreted. Interpersonal nonverbal communication is expressed through eye contact, gestures, and the time it takes to respond to business correspondence. Because of their ability to read nonverbal cues, communicators in high-context cultures expect communicators from low-context cultures to interpret nonverbal communication; therefore, high-context communicators are more reserved in their speech. Hierarchial leadership is the business communication model.

In **low-context cultures**, verbal communication is the primary way in which meaning is interpreted. Verbal communication is expressed openly through discussing a topic face-to-face and reading detailed business documents.

Business-Specific Cultural Differences

Collectivism and Individualism

Within a business, **collectivism** is reflected in the team or collaborative approach; the performance of the group has precedence over each individual in the group. The preferred structure to complete tasks for high-context cultures is through collectivism.

Within a business, **individualism** is reflected in the individual approach; the performance of the individuals within the group has precedence. Individuals are expected to contribute to the group process. The preferred structure to complete tasks for low-context cultures is through individualism. Group members are often encouraged to share their opinions.

Knowledge is based on what is already known about the topic, in order to understand context and meaning. Communicators read nonverbal behavior and the environment in which the communication takes place. The following table provides additional categories of intercultural nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication	Cultural Context
Body language	Checking messages on your phone, fidgeting, or having a closed body position may suggest that you are uninterested or uncomfortable. In turn, your audience may feel disrespected or believe such actions are unprofessional.
Business versus personal relationships	Discussing your interests, family, and hobbies is an effective way to break the ice and build rapport with counterparts from other cultures.
Clothing	Clothing communicates cultural norms, trends, style, tradition, religion, status, and comfort.

Expressions and Eye Contact	Nodding and maintaining eye contact may indicate agreement, but not always. To ensure that everyone agrees and/or understands, incorporate various communication modes, written and oral, to ensure everyone agrees.
Gestures	Gestures are hand or head movements used to signal information such as emotions, attitudes, and intentions. The use and interpretation of gestures are based on one's culture. Therefore, gestures are not universal.
Space	Social distancing is a term that is in the international lexicon. Personal space throughout the world is six feet. Before COVID-19, it was customary for citizens of high-context cultures to communicate in close proximity of three feet or less.
Time	Time is categorized as monochronic and polychronic. Monochronic refers to doing or focusing on one task. Polychronic refers to doing or focusing on multiple tasks , or multitasking. In addition, monochronic individuals are time sensitive. When a meeting is scheduled to begin at 1:00 p.m. they expect the meeting to begin on time. Whereas polychronic individuals are not time sensitive. When a meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., they may not attend until 1:15 p.m. The lateness is not necessary disrespectful. Instead, polychronic individual prefer to take a leisurely and reflective approach to business.

High Context and Low-Context Spectrum of Countries: A Representative Table

The following chart categorizes high-context and low-context cultures.

High Context	Low Context
Brazil	Canada
China	Denmark
Colombia	Finland
Ghana	Germany
Mexico	Norway
Saudi Arabia	United States

High-Context and Low-Context Business Communication Differences: A Representative Table

The following chart presents differences in business communication based on high-context and low-context cultures.

High Context	Low Context
An oral agreement finalizes a deal	A written contract finalizes a deal
Complements are deflected	Complements are embraced
Word choice and style are formal	Business communication is formal or semi-formal, depending on the medium and the audience
Face-to-face communication relies more on nonverbal cues	Face-to-face communication relies more on oral cues
Time is spent discussing family, friends, and hobbies	Time is spent discussing business
Tasks are performed one at a time	Multitasking is common

Negative information is not communicated bluntly in order to avoid embarrassment for the recipient (also known as “saving face”); an indirect communication method is preferred	Negative information is communicated at times, too bluntly; a direct communication method is preferred

The following videos provide an overview of nonverbal intercultural communication. The videos are sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

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Formalize Your Writing to Produce Clarity in Intercultural Communication

To lessen miscommunication between cultures and within cultures, focus on explaining meaning to ensure readers understand your points. Your writing goal is denotation and eliminating abstract expressions such as clichés, stock expressions. **Denotation** refers to using words that are concrete and explanations that are clear to ensure that all members in your audience have the same understanding.

Another way to clarify your writing is to eliminate euphemisms. **Euphemisms** refer to abstract expressions that are used within a culture or subculture as a way to soften a word or phrase that may be too harsh.

Nuances of Language

Readers may interpret written text based on the language and grammar conventions of their primary language. It may be difficult to switch to the standards of another language because of the variances in word choice, structure, development, grammar, and style. Additional time to complete the drafting and editing stages of the writing process, and collaborating with colleagues may be necessary.

Peacebuilding, Justice, and Business Communication

Peacebuilding is a key factor to ensuring a company does not take advantage of a country's resources. The term peacebuilding ("United Nations," para.1) was first introduced by Johan Galtung, a conflict and peace scholar, to present strategies for lasting peace by addressing the "root causes" of violent conflict. Peacebuilding addresses the reasons for conflict and establishes ways for peaceful relationships through empowerment by those in conflict to reach peaceful solutions. In this way, peacebuilding serves as a business strategy for all stakeholders to work together to create a culture of peace. Peacebuilding in business encompasses employers and employees providing a safe work environment free from harassment and bullying; governance and policing that is fair and just; safe environmental conditions regardless of location; and a global perspective that incorporates cultural differences.

Stakeholders can practice peacebuilding on a small scale by, for example:

- Marching for a social justice cause
- Boycotting a company that does not share your view on a social justice issue
- Writing to the CEO of a company to complain about its hiring policies
- Signing petitions and emailing the CEO to encourage her or him to offer only non-genetically modified foods

These categories require companies to have an environmental and social agenda:

- Safe workplace
- Fair policies
- Safe environment
- Global perspective

Cultural Considerations Summary

This chapter provides strategies for writing documents that address international and intercultural communication, and the responsibilities stakeholders assign to businesses that are local and international. To lessen miscommunication between cultures and within cultures, focus on writing with denotation and eliminating abstract expressions such as clichés, euphemisms, and expressions.

General Intercultural Writing Tips

The successful intercultural business communicator is:

• Aware that their preferred values and behaviors are influenced by culture and are not necessarily correct

• Aware that language choices can lead to miscommunication

• Flexible and open to change

• Sensitive to verbal and nonverbal behavior

• Sensitive to differences among individuals within a culture

• Aware of the values, beliefs, and practices in other cultures

• Aware that one way of conducting business is not the only way

• Celebrates commonalities and differences

All links live as of July 2021.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Meeting Etiquette and Group Dymanics

Groups have existed throughout human history and continue to follow familiar patterns across emerging venues as we adapt to technology, computer-mediated interaction, suburban sprawl, and modern life. We need groups, and groups need us. Our relationship with groups warrants attention on this interdependence as we come to know our communities, our world, and ourselves. This will be the focus of this chapter.

4.1: Prelude to Working Effectively in Groups

Significant portions of this chapter were adapted from Scott McLean's *Business Communication for Success* textbook with permission of the author.[1]

Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

- Andrew Carnegie

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

Teamwork at Quick-Lube

At Quick-Lube, the promise to customers is to change oil within ten minutes. There is no way that Quick-Lube could do this without teamwork. For example, in one shift, there is someone assigned as the customer interface, the below hood, and the above hood. The duties of the customer interface include checking people in, moving the car into the stall, and managing the oil change process. The below the hood person is responsible for draining the oil and replacing it. The above hood person washes the windows, vacuums the floors, and also checks the above the hood items such as the air filter. All of these people must communicate well in order to finish the job in ten minutes. Sometimes, on busy days such as Saturday afternoon, this can be stressful, but each team member knows their job, which creates a better and faster customer experience.

As humans, we are social beings. We naturally form relationships with others, as in our opening example of Quick-Lube. Sometimes forming relationships is necessary to serve the customer best. In fact, relationships are often noted as one of the most important aspects of a person's life, and they exist in many forms. Interpersonal communication occurs between two people, but group communication may involve two or more individuals. Groups are a primary context for interaction within the business community. Groups may have heroes, enemies, and sages alongside new members. Groups overlap and may share common goals, but they may also engage in conflict. Groups can be supportive or coercive and can exert powerful influences over individuals.

Within a group, individuals may behave in distinct ways, use unique or specialized terms, or display symbols that have meaning to that group. Those same terms or symbols may be confusing, meaningless, or even unacceptable to another group. An individual may belong to both groups, adapting his or her communication patterns to meet group normative expectations. Groups are increasingly important across social media venues, and there are many examples of successful business ventures on the web that value and promote group interaction.

Groups use words to exchange meaning, establish territory, and identify who is a stranger versus who is a trusted member. Are you familiar with the term "troll"? It is often used to identify someone who is not a member of an online group or community; does not share the values and beliefs of the group; and posts a message in an online discussion board to initiate flame wars, cause disruption, or otherwise challenge the group members. Members often use words to respond to the challenge that are not otherwise common in the discussions, and the less-than-flattering descriptions of the troll are a rallying point.

Groups have existed throughout human history and continue to follow familiar patterns across emerging venues as we adapt to technology, computer-mediated interaction, suburban sprawl, and modern life. We need groups, and groups need us. Our relationship with groups warrants attention on this interdependence as we come to know our communities, our world, and ourselves. This will be the focus of this chapter.

4.2: What is a Group?

Learning Objectives

- Be able to explain the meaning of a group and a team.
- Discuss how primary and secondary groups meet our interpersonal needs.
- Discuss how we can understand group norms in our own current or future workplace.

Our ability to work effectively in a group shows our emotional intelligence skills of social awareness, self-awareness, and our ability to manage relationships. We cannot have relationships with others if we do not have a sense of ourselves. To maintain those relationships, we need to have social awareness and be able to manage those relationships in a positive way. Let’s get into a time machine and travel way, way back to join early humans in prehistoric times. Their needs are like ours today: they cannot exist or thrive without air, food, and water—and a sense of belonging. How did they meet these needs? Through cooperation and competition. If food scarcity was an issue, who got more and who got less? This serves as our first introduction to roles, status and power, and hierarchy within a group. When food scarcity becomes an issue, who gets to keep their spoon? In some Latin American cultures, having a job or earning a living is referred to by the slang term *cuchara*, which literally means “spoon” and figuratively implies food, safety, and security.

Now let’s return to the present and enter a modern office. Cubicles define territories and corner offices denote status. In times of economic recession or slumping sales for the company, there is a greater need for cooperation, and there is competition for scarce resources. The loss of a “spoon”—or of one’s cubicle—may now come in the form of a pink slip, but it is no less devastating.

We form self-identities through our communication with others, and much of that interaction occurs in a group context. A group may be defined as three or more individuals who affiliate, interact, or cooperate in a familial, social, or work context. **Group communication** may be defined as the exchange of information with those who are alike culturally, linguistically, and/or geographically. Group members may be known by their symbols, such as patches and insignia on a military uniform. They may be known by their use of specialized language or jargon; for example, someone in information technology may use the term “server” in reference to the Internet, whereas someone in the food service industry may use “server” to refer to the worker who takes customer orders in a restaurant. Group members may also be known by their proximity, as in gated communities. Regardless of how the group defines itself, and regardless of the extent to which its borders are porous or permeable, a group recognizes itself as a group. Humans naturally make groups a part of their context or environment.

Types of Groups in the Workplace

As a skilled communicator, learning more about groups and group dynamics will serve you well. Mergers, forced sales, downsizing, and entering new markets all call upon individuals within a business or organization to become members of groups. Groups may be defined by function. They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by the relationships within them. Groups can also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs.

Some groups may be assembled at work to solve problems, and once the challenge has been resolved, they dissolve into previous or yet to be determined groups. Functional groups like this may be immediately familiar to you. You take a class in sociology from a professor of sociology, who is a member of the discipline of sociology. To be a member of a discipline is to be a disciple, and adhere to a common framework to for viewing the world. Disciplines involve a common set of theories that explain the world around us, terms to explain those theories, and have grown to reflect the advance of human knowledge. Compared to your sociology instructor, your physics instructor may see the world from a completely different perspective. Still, both may be members of divisions or schools, dedicated to teaching or research, and come together under the large group heading we know as the university.

In business, we may have marketing experts who are members of the marketing department, who perceive their tasks differently from a member of the sales staff or someone in accounting. You may work in the mailroom, and the mailroom staff is a group in itself, both distinct from and interconnected with the larger organization.

Figure 4.2.1: Groups and teams are an important part of any type of communication that happens at work.

Relationships are part of any group and can be described in terms of status, power, control, as well as role, function, or viewpoint. Within a family, for example, the ties that bind you together may be common experiences, collaborative efforts, and even pain and suffering. The birth process may forge a relationship between mother and daughter, but it also may not. An adoption may transform a family. Relationships are formed through communication interaction across time and often share a common history, values, and beliefs about the world around us.

In business, an idea may bring professionals together and they may even refer to the new product or service as their “baby,” speaking in reverent tones about a project they have taken from the drawing board and “birthed” into the real world. As in family communication, work groups or teams may have challenges, rivalries, and even “birthing pains” as a product is developed, adjusted, adapted, and transformed. Struggles are a part of relationships, both in families and business, and form a common history of shared challenges overcome through effort and hard work.

Through conversations and a shared sense that you and your coworkers belong together, you meet many of your basic human needs, such as the need to feel included, the need for affection, and the need for control.[1] In a work context, “affection” may sound odd, but we all experience affection at work in the form of friendly comments like “good morning,” “have a nice weekend,” and “good job!” Our professional lives also fulfill more than just our basic needs (i.e., air, food, and water, as well as safety). While your work group may be gathered together with common goals, such as to deliver the mail in a timely fashion to the corresponding departments and individuals, your daily interactions may well go beyond this functional perspective.

In the same way, your family may provide a place for you at the table and meet your basic needs, but they also may not meet other needs. If you grow to understand yourself and your place in a way that challenges group norms, you will be able to choose which parts of your life to share and to withhold in different groups, and to choose where to seek acceptance, affection, and control.

Primary and Secondary Groups

There are fundamentally two types of groups that can be observed in many contexts, from church to school, family to work. These two types are primary and secondary groups. The hierarchy denotes the degree to which the group(s) meet your interpersonal needs. **Primary groups** meet most, if not all, of one’s needs. Groups that meet some, but not all, needs are called **secondary groups**. Secondary groups often include work groups, where the goal is to complete a task or solve a problem. If you are a member of the sales department, your purpose is to sell.

In terms of problem solving, work groups can accomplish more than individuals can. People, each of whom have specialized skills, talents, experience, or education come together in new combinations with new challenges, find new perspectives to create unique approaches that they themselves would not have formulated alone.

Secondary groups may meet your need for professional acceptance and celebrate your success, but they may not meet your need for understanding and sharing on a personal level. Family members may understand you in ways that your coworkers cannot, and vice versa.

If Two’s Company and Three’s a Crowd, What Is a Group?

This old cliché refers to the human tendency to form pairs. Pairing is the most basic form of relationship formation; it applies to childhood best friends, college roommates, romantic couples, business partners, and many other dyads (two-person relationships). A **group**, by definition, includes at least three people. We can categorize groups in terms of their size and complexity.

When we discuss demographic groups as part of a market study, we may focus on large numbers of individuals that share common characteristics. If you are the producer of an ecologically innovative car such as the Smart ForTwo and know your customers have an average of four members in their family, you may discuss developing a new model with additional seats. While the target audience is a group, car customers don't relate to each other as a unified whole. Even if they form car clubs and have regional gatherings, a newsletter, and competitions at their local race tracks each year, they still subdivide the overall community of car owners into smaller groups.

The larger the group grows, the more likely it is to subdivide. Analysis of these smaller, or microgroups, is increasingly a point of study as the Internet allows individuals to join people of similar mind or habit to share virtually anything across time and distance. A **microgroup** is a small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or association with a larger group. With each additional group member the number of possible interactions increases.[2],[3]

Small groups normally contain between three and eight people. One person may involve intrapersonal communication, while two may constitute interpersonal communication, and both may be present within a group communication context. You may think to yourself before making a speech or writing your next post, and you may turn to your neighbor or coworker and have a side conversation, but a group relationship normally involves three to eight people, and the potential for distraction is great.

In Table $4.2.1$, you can quickly see how the number of possible interactions grows according to how many people are in the group. At some point, we all find the possible and actual interactions overwhelming and subdivide into smaller groups. For example, you may have hundreds of friends on MySpace or Facebook, but how many of them do you regularly communicate with? You may be tempted to provide a number greater than eight, but if you exclude the "all to one" messages, such as a general tweet to everyone (but no one person in particular), you'll find the group norms will appear.

Table $4.2.1$ Possible Interaction in Groups

Number of group members	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of possible interactions	2	9	28	75	186	441	1,056

Group norms are customs, standards, and behavioral expectations that emerge as a group forms. If you post an update every day on your Facebook page and your friends stop by to post on your wall and comment, not posting for a week will violate a group norm. They will wonder if you are sick or in the hospital where you have no access to a computer to keep them updated. If, however, you only post once a week, the group will come to naturally expect your customary post. Norms involve expectations that are self and group imposed and that often arise as groups form and develop.

If there are more than eight members, it becomes a challenge to have equal participation, where everyone has a chance to speak, listen, and respond. Some will dominate, others will recede, and smaller groups will form. Finding a natural balance within a group can also be a challenge. Small groups need to have enough members to generate a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas, information, and interaction, but not so many people that what each brings cannot be shared.[4]

Key Takeaways

- Forming groups fulfills many human needs, such as the need for affiliation, affection, and control; individuals also need to cooperate in groups to fulfill basic survival needs.
- Part of our ability to be successful at work depends on our ability to work in groups.
- A primary group is one that meets most, if not all of your needs.
- Secondary groups are groups that may meet some but not all of your needs. Secondary groups are normally those found in the workplace, while our family and friends might be considered a primary group.
- A group consists of at least three people.

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4.3: Group Life Cycles and Member Roles

Learning Objectives

- Identify the typical stages in the life cycle of a group you have worked with.
- Describe different types of group members and group member roles.

Groups are dynamic systems in constant change. Groups grow together and eventually come apart. People join groups and others leave. This dynamic changes and transforms the very nature of the group. **Group socialization** involves how the group members interact with one another and form relationships. Just as you were once born and changed your family, they changed you. You came to know a language and culture, a value system, and a set of beliefs that influence you to this day. You came to be socialized, to experience the process of learning to associate, communicate, or interact within a group. A group you belong to this year—perhaps a soccer team or the cast of a play—may not be part of your life next year. And those who are in leadership positions may ascend or descend the leadership hierarchy as the needs of the group, and other circumstances, change over time.

Group Life Cycle Patterns

Your life cycle is characterized by several steps, and while it doesn't follow a prescribed path, there are universal stages we can all recognize. You were born. You didn't choose your birth, your parents, your language, or your culture, but you came to know them through communication. You came to know yourself, learned skills, discovered talents, and met other people. You learned, worked, lived, and loved, and as you aged, minor injuries took longer to heal. You competed in ever-increasing age groups in your favorite sport, and while your time for each performance may have increased as you age, your experience allowed you to excel in other ways. Where you were once a novice, you have now learned something to share. You lived to see some of your friends pass before you, and the moment will arrive when you too must confront death.

In the same way, groups experience similar steps and stages and take on many of the characteristics we associate with life.[1] They grow, overcome illness and dysfunction, and transform across time. No group, just as no individual, lives forever.

Your first day on the job may be comparable to the first day you went to school. At home, you may have learned some of the basics, like how to write with a pencil, but knowledge of that skill and its application are two different things. In school, people spoke and acted in different ways than at home. Gradually, you came to understand the meaning of recess, the importance of raising your hand to get the teacher's attention, and how to follow other school rules. At work, you may have had academic training for your profession, but the knowledge you learned in school only serves as your foundation—much as your **socialization at** home served to guide you at school. On the job, they use jargon terms, have schedules that may include coffee breaks (recess), have a supervisor (teacher), and have rules, explicit and understood. On the first day, it was all new, even if many of the elements were familiar.

In order to better understand group development and its life cycle, many researchers have described the universal stages and phases of groups. While there are modern interpretations of these stages, most draw from the model proposed by Bruce Tuckman.[2] This model, shown in Table $4.3.1$ below [3] specifies the usual order of the phases of group development and allows us to predict several stages we can anticipate as we join a new group.

Table 4.3.1 Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development

Stages	Activities
Forming	Members come together, learn about each other, and determine the purpose of the group.
Storming	Members engage in more direct communication and get to know each other. Conflicts between group members will often arise during this stage.
Norming	Members establish spoken or unspoken rules about how they communicate and work. Status, rank, and roles in the group are established.
Performing	Members fulfill their purpose and reach their goal.

Stages	Activities
Adjourning	Members leave the group.

Tuckman begins with the **forming stage** as the initiation of group formation. This stage is also called the orientation stage because individual group members come to know each other. Group members who are new to each other and can't predict each other's behavior can be expected to experience the stress of uncertainty. **Uncertainty theory** states that we choose to know more about others with whom we have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown.[4],[5],[6] The more we know about others and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts. If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later in the week. Individuals are initially tentative and display caution as they begin to learn about the group and its members.

If you don't know someone very well, it is easy to offend. Each group member brings to the group a set of experiences, combined with education and a self-concept. You won't be able to read this information on a nametag, but instead, you will only come to know it through time and interaction. Since the possibility of overlapping and competing viewpoints and perspectives exists, the group will experience a **storming stage**, a time of struggles as the members themselves sort out their differences. There may be more than one way to solve the problem or task at hand, and some group members may prefer one strategy over another. Some members of the group may be more senior to the organization than you, and members may treat them differently. Some group members may be as new as you are and just as uncertain about everyone's talents, skills, roles, and self-perceptions. The wise business communicator will anticipate the storming stage and help facilitate opportunities for the members to resolve uncertainty before the work commences. There may be challenges for leadership, and there may be conflicting viewpoints. The sociology professor sees the world differently than the physics professor. The sales agent sees things differently than someone from accounting. A manager who understands and anticipates this normal challenge in the group's life cycle can help the group become more productive.

A clear definition of the purpose and mission of the group can help the members focus their energies. Interaction prior to the first meeting can help reduce uncertainty. Coffee and calories can help bring a group together. Providing the group with what they need and opportunities to know each other prior to their task can increase efficiency.

Groups that make a successful transition from the storming stage will next experience the **norming stage** Time when the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behavior and interaction., where the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behavior and interaction. Who speaks first? Who takes notes? Who is creative, who is visual, and who is detail-oriented? Sometimes our job titles and functions speak for themselves, but human beings are complex. We are not simply a list of job functions, and in the dynamic marketplace of today's business environment, you will often find that people have talents and skills well beyond their "official" role or task. Drawing on these strengths can make the group more effective.

The norming stage is marked by less division and more collaboration. The level of anxiety associated with interaction is generally reduced, making for a more positive work climate that promotes listening. When people feel less threatened and their needs are met, they are more likely to focus their complete attention on the purpose of the group. If they are still concerned with who does what and whether they will speak in error, the interaction framework will stay in the storming stage. Tensions are reduced when the normative expectations are known and the degree to which a manager can describe these at the outset can reduce the amount of time the group remains in uncertainty. Group members generally express more satisfaction with clear expectations and are more inclined to participate.

Ultimately, the purpose of a workgroup is performance, and the preceding stages lead us to the **performing stage**, in which the group accomplishes its mandate, fulfills its purpose, and reaches its goals. To facilitate performance, group members can't skip the initiation of getting to know each other or the sorting out of roles and norms, but they can try to focus on performance with clear expectations from the moment the group is formed. Productivity is often how we measure success in business and industry, and the group has to produce. Outcome assessments may have been built into the system from the beginning to serve as a benchmark for success. Wise managers know how to celebrate success, as it brings more success, social cohesion, group participation, and a sense of job satisfaction. Incremental gains toward a benchmark may also be cause for celebration and support, and failure to reach a goal should be regarded as an opportunity for clarification.

It is generally wiser to focus on the performance of the group rather than individual contributions. Managers and group members will want to offer assistance to underperformers as well as congratulate members for their contributions. If the goal is to create a community where competition pushes each member to perform, individual highlights may serve your needs, but if you want a group to solve a problem or address a challenge as a group, you have to promote group cohesion. Members need to feel a sense of belonging, and praise (or the lack thereof) can be a sword with two edges: one stimulates and motivates while the other demoralizes and divides.

The Group Development Process

Groups should be designed to produce and perform in ways and at levels that individuals cannot, or else you should consider compartmentalizing the tasks. The performing stage is where productivity occurs, and it is necessary to make sure the group has what it needs to perform. Missing pieces, parts, or information can stall the group and reset the cycle to storming all over again. Loss of performance is inefficiency, which carries a cost. Managers will be measured by the group's productivity and performance. Make sure the performing stage is one that is productive and healthy for its members.

Imagine that you are the manager of a group that has produced an award-winning design for an ecologically innovative four-seat car. Their success is your success. Their celebrations are yours even if the success is not focused on you. A manager manages the process while group members perform. If you were a member of the group that helped design the belt line, you made a fundamental contribution to the style of the car. Individual consumers may never consider the line from the front fender, across the doors, to the rear taillight as they make a purchase decision, but they will recognize beauty. You will know that you could not have achieved that fundamental part of car design without help from the engineers in the group, and if the number-crunching accountants had not seen the efficiency of the production process that produced it, it may never have survived the transition from prototype to production. The group came together and accomplished its goals with amazing results.

Now, as typically happens, all groups will eventually have to move on to new assignments. In the **adjourning stage**, members leave the group. The group may cease to exist or it may be transformed with new members and a new set of goals. Your contributions in the past may have caught the attention of the management, and you may be assigned to redesign the flagship vehicle, the halo car of your marque or brand. It's quite a professional honor, and it's yours because of your successful work in a group. Others will be reassigned to tasks that require their talents and skills, and you may or may not collaborate with them in the future.

the group development process

Video 4.3.1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEJaz3sinEs

The movie Remember The Titans shows the group development process.

You may miss the interactions with the members, even the more cantankerous ones, and will experience both relief and a sense of loss. Like life, the group process is normal, and mixed emotions are to be expected. A wise manager anticipates this stage and facilitates the separation with skill and ease. We often close this process with a ritual marking its passing, though the ritual may be as formal as an award or as informal as a “thank you” or a verbal acknowledgment of a job well done over coffee and calories.

On a more sober note, it is important not to forget that groups can reach the adjourning stage without having achieved success. Some businesses go bankrupt, some departments are closed, and some individuals lose their positions after a group fails to perform. Adjournment can come suddenly and unexpectedly or gradually and piece by piece. Either way, a skilled business communicator will be prepared and recognize it as part of the classic group life cycle.

Why Human Relations?

Without a doubt, most if not all of us will work in groups in our workplace. Even if we seem to have a somewhat isolated job, part of what we do will impact others. Developing skills that can help us work better in these groups relates to the social awareness and relationship management aspects of emotional intelligence, as we discussed in Chapter 2. **These two skills—the ability to understand social cues that can be affecting others and our ability to communicate and maintain good relationships—are the cornerstones in any group situation.**

For example, in the group development process, we depend greatly on our social awareness skills in order to make successful first impressions during the forming stage. We use our ability to resolve conflict during the storming and norming phase. Having the skills to handle these different phases are key to successful and productive group work. Have you ever worked with a dysfunctional group, perhaps on a class project? These types of groups are lacking in communication and possibly emotional intelligence skills, which can make the group more cohesive. **Group cohesiveness is the goal in any type of group setting. This makes the performing stage more productive, less stressful, and maybe even enjoyable!**

In a study by Jordan and Troth, there was a significant correlation between higher team performance and the emotional intelligence skills of the team members.[7] **Being able to understand your own emotions (self-awareness), manage them (self-management), and establish positive relationships built on trust is what makes groups work most effectively.**

Life Cycle of Member Roles

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so do the group members fulfill different roles during this life cycle. These roles, proposed by Richard Moreland and John Levine,[8] are summarized in Table $4.3.2$.[9]

Table $4.3.2$: Life Cycle of Member Roles

Potential member	Curiosity and interest
New member	Joined the group but still an outsider, and unknown
Full member	Knows the “rules” and is looked to for leadership
Divergent member	Focuses on differences
Marginal member	No longer involved
Ex-Member	No longer considered a member

Suppose you are about to graduate from school and you are in the midst of an employment search. You’ve gathered extensive information on a couple of local businesses and are aware that they will be participating in the university job fair. You’ve explored their websites, talked to people currently employed at each company, and learned what you can from the public information available. At this stage, you are considered a **potential member**. You may have an electrical, chemical, or mechanical engineering degree soon, but you are not a member of an engineering team.

You show up at the job fair in professional attire and completely prepared. The representatives of each company are respectful, cordial, and give you contact information. One of them even calls a member of the organization on the spot and arranges an interview for you next week. You are excited at the prospect and want to learn more. You are still a potential member.

The interview goes well the following week. The day after the meeting, you receive a call for a follow-up interview that leads to a committee interview. A few weeks later, the company calls you with a job offer. However, in the meantime, you have also been interviewing with other potential employers, and you are waiting to hear back from two of them. You are still a potential member.

After careful consideration, you decide to take the job offer and start the next week. The projects look interesting, you’ll be gaining valuable experience, and the commute to work is reasonable. Your first day on the job is positive, and they’ve assigned you a mentor. The conversations are positive, but you feel lost at times, as if they are speaking a language you can't quite grasp. As a **new group member**, your level of acceptance will increase as you begin learning the groups' rules, spoken and unspoken.[10] You will gradually move from the potential member role to the role of new group member as you learn to fit into the group.

Over time and projects, you gradually increase your responsibilities. You are no longer looked at as the new person, and you can follow almost every conversation. You can't quite say, "I remember when," because your tenure hasn't been that long, but you are a known quantity and know your way around. You are a full member of the group. **Full members** enjoy knowing the rules and customs and can even create new rules. New group members look to full members for leadership and guidance. Full group members can control the agenda and have considerable influence on the agenda and activities.

Full members of a group, however, can and do come into conflict. When you were a new member, you may have remained silent when you felt you had something to say, but now you state your case. There is more than one way to get the job done. You may suggest new ways that emphasize efficiency over existing methods. Coworkers who have been working in the department for several years may be unwilling to adapt and change, resulting in tension. Expressing different views can cause conflict and may even interfere with communication.

When this type of tension arises, **divergent group members** pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group. Divergent group members have less eye contact, seek out each other's opinion less frequently, and listen defensively. At the beginning of the process, you felt a sense of belonging, but now you don't. **Marginal group members** start to look outside the group for their interpersonal needs.

After several months of trying to cope with these adjustments, you decide that you never really investigated the other two companies, that your job search process was incomplete. Perhaps you should take a second look at the options. You will report to work on Monday but will start the process of becoming an **ex-member**, one who no longer belongs. You may experience a sense of relief upon making this decision, given that you haven't felt like you belonged to the group for a while. When you line up your next job and submit your resignation, you make it official.

This process has no set timetable. Some people overcome differences and stay in the group for years; others get promoted and leave the group only when they get transferred to regional headquarters. As a skilled business communicator, you will recognize the signs of divergence, just as you have anticipated the storming stage and do your best to facilitate success.

Group Member Roles

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Table 3 and 4 list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting.[15],[16]

Table 3: Positive Roles

Initiator-coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques

Table 4: Negative Roles

Dominator	Dominates discussion, not allowing others to take their turn
Recognition seeker	Relates discussion to their accomplishments; seeks attention
Special-interest pleader	Relates discussion to special interest or personal agenda
Blocker	Blocks attempts at consensus consistently
Joker or clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracts group members

Now that we've examined a classical view of positive and negative group member roles, let's examine another perspective. While some personality traits and behaviors may negatively influence groups, some are positive or negative depending on the context.

Just as the class clown can have a positive effect in lifting spirits or a negative effect in distracting members, a dominator may be exactly what is needed for quick action. An emergency physician doesn't have time to ask all the group members in the emergency unit how they feel about a course of action; instead, a self-directed approach based on training and experience may be necessary. In contrast, the pastor of a church may have ample opportunity to ask members of the congregation their opinions about a change in the format of Sunday services; in this situation, the role of coordinator or elaborator is more appropriate than that of dominator.

The group is together because they have a purpose or goal, and normally they are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that. If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. But if that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behavior, then the behavior becomes a problem. To become effective at human relations skills, learn how to work in groups. The use of emotional intelligence skills in relationship management can help achieve this goal.

Key Takeaways

- Groups and their individual members come together and grow apart in predictable patterns.
- Group lifecycle patterns refer to the process or stages of group development.
- There are five stages to the group development process, which include forming, norming, storming, performing, and adjourning.
- Within each of the stages, group members have a variety of roles, which include potential member, new member, full member, divergent member, marginal member, and an ex-member.
- You can take on a variety of roles when working with a group. These roles can be positive or negative, and you can rely on your emotional intelligence skills to make sure they are positive.oup, how and why you became a member, and how and why you left. Share your description with a classmate.

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4.4: Effective Group Meetings

Learning Objectives

- Understand how you can prepare for and conduct meetings.
- Understand how you can use technology to aid in group communications.
- Understand the basic principles of organizational communication.

Business and professional meetings are a part of the communication climate of any business. Some view meetings as boring, pointless, and futile exercises, while others see them as opportunities to exchange information and produce results. A combination of preparation and execution makes all the difference. Remember, too, that meetings do not have to take place in a physical space where the participants meet face to face. Instead, a number of technological tools make it possible to hold virtual meetings in which the participants are half a world away from one another. Virtual meetings are formally arranged gatherings where participants, located in distinct geographic locations, come together via the Internet.

Preparation

A meeting, like a problem-solving group, needs a clear purpose statement. The specific goal for the specific meeting will clearly relate to the overall goal of the group or committee. Determining your purpose is central to an effective meeting and getting together just to get together is called a party, not a meeting. Do not schedule a meeting just because you met at the same time last month or because it is a standing committee. Members will resent the intrusion into their schedules and quickly perceive the lack of purpose.

Similarly, if the need for a meeting arises, do not rush into it without planning. A poorly planned meeting announced at the last minute is sure to be less than effective. People may be unable to change their schedules, may fail to attend, or may impede the progress and discussion of the group because of their absence. Those who attend may feel hindered because they needed more time to prepare and present comprehensive results to the group or committee.

If a meeting is necessary, and a clear purpose can be articulated, then you'll need to decide how and where to meet. Distance is no longer an obstacle to participation, as we will see later in this section when we explore some of the technologies for virtual meetings. However, there are many advantages to meeting in person. People communicate not just with words but also with their body language—facial expressions, hand gestures, head nodding or head shaking, and posture. These subtleties of communication can be key to determining how group members really feel about an issue or question. Meeting in real time can be important, too, as all group members have the benefit of receiving new information at the same time. For purposes of our present discussion, we will focus on meetings taking place face to face in real time.

If you have a purpose statement for the meeting, then it also follows that you should be able to create an agenda or a list of topics to be discussed. You may need to solicit information from members to formulate an agenda, and this premeeting contact can serve to encourage active participation. The agenda will have a time, date, place, and method of interaction noted, as well as a list of participants. It will also have a statement of purpose, a list of points to be considered, and a brief summary of relevant information that relates to each point. The start and end times need to be clearly indicated somewhere on the agenda, and it is always a good idea to leave time at the end for questions and additional points that individual members may want to share. If the meeting has an emotional point or theme, or the news is negative, plan for additional time for discussion, clarification, and recycling of conversations as the participants process the information.

If you are planning an intense work session, you need to consider the number of possible interactions among the participants and limit them. Smaller groups are generally more productive. If you are gathering to present information or to motivate the sales staff, a large audience, where little interaction is expected, is appropriate. Each member has a role, and attention to how and why they are interacting will produce the best results. Review the stages of group formation in view of the idea that a meeting is a short-term group. You can anticipate a "forming" stage, and if roles are not clear, there may be a bit of "storming" before the group establishes norms and becomes productive. Adding additional participants for no clear reason will only make the process more complex and may produce negative results.

Inviting the participants via e-mail has become increasingly common across business and industry. Software programs like Microsoft Outlook allow you to initiate a meeting request and receive an "accept" or "decline" response that makes the invitation process organized and straightforward. Reliance on a software program, however, may not be enough to encourage and ensure participation. A reminder on the individual's computer may go off fifteen minutes prior to the meeting, but if they are away from their computer or if Outlook is not running, the reminder will go unseen and unheard. A reminder e-mail on the day of the meeting, often early in the morning, can serve as a personal effort to highlight the activities of the day.

If you are the person responsible for the room reservation, confirm the reservation a week before the meeting and again the day before the meeting. Redundancy in the confirmation process can help eliminate **double-booking** a room, where two meetings are scheduled at the same time. If technology is required at the meeting, such as a microphone, conference telephone, or laptop and projector, make sure you confirm their reservation at the same time as you confirm the meeting room reservation. Always personally inspect the room and test these systems prior to the meeting. There is nothing more embarrassing than introducing a high-profile speaker, such as the company president, and then finding that the PowerPoint projector is not working properly.

Conducting the Meeting

The world is a stage and a meeting is a performance, the same as an interview or speech presentation. Each member has a part to perform and they should each be aware of their roles and responsibilities prior to the meeting. Everyone is a member of the group, ranging from new members to full members. If you can reduce or eliminate the storming stage, all the better. A clearly defined agenda can be a productive tool for this effort.

People may know each other by role or title but may not be familiar with each other. Brief introductions can serve to establish identity, credibility, and help the group transition to performance. The purpose of the meeting should be clearly stated, and if there are rules or guidelines that require a specific protocol, they should be introduced.

Mary Ellen Guffey[1] provides a useful participant checklist that is adapted here for our use:

- Arrive on time and stay until the meeting adjourns (unless there are prior arrangements).
- Leave the meeting only for established breaks or emergencies.
- Be prepared and have everything you need on hand.
- Turn off cell phones and personal digital assistants.
- Follow the established protocol for turn taking.
- Respect time limits.
- Demonstrate professionalism in your verbal and nonverbal interactions.
- Communicate interest and stay engaged in the discussion.
- Avoid tangents and side discussions.
- Respect space and don't place your notebook or papers all around you.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Engage in polite conversation after the conclusion.

If you are cast in the role of meeting leader, you may need to facilitate the discussion and address conflict. The agenda serves as your guide and you may need to redirect the discussion to the topic, but always demonstrate respect for each and every member. You may also need to intervene if a point has reached a stalemate in terms of conflict (this text offers specific guidelines for managing interpersonal conflict that apply here).

There has been quite a discussion on the role of seating arrangements in meeting within the field of business communication. Generally, a table that is square, rectangular, or U-shaped has a fixed point at which the attention is directed, often referred to as the head of the table. This space is often associated with power, status, and hierarchy and may play an important role in the flow of interactions across the meeting. If information is to be distributed and presented from administration to managers, for example, a table with a clear focal point for the head or CEO may be indicated. Tables that are round, or tables arranged in a circular pattern, allow for a more egalitarian model of interaction, reducing the hierarchical aspects while reinforcing the clear line of sight among all participants. If a meeting requires intense interaction and collaboration, generally a round table or a circular pattern is indicated.

Some meetings do not call for a table but rather rows of seats all facing toward the speaker; you probably recognize this arrangement from many class lectures you have attended. For relatively formal meetings in which information is being delivered to a large number of listeners and little interaction is desired, seating in rows is an efficient use of space.

Transitions are often the hardest part of any meeting. Facilitating the transition from one topic to the next may require you to create links between each point. You can specifically note the next point on the agenda and verbally introduce the next speaker or person responsible for the content area. Once the meeting has accomplished its goals in the established time frame, it is time to facilitate the transition to a conclusion. You may conclude by summarizing what has been discussed or decided and what actions the group members are to take as a result of the meeting. If there is a clear purpose for holding a subsequent meeting, discuss the time and date and specifically note assignments for next time.

Feedback is an important part of any communication interaction. Minutes are a written document that serves to record the interaction and can provide an opportunity for clarification. Minutes often appear as the agenda with notes in relation to actions taken during the meeting or specific indications of who is responsible for what before the next meeting. In many organizations, minutes of the meeting are tentative, like a rough draft, until they are approved by the members of the group or committee. Normally minutes are sent within a week of the meeting if it is a monthly event and more quickly if the need to meet more frequently has been determined. If your organization does not call for minutes, you can still benefit by reviewing your notes after a meeting and comparing them with those of others to make sure you understood what was discussed and did not miss—or misinterpret—any key information.

The following links provide important information on planning meetings:

How To Effectively Plan Business Meetings (With Tips): https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-plan-meetings

Guide To Creating a Project Status Meeting Agenda (With Template): https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/project-status-meeting-agenda-template

How To Write Meeting Minutes in 7 Steps (With Tips): https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-meeting-minutes

Using Technology to Facilitate Meetings

Given the widespread availability and increasingly low cost of electronic communication, technologies that once served to bring people together across continents and time zones are now also serving people in the same geographic area. Rather than traveling (by plane, car, or even elevator within the same building) to a central point for face-to-face interaction, busy and cost-conscious professionals often choose to see and hear each other via one of many different electronic interface technologies. It is important to be aware of the dimensions of nonverbal communication that are lost in a virtual meeting compared to an in-person meeting. Nevertheless, these technologies are a boon to today's business organizations, and knowing how to use them is a key skill for all job seekers. We will discuss the technologies by category, beginning with audio-only, then audio-visual, and finally social media.

Audio-Only Interactions

The simplest form of audio-only interaction is, of course, a telephone call. Chances are that you have been using the phone all your life, yet did you know that some executives hire professional voice coaches to help them increase their effectiveness in phone communication? When you stop to think about it, we use a great many audio-only modes of communication, ranging from phone calls and voice-activated telephone menus to radio interviews, public address systems, dictation recording systems, and computer voice recognition technology. The importance of audio communication in the business world has increased with the availability of conference calls, web conferences, and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) communications.

Your voice has qualities that cannot be communicated in written form, and you can use these qualities to your advantage as you interact with colleagues. If you are sending a general informative message to all employees, an e-mail may serve you well, but if you are congratulating one employee on receiving an industry award, your voice as the channel carries your enthusiasm.

Take care to pay attention to your **pronunciation** of words, stating them correctly in normal ways, and avoiding words that you are not comfortable with as you may mispronounce them. Mispronunciation can have a negative impact on your reputation or perceived credibility. Instead of using complicated words that may cause you to stumble, choose a simple phrase if you can or learn to pronounce the word correctly before you use it in a formal interactive setting.

Your voice quality, volume, and pitch also influence how your spoken words are interpreted. **Quality** often refers to the emotional tone of your voice, from happy and enthusiastic to serious or even sad. In most business situations, it is appropriate to speak with some level of formality yet avoid sounding stilted or arrogant. Your **volume** (the loudness of your voice) should be normal, but do make sure your listeners can hear you. In some situations, you may be using a directional microphone that only amplifies your voice signal if you speak directly into it.

If your audience includes English learners, remember that speaking louder (i.e., shouting) does not help them to understand you any better than speaking in a normal tone. Your word choices will make a much more significant impact when communicating across cultures; strive to use direct sentences and avoid figures of speech that do not translate literally.

Pitch refers to the frequency, high or low, of your voice. A pleasant, natural voice will have some variation in pitch. A speaker with a flat pitch, or a monotone (one-tone) voice, is often interpreted as being bored and often bores his or her listeners.

If you are leaving a voice mail, state all the relevant information in concise, clear terms, making sure to speak slowly; don't forget to include your contact information, even if you think the person already knows your phone number. Imagine you were writing down your phone number as you recite it and you will be better able to record it at a "listener-friendly" speed. Don't leave a long, rambling voice mail message. You may later wish you had said less, and the more content you provide the more you increase the possibility for misunderstandings without your being present for clarification.

Audio-Visual Interactions

Rather than call each other, we often call and interact in both audio and visual ways via the Internet. There are several ways to interface via audio and video, and new technologies in this area are being invented all the time. For example, VoIP software allows the participants to see and hear each other across time and distance with one-on-one calls and video conferencing. The audio portion of the call comes through a headset, and the callers see each other on their computer monitors, as if they were being broadcast on television. This form of audio-visual communication is quickly becoming a low- or no-cost business tool for interaction.

If you are going to interact via audio and visual signals, make sure you are prepared. Appropriate dress, setting, and attitude are all required. The integration of a visual signal to the traditional phone call means that nonverbal gestures can now be observed in real time and can both add and detract from the message.

If you are unfamiliar with the technology, practice with it before your actual business interaction. Try out the features with a friend and know where to find and access the information. If the call doesn't go as planned, or the signal isn't what you expected or experienced in the past, keep a good attitude and try again.

Social Media

Online communities, forums, blogs, tweets, cloud computing, and avatar-activated environments are some of the continually developing means of social media being harnessed by the business world. The Internet is increasingly promoting tools and platforms for people to interact. From bulletin boards that resemble the FreeNet posts of years past, to interactive environments like Second Life, people are increasingly representing and interpreting themselves online.

Humans seek interaction, and this has led to new ways to market, advertise, and interact; however, caution is warranted when engaging in social media online. When you use these media, remember a few simple cautions:

1. Not everything is as it appears. The individuals on the forum may not all be who they represent themselves to be.
2. The words you write and the images you send, regardless of how much you trust the recipient, may become public and can remain online forever.
3. Always consider what you access and what you post and how it represents you and your employer, even if you think others cannot know where you work or who you are.
4. Be aware that Internet service providers (ISPs) are required by law to archive information concerning the use and traffic of information that can become available under subpoena.

Forums are often theme-based websites that gather a community of individuals dedicated to a common interest. From owner-enthusiast websites that celebrate the new Mini Cooper, where owners discuss modifications and sell parts to each other, to forums that emphasize a viewpoint, such as the Life After the Oil Crash (LATOC) discussion board, affectionately called doomers, people come together to compare notes around areas of interest.

Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn allow people to link to, and interact with, others who work in their industry or related ones. More general social media sites include MySpace and Facebook, which also present threaded discussions and dynamic interfaces with groups that may or may not be limited to those that user intends. Interactive writing platforms such as blogs, wikis, and cloud computing involve having common documents stored on the Internet, which can be accessed from multiple sites at once, further facilitating the interaction. **Blogs** are Web pages with periodic posts that may or may not feature feedback responses from readers. **Wikis** are collaborations on web content that are created and edited by users. **Cloud computing** involves secure access of files from anywhere as information is stored remotely. Somewhere between a **social networking site**, where people gather virtually to interact, and a computer game lies the genre of avatar-activated virtual worlds such as Second Life. In these environments, users can meet others and make friends, participate in activities, and create and trade virtual property and services.

Business and industry organizations may also incorporate posts and threaded discussions but often under a password-protected design on a company's intranet or other limited-access platforms. Employees may use their business-provided computer equipment to access sites that are not business related (if not specifically blocked), but all information associated with each business's computer is subject to inspection, archival, and supervision.

Every computer is assigned an Internet protocol or IP address. The IP address can be specifically traced back to the original user, or at least to the computer itself and to who is responsible for its use. From an e-mail via one of the free sites (e.g., Juno, Google's Gmail, or Yahoo! Mail) to cloud computing and wikis, your movements across the web leave clear "footprints."

Whether you maintain a personal web page or a blog or engage with peers and colleagues via Twitter, take care when considering what personal information to make public. Privacy is an increasing issue online and your safety is a priority. Always represent yourself and your organization with professionalism, knowing that what you search for and how you use your business computer can and often is subject to inspection.

Key Takeaways

- Meetings require planning, appropriate conduction of the meeting, choice of appropriate technology, and understanding of organizational communication to enhance their success.
- Forming groups fulfills many human needs, such as the need for affiliation, affection, and control; individuals also need to cooperate in groups to fulfill basic survival needs.
- Primary groups are those groups that meet all or most of our needs. Secondary groups are those that meet some but not all of our needs.
- A group includes at least three people. Groups and their individual members come together and grow apart in predictable patterns. This is called the group development stages, which include forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Groups have norms, which can change over time.
- Each group member has a life cycle that defines their role as they enter and exit the group.
- There are a number of negative and positive roles that group members can play within a group.

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4.5: Chapter Summary

Chapter Summary

- Part of our ability to be successful at work depends on our ability to work in groups.
- A primary group is one that meets most, if not all, of your needs.
- Secondary groups may meet some, but not all, of your needs. Secondary groups are normally those found in the workplace, while our family and friends might be considered a primary group.
- A group consists of at least three people.
- Group lifecycle patterns refer to the process or stages of group development.
- There are five stages to the group development process, which include forming, norming, storming, performing, and adjourning.
- Within each of the stages, group members have a variety of roles, which include potential member, new member, full member, divergent member, marginal member, and an ex-member.
- You can take on a variety of roles when working with a group. These roles can be positive or negative and rely on your emotional intelligence skills to make sure they are positive.
- Meetings require planning, choice of appropriate technology, and understanding of organizational communication.
- Groups have norms, which can change over time.
- There are a number of negative and positive roles that group members can play within a group to enhance the success of the meeting. Meetings require planning, appropriate conduction of the meeting, and choice of appropriate technology to enhance its success.

5: Ethical Considerations in Business Writing

> **Chapter Objectives**
>
> The purpose of this chapter is to:
>
> - Explain the meaning of ethics and business ethics
> - Describe the role of ethics in a business environment
> - Explain what it means to be a professional of integrity
> - Demonstrate ethical writing responsibilities
> - Distinguish between ethical and legal responsibilities
> - Describe four approaches for examining the ethical nature of a decision

The Importance of Ethical Responsibility

Safety, security, and confidentiality are foundational for establishing consumer confidence. In order to build a business relationship of trust, consumers rely on the reputation and identity a company projects. When employees behave unethically, illegal, or immorally, all trust is lost. It is often difficult to regain it.

> **Ethical Considerations**
>
> Should we care about ethics in our lives? Should we care about ethics in our practices in business and the professions? In all of our business writing media? Your goal is to understand why the answer to these questions is *yes*.
>
> - Documentation
> - Citation
> - Responsibility
> - Integrity
> - Trust
> - Truth
> - Principles
> - Transparency
> - Justice
> - Equity
> - Ethical Intelligence
> - Outreach
> - Citation
> - Regulations

Ethical Writing: Setting a Firm Ethical Tone

Ethics consists of the individual standards of behavior you exhibit in your personal and professional lives. It establishes the levels of honesty, empathy, trustworthiness, and other virtues that identify your personal behavior and your public reputation**.**

In your personal live, ethics sets norms for the ways in which you interact with family, friends, and colleagues. Ethical acts are generally considered voluntary and personal—often based on your perception or position on what is right or what is wrong. In business, each employee has a choice in making an ethical or unethical decision. Whenever you think about the behavior you expect of yourself in your personal life and as a professional, you are engaging in a philosophical dialog with yourself to establish the standards of behavior you choose to uphold. That is your ethical position.

Business Ethics

Your success at work entails more than simply earning money and promotions. It may also mean treating stakeholders--employees, customers, clients--with honesty and respect. It may come from the sense of pride you feel about engaging in honest transactions, not just because the law or policy demands it, but because you demand it of yourself. It may lie in knowing the profit we make does not come from shortchanging others. Thus, **business ethics** guides the conduct by which companies and their representatives abide by laws, regulations, and policies. Business ethics means respecting the rights of stakeholders and the communities in which they live. Business ethics centers on principles of good conduct through civil, social, economical, environmental, and lawful actions.

Corporate culture is the acceptance of what is the normal operations of a business. It is a set of values and practices to which employees are expected to follow. Corporate leadership and governance usually sets what is acceptable and what will be tolerated. One way in which this occurs in business is through company policies and procedures. Policies are a set of organizational standards put in place to achieve a desired communication outcome. Procedures are the official ways in which a task is completed and approved.

To see an example of a corporate ethical code or mission statement, visit Johnson & Johnson and read "Our Credo" written by former chair Robert Wood Johnson. (Note: This link was viable at the time of publication; it may be inoperable now.)

Forbes provides a list of companies recently deemed the most reputable companies for corporate responsibility in 2019 according to their standards and research. (Note: This link was viable at the time of publication; it may be inoperable now.)

In our professional lives, ethics guides our interactions. Business ethics consist of businesses having a reputation of composing standards and displaying conduct that exemplifies civil and lawful actions that build trust, confidence, and goodwill amongst the business and its stakeholders.

The size of a company and whether it is public or private often determines its hierarchy. Whether it is a small business or a fortune 500 company, the business owner/CEO/manager/supervisor/employee will be the front person to represent the company and to communicate its message. That person's image, ethics, opinions, and words, even if expressed during personal time, can be intertwined with the business. Stakeholders directly attach the unethical, racist, or otherwise controversial views and actions of an employee to the company's image. Therefore, ethical codes of conduct and ethical standards must be written in a company's culture.

Ethical Outreach: The Importance of Connecting With the Audience

Clients, customers, suppliers, investors, retailers, employees, the media, the government, members of the surrounding community, competitors, and even the environment are **stakeholders** in a business; they are the individuals and entities affected by the business's decisions, as Figure 1.1 illustrates.

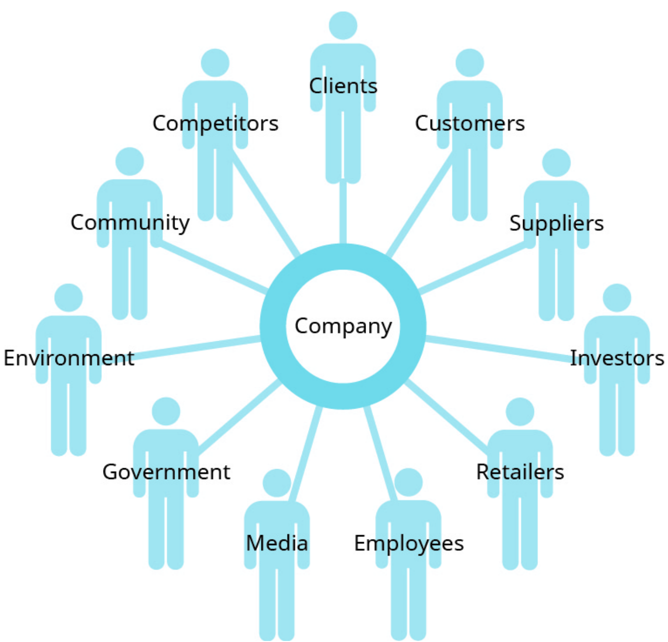


Figure
4.1:
Stakeholders are the individuals and entities affected by a business's decisions, including clients, customers, suppliers, investors, retailers, employees, the media, the government, members of the surrounding community, the environment, and even competitors. (Attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Acting With Integrity

Integrity is unity between what we say and what we do. Being a professional of integrity means consistently striving to be the best person you can be in all your interactions with others. It means you practice what you do based upon reasoning, laws, morality, and justice. Integrity in business brings many advantages, not the least of which is that it is a critical factor in allowing business and society to function ethically and responsibly.

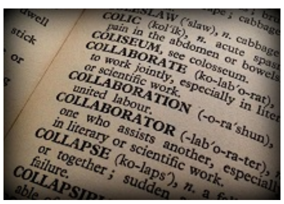
Successful corporate leaders and the companies they represent will take pride in their enterprise if they engage in business interactions with honesty and fair play. To treat stakeholders and all those affected by a business with dignity and respect *is* ethical. Laudable business practices serve the long-term interests of corporations. Why? Because customers, clients, employees, and society at large will much more willingly patronize a business and work hard on its behalf if that business is perceived as caring about the community it serves. And what type of firm has long-term customers and employees? One whose track record gives evidence of honest business practice. Should gaps in integrity appear, companies with an ethical base will react quickly and rectify improprieties that may occur. Company **policies** and regulations should not only consider the profit margin for the company but also the good the company brings to the communities that it represents.

Although ethics are an individual choice, in business, ethical choices by employees often define the success of a business. To show a connection and relationship with stakeholders, both near and far, successful companies adapt social, economical, legal, and voluntary responsibilities.

Social responsibility represents the interaction and collaboration with stakeholders to reflect the concerns of communities which a business serves. Social responsibility includes:

- Practices that are inclusive and diverse
- Activities that help local communities and stakeholders

An example of a business implementing social responsibility is Warby Parker. Executives at Warby Parker, an online prescription glasses retailer, displayed social responsibility by pledging $1 million to organizations and initiatives that focused on combating systemic racism. This outreach demonstrates that executives understand the importance of addressing inclusion and diversity.



Source: "Work Ethic (1 of 2)" by Brett Jordan is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Economical responsibility represents the obligation businesses have to offer and produce quality goods and services at an equitable price; and to pay employees equitable wages and benefits.

In essence, the first question any company should ask itself is: “Do we have a moral purpose?” Having a moral purpose requires focusing on the common good, which precedes the accumulation of profit and results in economic and social benefits. If companies seek the common good, profits generally will follow.

Legal responsibility represents practices that are in compliance with local, state, federal, and industry regulations and laws.

Many people conflate legal and ethical compliance. They are, however, totally different and call for different standards of behavior. What is legal isn't always ethical. The purpose of a law is to establish and maintain a functioning society. Compliance with these legal standards is strictly mandatory: If we violate these standards, we are subject to punishment. Therefore, **compliance** in terms of business ethics generally refers to the extent by which a company conducts its business operations in accordance with applicable regulations, statutes, and laws. Yet this represents only a baseline minimum. Companies today need to be focused not only on complying with the letter of the law but also on going above and beyond that basic mandatory requirement to consider ethical practices for their stakeholders and do what is right.

Ethical Considerations for Legal Responsibility

Ethical reasoning often is more topical and reflects the changes in consciousness that individuals and society undergo. Often, ethical thought precedes and sets the stage for changes in the law.

Some professions, such as engineering, journalism, and medicine have traditional codes of ethics. Essentially, a code of ethics is a commitment to treat with honesty and integrity customers, clients, employees, and others affiliated with a profession. The Hippocratic Oath, for example, is embraced by most professionals in health care today as an appropriate standard always owed to patients by physicians, nurses, and others in the field. This obligation traces its etymology to ancient Greece and the physician Hippocrates.

Source: "Code of Ethics for Government Service" by GovdocsGwen is marked with CC PDM 1.0

Voluntary responsibility represents the activities stakeholders would like company employees to partake to improve their local communities. Examples include volunteering at a local food bank or building a community playground.

Ethical Writing Considerations

Aristotle and the Concept of Phronesis, or Practical Wisdom

Phrónēsis (fro-NEE-sis) is a type of practical wisdom that enables us to act virtuously. In “The Big Idea: The Wise Leader,” a *Harvard Business Review* article on leadership and ethical decision-making, Ikujiro Nonaka, a Japanese organizational theorist, and Hirotaka Takeuchi (2011), a professor of Management Practice at Harvard Business School, discuss the gap between the theory and practice of ethics and the characteristics that make a wise leader. The authors conclude that chief executive officers (CEOs) must incorporate practical wisdom by leading with values and morals. The concept of practical wisdom dates back to Aristotle, who considered phrónēsis , which can also be defined as prudence, to be a key intellectual virtue. Phrónēsis enables people to make ethically sound judgments.

From a business writing perspective, effective writers impart practical wisdom by:

- Providing details and explanations
- Including information that is pertinent to the topic
- Analyzing content to determine its efficacy
- Providing introductions, overviews, and transitions
- Analyzing content to envision the consequences of possible actions or responses
- Including information that reflects the concerns and feedback of stakeholders
- Composing content that is easy to read and follow
- Creating a shared sense of purpose among the document, readers, and stakeholders and inspire people to work together in pursuit of a common goal
- Engaging as many people as possible in conversation and communicate using an audience-centered approach

Plagiarizing is misrepresenting the source or facts, most commonly when you claim the ideas you are writing about are yours. When you are researching professional documents, make sure you are using material with permission. If you are writing about what you’ve researched, make sure you are citing the sources of your information and giving credit to all the necessary researchers.

Attribution refers to acknowledging and recognizing the source of information used in writing, ideas, concepts, and creations. Depending on the creation, the attribution is valid in various forms.

This rule also extends beyond writing to what is referred to as intellectual property. Intellectual property includes the following:

Patents and trademarks are company names *(*WalMart), logos (the Target bullseye), processes or slogans *(I'm lovin' it)* that belong to a person or company. None of these things can be used without proper recognition of or approval from the appropriate company or individual involved.

A company uses a **™** to show something is trademarked or an ® for something registered with the U.S Patent and Trademark Office. An example would be Nike**™** and their famous swoosh symbol.

The legal consequences are most notable when writing in the professional world. While plagiarizing may give you a failing grade in a class, plagiarizing in the workplace can not only get you fired, but could result in a costly lawsuit or possibly even jail time. It is not only ethical to follow these rules, it is an enforced law. Make sure you properly document all sources so as not to mislead a reader.

Spend a few minutes viewing the following website for clarification on copyright, trademark, and registered trademark: United States Patent and Trademark Office

Copyright law includes items whose distribution is protected by law (books, movies, or software). The copyright symbol is shown with a **©.** Copyright is different from plagiarism in that it is a legal issue. Only the copyright holder, the person/organization who owns the protected item, can copy it.

Any written document, once produced, is copyrighted by law. That means if you are borrowing a good idea from a friend at another company, you must cite them as a source. Also, it is a good idea to cite sources from inside your own company, as well. You wouldn't want someone else taking credit for your ideas. Why should you treat others any differently?

A Business Document is a Legal Document

Most documents written by employees represent the position and commitments of the organization itself. There are always legal issues to consider when writing a professional document and they reflect in writing style and content. Professional documents can serve as evidence in disputes over contracts and in product liability lawsuits. A lawsuit is a civil action brought in court. Today, the average company is involved in 400 lawsuits at any given time. While most companies win their lawsuits, being caught in a lawsuit has many consequences. Lawsuits cost companies time and money. The money spent on lawyers and the time spent in court takes away resources a company could use for improving business and products, or hiring additional employees. Lawsuits also have ramifications for a company's reputation.

One of the main reasons a company gets involved in a lawsuit is because of unclear writing. When in a lawsuit, all documents may be subpoenaed. This means that any document from memos and emails to proposals and tweets can be subject to review by a court of law.

A Boilerplate for Consistency and Legality

Many companies also like to form a "custom" way of writing. Companies like Microsoft want all documents to be written in the same style and format. The only way to do this is to customize the "correct" way to write in order to represent Microsoft in a consistent manner. This is referred to as boilerplates. **Boilerplates** are text strings that appear in various company documents, without modification.

What many people may not know is that Microsoft does this is to provide legal cover. If every document for a specific purpose is written using the same cadence, the opportunity for readers to understand the entire document may increase. Therefore, a boilerplate is a form of legalese writing in which language from previous documents is used in a new document. Boilerplates are acceptable for legal documents such as applications, contracts, descriptions, and mission statements.

Remember that in business writing, you are trying to persuade the reader using an ethical style. This means avoiding content that will not stand up in court. Make sure that the documents you write for your company are correct, persuasive, and ethical while also preserving your company's competitive edge.

A Clear Writing Style

Ethical writing decisions include word selection, content, organization, and tone. There should be no clichés and idioms in documents because they may pose a problem with comprehension. A **cliché** is a worn-out or overused expression that tends to sound trite and often doesn't express what you truly mean to say. Examples include: *the bottom line is, head over heels, or take it or leave it*. Idioms, also known as jargon, are words or expressions that are specialized, usually industry-specific vocabulary. When it is necessary to use jargon, be sure to explain its meaning to increase understandability by various audiences. Opinions and jokes should also be avoided in business documents. Inform and persuade your readers through facts and data instead of opinions and beliefs.

Ethical Infractions in Business Writing

You have learned what constitutes ethical behavior in business and business writing. In addition to discussing what to do, it is also necessary to discuss ethical infractions to avoid in order to strengthen your ethical knowledge and writing.

An **ethical infraction** is a decision that results in an ethical and moral breach. In business, the following breaches pertain to business writing and communication.

Infraction	**Definition**
Defamation	Causing harm to one's reputation or character by communication false and malicious information. Example: Communicating that the CEO of a company was arrested for drunk driving.
Libel	Causing harm to one's reputation or character by writing false and malicious information.
Slander	Causing hard to one's good name or character by speaking false and malicious information.
Fraud	Misrepresenting the truth for personal or professional gain. Example: Someone claiming to be an investor who deposits customers' funds in her/his bank account instead of the customer's stock account.
Invasion of privacy	Intruding in the business records of employees or stakeholders. Example: Communicating that a colleague is seeking assistance to overcome depression.

Proprietary refers to company-specific confidential information. Only employees working on the project know the information. They usually sign an agreement stating they will maintain confidentiality, even after they leave the company. Confidentiality is important for companies to maintain a competitive edge.

Confidentiality does not mean that employees should not reveal a company's unethical behavior. Whistler Blower laws are in place to assist workers who report unethical business behavior.

Ethical Sins of Commission and Omission

Unethical actions are classified into two categories: Sins of commission and sins of omission.

Sins of commission refer to unethical actions that includes manipulating or changing information to benefit a person or company a person represents.

To avoid using misleading or manipulating words and phrases, it is important to be open to alternative viewpoints; conduct an audience analysis. In preparing any type of writing, you may come across conflicting viewpoints. Keep your readers' needs in mind and consider what lies behind their concerns. To help solve these problems it may also be good to make statements based on not only the primary audience, but also the secondary and gatekeeper audiences. Discussing several points of view and ideas on the subject will make your writing more persuasive and inclusive, resulting in the avoidance of sins of omission. In addition, be aware of biased language; make sure you have not included anything that may point to discriminatory assumptions or stereotypes.

Sins of omission refer to withholding or using inaccurate information in order to benefit a person or company a person represents. Do not use false or skewed facts or argue from such premises because you may deceive readers and cause them to make an uninformed decision.

Ethical Principles

Here are ethical principles specific to business writing.

Transparency

Include an in-depth discussion of content and data; place the information in a document so that it is easy to find and understand.

Neutrality

State information objectively and in a reporting voice.

Comprehensively

Compose information clearly to help your audience understand.

Integrity

Follow the rules of copyright. Attribute ideas, text, and visuals; cite and document sources.

Ethical Considerations for Success

Whatever hopes you have for your future, you almost certainly want to be successful in whatever career you choose. But what does success mean to you, and how will you know you have achieved it? Will you measure it in terms of wealth, status, power, or recognition?

Before blindly embarking on a quest to achieve these goals, which society considers important, stop and think about what a successful career means to you personally. Does it include a stellar reputation, colleagues whose good opinion you value, and the ability to think well of yourself? How might ethics guide your decision-making and contribute to your achievement of these goals? It is important to consider the answer to these questions before you are faced with a decision that you must make in the moment.

Ethical Considerations Checklist

What is social responsibility?

The interaction and collaboration with stakeholders to reflect the concerns of communities which a business serves.

What is ethics?

A principle of right or good conduct; the general nature of morals and of specific moral choices; the individual standards of behavior exhibited in personal and professional lives.

What is business ethics?

The conduct by which companies and their representatives abide by laws, regulations, and policies. Businesses displaying principles of right or good conduct through acting civilly and lawfully, and building goodwill.

What are the categories of ethical responsibility?

Following accepted principles that govern the conduct of an organization, group, person, people, culture, or movement. Ethical responsibility includes:

- Social
- Economical
- Legal
- Voluntary

What are sins of commission?

Changing facts for one’s benefit or the benefit of the company a person represents.

What are sins of omission?

Deleting facts for one’s benefit or the benefit of the company a person represents.

What is in-text citation?

Attributing an idea, quote, or fact to its source in the body of the document.

What is the importance of documentation?

Documentation includes the bibliographic information of a source to lead the reader to the source. Documentation acknowledges the research and writing of others.

What is boilerplating?

A form of legalese writing in which language from previous documents is used in a new document.

What are the four ethical principles?

1. Reveal information or data to reveal factual communication
2. Present unfavorable data
3. Present the information clearly to help your audience understand
4. Respect copyright information

What is proprietary information?

Company-specific confidential information.

What is slander?

Defamation is causing injury to one's reputation by communicating malicious and false information by slander—oral communication.

What is defamation?

Causing injury to one's reputation by communicating malicious and false information.

What is invasion of privacy?

Unreasonable intrusion into an individual's personal life.

What is corporate culture?

A set of values and norms practiced within a company that is well established to which each employee is expected to conform.

How can corporate culture influence ethical behavior?

Corporate culture sets the level of social responsibility commitment a company displays.

General Ethical Tips

When you are faced with an ethical dilemma, answer these questions to assist you with determining your next steps.

- What is the nature of the ethical dilemma?
- What are the specific aspects of this dilemma that make me uncomfortable?
- What are my competing obligations in this dilemma?
- What advice does a trusted supervisor or mentor offer?
- Does my company's code of conduct address this issue?
- Does my professional association's code of conduct address this issue?
- What am I unwilling to do? What am I willing to do?
- How will I explain or justify my decision?

"General Ethical Tips" is a derivative of "Ethical Decision Checklist:" by ENGL 145: Technical and Report Writing. Bay College. is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. https://www.oercommons.org/courses/b...t-writing/view. Kinonen, Amber, et al.

All links live as of July 2021.

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6: Business Writing Style

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Explain the concept of plain language
- Discuss strategies to improve clarity in writing
- Highlight the difference between active and passive voice
- Emphasize the importance of positive tone
- Present ways to write inclusively

Plain Language in Business Writing

Business is about people. Business writers facilitate sales of products and services, purchases of supplies and merchandise, management and operations of units and departments, and communication with clients and customers. To be in business is to be surrounded by people who interact with you, who require something from you.

Communication is the connection between people. As long as one person is sending a message and another person is understanding it, communication is happening. A successful professional builds and maintains relationships, completes tasks, directs teams, and expresses ideas by communicating effectively. To be successful, you will need to be an effective communicator: you need to be understood.

A key skill in any professional setting is the ability to use **plain language**. Plain language writing--and speaking--will help you to get your message across clearly and concisely. This chapter will introduce you to the principles of plain language.

Source: Photo by Daniel Fazio on Unsplash

Clarity and Conciseness

Word selection and phrasing leads to successfully transferring meaning from the sender to the receiver. Careful word selection enhances the writer's reputation and reflects the business's reputation. Think of the advice a home seller receives before an open house. They will often have bread baking or apple cider simmering to create an aroma that makes the house feel like a home. This small step might help a potential buyer appreciate the house more. Solid writing skills can have the same effect for the employee. The employee gains respect and appreciation because of writing skills that project credibility and confidence.

When trying to enhance your reputation, it is tempting to want to use complex words in order to sound sophisticated. Unfortunately, using complex vocabulary may obscure your ideas and potentially damage your credibility. Remember the focus of your writing should be on the reader who needs to understand your message (**the "you-attitude**"). Instead of focusing on complex words, concentrate on expressing accurate content with precise, unambiguous words so that the message is transmitted clearly. Be precise while understandable.

Avoid	Use Instead
The lawyer was trying to obfuscate details during his opening speech.	The lawyer was trying to confuse the details during his opening speech.
The remuneration the contractor receives is commensurate with the time and materials used.	The pay the contractor receives is equal to the time and materials used.

Choose common words instead of difficult and complicated words to make your message accessible to your audience. Inappropriate word choices will get in the way of your message. For this reason, use language that is accurate and appropriate for the writing situation. Omit **jargon** (technical words and phrases common to a specific profession or discipline) and **slang** (invented words and phrases specific to a certain group of people) unless your audience and purpose call for such language. For example, sometimes using jargon is fine as long as you can safely assume your readers also know the jargon. If you are a paralegal writing to others in the legal profession, using legal jargon is perfectly fine. On the other hand, if you are writing for people outside the legal profession, using legal jargon would most likely be confusing. Although lawyers must use legal jargon in papers they prepare for customers, those papers are designed to navigate within the legal system and may not be clear to readers outside of this demographic. Therefore, when communicating with the customer, such language should be avoided.

Also avoid using outdated words and phrases, such as "dial the number" and be straightforward in your writing rather than using **euphemisms** (a gentler but sometimes inaccurate way of saying something). Be clear about the level of formality each piece of writing needs and adhere to that level.

At the heart of business is the idea that "time is money." This may lead you to believe that shorter message are always better; however, concise writing is not just fast or short. Your writing must always balance the clarity of the message with efficiency. In order to write straight forward sentences that are appropriate and effective in business communication, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Rule	Example and Explanation	Revision and Explanation
Be careful not to string together too many ideas in the same sentence. A sentence like this is not only confusing but can also become boring or confusing to read.	**Michael copy edited the report, and the data tables were compiled, and the graphics looked wonderful.** All three of these activities are part of the completion of a report, but they don't really belong in the same sentence.	**Michael copy edited the report while the rest of the team compiled the data tables. The graphics looked wonderful.** By using a connector other than "and," the sentences actually gives more information: that the copy editing and compiling happened at the same time. Note that if we replace "while" with "after which," for example, we would be telling a somewhat different story. Also, it is great that the graphics are impressive, but that idea does not belong in the same sentence.

Starting a sentence with a dependent clause can sometimes bury the important news at the back of the sentence.	Think about the emotions a reader goes through when faced with a sentence like this: **While we suffered a dismal first quarter because of supply-chain issues, and our stock prices wobbled a lot thanks to fluctuations in the Japanese market that caused the company to begin targeting employees for layoffs, the executive team is happy to report that we are on track for a profitable year.**	**The executive team is happy to report that we are on track for a profitable year even though we suffered a dismal first quarter because of supply chain issues...** Notice the difference when the sentence tells the important news first.
Clear is good; simple can be mind-numbing, so vary your sentence structures.	Imagine an entire report full of this: **Profits were up. This is good. Production increased by six percent. Employees received bonuses in two of our quarters. The stock split.** Even though you are reading excellent news, you are about to keel over from the monotony, aren't you? Writing cleanly and concisely doesn't mean writing like a robot. Think about how the small nuggets of information relate to one another, and combine them in sentences that make sense, put the important news first, and show that you take pride in writing well.	**We are happy to report that profits are up, and our shares have split because of a six-percent increase in production. As a result, our hard-working employees were rewarded with bonuses in two of four quarters.** Not only is it possible to read this passage without dozing off, it also gives more information by showing the relationship among the pieces of information given.

Finally, watch for wordiness. As you write and edit, ask yourself whether you are using several words when there's one perfectly good one that would suffice.

Type of Redundancy	Example	Revision
Redundant pairs	each and every first and foremost full and complete	each first complete
Redundant expressions	the month of July fellow colleagues personal opinion past memories	July colleagues opinion memories
Wordy Phrases	at a later time on a daily basis due to the fact that in reference to	later daily because about
Nominalizations	take into consideration make a recommendation make an effort perform a review	consider recommend try review

Positive Tone

As we already stated, business writing should be clear and concise. Take care, however, that your document does not turn out as an endless series of short, choppy sentences. Keep in mind also that "concise" does not have to mean "blunt" – you still need to think about your tone and the audience for whom you are writing. Consider the following examples:

After carefully reviewing this proposal, we have decided to prioritize other projects this quarter.
Nobody liked your project idea, so we are not going to give you any funding.

The first version is a weaker statement, emphasizing facts not directly relevant to its point. The second version provides the information in a simple and direct manner. But you don't need to be an expert on style to know that the first phrasing is diplomatic and respectful (even though it's less concise) as compared with the second version, which is unnecessarily harsh and likely to provoke a negative reaction.

Unless there is a specific reason not to, use positive language wherever you can. **Positive language** benefits your writing in two ways. First, it creates a positive **tone**, and your writing is more likely to be well-received. Second, it clarifies your meaning, as positive statements are more concise. Take a look at the following negatively worded sentences and then their positive counterparts, below.

Examples of Negative and Positive Sentences

- Negative: Your car will not be ready for pick up until Friday.
- Positive: Your car will be ready for pick up on Friday.

- Negative: Your vacation is not approved until the manager clears it.
- Positive: Your vacation will be approved when the manager clears it.

- Negative: Don't forget to turn in your request for reimbursement.
- Positive: Remember to turn in your request for reimbursement.

Source: Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

Pronouns

Personal pronouns (like I, we, and you) are important in letters and memos. In such documents, it is perfectly appropriate to refer to yourself as I and to the reader as you. Be careful, however, when you use the pronoun we in a business letter that is written on company stationery since it commits your company to what you have written. When stating your opinion, use I; when presenting company policy, use we.

Active and Passive Voice

The best writers strive to achieve a style that is so clear that their messages cannot be misunderstood. One way to achieve a clear style is to minimize your use of the passive voice because it not only makes your writing dull but also can be ambiguous or overly impersonal. To communicate professionally, you need to know when and how to use either active or passive voice. Although most contexts prefer the **active voice**, the passive voice may be the best choice in certain situations. Generally, though, passive voice tends to be awkward, vague, and wordy.

To use active voice, make the **noun** that performs the action the **subject** of the sentence and pair it directly with an **action verb**.

Read these two sentences:

1. The administrative assistant provided copies of the contract for everyone present.
2. Everyone present was provided with a copy of the contract by the administrative assistant.

In the first sentence, *provided* is an action verb that is paired with the subject, *the administrative assistant*. If you ask yourself, "Who provided the copies?" the answer is *the administrative assistant*. The other noun in the sentence—*everyone*— did not provide anything.

Now look at the second sentence. The action verb is *provided*. If you ask yourself, "Who provided the copies?" the answer, again, is *the administrative assistant*. But, in this sentence, the writer placed *everyone*—not *the administrative assistant*—in the subject position. When the doer of the action is not the subject, the sentence is in passive voice. In passive voice constructions, the doer of the action usually follows the word by as the indirect object of a prepositional phrase, and the action verb is typically partnered with a version of the verb *to be*.

Examples

Example 1: The timing and allocation of resources will be determined by the project manager.

- The nouns in the subject position are "timing and allocation."
- The form of the verb to be is the word "will be."
- The action verb is the word "determined."
- The doer of the action is "the project manager."

Example 2: More opportunities as well as challenges are created for members of the accounting profession by growing globalization.

- The nouns in the subject position are "opportunities and challenges."
- The form of the verb to be is the word "are."
- The action verb is "created."
- The doer of the action is "growing globalization."

Now, try to convert these sentences into active voice.

Generally, use active voice as much as you can. Sometimes, however, passive voice is the best option. Consider the following situations when it is acceptable to use passive voice:

- When you do not know who or what is responsible for the action.

- Example: Our front-door lock was picked.
- Rationale: If you do not know who picked the lock on your front door, you cannot say who did it. You could say a thief broke in, but that would be an assumption; you could, theoretically, find out that the lock was picked by a family member who had forgotten to take a key.

- When the person or thing that performed the action is not important.
  - Example: The park was flooded all week.
  - Rationale: Although you know that the rainwater flooded the park, saying so would not be important.
- When you do not want to place credit, responsibility, or blame.
  - Example: A mistake was made in the investigation that resulted in the wrong person being on trial.
  - Rationale: Even if you think you know who is responsible for the problem, you might not want to expose the person.
- When you want to maintain the impression of objectivity.
  - Example: It was noted that only first-grades chose to eat the fruit.
  - Rationale: Research reports in certain academic disciplines attempt to remove the researcher from the results to avoid saying, for example, "I noted that only first graders..."

Active or Passive?

- The Human Resource Director was hired last week.
- All employees are required to submit their timesheets this Friday.
- Key stakeholders need to attend the meeting in Philadelphia next month.
- The presenter has explained the theory clearly and thoroughly.

Hint: You can figure this out by asking yourself, “Is the doer in the subject position paired with an action verb?” If you answer yes, the sentence uses active voice.

Lists

Lists can consist of words, phrases, or even sentences. Lists are useful in business writing because they are a fast way to draw attention to several items. They can be found embedded in sentences or arranged vertically. In business documents, we should always try to arrange lists vertically because the vertical arrangement adds emphasis and makes the information stand out. They also add white space, which helps the reader locate the list easily in the document and to focus on the information.

Horizontal (Embedded List) vs. Vertical List

The store needs several items to process the refund for the incorrect billing. If you have the receipt, we'll need that. After you find the receipt, circle the incorrect payment and add the voided check to the envelope. Remember that a stamped return envelope will get your money back more quickly. Please be sure to add that.

OR

To process your refund, the store needs several pieces of documentation. Please do the following:

1. Circle the incorrect items on the original receipt.
2. Prepare a voided check.
3. Provide a self-addressed, stamped envelope.
4. Mail all of these items to this address: ACMT Products, PO Box 145, Shippensburg, PA 17257.

Note that a vertical list must be properly introduced with a sentence so that the context of the list would be clear to the reader. Depending on the nature of the items listed, you will need to decide between a **bulleted list** and a **numbered list**. Bullets are usually used when the order or sequence does not matter. Numbers are used when we wish to emphasize the order, sequence, or quantity of listed items. Instructions, for example, must use numbered lists to clearly indicate the sequence of the steps.

Bulleted List vs. Numbered List

Follow these tips for effective time management:

- Use a planner or calendar to be mindful of deadlines.
- Divide big projects into smaller sections.
- Set a time limit to complete a task.

OR

Follow these three tips for effective time management:

1. Use a planner or calendar to be mindful of deadlines.
2. Divide big projects into smaller sections.
3. Set a time limit to complete a task.

Remember that we use a period at the end of each listed item only when we are listing complete sentences.

Parallelism

Parallel construction of sentences, lists, and even headings makes messages much easier for the reader to absorb. Sometimes, for the newer writer, it might be easier to think of a predictable rhythm or format when working on how to achieve parallelism. Think of the beat of poetry or songs and how it makes the words easy to remember and predict. As a writer, you can use that same structure to your advantage.

Compare the following sentences:

- Yara loves running, to swim, and biking.
- Yara loves running, swimming, and biking.

Was the second sentence easier to comprehend than the first? The second sentence uses parallelism. All three verbs end in "ing," whereas in the first sentence, two of the action words end in "ing" and one does not. While the meaning of the first sentence comes through, it's easy to trip up over the mismatched action words (or verbs).

The application of parallelism improves writing style and readability, and it makes sentences easier to process.

Compare the following examples:

- Lacking parallelism: "She likes cooking, jogging, and to read."
  - Parallel: "She likes cooking, jogging, and reading."
  - Parallel: "She likes to cook, jog, and read."
- Lacking parallelism: "He likes to swim and running."

- Parallel: "He likes to swim and to run."
- Parallel: "He likes swimming and running."

Once again, the examples above combine different action words. To make them parallel, the sentences are rewritten using the same types of action word. You could argue that the first sentence is correct in that "cooking," jogging," and "to read" are all grammatically valid conclusions to "She likes." However, when you put them together, the lack of parallelism leads to a sentence that is hard to follow.

Here are a few more examples of parallelism in which the elements are all different lengths and types:

- Jackson and Krista are cooking dinner, David and Rogelio are setting the table, and Ollie and Ron are picking up dessert. **(The parallel elements in this sentence are independent clauses that could stand alone. We could make sentences out of each clause before the comma.)**
- Juana looked for her phone under the table, on top of the bookcase, and inside the cupboard. **(The parallel elements are prepositional phrases, or words that indicate location, in this sentence.)**
- Mandy and Torrence watched *The Godfather*, *Mary Poppins*, and a PBS documentary about pelicans. **(The parallel elements in this sentences are nouns, or things.)**

Bias-Free Language

Business writers work to be clear and direct in meaning, and drawing attention to details about race, age, country of origin, disability, and gender in the workplace might cause conscious or unconscious bias.

Let's look at some examples and ways to fix them. A simple rule for **bias-free writing** is to consider whether personal details need to be included to get the point across.

Avoid	Try Instead
Franklin is the new African-American accountant.	Franklin is the new accountant.
For someone nearing retirement, she caught on to that new software quickly.	She caught on to that new software quickly.
Abdul has some of the highest call center ratings even though his Saudi accent is strong.	Abdul has some of the highest call center ratings.
John is one of our most active employees even though he must use a wheelchair.	John is one of our most active employees.
Did the cleaning woman bring new trash bags?	Did the cleaner bring new trash bags?
Do we have enough manpower to finish this project?	Do we have enough workforce to finish this project?

Gender Bias

Writing in a non-sexist way requires the ability to recognize sexism in the first place. The next hurdle is to figure out a way to eliminate any inherent sexism without disrupting the flow of the piece. Here are a few techniques to help avoid bias.

The first way to avoid gender bias in your writing is to use gender-neutral words when referring to individuals in various positions:

Avoid	Try Instead
businessman, businesswoman	business executive
chairman, chairwoman	chairperson
the common man	the average person
salesman, saleswoman	salesperson, sales clerk, marketer

The next thing to be aware of is the use of gendered pronouns. While some still use *he* as a generic pronoun, this shows a strong bias towards male individuals. Instead you can use "he or she" ("his or her," etc) as the pronoun for a generic noun. This is an okay solution, but it can get clunky in large doses: "Every employee should check with his or her supervisor that his or her report was properly filed." Or, you can try to make the subject plural, using "they" instead.

While *they* is typically treated as a plural pronoun, when an individual has expressed a desire to be identified with gender-neutral pronouns (*they/their/theirs*), it *is* grammatically correct to use *they* as a singular pronoun. In fact, American Psychological Association (APA) now recognizes "they" as a generic third-person pronoun in English. Using this pronoun helps us avoid gender assumptions and become inclusive writers.

Avoid	**Try Instead**
Every employee should file his report by the end of the day.	All employees should file their reports by the end of the day. **OR** Every employee should file their report by the end of the day.
When filing the report, each employee should make sure he or she included yesterday's data.	When filing the report, employees should make sure they included yesterday's data. **OR** When filing the report, each employee should make sure they included yesterday's data.
Any author knows that his first draft won't be good.	All authors know that their first drafts won't be good. **OR** Any author knows that their first draft won't be good.

Race and Ethnicity Bias

When speaking about a racial or ethnic group, deciding which term to use can be a tricky subject because the ascribed meaning to particular terms and labels can frequently change. When choosing between terms to refer to a group, it is best to ask a member of that group what they prefer.

As a general rule in a business setting, do not mention a person's race or ethnicity unless it is directly relevant to the situation.

Disability Bias

As a general rule, avoid using labeled nouns when talking about people with disabilities. Try to use emotionally neutral expressions rather than ones that assign a role, such as *victim*.

Avoid	**Try Instead**
the disabled	the people with disabilities
the schizophrenic	the person diagnosed with schizophrenia
an AIDS victim	a person with AIDS
a person suffering from epilepsy	a person with epilepsy

General Business Writing Style Tips

- When revising and editing a document, evaluate it for the quality of its content, organization, style and readability. Then add to it, reorganize, and trim as necessary to meet the needs of the target audience. Always think of the audience.
- Determine the level of formality based on the audience and the situation.
- Express your ideas in a positive manner.
- Avoid big words and lengthy, complicated sentences.
- Use lists to emphasize and to make navigation easier.
- Use active voice often; use passive voice only when the situation requires it.
- Check that your writing is free of bias.

All links live as of July 2021.

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7: The Writing Process

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Define the elements of the writing process
- Discuss the recursive nature of the writing process
- Explain how the elements of the writing process pertain to business writing
- Apply the writing process to business writing tasks

Refining Your Unique Writing Process

"Accepted" Writing Process

Generally speaking, the accepted writing process includes:

Planning

The planning step of the writing process includes all tasks designed to help you draft a strong document. For instance, planning may include prewriting strategies such as outlining, brainstorming, mapping, and freewriting. It also includes time spent researching as strong research provides the raw materials necessary to "build" an effective written document. While planning usually occurs early in the writing process, writers return to these planning strategies many times throughout the writing process.

Drafting

The drafting step of the writing process includes time spent actively writing parts of the document. Drafting is often expected to be messy. It's the time when a writer gets the ideas on the page without immediate concern for the flawlessness of the ideas. It involves creating, grouping, and analyzing the raw materials (research, language, and ideas) of a written document. While drafting usually occurs as a middle step of the writing process, writers return to the drafting strategies any time a new idea or concept must be developed and included in the document.

Revising

The revising step of the writing process includes adding, rearranging, removing, and replacing words, sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. Revision refers to large changes in a written document. It is the time when a writer looks at the messy draft to critically analyze changes that must be made to better serve the purpose and audience. Revision must be done courageously; it may be difficult to make large changes to a document that is seemingly "complete." However, strong revision is necessary to strengthen a written document to its best form. Decisions made in the revision step may send the writer back to the planning or drafting stage.

Editing

The editing step of the writing process is the polishing stage. While the aforementioned steps are recursive, meaning you can move back and forth between them, the editing step should be kept to the end of the process to avoid writers spending too much time polishing a sentence or paragraph that may be removed in revision, for instance. Editing refers to the fine details of a document such as correcting spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Editing may also include changes to word choice and sentence structure.

Your Unique Writing Process

Although I've just explained the generally accepted writing process, it's important to realize that as you continue developing written documents, you are best served by learning how you write best, or in other words, your **unique writing process**.

As a young writer, I never understood the benefits of a formal outline with all of its letters - capital, lowercase, roman numeral. And if I had an A, did I have to have a B? And what did the A and B even mean in practical terms? In other words, a formal outline was not part of my process. I also soon learned that my beginnings rarely worked. Until I completed the whole of what I had to say, the beginning didn't entirely fit. Therefore, I knew at the end of my writing process, I would have to take time to go back and revise the beginning heavily until it fit the rest of the document.

That's what I mean about your unique writing process. What works for you? What does not? I'm open to your exploration of this as wildly as you'd like it to be with one caveat - I will not accept that waiting until the last minute and then turning out a work of brilliance is your unique writing process. The process must allow for some planning, some drafting, some revising, and some editing. How you piece together that particular "process" is up to you.

As you continue reading this chapter, be thinking about your unique writing process. Feel comfortable questioning the concepts in the chapter and whether they are relevant to your own process. Feel comfortable asking your instructor about their process and sharing your own thoughts and experiences as well.

General Writing Process Tips

1. Allow your writing process to grow and change. Like your taste buds change over time, so too may your writing strengths and subsequently your writing process. For example, a new writer may rely heavily on outlining, but after outlining many writing tasks, structure may come more naturally to the writer, and a different strategy may serve that writer better.
2. Think about writing tasks you've completed recently. Once you read the assignment description, what did you do next? Explore his question with a freewriting exercise. Set a timer for three minutes, and don't stop writing. Walk yourself through all of the work you completed from the moment you read the assignment description to the moment you submitted the final document. After you do so, think critically about the work you completed in that writing assignment. What would you like to change abut your writing process moving forward? What techniques would you like to experiment with to further understand and improve your unique writing process?
3. Talk to a friend, family member, colleague, or instructor about their writing process. What steps do they take? What has not worked for them? Consider speaking to multiple people, maybe 3-5. Ask them the same questions, and compare the differences in their responses. Are there any trends of strategies that work well? Trends of strategies that are not as successful? Are there any strategies you have not tried that you'd like to try in the future?

Identifying Your Rhetorical Situation

One of the most crucial steps early in the writing process is to first understand your rhetorical situation - or what it is you are setting out to do. It’s important that writers identify the **audience** and the **purpose** of a piece of writing before they begin developing it. For instance, this text is for students of business writing. What if we did not take that audience into consideration before we started writing? What if the text had instructions for completing science labs? What if it generally shared personal anecdotes about our lives that have nothing to do with teaching, learning, or business writing?

Then, we would fail at identifying our rhetorical situation.

Purpose and Audience

To identify the rhetorical situation, or in other words, the purpose and audience of a piece of writing, writers should ask the following questions:

- Why is the writer writing this document? (PURPOSE)
- To whom is the writer communicating? (AUDIENCE)

Students often say they are writing for whomever is grading their work at the end. However, business writing is different. In business writing, writers develop documents for their colleagues, customers, supervisors, stakeholders, funding bodies, and so on. Business writing is a form of professional writing, and students should keep that goal of writing professionally in mind as part of their purpose.

Likewise, the goal of writing professionally should help student-writers consider their audience. Business documents should be flawless; the audience expects that. I know of hiring managers who reject job applicants based on a single error on their cover letter or resume. That may seem harsh, but keep in mind that the hiring manager is evaluating a candidate for a job that requires many tasks. Attention to detail is likely to be expected, so if a candidate cannot offer a high attention to detail for two pages, then how successful will the candidate be at performing attention to detail every day in many tasks?

General Rhetorical Situation Tips

1. To begin identifying your rhetorical situation, ask yourself: What is my purpose? Is your purpose to inform? To persuade? Likewise, whom is your audience? Are you writing a report for your superiors? Are you sending an email to a colleague? Are you developing promotional materials for possible clients? Consider the concepts of purpose and audience together to better understand your rhetorical situation, so that you can move through the writing process in a way that serves the purpose and audience.

2. Think of a writing task you have to complete either for this class, for another course, or for your work or personal life. Set a timer for five minutes, and write down everything you can think of about your purpose and your audience. How might this information help you move forward with that writing task?

3. Reread your writing assignment description until you understand it. If you do not understand it, ask a classmate for clarification? If you still do not understand, ask your instructor for clarification. Until you fully understand what a writing assignment is asking you to achieve, you cannot understand your rhetorical situation. And without understanding of your rhetorical situation, you will struggle through the writing process and in completing the task to a high quality.

Prewriting as Part of the Process

Prewriting is an essential activity for most writers. Through robust prewriting, writers generate ideas, explore directions, and find their way into their writing. When students attempt to write a document without developing their ideas, strategizing their desired structure, and focusing on precision with words and phrases, they can end up with a "premature draft"—one that is more writer-based than reader-based and, thus, might not be received by the audience in the way the writer intended.

In addition, a lack of prewriting can cause students to experience writer's block. Writer's block is the feeling of being stuck when faced with a writing task. It is often caused by fear, anxiety, or a tendency toward perfectionism, but it can be overcome through prewriting activities that allow writers to relax, catch their breath, gather ideas, and gain momentum.

Goals of Prewriting

- Contemplating the many possible ideas worth writing about
- Developing ideas through brainstorming, freewriting, and focused writing
- Planning the structure of the document overall so as to have a solid introduction, meaningful body components, and a purposeful conclusion

Prewriting Activities

Quick strategies for developing ideas include **brainstorming**, **freewriting**, and **bubble mapping**. These activities are done quickly, with a sense of freedom, while writers silence their inner critic. In her book *Wild Mind*, teacher and writer Natalie Goldberg describes this freedom as the "creator hand" freely allowing thoughts to flow onto the page while the "editor hand" remains silent. Sometimes, these techniques are done in a timed situation (usually two to ten minutes), which allows writers to get through the shallow thoughts and dive deeper to access the depths of the mind.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming begins with writing down or typing a few words and then filling the page with words and ideas that are related or that seem important without allowing the inner critic to tell the writer if these ideas are acceptable or not. Writers do this quickly and without too much contemplation. Students will know when they are succeeding because the lists are made without stopping.

Freewriting

To freewrite, writers must silence the inner critic and the "editor hand" and allow the "creator hand" a specified amount of time (usually from 10 to 20 minutes) to write nonstop about whatever comes to mind (Elbow). The goal is to keep the hand moving, the mind contemplating, and the individual writing. If writers feel stuck, they just keep writing "I don't know what to write" until new ideas form and develop in the mind and flow onto the page. Focused freewriting entails writing freely—and without stopping, during a limited time—about a specific topic. Once writers are relaxed and exploring freely, they may be surprised about the ideas that emerge.

Bubble Mapping

Bubble mapping begins with writing down the central idea or concept of your writing task then circling it. Draw a line from that word or concept to other concepts connected to it in some way. Circle those secondary concepts. Then, draw a line from the secondary concepts to additional concepts or ideas. Continue expanding the ideas and concepts until the page is full of mapped circles and ideas. You may then use the concepts and ideas to develop keyword searches in the research step of the process or to develop a general structure for the written document itself.

These are just a few prewriting activities you might try to develop ideas for a writing task. Consider others by searching online or talking with friends and colleagues about their writing processes.

It should also be noted that a crucial prewriting activity is research, which will be discussed later in the text. If you struggle with the prewriting activities, it may be because you have not done enough research to explore the concepts to an appropriate depth. Think of the prewriting exercises above as recursive with researching strategies.

If you struggle with prewriting activities, complete more research. If you struggle with research, complete more prewriting activities.

Structure Techniques

Before writing a first draft, writers find it helpful to begin organizing their ideas into chunks so that they (and readers) can efficiently follow the points as organized in an essay. There are many ways to plan an essay's overall structure, including mapping and outlining.

Mapping

Mapping (which sometimes includes using a graphic organizer) involves organizing the relationships between the topic and other ideas. Figure 1 provides an example of **a graphic organizer** that could be used to write a basic, persuasive document such as a proposal or report:

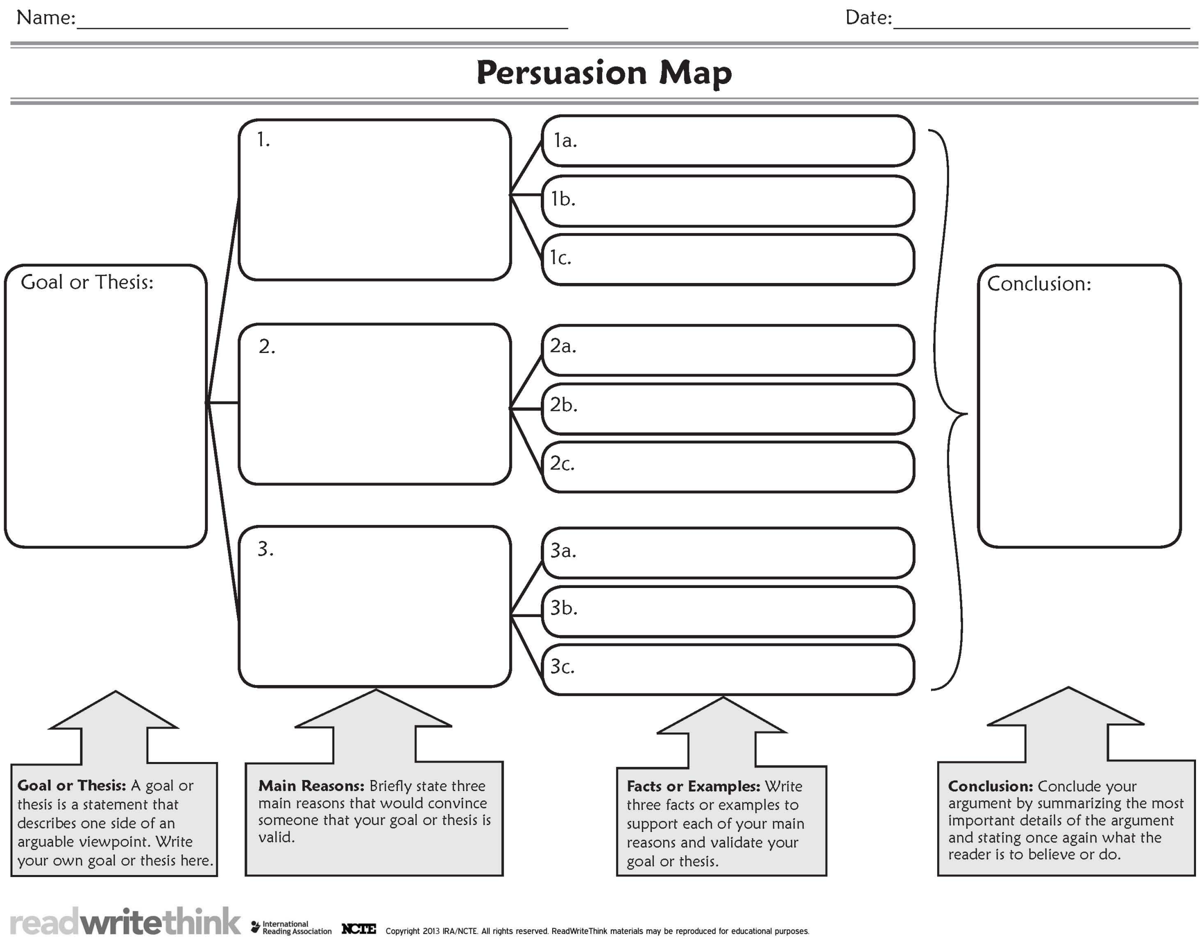


Figure 1: Persuasion Map. Copyright 2013 IRA/NCTE. All rights reserved. ReadWriteThink materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.

Outlining

Outlining is also an excellent way to plan how to organize a document. Formal outlines use levels of notes, with **Roman numerals** for the top level, followed by **capital letters**, **Arabic numerals**, and **lowercase letters**. Here's an example of an outline for a report that discusses the importance of business writing for managers.

1. Introduction
    1. Background information about entry level positions, general managerial tasks, and a summary of the kinds of writing entry level managers complete.
    2. Thesis: While securing an entry level management position may be relatively simple, to advance within the career field, a manager must possess strong writing skills particularly in writing reports and communicating both internally and externally.
2. Body Paragraphs
    1. Main Point: Entry level managers complete different writing tasks than senior managers.
        1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Source 1—Supporting Sentences
            1. Subpoint
            2. Subpoint
        2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Source 2—Supporting Sentences
            1. Subpoint

2. Subpoint
2. Main Point: Senior managers must write persuasive, complete reports and other documents.
    1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Source 3—Supporting Sentences
        1. Subpoint
        2. Subpoint
    2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Source 4—Supporting Sentences
        1. Subpoint
        2. Subpoint
3. Main Point: Senior managers must communicate effectively within their organization, especially with subordinates and supervisors, as well as outside their organization, especially with customers and stakeholders.
    1. Supporting Detail 1: Information from Source 5—Supporting Sentences
        1. Subpoint
        2. Subpoint
    2. Supporting Detail 2: Information from Source 6—Supporting Sentences
        1. Subpoint
        2. Subpoint

3. Conclusion (Revisit thesis).

Informal outlines can be created using lists with or without bullets. What is important is that main and sub-point ideas are linked and identified. An informal outline might look something like this:

Introduction - Background information about entry level positions, general managerial tasks, and a summary of the kinds of writing entry level managers complete.

Thesis: While securing an entry level management position may be relatively simple, to advance within the career field, a manager must possess strong writing skills particularly in writing reports and communicating both internally and externally.

Main Point 1: Entry level managers complete different writing tasks than senior managers. (Include a few supporting details).

Main Point 2: Senior managers must write persuasive, complete reports and other documents. (Include a few supporting details).

Main Point 3: Senior managers must communicate effectively within their organization, especially with subordinates and supervisors, as well as outside their organization, especially with customers and stakeholders. (Include a few supporting details).

Conclusion (Revisit thesis).

General Prewriting Tips

1. Use 10 minutes to freewrite with the goal to "empty your cup"—writing about whatever is on your mind or blocking your attention on your classes, job, or family. This can be a great way to help you become centered, calm, or focused, especially when dealing with emotional challenges in your life.
2. Before each draft or revision of assignments, spend 10 minutes freewriting an introduction and a thesis statement that lists all the key points that supports the thesis statement. Use the key points to develop body paragraphs to support your thesis.
3. Create a metacognitive, self-reflective journal: Freewrite continuously (e.g., 5 times a week, for at least 10 minutes, at least half a page) about what you learned in class or during study time. Document how your used your study hours this week, how it felt to write in class and out of class, what you learned about writing and about yourself as a writer, how you saw yourself learning and evolving as a writer, what you learned about specific topics. What goals do you have for the next week?
4. For each of the writing tasks you have assigned to you in the next couple weeks, attempt each of the Prewriting Activities and Structure Techniques here. Which work best for you? Does the success of the strategy vary by the task's purpose and audience? How will the knowledge you've gained shape your unique writing process?

Researching as Part of the Process

Unlike quick prewriting activities, researching is best done slowly and methodically and, depending on the project, can take a considerable amount of time. Researching is exciting, as students activate their curiosity and learn about the topic, developing ideas about the direction of their writing. The goal of researching is to gain background understanding on a topic and to check one's original ideas against those of experts. However, it is important for the writer to be aware that the process of conducting research can become a trap for procrastinators. Students often feel like researching a topic is the same as doing the assignment, but it's not.

Researching Pitfalls

The two aspects of researching that are often misunderstood are as follows:

1. Writers start the research process too late so the information they find never really becomes their own setting themselves up for way more quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing the words of others than is appropriate for the 70% one's own words and 30% the words of others ratio necessary for college-level research-based writing.
2. Writers become so involved in the research process that they don't start the actual writing process soon enough so as to meet a due date with a well written, edited, and revised finished composition.

Being thoughtful about limiting your research time—and using a planner of some sort to organize your schedule—is a way to keep yourself on task with research. The value of research should not be underestimated in the writing process. Often, it's the students who take the time to research effectively that develop the most appropriate documents for their rhetorical situations.

This can't be overstated.

Student-writers who prioritize research usually produce the best documents.

Student-writers sometimes think that if they visited the library in a former English course, they know how to use the library. However, a specific research might require specific tasks and specific sources that you might not be familiar with. Asking a librarian for help with save you a lot of time and help you locate much better sources. Remember that librarians are the experts. And, they are available to you at no cost. I cannot urge you enough - **for every writing task you have in your academic and professional life, ask a librarian for advice.**

General Researching Tips

1. Schedule an appointment to discuss your writing assignment with a librarian. Appointments can be face-to-face, online, or over the phone. Or you can email a librarian (remember to develop an effective professional email as described in this text). Share the assignment description with the librarian, and be clear about what kinds of help you'd like. You might ask questions such as: What are the best databases for me to search? What electronic books or movies are available about my topic? What keywords will yield the best results? Be sure to thank the librarian for their time!
2. Consider unexpected forms of research. Student-writers often look to online searches for research, but what about other options? Some business writing tasks in particular rely on research that cannot be found in databases or books. Let's say, for instance, your writing task is to develop a set of instructions. You could look to personal blogs from people in the career field you're researching. Perhaps they have written a blog post with a similar set of instructions. Or you could watch Youtube videos for examples of instructions. You can also interview people to ask for their insight. A word of caution though - when looking at how others have written documents, **take extra care not to model your document similarly.** Their work is copyrighted; you must honor copyright, or you could lose your job or worse. In the academic setting, academic dishonesty consequences might apply as well.
3. Cite your information as you research and write. Often, student-writers will wait until late in their writing process to figure out citations. That is a flawed approach though because you could miss a citation or several, also leading to issues and consequences of academic dishonesty. An annotated bibliography is a great way to keep track of the sources you research and why you think they might be valuable to your writing. However, you could develop a less formal note-taking strategy.

Drafting as Part of the Process

Once you have spent time and effort preparing to write by gathering ideas, researching concepts, and organizing content, you are ready to begin drafting.

Many instructors recommend a practice that is referred to as fast drafting, in which the student writes under the pressure of a time limit, much like freewriting. This allows students to create without their inner critic undermining their momentum. It empowers the "creator hand" to work with agency, while silencing the "editor hand."

To do fast drafting, you first need to set up the conditions that will help in your success and is appropriate to your abilities to focus. The following are easy steps writers follow:

- Create a block of time in which there are no interruptions. This should be a realistic length, given a writer's ability to focus, from 10 minutes at a time to 75 minutes or longer.
- Decide on the goal: Write a paragraph in 10 minutes, 2 pages in 1 hour, or a complete document in 1 hour and 15 minutes.

For some, 75 minutes is a good length, but some students find that after 30 minutes they can no longer concentrate. If that is the case, plan on several shorter sessions of distraction-free time.

During this time, students should turn off their phones and social media, let the dog outside, and ensure that it's time for children to be asleep. **This needs to be quiet, concentrated time.**

Let go of your worries about good and bad ideas. There will be time to rethink, rephrase, and rework during the revision process.

General Drafting Tips

1. When a writer struggles without direction of what to write, it is usually due to a lack of prewriting or researching. Remember researching provides the raw material to "build" a written document. And prewriting helps to develop those raw materials further. Also remember the writing process is recursive. If you have reached the drafting stage but are struggling to complete a 20-minute drafting session to get ideas onto the page, consider a strategy from the prewriting or researching stage.
2. Use placeholders as you draft. When I write, if I'm not sure what I want to say on a topic, I use /// to mark that section. For instance, I might write ///need to find data to support this claim/// and then continue writing. That keeps me focused on getting all of my ideas on paper while I have them. Later, I can use the "Find" search in my word processing program and search for ///. That will remind me of any sections that require further development. This is also a good technique for citations. If you're unsure how to cite a source, use a placeholder, and come back to that task later.
3. Draft early. Student-writers almost always report to me after completing a writing assignment that they wished they would have started earlier. Start early. Don't procrastinate. Ideally, you will complete your draft and then step away from it for a day or two at least. Then when you look back at it, you will have fresh eyes to critically analyze the content, so you can revise appropriately.

Revising as Part of the Process

Revision literally means to re-see or re-envision a piece of writing. Too often, student-writers may be so pleased to have completed an assignment that they skip revision and instead jump to editing. Or, student-writers may be too busy and overwhelmed with life to give revision the attention it deserves.

Trust this fact, though -***good writing is made in the revision part of the process.***

No writer gets it right the first time.

That is why revision is so crucial.

The House Analogy

I once had a writing professor in college who described the revision and editing steps of the writing process similarly to beautifying your home. Editing is akin to straightening the pictures on the shelves, perfecting the setting of the table, and making sure things are just so. Revision is all the other stuff - knocking down walls, remodeling rooms, replacing or moving furniture, or sometimes deciding to pick up and move altogether.

To skip revision is like putting a beautiful wreath on the front door of a construction zone. It will not succeed in the having the desired effect on your audience.

When you revise, you may have to re-frame the focus of your message. You may have to delete entire sections or majorly rewrite them. You may have to decide your topic is not working, which is a brave decision to make once you have already begun. In fact, ***revision is about courage***. Have you ever heard the saying, you must kill your darlings? Even if you love something you've written or a piece overall, if it does not fit the rhetorical situation - in other words, if it does not meet the expectations of your assignment's purpose and honor the needs and expectations of your audience - you are best to kill it in revision.

Earlier in the chapter, I asked you to use critical analysis while researching. Therefore, research relies on your ability to critically analyze someone else's information. ***Revision relies on your ability to critically analyze your own information.***

Practical Tools for Revision

Revision may involve **adding, rearranging, removing, and replacing (ARRR)** words, sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. Since writing is recursive, revising may require revisiting the prewriting stage.

Adding

What else does the reader need to know? If the essay doesn't meet the required word or page count, what areas can be expanded? Where would further explanation help key points to be more clear? This is a good time to go back to the prewriting notes and look for ideas which weren't included in the draft.

Rearranging

Even when writers carefully plan their writing, they may need to rearrange sections for their essays to flow better.

Removing

Some ideas just don't work or don't contribute enough to the overall goal of the essay. Often when writers delete excess words or paragraphs, the ideas become clearer.

Replacing

Vivid details help bring writing to life. Writers need to look for strong examples and quotable passages from outside sources to support their arguments. If particular paragraphs aren't working well, writers need to try rewriting them.

Other Useful Strategies for Revision

There are many tips and tricks to help you move into a critical mind frame, so you are able to analyze your own writing. Here are a few that might help you, but as a continued exploration of further understanding your unique writing process, never be afraid to turn to search engines to ask such questions as: what are the best ways to revise? What are revising tricks that work? You could also look to social media and ask friends and colleagues about their writing process and the tools that work best for them!

Reverse Outlining

In reverse outlining, the student reads through the written text and notes, noting down the topic of each paragraph. This way, the student can review if each paragraph has a clear focus and if each paragraph fits the overall organization of the paper. More on reverse outlining is available at *The Purdue Online Writing Lab* (OWL), "Reverse Outlining: An Exercise for Taking Notes and Revising Your Work."

Reading Aloud

The act of reading one's essay aloud allows the student to "hear it" in the way a reader will. This act permits the writer to slow down and pay attention to all words in the essay. They get a sense of what a reader experiences, where words are clear and effective, and where they are weak. Poorly structured sentences are hard to read out loud, indicating that this would be a good place to start revising. This technique is a great precursor for receiving feedback from others. It also helps writers take responsibility for their writing.

How to Incorporate Feedback in Revision

Feedback is a wonderful tool in the revision process. Some instructors require student-writers to give each other feedback; this is often referred to as peer review. Other instructors may give every student-writer feedback on their projects directly. This may involve a list of general concepts to work on or in-line comments handwritten on a printed document or typed using the comments feature of an electronic document. Still, student-writers may seek their own feedback by sharing their work with friends and family or visiting the campus writing/tutoring center or using an online tutoring program.

There is value in receiving different kinds of feedback. If you participate in peer review, that does not mean you would not benefit from sharing with a tutor. Likewise, if your parent, sibling, or partner often reads your work, that does not mean feedback from your classmates will not help you. Writing is subjective. That means that you will likely receive varying bits of advice from everyone who reads your work. But when you have a vast array of feedback, you can consider the trends that cannot be ignored. Additionally, you may find that some feedback resonates with you while other feedback does not. Give careful consideration to the feedback you receive, but also be brave enough to accept or reject as you see fit. Remember, though, revision relies on your ability to think critically about your own work.

General Revision Tips

1. Look back at a writing assignment you've completed in the past. Either reverse outline it or read it aloud. After doing so, consider what changes you might make if you were to revisit the assignment again. To improve the document: What could be added? What could be rearranged? What could be removed? What could be replaced?
2. Find a partner or group of classmates who are willing to meet weekly either face-to-face or online. During your meetings, read your writing assignments aloud, and give each other feedback on the content and language of the work. This should be a group you are committed to working with throughout the semester with the goal of helping each other grow as writers.
3. Explore tutoring services at your institution. Ask your instructor what face-to-face and online options are available to you. Make a point to submit your first writing assignment for feedback through one of the tutoring options. Once you do, you will know whether and/or how the services would be useful for you as you continue with your other writing assignments in the course.

Editing as Part of the Process

The process of editing is an ongoing activity for all writers. From the time they come up with a possible topic, they begin editing their ideas and directions in which to go. Once they begin to write, however, the editing takes a new path. Writers edit their own work by reading with fresh eyes and deciding if words need to be moved around or changed. They look for misspellings and awkward wording, and they rework for the sake of clarity. They check their work for typos and unintentional repetition of words and phrases, and they check all the grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Questions to Ask

- Is this saying what I think it does?
- Am I being as clear as possible?
- Is there a more concise or artful way that I can express this important idea?

However, it is extremely important not to focus on editing too early in the writing process. If you write one sentence or paragraph and immediately begin to edit it, you may find that you lose the flow of your ideas. Suddenly, while focusing on how to spell a word, the whole rest of the essay gets put on hold. The inner editor or critic can inhibit writers, causing them to lose flow and to experience perfectionism and writer’s block. Most instructors recommend that writers ban their critics until they have completed their first drafts and revision has taken place. This saves writers the wasted effort that comes with closely editing material that doesn’t make the final cut anyway.

At later points during the document’s creation, an outside set of editorial eyes may be needed—those of a peer, instructor, colleague, or formal editor—to help move that piece of text toward excellence. In addition to the big-picture structural or information-based considerations, the need for a comma or better word may be the focus of editing efforts. Good editing allows the writer to submit the written creation with the confidence that it is the best it can be and stands as something to truly be proud of.

Grammar: The Grand Dame

According to Merriam-Webster, grammar is a system of rules that defines the structure of a language. For most of the USA, that system is Standard American English (SAE). Grammar is the way people use language rules and how words are used in a certain order to form phrases and clauses that relay a meaning for readers. The term “syntax” (the art of sentence structure) goes hand-in-hand with this.

Writers and speakers of any given language are aware that the rules related to grammar and usage of that language are largely appropriated not by formal instruction and memorization but informally and even subconsciously as one grows up listening, speaking and reading. So it’s important to note that, as those who use language every day, students already have internalized essential grammar rules. Most college writers struggle with only one or two main grammar blind-spots, like how to correctly use a comma or semicolon. Once they master these, they can confidently edit their own work.

Language Usage

Writing is all about decision-making. Writers need to ask, “How should I craft this sentence, this paragraph? Given the effect of two possible punctuation marks, which one should I use? What is the effect of this word instead of that one, so similar in meaning but carrying a more negative connotation?” In this way, writing is about making endless choices.

Precision of Words

Sometimes, in early drafting, writers fall back on words that are vague or boring. For example, consider sentences starting with “This” or “It.” Unless the previous sentence made it totally clear what the “This” or the “It” is, the reader will be confused. For example,

Instead of the following: “This is an exciting point in the movie.”

How about this?

“The surprise ending of movie is exciting.”

The same thing goes for starting a sentence with the personal pronoun “It.” See the two sentences below.

Instead of this: “It caused the audience to break into applause.”

Define the “It” like this. “The final scene caused the audience to break into applause.”

To note, this kind of sentence structure is essentially using words as “filler” to take up space within a sentence and creates a sort of vagueness for the reader who will wonder what the subject of the sentence might be. Sometimes such sentence construction is fine, but writers use it too often.

In addition, many students believe that using one of the following words adds an element of description or accentuation to their phrases; however, these specific words are overused by writers and should be given special consideration:

- Really
- Very
- Just

Trick #1: If writers conduct a global search for each of the three words above, they can use them as “red flags” to alert themselves to the perfect place to try to find a better way of saying what they want to say. How does one improve vocabulary? Use a thesaurus and read more.

What’s a word for “very scary”? Frightening.

What’s another way of saying “really hungry”? Famished.

On another note: The phrase “a lot” has generally outrun it’s usage by the time one reaches college. Generalizations are better avoided, as they are vague and imprecise. Academics prefer statistics and specific, verifiable statements.

Repetition of Words and Phrases

The unintentional repetition of words and phrases is one of the most common oversights writers make. They all have their go-to words—ones that come naturally to them when they speak and write. The general advice is for writers to use a thesaurus to find a synonym for the overused word. However, what if there isn’t a synonym for the word? Look at the paragraph below:

This past summer, I had the opportunity to intern at Sea Life Park. Sea Life Park is known for being an exciting destination for locals and tourists to experience the wonders of sea life from throughout the Pacific. At the park, green sea turtles, or Honu, thrive and even continue to have babies. In addition, dolphins and the Hawaiian monk seals provide visitors with the ability to view these majestic creatures but also learn about their significance within the Pacific Ocean ecosystem and their importance within island culture.

This writer’s paragraph isn’t bad. However, “Sea Life Park” is repeated twice in the first two sentences. In addition, in sentence three, he begins with “At the park” followed by another “sea.” He defended his construction and word choice by stating, “But there isn’t another word for ‘Sea Life Park’.” Indeed, the “find a synonym” strategy would not work in this case just like there isn’t a synonym for “parking lot” or “ice cream sundae.” So another trick has to be used.

Trick #2: If a synonym doesn't exist, remove the repetitive words and combine the sentences.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to intern at Sea Life Park, known for being an exciting destination for locals and tourists to experience the wonders of sea life from throughout the Pacific.

Replacing the repeated phrase with a comma before "known" does the trick. But wait. The phrase "sea life" appears again a little later in this same sentence. Now what?

Trick #3: Use your creativity to craft an original way of saying the same thing. Instead of "Sea Life Park," call it "the world-renowned marine playground committed to protection, preservation, and education" and the writer has not only fixed the repetition issue but also introduced wonderfully original prose.

Trick #4: Writers should read everything out loud so the ear can catch what the eye might miss.

Voice, for writers, is something uniquely their own. It's the way they put words together and involves their distinctive way of looking at the world. It makes one writer's work stand out from that of others in its originality and authenticity. Key, though, is understanding that the development of one's writing voice takes time and is ever changing. That's what makes it so exciting.

Here are samples of sentences from two famous writers. Though both these writers lived in America at approximately the same time, their "voices" are very different. What are the elements that make these sentences so different?

It was very late and everyone had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the daytime the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. (Ernest Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.")

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care, a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. (William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily.")

Style: Style is much broader than voice. Some writers have a writing style that's complex and packed with personification, metaphor, and imagery. Other writers have a more straightforward style with more simplicity or directness.

Engaging the Reader

When it comes down to it, writers within the academic setting do best when they acknowledge that what they are trying to produce is reader-based prose—written content that informs the reader of the essential message the writer is wanting to convey and also does so in a manner that is engaging and well-received.

On this note, it is important that the reader is able to follow the path of words, images, and meaning that the writer is wanting to create. Readers can become distracted and disinterested by awkward word choices, unintentional repetition, and incorrect spelling, grammar, word usage, and punctuation.

Spelling

All writers have words that give them hassles, even if they have learned how to spell those words. Does the word "essence" end with a "ce" or "se"? Does the word "privilege" spend any time on the "ledge"?

By the time one reaches college, one knows if spelling words correctly comes easily or not. And everyone knows that spell-checkers won't pick up every mistake. Writers need to make time for careful editing and proofreading throughout the writing process with an extra special proofreading session before turning in any assignment. In addition, though, here is a trick that can actually help one become a better speller, even into adulthood.

Trick #5: Create a running list of all the words that you tend to misspell. If you find another word, add it to the list. Every time you sit down to write, scroll through your list. You'll find that the spelling will become less of an issue.

Punctuation and Mechanics

Punctuation refers to the "symbols" writers use to help readers understand and process the information they wish to convey through the sentences they write. Somewhat like the notes and rests within a piece of music help musicians move quickly or slowly through a composition, punctuation marks are used for effect.

Mechanics are established rules within a language system, and sometimes include the individual decisions writers make regarding the use of capitalization, underlining, italicizing, numbers versus numerals, the placement of specific punctuation marks, and how this differs throughout English-speaking countries (e.g., "towards" in the UK is often "toward" in the US, and periods and commas always go inside quotation marks in the U.S. but not in Canada).

For examples, see Table 1:

All compound sentences need either a semicolon or a comma conjunction combination. Make sure that a comma is included if there are two independent clauses. Omit the comma if the second clause is subordinate.	Example: Unless the surf is bad, we are going to surf in the morning. Example: The surf is great; we're going surfing.
Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. In the U.S., current style guides place commas and periods inside quotation marks.	Example: She said, "I'm not going with you." Example: While she said, "I'm sick," she still came with us.
Absolutes: Avoid them in most all cases.	Example: Like all other eighteen-year-old girls, I love drama.
Use the subjunctive form of the verb with the words "if" and "wish" (i.e., use "were" not "was").	Example: I wish I were taller. If I were taller, I could play professional volleyball.
Using "so" and "that" right next to each other is often not needed unless you want to make your sentence sound more like an announcement of sorts.	Example: I took a culinary class so that I could show my gratitude toward those who had influenced me.
Using "so" to mean "really" or "very" without using "that" is an error.	Example: I am so grateful to have been a part of a family that has nurtured and emphasized the importance of our heritage. This sentence should read as: I am grateful to have been part of a family **who** has nurtured and emphasized the importance of our heritage."
A person "who" versus a person "that."	Example: I was furious when this happened because the person who was our advisor made the wrong decision.
Only use single quotes when within double quotes. (In UK English, the two would be reversed.)	Example: She declared, "At that moment, that 'Ah-ha' moment, I decided to completely move in."
No "etc." (which is the abbreviation for et cetera) in formal academic writing in most disciplines.	Example: I would lose the ball, fumble passes, and miss shots, etc. It's enough to phrase this sentence as: I would falter in many ways including losing the ball, fumbling passes, and missing shots.
Avoid exclamation points in academic writing unless you want it to sound like you are yelling.	Example: I got ready and made it to the bus on time. The period works just fine here.
Be especially mindful of singular and plural subjects with subject-verb agreement.	Example: The source of the problems were my father's lack of work. This sentence should read as follows: Example: The source [singular] of the problems was [singular] my father's lack of work.
Colons cannot directly follow verbs.	Example:Incorrect: They all harmoniously incorporate elements such as: romance, humor, and, of course, drama. Better: They all harmoniously incorporate elements such as romance, humor, and, of course, drama. (The "such as" does the trick.)
Do not address the reader directly (i.e., no "you") unless you mean to.	Example: Incorrect: If you need to buy books, you should go to the college bookstore. Better: Students who need to buy books can go to the college bookstore.
Avoid italics for emphasis and keep them just for foreign words	Incorrect: And one should *never* follow my footsteps. (The word "never" does not need italicizing.)

The correlative conjunction "not only" needs both words "but" and "also." But the "also" could be replaced by a comma at the end of the sentence and an "as well."	Example: I saw how this was not only a significant aspect of my family but also of my culture. Note that no commas are needed within this sentence. Many times people like to add them with this "not only/but (also)" pair unnecessarily.
When explaining the "reason" for something happening, you almost always do not need the word "why."	Example: It just so happens that teenagers and adults see the world differently, hence the reason [why] adults sometimes cannot comprehend teenage struggles the way teens do. Omit the "why" as it's not needed.

General Editing Tips

1. Search your draft using the "find" tool for words like "it," "this," "really," "very," "just" or "you." See if you can find ways to eliminate these words to make your language sharper, more precise.
2. Read the sentences of your document in backward order, starting with the last sentence, and then the one above it, all the way up to the first sentence in the document. This is a great way to find fragments or to hear where the language is repetitive or unclear.
3. Make an appointment with a tutor or your instructor. Ask for help doing a close editing of two paragraphs with an eye to learning how to identify typical errors in your work, and then apply your learning to the rest of your document.
4. Business documents must be concise. While editing, pretend that you have to pay a fee for every word on the page. If each word costs you $1, would you keep every word you have, or would you find some that are not necessary and could be cut? What if the fee were $5 per word? Would you find more to cut? Challenge yourself to trim away all unnecessary words to make the document as concise as possible.

Further Resources

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides free writing resources and instructional material. Visit *The Purdue OWL* (Purdue U Writing Lab, 2019).

For further information on the steps of the writing process and tips for each of those steps, read "The Writing Process" by Ali Hal (*Daily Writing Tips* website, 2019).

For an editing checklist by Mignon Fogarty (also known as "Grammar Girl"), visit "Grammar Girl's Editing Checklist" (*Quick and Dirty Tips* website, 2019).

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. 2nd edition, 1973, Oxford UP, 1998.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Wild Mind : Living the Writer's Life.* Bantam Books, 1990.

All links live as of June 2021.

8: Positive and Negative Messages

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Present different types of routine messages
- Explain the difference between complaints and claims
- Identify parts of an adjustment message
- Explain the significance of apology
- Present different types of positive (goodwill) messages
- Discuss organization and impact of negative messages

Positive and Routine Messages

The vast majority of business messages sent every day are short messages of a routine nature such as asking for and sharing information, requesting action, or thanking someone for something given. Most of the time these are positive or neutral messages even when they involve small complaints or claims where you request that an error be corrected. These are all **direct approach messages**, in which the main idea comes right upfront and details follow. Occasionally, you must communicate bad news in writing, which requires a more careful, indirect approach. All of these situations involve conventions that business professionals follow to minimize miscommunication and its fallout, and thus keep their operation running smoothly.

Positive (Goodwill) Messages

Goodwill messages are as essential to healthy professional relationships as they are to personal ones. Thank-you, congratulatory, and sympathy notes add an important, feel-good human touch in a world that continues to embrace technology that isolates people while being marketed as a means of connecting them. The goodwill that such messages promote makes both the sender and receiver feel better about each other and themselves. In putting smiles on faces, such notes are effective especially because many people don't send them--either because they feel that they are too difficult to write or because it does not even occur to them to do so. Since praise for someone can be harder to think of and write than criticism, a brief guide on how to do it right may be of help.

Type of Message	Characteristics
Thank-You Notes	Such messages should be short and simple as well as quick and easy to write. For that reason, not sending them when someone does something nice for you appears ungrateful, rude, and inconsiderate. In fact, sending a thank-you note within 24 hours of interviewing for a job, for example, is not just extra thoughtful but close to being an expected formality. In most situations, email or text is an appropriate medium for sending thank-you messages.
Congratulatory Messages	Celebrating the successes of your professional peers shows class and tact. Such messages create positive energy in the workplace and should be all about he person you are congratulating.
Expressions of Sympathy	Few situations require such sincerity and care with words as expressions of sympathy. Misfortune comes upon us all, and tough times are just a little more tolerable with the support of our friends, family, and community--including those we work with. When the loved-one of a close associate dies, for instance, expressing sympathy for their loss is customary, often with a card, rather than an email or text, signed by everyone in the workplace who knows the bereaved. You can't appreciate email messages the same way you can a collection of cards from people showing they care. Remember that these messages should be selfless. Offering your condolences in the most respectful, sensitive manner possible is the right thing to do.

Information Shares

Perhaps the simplest and most common routine message type is where the sender offers up information that helps the receiver.

Information Share Email

To: smitha@gmail.com

Subject: CFP info you might find interesting

Hi Karin,

I just saw a CFP for a new funding opportunity you can apply for via the Department of Agriculture.

Find it on the Greenbelt Fund's Local Food Literacy Grant Stream page. If you haven't already been doing this, you should also check out the Department of Agriculture's general page on Funding Programs and Support to connect with any other grants etc. relevant to the good work you do.

It looks like the deadline for proposals is at the end of the week, though, so you might want to get on it right away.

Good luck!

Rima

Replies to such information shares involve either a quick and concise thank-you message or carry the conversation on if it's part of an ongoing project, initiative, or conversation. If you are using email, remember to change the subject line as the topic evolves. Information shares to a larger group, such as a departmental memo to 60 employees, don't usually require acknowledgment and would be slightly more formal in tone. If everyone wrote the sender just to say thanks, the barrage of reply notifications would frustrate them as they try to carry on their work while sorting out replies with valuable information from mere acknowledgments. Only respond if you have valuable information to share with all the recipients or just the sender. Pay attention whether you need to Reply All or whether it is sufficient to reply just to the sender. Do not burden others with messages not directly relevant to them.

Information or Action Requests

Managers, clients, and coworkers alike send and receive requests for information and action all day. Because these provide the recipient with direction on what to do, the information that comes back or action that results from such request can only be as good as the instructions given. Such messages must be well organized and clear about expectations, opening directly with a clearly stated general request (unless you anticipate resistance to the request) and proceeding with background and more detailed instructions if necessary. Figure 1 below provides an example of a request email.

Figure 1: Request Email, Communication @ Work

Note that, because we expect action to come of the request rather than a yes or no answer, the opening question does not require a question mark. Never forget, however, the importance of saying "please" when asking someone to do something. Notice also that the list in the message body helps break up dense detail, so the request message is more reader friendly. All of the effort that the writer of the above message made to deliver a **reader-centered message** will pay off when the recipient performs the requested procedure exactly according to these clearly worded expectations.

If you expect resistance to your request, an **indirect approach** is more effective. Ideally, you'll make such persuasive pitches in person or on the phone so that you can use a full range of verbal and non-verbal cues. When it's important to present your argument in writing, however, such requests should be clear and easy to spot but buffered by goodwill statements and reasonable justifications.

When responding to information or action requests, simply deliver the needed information or confirm that the action has been or will be completed unless you have good reasons for refusing. Ensure the accuracy of all details and utilize the "you-attitude." Note that sometimes manager approval may be necessary before providing the information. Organizationally, a positive response to an information request delivers the main answer in the opening, proceeds to give more detail in the body if necessary, and ends politely with appreciation and goodwill statements.

Complaints and Claims

Business doesn't always go smoothly and bad customer experience can have long-lasting consequences. Customers can be disappointed with a faulty product or poor service; shipments might get damaged, lost, or arrive late; or one business might infringe on the rights and freedoms of another. In all such cases, customers or clients are likely to make your company aware of what went wrong and what they want o be done about it. Indeed, it's their consumer right to do so and the business or organization receiving such a message should take it as valuable intelligence on customer expectations that must be met for the business to be viable.

A **claim** explains what went wrong and demands compensation from the offending party while a complaint explains what went wrong and merely demands correction or apology. Minor complaints are best communicated in person, on the phone, or by email (if it's important to have them in writing) so they can be dealt with quickly. More serious complaints or claims are delivered as formal letters to lay down a paper trail in case they need to be used as evidence in a lawsuit.

When customers are reasonable about communicating a problem with a situation or business transaction, the customer service representative or manager dealing with the matter is more likely to respond positively and meet the needs of the client. However, ineffective complaints or claims often merely vent frustrations, issue threats, don'ts say what they want or only vaguely imply it, or demand completely unreasonable compensation. Assume that a business will take your complaint or claim seriously if it's done right because, no matter the industry, companies are rightfully afraid of losing business to negative online reviews. In this day of social media, good customer service is crucial to business survivability. A complaint provides a business with both valuable information about customer expectations and an opportunity to win back a customer--as well as their social network if a good endorsement comes of it from the now-satisfied customer--or else risk losing much more than just the one customer.

Effective complaints or claims are politely worded and motivated by a desire to right wrongs and save the business relationship. They are best if they remind the business that you have been a loyal customer (if that's true) and really want to keep coming back, but you need them to prove that they value your business after whatever setback prompted the complaint. If the writer of such message strikes the right tone, they can end up getting more than they originally bargained for.

Complaints and claims take the direct approach of message organization even though they arise from dissatisfaction. They follow the usual three-part message organization.

Complaint/Claim Organization

1. **Opening** - To be effective at writing a complaint or claim, be clear, precise, and polite about what you want in the opening. If you want financial compensation or a replacement product in the case of a claim, be clear about the amount or model. You could also suggest equivalent or alternative compensation if you stand a poor chance of getting exactly what you want. If you want an error corrected or an apology in response to your complaint, be upfront about it.
2. **Body** - The message body justifies the request with a narrative account of what should have happened versus what actually happened instead. Be objective in writing the account because an angry tone coming through in negative words, accusations, and exaggerations will only undermine the validity of your complaint or claim. Be precise in such details as names, dates and times, locations (addresses), and product names and numbers. Whenever possible, provide and refer to evidence. For instance, you may include copies (definitely not originals) of documentation such as receipts, invoices, work orders, bills of lading, emails (printed), phone records, photographic evidence, and even video (e.g., of a malfunctioning product).

3. **Closing** - No matter what prompted the complaint or claim, the closing must be politely worded with action requests (e.g., a deadline) and goodwill statements. Nasty parting shots, even if merely passive-aggressive, may lower your chances of getting what you are asking for. By complimenting the recipient's company, however, you increase your chances of getting not only what you wanted, but perhaps a little extra. In damage-control mode, the business wants you to feel compelled to tell your friends that the company really turned it around.

Claim Email

To: customerservice@FScomputers.com

Subject: Refund for unwanted warranty purchase

Hello,

please refund me for the $89.99 extended warranty that was charged to my Visa despite being declined at the point of sale.

This past Tuesday (June 15, 2021), I purchased a Dell laptop at the Belleville location of Future Shock Computers and was asked by the sales rep if I would like to add a 3-year extended warranty to the purchase. I declined and we proceeded with the sale, which included some other accessories. When I got home and reviewed the receipt (the PDF scan of the receipt is attached), I noticed the warranty that I had declined was added to the bill after all.

Please apply the cost of the warranty to the Visa account associated with the purchase by the end of the week and let me know when you've done so. I have enjoyed shopping at Future Shock for the great prices and friendly customer service. I would sincerely like to return to purchase a printer soon.

I appreciate your assistance in this matter,

Samantha Nguyen

Adjustment Letters

If a company grants what the customer has asked for, communicating this is called an **adjustment** message. An adjustment letter or email is heavy on courtesy in letting the disappointed customer know that they are valued and will be (or have already been) awarded what they were asking for, and possibly even a little extra. In the case of coupons for discounts on future purchases, the little extras help smooth things over and win back the customer's confidence, hopefully so they will tell their friends that the store or company is worthy of their business after all.

An adjustment message takes the **direct approach** by immediately delivering the **good news** about granting the customer's request. You may start with an apology, but starting on a purely positive note is more effective, especially in a written message. Tone is also important here; resist the urge to shame the customer--even if they are partly to blame or if part of you still suspects that the claim is fraudulent. If you are going to grant the claim, write it whole-heartedly as if others will be able to see it and judge whether your company has good customer service or if you are going to be difficult about it.

Though a routine adjustment letter might skip a message body, a more serious one may need to go into more detail about how you are complying with the request or take the time to explain what your company is doing to prevent the error again. Doing this makes the reader feel as though making the effort to write will have made a positive impact in the world, however small, because it will benefit not only them but also everyone else who will not have to go through what they did. Do not make empty promises, though.

An **apology** might also be appropriate in the body of the message, but be aware that apologizing is tricky. It is essential to winning back customer confidence in some situations, but it also leaves you or your company open to legal action in others. For minor matters, admitting fault with an apology usually helps vindicate or validate the customer. In more serious matters, especially involving injury or damage to property or even someone's reputation (and thus their earning potential), a written apology might be read as admitting fault and be used as evidence in court. For this reason, it is best to ask a manager or legal department for guidance on apologizing to a customer or other stakeholder in writing.

If apologizing is appropriate because you genuinely erred, no legal repercussions are expected, and it is the right thing to do when trying to calm an angry response and mend a damaged business relationship, ensure that the apology has the following characteristics:

- **Sincere** - Saying "We are genuinely sorry that you were disappointed with the customer service experience" is a good first step, but it requires some additional assurances to prove it.

- **Responsible** - Own the error by admitting fault (again, only if you are at fault and it does not open you to litigation). Say what should have happened versus what actually happened and acknowledge that you were wrong.
- **Specific** - To be sincere, an apology must refer to a specific error by briefly describing it, possibly including dates, locations, and the names of product or service. The worst apologies are blanket, generic statements such as "We are sorry if anyone was offended by our actions." On the other hand, it is unprofessional to throw your employees under the bus or to vent about the situation in your company that might have contributed to the problem. These issues should be dealt with within the business.
- **Improvement-focused** - An apology is useless unless it includes some assurances that you will make every effort for the error to not happen again. Simply saying it won't happen again is not convincing and might sound as an empty promise. Instead, describe what will be done to ensure improvement. When Starbucks apologized for a racist incident at one of its locations in 2018, for instance, it followed through on a plan for improving customer service by shutting down all of its stores for a half-day racial sensitivity training for employees.

Adjustment Email

To: snguyen@gmail.com

Subject: Refund for unwanted warranty purchase

Hello Samantha,

absolutely, we would be happy to refund you for the $89.99 warranty mistakenly charged along with your purchase of the Dell laptop. For your inconvenience, we will also offeer you a $20 gift card for future purchases at our store.

To receive your refund and gift card, please return to our Belleville location with your receipt and the credit card that was charged so that we can credit the same card (For consumer protection reasons, we are unable to complete any transactions without the card.)

We are sorry for inconveniencing you and will speak with all sales staff about the importance of carefully checking the accuracy of any bill of sale before sending the order for payment.

We appreciate your choosing Future Shock for your personal electronics and look forward to seeing you soon to credit your Visa card and provide you with the best deal in town on the printer you were looking to purchase.

Have a great day,

Melissa

Negative Messages

Just as in life, the workplace is not always sunny. Sometimes things do not go according to plan, and it is your job to communicate about them in a way that does not ruin your relationships with customers, coworkers, managers, the public, and other stakeholders. When doing damage control, bad-news messages required care, diplomacy, and skillful language because your main point will meet resistance. Rarely are people okay being told they they are laid off, their application has been rejected, their shipment got lost, prices or rates are increasing, their appointment has to be moved back several months, or they are losing their benefits. Though some people prefer that the messenger be blunt about it, in most cases you can assume that the receiver will appreciate or even benefit from a more tactful, indirect approach. The list below provides several tips for delivering bad news in person or in writing:

- Be clear and concise to avoid being asked for additional clarification.
- Help the receiver understand and accept the news.
- Reduce the anxiety associated with the bad news as much as possible by expressing sympathy or empathy.
- Maintain trust and respect between you and your audience to ensure the possibility of good future relations.
- Deliver the bad news in a timely fashion through the appropriate medium.
- Avoid the legal liability that comes with admitting negligence or guilt.
- Achieve the designated business outcome.

For more information on delivering unwelcome news effectively, watch Don R. Crawley, IT Customer Service Speaker, in this video: How to Deliver Bad News: Customer Service Training 101, which provides five strategies for delivering bad news. Your ability to manage, clarify, and guide understanding is crucial to addressing challenging situations while maintaining trust and integrity.

Key to helping the receiver understand and accept information they don't want to hear or read is organizing the message using the **indirect approach**. For example, this is effective when you need to refuse a claim because the customer's complaint is not justified. If you tactlessly provide your audience with really bad news, you run the risk of them rejecting or misunderstanding it because they may be reeling from the blow and be too distracted with anger or sadness to rationally process the explanation or instructions for what to do about the bad news. To avoid misunderstandings when delivering bad news, follow this organization.

Bad News Message Organization

1. **Buffer (Acknowledgment of the Claim)** - Begin with a neutral or positive statements that set a goodwill tone and serve as a buffer for the information to come. A buffer softens the blow of bad news. The idea here is not to fool the audience into thinking that only good news is coming but to put them in a receptive frame of mind for understanding the explanation that follows. Note that if you raise the expectation that they are going to hear the good news that they are getting what they want, only to let them down near the end, they are going to be even more disappointed for being led on. For that reason, be careful not to create false hope.
2. **Justification (Explanation)** - The justification explains the background or context for the bad news before delivering the bad news itself. Let's say that you must reject an application, claim for a refund, or request for information. In such cases, the explanation could describe the strict acceptance criteria and high quality of applications received in the competition, the company policy on refunds, or its policy on allowable disclosures and the legalities of contractually obligated confidentiality. Your goal with the explanation is to be convincing so that the reader thinks, "That sounds reasonable" or "I understand their point" and accepts the bad news as inevitable given the situation you describe. If you make the bad news seem like mysterious or arbitrary decision making, your audience will most likely feel like they've been treated unfairly. Such situations usually escalate further, which we always try to avoid. While an explanation is ethically necessary, never admit or imply responsibility without written authorization from your company cleared by legal counsel if there is any indication that the justification might be seen as actionable.
3. **Bad News** - We usually use the indirect approach to delay the bad-news message so that it can be properly understood and its negative impact minimized. Be clear while also being sensitive to your reader's feelings. Consider using passive voice when delivering this news.
4. **Redirection (Alternative)** - This is keBay to bad news' effectiveness because it quickly shifts the reader's attention to an alternative to what they are seeking. Some kind of consolation prize (e.g., a coupon or store credit) helps soothe the pain and will be appreciated as being better than nothing, at least. Even if you are not able to offer the reading anything of value, you could at least say something nice or provide some useful information. If your redirection involves some alternative, remember to also offer some follow-up details. For example, if you are offering coupon or store credit, explain how the customer should redeem this offer.
5. **Positive Closing** - The goal of the closing is to leave on a positive note. You need to ensure that the reader understands the bad news without rehashing it. Remain courteous, positive, and forward looking. End the conversation in such a way that you do not invite further communication unless it is necessary with respect to the alternative that you have offered.

Bad News Message Outline and Example

Part	Example Message
1. Buffer	Thank you for your order. We appreciate your interest in our product and are confident you will love it.
2. Explanation	We are writing to let you know that this product has been unexpectedly popular with over 10,000 orders submitted on the day you placed yours.
3. Bad news + redirect	This unexpected increase in demand has resulted in a temporary out-of-stock/backorder situation. Despite a delay of 2-3 weeks, we will definitely fulfill your order as it was received at 11:57 p.m. on October 9, 2018, as well as gift you a $5 coupon towards your next purchase.
4. Positive action closing	While you wait for your product to ship, we encourage you to use the enclosed $5 coupon toward the purchase of any product in our online catalog. We appreciate your continued business and want you to know that our highest priority is your satisfaction.

Although it is usually preferable to deliver negative messages using the indirect approach, there are several occasions when you can or should be upfront about the bad news:

- Wen the bad news does not have a high emotional impact
- When you know that the recipient prefers or requires the direct approach
- When the reader may miss the bad news (e.g., if your reader doesn't have a strong command of English, they may not pick up on the buried bad news past the midpoint of a challenging message)
- When you are short on time or space
- When the indirect approach has not worked.

Delivering bad news can be dangerous if it angers the reader so much that they are motivated to fight back. If you are not careful with what you say and how you say it, that message can be used as evidence in a court case that, when read by a judge or jury, could compromise your position. You can lower the risk of being litigated by following general principles given below when delivering bad news.

- **Avoid negative or abusive language** - sarcasm, profanity, harsh accusations, and abusive or insulting language may feel good to write in a fit of anger but, in the end, make everyone's lives mroe difficult. When someone sends an inflammatory message and it's interpreted by the reader as harmful to their reputation, it could legally qualify as libel that is legitimately actionable. Even if you write critically about a rival company's product or service by stating (as if factually) that it's dangerous, whereas your version of the product or service is safer and better, this can be considered defamation or libel. If said aloud and recorded, perhaps on a smart phone's voice recorder, ti is slander and can likewise be litigated. It is much better to always write courteously and maturely, even under difficlut circumstances, to avoid fallout that involves expensive court proceedings.
- **Avoid oversharing but tell the truth** - When your job is provide a convincing rationale that might make the recipient of bad news accept it as reasonable, be careful with what details you disclose. When rejecting a job applicant, for instance, you must be especially careful not to share the scoring sheets of the winning and rejected candidates, nor even summarize them. Though that would give them full picture, it would open you up to a flood of complaints and legal challenges. Instead, you should simply wish the rejected candidate luck in their ongoing job search. When you must provide detail, avoid saying anything bad about anyone so that you can't be accused of libel and taken to court for it. Provide only as much information as necessary to provide a convincing rationale. At the same time, it is important to tell the truth. If you are inconsistent or contradictory in your explanation, it may invite scruity and accusations of lying. Even making false claims by exaggerating my give the reader the wrong impression, which can lead to serious consequences. Though some might say that omitting the truth is a form of lying, telling the truth selectively is the necessary compromise of a professional constrained by competing obligations to both the organization they represent and the reader whom they don't want to anger or severely disappoint.
- **Respect the recipient's privacy** - criticizing an employee in a group email or memo--even if the criticism is fair--is extremely unprofessional. People who call out others in front of a group create a chilly climate in the workplace, one that leads to fear, loathing, and a loss of productivity among employees. Always maintain respect and privacy when communicating bad news as a matter of workplace professionalism.

General Positive and Negative Messages Tips

- Follow best practices when sharing information, requesting information or action, and replying to such messages.
- Be courteous both when complaining and responding to complaints and claims.
- Write carefully when addressing negative situations, such as delivering bad news, usually by using the indirect approach.

All links live as of June 2021.

9: Emails

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Identify content appropriate for professional emails
- Demonstrate how audience influences email content
- Exemplify the important components of professional emails
- Explain ethical dilemmas posed by electronic communication

Employees send memos to communicate brief, internal messages to a large audience, such as to announce a meeting, organizational change, policy or procedural update, or other important information.

We send emails for **internal** and **external communication**. Emails can be brief or lengthy and are quite malleable for most purposes. Emails are useful tools for messages that are longer than a memo and to conduct business outside the organization. Many businesses send automated emails for regular communication, such to disseminate monthly reports. Many companies have synchronous chat networks so colleagues can exchange information quickly and easily, especially among small groups and teams.

Email often serves to exchange information within organizations. Although email may have an informal feel, remember that when used for business, it needs to convey professionalism and respect. Never write or send anything that you wouldn't want read in public or in front of your company president.

Is Your Email Appropriate?

Ask the following questions to determine if an email is appropriate:

- Is your message long, emotionally-charged, or does it contain highly-confidential information? If so, it may be more appropriate to communicate via a letter, a phone call, or a face-to-face meeting.
- How many emails does the recipient receive each day and what will make them read (or delete) your message?
- Will your recipient deem your email message important, an annoyance, or waste of time?
- Does the formality and style of your writing fit the expectations of your audience?
- How will your message appear when it reaches the receiver? Is it easy-to-read? Have you used correct grammar and punctuation?
- Did you divide your thoughts into discrete paragraphs and highlight important items, such as due dates, in the text?
- Did you provide enough context for your audience to easily understand and follow the thread of your message?
- Did you identify yourself and make it easy for the reader to respond appropriately?
- Will the receiver be able to open and read any attachments?

Deciding whether it is appropriate to send an email requires you to consider your **rhetorical situation**. If you recall from earlier in the text, your rhetorical situation refers to your purpose for writing a document and the audience who will receive the message. The questions above offer practical strategies for analyzing your rhetorical situation.

Also keep in mind that business writing is a general term to refer to many different types of documents. As you continue working through this text, remind yourself of the conventions for each type of document. How does a memo differ from an email? When should each be used? What about a letter? Why choose an email rather than a letter? Or vice versa? Again, understanding your rhetorical situation will help you make appropriate decisions about the types of documents to choose. Here are some additional thoughts to help you.

When Is an Email an Appropriate Form of Communication?

- You need to get in touch with a person who is hard to reach via telephone, does not come to campus regularly, or is not located in the same part of the country or world (for instance, someone who lives in a different time zone).
- The information you want to share is not time-sensitive. The act of sending an email is instantaneous, but that does not mean the writer can expect an instantaneous response. For many people, keeping up with their email correspondence is a part of their job, and they only do it during regular business hours. Unless your reader has promised otherwise, assume that it may take a few days for him/her to respond to your message.

- You need to send someone an electronic file, such as a document for a course, a spreadsheet full of data, or a rough draft of your paper.
- You need to distribute information to a large number of people quickly (for example, a memo that needs to be sent to the entire office staff).
- You need a written record of the communication. Saving important emails can be helpful if you need to refer back to what someone said in an earlier message, provide some kind of proof (for example, proof that you have paid for a service or product), or review the content of an important meeting, deadline, memo.

When Is an Email Not an Appropriate Form of Communication?

- Your message is long and complicated or requires additional discussion that would best be accomplished face-to-face. For example, if you want feedback from your supervisor on your work or if you are asking your professor a question that requires more than a yes/no answer or simple explanation, you should schedule a meeting instead.
- Information is highly confidential. Email is NEVER private! Keep in mind that your message could be forwarded on to other people without your knowledge. A backup copy of your email is always stored on a server where it can be easily retrieved by interested parties, even when you have deleted the message and think it is gone forever.
- Your message is emotionally charged or the tone of the message could be easily misconstrued. If you would hesitate to say something to someone's face, do not write it in an email.

As you can see from the complexity noted above, although email is a valuable communication tool, its widespread use in academic and business settings has introduced some new challenges for writers.

Because it is a relatively new form of communication, basic social conventions for writing and responding to email are still being worked out. Miscommunication can easily occur when people have different expectations about the emails that they send and receive. In addition, email is used for many different purposes, including contacting friends, communicating with professors and supervisors, requesting information, and applying for jobs, internships, and scholarships. Depending on your purposes, the messages you send will differ in their formality, intended audience, and desired outcome. Finally, the use of email for advertising purposes has clogged communication channels, preventing some emails from reaching their intended audience. Writers are challenged to make their email stand apart from "spam" and to grab and hold the attention of their audience.

So—how do you know when sending an email is the most effective way of getting your message across? When is a brief message okay, and when it is more appropriate to send a longer, more professional-sounding email? How should a writer decide what style of writing is appropriate for each task? How can you prevent your email from ending up in the junk pile? Keep reading for answers to these questions.

Source: Photo by Stephen Phillips - Hostreviews.co.uk on Unsplash

Rhetorical Situation: Who Is Your Audience?

People have different opinions about the form and content of emails, so it is always helpful to be aware of the expectations of your **audience**. For example, some people regard email as a rapid and informal form of communication—a way to say "hello" or to ask a quick question. However, others view email as simply a more convenient way to transmit a formal letter. Such people may consider an informal email rude or unprofessional.

Email To a Friend

A message like this one might be acceptable to send your friend, but not to your professor:

Hey Joan,

Do you know what the assignment is about? Can U help me?

~M

Although it may be obvious to you that you wouldn't send such an email to your professor, let's carefully examine what assumptions this message makes about the reader and his/her expectations.

The **tone** of this message is very casual; it assumes that the reader knows who the sender is and has a close personal relationship with the sender. Because it contains an ambiguous reference to "the assignment," this message also assumes that the reader is familiar with the subject matter at hand (for instance, it assumes the reader will know which course and which particular assignment the sender is referring to). In this message, the writer also makes an implicit assumption about the reader's familiarity with the slang that is often used when sending an instant message or text message. If the reader is not familiar with this type of slang, the "U" in "Can U help me?" might be confusing, or it might even be taken as a sign that the writer is too lazy to type out the word "you."

Avoiding Misinterpretation

Making assumptions about your audience's expectations increases the risk that your message or its tone will be misinterpreted. To ensure that your message has its intended effect, use the following questions to help you think about your audience and their needs:

- Who is your audience? How often does your audience use email to communicate? How comfortable is your audience with using electronic communication—for example, when in their lifetime did they begin using email (childhood or adulthood)?
- What is your audience's relationship to you—for example, is the reader your teacher? Your boss? A friend? A stranger? How well do you know him/her? How would you talk to him/her in a social situation?
- What do you want your audience to think or assume about you? What kind of impression do you want to make?

Important Components of an Effective Email

Subject Lines

Email subject lines are like newspaper headlines. They should convey the main point of your email or the idea that you want the reader to take away from your email. Therefore, be as specific as possible. One word subjects such as "Hi," "Question," or "FYI" are not informative and don't give the reader an idea of how important your message is. If your message is time sensitive, you might want to include a date in your subject line, for example, "Meeting on Thurs, Dec 2."

Greetings and Sign-offs

Use some kind of greeting and some kind of sign-off. Don't just start with your text, and don't stop at the end without a polite signature. If you don't know the person well, you may be confused about how to address him/her ("What do I call my TA/professor?") or how to sign off (From? Sincerely?). Nonetheless, it is always better to make some kind of effort. When in doubt, address someone more formally to avoid offending them. Some common ways to address your reader are:

Dear Professor Smith,

Hello Ms. McMahon,

Hi Mary Jane,

If you don't know the name of the person you are addressing, or if the email addresses a diverse group, try something generic, yet polite:

Dear members of the selection committee,

Hello everyone,

To whom it may concern,

Your ending is extremely important because it lets the reader know who is contacting them. Always sign off with your name at the end of your email. If you don't know the reader well, you might also consider including your title and the organization you belong to:

Mary Watkins

Senior Research Associate

Bain and Company

Joseph Smith

UNC-CH, Class of 2009

For your closing, something brief but friendly, or perhaps just your name, will do for most correspondence:

Thank you,

Best wishes,

See you tomorrow,

Regards,

For a very formal message, such as a job application, use the kind of closing that you might see in a business letter:

Sincerely,

Respectfully yours,

Cc: and Bcc: ('carbon copy' and 'blind carbon copy')

Copying individuals on an email is a good way to send your message to the main recipient while also sending someone else a copy at the same time. This can be useful if you want to convey the same exact message to more than one person. In professional settings, copying someone else on an email can help get things done, especially if the person receiving the copy is in a supervisory role. For example, copying your boss on an email to a nonresponsive co-worker might prompt the co-worker to respond. Be aware, however, that when you send a message to more than one address using the Cc: field, both the original recipient and all the recipients of the carbon copies can see all the email addresses in the To: and Cc: fields. Each person who receives the message will be able to see the addresses of everyone else who received it.

Blind copying emails to a group of people can be useful when you don't want everyone on the list to have each other's email addresses. The only recipient address that will be visible to all recipients is the one in the To: field. If you don't want any of the recipients to see the email addresses in the list, you can put your own address in the To: field and use Bcc: exclusively to address your message to others. However, do not assume that blind copying will always keep recipients from knowing who else was copied—someone who is blind copied may hit "reply all" and send a reply to everyone, revealing that he/she was included in the original message.

Additional Tips for Writing More Effective Emails

Think about your message before you write it. Don't send emails in haste. First, decide on the purpose of your email and what outcome you expect from your communication. Then think about your message's audience and what he/she/they may need in order for your message to have the intended result. You will also improve the clarity of your message if you organize your thoughts before you start writing. Jot down some notes about what information you need to convey, what questions you have, etc., then organize your thoughts in a logical sequence. You can try brainstorming techniques like mapping, listing, or outlining to help you organize your thoughts.

Reflect on the tone of your message. When you are communicating via email, your words are not supported by gestures, voice inflections, or other cues, so it may be easier for someone to misread your tone. For example, sarcasm and jokes are often misinterpreted in emails and may offend your audience. Similarly, be careful about how you address your reader. For instance, beginning an email to your professor or TA with "Hey!" might be perceived as being rude or presumptuous (as in, "Hey you!"). If you're unsure about how your email might be received, you might try reading it out loud to a friend to test its tone.

Strive for clarity and brevity in your writing. Have you ever sent an email that caused confusion and took at least one more communication to straighten out? Miscommunication can occur if an email is unclear, disorganized, or just too long and complex for readers to easily follow.

A Note on Clarity

Here are some steps you can take to ensure that your message is understood:

1. Briefly state your purpose for writing the email in the very beginning of your message.
2. Be sure to provide the reader with a context for your message. If you're asking a question, cut and paste any relevant text (for example, computer error messages, assignment prompts you don't understand, part of a previous email message, etc.) into the email so that the reader has some frame of reference for your question. When replying to someone else's email, it can often be helpful to either include or restate the sender's message.
3. Use paragraphs to separate thoughts (or consider writing separate emails if you have many unrelated points or questions).
4. Finally, state the desired outcome at the end of your message. If you're requesting a response, let the reader know what type of response you require (for example, an email reply, possible times for a meeting, a recommendation letter, etc.) If you're requesting something that has a due date, be sure to highlight that due date in a prominent position in your email. Ending your email with the next step can be really useful, especially in work settings (for example, you might write "I will follow this email up with a phone call to you in the next day or so" or "Let's plan to further discuss this at the meeting on Wednesday").

Format your message so that it is easy to read. Use **white space** to visually separate paragraphs into separate blocks of text. Bullet important details so that they are easy to pick out. Use bold face type or capital letters to highlight critical information, such as due dates. (But do not type your entire message in capital letters or boldface—your reader may perceive this as "shouting" and won't be able to tell which parts of the message are especially important.)

Re-read messages before you send them. Use proper grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. If your email program supports it, use spelling and grammar checkers. Try reading your message out loud to help you catch any grammar mistakes or awkward phrasing that you might otherwise miss.

Sample Email

Use what you've just learned to explain why Student 2's email to Professor Jones is more effective than the email written by Student 1. How does the tone of the messages differ? What makes Student 2's email look and sound more appropriate? What are the elements that contribute its clarity? If you were Professor Jones and you received both emails, how would you respond to each one?

Email from Student 1

hey,

i need help on my paper can i come by your office tomorrow

thx

Email from Student 2

Hi Dr. Jones,

I am in your ENGL 101 class on Thursdays, and I have a question about the paper that is due next Tuesday. I'm not sure that I understand what is meant by the following sentence in the prompt: "Write a 10 page paper arguing for or against requiring ENGL 101 for all UNC freshmen and provide adequate support for your point of view."

I am not sure what you would consider "adequate" support. Would using 3 sources be o.k.?

Can I come by your office tomorrow at 2:00 pm to talk to you about my question? Please let me know if that fits your schedule. If not, I could also come by on Friday after 1:00.

Thank you,

Tim Smith

Here are two versions of an e-mail from a supervisor, Jane Doe, to a group of her employees. Which version do you think is most effective? Why?

Version 1

Subject: tomorrow

As you know, tomorrow afternoon we'll be meeting to discuss the status of all of our current projects. Donuts will be provided. Be sure to arrive on time and bring along the materials you have been working on this week—bring enough copies for everyone. Some of these material might include your calendars, reports, and any important emails you have sent. Also, I wanted to remind you that your parking permit requests are due later this week; you should turn those in to Ms. Jones, and if she is not at her desk when you stop by, you can email them to her.

Version 2

Subject: Materials for Wed. Staff Meeting

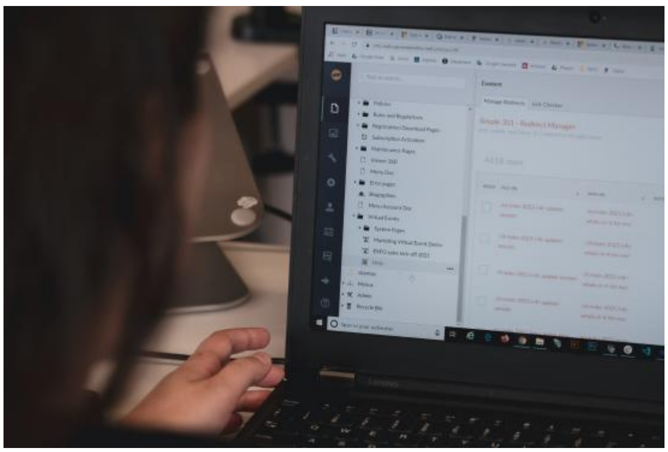
Hi, everyone—

For tomorrow's 3 p.m. staff meeting in the conference room, please bring 15 copies of the following materials:

- Your project calendar
- A one-page report describing your progress so far
- A list of goals for the next month
- Copies of any progress report messages you have sent to clients this past month

See you tomorrow—

Jane



Source: Photo by Sigmund on Unsplash

Ethical Dilemmas Posed by Electronic Communication

Since emails can contain a lot of personal data, you should take steps to protect your privacy and that of your email recipients. For example, you might use encryption software, or an email server that encrypts your email between your computer and the server, to prevent your personal data from being distributed to the general public. However, the server (and government agencies) can access your data without your knowledge via the server's encryption key. To combat this, Andy Yen recommends you create your own encryption keys, so you own the data and access to the content.

Your employer may require you to sign a confidentiality agreement, in addition to following their code of conduct or ethics. Confidentiality is a safeguard that protects you and your employer from betraying the trust of your readers, clients, colleagues, and supervisors. For example, confidential messages could include proprietary knowledge your organization owns, the financial data of a client, or your own medical or personnel records.

You are ethically and contractually obligated to protect this data when you create internal reports and external promotional materials. For ethical reasons, during written and oral presentations, you should relay all information (positive and negative) to present an accurate picture of the subject. You should never intentionally mislead your audience, even if the purpose is to persuade them to buy a product, or support a policy or procedure change.

Keeping accurate records will help protect you and your organization against questions about confidentiality and other ethical breaches. The rules and regulations vary by industry and individual company policies. For example, many private and public offices have certain legal requirements for electronic record keeping. This "paper trail" can protect your interests and document customer service issues.

General Emailing Tips

- Proper salutations should demonstrate respect and avoid mix-ups in case a message is accidentally sent to the wrong recipient. For example, use a salutation like “Dear Ms. X” (external) or “Hi Barry” (internal).
- Subject lines should be clear, brief, and specific. This helps the recipient understand the essence of the message. For example, “Proposal attached” or “Your question of 10/25.”
- Close with a signature. Identify yourself by creating a signature block that automatically contains your name and business contact information.
- Avoid abbreviations. An email is not a text message, and the audience may not find your wit cause to ROTFLOL (roll on the floor laughing out loud).
- Be brief. Omit unnecessary words.
- Use a good format. Include line breaks between sentences or divide your message into brief paragraphs for ease of reading. A good e-mail should get to the point and conclude in three small paragraphs or less.
- Reread, revise, and review. Catch and correct spelling and grammar mistakes before you press “send.” It will take more time and effort to undo the problems caused by a hasty, poorly written email than to get it right the first time.
- Reply promptly. Watch out for an emotional response—never reply in anger—but make a habit of replying to all emails within twenty-four hours, even if only to say that you will provide the requested information in forty-eight or seventy-two hours.
- Use “Reply All” sparingly. Do not send your reply to everyone who received the initial email unless your message absolutely needs to be read by the entire group.
- Avoid using all caps. Capital letters are used on the Internet to communicate emotion or yelling and are considered rude.
- Test links. If you include a link, test it to make sure it is complete.
- Email ahead of time if you are going to attach large files (audio and visual files are often quite large) to prevent exceeding the recipient’s mailbox limit or triggering the spam filter.
- Give feedback or follow up. If you don’t get a response in twenty-four hours, email or call. Spam filters may have intercepted your message, so your recipient may never have received it.

All links live as of July 2021.

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10: Memos

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Describe the purpose of a memo
- Identify the proper format of a memo
- Explain how to effectively organize a memo's content

Once the dominant form of communication in the workplace, **memos** typically serve as a tool for **internal communication** within organization. Memos can update policies and procedures, announce meetings or organizational changes, or inform the internal audience as needed. The truth is, there are lots of different occasions to write memos. We use memos to distribute progress reports, meeting minutes, incident reports, directive, and responses to an inquiry.

Memos are an accepted method of communication within a specific business, company, or institution. The fact that memos are only used internally makes them different from letters, emails, and texting, which can be used inside and outside of the workplace. The successful operation of a company depends on memos for communication between the employees of the company. They are often (but not always) written from a one-to-all perspective, broadcasting a message to an audience, rather than a one-on-one, interpersonal communication. Memos may be used to update a team on activities for a given project or to inform a specific group within a company of an event, action, or observance.

Memo Purpose

A memo's purpose is often to inform, but it may occasionally include an element of persuasion or a call-to-action. All organizations have informal and formal communication networks. The unofficial, informal communication network within an organization is often referred to as the grapevine, and it is characterized by gossip, rumors, and innuendo. On the grapevine, one person may hear that someone else is going to be laid off and start passing the news around. Rumors change and transform as they are passed from person to person, and before you know it, the word is that they are shutting down your entire department!

One effective way to address unofficial speculation is to spell out clearly for all employees what is going on with a particular issue. If budget cuts are a concern, then you could send a memo explaining the changes that are imminent. If a company wants employees to take action, they may also issue a memo. For example, on February 13, 2009, upper management at the Panasonic Corporation issued a declaration that all employees should buy at least $1,600 worth of Panasonic products. The company president noted that if everyone supported the company with purchases, it would benefit all (Lewis, 2009). While memos do not normally include a call-to-action that requires personal spending, they do usually represent the organization's interests. They may also include statements that align business and employee interests.

Memo Format

Memos are typically brief, concise, organized for readability, and addressed to targeted audiences with specific subject lines. A memo's format provides employees with clear and easy access to information. The message is direct. In order to be easy to navigate, a memo follows a specific format. Usually, we start by typing the word Memo or Memorandum under the letterhead. (Note that there are memo templates available to you in Microsoft Word.) If there is no letterhead, start by typing up the name of the company on top of the page before you write the word Memo or Memorandum. Then, follow with a heading block.

Organization of a Heading Block

To: Date:

From: OR To:

Date: From:

Subject: Subject:

The **recipient** can be a single person or a group of people. If you are writing the memo to one person, use the person's name and job title. If you are writing to a group of people, use the name of the group rather than a list of specific names. For example, we can address a memo to The Sales Team. The sender should always include their name and their job title. The **subject line** is very important and should be used responsibly. It must be brief and concise while specifically indicating the main point of the memo. Note that every major word should start with a capital letter (prepositions and articles are not capitalized in subject lines and titles in general). Some companies prefer that the subject line is also in bold.

Example of a Heading Block

To: Student Support Services

From: Greg Brown, User Support Technician

Date: December 1, 2020

Subject: Server Outage on Friday, December 4

You will fill in the information, and then you will begin your memo. If it is a longer memo (longer than a few paragraphs), you may also wish to use section headers. Remember that we do not start the memo with any type of salutation (such as, "Dear Assistant Managers"). Also note that the order of the parts of the memo heading block varies according to different companies' expectations.

Unlike emails and letters, memos do not have a closing and signature. Instead, in the past, the writer would indicate that they really wrote the memo by initialing by their name in the paper heading using blue or black ink. Or, if a memo was typed up by another person, it would be taken back to a supervisor for approval, and the person who typed the memo would initial at the bottom of the memo like this, for example: /jc. However, in today's workplace, most employees write their own messages on their own computers, so this is rarely done anymore.

Finally, in the days of paper, memos also indicated attachments. If a memo arrived on a desk with the notation "Enclosure" it meant that there was supposed to be something paper clipped to the memo with additional information. And, if the recipient saw nothing paper clipped, it was immediately clear that something was missing. It is for this reason that you often see in an email a paper clip icon for the attachment button or notification. The following link shows an example of a paper memorandum.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/memos/sample_memo.html

Memo Content

In a standard writing format, we might expect to see an **introduction**, a **body**, and a **conclusion**. All these are present in a memo, and each part has a purpose. The introduction in the opening uses a declarative sentence to announce the main topic. If there are any effective dates or due dates that need to be presented, they should be presented in the first paragraph to ensure that they are not overlooked.

The body elaborates or lists major points associated with the topic, and the conclusion serves as a summary. It is quite common at the end of the memo to encourage readers to follow up with questions or comments and to provide contact information for their convenience. Throughout the memo, we need to pay attention to the tone to maintain goodwill.

Example of Memo Format and Content

To: All Employees

From: Maya James, President, Blue Lake Community College

Date: September 21, 2020

Subject: Future Expenditure Guidelines

After careful deliberation, I have determined it is necessary to begin the initial steps of a financial stewardship program that carries Blue Lake Community College through what appears to be a two-year cycle of a severe shortfall in revenue and subsequent necessary legislative budget reductions.

Beginning October 1, 2020, the following actions are being implemented for the General Fund, Auxiliary Fund, and Capital Fund in order to address the projected reductions in funding for the remainder of this year, 2020/2021, and for the next year, 2021/2022:

- Only purchases needed to operate the university should be made so that we can begin saving to reduce the impact of the 2021/2022 budget reductions.
- Requests for out-of-state travel will require approval from the Executive Committee to ensure that only necessary institutional travel occurs.
- Purchase, including in-state travel and budget transfers, will require the appropriate vice president's approval.

Please understand that we are taking these prudent steps to create savings that will allow BLCC to reduce the impact of projected cuts in expected 2021/2022 legislative reductions. Thank you for your cooperation. Please direct any questions to my office at (530) 218-3976 or email at officeofpresident@blcc.edu.

General Business Memo Tips

- **Audience Orientation** - Always consider the audience and their needs when preparing a memo. An acronym or abbreviation that is known to management may not be know by all the employees of the organization, so if the memo is to be posted and distributed within the organization, your goal should be clear and concise communication at all levels with no ambiguity.
- **Professional Tone** - Memos are often announcements, and the person sending the memo speaks for a part or all of the organization. While it may contain a request for feedback, the announcement itself is linear, from the organization to the employees. The memo may have legal standing, as it often reflects policies and procedures.
- **Subject Emphasis** - The subject is normally declared in the subject line and should be clear and concise. If the memo is announcing the observance of a holiday, for example, the specific holiday should be named in the subject line--for example, use "Thanksgiving Weekend Schedule" rather than "Holiday Observance."
- **Direct Format** - Memos are always direct, meaning they get to the point quickly and the purpose is clearly announced.
- **Objectivity** - Memos should contain just facts and should have an objective tone without personal bias, preference, or interest on display. Avoid subjectivity.

All links live as of June 2021.

11: Letters

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of the chapter is to:

- List different types of letters
- Explain the difference between full-block and modified-block style letters
- Review major parts of a letter
- Discuss organization of a letter

The Purpose of Letters

As one of the most formal documents you can send, a letter conveys a high degree of respect to its recipient. Sending a **letter** is your way of saying that the recipient matters. Letters are usually one- to two-page documents sent to people or organizations outside of the organization from which they're sent, whereas **memos**, as you have previously learned, are equivalent documents for formal communications within an organization. Though we use **email** for many of the occasions that we used to send letters for before the twenty-first century, the following types of letters are still sent rather than emails:

- Cover letters to employers in job applications
- Thank-you letters and other goodwill expressions
- Letters of recommendation (a.k.a. reference letters)
- Letters of transmittal to introduce reports or proposals
- Campaign initiatives, such as for fundraising or political advocacy
- Official announcements of products, services, and promotions to customers
- Claims and other complaints sent to companies to lay down a formal paper-trail record as evidence in case matters escalate into the court system
- Responses (adjustments) to claims and other complaints (although this can also be done via email if you are responding to an email complaint)
- Formal rejection notices to job or program applicants
- Collection notices to people with overdue payments

Letters offer the advantage of formality, confidentiality (it's illegal to open someone else's mail), and a record of evidence. In order for you to determine when to use a letter in your communication, review the advantages, disadvantages, and appropriate use in the table below:

Advantages	Disadvantages	Appropriate Use

• Shows respect through formality and effort • Ensures confidentiality when sealed in an envelope and delivered to the recipient's physical address (it is illegal to open someone else's mail) • Can introduce other physical documents (enclosures)	• Take time to arrive at the recipient's address depending on how far away they are from the sender • Can be intercepted or tempered with in transit (albeit illegally) • Can be overlooked as junk mail • Require more time because they need to be printed, signed, sealed, and sent for delivery • Cost money to send	• job application letters • persuasive messages (for example, fundraising campaigns) • bad news messages • matters with potential legal implications (claims and adjustments) • non-urgent matters

Components of a Letter

Though you may see minor format variations from company to company, letters have about 10-12 major parts. There are two main types of letters: **full-block-style letters** and **modified-block-style letters** (see Figure 1 below). In a full-block letter, all of the components of the letter are aligned left. The letter should have one-inch margins and the entire document should be single spaced. Paragraphs should not be indented. Instead, use one double space between paragraphs. This style is used by most companies today.

Modified-block letters, on the other hand, have several components centered or aligned slightly to the right: the return address, date, complimentary closing, and the signature block. Modified block letters are not commonly used in business. They are more suitable for personal letters. For that reason, the instructions provided below will focus on full-block-style letters only.

Figure 1: Full Block and Modified Block Letter Formats, Communication @ Work

Major Parts of a Letter

- Return address or company letterhead
- Date line

- Recipient address (inside address)
- Subject reference (optional)
- Salutation (greeting)
- Message opening
- Message body
- Message closing
- Complimentary closing
- Signature
- Signature block
- Enclosure notation

Figure 2 below provides step-by-step instructions for a full-block-style letter.

Figure 2: Creating a Block Style Business Letter, YouTube

Return Address or Company Letterhead

The first piece of information in a letter is usually the sender's address. In block-style letters, the address usually appears as part of the company letterhead in the header under or beside the prominently displayed and brand-stylized company name and logo. Use a company letterhead template whenever writing on behalf of the company you work for; personal letterhead can be used for personal letters (many formats are available in word processing programs and various websites). Company letterhead also includes other contact information such as phone and fax numbers, as well as the company web address. Some company letterhead templates move some or all of these parts, besides the company name and logo, to the footer so that the whole page is framed with company branding. For dozens of letter template examples, browse Letters in Microsoft Office.

For personal letters, the address is formatted as follows. Below the sender's name, the street number, name, and type go on the first line (with no comma at the end) and the city/town, state, and ZIP code go on the second, as shown below:

Example of Return Address for an Individual

135 Market Street

Harrisburg, PA 17110

Note: Strike a formal tone by fully spelling out the street type rather than abbreviating it (e.g., Street, not St.; Avenue, not Ave.; Road, not Rd.; Crescent, not Cres.; Boulevard, not Blvd.; Court, not Crt.; etc.). Also, use the two-letter state abbreviations established by the United States Postal Service.

Date Line

In a formal letter, the date must follow the unambiguous style that fully spells out the month, gives the calendar date, a comma, and the full year (e.g., March 26, 2021). In block-style letters, this appears left-justified (its left edge lines up with the left margin) often with 2-3 lines of space between it and the company letterhead above it and, for symmetry, as much between it and the recipient address below.

Recipient Address (Inside Address)

The recipient address, also called the inside address, is left-justified, begins with the recipient's full name on the top line, and follows with their mailing address on the lines below in the format options given in the table below.

Address Format	Example
Title Full Name, Professional Role or Job Title Company Name Address City, State ZIP Code	Dr. Michelle Masterton, Geriatrician Tidal Healthcare Center 201 Hall Avenue Seaford, DE 19973
Title Full Name, Credentials Professional Role or Job Title (if long) Address City, State ZIP Code	Mr. Jonathan Carruthers, MBA Freelance Marketing Consultant 3489 Cook Street Portland, OR 97227

Subject Reference

Like a subject line in an email or a memo, letters might include subject lines that indicate the topic or purpose. The same titling principles as email and memo apply, only the letter's subject reference begins with "**Re**:" or "RE:" and is entirely in either bold typeface or all-caps, but not both. You might also see it positioned above or below the opening salutation, but usually above. One double space usually separates the subject line from the other parts above and below.

Salutation

Begin the letter with a salutation or **greeting**. The most common greeting is "Dear" followed by the title, name, and colon. Variations in formal letters include omitting the title or the first name, but not both at once. Omit the title if you're at all concerned about its accuracy. For instance, if the recipient's first name is a unisex name and you're not sure it they're male or female, skip the gender title to avoid offending the recipient by mixing up their gender. Unless you're sure that the recipient prefers Mrs. (indicating that she's married) over Ms. because she's used it herself, Ms. might be the safer option. Avoid the title Miss because it's no longer commonly used and appears outdated. If you're addressing someone who identifies as non-binary, then Mx. might be best if you must use a title, or just no title at all. Other considerations in the opening salutation include the following:

- Use the recipient's first name only if you know them well and are on a friendly, first-name basis.
- Only use a comma instead of a colon with **very** informal letters.
- The use of "To Whom It May Concern" is considered outdated. In the past, it was used in situations where someone intended for their letter to be read by whomever it is given to, as in the case of a reference letter that an applicant distributes to potential employers. Every effort should be made to direct the letter to a particular person, especially job application letters. If an employer has deliberately omitted any mention of who is responsible for hiring, for example, addressing the person by professional role in your letter (e.g., Dear Hiring Manager) is preferred. If no name or title as known, omitting a salutation is best.

Examples of Salutations in Business Letters

Dear Dr. Boyd:

Dear Ms. Alexander:

Dear Mr. Farinelli:

Dear Dwayne Jones:

Message Opening

Letters are ideal for both **direct**- and **indirect-approach** messages depending on the occasion for writing them. Direct-approach letters get right to the point by stating their main point in the first paragraph and follow with explanations and other specific information in subsequent paragraphs. Letters organized with openings like this lend themselves to positive or neutral messages. Ideal for formally delivering bad-news or persuasive messages, indirect-approach letters begin with a buffer paragraph or another neutral statement—again, this may only be a sentence or two—just to establish some common ground before getting to the bad news or difficult request in the body of the message.

Message Body

Whether the opening takes the direct or indirect approach, the body supports this with explanatory detail. Ensure that your message body abides by rules explained in Chapter 3, especially conciseness because a letter should only be a page or two. If appropriate for the content, use effective document design features such as numbered or bulleted lists to improve readability. For instance, if your letter contains a series of questions, use a numbered list so that the reader can respond to each with a corresponding numbered list of their own.

Like all other text blocks throughout the letter, every line in the message body must be flush to the left margin, including the first. In other words, rather than indent a paragraph's first line as novels do to mark where one paragraph ends and another begins, separate them with a double space. Brevity in formal letters limits the number of paragraphs to what you can fit in a page or two. However, a letter, unlike an email or a memo, must have at least three paragraphs.

Message Closing

The closing mirrors the opening with a sentence or two that wraps up the letter with something relevant to the topic at hand. Because of their formality, letters almost always end with a goodwill statement, such as an expression of gratitude thanking the reader for their attention or consideration. For instance, a job application letter thanks the reader for their consideration, invites them to read the enclosed resume, and expresses interest in meeting to discuss the applicant's fit with the company in person since getting an interview is the entire point of an application. A thank-you letter will thank the recipient again, and a recommendation letter will emphatically endorse the applicant. Even letters delivering bad news or addressing contentious situations should end with positive statements and expressions of goodwill rather than hostile or passive-aggressive jabs.

Complimentary Closing

A simple "Sincerely" or "Best regards" are standard business letter closing salutations that signal the formal end of the message much like the opening salutation did before the beginning of the message proper. A more personal letter sent to someone you know well may end with "Yours truly," but don't use this with someone you've never met or with anyone you want to maintain a strictly professional relationship with. Always place a comma after the closing.

Signature

Your signature is a guarantee of authorship that carries legal weight. In a printed letter, leave enough space—usually about three single-spaced lines—to autograph your signature by hand. When sending a letter that you write and submit completely electronically, you have two options for an electronic signature, as explained below. Of the two, an image of your hand-written signature looks much more professional than a typed-out version using a simulated handwriting font. The hand-written image gives the impression that you are adept at technology.

Signature Image

Sincerely,
Sign name here
Galileo Galilei, Astronomer

1. Write your signature on a sheet of white paper.
2. Scan the document.
3. Crop the image into a close-fitting jpeg image file. If the scanner makes a PDF file of the scanned image, make a jped file of the signature by using the Snipping Tool.
4. Drag and drop the signature image from the folder where you saved it to the space between your complimentary closing and your full printed name in the signature block.
5. Adjust the signature size so that it occupies the equivalent of about 2-3 single-spaced lines and delete any blank lines of space above and below it so that it would fit snugly between the closing and your full typed name.

Simulated Signature

Sincerely,

John Smith

John Smith

1. Type your name on the line between the closing and full printed name in the signature block.
2. Highlight it.
3. Go to the font selection drop-down menu and select a simulated handwriting signature that is common to most computers, such as Freestyle Script.
4. Adjust the font size so that your simulated signature occupies the equivalent of 2-3 single-spaced lines.

Don't cut corners when assembling an image of your handwritten signature. For instance, taking a smartphone photo of your signature rather than scanning it will look amateurish because the background will probably be grayish or another off-white shade that will clash with the pure white of your page background. Also, drawing your signature with your computer's mouse or touchpad will look shaky like it was signed by a seven year-old. The inserted signature image must be seamlessly integrated and smoothly drawn for it to look professionally done.

Besides giving the impression that you're adept at technology, making an image file of your handwritten signature for electronic letters also sets you up for using it repeatedly to sign contracts and other documents electronically. Unless you're sent a contract via technology solution to legally sign documents in a secure manner, a PDF contract sent to you would otherwise require printing it out, signing it, scanning it, and emailing it back. With a signature image, you can just drag and drop your signature into the document after downloading it, re-save it as a PDF, and email it back to the employer in a minute or two.

Though the simulated signature is certainly easier to put together, it carries with it several problems: it looks lazy and even tacky, carries no legal authority, and may not appear as a simulated signature font when it's opened by the recipient on another computer. If it's opened on, say, a Mac computer when you wrote it on a Windows-based PC, the signature might be converted into 25-pt. Arial font, making the recipient wonder why you chose a font that looks nothing like handwriting for your signature. The reason is that their computer didn't have the signature font you chose, or something was lost in translation, and their reader rendered the signature into a different font. For these reasons, using an image of your actual signature is better.

Signature Block

The signature block clarifies the sender's name in full since handwritten signatures are rarely legible enough to do so themselves. The sender's professional role follows their name either on the same line (with a comma in between) if both the name and role are short enough, and on the second line if they are too long together. On the line below the sender's name and role can appear the name of the company they work for and their work email address on the third line; all three lines are single-spaced. If you are writing independently, putting your email address and phone number on the line(s) below your printed name is a good idea. If you used a personal letterhead, perhaps for a job application letter, then you need not include anything more than your full printed name in your signature block.

Sometimes letters are written on someone else's behalf, perhaps by an administrative assistant. In such cases, the signature and typed-out name of the person responsible for the letter is given at the bottom, then the initials of the person who typed it appear after a line of space below the last line of the signature block.

Enclosure Notation

Just as emails can include attachments, letters are often sent along with other documents. **Job application letters** introduce résumés, for instance, and **letters of transmittal** introduce reports to their intended recipients. In such cases, an enclosure notation on the very last line of the page (above the footer margin) tells the reader that another document or other documents are included with the letter. Remember that you need to mention the enclosure in the body of the letter as well. For example, you can write: "I am including the expense report we discussed last week during our meeting."

> Examples of Enclosure Notations
>
> Enclosure: Expense Report
>
> Enclosures: Resume, Porfolio
>
> Enclosures (2)
>
> Enc. or Encs.

Given the importance of the letter you're writing, especially if it has to do with employment, editing is crucial to your career success. Even a single writing error in a job application letter, for instance, is enough to prompt the reader to dump it in the shredder without even glancing at the enclosed résumé, making the applicant's efforts useless. Also ensure that the letter fulfills its purpose and represents you well with its flawless attention to detail.

Your letter must meet all expectations for standard business letter format. In North America, the page must be 8.5″ x 11″ (21.6 x 27.9cm) with one-inch (2.5cm) or 3cm margins all around. Though letterhead and graphic elements may go in the header and footer for company branding purposes, the side margins must remain blank. Make the font 12-point Times New Roman or a similar serif font, or alternatively a sans-serif font such as Arial, but definitely not something exotic like Papyrus or something informal like Comic Sans MS. Single-space the text by ensuring that the line spacing is 1.0 in your word processor, which may be different from your word processor's default (the MS Word default is 1.08). Adjusting the default setting that adds additional line spaces every time you hit the Enter or Return key is essential to avoiding the effect of the line spacing looking like it's double even when you indeed set it to single.

Though letters sent electronically can be attached in emails or uploaded to a website, hard-copy letters must be printed out and signed. Those mailed on their own or perhaps with one or two enclosed pages can be folded twice to make three horizontal panels of equal height so that the letter fits in a standard 4 1/8″ x 9 1/2″ envelope. When a hard-copy letter covers extremely important documents (e.g., a mailed job application or report), consider sending them pristinely unfolded in a 9″ x 11.5″ envelope.

Finally, ensure that you leave enough time for your letter to arrive at its destination if punctuality is a factor. Though letters sent to a destination within your city may take only a couple of days to get there, those sent across the country may take a week or longer depending on weekend and holiday slow-downs (e.g., letters sent during the Christmas holiday season take longer to arrive). Email has largely replaced hard-copy letters because it ensures that a message gets to its destination the instant you press Send, so send letters when urgency isn't an issue.

General Letter Tips

For more perspectives on business letters, including slight format variations, see the following resources:

- How to Format a Business Letter
- Writing the Basic Business Letter
- How to Write a Business Letter

All links live as of June 2021.

12: Business Presentations - Part 1

Chapter Objectives

- Create oral presentation materials that reflect standards of effective presentations
- Apply the standards of effective presentation to Business Writing
- Demonstrate formatting and designing of presentations
- Evaluate presentations for effectiveness

Introduction

A common assignment in business writing courses—not to mention in the workplace—is to prepare and deliver **presentations**, a task most of us would be happy to avoid. However, while employers look for coursework and experience in preparing written documents, they also look for experience with presentations as well.

Business presentations will be prepared differently face-to-face than in an online environment. You would see many presenters use flip charts, PowerPoint, and other visuals for face-to-face presentations. If you are presenting online, oral reports can be sent in as "scripts," or audio versions can be transmitted live or recorded. You might also use PowerPoint and Prezi presentations as well.

Most people would rather have root canal surgery without Novocaine than stand up in front of a group and speak. It truly is one of life's great stressors. But with some help from the resources that follow, you can be a champion presenter. Learning how to have effective presentations can help you close a big deal or explain information to your colleagues at work.

Topics and Situations for Presentations

For a presentation in a business writing course, imagine that you are formally handing over your final *written* report to the people with whom you set up the hypothetical contract or agreement. For example, imagine that you had contracted with a software company to write its user guide. Once you have completed it, you have a meeting with the chief officers to formally deliver the guide. You spend some time orienting them to the guide, showing them how it is organized and written, and discussing some of its highlights. Your goal is to get them acquainted with the guide and to prompt them for any concerns or questions.

The first step is to figure out a topic. It is important to remember what you did in the writing process and apply the same steps here. Start with brainstorming some possibilities on what you want to present:

- **Purpose:** One way to find a topic is to think about the purpose of your talk. Is it to instruct (for example, to explain how to run a text editing program on a computer), to persuade (to vote for or against a local business-related bond issue), or simply to inform (to report on citizen participation in the new recycling program)?
    - *Informative purpose:* A presentation can be primarily informative. For example, as a member of a committee involved in a project to relocate a distribution center, your job might be to give an oral report on the condition of the building and grounds at one of the sites proposed for purchase.
    - *Instructional purpose:* A presentation can be instructional. Your task might be to train new employees to use certain equipment or to perform certain routine tasks.
    - *Persuasive purpose:* A presentation can be persuasive. You might want to convince members of local civic organizations to support a city-wide recycling program.
- **Topics:** You can start by thinking of a business-related subject, like how computers aid innovations in customer service or the impact of climate change on tourism. For your presentation, think of a subject you would be interested in talking about, but find a reason why an audience would want to hear your report.
- **Place or situation:** You can find topics presentations or make more detailed plans for them by thinking about the place or the situation in which your report might naturally be given: at meetings for your employer? at a city council meeting? at a meeting of the board of directors or high-level executives of a company? Thinking about a presentation this way makes you focus on the audience, their reasons for listening to you, and their interests and background. As in all business writing situations, identifying and understanding your audience is of the utmost importance.

Contents and Requirements for Presentations

Once you have picked a topic for your presentation, it is time to organize your thoughts. The focus for your presentation is clear, understandable presentation, and a well-organized, well-planned, and well-timed discussion.

When you give your presentation, use the following as a requirements list as a way of focusing your preparations:

- **Situation:** Plan to explain the situation of your oral report and who you are. Make sure that there is a clean break between this brief explanation and the beginning of your actual report.
- **Timing:** Make sure your report lasts no longer than the time allotted.
- **Introduction:** Pay special attention to the introduction to your talk. Here's where you tell your audience what you are going to present.
  - Indicate the *purpose* of your oral report
  - give an *overview* of its contents
  - find some way to *interest* the audience
- **Visuals:** Use at least one visual—preferably slides using presentation software (such as Powerpoint, Keynote, or Prezi). Flip charts and objects for display are good, but avoid scribbling stuff on the chalkboard or whiteboard or relying strictly on handouts. Make sure you discuss key elements of your visuals. Don't just throw them up there and ignore them. Point out things about them; explain their significance to the audience.
- **Explanation:** Plan to explain any complex aspects of your topic clearly and understandably. Don't race through complicated, technical information—slow down and explain it carefully so that your audience understands it.
- **Transitions:** Use "verbal headings"—by now, you've gotten used to using headings in your written work. There is a corollary in presentations. With these, you give your audience a very clear signal you are moving from one topic or part of your talk to the next. Your presentation visual can help you signal these headings.
- **Planning:** Plan your report in advance and practice it so that it is organized. Make sure that your audience knows what you are talking about and why, which part of the talk you are on, and what is coming next. Overviews and verbal headings greatly contribute to this sense of organization.
- **Closing:** End with a real conclusion. People sometimes forget to plan how to wrap up a presentation and end by just trailing off into a mumble. Remember that in conclusions, you can:
  - *summarize* (go back over high points of what you've discussed)
  - *conclude* (state some logical conclusion based on what you have presented)
  - provide some *last thought* (end with some final interesting point but general enough not to require elaboration)
  - or some combination of the three
- **Questions:** And certainly, you'll want to prompt the audience for questions and concerns.
- **Timing (again):** As mentioned above, be sure your presentation is carefully timed. Some ideas on how to work within an allotted time frame are presented in the next section.

The sample chart in Figure 1 below can help you with your organization and brainstorming.

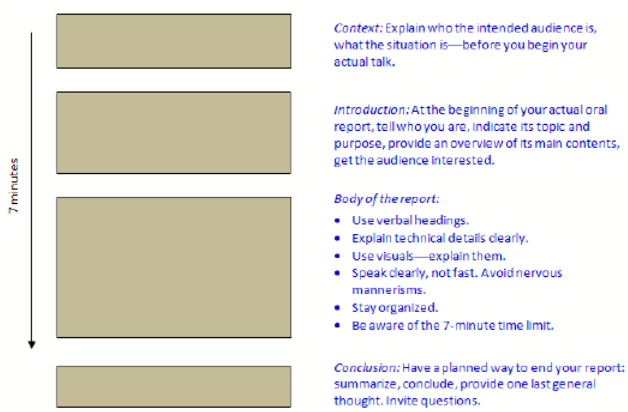

Figure 1: Diagram of the 7 minute oral presentation. (CC BY 2019; Tiffani Reardon)

Just as different writing assignments have unique expectations from you as a student, presentations will also vary depending on the assignment. Carefully read the assignment and directions before you try to create an outline for your presentation.

Planning and Preparing Visuals for Presentations

Presentations are quite common in both academic and professional settings, and, because they are such an important part of how you'll likely present your ideas and information to an audience, it's helpful to have some basic information on how to create effective visuals for your presentation.

The basic purpose of a presentation is to give you a way to present key ideas to an audience with visual support. Your presentation shouldn't be full of text. It is meant to provide you with speaking points, and detailed notes should be kept from your audience. You want to keep your slides clear, clean, short, focused, and you want to keep your audience from using the expression that we sometimes hear in reference to long, boring presentations: "death by PowerPoint."

Common Presentation Tools

The right tool for the job depends, of course, on the job. In this case, that means examining your audience and objective. If, for example, your task is simply to present "the facts," there's no need to consider interactive tools and techniques. If, however, your objective is to educate and/or inspire, you may want to consider a range of options for involving your audience, engaging them as participants or even co-presenters. For example, some workshops require participants—generally in group—to solve challenges or "stand and deliver." That is, to review and present a segment of the material to the audience or peers. Or perhaps your goal is to engage a group in a training or strategic planning exercise. In this case, you would want to incorporate tools that support participative learning and collaboration such as Post-It Note Pads, or packages of smaller note pads (don't forget markers, pens and highlighters) that can be arranged and rearranged as a pattern or plan emerges. Also consider easels, dry erase boards and other surfaces that lend themselves to idea sharing.

Whether you're presenting to a K-12, higher education, or business audience will also influence your choice of primary and supplemental tools: handouts, product samples, giveaways, worksheets, and snacks (yes, even for the adults). If your assignment is to develop and present a business presentation to be delivered to your Business Communications class peers, the topic, format and any supporting materials may be pre-defined. But don't stop there. If you're proposing an edible garden space on campus, you could make or hand out seed packets. Think about how to differentiate yourself and your proposal—whatever you're proposing—in a way that's relevant and memorable.

Similarly, if you're presenting to your management team, there may be a company standard template and tools that you're expected to use. Again, you can distinguish yourself by your knowledge and application of learning and design principles. Even basic facts and figures can be rendered beautifully. Instead of handing out a hard copy of your presentation or supporting charts, graphs or worksheets, consider creating an infographic that distills those insights into a single visual aid. Also consider the logistical and technical details including the room layout, lighting, temperature controls, WiFi and electrical outlets and bathroom facilities.

There are various formats you can use to create effective presentations. Depending on your operating system, there is Keynote for Mac computers while PowerPoint is a Microsoft product; there are also online options such as Prezi. These applications are easy to use and can provide step by step instructions.

There are various types of presentation formats you can use:

- **Presentation software slides:** Projecting images ("slides") using software such as PowerPoint, Keynote, Google Slides, and Prezi, to name a few. One common problem with the construction of these slides is cramming too much information on individual slides.
- **Poster board-size charts:** Another possibility is to get some poster boards and draw and letter what you want your audience to see. Of course, it's not easy making charts look neat and professional.
- **Handouts:** You can make copies of what you want your audience to see and hand them out before or during your talk. This option is even less effective than the first two because you cannot point to what you want your audience to see and because handouts may distract the audience's attention away from you. Still, for certain visual needs, handouts are the only choice. Keep in mind that if you are not well prepared, the handouts become a place for your distracted audience to doodle.
- **Objects:** If you need to demonstrate certain procedures, you may need to bring in actual physical objects. Rehearse what you are going to do with these objects; sometimes they can take up a lot more time than you expect.
- **Zoom, Teams, Google Hangouts (conference style software):** We are seeing more and more companies using this type of software to conduct business meetings. Since people are conducting virtual meetings with increased frequency, learning how to

use this software to present your presentations is very important.

Take some time to make your visuals look sharp and professional—do your best to ensure that they are legible to the entire audience.

As for the content of your visuals, consider these ideas:

- **Drawing or diagram of key objects:** If you describe or refer to any objects during your talk, try to get visuals of them so that you can point to different components or features.
- **Tables, charts, graphs:** If you discuss statistical data, present it in some form or table, chart, or graph. Many members of your audience may be less comfortable "hearing" such data as opposed to seeing it.
- **Outline of your talk, report, or both:** If you are at a loss for visuals to use in your presentation, or if your presentation is complex, have an outline of it that you can show at various points during your talk.
- **Key terms and definitions:** A good idea for visuals (especially when you cannot think of any others) is to set up a two-column list of key terms you use during your presentation with their definitions in the second column.
- **Key concepts or points:** Similarly, you can list your key points and show them in visuals. (Outlines, key terms, and main points are all good, legitimate ways of incorporating visuals into presentations when you cannot think of any others.)

During your actual report, make sure to discuss your visuals, refer to them, guide your audience through the key points in your visuals. It is a big problem just to throw a visual up on the screen and never even refer to it.

As you prepare your visuals, look at resources that will help you. There are many rules for using PowerPoint, Keynote, Google Slides, and Prezi down to the font size and how many words to put on a single slide, but you will have to choose the style that best suits your subject and your presentation style.

Presentation software also allows you to take a presentation to the next level—engaging your audience verbally and visually as well as aurally. What's particularly powerful about using presentation software and other visual aids is the ability to use imagery to bridge cultural and language gaps and arrive at a shared understanding of the issue/opportunity at hand. Using multimedia—images, photos and video and animation—that supports your point also provides repetition and can increase retention.

You may also have heard about the presentation skills of Steve Jobs. The video that follows is the introduction of the I-Phone. As you watch, take notes on how Jobs sets up his talk and his visuals. Observe how he connects with the audience, and then see if you can work some of his strategies into your own presentation skills. This is a long video; you don't need to watch it all, but do take enough time to form some good impressions.

Steve Jobs iPhone Presentation

Designing the Presentation

When creating a presentation, you want to make sure it is visually appealing and easy to read for your audience. When you start to think about the layout of your presentation, make sure to have an outline of how you want your presentation to flow. This will help you make sure you cover all your points. Make sure that your presentation is spaced out well and your content does not look cluttered on the slide. You want to have less text and use more bullet points. You want to also have visuals to highlight your topic. The supplemental information below will help you create a slide that highlights bullet points, illustrated points, and speaker props.

https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Graduate-Writing-Center/GWC%20Guides/Genres/Powerpoint_Presentations.pdf

The following video will help bring it all together:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iwpi1Lm6dFo

Speaker Props

This type of presentation is random pictures that will flash across your screen. You have to be careful when using it as it could be distracting for the audience and some people cannot handle flashes like that. The video below is an example of this type of presentation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=RrpajcAgR1E

Fonts and Size for Your Presentation

When you are creating your presentation, make sure to pick a font and size that is easy for your audience to read. Your audience needs to be able to read the information being projected in the room. Remember you could be in a conference room or an auditorium. Make sure you are using the same font throughout your presentation and the font is appropriate for your topic and audience. It can be distracting if you have various fonts throughout the presentation.

Tips

1. Use a font that is easy to read
2. Make sure the font and the background are compatible
3. Make sure your title font is bigger than the content and stands out
4. The common size is 24 font
5. Bold important information

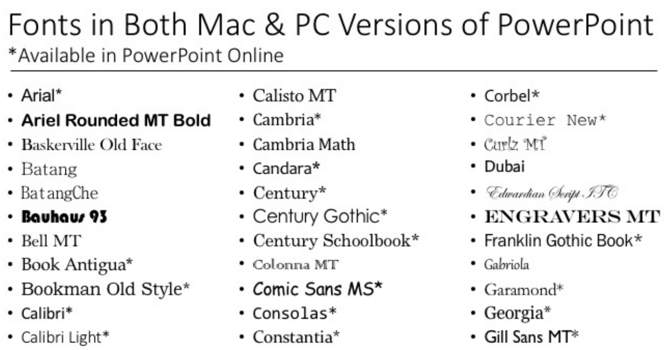

Figure 4: The best fonts to use in PowerPoint. Source: TemplateMonster

Presentation Design Aesthetics

For our purposes, **aesthetics** refers to the beauty or good taste of a presentation aid. Earlier we mentioned the universal principles of good design: unity, emphasis or focal point, scale and proportion, balance, and rhythm. Because of wide differences in taste, not everyone will agree on what is aesthetically pleasing, and you may be someone who does not think of yourself as having much artistic talent. Still, if you keep these principles in mind, they will help you to create attractive, professional-looking visuals.

The other aesthetic principle to keep in mind is that your presentation aids are intended to support your speech, not the other way around. The decisions you make in designing your visuals should be dictated by the content of your speech. If you use color, use it for a clear reason. If you use a border, keep it simple. Whatever you do, make certain that your presentation aids will be perceived as carefully planned and executed elements of your speech.

How to Choose the Right Colors

Color is very important and can definitely make a strong impact on an audience. However, don’t go overboard or decide to use unappealing combinations of color. For example, you should never use a light font color (like yellow) on a solid white background because it’s hard for the eye to read. You should also realize that while colors may be rich and vibrant on your computer screen at home, they may be distorted by a different monitor. Remember that you want the color to be suitable for all audiences; ome people are color blind and cannot see certain colors. While we definitely are in favor of experimenting with various color schemes, always check your presentation out on multiple computers to see if the slide color is being distorted in a way that makes it hard to read.

Visual and Audio Effects

Everyone who has had an opportunity to experiment with PowerPoint, Keynote, and Prezi knows that animation in transitions between slides or even on a single slide can be fun, but often people do not realize that too much movement can actually distract audience members. While all presentation software packages offer you interesting slide movements and other novelty visual effects, they are not always very helpful for your presentation. If you’re going to utilize slide transitions or word animation, stick to only three or four different types of transitions in your whole presentation. Furthermore, do not have more than one type of movement on a given slide. If you’re going to have all your text come from the right side of the screen in a bulleted list, make sure that all the items on the bulleted list come from the right side of the screen.

Good writers make conscious choices. They understand their purpose and audience. Every decision they make on the page, from organizing an essay to choosing a word with just the right connotations, is made with their purpose and audience in mind.

The same principle applies to visual communication. As a presenter, you choose the following:

- When to show images or video for maximum impact;
- Which images will best produce the effect you want;
- When to present information using a table, chart, or other graphic;
- How much text to include in slides or informational graphics; and
- How to organize graphics so they present information clearly.

Your goal is to use visual media to support and enhance your presentation. At the same time, you must make sure these media do not distract your audience or interfere with getting your point across. Your ideas, not your visuals, should be the focus.

Tips

Here are some tips to keep in mind when creating an effective presentation:

1. Remember to avoid too much text. You should keep your text brief and include talking points only. Detailed notes can be inserted into the notes section (or you can use some other form of notes as you present), but only you should see those notes, unless a professor asks to see your notes to evaluate your presentation as an assignment.
2. Be consistent and clear with your font choices. Helvetica is a nice font for presentations. Make sure your font is large enough that an audience in a room would be able to see your text, even if audience members are sitting in the back of the room.
3. Be careful with your color choices for text and background. You want to make sure your audience can read your text easily. Black on white text is easiest to read but can also be boring for a presentation. Still, when you add color, be sure you are adding color that works and doesn’t distract.
4. Add images. Text on slides for every slide is rather dull. Add appropriate images to your slides. Relevant charts and graphs are excellent, as are pictures that will connect to your content. Think about moments where an image can more easily convey information or a message. A powerful image on a slide with no accompanying text can be a powerful way to capture your audience’s attention.
5. Make sure your main points are clear. Remember to connect your ideas well and provide background information and transitions when necessary.
6. Keep your audience in mind. Your audience will affect the overall tone and appearance of your presentation. Sometimes, humor can be appropriate. Other times, a more serious tone may be necessary. Just as you evaluate your situation any time you write a paper, you should evaluate your situation for creating a presentation.

Preparing for the Presentation

Pick the method of preparing for the talk that best suits your comfort level with public speaking and with your topic. However, plan to do ample preparation and rehearsal—some people assume that they can just jump up there and ad lib for so many minutes and be relaxed and informal. It does not often work that way—drawing a mental blank is the more common experience. A well delivered presentation is the result of a lot of work and a lot of practice.

Here are the obvious possibilities for preparation and delivery:

- Write a script, practice it; keep it around for quick-reference during your talk.
- Set up an outline of your talk; practice with it, bring it for reference.
- Set up cue cards, practice with them, and use them during your talk.
- Write a script and read from it.

A good presentation is one that is clear, understandable, well-planned, organized, and on target with your purpose and audience.

It does not matter which method you use to prepare for the talk, but you want to make sure that you know your material. The head-down style of reading your report directly from a script will not work. There is little or no eye contact or interaction with the audience. The delivery tends to lean toward a dull, boring monotone that either puts listeners off or is hard to understand. Also, most of us cannot stand to have reports read to us!

For a variety of reasons, many people get nervous when they have to give presentations. Being well prepared is your best defense against the nerves. The nerves will wear off someday, gradually decreasing with every presentation you give. In the meantime, breathe deeply and enjoy.

Delivering Presentations

When you give a presentation, focus on common problem areas such as these:

- **Timing:** Make sure you keep within the time limit. Finishing more than a minute under the time limit is also a problem. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse until you get the timing just right.
- **Volume:** Obviously, you must be sure to speak loud enough so that all of your audience can hear you. You might find some way to practice speaking a little louder in the days before the presentation.
- **Pacing and speed:** Sometimes, speakers who are nervous talk too fast. All that adrenaline causes them to speed through their talk, making it hard for the audience to follow. In general, it helps listeners understand you better if you speak a bit more slowly and deliberately than you do in normal conversation. Slow down, take it easy, be clear, and remember to breathe.
- **Gestures and posture:** Watch out for nervous hands flying all over the place. This can be distracting and a bit comical. At the same time, do not turn yourself into a mannequin. Plan to keep your hands clasped together or holding onto the podium and only occasionally making some gesture. Definitely keep your hands out of your pockets or waistband. As for posture, avoid slouching at the podium or leaning against the wall. Stand up straight, and keep your head up.
- **Verbal crutches:** Watch out for overuse of phrases like "uh," "you know," "okay" and other kinds of nervous verbal habits. Instead of saying "uh" or "you know" every three seconds, just do not say anything at all. In the days before your presentation, practice speaking without these verbal crutches. The silence that replaces them is not a bad thing—it gives listeners time to process what you are saying.

Face Your Audience

“Maintain eye contact” is a common piece of public-speaking advice—so common it may sound elementary and clichéd. Why is that simple piece of advice so hard to follow?

Maintaining eye contact may not be as simple as it sounds. In everyday conversation, people establish eye contact but then look away from time to time, because staring into someone’s eyes continuously feels uncomfortably intense. Two or three people conversing can establish a comfortable pattern of eye contact. But how do you manage that when you are addressing a group?

The trick is to focus on one person at a time. Zero in on one person, make eye contact, and maintain it just long enough to establish a connection. (A few seconds will suffice.) Then move on. This way, you connect with your audience, one person at a time. As you proceed, you may find that some people hold your gaze and others look away quickly. That is fine, as long as you connect with people in different parts of the room.

Pay attention to your facial expressions as well. If you have thought about how you want to convey emotion during different parts of your presentation, you are probably already monitoring your facial expressions as you rehearse. Be aware that the pressure of presenting can make your expression serious or tense without your realizing it.

Practice, Practice, Practice

It is vital to practice using the technology. Nothing is worse than watching a speaker stand up and not know how to turn on the computer, access the software, or launch his or her presentation. When you use technology, audiences can quickly see if you know what you are doing, so don’t give them the opportunity to devalue your credibility because you can’t even get the show going.

Always Have a Backup Plan

Lastly, always have a backup plan. Unfortunately, things often go wrong. One of the parts of being a professional is keeping the speech moving in spite of unexpected problems. Decide in advance what you will do if things break down or disappear right when you need them. Don’t count on your instructor to solve such predicaments; it is your responsibility. If you take this responsibility seriously and check the room where you will be presenting early, you will have time to adapt. If the computer or audiovisual setup does not work on the first try, you will need time to troubleshoot and solve the problem. If an easel is missing, you will need time to experiment with using a lectern or a chair to support your flip chart. If you forgot to bring your violin for a speech about music, you will need time to think through how to adapt your speech so that it will still be effective.

Tips

If you are speaking to a very large group, it may be difficult to make eye contact with each individual. Instead, focus on a smaller group of persons or one row of people at time. Look in their direction for a few seconds and then shift your gaze to another small group in the room.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how to plan, create, and share presentations. There are so many presentation solutions available, so be sure to find one that works with your computer and you feel comfortable using. When you create a PowerPoint, Prezi, Google Slide, or Keynote presentation, be sure to consider the principles discussed.

Chapter Summary

When creating a presentation, remember to:

- Brainstorm your topic
- Content and requirements for effective presentation
- Planning and Preparing your presentation
- Choose a presentation that fits your audience
- Use a font and size that is appropriate for presentation
- Make sure object and content are position appropriate for your presentation
- Make sure the colors and text are not distracting and in contrast with each other
- Make sure your backgrounds are easy to read and see - remember some people are color blind
- Make sure to pick affects and visuals that are stimulating and pleasing to the eye

All links live as of July 2021.

This work "Oral Presentations" is a derivative of "Oral Presentations" by David McMurrey and Casandra Race, and Excelsior Online Reading Lab, Presentations and Other Visual Aids by Nina Burokas. "Oral Presentations" is licensed under CC BY 4.0 by Lise-Pauline Barnett.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: Business Presentations - Part 2

13.1: Rhetorical Situation

Learning Objectives

1. Label and discuss the three main components of the rhetorical situation.

In the classical tradition, the art of public speaking is called rhetoric; the circumstances in which you give your speech or presentation are the rhetorical situation. By understanding the rhetorical situation, you can gauge the best ways to reach your listeners and get your points across. In so doing, you'll make the transition from your viewpoint to that of your audience members. Remember that without an audience to listen and respond to you, it's really not much of a speech. The audience gives you the space and time as a speaker to fulfill your role and, hopefully, their expectations. Just as a group makes a leader, an audience makes a speaker. By looking to your audience, you shift your attention from an internal focus (you) to an external (them/others) emphasis. This "other-orientation" is key to your success as an effective speaker.

Several of the first questions any audience member asks himself or herself are, "Why should I listen to you?" "What does what you are saying have to do with me?" and "How does this help me?" We communicate through the lens of personal experience and it's only natural that we would relate what others say to our own needs and wants, but by recognizing that we share in our humanity many of the same basic motivations, we can find common ground of mutual interest. Generating interest in your speech is only the first step as you guide perception through selection, organization, and interpretation of content and ways to communicate your point. Your understanding of the rhetorical situation will guide you as you plan how to employ various strategies to guide your listeners as they perceive and interpret your message. Your awareness of the overall process of building a speech will allow you to take it step by step and focus on the immediate task at hand.

Figure 13.1.1: The rhetorical situation involves where we are, who we are with, and why we are communicating. photolibrarian – Red Oak, Iowa, Courtroom, Judge Hayzlett – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The rhetorical situation involves three elements: the set of expectations inherent in the context, audience, and the purpose of your speech or presentation (Kostelnick, C. and Roberts, D., 1998). This means you need to consider, in essence, the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" of your speech from the audience's perspective.

Context

As we consider the rhetorical situation, we need to explore the concept in depth. Your speech is not given in a space that has no connection to the rest of the world. If you are going to be presenting a speech in class, your context will be the familiar space of your classroom. Other contexts might include a business conference room, a restaurant where you are the featured speaker for a dinner meeting, or a podium that has been set up outdoors for a sports award ceremony.

The time of your speech will relate to people's natural patterns of behavior. If you give a speech right after lunch, you can expect people to be a bit sleepy. Knowing this, you can take steps to counter this element of the context by making your presentation especially dynamic, such as having your audience get up from their seats or calling on them to answer questions at various points in your speech.

You can also place your topic within the frame of reference of current events. If you are presenting a speech on the importance of access to health care for everyone, and you are presenting it in October of an election year, the current events that exist outside your speech may be used to enhance it. Your listeners might be very aware of the political climate, and relating your topic to a larger context may effectively take into consideration the circumstances in which your readers will use, apply, or contemplate your information.

Audience

The receiver (i.e., listener or audience) is one of the basic components of communication. Without a receiver, the source (i.e., the speaker) has only himself or herself in which to send the message. By extension, without an audience you can't have a speech. Your audience comes to you with expectations, prior knowledge, and experience. They have a purpose that makes them part of the audience instead of outside playing golf. They have a wide range of characteristics like social class, gender, age, race and ethnicity, cultural background, and language that make them unique and diverse. What kind of audience will you be speaking to? What do you know about their expectations, prior knowledge or backgrounds, and how they plan to use your information? Giving attention to this aspect of the rhetorical situation will allow you to gain insight into how to craft your message before you present it.

Purpose

A speech or oral presentation may be designed to inform, demonstrate, persuade, motivate, or even entertain. You may also overlap by design and both inform and persuade. The purpose of your speech is central to its formation. You should be able to state your purpose in one sentence or less, much like an effective thesis statement in an essay. You also need to consider alternate perspectives, as we've seen previously in this chapter. Your purpose may be to persuade, but the audience after lunch may want to be entertained, and your ability to adapt can make use of a little entertainment that leads to persuasion.

Key Takeaway

The rhetorical situation has three components: the context, the audience, and the purpose of the speech.

References

Kostelnick, C., & Roberts, D. (1998). *Designing visual language: Strategies for professional communicators*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

13.2: Strategies for Success

Learning Objectives

1. Identify strategies to highlight ways to approach the preparation and presentation of your message.

Given the diverse nature of audiences, the complexity of the communication process, and the countless options and choices to make when preparing your speech, you may feel overwhelmed. One effective way to address this is to focus on ways to reach, interact, or stimulate your audience. Humans share many of the same basic needs, and meeting those needs provides various strategies for action.

Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts outline several cognate strategies, or ways of framing, expressing, and representing a message to an audience, in *Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators* (Kostelnick C. and Roberts, D., 1998). The word “cognate” refers to knowledge, and these strategies are techniques to impart knowledge to your audience. Kostelnick and Roberts’s strategies are cross-disciplinary in that they can be applied to writing, graphic design, and verbal communication. They help the writer, designer, or speaker answer questions like “Does the audience understand how I’m arranging my information?” “Am I emphasizing my key points effectively?” and “How does my expression and representation of information contribute to a relationship with the audience?” They can serve you to better anticipate and meet your audience’s basic needs.

Aristotle outlined three main forms of rhetorical proof: ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos involves the speaker’s character and expertise. Logos is the logic of the speaker’s presentation—something that will be greatly enhanced by a good organizational plan. Aristotle discussed pathos as the use of emotion as a persuasive element in the speech (Wisse, J., 1998), or “the arousing of emotions in the audience.” We don’t always make decisions based on clear thinking. Sometimes we are moved by words, by a scene in a movie, or by other mediated forms of communication. As the speaker, you may create a message by selecting some aspects and rejecting others. A close-up picture of a child starving to death can capture attention and arouse emotions. If you use pathos in a strategic way, you are following Aristotle’s notion of rhetorical proof as the available means of persuasion. If logic and expertise don’t move the audience, a tragic picture may do so.

The cognate strategies are in many ways expressions of these three elements, but by focusing on individual characteristics, can work towards being more effective in their preparation and presentation. Many of these strategies build on basic ideas of communication, such as verbal and nonverbal delivery. By keeping that in mind, you’ll be more likely to see the connections and help yourself organize your presentation effectively.

Here we adapt and extend Kostelnick and Roberts’ strategies in order to highlight ways to approach the preparation and presentation of your message. Across the cognate strategies, we can see Aristotle’s rhetorical elements through a range of strategies to communicate better with our audience. There is a degree of overlap, and many of the strategies draw on related elements, but by examining each strategy as a technique for engaging your audience, you can better craft your message to meet their expectations.

Tone

From the choice of your words, to the choice of your dress, you contribute to the tone of the speech. Tone, or the general manner of expression of the message, will contribute to the context of the presentation. First, consider your voice. Is it relaxed, or shaky and nervous? Your voice is like a musical instrument that, when played expressively, fulfills a central role in your ability to communicate your message to your audience. Next consider how your tone is expressed through your body language. Are your arms straight down at your sides, or crossed in front of you, or are they moving in a natural flow to the rhythm and cadence of your speech? Your dress, your use of space, and the degree to which you are comfortable with yourself will all play a part in the expression of your message.

Emphasis

If everyone speaks at the same time, it’s hard for anyone to listen. In the same way, if all your points are equally presented, it can be hard to distinguish one from another, or to focus on the points that are most important. As the speaker, you need to consider how you place emphasis—stress, importance, or prominence—on some aspects of your speech, and how you lessen the impact of others. Perhaps you have a visual aid to support your speech in the form of a visually arresting picture. Imagine that you want to present a persuasive speech on preventing skin cancer and you start with a photo of two people wearing very little clothing. While the image may capture attention, clearly placing emphasis on skin, it may prove to be more of a distraction than an addition.

Emphasis as a cognate strategy asks you to consider relevance, and the degree to which your focal point of attention contributes to or detracts from your speech. You will need to consider how you link ideas through transitions, how you repeat and rephrase, and how you place your points in hierarchical order to address the strategy of emphasis in your presentation.

Engagement

Before you start thinking about weddings, consider what key element is necessary for one to occur? If you guessed a relationship you were correct. Just as a couple forms an interpersonal relationship, the speaker forms a relationship with the audience members. Eye contact can be an engaging aspect of this strategy, and can help you form a connection—an engagement—with individual audience members. Looking at the floor or ceiling may not display interest to the audience. Engagement strategies develop the relationship with the audience, and you will need to consider how your words, visuals, and other relevant elements of your speech help this relationship grow.

Clarity

As a speaker, you may have excellent ideas to present, but if they are not made clear to the audience, your speech will be a failure. “Clarity strategies help the receiver (audience) to decode the message, to understand it quickly and completely, and when necessary, to react without ambivalence” (Kostelnick, C. and Roberts, D., 1998). Your word choices, how you say them, and in what order all relate to clarity. If you use euphemisms, or indirect expressions, to communicate a delicate idea, your audience may not follow you. If you use a story, or an arresting image, and fail to connect it clearly to your main point or idea, your audience will also fail to see the connection. Depending on the rhetorical situation, the use of jargon may clarify your message or confuse your audience. You’ll also need to consider the visual elements of your presentation and how they clarify your information. Is the font sufficiently large on your PowerPoint slide to be read in the back of the room? Is your slide so packed with words that they key ideas are lost in a noise of text? Will it be clear to your listeners how your pictures, motion clips, or audio files relate to topic?

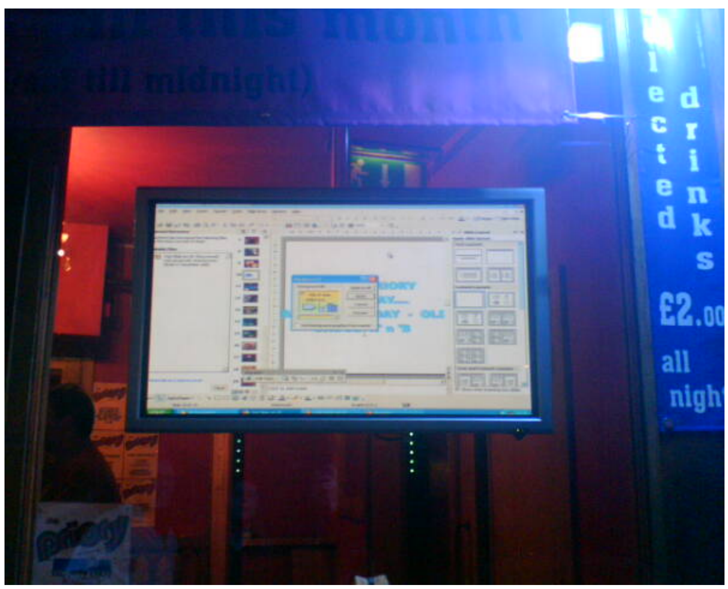

Figure 13.2.2: Dense graphics that are not legible from the back of the room can sabotage your presentation. Simon Pearson – Powerpoint lessons at The Priory – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Conciseness

Being clear is part of being concise. Conciseness refers to being brief and direct in the visual and verbal delivery of your message, and avoiding unnecessary intricacy. It involves using as many words as necessary to get your message across, and no more. If you only have five to seven minutes, how will you budget your time? Being economical with your time is a pragmatic approach to insuring that your attention, and the attention of your audience, is focused on the point at hand.

Arrangement

As the speaker, you will gather and present information in some form. How that form follows the function of communicating your message involves strategically grouping information. “Arrangement means order, the organization of visual (and verbal) elements

(Kostelnick, C. and Roberts, D., 1998) “in ways that allow the audience to correctly interpret the structure, hierarchy, and relationships among points of focus in your presentation. We will discuss the importance of hierarchy, and which point comes first and last, as we explore arguments and their impact on the perception of your message.

Credibility

Here we can clearly see Aristotle’s ethos—character and expertise. You will naturally develop a relationship with your audience, and the need to make trust an element is key to that development. The word “credibility” comes from the word “credence,” or belief. Credibility involves your qualities, capabilities, or power to elicit from the audience belief in your character. Cultivating a sense of your character and credibility may involve displaying your sense of humor, your ability to laugh at yourself, your academic or profession-specific credentials, or your personal insight into the topic you are discussing.

For example, if you are going to present a persuasive speech on the dangers of drinking and driving, and start with a short story about how you helped implement a “designated driver” program, the audience will understand your relationship to the message, and form a positive perception of your credibility. If you are going to persuade the audience to give blood, practice safe sex, or get an HIV test, your credibility on the subject may come from your studies in the medical or public health field, from having volunteered at a blood drive, or perhaps from having had a loved one who needed a blood transfusion. Consider persuasive strategies that will appeal to your audience, build trust, and convey your understanding of the rhetorical situation.

Expectation

Your audience, as we’ve addressed previously, will have inherent expectations of themselves and of you depending on the rhetorical situation. Expectations involve the often unstated, eager anticipation of the norms, roles and outcomes of the speaker and the speech. If you are giving an after-dinner speech at a meeting where the audience members will have had plenty to eat and drink immediately before you get up to speak, you know that your audience’s attention may be influenced by their state of mind. The “after-dinner speech” often incorporates humor for this very reason, and the anticipation that you will be positive, lighthearted and funny is implicit in the rhetorical situation. If, on the other hand, you are going to address a high school assembly on the importance of graduating from high school and pursuing a college education, you may also be motivational, funny, and lighthearted, but there will be an expectation that you will also discuss some serious issues as a part of your speech.

Reference

No one person knows everything all the time at any given moment, and no two people have experienced life in the same way. For this reason, use references carefully. Reference involves attention to the source and way you present your information. If you are a licensed pilot and want to inform your audience about the mistaken belief that flying is more dangerous than driving, your credibility will play a role. You might also say “according to the Federal Aviation Administration” as you cite mortality statistics associated with aviation accidents in a given year. The audience won’t expect you to personally gather statistics and publish a study, but they will expect you to state where you got your information. If you are talking to a group of children who have never flown before, and lack a frame of reference to the experience of flying, you will need to consider how to reference key ideas within their scope of experience.

A good way to visualize this is as a frame, where some information you display to the audience is within the frame, and other information (that you do not display) lies outside the frame. You focus the information to improve clarity and conciseness, and the audience will want to know why the information you chose is included and where you got it. That same frame may also be related to experience, and your choice of terms, order or reliance on visual aids to communicate ideas. If you are giving a speech on harvesting crops on an incline, and your audience is made up of rural Bolivians who farm manually, talking about a combine may not be as effective as showing one in action in order to establish a frame of reference.

- References

Kostelnick, C., & Roberts, D. (1998). *Designing visual language: Strategies for professional communicators*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Wisse, J. (1989). *Ethos and pathos: From Aristotle to Cicero*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Adolph M. Hakkert.

13.3: Building a Sample Speech

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate how to build a sample speech by expanding on the main points you wish to convey.
2. Demonstrate how to use the five structural parts of any speech.

As you begin to investigate your topic, make sure you consider several sides of an issue. Let's say you are going to do a speech to inform on the history of the First Transcontinental Railroad. At first you may have looked at just two sides, railroaders versus local merchants. Railroad tycoons wanted to bring the country together—moving people, goods, and services in a more efficient way—and to make money. Local merchants wanted to keep out competition and retain control of their individual markets.

Take another look at this issue and you see that several other perspectives have bearing on this issue. Shipping was done primarily by boat prior to the railroad, so shippers would not want the competition. Recent Chinese immigrants were in need of work. Native Americans did not want to lose their culture or way of life, and a railroad that crossed the country would cut right through the buffalo's migration patterns. We now have five perspectives to the central issue, which makes the topic all the more interesting.

The general purpose is to inform the audience on the First Transcontinental Railroad and its impact on a young but developing United States. The thesis statement focuses on shipping, communication, and cultures across America.

- *Topic*. First Transcontinental Railroad
- *General purpose statement*. I want the audience to be more informed about the impact of the First Transcontinental Railroad.
- *Thesis statement*. The First Transcontinental Railroad changed shipping, communication, and cultures across America.

With the information we have so far, we can now list three main points:

1. Change in shipping
2. Change in communication
3. Change in cultures

Think of each one of these main points as a separate but shorter speech. The point is to develop each of these main points like you have developed your overall speech. What do you want to focus on? The major types of shipping at the time of the First Transcontinental Railroad? One aspect you may want consider is to what degree is your audience familiar with this time in history. If they are not very familiar, a little background and context can help make your speech more meaningful and enhance its relevance to your thesis statement. By taking time to consider what you want to accomplish with each point, you will help yourself begin to address how you need to approach each point. Once you have thought about what you want to focus on for each point, list each subheading next to the main points. For example,

1. Change in shipping
    1. Navigating the waterways via barges and boats
    2. Overland stagecoaches
    3. Timetables for modes of travel
2. Change in communication
    1. Letters in the days of the Pony Express
    2. How the Morse Code telegraph system followed railroad lines
    3. Bringing people together across distances
3. Change in cultures
    1. Prerailroad immigration
    2. Impact on Native Americans
    3. Territories become States

By now you've identified your key points and are ready to start planning your speech in more detail. While your organizational structure will vary from speech to speech, there are nonetheless five main parts of any speech: attention statement, introduction, body, conclusion, and residual message. These are basic to the rhetorical process and you will see time and time again, regardless of audience or culture, these same elements in some form utilized to communicate in public. They will serve to guide you, and possibly even save you should you get a last minute request to do a speech or presentation.

Place your hand on the table or desk and you'll more likely see a thumb and four fingers. Associate your hand with these five elements. Each digit is independently quite weak, but together they make a powerful fist. Your thumb is quite versatile and your most important digit. It's a lot like your attention statement. If you don't gain the audience's attention, the rest of the speech will be ineffective.

Each successive digit can represent the remaining four parts of any speech. One day you will be asked to speak with little or no time for preparation. By focusing on this organizational model, and looking down at your hand, you can quickly and accurately prepare your speech. With the luxury of time for preparation, each step can even be further developed. Remember the five-finger model of public speaking, as summarized in Table 13.3.1, and you will always stand out as a more effective speaker.

Table 13.3.1: Five-Finger Model of Public Speaking

Attention Statement	The attention statement is the way you focus the audience's attention on you and your speech.
Introduction	Your introduction introduces you and your topic, and should establish a relationship with your audience and state your topic clearly.
Body	In the body, or main content area of your speech, you will naturally turn to one of the organizational patterns.
Conclusion	You conclusion should provide the audience with a sense of closure by summarizing the main points and relating the points to the overall topic.
Residual Message	The residual message is an idea or thought that stays with your audience well after the speech.

Key Takeaway

Speeches are built by identifying the main points to be communicated and by following five structural elements (attention statement, introduction, body, conclusion, and residual message).

13.4: Sample Speech Outlines

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to create two different styles of outlines for a speech.

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 center column of Table $13.4.1$ presents a generic outline in a classical style. In the left column, the five main structural elements of a speech are tied to the outline. Your task is to fill in the center column outline with the actual ideas and points you are making in your speech. Feel free to adapt it and tailor it to your needs, depending on the specifics of your speech. Next, fill in the right column with the verbal and visual delivery features of your speech.

Table 13.4.1: Speech Outline A

Attention Statement	Device	Verbal and Visual Delivery
Introduction	• Main idea • Common ground	
Body	• I. Main idea: Point 1 • Subpoint 1 • A.1 specific information 1 • A.2 specific information 2 • II. Main idea: Point 2 • Subpoint 1 • B.1 specific information 1 • B.2 specific information 2 • III. Main idea: Point 3 • Subpoint 1 • C.1 specific information 1 • C.2 specific information 2	
Conclusion	Summary, main points 1–3	
Residual Message	Main idea	

There is no law that says a speech outline has to follow a classical outline format, however. Table $13.4.2$ is an alternate outline form you may want to use to develop your speech. As you can see, this outline is similar to the one above in that it begins with the five basic structural elements of a speech. In this case, those elements are tied to the speech's device, thesis, main points, summary, and recap of the thesis. In the right column, this outline allows you to fill in the cognate strategies you will use to get your points across to your audience. You may use this format as a model or modify it as needed.

Table 13.4.2: Speech Outline B

Attention Statement	Device	Cognate Strategies, Verbal and Visual
Introduction	• General purpose statement or thesis statement • Common ground	
Body	• Point 1: • Point 2: • Point 3:	
Conclusion	Summarize main points and reinforce common ground	
Residual Message	Reiterate thesis	

Key Takeaway

An outline is a framework that helps the speaker to organize ideas and tie them to the main structural elements of the speech.

13.5: Organizing Principles for Your Speech

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and understand how to use at least five different organizing principles for a speech.

There are many different ways to organize a speech, and none is "better" or "more correct" than the others. The choice of an organizing principle, or a core assumption around which everything else is arranged, depends on the subject matter, the rhetorical situation, and many other factors, including your preference as speaker.

The left column of Table 13.5.1 presents seventeen different organizing principles to consider. The center column explains how the principle works, and the right column provides an applied example based on our sample speech about the First Transcontinental Railroad. For example, using a biographical organizing principle, you might describe the journey of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804; the signing of the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862, and the completion of the first Transcontinental Express train trip in 1876. As another example, using a spatial organizing principle, you might describe the mechanics of how a steam locomotive engine works to turn the train wheels, which move on a track to travel across distances.

As you read each organizational structure, consider how the main points and subheadings might change or be adapted to meet each pattern.

Table 13.5.1 Sample Organizing Principles for a Speech

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
1. Time (Chronological)	Structuring your speech 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…
2. Comparison	Structuring your speech by comparison focuses on the similarities and/or differences between points or concepts.	A comparison of pre– and post–First Transcontinental Railroad North America, showing how health and life expectancy remained the same.
3. Contrast	Structure your speech by using contrasting points highlights the differences between items and concepts.	A contrast of pre– and post–First Transcontinental Railroad North America, by shipping times, time it took to communicate via letter, or how long it took to move out West.
4. Cause and Effect	Structuring your speech by cause and effect 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.
5. Problem and Solution	Structuring your speech 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 lack a fast, effective method of getting their goods to growing markets. The First Transcontinental Railroad gave them speed, economy, and access to new markets.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
6. Classification (Categorical)	Structuring your speech by classification establishes categories.	At the time the nation considered the First Transcontinental Railroad, there were three main types of transportation: by water, by horse, and by foot.
7. Biographical	Structuring your speech by biography means examining specific people as they relate to the central topic.	• 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
8. Space (Spatial)	Structuring your speech 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 stream, and turn a turbine, which moves a lever that causes a wheel to move on a track.
9. Ascending and Descending	Structuring your speech 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.
10. Psychological	It is also called “Monroe’s Motivated Sequence” (Ayres, J. and Miller, J., 1994). Structuring your speech on the psychological aspects of the audience involves focusing on their inherent needs and wants. See Maslow and Shutz. The speaker calls *attention* to a *need*, then focuses on the satisfaction of the need, *visualization* of the solution, and ends with a proposed or historical *action*. This is useful for a persuasive speech.	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 brought families and the country together.
11. Elimination	Structuring your speech using the process of elimination involves outlining all the possibilities.	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.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
12. Ceremonial: Events, Ceremonies, or Celebrations	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank dignitaries and representatives. 2. Mention the importance of the event. 3. Mention the relationship of the event to the audience. 4. Thank the audience for their participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.	Thanking the representatives, builders, and everyone involved with the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. The railroad will unite America, and bring us closer in terms of trade, communication and family. Thank you for participating in today's dedication.
13. Awards	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Discuss the history and importance of the award. 3. Give a brief biography of the person who will receive the award (often nonspecific to keep people guessing and to build suspense). 4. Announce the name of the award recipient. 5. Present the award (present award with left hand, shake with right). 6. Award recipient may give a speech. 7. Transition to the next item or thank everyone for participating.	>Thank everyone for coming together. The Golden Spike Award was created in honor of all the great men and women that made today possible. The person receiving this award needs no introduction. His/her tireless efforts to build partnerships, coalitions, and raise support for the railroad have been unwavering. (Name), please come and receive the Golden Spike Award. (Speech/no speech.) Thank you, everyone, for coming.
14. Toast: Weddings or Similar Gatherings	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Discuss the importance of the event (wedding). 3. Mention the relationship of the couple to the audience or the speaker to the person being celebrated. 4. Add one short sentence. 5. Optional: Conclude, thanking the audience for participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.	Thank everyone for coming together. I've know the groom since he played with toy trains and only now, with (partner's name), can I see how far his involvement in our new cross-country train got him. "All the best of healthy and happiness." Thank you everyone for joining us in this celebration of (name) and (name) (point 5 is optional).

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
15. Speaker Introductions	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Provide a brief biography of the person who will speak or establish their credibility. 3. Discuss the speaker and his or her topic. 4. Announce the name of the speaker, and possibly once their speech has concluded. 5. Transition to the next item or thank everyone for participating.	Thank everyone for coming together. Today's speaker has a long history in the development of the train, including engineering technical aspects of steam locomotion. Today he/she will address the steps that lead to our very own cross-country railroad. Please help me welcome (name). (Optional after speech: Thank you, everyone. Next we have…)
16. After-Dinner Speech	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Thank everyone for coming together. 2. Provide a fun or humorous attention statement. 3. Discuss the topic in a light-hearted manner with connected stories, anecdotes, or even a joke or two. 4. Connect the humor to the topic of importance 5. Thank everyone for participating.	Thank you for coming together to celebrate the driving of the Golden Spike. There have been many challenging moments along the way that I would like to share tonight (stories, anecdotes, or even a joke). While it's been a long journey, we've made it. Thank you for coming tonight.
17. Oral Interpretation	Structure your speech by focusing on the following: 1. Draw attention to the piece of literature. 2. Explain its significance, context, and background. 3. Interpret the manuscript for the audience. 4. Conclude with key points from the reading. 5. Reiterate the main point of the piece of literature.	Today I would like to share with you the proclamation that led to the railroad you see before you today. (Interpret the proclamation, using your voice to bring the written word alive.) Without the foresight, vision and leadership we can now see, this railroad might still be a dream.

Key Takeaway

A speech may be organized according to any of many different organizing principles.

References

Ayres, J., & Miller, J. (1994). *Effective public speaking* (4th ed., p 274). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Shutz, W. (1966). *The interpersonal underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

13.6: Transitions

Learning Objectives

1. Understand and demonstrate how to use transitions effectively within your speech.

By now you have identified your main points, chosen your organizational model, and are ready to begin putting your speech together. If you were going to build a house, you would need a strong foundation. Could the columns and beams hold your roof in place without anything to keep them from falling down? Of course not. In the same way, the columns or beams are like the main ideas of your speech, and identifying them is one important step. Another is to consider how to position them securely to rest on a solid foundation, have sufficient connection to each other that they become interdependent, and to make sure they stay where you want them to so your house, or your speech, doesn't come crashing down.

Transitions are words, phrases, or visual devices that help the audience follow the speaker'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 speech. Transitions are used by the speaker to guide the audience in the progression from one significant idea, concept or point to the next issue. They can also show the relationship between the main point and the support the speaker uses to illustrate, provide examples for, or reference outside sources. Depending your purpose, transitions can serve different roles as you help create the glue that will connect your points together in a way the audience can easily follow.

Table 13.6.1: Types of Transitions in Speeches

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 coming in your speech.	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 that you are moving from one topic to the next. Signposts or signal words draw attention to themselves and focus the audience's attention.	Stop and consider, we can now address, next I'd like to explain, 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 speech.	As I have said, as we have seen, as mentioned earlier, in any event, in other words, in short, on the whole, therefore, to summarize, as a result, as I've noted previously, in conclusion
4. Sequence Transition	A sequence transition outlines a hierarchical order or series of steps in your speech. 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 speech order. Particularly useful in a speech 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

Type	Definition	Examples
6. Addition	An addition or additive transition contributes to a previous point. This transition can build on a previous point and extend the discussion.	In addition to, furthermore, either, neither, besides, moreover, in fact, as a matter of fact, actually, not only, but also, as well as, not to mention
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, smaller than, the fastest, than any other, is greater than, both, either…or, likewise, even more important
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, even though, in contrast, in spite of, despite, on the contrary, conversely, unlike, while, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, regardless, still, though, yet
10. Cause and Effect or 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
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 speech, of one point of emphasis to another. Again, visual aids work well when discussing physical location with an audience.	Opposite to, there, to the left, to the right, above, below, adjacent to, elsewhere, far, farther on, 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 even though

Table 13.6.1 is a summary of fourteen distinct types of transitions. As you contemplate how to bring together your information, consider how you will use various transitions, and note them on your outline.

Key Takeaway

A speech needs transitions to help the audience understand how the speaker's main ideas are connected to one another.

13.7: Additional Resources

The commercial site from *Inc*. magazine presents an article on organizing your speech by Patricia Fripp, former president of the National Speakers Association. www.inc.com/articles/2000/10/20844.html

Read a straightforward tutorial on speech organization by Robert Gwynne on this University of Central Florida site. pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~rbrokaw/organizing.html

View an eHow video on how to organize a speech. How does the advice in this video differ from organizing advice given in this chapter? http://www.ehow.com/video_4401082_organizing-speech-parts.html

Read more about how to outline a speech on this site from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/research/outlining.html

Learn more about how to outline a speech from the Six Minutes public speaking and presentation skills blog. http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/2008/02/29/speech-preparation-3-outline-examples

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

14: Visuals in Business Documents

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Understand the various types of visuals in business documents and their uses
- Identify and apply best practices when selecting and creating tables, charts, graphs, and images for use in business documents
- Format and attribute visuals in business documents appropriately

One of the nice things about business and technical writing courses is that most of the papers have graphics in them—or at least they should. A lot of professional writing contains graphics—drawings, diagrams, photographs, illustrations, tables, pie charts, bar charts, line graphs, flow charts, and so on. Graphics are an important feature of business communication.

We learn more from a document when graphics are included (Gatlin, 1988). In fact, people learn about 1/3 more from a document with graphics than without (Levie and Lentz, 1982). A recent study found that readers learn faster and are better able to use the information they learn when the text includes graphics (Große, Jungmann, and Drechsler, 2015). That does not, of course, mean that one should place graphics willy-nilly into every spot possible, nor should they be treated as mere decoration. On the contrary, graphics should be used carefully and correctly. The information below will help you make informed decisions regarding graphic creation and placement in order to improve the readability of your documents.

Getting Started with Graphics

Before getting into details on creating, formatting, and incorporating graphics, it is important to understand the different types of graphics and their functions. You can use graphics to represent the following elements in your writing:

- **Objects-** If you're describing a fuel-injection system, you'll probably need a drawing or diagram of the component parts. If you are explaining how to graft a fruit tree, you'll need some illustrations of how that task is done. Photographs, drawings, diagrams, and schematics are the types of graphics that show objects.
- **Numbers-** If you're discussing the rising cost of housing in Austin, you could use a table with the columns marking off five-year periods since 1970; the rows could be for different types of housing. You could show the same data in the form of bar charts, pie charts, or line graphs. Tables, bar charts, pie charts, and line graphs are some of the principal ways to show numerical data.
- **Concepts-** If you want to show how your company is organized, detailing the relationships of the different departments and officials, you could set up an organization chart-- boxes and circles connected with lines that show how everything is hierarchically arranged and related. A concept graphic shows nonphysical, conceptual ideas and their relationships. In the figure below, see how Apple Computer illustrated the difference between 32-bit processors and 64-bit processors in an infographic.
- **Words-** Finally, graphics can be used to depict words. You've probably noticed how textbooks put key definitions in a box, sometimes using a different color. The same can be done draw attention to key points or extended examples.

Tables

Tables are rows and columns of numbers and words, mostly numbers. They permit rapid access to and relatively easy comparison of information. If the data is arranged chronologically (for example, sales figures over a ten-year period), the table can show trends-- patterns of rising or falling activity. Of course, tables are not necessarily the most vivid or dramatic means of showing such trends or relationships between data; that's why we have charts and graphs (discussed in the next section).

The most common use of tables is to share numerical data. Imagine that you are comparing different models of laser printers in terms of physical characteristics, such as height, depth, length, weight, and so on. This type of information is perfect for a table.

However, don't get locked into the notion that tables are strictly for numbers. Whenever you have situations where you discuss several things about which you provide the same categories of detail, you've got the possibility to use a table. Again, imagine that you are comparing several models of a laser printer, but you want to know more detailed information about things like its cost, print speed, supply costs, and warranty terms. This is an ideal opportunity to use a table, and it would be mostly words rather than numbers (and in this case, you would probably want to leave the textual discussion where it is and "re-present" the information in table form).

Formatting Requirements

In its simplest form, a table is a group of **rows** and **columns** (horizontal and vertical groups of cells, respectively.) At the top of each column is a column heading, which defines or identifies the contents of that column (and indicates the unit of measurement when applicable). On the left edge of the table may be row headings, which define or identify the contents of that row. Things get tricky when rows or columns must be grouped or subdivided. In such cases, you have to create row or column subheadings.

Traditionally, the title of a table is placed on top of the table or is the first row of the table. If the contents of the table are obvious and there is no need to cross-reference the table from anywhere else in the report, you can omit the title.

When formatting tables for a business document, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Explain the general significance of the data in the table; don't expect readers to figure it out entirely for themselves.
- Don't overwhelm readers with an enormous 11-column, 30-row tables. Simplify the table data down to just that amount of data that illustrates your point while making sure that this does not distort or misrepresent the data.
- Don't put the word or abbreviation for the unit of measurement in every cell of a column. For example, in a column of measurements all in millimeters, don't put "mm" after every number. Put the abbreviation in parentheses in the column or row heading.
- Right- or decimal-align numbers in the columns. If the numbers 156 and 4 were in the same column, the 4 should appear right below the 6, not the 1.
- Normally, words in columns are left-justified (although you will occasionally see columns of words all centered).
- When there is some special point you need to make about one or more of the items in the table, use a footnote instead of clogging up the table with the information.

Producing Tables

When conducting research, you may find data in a table that you wish to incorporate into your own work. If it's a simple table without too many rows and columns, you can retype it yourself into your own document (but remember to document where the data came from in the figure title). However, if it is a large table with lots of data, you can scan, screen-capture, or photocopy it and bringing it into your report that way.

Occasionally, in report drafts, information is presented in regular running-text form that could be better presented in table (or tabular) form. Be sure and look back over your rough drafts for material that can transformed into tables.

Charts and Graphs

Charts and **graphs** are another way of presenting the same numeric data that is presented in tables, although a more dramatic and visually interesting one. At the same time, however, you get less detail and precision in a chart or graph than you do in a table. Imagine the difference between a table of sales figures for a ten-year period and a line graph for that same data. You can convey a better sense of the overall sales trend by using a graph, but it may be harder to decipher a single, precise dollar amount than it would be in a table.

Formatting Requirements

When you create charts and graphs, keep these formatting tools in mind:

- **Axis labels.** In bar charts and line graphs, don't forget to indicate what the x and y axes represent. One axis might indicate monetary increments while the other shows time in five or ten-year segments over a specified targeted period of interest. Make sure to include what is being measured and units of measurement.
- **Keys (legends).** Bar charts, line graphs, and pie charts often use special color, shading, or line styles (solid or dashed) to distinguish between two or more sets of data. Be sure to indicate what these mean by translating them onto a key in some unused place in the chart or graph.
- **Figure titles.** For most charts and graphs, you'll want to include a title. In many cases, this will be a numbered figure, as seen throughout this chapter. Readers need some way of knowing what they are looking at.
- **Cross-references.** Whenever you use a chart or graph, don't forget to put a cross-reference to it from the related text. With that cross-reference, provide some explanation of what is going on in the graphic, how to interpret it, what its basic trends are, and

so on.

- **Documentation.** When you borrow information to create a graphic, be sure to use the standard format to indicate the source. It does not matter how you import the graphic into your report—it is all borrowed information, which some brave and noble soul worked hard to develop and who deserves credit for that effort.

Producing Charts and Graphs

As with tables, you can screen-capture, scan, or photocopy charts and graphs that you find to use in your work. You can also generate your own graphics with many types of software. If you use programs like OpenOffice, Word, or WordPerfect, familiarize yourself with their table-generating tools since they will be able to draw the lines and create other formatting details automatically. Free charting and graphing tools are also available online if you want even more design control. Some helpful resources for creating your own charts and graphs include the following:

- Online Chart Tool
- Chart Chooser
- Creating Charts in Word

Illustrations and Photographs

If your document needs to depict objects, places, people, and the relationships between them, the options can run from minimal detail to maximal. A **line drawing** reduces an image to just its essential details, omitting things like colors, shadows, or texture; for example, a line drawing of how to graft a fruit tree reduces the detail to simple lines representing the hands, the tools, the graft stock, and graft. **Diagrams** are a more abstract, schematic view of things; for example, a wiring diagram of a clock radio hardly resembles the actual physical thing at all. **Photographs** provide the most detail of all, as they show the person or object exactly as they exist in the world. These graphics, supplying gradations of detail as they do, have their varying uses. Here are some examples:

- In instructions, simple drawings (often called line drawings) are the most common. They simplify the situation and the objects so that the reader can focus on the key details. In the examples below, you can see a fully detailed photograph of a microprocessor alongside a simplified, labeled diagram of one. In this circumstance, the diagram has less visual distraction, making it more helpful to the person carrying out the task.
- In descriptions, you would want to use drawings, but in this case drawings with more detail that show shading and depth perspectives or employ techniques that display key features, as in a map, a floor plan, a cross-section, or an exploded view.
- In feasibility, recommendation, and evaluation reports, photographs are often used. Since photographs are a precise representation of the object depicted, they are useful tools when accuracy is important. For example, if you are recommending a photocopier, you might want to include photos of the leading contenders.

Formatting Requirements

When you use an illustration in a report, there are several design considerations to keep in mind:

- **Labels**. Just about every illustration should contain labels—words and phrases with pointers to the parts of the objects being depicted.
- **Keys**. If the illustration has certain shadings, colors, line styles, or other such details that have a special meaning in the illustration, these should be indicated in a key—an area in an unused corner of the illustration that deciphers their meaning.
- **Titles.** Illustrations should have specific titles that briefly describe the image, and these titles should be numbered (Figure 1, Figure 2, and so on). If there is only one graphic element in the document, the title may be omitted.
- **Cross-references**. Illustrations should be referred to at the relevant point in the discussion. Identify the figure by its number, and discuss the illustration a bit—focus readers' attention on the key details of the illustration.
- **Location within the report.** Ideally, illustrations should be placed just after the point where they are needed. However, sometimes because of the pagination (the way the text falls on the pages) and the size of the illustrations, this close placement is not possible. When this happens, just put the illustration at the top of the next page.
- **Size of illustrations.** Illustrations should be between one-half to one-quarter of the vertical size of the page, and should fit on the page with other text. In fact, that's what you really want—to intersperse text and graphics in a report. Avoid appending the illustration to the back of the report; if your reader has to go searching for it, the image will not be as useful.
- **Placement within margins.** Make sure that your illustrations fit neatly and comfortably within standard margins. You don't want the illustration spilling over into the right or left margins. Allow the equivalent of at least one blank line above and below each illustration.

- **Level of technical detail.** Illustrations should be at the appropriate technical level for your readers. Remember to be mindful of your audience when creating and selecting images.

Producing Illustrations and Photographs

Technology has made capturing and manipulating images easier than ever, and most computers and smartphones come equipped with basic photo editing tools. Digital clip art and stock photography are also readily available on from a number of websites. Even if you are not taking and editing your own pictures or using existing digital images, there are still several options available: scanning, using computer graphics software, and hand-drawing. No matter which method you choose, don't forget that you must indicate the source of any borrowed graphics.

- Scanning is the best way to pull graphics from printed materials into your document files. Universities and colleges usually make scanners available to students and faculty. Print shops will allow you to scan for a fee. Save your graphics as graphic-format files (such as .jpg or .png) then copy them into your document files.
  Note: When you scan a graphic, trim off the title, caption, and any other written content from the original if possible. This will prevent any issues with legibility in the text. Retype the information directly into your document or replace it with words of your own.
- Using computer graphics software has become more user-friendly in recent years. With a little practice, you can create graphics like the ones shown in the figure below in OpenOffice Writer or Microsoft Word (and of course GIMP and Illustrator). With a computer-graphics drawing like the keylock mechanism in Figure 9, you are at the very edge of what OpenOffice Writer or Microsoft Word can do.
- Drawing images by hand is also an option. You can trace shapes to get rough images to start, then sketch over this lightly with a soft-leaded pencil. Keep working until you have the drawing the way you like, then use a black marker to ink in the lines that you want, erasing any stray pencil markings. Once the drawing is complete, just scan the image following the method described above.

Indicating Sources

As mentioned earlier, it's perfectly legal to borrow graphics—to trace, photocopy, scan, or extract subsets of data from them. But you're obligated to cite your sources for graphics just as you are for the words you borrow. Normally, this is done either in the figure title of the graphics or in a source notation immediately below the image, but an instructor may want images credited on your references page as well, so always check the your instructor or the assignment sheet for any such requirements.

Best Practices for Creating Graphics in Business Writing

What are best practices for creating graphics? How can one mess up when adding a graphic to business communication? This video will show you how to do things correctly and incorrectly:

Graphics in Technical Writing

For more information and examples on how NOT to create graphs, please look at C.J. Schwarz' "A Short Tour of Bad Graphs."

Review: General Guidelines for Using Visuals

- Intersperse graphics and text on the same page. Place graphics as near to the point in the text where they are relevant as is reasonable. However, if a graphic does not fit properly on one page, put it at the top of the next, and continue with regular text on the preceding page. Don't leave half a page blank just to keep a graphic near the text it is associated with.
- Watch out for areas in your text where you discuss lots of numeric data in relation to two or more things—that's ideal for tables, charts, or graphs.
- Watch out for areas in your text where you define a series of terms—that's ideal for tables.
- Always discuss visuals in the preceding text. Don't just place a table, chart, graph, or image in your document without explanation. Orient readers to it and explain its significance.
- Make sure your visuals are appropriate to your audience, subject matter, and purpose—don't overwhelm beginners with massive, highly technical constructions they can't understand.
- Label all visuals with appropriate identifying information: column and row headings, keys, axis labels, and so on.
- Use a title unless the table, chart, or graph is very informal. Remember that the title goes just above the table; for charts and graphs, below.

- Indicate the source of all visuals you have borrowed whether in part or in whole. This can be done in the figure title or in a footnote.

All links live as of July 2021.

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15: Brochures, Flyers, and Posters

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Understand appropriate uses for different types of marketing materials
- Understand formatting differences between brochures, flyers, and posters
- Apply basic design principles when creating brochures, flyers, and posters

Marketing materials like brochures, flyers, and posters allow companies to communicate with a wide audience in a way that is more visually engaging than an email or a letter. In order to reach their target audience, these documents need to be eye-catching, as they are often displayed in public places where they will have to compete for attention. Though it sometimes seems as though these pieces of paper are everywhere, brochures, flyers, and posters can be marketing tools that are both affordable and effective when designed well.

Types of Marketing Materials

Brochures

A **brochure**, sometimes referred to as a **pamphlet**, is an informational tool mainly used for advertising. A brochure is a single piece of paper that can be folded in a variety of ways, with summary information regarding an organization, company, product, or service printed on either side of it. The most common type of brochure is a tri-fold brochure, which utilizes a sheet of 8.5" x 11" paper, printed front and back in landscape orientation, to create 6 vertical panels that can be filled with text and images.

While there are many ways to fold a single piece of paper to create a pamphlet, most tri-fold brochures are created as shown in the figure below:

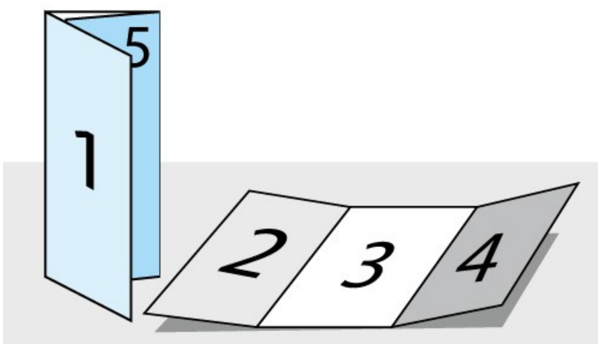

Figure 1: A tri-fold brochure layout with numbered panels. Source: PrintPlace.

When designing your brochure, it is important to plan what content will be placed in which column. The most common approach follows the structure below:

- **Panel 1:** This will be the front cover of the folded brochure. The panel should include an image and clearly identify the business. If the company has a logo, this may appear on the cover as well, along with a slogan or other brief phrasing that announces the subject of the brochure.
- **Panel 2:** This panel is inside front cover. Text in this column should introduce the reader to the company and the product or service being advertised.
- **Panels 3 & 4:** These two sections complete the interior of the brochure, and provide further details about the company, product, or service.
- **Panel 5:** This outside flap can be used in a variety of ways depending on what the brochure is promoting. Since this is the easiest flap to detach from the rest of the brochure, tools like coupons or interest forms can be placed here. Customer testimonials or inspirational quotes can be found in this location as well, depending on the purpose of the brochure.
- **Panel 6:** This is the back cover of the brochure. This space is generally used for contact info, sometimes including a picture of the location (if advertising a store) or occasionally a map to make finding the location easier. The back cover can also be formatted like the outside of an envelope if the brochure is going to be placed in the mail.

When writing text for a brochure, remember to include only that which is absolutely necessary since the narrow columns can get crowded very quickly. Balancing text with images and using tools like headers and bullet points will also make the content easier to read.

Many software packages now come equipped with tri-fold brochure templates to make the design process easier, and there are numerous websites with more advanced design ideas from which to draw inspiration. Some helpful web resources include:

- How to Design a Stunning Brochure in Microsoft Word
- How to Create Pamphlets & Flyers
- Tri-fold Brochure Examples

Flyers

Flyers are single-page advertisements that can be easily printed and distributed throughout the community. They are frequently used to announce store openings, going out of business sales, or fundraisers within a smaller geographic area. Whether they are being handed out on a street corner, displayed on a counter at a local store, pinned to a bulletin board or tucked under windshield wipers in a parking lot, the goal is to reach a large number of people in a fast and affordable way. While flyers may have images, they tend to be simple; usually, a single photograph or a bit of clip art will do, as in the example below:

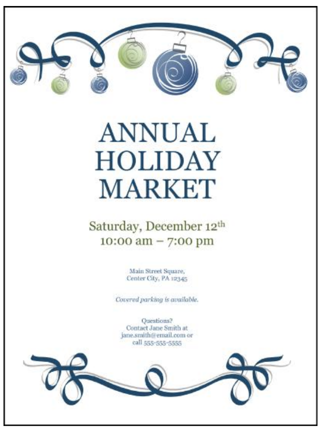

Figure 2: Sample flyer made using word processing software. (CC BY 2021; Heather Katzoff)

Posters

Like a flyer, a **poster** is a single piece of paper that is posted all over the community to draw in the attention of the public while providing information about a particular topic. However, posters are often larger and tend to be more visually striking, and include eye-catching images and designs, bright colors, and various text fonts and sizes. They might be for local businesses or events, but can also be used as part of larger national or international campaigns. Advertising posters may promote an event, a new product, or a new company or organization, while informative posters are used to educate and influence individuals about a specific topic, raising awareness to local, national, or international problems and to inform people of campaigns happening to contribute to causes.

Figure 3: Sample poster for a local event made using a Word template. (CC BY 2021; Heather Katzoff)

Whether you are creating a flyer or a poster, a number of common design principles apply:

- **Focus on a single message**. Flyers and posters have a limited amount of visual space to communicate with, so the message needs to be focused. Be specific: what single product or event are you trying to advertise or promote?
- **Create a striking headline.** Writing a headline that gets people to respond to your advertisement requires a clear sense of your audience. Think about who you are writing for and what they would want to know most. Gideon Wagas of Pugo Designs offers this example: "Instead of saying that you are offering a new back pain relief cream, you can place "Say goodbye to back pains!" in your headline." This keeps the focus on what the reader can gain, which makes them more likely to take action.
- **Select legible fonts.** Poster design utilizes a wider variety of fonts in order to catch the attention of readers, but the fonts selected still need to be easy to read at a distance. Highly decorative fonts should be avoided, as should colors that blend in with the background of the poster.
- **Choose images carefully.** Whether using a photograph or an illustration, be sure that the image is clear and has a reason to be there. Also, in a poster, quality is better than quantity. A single, clear visual will focus the reader's attention better than many smaller images.
- **Include contact information.** Though it will generally be in a smaller font and placed in a less-prominent position on the poster, make sure to include your company's name, address, phone numbers, and website. If your company has a social media presence, including logos or links for those pages has become an increasingly common practice.

Design Considerations

Typography

Whether creating brochures, flyers, or posters, it is important to use **font styles** and sizes consistently throughout the document. Creating a **typescale**, like the one shown below for the Owl educational app, can help ensure that your font sizes communicate the hierarchy of information clearly.

Figure 4: Example of a typescale created for the Owl app. Source: Material Design.

The Owl example utilizes a single font, Rubik, but variations in size and line thickness create differentiation between the various header and body levels. In a brochure, since the text is usually limited by the width of the columns, body text is commonly around 11 or 12 point fonts, with headlines scaling up as large as 16 or 22 point and captions as small as 8 or 10 point. Posters and flyers have more space, so headline sizes may get as large as 72 or 96 point font, depending on how much text you have. Sub-headers and body fonts should be scaled down from there, but will generally be larger than they would be on a brochure.

Multiple fonts *can* be used together, but care must be taken when selecting two fonts for a single document. Experimenting with different font combinations can be part of the fun of page design, but you can also use tools available online, like Fontjoy.com, to suggest pairings that are sure to work. Whether you use a single font throughout your document or opt to employ a feature font for major headings and a second for body text, make sure that the fonts you choose are easy to read at a realistic distance for your design. Remember, brochures are read just inches from a person's face while a poster generally needs to grab the viewer's attention from much further away.

Image Selection

Visual elements are always advisable when designing marketing materials. While the instinct may be to pack your documents with as much written information possible, as the saying goes, a picture really can be worth a thousand words. However, too much imagery can also have its drawbacks. Visual clutter can detract from your message just as too much text can, so select only the best images to use in your designs. Think quality, not quantity.

Any photographs you use should be in focus. If there are people in your pictures, pay attention to the position of their bodies and the direction of their gaze; you want their faces pointing to the same place you want your viewer's eyes to look. Positioning a picture with a person looking out at your margin draws the viewer's gaze out of the design and away from the information you're trying to communicate. Simply flipping a picture with a **horizontal flip** tool (a feature of almost all photo-editing software) can solve this problem. Using a **crop tool** can also remove any distracting elements at the edge of your photographs.

In brochures, having a single, strong image on the cover that grab's the readers attention is always a good idea. Within the body of the brochure, use images sparingly to break up large bodies of text rather than stacking multiple images on top of each other. For posters, a single image is more frequently employed, usually occupying the entire canvas of the design. Text can then superimposed on the image. Sometimes the **opacity** of the image is also reduced to make the text easier to read (as seen in the poster in Figure 3 above.)

Color

Just as the fonts and images we use for our designs need careful consideration, the colors we choose for our designs also require scrutiny. Color can be employed as a background for your design, but it can also be used for text, lines, or other graphic elements. Selecting the right colors is an art, one that requires you to know a bit about how colors work together and what they mean to people out in the world.

Different colors can communicate a range of moods and an emotions, so the colors you select should communicate a feeling that is consistent with the written content of your brochure, flyer, or poster.

According to graphic designer Cameron Chapman, some common color associations include:

- **Red:** Passion, Love, Anger
- **Orange:** Energy, Happiness, Vitality
- **Yellow:** Happiness, Hope, Deceit
- **Green:** New Beginnings, Abundance, Nature
- **Blue:** Calm, Responsible, Sadness
- **Purple:** Creativity, Royalty, Wealth
- **Black:** Mystery, Elegance, Evil
- **Gray:** Moody, Conservative, Formality
- **White:** Purity, Cleanliness, Virtue
- **Brown:** Nature, Wholesomeness, Dependability
- **Tan or Beige:** Conservative, Piety, Dull
- **Cream or Ivory:** Calm, Elegant, Purity

While these associations are very common, keep in mind that they are *not*universal, and different cultures may have different reactions to colors than you do. Also keep in mind that sometimes, especially if you are creating marketing materials for an established company, you may have to work with the **color palette** already in use by the company, one that coordinates with their logo and existing brand image.

If you do get to choose the colors for a design, make sure that the colors you choose work together. Selecting colors that are **analogous, complementary,** or **triads** on the **color wheel** can help unify your design and narrow your color choices to ones that will visually work best together. Using a tool like Adobe Color allows you to experiment with various groupings from the color wheel and create the most attractive grouping for your project. Finally, just as with text and images, less really is more. Just because you can make every element of your design a different color doesn't mean that you should.

Space

A final design consideration is one that is often overlooked: space. Also referred to as **negative space,** this is the absence of other design elements or the space between objects on the page. A common document design flaw is crowding the page with too much text and too many visual elements, sometimes making it difficult to understand the message being communicated. Good design has space that is intentionally left blank, giving the viewer's eye an opportunity to rest.

When employed correctly, negative space in a design should push the gaze of your viewer to the elements you want them to focus on. If you find that your eye is drawn to the negative space on your layout, then the design probably needs to be reworked. In general, for marketing materials, negative space works best when it's placed closer to the edges of your design and not trapped in the center of your layout.

Review: General Guidelines for Creating Marketing Materials

- Select what type of marketing you are going to create based on how and where it will be used: if you have a lot of details to convey, a brochure will work better than a poster or a flyer; if you need to grab attention from a distance, a poster will be a better option.
- Keep the text to a minimum. Only include essential information, providing contact information for readers if they want more details.

- Break up larger sections of text in brochures by using tools such as headers and bulleted lists.
- Fonts should be legible, and any document should use no more than two different fonts.
- Images should be in in-focus and eye-catching, but don't overcrowd your design with too many of them.
- Colors should be chosen with relevant associations in mind, and used to support the messaging in your document.

All links live as of July 2021.

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16: Business Reports - Part 1

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Define the purpose for writing progress, summary, and recommendation reports
- Explain the differences between secondary and primary research
- List the main sections to include in recommendation reports
- Explain the voice and tone to use in report writing
- Analyze content to determine reliability

The Function of Business Reports

The purpose of business reports is to communicate facts and ideas. In order to accomplish that purpose, each report has key components that need to be present in order for your reading audience to understand the message. Reports vary by function, style, and tradition. Within your organization, you may need to address specific expectations. This chapter discusses reports in general terms, focusing on common elements and points of distinction.

You need to be flexible and adjust your report to the needs of the audience. Reports are typically organized around six key elements. These elements hold true for all business reports.

1. Who the report is about and/or prepared for
2. What was done, what problems were addressed, and what are the results, including conclusions and/or recommendations
3. Where the subject studied occurred
4. When the subject studied occurred
5. Why the report was written (function), including under what authority, for what reason, or by whose request
6. How the subject operated, functioned, or was used

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. These points will also be useful as you review 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 improve it.

Business report writing is considered formal writing. The formality of reports pertains to the business writing conventions of detailed content, citation, documentation, format, organization, and style. Formality requires writers to support the report with thorough evidence and complete content. Although your report is written for a primary audience (your supervisor, for example), the primary audience may share the information with others. Therefore, it is important to compose information that addresses the needs of readers with varying knowledge levels.

Types of Business Reports

The way a report is organized depends on its type and purpose. There are many types of reports, but this chapter focuses on three types common to the workplace:

- Progress Report
- Recommendation Report
- Summary Report

Other types of reports include:

- Short Informational Reports
- Short Analytical Reports
- Proposals (next chapter of this book)
- Formal Business Reports

An explanation of, purpose for, and sections of each business report follows.

Progress Report

Progress reports are submitted throughout the duration of a project. Therefore, it is probable that you will complete more than one progress report for a project. Its purpose is to inform the audience of the status of a project. Progress reports explain both the negative and positive aspects of the project; any issues or problems encountered and the ways the project team plans to overcome them. In addition, it must include details regarding the allocation of funds.

Progress reports include the following topics:

- An overview
- The work completed, with a timeline
- The work being completed, with a timeline
- The work to complete, with a timeline
- Any problems encountered and the ways you plan to overcome each problem
- The funds allocated or how the funds will be allocated

Use a reporting and explanatory voice throughout the progress report. You may use first person pronoun "I" sparingly in the introduction and conclusion if you performed or plan to perform specific tasks; this is acceptable because you are explaining the status of what you accomplished or plan to accomplish.

Recommendation Report

A **recommendation report** is used to help management make decisions. The goal of this report is to identify a solution to a problem or suggest a course of action. In it, the writer might suggest that a procedure be adopted or rejected, assess an unsatisfactory situation, or persuade decision makers to make a change that will benefit the organization. For example, the report might suggest ways to enhance the quality of a product, increase profit, reduce cost, or improve workplace conditions. The intention of a recommendation report is not to assign blame or be overly critical, but to suggest improvements in a positive or neutral manner.

The problem/situation statement may be only two or three paragraphs; however it supports the entire report. The information is organized from specific to concrete. The topic is introduced and defined in statement of the problem and builds by including specific and concrete information to support the topic and the report's purpose. The discussion builds by presenting the cause and effect of the problem/situation. Information focuses on what caused a specific situation and its results, which are the effects.

Ten Common Elements of a Recommendation Report

Pay attention to these essential elements when you consider your stakeholders. That may include the person(s) the report is for, and the larger audience of the organization. Ask yourself who the key decision makers are, who the experts will be, and how your words and images may be interpreted. While there is no universal format for a report, there is a common order to the information. Each element supports the main purpose or function, playing an important role in the transmission of information.

Page	**Element**	**Function**
1. Cover	Title and image	Like the cover of a book, sometimes a picture, image, or logo is featured to introduce the topic to the reader.

2. Title Page	Label, report, features title, author, affiliation, date, and sometimes for whom the report was prepared The title page of your paper includes the following information: • Title of the paper • Author’s name • Name of the company with which the author is affiliated • Header at the top of the page with the paper title (in capital letters) and the page number (If the title is lengthy, you may use a shortened form of it in the header.). List the first three elements in the order given in the previous list, centered about one-third of the way down from the top of the page. Use the headers and footers tool of your word-processing program to add the header, with the title text at the left and the page number in the upper-right corner.	
3. Table of Contents	A list of the main sections and their respective page numbers. When including a Table of Contents (ToC) in the report, the headings must be worded the same in both locations.	
4. Headings	Detailed section headings lead the reader to understand the focus and content of each section. Headings contain four to six words. Headings are parallel; each begins with the same grammatical structure. For example, each major heading is a question, a noun phrase, or a verb phrase.	APA style uses section headings to organize information, making it easy for the reader to follow the writer’s organizational process and to know immediately what major topics are covered. Depending on the length and complexity of the paper, its major sections may also be divided into subsections, sub-subsections, and so on. These smaller sections, in turn, use different heading styles to indicate different levels of information. In essence, you are using headings to create a hierarchy of information. The following heading styles used in APA formatting are listed in order of most important to least important: 1. Section headings use centered, boldface type. Headings use title case, with important words in the heading capitalized. 2. Subsection headings use left-aligned, boldface type. Headings use title case. 3. The third level uses left-aligned, indented, boldface type. Headings use a capital letter only for the first word, and they end in a period. 4. The fourth level follows the same style used for the previous level, but the headings are boldfaced and italicized. 5. The fifth level follows the same style used for the previous level, but the headings are italicized and not boldfaced.

5. Abstract	Informational abstract: Highlight topic, methods, data, and results. Descriptive abstract: All of the above without statements of conclusion or recommendations.	A brief summary of your findings. You may not need to be provide an abstract in every paper, but you should use one in papers that include a hypothesis. A good abstract is concise—about one hundred to one hundred fifty words—and is written in an objective, impersonal style. Your writing voice will not be as apparent here as in the body of your paper. When writing the abstract, take a just-the-facts approach and summarize your research question and your findings in a few sentences.
6. Introduction	Introduces the topic of the report by including a problem/situation statement. The problem/situation statement may be only two or three paragraphs; however it supports the entire report. The information is organized from specific to concrete. The topic is introduced and defined in statement of the problem and is expanded in the body paragraphs.	
7. Body	Key elements of body include: • Background • Methodology • Results • Analysis and Recommendations	
8. Conclusion	Concise presentation of findings.	Indicates the main results and their relation to recommended action or outcome.
9. References	List of resources with bibliographic details.	List of citations.
10. Appendix	Related supporting materials.	May include maps, additional visuals, analysis of soil samples, field reports, etc.

Summary Report

A summary report is used to inform management of an outcome. For example, if you work in the marketing department, your boss might ask you to find out about your competitors' online activities so that your company can effectively compete with them. To do this, you would research your competitors' websites, social media profiles, digital advertising campaigns, and so on. You would then summarize your findings to the key points so that your boss can get the essential information and then decide how to act on it. Unlike the recommendation report, the summary report focuses on the facts, without providing solutions, leaving it to management to decide on a course of action.

The following table presents an outline form that may be used for summary reports. You can use this format as a model or modify it as needed.

Element	**Contents**
Introduction	General purpose, problem/situation statement, or thesis statement
Body	Point 1:

	Point 2:
	Point 3:
Conclusion	List the main points

No matter what your business writing project involves, it needs to convey a central idea. To clarify the idea in your mind and make sure it comes through to your audience, write a problem/situation statement. A problem/situation statement, or central idea, should be detailed and concrete. 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 conclusion, you will help your readers to understand and remember your message.

Use FAST: Format, Audience, Style, Tone to Format Business Reports

Business report writing features specific format, style, and tone techniques that address the needs of the audience. Here are the distinctive features.

When composing your business documents, you will first have to decide which **format** best suits your purpose. The medium is the message. Similarly in this case, the format you choose for your business document should also align well with the purpose of your message. For example, an email might be considered semiformal depending on its subject, audience and purpose. A business letter is usually considered quite formal as are memos and short reports. Knowing what you've recently learned about the common types of business documents, you must remain mindful that the format you choose tells the audience something about the information they will receive and how important or serious it is for them to pay attention to it.

Once you have chosen the appropriate format for your message, it is also important to ensure that the formatting is correct. For example, if you intend to send the summary report via email, it should not look like an informal email. It needs to be clear to the reader what format you are using and you can make that apparent by ensuring the appropriate formatting of your document.

Make it easier for your reader to comprehend the information in your report by formatting your document cleanly. APA style requirements also address specific formatting concerns, such as margins, pagination, and heading styles within the body of the paper. Review the following APA guidelines:

- Set the top, bottom, and side margins of your paper at 1 inch.
- Use double-spaced text throughout your paper.
- Use a standard font, such as Times New Roman or Arial, in a legible size (10- to 12-point).
- Use continuous pagination throughout the paper, including the title page and the references section. Page numbers appear flush right within your header.
- Section headings and subsection headings within the body of your paper use different types of formatting depending on the level of information you are presenting.
- Separate paragraphs using white space
- Use visuals (charts, graphs, photographs, diagrams, etc.) where they will help in explaining numbers or other information that would be difficult to understand in text.

Note: If applicable, follow your employer's style guide standards.

Audience

Your **primary audience** remains central to your messaging. A helpful approach some writers use is to try to put themselves in the primary audience's shoes and ask, *What's in it for me?* or *Why should I care?* or *So what?* Identifying the audience and being aware of their needs will help you draft a document that is more likely to get their interest.

Style

Style and tone are often considered interchangeable and there are some blurry distinctions between the two. **Writing style** refers to the compositional choices you make in content, word choice, organization, tone; and elements such as active versus passive writing, varied sentence lengths, flow, and punctuation choices. Style gives your writing a type of personality when coupled together with tone. As with the audience and format, it is important that the style you choose matches with the intended purpose of your message.

The information is composed in a reporting and explanatory tone. Word choice is professional and formal. Writers refrain from using "I" because it lacks an audience-centered perspective.

Overall, the style is the same as other business documents. Sentences are concise because they do not contain unnecessary words. Reliable sources are used to reinforce information. Sources and visuals are introduced and explained. Each paragraph contains a topic sentence. Transitions are used to link points.

Tone

Tone refers to the attitude your writing projects to your audience when they read your document. Here you would ask yourself if your tone is formal, informal, positive, negative, polite, direct, or indirect. The purpose of asking yourself this question is to determine whether the tone suits or otherwise enhances the purpose of your intended message.

The acronym FAST not only helps as a guide to remembering the importance of selecting the right format, remembering your audience, and ensuring appropriate style and tone but also helps you remember that in business writing it is important to get to the point—fast!

Here is a handy tool you can use to incorporate the principles of FAST as you draft a report.

Adding to Your Information Needs

The need for a report comes from conditions and circumstances within a business. It may be in response to a stakeholder's complaint or suggestion. Content for a report comes from the gathering of information. You will need to do your research to support and substantiate the purpose/problem statement. Writers of reports conduct primary and secondary research.

Primary Research

Start by consulting with colleagues who have written similar documents and ask what worked, what didn't work, and what was well received by management and the target audience. Your efforts will need to meet similar needs. In addition, your colleagues may be the source of information. One way to accomplish this goal is by conducting primary research. Examples of **primary research** include:

- Interviewing someone who is knowledgeable about the subject and presenting the answers in the report
- Distributing questionnaires or surveys and writing about the results in the report
- Observing relevant situations and writing about the results in the report
- Conducting experiments and writing about the conclusions in the report

You might even know someone who has experience in the area you want to research, someone who has been involved with the topic for their whole life. We do a lot of our reading and research online today, so getting information firsthand is probably not the first method that comes to mind—but talking to an expert directly will give you insight into a topic that no website can compete with.

Secondary Research

Secondary sources refer to reliable information and data written by other writers. These include books, academic journals, trade journals, electronic newspapers, and reliable websites. Use secondary sources to substantiate points you made in the report. For example, to support recommendations, solutions, needs, and data. Review the information sources you already have in hand. Do you regularly read a trade journal that relates to the topic? Was there an article in the newspaper you read that relevant to the report? Is there a book, website, or podcast that has information you can use?

Evaluating Secondary Sources of Information for Validity, Reliability, and Credibility

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 website; 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** in the area. Therefore, it is always important to look beyond the surface of a site to assess who sponsors it, where the information 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.

Credibility Checklist

When you are looking at a web source, here are some things you should keep in mind when trying to identify the source's credibility:

- **Who wrote the material?** Look for an author's name or company logo. Look up the person/company elsewhere to see what you can find out about them. Also look for any contact information on the website, such as an address or phone number. If the organization is of questionable origins, they are less likely to provide direct contact details.
- **Who owns the website?** You can use web domain lookup tools (like Who.is, for example) to find out who the owner of the web domain is and how long they have owned the domain. This may help you to decipher who is behind the message.
- **Is the material recent?** You might notice a "last updated" date across the bottom of the website or a date attached to the article. If the information is timely or focuses on a highly changeable topic (technology or medical research, for example), you'll want the most recent information you can find.
- **How is the material laid out?** While not a definitive clue to authenticity, a poorly designed website full of flashing banners and clip art might quickly tell you that you're not looking at the most reputable source.
- **What is the website doing with your information?** Any websites that process payments or collect any user data are required to tell you what they collect and what they are doing with this information, though a cookie alert and perhaps also through a Terms and Conditions page or Privacy Policy. Look for these on any website before you give out personal details of any kind.
- **How is the website viewed by the wider community on the web?** Search for the website's name and any company names or author names you find on the site, using search engines and social media. Can you find any reviews? Has the website been pointed to as a credible resource via social media sharing?

In-Text Citations (Citation)

Throughout the body of your paper, include a citation whenever you paraphrase, quote, or summarize material from your research sources. The purpose of **citations** is twofold: to give credit to others for their ideas and to allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic, if desired. Your in-text citations provide basic information about your source; each source you cite will have a longer entry in the references section that provides more detailed information.

In-text citations must provide the name of the author or authors and the year the source was published. (When a given source does not list an individual author, you may provide the source title or the name of the organization that published the material instead.) When directly quoting a source, you are also required to include the page number where the quote appears in your citation.

This information may be included within the sentence or in a parenthetical reference at the end of the sentence, as in this example for a recommendation report to limit snack choices in the company cantina.

Example:
Epstein (2010) points out that "junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive" (p. 137).

Here, the writer names the source author when introducing the quote and provides the publication date in parentheses after the author's name. The page number appears in parentheses *after* the closing quotation marks and *before* the period that ends the sentence.

References List (Documentation)

The brief citations included in the body of your paper correspond to the more detailed citations provided at the end of the paper in the references section. In-text citations provide basic information (the author's name, the publication date, and the page number if necessary), while the references section provides more extensive bibliographical information. Again, this information allows your reader to follow up on the sources you cited and do additional reading about the topic if they so desire.

The specific format of entries in the list of references varies slightly for different source types, but the entries generally include the following information:

- The name(s) of the author(s) or institution that wrote the source
- The year of publication and, where applicable, the exact date of publication
- The full title of the source
- For books, the city of publication
- For articles or essays, the name of the periodical or book in which the article or essay appears

- For magazine and journal articles, the volume number, issue number, and pages where the article appears
- For sources on the web, the URL where the source is located

The references page is double spaced and lists entries in alphabetical order by the author's last name. If an entry continues for more than one line, the second line and each subsequent lines are indented five spaces.

Ethical Consideration

Write and document your composition. You are the writer, not compiler of information. This rule is a step toward avoiding plagiarism.

Information that is well known, appears in multiple sources, and easy to verify is known as **common knowledge**. An example of common knowledge is Kamala Harris is the Vice President of the United States.

Ethical Consideration

When you are unsure, cite and documentation information; err on the side of clarity and transparency.

Check Your Understanding of Business Reports

Read the scenario below and answer the following questions.

Jean is a supervisor in a large agricultural equipment manufacturing facility. The facility has several different departments for different tasks such as fabrication, welding, assembly, and painting. Orders come in through the computer system, which starts a series of tickets for workers, indicating to the workers which and how many parts to produce to fulfill an order. The most recent order was distributed through the ticketing system three weeks ago and has still not been completed. This order should have taken only two weeks to complete. Jean identified that there is a problem in the fabrication department. It seems that the group of new hires are not fabricating parts within the tolerances set by the engineers, which is causing problems at the time of welding and sometimes as far down the line as assembly.

Jean needs to communicate the current state, her assessment of the production issues, and provide an estimated time for completion to her superiors. Which report would she write to accomplish this?

a) a progress report

b) a recommendation report

c) a summary report

Jean believes that she has a solution that will prevent these fabrication issues from occurring in the future. Which type of report would she use to describe what has been completed, what problems were encountered, and solutions to the problems?

a) a progress report

b) a recommendation report

c) a summary report

Jean believes that she has a solution that will prevent these fabrication issues from occurring in the future. She would like to propose these solutions to her boss, Kim Kelly, but has encountered pushback from her boss before. Her boss has made it clear that Jean does not make decisions and that responsibility (or right) resides with Kelly. Which type of report would best suit Jean's needs and purpose?

a) a progress report

b) a recommendation report

c) a summary report

Source: Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

Conclusion

This chapter on writing business reports began with an explanation of reports, their purpose, and their function. Specifically, this chapter presented progress, recommendation, and summary reports. You then learned the topics to include in each report and distinguishable features. Finally, you were introduced to the acronym FAST as a tool to stay mindful of your document and content choices around format, audience, style, and tone.

With this new knowledge you should be well on your way to honing your workplace writing skills, which will further enhanced your ability to write effective business reports.

General Report Writing Tips

Here is a checklist for ensuring that a report fulfills its goals:

- Report considers the audience’s needs
- Form follows function of report
- Format reflects institutional norms and expectations
- Information is accurate, complete, and documented
- Information is easy to read
- Terms are clearly defined
- Figures, tables, and art support written content
- Figures, tables, and art are clear and correctly labeled
- Figures, tables, and art are easily understood without text support
- Words are easy to read (font, arrangement, organization)
- Results are clear and concise
- Recommendations are reasonable and well-supported
- Report represents your best effort
- Report speaks for itself with clearly written details and explanation
- Reference to similar documents at your workplace may serve you well as you prepare your own report

All links live as of July 2021.

17: Business Reports - Part 2

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Define business proposals
- Explain the purpose for writing proposals
- Explain the differences amongst audiences for proposals
- Explain the main sections to include in a proposal
- Analyze the importance of using references in a proposal
- Incorporate the voice and tone in business proposals

The Purpose of Business Proposals

An effective business proposal informs and persuades its target audience that action must be taken to improve a situation. It features many of the common elements of a report, but its emphasis on persuasion guides the overall document.

The audience for a proposal can be external and internal. **External audiences** do not work for the same business as the writer of the proposal. External audiences work for another company and will answer a **Request for Proposals** (RFP) sent by a company that needs work completed, but does not have specialized employees on staff who can complete the work. **Internal audiences** work within the company and will answer an indirect RFP from a department or unit.

If you have been asked to submit a proposal it is considered **solicited**. The solicitation may come in the form of a direct verbal or written request, but normally solicitations are indirect, open-bid to the public, and formally published for easy access. An RFP, **request for quotation** (RFQ), and **invitation for bid** (IFB) are common ways to solicit proposals for business, industry, and the government.

Here is an example of how an RFP works for external audiences:

Mercy Hospital needs to expand and is going to construct a new wing. Hospital administrators decide to put out a RFP so that various businesses will submits bids to construct the new wing. The RFP does not have to stop with construction. Everything from office furniture to bedpans could potentially be put out to bid, specifying cost, quantity, quality, and time of delivery required. Janitorial services may also be bid on each year, as well as food services, and even maintenance. Using the power of bidding via an IFP to lower contract costs for goods and services is common practice.

IRBs are often job-specific in that they encompass a project that requires a timeline, labor, and materials.

Here is an example of how an IRB works for external audiences:

If board members of a local school district announces the construction of a new elementary school, they normally have the architect and engineering plans on file, but need a licensed contractor to build it.

When the writer of and the audience for the proposal work for the same company, the proposal is internal. Here is an example of how a proposal may work for an internal audience:

You are the media specialist for Immediate Enterprises. Based on customer feedback data, you want to implement a new procedure for improving customer service. To share the situation, solution, data, research, scope, and timeline, you write a proposal to your supervisor.

Unsolicited proposals are the “cold calls” of business writing. They require a thorough understanding of the market, product and/or service, and their presentation is typically general rather than customer-specific. They can, however, be tailored to specific businesses with time and effort, and the demonstrated knowledge of specific needs or requirement can transform an otherwise generic proposal into an effective sales message. Getting your tailored message to your target audience, however, is often a significant challenge if it has not been directly or indirectly solicited. Unsolicited proposals are often regarded as marketing materials, intended more to stimulate interest for a follow-up contact than make direct sales. Sue Baugh and Robert Hamper (1995) encourage you to resist the temptation to “shoot at every target and hope you hit at least one.” A targeted proposal is your most effective approach.

Solution

In a proposal, a **problem** is a question posed for considering, solving, or answering. In order to solve the problem, you must provide support that a problem exists and that it is worth solving. In order to support a solution to a problem, you need to write an effective statement of the problem. Effective business proposals are built around a great solution or idea. While you may be able to present your solution in an interesting way, you want your document and its solution to stand out against the background of competing proposals or maintaining the status quo. What makes your idea different or unique? How can you better meet the needs of the company that other vendors? If the purchase decision is made solely on price, it may leave you little room to underscore the value of service, but the sale follow-through has value. Business proposals need to have an needed idea or solution in order to be effective.

Traditional Categories

You can be creative in many aspects of the business proposal, but follow the traditional categories. Business associates expect to see information in a specific order, much like a résumé or even a letter. Each aspect of your proposal has its place and it is to your advantage to respect that tradition and use the categories effectively to highlight your solutions. Every category is an opportunity to sell, and should reinforce your credibility, you knowledge, your passion, and the reason why your solution is simply the best.

The format of a business proposal often depends on the style guide or format implemented by the company. However, customary sections for the body to a proposal include:

Cover Page: Title page with writer's name, title, date, and specific reference to request for proposal, if applicable.

Executive Summary: Like an abstract in a report, this is a one- or two-paragraph summary of the product or service and how it meets the requirements and exceeds expectations.

Background: Discuss the history of your product, service, and/or company and the problems that have developed over time. Consider focusing on the relationship between you and the potential buyer and/or similar companies to solve the situation.

Proposal: The idea. State and discuss the problem. Who, what, where, when, why, and how are the questions that must be answered. Make it clear and concise. Don't waste words, and don't exaggerate. Use clear, well-supported reasoning, with details, to demonstrate your product or service.

Market Analysis: What currently exists in the marketplace, including competing products or services, and how does your solution compare?

Benefits: How will the potential buyer benefit from the product or service? Be clear, concise, specific, and provide a comprehensive list of immediate, short, and long-term benefits to the company.

Timeline: A clear presentation, often with visual aids, of the process, from start to finish, with specific, dated benchmarks noted.

Solution section: Discuss the solution. Since your problem is unique, the research will not present the solution to your problem. However, the research will discuss similar problems and the solutions to these problems. This research will provide you information with which to formulate a solution that is relative to your specific problem.

Research section: Research your topic. Your sources must be current for trends, within the last 2 or 3 years. Therefore, you need to research journals or newspapers for published articles, published interviews, published speeches, etc. You may use books for historical information or information that hasn't changed over time.

You will need at least three or four documents that address a problem similar to the one that exists. Although you will not find your exact situation/problem, you will find documents that refer to similar problems. These documents will have similar populations, environments, workforces, etc. For example, if you propose to implement a shuttle bus service from the parking lot to the office site for a more efficient and effective way for employees to report to work, you may find documents from other workplaces, with circumstances similar to yours, who experienced similar problems and solved them by providing shuttle bus services.

The research will provide you with information that validates your topic as a problem and your solution, as well as validating your proposed implementation, methods of operation, costs, and benefits.

Implementation section: Tell when, why, and how the solution will be used for the first time. The implementation period is usually a trial period to see if the solution is feasible as planned. Thus, you will pick a time that does not impact the normal operation of existing programs/patterns of operation/etc. In addition, describe the location of implementation, who will be involved, costs of implementation, what is expected to happen, the date and time of implementation, the duration of implementation, etc. Explain also why you chose this time for implementing the solution. State that during this time you will note what works and what needs to be changed.

Methods of Operation section: This section will tell how the solution will fit into and be used as a functional part of the day-to-day operation of the company/business, etc. Detail the date you expect to launch the solution into the operation the company, the place from where the solution will operate, how it will operate, and who will be involved (identify their responsibilities, duties, and any titles, certifications, degrees, etc, needed).

Costs section: This section tells how much the solution will cost. Detail the cost in dollars and cents. Discuss the costs associated with implementing the product or service and extended financial plans.

Benefits section: This section explains the benefits of the solution. There is little reason why your proposal should be accepted if there are not meaningful benefits. Thus, be sure to show that your solution will result in substantial benefits for the organization, company, etc.

Conclusion: Like a speech or essay, restate your main points clearly. Tie them together with a common theme and make your proposal memorable.

Reference page: The reference page is a separate page that references your research in the in-text parenthetical citations.

Appendices: The Appendices include the full summaries and responses, the Problem Analysis, and any information that is meaningful to the proposal.

Keep in mind that formatting may vary. A business or organization may even provide a template they want writers to use or specify what components they expect to be covered in the proposal. However, if they don't, then follow the suggested format above.

Using Persuasive Appeals in Proposals

The term *persuasion* refers to using words and their meaning to convince the audience to believe, understand, and respond to information as intended. A message depends on three persuasive appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos.

Ethos refers to credibility. **Pathos** refers to passion and enthusiasm. **Logos** refers to logic or reason. All three elements are integral parts of your business proposal. Your credibility may be unknown to the potential client and it is your job to reference previous clients, demonstrate order fulfillment, and clearly show that your product or service is offered by a credible organization. By association, if your organization is credible the product or service is often thought to be more credible.

In the same way, if you are not enthusiastic about the product or service, why should the potential client get excited? How does your solution stand out in the marketplace? Why should they consider you? Why should they continue reading? Passion and enthusiasm are not only communicated through "!" exclamation points, which should be excluded from formal business documents, including proposals and report. Your thorough knowledge and your demonstration of that knowledge, communicates dedication and interest.

Each assertion requires substantiation and each point requires clear support. It is not enough to make baseless claims about your product or service. You have to show why the claims you make are true and relevant. Make sure you cite sources and include a signal phrase such as "according to" to indicate the information that follows is from a reliable source. Doing so increases your credibility.

Composing Clear and Concise Proposals

A clear and concise professional document is a base requirement. If it is less than professional, you can count on its prompt dismissal. There should be no errors in spelling or grammar, and all information should be concise, accurate, and clearly referenced when appropriate. Information that pertains to credibility should be easy to find and clearly relevant. If the document exists in a hard copy form, it should be printed on a letterhead. If the document is submitted in an electronic form, it should be in a file formatted to your company's standards. Use a widely use software to compose the proposal. A portable document format (PDF)—a format for electronic documents—may be used to preserve content location and avoid any inadvertent format changes when it is displayed.

Use a reporting and explanatory voice throughout the proposal. You may use first person pronoun "I" sparingly in the introduction and conclusion if you will perform specific tasks; this is acceptable because you are explaining what you accomplished or plan to accomplish. Provide the advantages and benefits of your solutions.

Emphasizing Key Components for Proposals

In order to be successful in business and industry, you should be familiar with the business proposal. Much like a report, with several common elements and persuasive language, a business proposal makes the case for your product, service, or solution. Business proposals are documents designed to make a persuasive appeal to the audience to achieve a defined outcome, often proposing a solution to a problem.

General Proposal Writing Tips

When you develop a proposal, go through this checklist to determine whether the draft meets the needs of the audience.

Who is your audience?

What objectives can you expect your reader to have?

Audience: Describe the intended audience of the proposal and the proposed report (they may be different) in terms of the organization they work for, their titles and jobs, their technical background, their ability to understand the report you propose to write.

What are your purposing in writing?

What aspects of the situation may affect reader response (dedication, time, money, work conditions)?

Situation: Describe the situation in which the proposal is written and in which the project is needed: What problems or needs are there? Who has them? Where are they located?

Deliverable type: Describe the deliverable that you are proposing. If you are writing a research proposal, have you provided the audience with a technical background/history section?

What information must your message include?

How can you build support for you position?

Information sources: Make sure you know that there is adequate information for your topic. List specific books, articles, reference works, interview subjects, field observations, and other kinds of sources that you think will contribute to your report.

Graphics: List the graphics you think your report will need according to their type and their content.

All links live as of July 2021.

References

Baugh, L. S., & Hamper, R. J. (1995). Handbook for writing proposals (p. 3). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

18: Job Application Materials

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Apply research techniques for job searching in your field of study
- Design a resume for a job application
- Create a cover letter for a job application
- Describe the process of interviewing for jobs
- Apply networking skills by using various social media

Introduction

The **job search process** can be very intimidating. Many people struggle to find listings they are interested in, while others may be intimidated or overwhelmed by the application process. The diagram below explains the steps that occur during a job search. Many people think it starts with finding a job post, applying with your application, cover letter letter and resume, and then going into the interview. However, there are many more steps involved in order to be successful in your job search.

Job seeking is a multi-step process, which should be completed in order to increase your likelihood of obtaining the desired position. Often, it looks like the following:

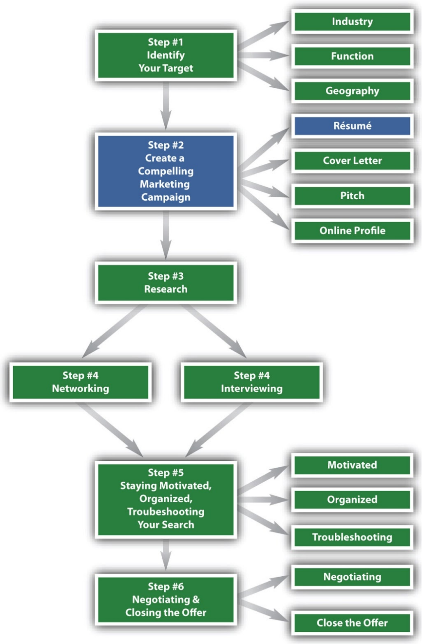


Figure 1: The Six-Step Job Search Process—Step 2. (CC BY 2017; Amber Kinonen)

Job Research

The first step is to figure out what type of job you are looking for. Are you just coming out of college and looking for an entry-level position? Are you an experienced technician in your field and you are looking for another job? Once you have determined what type of job you are looking for, you need to do some research on positions available in your field. There are many places you can look to find a job in your field of study. There are **job search websites** like Monster, Indeed, LinkedIn, etc... You can also look at company websites in their "career opportunities" section. It is also good to tell friends, family, and colleagues that you are looking for a job. They might know of opportunities that are available at their employer.

Once you find the jobs you want to apply for, you will need to decipher the **job description**.

Deciphering the Job Description

Most job descriptions can be found on the employer's website. Generally, a job description will contain important information about what the job entails, along with any technical or educational requirements the employer expects qualified applicants to hold. To start planning planning your application materials, identify each skill and qualification listed on the job posting. You can highlight on a physical printout of the posting, or copy down details into a notebook or on a spreadsheet.

- List each skill and qualification on a separate line.
- Group like with like. If communication skills are listed as important, in addition to giving presentations to potential clients, list one after the other.

Once you have completely decoded the job description, you can start matching up your own experiences and qualifications to what the employer is looking for. This will be very helpful to have on hand as you start working on the next step of the process: creating your resume.

Resumes

A resume is a selective record of your background—your educational, military, work experience, your certifications, abilities, and so on. You send it, sometimes accompanied by an application and a cover letter, to potential employers when you are seeking job interviews.

A resume should be easily readable, effectively designed, and adapted to audience expectations. If you're just starting your college education and have little work experience, try using the techniques and suggestions here to create a resume that represents your current skills, abilities, and background.

Figure 2 below presents the seven benefits that a well-written resume can do for you and your job search:

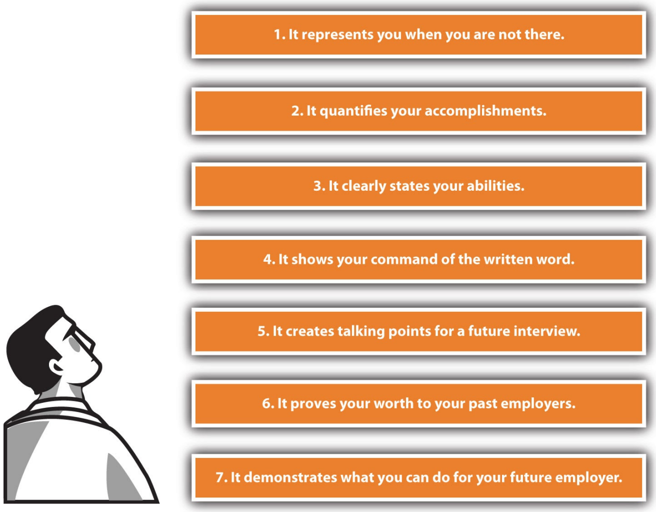


Figure 2: The benefits of a well-written resume. (CC BY 2017; Amber Kinonen)

Résumé Design: An Overview

Before personal computers, people used one resume for varied kinds of employment searches. However, with less expensive desktop publishing and high-quality printing, people sometimes rewrite their resume for every new job they go after. For example, a person who seeks employment both with a community college and with a software-development company would use two different resumes. The contents of the two might be roughly the same, but the organization, format, and emphasis would be quite different.

You are probably aware of resume-writing software: you feed your data into them and they churn out a prefab resume. You probably also know about resume-writing services that will create your resume for you for a hundred dollars or so. If you are in a time bind or if you are extremely insecure about your writing or resume-designing skills, these services might help. Often, though, they take your information and put it into a computer database that then forces it into a prefab structure. They often use the same resume-writing software just mentioned; they charge you about what the software costs. The problem is that these agencies simply cannot be that sensitive or perceptive about your background or your employment search. Nor are you likely to want to pay for their services every month or so when you are in the thick of a job search. Why not learn the skills and techniques of writing your own resume here, save the money, and write better resumes anyway?

There is no one right way to write a resume. Every person's background, employment needs, and career objectives are different, thus necessitating unique resume designs. Every aspect of your resume must start with who you are, what your background is, what the potential employer is looking for, and what your employment goals are—not with a prefab design.

Sections in Resumes

Resumes can be divided into three sections: the heading, the body, and the conclusion. Each of these sections has fairly common contents.

Heading. The top third of the resume is the *heading*. It contains your name, phone number, address, and other details such as your occupation, titles, and so on. Some resume writers include the name of their profession, occupation, or field. In some examples, you'll see writers putting things like "CERTIFIED PHYSICAL THERAPIST" very prominently in the heading. Headings can also contain a professional summary or highlights. These two special subsections are described later.

Body. In a one-page resume, the body is the middle portion, taking up a half or more of the total space of the resume. In this section, you present the details of your work, education, and military experience. This information is arranged in **reverse chronological order**, where you start with your most recent experience and work backwards in time. In the body section, you also include your accomplishments, like publications, certifications, equipment you are familiar with, and so on. There are *many* ways to present this information:

- You can divide it **functionally**—into separate sections for work experience and education.
- You can divide it **thematically**—into separate sections for the different areas of your experience and education.

Conclusion. In the final third or quarter of the resume, you can present other related information on your background. For example, you can list activities, professional associations, memberships, hobbies, and interests. At first, you might think that listing non-work and personal information would be totally irrelevant and inappropriate. Actually, it can come in handy—it personalizes you to potential employers and gives you something to chat about while you're waiting for the coffee machine or the elevator. For example, if you mention in your resume that you raise goats, that gives the interviewer something to chat with you about during those moments of otherwise uncomfortable silence.

Resume Types and Design

To begin planning your resume, decide which type of resume you need. This decision is in part based on requirements that prospective employers may have, and in part based on what your background and employment needs are.

Type of organization. Resumes can be defined according to how information on work and educational experience is handled. There are several basic, commonly used plans or designs you can consider using.

- **Functional design:** Illustrated schematically below in Figure 3, the functional design starts with a heading. Then it presents either education or work experience, whichever is stronger or more relevant, followed by the other of these two sections. Finally, it ends with a section on skills and certifications and one on personal information. Students who have not yet begun their careers often find this design the best for their purposes. People with military experience either work that detail into the education and work-experience sections as appropriate, or they create separate sections specifically for military experience at the same level as education and work experience.
- **Thematic design:** Another approach to resume is the thematic design, also illustrated schematically in Figure 3. It divides your experience and education into categories such as project management, budgetary planning, financial tracking, personnel management, customer sales, technical support, publications—whichever areas describe your experience. Often, these categories are based directly on typical or specific employment advertisements. If the job advertisement says that Company ABC wants a person with experience in training, customer service, and sales, then it might be a smart move to design thematic headings around those three requirements. If you want to use the thematic approach in your resume, take a look at your employment and educational experience—what are the common threads? Project management, program development, troubleshooting, supervision, maintenance, inventory control? Take a look at the job announcement you're responding to—what are the three, four, or five key requirements it mentions? Use these themes to design the body section of your resume. These themes become the headings in the body of the resume. Under these headings you list the employment or educational

experience that applies. For example, under a heading like "FINANCIAL RECORDS," you might list the accounting and bookkeeping courses you took in college, the company-sponsored seminars on Excel you took, and the jobs where you actually used these skills.

Type of information. Types of resume can be defined according to the amount and kind of information they present:

- **Objective resumes:** This type just gives dates, names, and titles, but no qualitative salesmanship information. These are very lean, terse resumes. In business writing courses, you are typically asked not to write this type. The objective-resume style is useful when you want to use a thematic approach or emphasize the summary/highlights section. By its very nature, you can see that the thematic approach is unclear about the actual history of employment. It's harder to tell where the person was, what she was doing, year by year.
- **Detailed resumes:** This type provides not only dates, titles, and names, but also details about your responsibilities and statements about the quality and effectiveness of your work. This is the type most people write, and the type that is the focus of most business writing courses. The rest of the details in this section of this chapter focus on writing the detailed resume.

Layout and Detail Format in Resumes

At some point in your resume planning, you'll want to think schematically about the layout and design of the thing. General layout has to do with the design and location of the heading, the headings for the individual sections, and the orientation of the detailed text in relation to those headings. Detail formats are the way you choose to arrange and present the details of your education and work experience.

Layout. Some resumes have the headings centered; others are on the left margin. The actual text—the paragraphs—of resumes typically does not extend to the far left and the far right margins. Full-length lines are not considered as **readable** or **scannable** as the shorter ones you see illustrated in the examples in this book.

Many resumes use a **"hanging-head" format**. In this case, the heading starts on the far left margin while the text is indented another inch or so. This format makes the heading stand out more and the text more scannable. Notice also that in some of the text paragraphs of resumes, special typography is used to highlight the name of the organization or the job title.

Detail formats. You have to make a fundamental decision about how you present the details of your work and education experience. Several examples of typical presentational techniques are shown below. The elements you work with include:

- Occupation, position, or job title
- Company or organization name
- Time period you were there (including the month and year for both the beginning and end of your employment)
- Key details about your accomplishments and responsibilities while there.

There are many different ways to format this information. It all depends on what you want to emphasize and how much or how little information you have (whether you are struggling to fit it all on one page or struggling to make it fill one page). Several different detail formats are shown throughout this chapter, but the most important thing is to be consistent with whatever format you choose. For example, if you list your job title on one line and then the name of the company you worked for on the line below it, that should be the format you use for every entry you create.

Special Sections in Resumes

Here are some ideas for special resume sections that emphasize your particular skills or qualifications.

Highlights. In some resumes, you may notice a "Highlights" section that occurs just below the heading and just above the main experience and education sections. This is an increasingly popular section in resumes since resume specialists believe that the eye makes first contact with a page somewhere one-fourth to one-third of the way down the page—not at the very top. If that is the case, then it makes sense to put your very "best stuff" at that point. Therefore, some people list their most important qualifications, their key skills, their key work experience in that space on the page. Actually, this section is useful more for people who have been in their careers for a while. It's a good way to create one common spot on the resume to list those key qualifications about yourself that may be spread throughout the resume. Otherwise, these key details about yourself are scattered across your various employment and educational experience—in fact, they may be buried by them.

Professional profile. Also called a **career summary**, a professional profile is a section that can be found on some resumes just under the heading and briefly describes key qualifications, experiences, and goals as they relate to the specific job for which you're applying. Think about this section as your professional "headline": what is it about you as an individual that makes you uniquely qualified for this position? Try to answer that question in brief phrases that connect to the key responsibilities from the job description, written in the imperative voice (avoiding "I" statements as much as possible.) A professional profile section is similar to a highlights section, but shorter (usually between two and four sentences) and in paragraph rather than list form.

Early-Career Resumes

If you are at the beginning of your career, all the advice and examples to this point may seem fine and good, but what if you have very little experience? Careers must start somewhere—and so must resumes. You can use several strategies to fill out your resume so that you appear to be the promising entry-level candidate that we all know you are.

- Cite relevant projects that you've worked on, both in academia and in your community, even if they are not exactly related to the career that you pursue.
- Spend extra time describing college courses and programs you have been involved in. Think about successful team projects, research projects, or reports you have completed while working on your degree.
- Include volunteer work that has required you to use any skills related to your industry. (If you've not done any volunteer work, get to volunteering!)
- List any organizations you have been a member of and describe any of their activities that have any trace of technical in them. (If you've not belonged to any business or professional organizations, get to belonging!)
- Use formatting to spread what information you have to fill out the resume page.

Resumes can include co-op and part-time work. Bulleted-lists extends the length of a the resume so that it fills up the page. At the bottom of the resume, a writer can list awards and organizations. These too can be amplified if necessary. Details as to what the award is about, why this writer received it, and what those organizations are—these are examples of good information that could be added, if necessary.

Subtle changes in format can also help make your resume fill a page. Top, bottom, left, and right margins can all be pushed down, up, and in from the standard 1.0 inch to 1.25 inches if needed. You can add an extra space between sections. To do so, don't just press Enter. Instead, use the paragraph-formatting feature of your software to put 6 or 9 points, for example, below the final element of each section. Line spacing is another subtle way to extend a resume. If your software by default uses 13.6 points of line spacing for Times New Roman 12 point text, experiment with changing the line spacing to exactly 15.0 points.

Résumé Checklist

As you plan, write, and review your resume, keep these points in mind:

- **Readability:** are there any dense paragraphs over 6 lines? Imagine your prospective employer sitting down to a two-inch stack of resumes. Do you think they are going to slow down to read through big thick paragraphs? Probably not. Try to keep paragraphs under 6 lines long. The "hanging-head" design helps here.
- **White space.** Picture a resume crammed with detail, using only half-inch margins all the way around, a small type size, and only a small amount of space between parts of the resume. Our prospective employer might be less inclined to work through that also. "Air it out!" Find ways to incorporate more white space in the margins and between sections of the resume. Again, the "hanging-head" design is also useful.
- **Special format.** Make sure that you use a special format consistently throughout the resume. For example, if you use a hanging-head style for the work-experience section, use it in the education section as well.
- **Consistent margins.** Most resumes have several margins: the outermost, left margin and at least one internal left margin. Typically, paragraphs in a resume use an internal margin, not the far-left margin. Make sure to align all appropriate text to these margins as well. Avoid unnecessary multiple margins: they give your resume a ragged messy look.
- **Terse writing style.** It's okay to use a rather clipped, terse writing style in resumes—up to a point. The challenge in most resumes is to get it all on one page (or two if you have a lot of information to present). Instead of writing "I supervised a team of five technicians..." you write, "Supervised a team of five technicians..." However, you don't leave out normal words such as articles.

- **Bold, italics, different type size, caps, other typographical special effects.** Use special typography, but keep it under control. Resumes are great places to use all of your fancy word-processing features such as bold, italics, different fonts, and different type sizes. Don't go crazy with it! Too much fancy typography can be distracting (plus make people think you are hyperactive). Also, whatever special typography you use, be consistent with it throughout the resume. If some job titles are italics, make them all italics. Avoid all-caps text—it's less readable.
- **Page fill.** Do everything you can to make your resume fill out one full page and to keep it from spilling over by four or five lines to a second page. At the beginning of your career, it's tough filling up a full page of a resume. As you move into your career, it gets hard keeping it to one page. If you need a two-page resume, see that the second page is full or nearly full.
- **Clarity of boundary lines between major sections.** Design and format your resume so that whatever the main sections are, they are very noticeable. Use well-defined headings and white space to achieve this. Similarly, design your resume so that the individual segments of work experience or education are distinct and separate from each other.
- **Reverse chronological order.** Remember to list your education and work-experience items starting with the current or most recent and working backwards in time.
- **Consistency of phrasing.** Use the same style of phrasing for similar information in a resume—for example, past tense verbs for all descriptions of past work experience.
- **Consistency of punctuation style.** For similar sections of information use the same kind of punctuation—for example, periods, commas, colons, or nothing.
- **Translations for "inside" information.** Don't assume readers will know what certain abbreviations, acronyms, or symbols mean—yes, even to the extent of "GPA" or the construction "3.2/4.00." Take time to describe special organizations you may be a member of.
- **Grammar, spelling, usage.** Watch out for these problems on a resume—they stand out like a sore thumb! Watch out particularly for the incorrect use of its and it's.

ROBERTA HAWLEY
333 West Terrace
Madison, WI 55555
E-mail: rh333@uwisconsin.edu
Cell: 917.333.5555

OBJECTIVE:

To secure an entry-level position in the health care industry, using my volunteer experience, along with my client focus, and results-oriented approach.

EDUCATION:

University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI
BS degree, expected Spring 2013
Major: health care, Minor: communications
GPA: 3.8

HONORS:

- Heath Care Award recipient, Wisconsin General Hospital, 2011
- University of Wisconsin Student Government, elected junior class president, 2011
- Dean's List, 2010, 2011
- Senator Smith Scholarship for Academic Excellence, 2010
- Pi Kappa Delta
- Silver Helmet National Honor Society

LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

- President, heath care club, 2011, member 2008–2012
- Treasurer, nutrition club, 2010, member 2009–2012
- Captain, varsity tennis team, 2009–2012 and state singles champion, 2009

HEALTH CARE VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

- Volunteer reader, Mercy General Hospital, 2007–Present
- Gift shop volunteer, Mercy General Hospital, 2009–Present

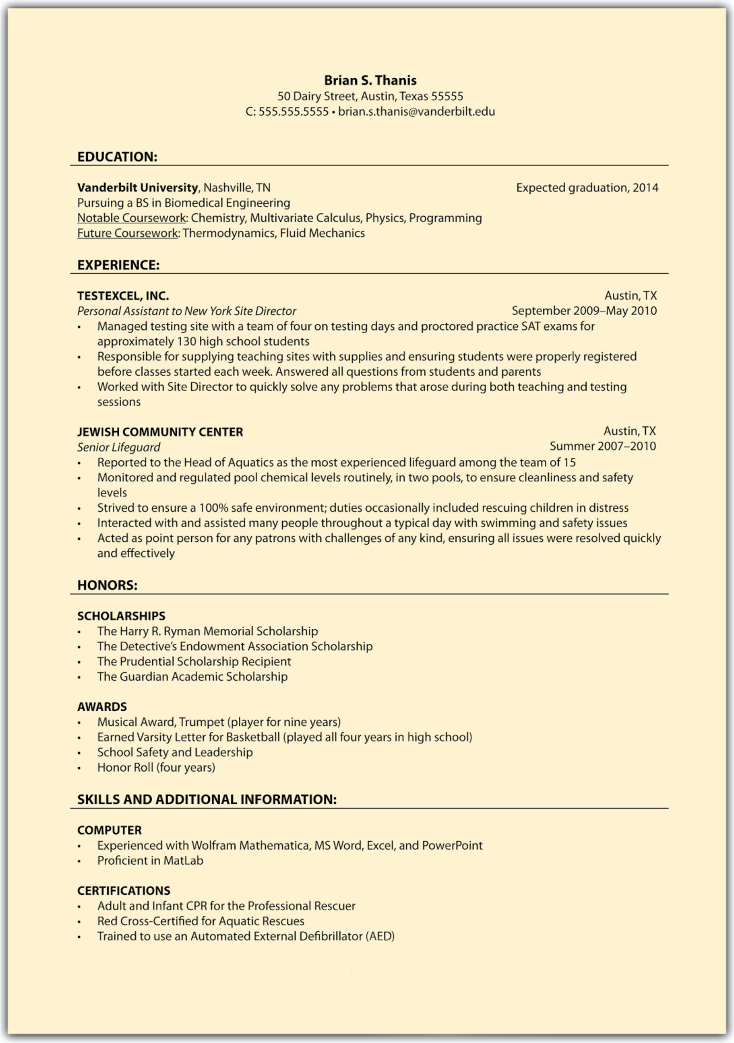
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

- Fun Run, Memorial Half Marathon, 2009–Present
- Wisconsin Cares volunteer, Coat Collection Drive, 2010
- Tennis coach, Wisconsin Special Olympics, 2008–2010

COMPUTER SKILLS:

- Microsoft Office Suite: Word, Excel, and PowerPoint
- Apple formats, Photoshop, and UNIX platforms
- LexisNexis and VISIO
- Programming skills: C++

Figure 5: Sample Thematic Résumé. (CC BY 2017; Amber Kinonen)



Brian S. Thanis
50 Dairy Street, Austin, Texas 55555
C: 555.555.5555 • brian.s.thanis@vanderbilt.edu

EDUCATION:

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN — Expected graduation, 2014
Pursuing a BS in Biomedical Engineering
Notable Coursework: Chemistry, Multivariate Calculus, Physics, Programming
Future Coursework: Thermodynamics, Fluid Mechanics

EXPERIENCE:

TESTEXCEL, INC. — Austin, TX
Personal Assistant to New York Site Director — September 2009–May 2010
- Managed testing site with a team of four on testing days and proctored practice SAT exams for approximately 130 high school students
- Responsible for supplying teaching sites with supplies and ensuring students were properly registered before classes started each week. Answered all questions from students and parents
- Worked with Site Director to quickly solve any problems that arose during both teaching and testing sessions

JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER — Austin, TX
Senior Lifeguard — Summer 2007–2010
- Reported to the Head of Aquatics as the most experienced lifeguard among the team of 15
- Monitored and regulated pool chemical levels routinely, in two pools, to ensure cleanliness and safety levels
- Strived to ensure a 100% safe environment; duties occasionally included rescuing children in distress
- Interacted with and assisted many people throughout a typical day with swimming and safety issues
- Acted as point person for any patrons with challenges of any kind, ensuring all issues were resolved quickly and effectively

HONORS:

SCHOLARSHIPS
- The Harry R. Ryman Memorial Scholarship
- The Detective's Endowment Association Scholarship
- The Prudential Scholarship Recipient
- The Guardian Academic Scholarship

AWARDS
- Musical Award, Trumpet (player for nine years)
- Earned Varsity Letter for Basketball (played all four years in high school)
- School Safety and Leadership
- Honor Roll (four years)

SKILLS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

COMPUTER
- Experienced with Wolfram Mathematica, MS Word, Excel, and PowerPoint
- Proficient in MatLab

CERTIFICATIONS
- Adult and Infant CPR for the Professional Rescuer
- Red Cross-Certified for Aquatic Rescues
- Trained to use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

Figure 6: Sample Functional Resume 2. (CC BY 2017; Amber Kinonen)

Cover Letters

In many job applications, you attach an **application** or **cover letter** to your resume. In actuality, the letter should come before the resume .

The role of the cover letter is to draw a clear connection between the job you are seeking and your qualifications listed in the resume . To put it another way, the letter matches the requirements of the job with your qualifications, emphasizing how you are right for that job. The cover letter is not a lengthy summary of the resume. Instead, it selectively mentions information in the resume, elaborating on it as appropriate.

Cover Letters: Their Purpose

When writing a cover letter, remember that you probably have competition. Your audience is a professional who screens and hires job applicants—someone who may look through dozens or even hundreds of other applications on the day they receive yours. The immediate objective of your application/cover letter and accompanying resume is to attract this person's attention. Your ultimate goal is to obtain an interview.

As you write your cover letter, be sure you complete three tasks: catch the reader's attention favorably, convince the reader that you are a qualified candidate for the job, and request an interview. A cover letter should accomplish the following five things:

1. Identify the job by title and let the recipient know how you heard about it.
2. Summarize your qualifications for the job, specifically your work experience, activities that show your leadership skills, and your educational background.

3. Refer the reader to your enclosed resume.
4. Ask for an interview, stating where you can be reached and when you will be available. If your prospective employer is located in another city and you plan to visit the area, mention the dates for your trip.
5. If you are applying for a specific job, include any information pertinent to the position that is not included in your resume.

Types of Cover Letters

To begin planning your letter, decide which type of cover letter you need. This decision is based both on employers' requirements and on what your background and employment needs are. In many ways, types of cover letters are like the types of resumes. The types of cover letters can be defined according to amount and kind of information:

- **Objective letters**—One type of letter says very little: it identifies the position being sought, indicates an interest in having an interview, and calls attention to the fact that the resume is attached. It also mentions any other special matters that are not included on the resume, such as dates and times when you are available to come in for an interview. This letter does no salesmanship and is very brief. (It represents the true meaning of "cover" letter.)
- **Highlight letters**—Another type of letter, the type you do for most business writing courses, tries to summarize the key information from the resume, the key information that will emphasize that you are a good candidate for the job. In other words, it selects the best information from the resume and summarizes it in the letter—this type of letter is especially designed to make the connection with the specific job.

Preparation and practice are critical to every step of the job search process, and the cover letter is no different. Five actions can help make your cover letter compelling:

1. Make a list of your top ten strengths.
2. Make a list of your top five weaknesses (also known as areas you would like to strengthen).
3. Decipher the job description to identify each separate skill and qualification.
4. Compare the two lists to see if they are in alignment. Also identify the gaps: does the job description list something you haven't done?
5. Highlight your top three skills that align with the job description, as you will use them in your cover letter.

Your cover letter should be engaging, informative, and show your command of the written word. It should flow easily from a reader's perspective, making the connection between the opportunity and your ability to succeed if given the chance. The tone should be compelling. You should be excited about the opportunity and you should be confident of your ability to succeed (even if you truly lack the confidence).

Cover Letter Template

The application/cover letter template includes three main sections:

1. The introductory paragraph
2. The magic middle
3. The last paragraph, which reiterates your interest

The Introductory Paragraph. In the introductory paragraph, you introduce yourself to the hiring manager or recruiter. That first paragraph of the application letter is the most important; it sets everything up—the **tone**, **focus**, as well as your most important **qualification**. A typical problem in the introductory paragraph involves diving directly into work and educational experience. The paragraph should include three general items:

1. State the purpose of the letter—to inquire about an employment opportunity.
2. Indicate the source of your information about the job—newspaper advertisement, a personal contact, or other.
3. State one eye-catching, attention-getting thing about yourself in relation to the job or to the employer that will cause the reader to want to continue.

These three items should be covered very quickly, the space of very short paragraph—no more than 3 to 4 lines of the standard business letter.

Main Body Paragraphs. In the main parts of the application letter, you present your work experience, education, and training—whatever makes that connection between you and the job you are seeking. Remember that this is the most important job you have to do in this letter—to enable the reader see the match between your qualifications and the requirements for the job.

There are two common ways to present this information:

- **Functional approach**—This one presents education in one section, and work experience in the other. If there were military experience, that might go in another section. Whichever of these sections contains your "best stuff" should come first, after the introduction.
- **Thematic approach**—This one divides experience and education into groups such as "management," "technical," "financial," and so on and then discusses your work and education related to them in separate paragraphs.

Another section worth considering for the main body of the application/cover letter is one in which you discuss your goals, objectives (the focus of your career), what you are doing, or want to do professionally. A paragraph like this is particularly good for people just starting their careers, when there is not much to put in the letter. Of course, be careful about loading a paragraph like this with "sweet nothings." For example, "I am seeking a challenging, rewarding career with a dynamic upscale company where I will have ample room for professional and personal growth"—come on, give us a break! You might as well say, "I want to be happy, well-paid, and well-fed."

One of the best ways to make a cover letter stand out is to work in details, examples, specifics about related aspects of your educational and employment background. Yes, if the resume is attached, readers can see all that details there. However, a letter that is overly general and vague might generate so little interest that the reader might not even care to turn to the resume.

In the cover letter, you work in selective detail that makes your letter stand out, makes it memorable, and substantiates the claims you make about your skills and experience. Take a look at this example, which is rather lacking in specifics:

Example

As for my experience working with persons with developmental disabilities, I have worked and volunteered at various rehabilitation hospitals and agencies in Austin and Houston [*which ones? Be specific to inject more detail into this letter*]. I have received training [*where? certificates?*] in supervising patients and assisting with physical and social therapy [*which specific therapies?*]. Currently, I am volunteering at St. David's Hospital [*doing what?*] to continue my education in aiding persons with developmental disabilities [*which specific disabilities?*].

Now take a look at the revision:

Example

I am passionate about working with persons with developmental disabilities, and have worked and volunteered at *Cypress Creek Hospital in Houston* and *Capital Area Easter Seals/ Rehabilitation Center and Health South Rehabilitation Hospital in Austin*. I have received *CPR, First Aid, and Crisis Intervention certificates* from *Cypress Creek Hospital*. Currently, I am volunteering at *St. David's Hospital* assisting with *physical therapy* to persons with *developmental disabilities* in the *aquatics department*.

These edits take general information and make it more specific, developing a narrative around something that might just get a bullet point on the resume. This makes the information much more engaging and memorable for the reader, which will help make you more memorable to the hiring manager.

Closing Paragraph. In the last paragraph of the cover letter, you can indicate how the prospective employer can get in touch with you and when are the best times for an **interview**. This is the place to urge that prospective employer to contact you to arrange an interview.

Remember that this is still a business letter, so make sure to have a professional salutation and closing. Put extra effort into identifying the name of the hiring manager, so that your letter can be appropriately addressed to the specific person who will be reviewing resumes. Employers do not make this an easy step for you, and you have to do your research. Helpful exercises include researching the company website, reading news releases, and even calling the company to ask. Laziness will hurt your job search effort if this special effort is not made. If, after doing all the preceding, you still do not know the name of the person to whom you are sending your information, by all means, address it using Dear Hiring Manager or Dear Recruiter.

Jane Smith
555 East 28th Street, Apartment 9E
New York, NY 10022

Company Name
Street
City, State, Zip

September 25, 2011

Dear Hiring Manager:

I would like to express my interest in the full-time position with your company which was posted on your website. I will graduate this spring from Fordham University with a BA in public accounting. My classmate, Alicia Smith, has shared with me her tax internship experience at ABC Company and she spoke very highly of her experience there. I am interested in this position because you have the largest tax practice in the United States, and I excel in large companies with a culture that is both inclusive and proactive.

My previous experiences make me a very strong candidate. I had two summer internships with XYZ Accounting, and partnered closely with my manager to set up the internal control system which helped us to meet regulatory requirements. In addition to improving the efficiency of our process, it saved our company significant time and money.

At EFG Inc., I organized and analyzed large amounts of data using excel and access. This work was shared with all accountants and strategies were created to compensate for areas of weakness. I'm proud to say that these programs and processes are still being used today, even though I worked at the company two years ago.

At Fordham University, teamwork and leadership are critical to our learning. I have been the vice-president of our accounting club for the past year. I managed the budget of $7K but more importantly, worked closely with other student clubs leaders to hold a successful recruiter's panel discussion, which was attended by over 100 students. The panels resulted in many positive career discussions and will hopefully result in full-time jobs for my fellow students. This successful event would not have been possible without the teamwork of the accounting club, and the partnership we built with Career Services and the companies that were represented.

My experience and skills in addition to my enthusiasm for taxes, will allow me to make an immediate and meaningful contribution to your company. I am very interested in discussing my qualifications with you.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith
xxxxx@fordham.edu
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Attachment

Figure 7: Example of a Cover Letter. (CC BY 2017; Amber Kinonen)

Early-Career Cover Letters

In the preceding, you've seen some impressive cover letters. But what if you don't have all that experience—how do you construct a respectable application/cover letter?

- Cite relevant projects (both in academia and community) you've worked on, even if they are not exactly related to the career that you pursue.
- Spend extra time describing college courses and programs you have been involved in. What about team projects, research projects, or reports?
- Include volunteer work that has had any trace of technical in it. (If you've not done any volunteer work, get to volunteering!)
- List any organizations you have been a member of and describe any of their activities that have any trace of technical in them. (If you've not belonged to any technically oriented organizations, get to belonging!)
- As with the resume, you can use formatting to spread what information you have to fill out the resume page.

Checklist for Application Cover Letters

- **Readability and white space**—Are there any dense paragraphs over 8 lines? Are there comfortable 1-inch to 1.5-inch margins all the way around the letter? Is there adequate spacing between paragraphs and between the components of the letter?
- **Page fill**—Is the letter placed on the page nicely: not crammed at the top one-half of the page; not spilling over to a second page by only three or four lines?
- **General neatness, professional-looking quality**—Is the letter on good quality paper, and is the copy clean and free of smudges and erasures?
- **Proper use of the business-letter format**—Have you set up the letter in one of the standard business-letter formats? (See the references earlier in this chapter.)
- **Overt, direct indication of the connection between your background and the requirements of the job**—Do you emphasize this connection?
- **A good upbeat, positive tone**—Is the tone of your letter bright and positive? Does it avoid sounding overly aggressive, brash, over-confident (unless that is really the tone you want)? Does your letter avoid the opposite problem of sounding stiff, overly reserved, stand-offish, blasé, indifferent?
- **A good introduction**—Does your introduction establish the purpose of the letter? Does it avoid diving directly into the details of your work and educational experience? Do you present one little compelling detail about yourself that will cause the reader to want to keep reading?
- **A good balance between brevity and details**—Does your letter avoid becoming too detailed (making readers less inclined to read thoroughly)? Does your letter avoid the opposite extreme of being so general that it could refer to practically anybody?
- **Lots of specifics (dates, numbers, names, etc.)**—Does your letter present plenty of specific detail but without making the letter too densely detailed? Do you present hard factual details (numbers, dates, proper names) that make you stand out as an individual?
- **A minimum of information that is simply your opinion of yourself**—Do you avoid over-reliance on information that is simply your opinions about yourself? For example, instead of saying that you "work well with others," do you cite work experience that proves that fact but without actually stating it?
- **Grammar, spelling, usage**—And of course, does your letter use correct grammar, usage, and spelling?

Networking

A great way to meet people and market yourself is through **networking**. A long time ago, people would network at events in person. This was a great way to talk to someone give your "elevator speech" and get to know them. People would exchange business cards which could ultimately lead to job opportunities. Now in the digital age, people network a bit differently. There are still events you can attend; however, you can do most of your networking through social media. Many employers now have links to Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. These are platforms that allow you to connect with people and post job opportunities.

One important piece of advice: be careful of what you put on social media as employers may look at your social media to determine if you are a good fit for their organization. There is much debate if employers should be allowed to use these platforms to make employment decisions. Whether you agree with this practice or not, if your social media presence is available to an employer, it is something that can influence whether or not you get called in to an interview or get offered a job. Because of this, make sure to keep your public social media as neutral as possible, and avoid potentially damaging posts or pictures on your feed. On professional sites like LinkedIn, make sure your information current and up-to-date. If you have been hesitant to use social media for your personal life, exploring the opportunities that exist on professional platforms like LinkedIn might be a good place to start.

Conclusion

The job search process can feel overwhelming. Remember to start with researching what type of job you are looking for to start your career or move into a different journey. Once you have found some jobs that fit where you are in your career, take a look at the job description and note how your experiences fit what the employer is looking for in their position. You want to make sure your cover/application letter covers those points highlighted in the job description. Your resume will either be functional or chronological. You will gear your resume towards the job in which you are applying. You might have multiple versions of your resume based on the types of jobs you are applying. Be creative and make your resume and cover letter stand out. Employers have many job applications packages to review, so you want to make sure they look at it and pick you for an interview.

All links live as of June 2021.

19: Appendix A- Research and APA Documentation Style

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Provide online search techniques
- Outline types of resources
- Explain how to evaluate resources
- Distinguish between summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting
- Review the APA format
- Explain how to cite and document sources

Before you head for the library or its Internet equivalent, you need a topic, some idea of the specific aspect of the topic you want to focus on, and some ideas about what to say about that narrowed topic. Problems finding a topic and thinking of what to say about it are often called the dreaded writer's block.

Narrowing a topic is that process in which you go from an impossibly huge topic such as nanotechnology to something more manageable such as applications of nanotechnology in brain surgery.

Brainstorming a topic is that process in which you think of everything you can that you might write about in relation to your topic.

Know Your Booleans for Searching Online or in Databases

An important tool to have when you go searching for information—either in libraries or on the Internet—has to do with **Booloean operators**: AND, OR, NOT and a few esoteric others. The following table will help you become an expert in narrowing search parameters, especially in a huge database such as that provided by the college.

Technique	What it does	Example
Truncation — adding a symbol to the root of the word to retrieve related terms and variant endings for the root term. Some databases have left- and right-hand truncation.	Expands your search	structur* finds structure, structuring, structures, etc. *elasticity will find elasticity, aeroelasticity, viscoelasticity
Boolean AND — retrieves only those records containing all your search terms	Narrows your search	finite AND element AND methods
Boolean OR — retrieves records containing any of your search terms; especially useful for synonyms, alternate spellings, or related concepts	Broadens your search	energy OR fuel pollut* OR contaminat* sulfur OR sulphur
Boolean NOT, AND NOT — attempts to exclude a term that is not useful or relevant	Narrows your search	"Advanced Materials" AND composite NOT wood
Proximity — retrieves terms within a specified distance of one another; variations of proximity searches are phrase searches, where the terms must be retrieved exactly as entered; NEAR, ADJACENT, WITH, and WITHIN searches	Narrows your search	"Styrenic Block Copolymers" (quotation marks ensure that the multiple-word term is searched as a phrase, but are not required for all databases)
Parentheses ( ) — groups terms with Boolean for more complex searches	Combines searches	"mechanical engineering" AND (handbook OR dictionary)

Types of Resources for Information Research

Encyclopedias and Other Reference Works

If you are beginning at ground zero with your report topic, a good strategy would be to read some articles in general **encyclopedias**. As a researcher, you need to know something about the topic so you will know what kinds of questions to ask and how to organize your data. If you are knowledgeable, the entire research process will be more efficient and even enjoyable.

- Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management
- Encyclopedia of Economic and Business History
- Business Jargons

Can you build a legitimate report based on encyclopedia articles that you summarize and paraphrase? NO! Most college level instructors will not accept encyclopedias as legitimate sources because their information is broad, not specific. You may not be able to gather enough information to create a report of any reasonable length. Encyclopedias (even Wikipedia) are an excellent place to begin your research and to build a background of knowledge, but they should not be used as part of your cited research data. They are a place to start and to decide where to direct your actual research.

Books

Books can provide excellent background, a historical treatment of your subject and depth. Check a book's table of contents and index to see if it has what you are looking for. For some current research topics, however, books tend to be too general and usually not as up-to-date as periodicals. To obtain more specific information on technological advancements and current information, go to journal articles, technical reports, or other sources discussed later in this chapter.

Try these resources. Search "job interview strategies" to see what kind of resources you can locate:

- Online Books
- WorldCat
- Perlego
- Google Scholar

Here are some sites that consolidate access to thousands of libraries worldwide:

- LibDex
- The WWW Library Directory
- LibWeb

In HACC library, you can either search the library catalog or use the eBooks on EBSCOhost database.

Periodicals

Periodicals is a librarian's word for publications that come out periodically—magazines, academic journals, trade publications, and newspapers. Depending on the topic and scope of your research, you will probably use academic journal articles and trade publications more often than magazines and newspapers. However, there are certainly some magazines and newspapers related to business that might provide useful, relevant, and credible information, too. HACC library offers over 80 databases that you can use to conduct your research.

When in doubt, pay a visit to your campus library and make friends with the librarians there. You can set up an appointment or chat with a librarian as well as use HACC library's research guides.

Evaluation of Your Research Findings

The following is a system of evaluating the reliability of Internet information developed by the Cornell University Library. This information is especially important if you are using Internet sources and need to defend their validity and reliability.

Point of view	Does this article or book seem objective, or does the author have a bias or make assumptions? What was the author's method of obtaining data or conducting research? Does the website aim to sell you something or just provide information? What is the author's purpose for researching and writing this article or book?

Authority	Who wrote the material? Is the author a recognized authority on the subject? What qualifications does this author have to write on this topic? Is it clear who the intended audience is? What is the reputation of the publisher or producer of the book or journal? Is it an alternative press, a private or political organization, a commercial press, or university press? What institution or Internet provider supports this information? (Look for a link to the homepage.) What is the author's affiliation to this institution?
Reliability	What body created this information? Consider the domain letters at the end of a web address (URL) to judge the site's quality or usefulness. What kind of support is included for the information? Are there facts, interviews, and statistics that can be verified? Is the evidence convincing to you? Is there any evidence provided to support the author's conclusions, such as charts, maps, bibliographies, and documents? Compare the information provided to other factual sources.
Timeliness	Has the site been recently updated? Look for this information at the bottom of a web page. How does the copyright of a book or publication date of an article impact the information contained in it? Do you need historical or recent information? Does the resource provide the currency you need?
Scope	Consider the breadth and depth of an article, book, website, or other material. Does it cover what you expected? Who is the intended audience? Is the content aimed at a general or a scholarly audience? Based on your information need, is the material too basic, too technical, or too clinical?

As a rule of thumb, steer clear of any resource that has "wiki" or "about" in the title or URL. Your safest bets are sites sponsored by the U.S. government (.gov) or educational institutions (.edu).

Summary, Paraphrase, Quote

Whether you're writing a summary or broaching your analysis, using support from the text will help you clarify ideas, demonstrate your understanding, or further your argument, among other things. Three distinct methods, which Bruce Ballenger refers to as "The Notetaker's Triad," will allow you to process and reuse information from your focus text.

Summary

Summary is useful for "broadstrokes" or quick overviews and brief references. When you summarize, you reword and condense another author's writing. Be aware, though, that summary also requires individual thought: when you reword, it should be a result of your processing the idea yourself, and when you condense, you must think critically about which parts of the text are most important. As you can see in the example that follows, one summary shows understanding and puts the original into the author's own words; the other summary is a result of a passive rewording, where the author only substituted synonyms for the original.

Original Text

"On Facebook, what you click on, what you share with your 'friends' shapes your profile, preferences, affinities, political opinions and your vision of the world. The last thing Facebook wants is to contradict you in any way" (Filloux).

Effective Summary

When you interact with Facebook, you teach the algorithms about yourself. Those algorithms want to mirror back your beliefs (Filloux).

Ineffective Summary

On Facebook, the things you click on and share forms your profile, likings, sympathies, governmental ideas and your image of society. Facebook doesn’t want to contradict you at all (Filloux).

Paraphrase

Paraphrasing is similar to the process of summary. When we **paraphrase**, we process information or ideas from another person’s text and put it in our own words. The main difference between paraphrase and summary is scope: if summarizing means rewording and condensing, then paraphrasing means rewording without drastically altering length. However, paraphrasing is also generally more faithful to the spirit of the original; whereas a summary requires you to process and condense, a paraphrase ought to mirror back the original idea in its entirety using your own language. Paraphrasing is helpful for establishing background knowledge or general consensus, simplifying a complicated idea, or reminding your reader of a certain part of another text. It is also valuable when relaying statistics or historical information, both of which are usually more fluidly woven into your writing when spoken with your own voice.

Quote

A direct quote might be most familiar to you: using quotation marks (“ ”) to indicate the moments that you’re borrowing, you reproduce an author’s words verbatim in your own writing. **Direct quotes** are good for establishing ethos and providing evidence. Use a direct quote if someone else wrote or said something in a distinctive or particular way and you want to capture their words exactly. However, remember that we should not quote too often because we want to maintain our voice as a writer throughout the document. Therefore, we should quote only if it is crucial to either use the exact words the author is using or emphasize the tone of the quoted words or phrases.

Citing Sources of Borrowed Information

When you write a report, you can and should borrow information to provide support and depth to your ideas, to offer examples to illustrate your points, or to introduce and discuss points of view different from yours. It is important that you always document your sources both in the text and at the end of the document on the References pages. Reports that do not cite and document sources are considered plagiarized. Depending on your instructor policy and severity of the charges, you may receive a failing grade for the assignment, fail the entire course, or even be expelled from the college. When in doubt how to cite a source, always check with your instructor, a librarian, or HOWL: HACC Online Writing Lab.

Types of Sources to Document

This question always comes up: how do I decide when to document information—when, for example, I forgot where I learned it from, or when it really seems like common knowledge? There is no neat, clean answer. You may have heard it said that anything in an encyclopedia or in an introductory textbook is common knowledge and need not be documented. Don't believe it. If it really isn't common knowledge for you, at least not yet, document it. If you know you read it during your research process, you need to document it.

One other question that is often asked: do I document information I find in product brochures or that I get in conversations with knowledgeable people? Yes, most certainly. You cite and document any information you did not create, regardless the type of the source. As a student, you are expected to present research that is not only informative and useful but also honest.

APA Format

These are the major components of an APA-style report or paper:

1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Body, which includes the following sections:
    - Headings and, if necessary, subheadings to organize the content
    - In-text citations of research sources
4. References page

All these components must be saved in one document, not as separate documents.

Title Page

The title page of your paper includes the following information:

- Title of the paper
- Author's name
- Name of the institution with which the author is affiliated
- Header at the top of the page with the paper title (in capital letters) and the page number (if the title is lengthy, you may use a shortened form of it in the header)

List the first three elements in the order given in the previous list, centered about one-third of the way down from the top of the page. Use the headers and footers tool of your word-processing program to add the header, with the title text at the left and the page number in the upper-right corner.

Abstract

The next page of your paper provides an abstract, or brief summary of your findings. You may not need to provide an abstract in every paper, but you should use one in papers that include a hypothesis. A good abstract is concise—about one hundred to one hundred fifty words—and is written in an objective, impersonal style. Your writing voice will not be as apparent here as in the body of your paper. When writing the abstract, take a just-the-facts approach and summarize your research question and your findings in a few sentences.

Margins, Pagination, and Headings

APA style requirements also address specific formatting concerns, such as margins, pagination, and heading styles within the body of the paper.

Review the following guidelines:

-
-
-
-
-

Headings

APA style uses section headings to organize information, making it easy for the reader to follow the writer's train of thought and to know immediately what major topics are covered. Depending on the length and complexity of the paper, its major sections may also be divided into subsections, sub-subsections, and so on. These smaller sections, in turn, use different heading styles to indicate different levels of information. In essence, you are using headings to create a hierarchy of information.

The following heading styles used in APA formatting are listed in order of most important to least important:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

APA Documentation Style

In your academic and professional career, you'll hear about a few different ways to cite your sources—for example, Harvard Style, MLA, and APA. In this course, we will use the **APA** (American Psychological Association) documentation style. This documentation style is used mainly in behavioral and social sciences as well as related fields, such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and business.

The following resources will provide all the guidance you need to correctly document, or give credit to, your sources:

-
-
-

-

Citing your sources will be easier if you plan for this at the start of the process. You should:

-
-
-

In-Text Citations

Throughout the body of your paper, include a citation whenever you quote or paraphrase material from your research sources. The purpose of citations is twofold: to give credit to others for their ideas and to allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic, if desired. Your in-text citations provide basic information about your source; each source you cite will have a longer entry in the references section that provides more detailed information.

In-text citations must provide the name of the author or authors and the year the source was published. (When a given source does not list an individual author, you may provide the source title or the name of the organization that published the material instead.) When directly quoting a source, you are also required to include the page number where the quote appears in your citation.

This information may be included within the sentence or in a parenthetical reference at the end of the sentence, as in these examples.

Example 1

Epstein (2010) pointed out that "junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive" (p. 137).

In Example 1, the writer names the source author when introducing the quote and provides the publication year in parentheses after the author's name. The page number appears in parentheses after the closing quotation marks and before the period that ends the sentence.

Example 2

Addiction researchers cautioned that "junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive" (Epstein, 2010, p. 137).

In Example 2, the writer provides a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence that includes the author's name, the year of publication, and the page number separated by commas. Again, the parenthetical citation is placed after the closing quotation marks and before the period at the end of the sentence.

Example 3

David Epstein's book *Junk Food, Junk Science* (2010) pointed out that "junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive" (p. 137).

In Example 3, the writer mentions both the author and the title of the source in the sentence, which is then followed by the publication year. The page number is provided after the quotation. As long as you have included the essential information, you can choose the option that works best for that particular sentence and source.

Citing a book with a single author is usually a straightforward task. Of course, your research may require that you cite many other types of sources, such as books or articles with more than one author or sources with no individual author listed. You may also need to cite sources available in both print and online and non-print sources, such as websites and personal interviews.

Please see the resources under "APA Documentation Style" above for more information.

References List

The brief citations included in the body of your paper correspond to the more detailed citations provided at the end of the paper in the **references section**. In-text citations provide basic information (the author's name, the publication date, and the page number if necessary), while the references section provides more extensive bibliographical information. Again, this information allows your reader to follow up on the sources you cited and do additional reading about the topic if they so desire.

The specific format of entries in the list of references varies slightly for different source types, but the entries generally include the following information:

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

The references page is double spaced and lists entries in alphabetical order by the author's last name. If an entry continues for more than one line, the second line and each subsequent line are indented five spaces, using a hanging indent.

Example of a References Page

References

Driver, S. (2020, March 23). *Keep it clean: Social media screening gain in popularity*. Retrieved from https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/2377-social-media-hiring.html

Evuleocha, S., & Ugbah, S. (2018, June). Profiling: The efficacy of using social networking sites for job screening. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 55*(2), 48–57. doi:10.1002/joec.12074

Gillet, B. (2019, November 10). Should you look at a job applicant's Facebook profile? *Ottawa Business Journal, 22*(9). Retrieved from https://web-a-ebscohost-com

Workopolis. (2015, April 5). *The top three things that employers want to see in your social media profiles*. Retrieved from https://careers.workopolis.com/advic...e-things-that-employers-want-to-find-out-about-you-online/

General Research Tips

- Clarify your general and specific purpose before you begin your research.
- Identify the resources that you have available, narrow your topic, focus on key points, and plan your investigation.
- Use Boolean operators to narrow your search.
- Use search engine filters to find information quickly.
- Source academic journal articles using your library databases or Google Scholar.
- "The filter bubble" can have a significant impact on the types of search results you receive online.
- Evaluate your sources for credibility. Consider the creator, language, recency, activity, and reputation of the website sources you use.
- Use APA style to place inline (in-text) citations and to create your reference list.
- Outline your work first to make the writing process easier.
- Use rhetorical proofs and/or organizational principles to order your document.

All links live as of June 2021.

20: Appendix B- Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics

> **✔ Chapter Objectives**
>
> The purpose of this chapter is to:
>
> - Understand and apply the rules for correct English grammar
> - Understand and apply the rules for correct usage of written English
> - Understand and apply the rules for correct English punctuation

Why is it important to know about grammar, usage, and punctuation?

Being correct goes beyond the basic grammar that language needs in order to function. Being correct means knowing the rules that a given culture has established to judge the language of individuals. Think about it: many years ago, ain't was not considered incorrect. How might you react to someone using that word today? We speak of this as usage. There are far more usage rules than grammar rules, and they are far more difficult to master. Many of them you just have to learn, and after you learn them, you have to use them over and over and over in order to incorporate them into your language.

It is important to remember that correctness is relative to a particular situation and the "rules" for usage will always be changing. Sometimes, it can be tough to keep up with all that change!

This is why a native speaker of English will find the following pages in Grammar Essentials helpful. And, if you are not a native speaker of English, learning or reviewing things like parts of speech, punctuation, and common errors can be helpful in your efforts to learn and feel comfortable with the English language.

By using a little humor, we hope this introduction into grammar and punctuation (using zombies, memes, and funny stories) will be a little less painful than when you were in junior high and had to do things like memorize prepositions or diagram sentences.

Punctuation

Meme - Punctuation Matters! Some people find inspiration in cooking their families and their dogs. vs. Some people find inspiration in cooking, their families, and their dogs.

Maybe you have heard the story about how punctuation saves lives. Clearly, there is a difference between

Correct: Let's eat, Grandma!

and

Incorrect: Let's eat Grandma!

In addition to saving lives, using punctuation properly will help your writing be clean and clear and help you build your credibility as a writer. The following pages will provide you with an overview of the basic rules regarding punctuation and will give you a chance to practice using the information you have learned.

Source: Excelsior College OWL

Apostrophes

When you send a text message, you probably do not bother with apostrophes right? It makes sense that we might not worry about properly punctuating possessives and contractions in a text message, but it's very important to remember that we do need to use apostrophes correctly in other writing situations.

Academics frequently debate about whether or not text messaging is going to kill the poor apostrophe. In his essay "Dear Apostrophe: C Ya," Rob Jenkins (2012) writes, "[O]ne of my professors, talking about the way language evolves over time, predicted that the next evolutionary stage would involve common punctuation marks. Specifically, he said, the apostrophe would eventually cease to exist" (para. 1).

This may be true, but the apostrophe is not dead yet!

So if you have been text messaging so long that you forgot what the apostrophe is for, the following pages should be helpful.

Using Apostrophes to Make Words Possessive

Beginning writers sometimes mistakenly add apostrophes to make words plural, but this is not how the apostrophe is used.

Rule: The apostrophe is used to show possession or ownership.

✔ Possessives

Sam’s game plan
my friend’s DVD
Beth’s zombie

Note: If you just mean to make a word plural, you should not add an apostrophe. For example,

Incorrect: **The student’s** planned to buy their books but played Xbox instead.

Here, you would not use an apostrophe because no ownership is being established. You can double-check this example and see that this use of the apostrophe would not pass the “of” test.

The planned of the students just does not make sense.

The red sentence above would not pass the test and instead should read as follows:

Correct: **The students** planned to buy their books but played Xbox instead.

For those times when you are determining whether an apostrophe is needed, use this test - we call it the “**of**” test. In other words, can you reword the sentence and substitute the apostrophe with “of”?

? The "of" Test

Using an apostrophe	
my friend’s DVD	the DVD of my friend
Beth’s zombie plan	the zombie plan of Beth
James’s canned goods*	the canned goods of James

Plural Possessives

Making plural words possessive can be confusing at times because we so often add an **s** to a **noun** to make it plural. All of those **s**’s can be a little overwhelming.But the rules are pretty clear on this issue:

Rule: To make plural nouns that do not end in **s** possessive, add **’s**. To make plural nouns that end in **s** possessive, add just the **’**.

✔ Possessive plural pronoun

my cats’ treasures
our zombie fortresses’ weaknesses

Using Apostrophes to Create Contractions

"To those who care about punctuation, a sentence such as 'Thank God its Friday' (without the apostrophe) rouses feelings not only of despair but of violence. The confusion of the possessive 'its' (no apostrophe) with the contractive 'it's' (with apostrophe) is an unequivocal signal of illiteracy and sets off a Pavlovian 'kill' response in the average sticklet." ~Lynne Truss, author of Eats, Shoots & Leaves

Rule: Apostrophes are also used in contractions where the apostrophe takes the place of letters that are omitted when you join two words. Here are some examples:

✔ Contractions

I am = I’m
you are = you’re
it is = it’s
did not = didn’t

Source: Excelsior College OWL

Omitted Numbers

Rule: You can also use an apostrophe to stand in for omitted numbers.

> **Apostrophe for omitted numbers**
>
> I was born in ’75, and I’m feeling old.

Note: Although there are plenty of writing situations where contractions are appropriate, contractions are too informal for most of the formal papers you write for college and should be avoided in those situations.

Tips from the Professor

While most of the rules regarding apostrophes are pretty straightforward, there are following situations related to apostrophes seem to give people trouble:

1. **It’s** is a contraction for **it is**. If you need to make **it** possessive, as in **its creepy eyes**, you shouldn’t use an apostrophe. Because of the contraction for it is, the possessive **its** goes against the normal rules.
2. Sometimes, you’ll see writers use an apostrophe when referring to decades like **the 1980’s**. However, it’s standard to write **the 1980s** without the apostrophe.
3. To make a compound word such as **mother-in-law** possessive, just add an **’s** to the last word. For example**:** My **mother-in-law’s** weekly phone calls make me really nervous.
4. If you need to show joint possession, only the last word should be made possessive, as illustrated in this example**: Alex and Megan’s** zombie-proof fence is an admirable example of joint possession.

Brackets

You may not use brackets often, but they can become helpful punctuation in academic writing as you integrate quotes into your essays. Brackets let your readers know you have made changes to the quote in some way.

Rule: You should use brackets when you have to alter text within a quote to make something clear for your readers. The material inside the brackets is your addition. Be careful though! You may not change the meaning of the quote.

To understand how to use brackets, let's start with the original quote:

> **Original Quotation:** “More than a decade ago, losses were already mounting to five billion dollars annually.”

The examples below demonstrate the three ways to use brackets in a quotation:

> **Three ways to use brackets**
>
> #### Clarify the meaning
>
> > Legal scholar Jay Kesan notes that “a decade ago, losses [from employees’ computer crimes] were already mounting to five billion dollars annually” (2010).
>
> Since your audience did not read the article, they won't understand which losses Jay Kesan is referring to in this quote. Therefore, you should use brackets to help your audience understand the context of the quotation.
>
> #### Signal misspelling within the quote
>
> > Legal scholar Jay Kesan notes that “a decad [sic] ago, losses were already mounting to five billion dollars annually” (2010).
>
> As tempting. as it may be, you may not change anything within a quotation. Because you do not want your audience to think you made a mistake in spelling, you should use the term [sic] after a

misspelled word within a quotation.

Emphasize a point that was not emphasized in the original quotation

> Legal scholar Jay Kesan notes that "a decade ago, losses were already mounting to *five billion dollars* annually" [emphasis mine] (2010).

Colons

Many writers think the colon is such a confusing piece of punctuation that they simply avoid it altogether, but it can be fun to use a colon every now and then. Plus, the colon can add some important variety to your writing. So why not review this list of uses for the colon and give it a try?

In most cases, essentially, a colon signals "anticipation"—the reader knows that what follows the colon will define, illustrate, or explain what preceded it. This is certainly the case in the colon's first three uses, as described below:

✔ Using a colon

Rule: Use a colon to separate two **independent clauses** (complete thoughts) when you want to emphasize the second independent clause.

Example: Road construction in New York City might pose a problem if there is a zombie attack: It is best to know which streets are closed, as you do not want to end up lost during a dire situation

Rule: Use a colon to separate an independent clause from a **list** that follows the independent clause.

Example: I have collected a wide variety of important items in case there is a zombie attack: canned food, bottled water, and wood for boarding my windows.

> **TIP!** You shouldn't use a colon when the introductory portion of the sentence is a **dependent clause** (incomplete thought). The first part of the sentence must be an independent clause or a complete sentence. So the following would NOT work:
>
> **Incorrect**: **I have collected:** canned food, bottled water, and wood for boarding my windows

Rule: Use a colon to separate an independent clause from an **appositive** (a noun or noun phrase that renames or identifies a noun or noun phrase right next to it) that follows the independent clause.

Example: I have the perfect solution to your problems with bullies at work: Chuck Norris

Rule: You should also use a colon at the end of a formal, business letter greeting.

Example: Dear Ms. Smith:

Rule: And, of course, you should use a colon to separate the hour from the minutes when writing numerical time.

Example: 3:00 a.m.

Commas

comma The Comma: Tricky, Mysterious, and Subjective?

People often think commas are tricky and mysterious, and while they may be tricky if we aren't familiar with the rules, they are not mysterious at all. They are not subjective, and no matter what your third-grade teacher told you, it's probably not a good idea to place a comma wherever you feel the need to take a breath. What happens if you have a stuffy nose from a cold? Your essay might be littered with **unnecessary commas**.

There are actually some pretty clear-cut rules regarding commas, and while some rules seem to be clearer than others, at least in terms of how much most people understand, there are some basic comma rules that can help you know when and when not to use a comma.

Source: Excelsior College OWL

With Coordinating Conjunctions

Rule: Use a comma with a coordinating conjunction when combining two independent clauses.

An **independent clause** is a term for a complete thought or sentence with both a subject and a verb. A **coordinating conjunction** is a conjunction that combines two equal elements and can combine two complete sentences. We have seven coordinating conjunctions in American English:

For	**Or**
And	**Yet**
Nor	**So**
But	

A comma with coordinating conjunctions

Rule: Coordinating conjunctions can connect all kinds of words and phrases, but when they are used to connect independent clauses, we must place a comma before the coordinating conjunction, as illustrated in the following example:

Example: I am preparing for a zombie invasion, **and** I am building a strong zombie fort around my home.

Rule: If the coordinating conjunction does not connect two independent clauses, do not place a comma before the coordinating conjunction, as illustrated in the following example:

Example: I am preparing for a zombie invasion **and** am building a strong zombie fort around my home.

Items i**n a Series**

Rule: Use a comma to separate items in a series (three or more things).

You should even place a comma between the last two, although some writing style guidelines now omit this comma. In academic culture, we still use the serial or “Oxford” comma, so even punctuation rules have a rhetorical context.

Serial comma

In some situations, you may not use the serial comma, but in academic writing you should, as illustrated in these examples:

> She stayed up all night watching scary movies and ate **popcorn, peanuts, and chocolate.**
>
> She **ran into the house, shut the door, and locked all of the locks** because she thought a werewolf was behind her.

With Introductory Phrases

Rule: Use commas after introductory words or phrases.

Subordinating conjunctions are words that connect, but unlike **coordinating conjunctions**, which connect equal parts, subordinating conjunctions connect dependent clauses (incomplete thoughts) to independent clauses.

A comma with subordinate introductory phrase

When you see a subordinating conjunction at the beginning of a sentence, this signals an introductory phrase, and you know a comma is coming at the end of that subordinate phrase, as illustrated in these examples:

> **Because his favorite team lost the Super Bowl,** he would not speak to anyone about the game for two years.
>
> **Although they have stored a lot of food in their basement,** I am not sure if they have enough for a zombie apocalypse.

Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions include the following:

because	**although**	**after**
while	**since**	Tip

When these same phrases appear at the end of a sentence, they are not set off by commas, except in cases of strong contrast—for instance, in the case of the word **although**.

He would not speak to anyone about the game for two years because his favorite team lost the Super Bowl.

I am not sure if they have enough for a zombie apocalypse, **although** they have stored a lot of food in their basement.

You should also place a comma after introductory words, as illustrated in this example:

However, video games make great presents for a teenager.

With Essential & Nonessential Information

Rule: Use commas in the middle of a sentence to set off words or phrases that are **not essential** to the meaning of the sentence.

✓ A comma with non-essential information

The New York Yankees, **who happen to be my favorite team,** have won more World Series than any other team in baseball.

The Boston Red Sox, **however,** won the World Series only seven times.

This rule can be a little tricky because of some misinformation we may have received at some point in elementary school. Were you ever taught that the trick to determining whether or not you need commas around information in the middle of a sentence was to pull out that information and see if the sentence was still complete? If the sentence was still complete, then you would know you needed a comma around that extra information.

Well, that doesn't always work so well.

The best tip is to think about how meaning would be affected if you pulled out the word or phrase. If the meaning is not really affected, the word or phrase is not essential and should be placed inside a set of commas.

✓ No comma with essential words or phrases

Rule: Conversely, it's important to remember that **essential** words or phrases should not be set off with commas.

Example: Her copy of Skyrim **that I borrowed last week** was the best game I have ever played and probably the best video game in the history of the world.

With Adjectives

Rule: Use a comma to separate coordinate **adjectives** describing the same **noun**.

✓ Commas and coordinate adjectives

An **adjective** is a word that describes a noun, and when we have two coordinate or "equal" adjectives describing the same noun, we need to place a comma between those adjectives, as illustrated in this example:

It was a **stressful, sleepless** night because I stayed up too late playing Dead Space.

If the adjectives aren't coordinate, or "equal," you should not separate them with a comma, as illustrated in this example:

Everyone knows the **white frame** house on Third Street is haunted.

A good trick to help you determine whether or not adjectives are coordinate is to try reading the sentence with the adjectives in reverse order or to add the word **and** between them. If the sentence would still make sense to you, the adjectives are coordinate, and you would need to separate them with a comma if they are describing a single noun.

With Shifts at the End

Rule: Use a comma to separate coordinate elements at the end of a sentence or to indicate a distinct shift at the end of a sentence.

Commas to indicate a shift at the end of a sentence

This comma rule is pretty straightforward. If you have a distinct shift at the end in content or a shift at the end for emphasis, you should set off that shift at the end with a comma.

> You want me to fight Chuck Norris for you? I am brave, **not crazy.**
>
> You are going to stand in line for the new Halo 4, **aren't you?**

With Quotes

Rule: Use a comma between the main discourse and a quote.

Comma before a quote

Whether you are writing dialog or setting up a quote from a source in your research essay, you should use a comma to separate the main discourse from your quote.

> As Bilbo Baggins said, **"I like half of you half as well as I should like, and like less than half of you half as well as you deserve!"**
>
> My favorite line in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is when the witches say, **"Double, double, toil and trouble; fire, burn; and cauldron, bubble."**

With Places & Dates

Rule: Use commas to set apart geographical names and to separate items in dates, except for between the month and the day.

Comma between geographical names and items in dates

Geographical names: When I heard zombies had been located in **New York, New York,** I knew it was time to move to **Los Angeles, California**.

It is a good thing that letter made it to **4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, England**.

Items in dates: I know the Mayan calendar indicates the end of the world on **December 21, 2012,** but I am going to stick with Nostradamus because he gave us until 3797.

Comma Abuse

Finally, don't abuse the poor comma. It hasn't done anything to you. Well, it may have caused you some stress from time to time, but you should not abuse it. You should *definitely* not use a comma in the following instances:

Don't use a comma

1. To separate a subject from a verb.

   Incorrect: My zombie **plan, involves** the complete and utter failure of your zombie plan.

2. Between two verbs or verb phrases in a compound predicate.

   Incorrect: Do those vampires really sparkle in the **sunlight, and** drink only animal blood?

3. Between two nouns or noun phrases in a compound subject.

   Incorrect: Aggressive **newbies, and campers** are ruining the gaming experiences for me.

4. To set off a dependent clause at the end of a sentence, except in cases of strong contrast.

   Incorrect: My gaming confidence is at an all-time **low, because** I got pawned ten times by a second-grader.

Tip!

Students often struggle with commas when it comes to using them correctly with the coordinating conjunctions—**and**, **but**, **or**, **for**, **nor**, **so**, and **yet**.

The important thing to remember is that you have to keep in mind what else is around that conjunction. You can't assume that every time you use **and** you'll need a comma. Sometimes, you will, and, sometimes, you won't.

Dashes

The dash is kind of like the superhero of punctuation. Not only does it have a cool, sleek name, it's often referred to as the "super comma." But you can't just go around using dashes because you want super commas. There are some rules you should follow, and you don't want to overuse any one type of punctuation.

✓ Rules and Examples: Using a Dash

The following two rules should help you make good decisions regarding that dashing dash:

Rule: You use dashes to set apart or emphasize the content that is within the dashes or after a dash. The content within the dashes or after the dash gets more emphasis than it would if you just used commas or parentheses.

Examples: His ideas regarding an evacuation in case of a zombie attack are certainly controversial—even radical.

> I think the reason those books became so popular—so much so that they became a cultural phenomenon—is that the world was ready for a little bit of magic.

Rule: You can also use dashes to set apart an **appositive phrase** or extra information that contains commas.

Example: The changes that came with the arrival of the eleventh doctor—the screwdriver, the TARDIS, and all of the side characters—certainly surprised many fans.

Of course, while the rules related to using dashes are relatively simple, there seems to be great confusion over how the dash is actually created in word processing programs.

To be sure, the dash is no **hyphen**. The hyphen is smaller and comes between words like mother-in-law. The dash is longer and is created by placing two hyphens in a row. When you space after the word after the dash, most word processing programs will turn those two little hyphens — into a dash—like so.

Ellipses

Many people use an ellipsis to show a pause or hint at the future in informal writing. Ellipses appear this way frequently in Facebook messages and emails. Interestingly, although this use of an ellipsis was technically incorrect at one time, it's becoming "more" correct over time with some style manuals suggesting you can use an ellipsis in this manner if you use it sparingly.

Still, in formal writing, it's not a good idea to use an ellipsis to show a pause or to create anticipation of some kind. Academic style guides recommend using an ellipsis to show that you have omitted words in quotes.

✓ Example: Ellipses

Here is an example of how to use ellipses in a formal, academic writing situation.

Quote: "Often, a school is your best bet—perhaps not for education but certainly for protection from an undead attack."
— **Max Brooks**, ***The Zombie Survival Guide***

Example: "Often, a school is your best bet . . . for protection from an undead attack."

Of course, now that you know when to use an ellipsis you may be wondering how to make one. An ellipsis is three periods or dots, and most style guides call for a space between each dot. So, you would type period, space, period, space, and period. You also need a space before and after the ellipsis. One tip is to make sure your ellipsis does not stretch to the next line. It must be all on one line. If you are ending a sentence with an ellipsis, it may look like you have a four-dot ellipsis, but there is really no such thing. The first dot is your period. Then, you have your ellipsis. In this situation, you will also put a space between each period.

Example: According to Jones (2012), "*The Walking Dead* series added to the popularity of zombies. . . . However, several movies are responsible for the initial interest" (p. 31).

The key is that you shouldn't change the meaning of the quote. The second quote here isn't nearly so witty, but the basic idea hasn't been changed. When you have long quotes and you need to eliminate some unnecessary information from those quotes, an ellipsis can be very helpful.

Exclamation Marks

You won't use many exclamation marks in academic writing. The exclamation mark is kind of the equivalent of yelling, and most academic writing situations don't call for much yelling, though you may feel like yelling about some of your assignments.

However, exclamation marks do serve an important function by adding emphasis to commands or other phrases, and you may find yourself needing the exclamation mark when you write dialog for certain narrative assignments. In most cases, you should be careful with exclamation marks and make sure the situation calls for them.

✔ Difference between a comma and an exclamation mark

You can certainly see the difference between a sentence punctuated with a period and one punctuated with an exclamation mark.

Watch out.
Watch out!

Zombies are coming.
Zombies are coming!

Hyphens

Hyphenating Words

"The basic rule of hyphens . . . is that they're used to form compound modifiers, that is, to link two or more words that are acting as adjectives or sometimes adverbs." (Casagrande, 2006, p. 62)

✔ Using a Hyphen

Rule: When you have two or more words that modify or describe a noun that follows, you should hyphenate those words. But a word of caution: you shouldn't hyphenate the same words if they come after the noun.

Examples: I thought we were in a **long-term** relationship.
Everyone knew that relationship was not long term.

I really need a **fuel-efficient** car to save money for more video games.
To save money for video games, I bought a car with better fuel efficiency.

I have a **three-year-old** son who mimics every word you say.
I have a son who mimics every word you say; he is three years old.

Hyphens have other uses including acting with prefixes, suffixes, nouns, letters, and numbers and clarifying the meaning of words.

Rule: Hyphenate words that begin with **self**, **all**, **ex**, and words that begin with a capital letter or number.

Examples:	ex-husband	all-inclusive	self-help	the A-team

Of course, we should also hyphenate compound numbers like **twenty-five** or **thirty-seven**

Finally, it's important to note that hyphen "rules" are more like the **Pirate Code** in that they are really more like guidelines. Even the "experts" will disagree about whether or not some words or groups of words should be hyphenated. It's definitely a good idea to double-check with the style manual you are using, such as the **APA** or **MLA** manuals, and for tricky words, you can consult a good dictionary.

Parentheses

Keyboard characters creating an emoji face using

Parentheses: More Than Helpful Emoticon Tools

Interestingly, parentheses can do more than make smiley faces :) and sad faces :(like these. Although they are quite handy for these important emoticons, they serve an important function in formal writing, as well.

Rule: Parentheses are used to set off information in a sentence that is important but not really a part of the main message. It's important to remember that your sentence should make sense if you eliminate the parentheses and all that is contained between them.

Source: Excelsior College OWL

✓ Using Parenthesis

The Headless Horseman (as the old legend goes) eliminated the disruption Ichabod Crane brought to Sleepy Hollow.

You'll probably use parentheses most often in your research papers because both APA and MLA formatting require in-text citations using parentheses. So right after a quote or any other borrowed information, you should include an in-text citation in parentheses, as illustrated in these examples:

APA (Jones, 2011, p.131).
MLA (Jones 131).

TIP: The period comes after the parenthesis in both APA and MLA format. The exception to this rule is with block quotes. When using block quotes, in both APA and MLA format, the period comes before the in-text citation.

Periods

The period seems pretty straightforward. After all, for most of us, this was the first punctuation we learned when we were learning to read. **See Jane run**. To our first-grader selves, that meant, **See Jane run, stop, take a break, keep going. You can do this thing.**

Periods are certainly important punctuation because they are what we most often use to separate complete thoughts or independent clauses. Periods are how we end our sentences most of the time.

Rule: However, periods do serve another important function in the world of punctuation: You should use a period with abbreviations.

✓ Using a period in an abbreviation

Dr.	Mrs.	Mr.
Ms.	a.m. (or A.M.)	p.m. (or P.M.)

Then, of course, there is the question about how many spaces should come after a period. If you learned to type on those things called typewriters, you learned to double space after all periods at the ends of sentences. However, this isn't always the case anymore. We just single space after all periods, though you should consult the style guide you are using. **APA** style now requires a single space after a period at the end of a sentence, after requiring a double space in the sixth edition.

The lesson here is clear. The "rules" change all the time and are dependent upon your style guide. It's important to stay up to date.

Question Marks

"In all affairs, love, religion, politics, or business, it's a healthy idea, now and then, to hang a question mark on things you have long taken for granted." ~Bertrand Russell, philosopher

✓ Using a Question Mark

Rule: You should use a question mark at the end of a question - like this:

Example: When did our professor say that essay was due?

However, there is one situation involving question marks that seems to give people a lot of trouble. What about when you have a sentence that is part statement and part question? What do you do then? You have a couple of options, depending upon the situation. You might have a sentence like this:

Rule: In the followng case, the statement before the question isn't complete, so you can simply use a comma to separate the statement from the question.

Example: The question I have is, how are we going to get out of here?

Rule: If the sentence is awkward, change it so the first part, the statement part, is a complete sentence. In this situation, you might have a sentence like the following:

Example: One question remains: How are we going to get out of here?

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are how we tell our readers we are including words that aren't our own. Whether we're using dialog or quote material from our research, quotation marks are important punctuation. The reality is that punctuation marks can really make a difference in whether or not you are breaking the law. After all, if you use someone's words and don't let your readers know you are using someone else's words, that constitutes plagiarism, which is most certainly illegal.

So, if you have doubts about this whole quotation thing, the following pages will be extremely helpful. This super-cool video can help as well.

Quotation Marks with Dialog

You may not find yourself needing to use dialog very often in academic writing, but you may be asked to write narrative essays in some classes, which often contain dialog.

Rule: When you use dialog, it's important to use quotation marks to set apart the speech from the rest of your text. Otherwise, separating the dialog from the rest of the writing can be very confusing for readers.

✔ Using quotation marks with dialog

"This time," my basketball coach said, "I know you can do it." It turned out he did not really know what he was talking about.

Quotation Marks with Quoted Material

Rule: You should use quotation marks any time you use words directly from another source. Sometimes, students think putting a citation or reference at the end "covers it," but you must use quotation marks to indicate borrowed words.

✔ Using quotation marks to indicate quoted material

"Quotation marks serve primarily to tell the reader the exact words someone used" (Hope, 2010, p. 21).

If you **paraphrase** a source, this means you have put the information in your own words, and you don't need to use quotation marks. You should still cite with an **in-text citation**, but you shouldn't use quotation marks.

The key to borrowing information from sources is to remember that any words appearing inside quotation marks belong to someone else. Words that do not appear inside quotation marks are assumed to be yours.

Single Quotes

Now that you know what quotation marks are used for, you may wonder about the single quotation marks—the one that look like **'this.'**

Single quotation marks are used for quotes within quotes, as illustrated in the following example:

✔ Using single quotation marks

> The article read, "When the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers was interviewed, he said he was 'upset' about the call that affected the game."

You may encounter situations where you'll close single quotation marks and double quotation marks at the same time, leaving you with **"something like 'this.'"** Don't worry if this happens. It is correct. It just means the quote within the quote ended at the same time the main quote ended.

> Jane asked, "Did you know that Bob said 'I love you?'"

Semicolons

It's true. The semicolon is used for more things than just winking in text. ;)

One of the main uses of a semicolon is to separate two independent clauses. The semicolon isn't like a **comma**; it's really more like a **period**. Using a semicolon like a comma can definitely create some trouble.

First, let's take a step back and explain the difference between an independent clause and a dependent clause. An **independent clause** expresses a complete thought. An independent clause is usually called a sentence. Conversely, a **dependent clause** is a group of words that may contain a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought.

Independent clause:
I ran quickly to escape the zombie I encountered on Main Street.

Dependent clause:
Although I ran quickly to escape the zombie I encountered on Main Street,

Can you see the difference? The first example is a complete sentence, and the second example isn't. (Of course, we also know the first one ends well, and we aren't so sure about the second one.)

So now that you understand what an independent clause is and that a semicolon connects two independent clauses, we can begin to look at how the semicolon can be used.

Semicolons to Join Clauses

Rule: You should use a semicolon when you're joining two independent clauses without a connecting word. The semicolon functions, structurally, just like a period. The difference is that the semicolon between the two independent clauses shows they are connected, as illustrated in the following examples:

Using semicolons

If you want me to vote for you, you are going to need to tell me what I want to hear; if you are lying, I guess I will worry about that later.

I am so tired of spending so much money on canned food for my zombie apocalypse hoard; I am pretty sure the grocery store clerks are laughing at me behind my back.

Using Semicolons in Lists

So right after telling you that semicolons shouldn't be used like commas, we should discuss one situation where the semicolon does function more like a comma. However, this is a very particular situation, so you'll want to pay close attention.

Rule: You should use semicolons when you are separating **items in a list that contains commas**. Here is an example:

Semicolons in lists

At the Comicon conference, I met Jeanne, from Dallas, Texas; James, from Bend, Oregon; and Stacey, from Bangor, Maine.

Because the items in the series contain commas themselves, it would be confusing to add more commas to the situation. In this particular instance, the semicolon separates the items in a series.

Tips!

Semicolons can feel a little confusing because sometimes they're used to separate items in a series, as mentioned on the previous page, but they are really nothing like a comma. In terms of sentence structure, they can separate independent clauses, just like a period.

If you have the habit of using a semicolon like a comma, it's important to work to break that habit. When you edit your writing, it's a good idea to circle all of the semicolons you have used. Then, ask yourself why each semicolon is there. If you're using it like a strong comma, you'll need to revise.

Time to Write

Now that you have a stronger understanding of the punctuation rules, it's time to think about how these rules might apply to your own writing. One key strategy is to think about areas in which you struggle. If you don't have problems with apostrophes, then you shouldn't worry too much about apostrophes.

However, it's important to keep punctuation in general in mind when you edit. Edit your writing in several passes; you can't catch every issue in one sweeping edit. So, with that in mind, it's a good idea to devote one edit to simply looking for punctuation issues. It's most helpful to review the rules right before you edit, especially the rules for the types of punctuation you have had struggles with, perhaps commas or semicolons.

Parts of Speech

A police woman You're probably quite familiar with the "grammar police"—those people who find it necessary to correct any grammar mistake you make. In fact, you might be a member of the "grammar police" squad yourself, but if you're not, you probably get a little tired of the corrections. After all, this person understood what you were saying. Why is it necessary to correct?

Usually, members of the "grammar police" squad aren't necessary. When we speak in informal conversations, as long as we are being understood, the particulars of correctness are not an issue.

However, there are times when correctness is really important, and when you write for an academic audience or a professional audience, correctness is a pretty big deal. The fact is that people judge us based on our writing, and correctness is a part of that. With that in mind, the following pages, which cover grammar and proper usage of the major parts of speech, will be helpful.

Source: Excelsior College OWL

Nouns

A **noun** is a person, place, object, idea, or event. "The word *noun*, in fact, comes from *nomen*, the Latin word for *name*" (Kolln, 1994, p. 276). Nouns are the first words you learned as a child, and you probably have a really strong sense of what a noun is. After all, how could we possibly talk about anything if we're unable to give it a name?

So you may be wondering why in the world we have to complicate something as simple as nouns by discussing so many different types of nouns. The answer is that it's important to learn about the different types of nouns as you work to ensure proper structures and agreements in your sentences.

Proper Nouns

A **proper noun** refers to a specific person, place, organization, etc. Proper nouns are capitalized because they are specific nouns.

Some examples of proper nouns are **Steven**, **Apple** (the company), **New York**, and the **Seattle Seahawks**.

Common Nouns

A **common noun** refers to a general group or class of people, places, objects, etc. One way to identify a common noun is called the "**the**" test. If you can use the noun with the article **the** (or another article like **a** or **an**) in front of it, the word is likely a common noun.

Some examples are **the *game***, **the *movie***, and **the *ghost***.

Of course, it's important to remember that the "**the**" test does not work all the time. It's just a good guideline. Some exceptions to the "**the**" test would be with proper nouns (discussed on the previous page) like the **Dallas Cowboys** and the **Boston Red Sox**. Even though they would pass the "**the**" test, they are proper nouns, not common nouns.

Collective Nouns

Nouns can get a little tricky when it comes to a discussion of collective nouns. Collective nouns are nouns such as **family**, **team**, and **majority**. The tricky part comes when we have to make a decision about whether these nouns are singular or plural because we have to choose verbs that will agree with these nouns.

And, now, here's the really tricky part: There are no hard and fast rules. The verb you choose to agree with the collective noun actually depends upon how you want your readers to perceive the noun. Is it a single unit or a group of individuals? Even then, it depends upon context. Take the collective noun **family**, for example.

> ✔ Using the correct verb tense with a collective noun
>
> In the example below each member went his or her separate way, so you would see the collective noun **family** as a group of individuals; therefore, you should use a plural verb instead of a singular verb.
>
> **Example**: The **family have** all gone their separate ways since Grandma died.
>
> But let's look at the example below where the family is seen as a single unit; here you would need a singular verb to agree with the collective noun.
>
> **Example:** The whole **family is** coming to my house for Thanksgiving this year. I had better learn to cook a turkey.

In her book, ***Rhetorical Grammar***, Martha Kolln (1991) says "[collective nouns] can be treated as either singular or plural, depending on context and meaning" (p. 47). So, it really does depend on the situation.

You may be wondering how this information is helpful. The key is to think about how you might perceive the collective noun and then, of course, to consider how it's used in the sentence.

And, after all, there are only about 200 collective nouns in the English language, so you really only have to worry about 200 of these. Okay, that's a lot. But this is a great example of how, very often, there are no hard and fast rules for grammar.

Verbal Nouns

A verbal noun is a type of noun that is derived from a verb. It looks like a verb but actually functions in a sentence like a noun. Here are some examples:

> ✔ Verbal Nouns
>
> **Running** from zombies is hard work
>
> **Jogging** is a good exercise that will help you prepare, but you have to do it every day.
>
> We had a **meeting** to compare our zombie action plans.

Verbal nouns and something called **gerunds** (a form of a verb or verb phrase that functions as a noun phrase and subject in a sentence) are very similar. In fact, the first two examples above are examples of verbal nouns that are also gerunds. But, a verbal noun can be more than a gerund. In the last example, the word **meeting**, is functioning like a noun but isn't a noun phrase that's the subject of a sentence.

It can certainly get a little confusing, and even the grammar experts disagree sometimes about the differences between verbal nouns and gerunds. The key thing for you to remember is that, when we are talking about nouns, verbs can sometimes function in your sentences like nouns.

Compound Nouns

A compound noun is a noun made up of two or more words. Sometimes, compound nouns are hyphenated, but there are plenty of examples of compound nouns that are not hyphenated. There are also compound nouns that are written as one word. Here are some examples:

Compound Nouns

mother-in-law
waste-paper basket
full moon
blackboard

Some compound nouns that used to be hyphenated are no longer hyphenated, and some compound nouns that used to be two words became one word. The “rules” change based upon common usage.

Paper-clip is now just **paperclip.** And **healthcare** is now generally considered just one word, but some people still say it should be two words, **health care**.

“Rules” of correctness change constantly, and rules related to compound nouns change rather quickly. If you’re in doubt about how to write a compound noun, be sure to check a good online dictionary.

Pronouns

Pronouns are actually just another type of noun, but because they’re such an important noun type and so commonly used, they’re usually classified as a separate part of speech. A **pronoun** is a noun that takes the place of a noun or groups of nouns, and because pronouns are “standing in” for nouns, you have to be sure that the pronoun you choose to “stand in” agrees in number, person, and gender.

Personal (Definite) Pronouns

Personal pronouns are pronouns that take the place of common and proper nouns and refer to people and things. Essentially, they “stand in” for people and things when you want to make sure you are not repeating yourself by having to rename people and things all the time. Let’s look at an example.

Personal (Definite) Pronouns

In this example, the author doesn’t have to repeat **my brother**, thanks to the personal pronoun **he**.

> **Example: My brother** is staying up late to watch a “Walking Dead” marathon. **He** is going to have nightmares!

Personal pronouns can be singular and plural, and there are first, second, and third person personal pronouns.

Personal (Definite) Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I, me	we, us
Second Person	you	you
Third Person	she, her, he, him, it	they, them

Indefinite Pronouns

What is the difference between definite and indefinite pronouns? A definite pronoun would be a pronoun that refers to something specific, so a **personal** pronoun would also be a definite pronoun. (Refer back to the **Personal Pronouns** for examples.)

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to anything specific, so words like **someone** and **everybody** are indefinite pronouns. Indefinite pronouns can also be **singular or plural**.

While any pronoun that refers to a specific person or thing would be a definite pronoun, it can be helpful to refer to a list of indefinite pronouns if you need to use pronouns that refer to people or things in general and do not refer to anyone or anything specific. The list below can help.

Indefinite Pronouns

Singular	Plural	Singular or Plural
anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something	both, few, many, several	all, any, most, none, some

Singular & Plural Pronouns

Singular pronouns are simply pronouns that refer to singular nouns. But it can get a little tricky when you think about the fact that singular pronouns can be **personal** pronouns, which, as you have learned, refer to a person or thing. They will also be **definite** or **indefinite**, which means they can refer to someone or something specific (definite) or not (indefinite).

Plural pronouns are simply pronouns that refer to plural nouns. But, like singular pronouns, plural pronouns can also be personal and definite or indefinite, and they refer to plural nouns or groups of nouns.

Singular and Personal Pronouns

Singular pronouns: Words like **he** and **she** are singular, personal, definite pronouns, and words like **anybody** and **anyone** are singular, indefinite pronouns.

Plural pronouns: Word such as **they** and **we** are plural, personal, definite pronouns, and words like **many** and **both** are plural, indefinite pronouns.

Tip! Don't worry if you feel a little confused about the fact that singular and plural pronouns can also be personal pronouns. They are definite or indefinite as well. However, most likely, you won't find yourself in situations where you have to label pronoun types. What you do need to know is that, when you choose a singular or plural pronoun, you have to make sure it agrees with the noun you're replacing. So, if you're replacing a singular noun, be sure to use a singular pronoun.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are pronouns that show ownership. Some possessive pronouns can be used before nouns and function as adjectives (words that describe nouns).

Possessive Pronouns

Pronouns such as **my**, **her**, or **his are possessive** because you would say things like ***my* books**, ***her* computer**, and ***his* zombie plan**.

Other possessive pronouns stand alone. These are pronouns such as **mine**, **yours**, **hers**, and **his**. An example would be **That book is *hers*.**

Relative & Demonstrative Pronouns

Relative pronouns relate **subordinate clauses** (clauses that cannot stand alone) to the rest of a sentence. Words like **that**, **which**, **who**, and **whom** are examples of relative pronouns.

Demonstrative pronouns stand in for a thing or things, and we choose these words based on how close these things are to us. For things that are nearby, we use the pronouns **this** and **these**. For things that are far away, we use the pronouns **that** and **those**.

Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns end in **self** or **selves**, and they're used when a pronoun is both the subject and the object of a sentence.

Reflexive Pronouns

She is going to can all of those beans for her zombie storage room **herself**.

> **I** am going to treat **myself** to a little vacation from all of this worry about a zombie apocalypse and spend the day playing Halo on my Xbox.

Reflexive pronouns can also be used to show emphasis in a sentence, as illustrated in this example:

> **I myself** had to go through all of those web pages to find the one that would be the most helpful for our escape plan.

Subjective & Objective Pronouns

Subjective and objective pronouns are simply pronouns that occur in either the subject or the object of the sentence. Subjective pronouns tell us who or what the sentence is about. Objective pronouns receive the action in the sentence.

There are some pronouns that are always subjective and others that are always objective.

	Singular	Plural
Subjective	I, you, he, she, it	we, you, they
Objective	me, you, her, him, it	us, you, them

Sometimes, determining which pronoun we should use in a sentence can be a little confusing, especially when it comes to **I** and **me**. You might want to write:

Incorrect: My mother bought my brother and I new clothes for the first day of school, even though we insisted we did not want to go.

The pronoun **I** in this sentence is actually incorrect because it appears in the object of the sentence. The sentence should read something like this:

Correct: My mother bought my brother and me new clothes for the first day of school, even though we insisted we did not want to go.

The trick is to take out the other person in the sentence to see if you would use **I** or **me**. For example:

Incorrect: “My mother bought **I** new clothes for school.”

Correct: “My mother bought **me** new clothes for school.”

Pronoun Agreement & Reference

Issues with pronoun agreement and pronoun references are common struggles for many beginning writers, but these problems are easy to correct once you realize the issue and just pay close attention to the pronouns you’re using in your writing.

Pronoun Agreement Errors

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun you are using to “stand in” for a noun does not agree with that noun in number, place, or gender.

Correct: **Clara** needs to pick up **her** book.

Using the singular pronoun **her** does agree with Clara. It does not feel natural for a native speaker to say the following:

Incorrect: **Clara** needs to pick up **their** book.

In the above sentence, **Clara** is the noun and **her** is the pronoun that agrees with Clara.

A common pronoun agreement error occurs when a writer uses a singular noun like **student** to represent students in general. Then, later, the writer may use **they** as a pronoun to replace **student** because the writer means students in general. This often occurs when people try to avoid that structure and use cumbersome word choices such as he/she, he or she, or (wo)men as ther is no gender-neutral singular pronoun in the English language. Using these variations is not preferred, and rewriting the sentence is a better option.

How to rewrite the sentence will depend on which style guide you are using. Both the MLA 8th edition and the APA 7th edition support using the singular they. On the other hand, The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) 17th edition does not support using the singular they in formal writing unless the person being discussed prefers they. CMOS recommends rewriting the sentence so that the noun and pronoun both agree.

Pronoun Agreement

For example, you may see something like this:

If **a student** really thinks about how much **they** are paying for college, **they** are likely to be more focused in class.

According to the most recent MLA and APA style guidelines, this is correct. However, according to CMOS, the sentence should be rewritten.

You could rewrite it like this:

Correct: If **students** really think about how much **they** are paying for college, **they** likely to be more focused in class.

Here is another example.

Incorrect: When **a chef** adds a recipe to **his or her** Facebook page, **he or she** will often get many likes seemingly instantaneously.

Rewritten with the singular they:

Correct: When **a chef** adds a recipe to **their** Facebook page, **they** will often get many likes seemingly instantaneously.

Rewritten with a plural subject and plural pronoun:

Correct: When **chefs** add a recipe to **their** individual Facebook page, **they** will often get many likes seemingly instantaneously.

Rewritten without pronouns:

Correct: When **a chef** add a recipe to Facebook, likes appear seemingly instantaneously.

When in doubt, it is always safe to choose a plural subject so that the pronoun **they** flows more smoothly (and will be correct in number according to all style guides).

Pronoun Reference Errors

Pronoun reference errors can also be problems for beginning writers because it's so easy to get in a hurry when you write and forget that you need to think about how clear your writing will be for your audience.

A common pronoun reference error occurs when students write about several different people or things and then use a pronoun later like **she** or **it**, but the audience has no idea what **she** or **it** refers to.

Here is a simple example to give you an idea about what a pronoun reference error looks like:

Incorrect: My mother and my aunt told me I should consider going to college, and she was right.

Here, the audience wouldn't be sure which person the writer is referring to. Is it the mother or the aunt?

You want to be careful with your writing and make sure you're clear and correct with your pronouns. Most of the time, slowing yourself down and working on some careful editing will reveal problems like these which can be easily corrected.

Tips from the Professor

Most beginning writers have a pretty good sense of correct pronoun usage, but a good editing strategy will help you make sure you have not missed any issues with pronoun agreement or pronoun reference.

One strategy is to edit your writing one time, just looking at pronouns, in addition to other editing passes. If you have had trouble with pronouns in the past, you should circle all of your pronouns and ask yourself questions about their purpose and what they refer to.

> **Note**
>
> Most academics now agree that the singular **they** is correct. Please always refer to your style guide, as some style guides still recommend not using the singular **they**.

Verbs

Verbs are the parts of speech that show action or indicate a state of being. We put them with nouns, and we create complete sentences. Like nouns, verbs are foundational in our vocabulary, and we learned verbs as children shortly after we learned nouns. The following pages will help you learn more about verbs, as there really is a lot to consider when it comes to verbs, such as making our subjects and verbs agree, using active versus passive voice, and keeping our verbs in the same tenses.

We'll explain the types of verbs first, to give you context and help you establish some "verb vocabulary," but most writers will want to pay close attention to issues of **tense**, **subject-verb agreement**, and **active versus passive voice** in the pages that follow.

Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are sometimes called the **helping** verbs because they work with the main verb in a sentence and "help it out". Together, the auxiliary verb and the main verb form a unit.

> **Auxiliary Verbs**
>
> Steven **is leaving** and taking his football with him. How are we going to play now?
>
> Her favorite team **has finished** at the top of the conference, so she **is going** to buy a team jersey. I hope she buys me one, too.

Common Auxiliary Verbs

am are be can could	did do does had have	is was were will would

Linking Verbs

Linking verbs join or "link" the subject of a sentence with the rest of the sentence. They make a statement by linking things, as opposed to showing any kind of action.

Common linking verbs are any of the **to be** verbs: **am**, **is**, **are**, **was**, **were**, **be**, **been**, and **being**. However, **become** and **seem** are also common, and other verbs have the potential to be linking verbs. It really depends upon the sentence.

> **Linking Verbs**
>
> Here is an example of a common linking verb used in a sentence:
>
> My environmental biology class **is** interesting because our teacher thinks Bigfoot might exist.
>
> Here are some examples of how other verbs can become linking verbs:
>
> That house **looks** haunted.
>
> Those old shoes **smell** funny.

Tip! Because linking verbs and auxiliary verbs are often the same words, you may wonder how you can tell the difference between a linking verb and an auxiliary verb. The key is that linking verbs join the subject and the predicate of a sentence, and in some ways, allow the predicate to rename the subject; auxiliary verbs will be used with other verbs.

Action Verbs

bobsled traveling fast Action verbs are the verbs you can probably identify as verbs quickly and easily. These are the words that show action, words like **jump**, **run**, and **eat**.

There are two main classes of action verbs: **transitive** and **intransitive**, and there aren't separate lists for each class. Action verbs can be both transitive and intransitive because it all depends on the structure of the sentence.

A transitive verb expresses action toward a person or thing named in the sentence. An intransitive verb expresses action without making any reference to an object.

Source: Excelsior College OWL

Examples: Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Transitive	The college freshman **ate** Ramen noodles.	Sophia **speaks** French.
Intransitive	The college freshman **complained** loudly.	Sophia **speaks** fluently.

Tenses

Verbs can be in the present tense, present progressive tense, past tense, past progressive, present perfect, or past perfect. According to Martha Kolln, author of ***Rhetorical Grammar***, there are two grammatical features of verbs that are especially useful: tense and agency, which will be discussed later in the pages on **passive voice**.

It's important to understand tense because you want to be consistent with your verb tenses in your writing. It's a common mistake to **shift tenses** without realizing it. This discussion of tenses can increase your "tense awareness," which will lead to fewer errors.

Let's take the verb **to eat** as an example and see how it looks in the different tenses with the subject **I**.

Tense	Example
present tense (present point in time)	I **eat** dinner.
present progressive (present action of limited duration)	I **am eating** dinner.
past tense (specific point in the past)	I **ate** dinner yesterday.
past progressive (past action of limited duration)	I **was eating**.
present perfect (completed action from a point in the past ending at or near present)	I **have eaten** dinner.
past perfect (past action completed before another action also in the past)	I **had just eaten** dinner when the phone rang.

When it comes to verb tenses, it's important to be consistent and to be aware of any shifts. If you shift, there needs to be a reason for the shift. Also, APA will often require past tense in your essays, while MLA requires present tense, even if the words have been written in the past. For example, to set up a quote in APA, you might write something like this:

APA vs. MLA verb tense examples

APA: Smith (2009) wrote, "This verb stuff is confusing" (p. 10)

MLA: Smith writes, "This verb stuff is confusing" (10).

For a more in-depth explanation of APA recommendations for verb tense usage in literature reviews and research papers, go to: **Verb Tense Shift**

Subject-Verb Agreement

"The basic rule of sentence agreement is simple: A subject must agree with its verb in number. Number means singular or plural." (Rozakis, 2003, p. 62) The subject may be either singular or plural, and the verb selection should match the subject. The task sounds simple, but it's not always easy to make the subject and verb match without some thought. Subject-verb agreement errors are common errors many beginning writers make, and they are highly-stigmatized errors, which means people will judge you for them.

Subject-verb agreement

Here are some tips to help you avoid subject-verb agreement errors.

Rule: When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **and**, use a plural verb.

Example: Suzy **and** her friend **are** missing the best movie ever!

Rule: When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **or**, use a singular verb.

Example: The pen **or** the pencil **is** in the drawer, my purse, my book bag, or perhaps, my pencil pouch.

Rule: Do not be confused by a phrase that comes between your subject and your verb.

Example: **Russell Wilson,** as well as the rest of the Seattle Seahawks, **is** ready for the game against the Green Bay Packers.

Collective nouns can be tricky. Sometimes, they take a singular verb, and sometimes they take a plural verb. It depends upon how they are being used. Be sure to refer to the **Collective Nouns** page for more information and examples.

Rule: Fractions should be treated as singular or plural, depending upon the noun they are referring to.

Examples: **Two-thirds** of the **zombies** in "The Walking Dead" **move** slowly. The rest can apparently sprint

Two-thirds of your **cake was** eaten before you got home.

Active Versus Passive Verbs

As mentioned earlier, grammarian Martha Kolln mentions agency as one of the most important aspects of verbs you should know about. Agency involves understanding the relationship between the subject and the verb in a sentence and whether or not the subject is the agent in the sentence.

Active and Passive verbs

Take a moment to read the following two sentences.

Amy **grabbed** the zombie survival guide.

The zombie survival guide **was grabbed** by Amy.

Can you see how these sentences are different? In the first sentence, the verb **grabbed** is active because its subject, **Amy** is the doer or agent. Amy did the grabbing.

In the second sentence, **was grabbed** is passive because it describes an action done to its subject, **guide**. The doer of the action, Amy, is now the object of the preposition **by**.

Use active verbs whenever possible as they allow you to express yourself clearly, succinctly, and strongly. Active verbs imply that you're confident with what you are saying; you believe in your words. Looking back at the two sentences, you can see that the first one uses fewer words and makes no mistake as to who did the action. The latter sentence is wordy and does not directly address Amy.

Tip! You can use a little strategy to see if you're using passive voice by checking to see if you can add **by zombies** after the verb. If you can, then you likely have passive voice and should restructure your sentence. In the example above, you can write, **was grabbed by zombies**, so you know this is passive voice. Since business writing and APA Style require that you use active voice whenever possible, you should restructure your sentences so they use active voice.

Purposeful Passive Voice

There are occasions when you might want to use passive verbs, such as when you don't want to mention the doer, the result of the action is more important than the doer, or the doer is unknown. Let's take the following scenario and apply it to all three reasons for using a passive verb.

Purposeful passive voice

Tom and Mark, two brothers, are preparing their home for the zombie apocalypse. Tom is throwing canned goods across the room to Mark, who is stacking them on a shelf. They continue to throw canned goods across the room, despite knowing that it's against their mother's wishes. Tom throws a can of creamy corn to Mark and accidentally hits a vase. The vase breaks into pieces. Their mother asks what happened.

The responses could go as follows:

> Tom **threw** the creamy corn and **broke** the vase.
>
> **OR**
>
> The vase **was broken** when the creamy corn **was thrown** at it.

The first sentence uses the active verbs **threw** and **broke**. It simply tells what happened and squarely blames Tom.

The second sentence uses the passive verbs **was broken** and **was thrown**. It doesn't mention who threw the can of corn, keeping the doer unknown. Also, it might be reasonable to believe that Tom thinks letting his mother know that the vase is broken is more important than identifying who broke the vase.

Tip! There are some situations when passive voice can be useful, so it's not the case that passive voice is "wrong." It's just that, in business writing, you should use active voice because it makes for lively, more engaging writing. A good way to spot passive voice is to look for **to be verbs**. You should limit those as well.

Adjectives

An **adjective** modifies (describes / distinguishes) **nouns** and **pronouns**. In other words, adjectives change nouns or pronouns in some way. So **movie** is a noun, and a **scary movie** has been changed by the adjective **scary**.

It's important to remember, too, adjectives, as in the case of a ***scary*** **movie**, give you a way to inject your point of view into your writing. You might also describe a ***loveable*** **book**, a ***beautiful*** **dress**, or an ***ominous*** **sky**. There's a certain amount of subjectivity, of course, in all of these words, so you'll want to work to keep your audience in mind when choosing your adjectives and do your best to make sure your adjectives (or descriptors) are specific, concrete, and will make sense to both you and your audience.

Tip! You should avoid imprecise adjectives in business writing. Business writing requires precision. For example, you should use **five** in place of "many," and **avoid generalized descriptors** such as a lot, great, some, and all other words that are open to interpretation.

Order of Adjectives

Adjectives need to be placed in a particular order. What information do you post first? If you're a native English speaker, you can probably figure out the order without any thought. That's because you understand English grammar—even if it's only because you know what "sounds" right. And, if you're a non-native English speaker, you've probably been schooled in the order.

Order of Adjectives

Think about it. Why would we automatically write four gorgeous, long-stemmed, red, silk roses rather than four silk, long-stemmed, gorgeous, red roses? What drives the order in our description. The first example leads us down a logical path; the second example doesn't let us know which details are most important.

Rule: Here is the specific order for English language adjectives—

1. Intensifier

2. Quality

3. Size

4. Age, color.

Look at the two sentences again:

Four gorgeous provides the intensifier and quality;

long-stemmed provides the size;

red, provides the color;

and **silk** provides an additional detail.

Now look at the order of the adjectives in one of your own sentences and see if it makes sense to you. Below, you'll find a table illustrating the royal order of adjectives.

The Royal Order of Adjectives

Determiner	Observation	Physical Description				Origin	Material	Qualifier	Noun
		Size	**Shape**	**Age**	**Color**				
a	beautiful			old		Italian		touring	car
an	expensive			antique			silver		mirror
four	gorgeous		stemmed		red		silk		roses
her			short		black				hair
our		big		old		English			sheepdog
those			square				wooden	hat	boxes
that	dilapidated	little						hunting	cabin
several		giant		young		American		basketball	players
some	delicious					Chinese			food

Types of Adjectives

Comparatives and **superlatives** are types of adjectives, but one (comparatives) provides a relative distinction while the other (superlatives) signifies the most extreme.

Comparative adjectives often end in **er**, and superlative adjectives often end in **est**.

✓ Comparative Adjectives

My World of Warcraft mage is **tougher** than your character.
Superlative:

My World of Warcraft mage is the **toughest** character ever.

Irregular Adjectives

There are also some adjectives that are irregular when you turn them into the comparative and superlative, and some, usually adjectives with two syllables, require that you simply add **more** or **most** in front of them.

The following examples are of some regular and some irregular adjectives.

✓ Irregular Adjectives

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative

kind strong good bad careful awesome	kinder stronger better worse more careful more awesome	kindest strongest best worst most careful most awesome (as in **This is the *most awesome* textbook ever!)**

Adverbs

Adverbs are words that modify or describe a **verb**, **adjective**, or another adverb. Just as an adjective changes a noun, an adverb changes a verb, adjective, or adverb. Adverbs are easily identified because they often end in **ly**, but this is certainly not always the case.

Descriptions make our writing rich and specific, so we shouldn't be afraid of using adjectives and adverbs in our sentences.

Adverbs in a Sentence

Look at these three sentences. As you can see, the last sentence is the most descriptive and informative. The use of adverbs and adjectives helps our writing come alive.

Jon walked to the store to get canned goods for his zombie stash.

Jon walked to the large store to get canned goods for his zombie stash.

Jon walked **urgently** to the **massively** large store to get canned goods for his zombie stash.

Order of Adverbs

Adverbs most commonly describe how, but below is a more comprehensive list of the most common types of adverbs.

Type of Adverb	Example
Adverbs of manner (or how)	Christine sang the song **atrociously**. No more karaoke for her!
Adverbs of time	Michelle did her homework **yesterday**, but she did the wrong assignment.
Adverbs of place	I met my friend **at the coffee shop**, and that's where we saw the first signs of the outbreak.
Adverbs of degree	It's **too** quiet in here.
Adverbs of frequency	Michael Jordan **rarely** misses a free throw, but Shaq **frequently** does.
Adverbs of purpose	I clean the litter box every day **to keep the house from smelling**.

The Royal Order of Adverbs

And like adjectives, adverbs have a "royal order." While you may already have an innate sense of this order, it can be helpful to review the rules.

Verb	Manner	Place	Frequency	Time	Purpose
Beth swims	enthusiastically	in the pool	every evening	before dusk	to keep in shape.
Dad walks	impatiently	into town	every morning	before work	to get a newspaper.
Joe naps		in his room	every afternoon	after lunch.	

Adapted from Adverbs. (n.d.) Capital Community College Foundation. Retrieved from grammar.ccc.commnet.edu

Prepositions

Prepositions are little words with a big purpose: they show relationships of time, place, and space. We might call them "glue" words because they bring other words together in ways that create meaning. Look at something you've read recently and take out the prepositions. Here is an example of a sentence written with and without prepositions:

✔ Using Prepositions in a Sentence

Correct: **With prepositions:** As soon **as** I closed the door, the turkeys that had been waiting **at** the wood line ran **to** eat the corn I had just put out **for** the squirrels.

Incorrect: **Without prepositions:** As soon I closed the door, the turkeys that had been waiting the wood line ran eat the corn I had just put out the squirrels.

They may be generally small in letters, but prepositions are important words that give great meaning for time and place relationships among actions, objects, and ideas. It's important to distinguish if you are throwing a ball **to** someone or **at** someone. Did you want your sandwich **with** or **without** onions? Do you need that zombie fort built **at** the end of summer or **before** the end of summer?

Even though they are small words, prepositions can be difficult—particularly for someone learning English—because their use isn't always logical. As an example, most mid-Westerners speak of standing ***in*** **line**, but many on the East coast speak of standing ***on*** **line**.

Common Prepositions

aboard	at	despite	like	than
about	before	down	near	though
above	behind	during	of	to
across	below	except	off	toward
after	beneath	excluding	on	under
against	beside	following	onto	underneath
along	between	for	outside	until
amid	beyond	from	over	up
among	but	in	past	upon
around	by	inside	regarding	verses
as	considering	into	since	with

✔ Prepositions

As you work to make good decisions about your preposition choices, you should consider the following preposition tips:

1. It's actually acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition. Contemporary scholars and writing style guides acknowledge the acceptability of ending a sentence with a preposition (Casagrande, 2006). It's natural and conversational to write short sentences that end with prepositions.
    - Did you find what you were looking **for**?

However, you should be aware that some professors prefer that you don't end a sentence with a preposition. See how correctness is relative?

2. You should avoid unnecessary prepositions because using prepositions unnecessarily can make your writing wordy and even confusing.
    - I am not [for] sure I have the answer.

Frank apparently fell off [of] his horse while doing a stunt for a YouTube video.

3. The difference between **beside** and **besides** can be confusing. Beside means next to. Besides means in addition to.

4. The difference between **between** and **among** can also be confusing. You should use between when referring to two people or things, and you should use among when referring to more than two people or things.

Articles

Articles are similar to **adjectives** in that they modify **nouns**, but unlike adjectives, they don't really describe a noun; they just identify a noun.

We have three articles in the English language: **a**, **an** and **the**.

1. The is the **definite article**, which means it refers to a **specific** noun in a group.

2. A is an **indefinite article**, which means it refers to **any** member of a group. You would use the indefinite article when you aren't trying to distinguish a particular noun and use if the noun begins with a consonant.

3. **An** also is an indefinite article because it refers to any member of a group. In general, you would use **an** if the noun begins with a vowel.

When to use "a" or "an"

Use the article **a** when the noun begins with a consonant:

a game

Use the article **an** when the noun begins with a vowel

an opportunity

Then, as always in English grammar, there are a few tricky exceptions. If a noun begins with **h**, you should think about the sound it makes.

Because the pronunciation of **hour** uses a silent h, you should use the article **an**

an hour

But since the pronunciation of **horse** includes the "h" sound, the article is **a**

a horse

And if a noun starts with a vowel, but it makes a **y** sound, you should use **a** instead of **an**.

a university

a user

Conjunctions

If words are the building blocks for our writing, then good transitions are the cement that holds them together. To make these transitions in our writing we need to turn to conjunctions. A conjunction is a word or words used to show the connection between ideas.

The following sections will provide you with details about what conjunctions are and what they do. But, this **classic video** will provide you with a fun overview before you learn more.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions coordinate or join two equal parts. They are particularly important because, when **used with a comma**, they can actually connect complete sentences. Of course, they don't always have to connect complete sentences. Coordinating conjunctions can also connect smaller, equal parts of a sentence.

The key to using coordinating conjunctions is to think about what they are coordinating. This will help you make decisions about which one to use and how to punctuate. First, however, we should look at the list of coordinating conjunctions. There are only seven, and you may have heard of them as the FANBOYS.

For **And** **Nor**	**But** **Or** **Yet** **So**

Refer to the section on **Commas** to learn when you should and should not use a comma with a coordinating conjunction.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions connect parts that aren't equal. In fact, you can tell by their name that they make a phrase subordinate to the main phrase or clause.

Rule: A subordinating conjunction sets off a phrase, so there should always be words with it.

Common Subordinating Conjunctions

after **although** **because** **before** **even**	**though** **since** **though** **when**

Subordinating conjunction

Rule: When a subordinating conjunction appears at the beginning of a sentence, the subordinating phrase is always set off with a comma. When a subordinating conjunction appears at the end of a sentence, the subordinating phrase is not usually set off with commas.

Examples:

Because my alarm clock did not go off, I missed the full moon and will now have to wait until next month to go out and play.

I missed the full moon and will now have to wait until next month to go out and play **because my alarm clock did not go off**.

Exceptions to the Rule: When you use words like **although** or **even though** at the end of a sentence. Because these set-off phrases show contrast, they still get a comma, even when they are used at the end of the sentence.

Examples:

> **Although I tried,** I could not outrun the werewolf.
>
> I could not outrun the werewolf, **although I tried**.

You will notice the comma with the **although** phrase, no matter where it appears in the sentence, but the **because** phrase follows the standard "rule."

It's also important to note that **although** cannot stand alone like a conjunctive adverb:

Incorrect: Although, I tried to outrun the werewolf.

Note: The above example is a common, incorrect usage of **although** and actually makes a sentence fragment, which is a serious grammatical error.

Conjunctive Adverbs

The conjunctions that are not exactly conjunctions are conjunctive adverbs. "Conjunctive adverbs are used to connect other words. Therefore, conjunctive adverbs act like conjunctions even though they are not technically considered to be conjunctions. Conjunctive adverbs are also called transitions because they link ideas." (Rozarkis, 1997, p. 55)

Conjunctive adverbs are words like **however**, **moreover**, **therefore**, and **furthermore**. They provide important transitions between ideas and are commonly used to help create a nice, flowing work.

Using conjunctive adverbs

Often, you'll see a conjunctive adverb used after a semicolon to start a new independent clause, as illustrated in this example:

Example: I have several back-up zombie plans in place; **however**, I am sure my first plan is the best plan.

However, it's also important to note that you don't have to use a conjunctive adverb every time you use a **semicolon** and you don't have to use a semicolon to use a conjunctive adverb. Conjunctive adverbs work well after periods, too.

Note: You don't have to use a conjunctive adverb every time you use a **semicolon** and you don't have to use a semicolon to use a conjunctive adverb. Conjunctive adverbs work well after periods, too.

Interjections

"Interjections are short exclamations like **Oh!**, **Um** or **Ah!** They have no real grammatical value but we use them quite often, usually more in speaking than in writing" (Interjections, 2001, para. 1).

While interjections are very short, they communicate a great deal because they are typically used to express emotion. "While any word that shows strong feelings can be an interjection, look for the usual suspects: Wow!, Zap!, Pop!, and the rest of the family" (Rozakis, 1997, p. 59).

Interjection

"Ouch! That hurts!" I said to the vampire.

Woops! Did I forget to include you in the zombie plan?

Because interjections communicate strong emotions, they should not be over-used. "With interjections, a little goes a long way. Use these marks of punctuation as you would hot pepper or hysterics, because they are strong and edgy" (Rozakis, 1997, p. 59).

Sentence Structure

This section is a quick review of the fundamentals of the sentence. If you encounter unfamiliar terminology in this book or in your class, refer to this section for help. For more on sentence grammar, refer to your copy of Rules for Writers by Diana Hacker (Bedford/St. Martin's Press) for a thorough discussion of sentence grammar, along with exercises.

Basic Sentence Patterns

Subject + verb

The simplest of sentence patterns is composed of a **subject** and **verb** without a direct object or subject complement. It uses an **intransitive verb**, that is, a verb requiring no direct object:

> Control **rods remain** inside the fuel assembly of the reactor.
>
> The **development** of wind power practically **ceased** until the early 1970s.
>
> All amplitude-modulation (AM) **receivers work** in the same way.
>
> The **cross-member** exposed to abnormal stress eventually **broke**.
>
> Only two **types** of charge **exist** in nature.

Subject + linking verb + subject complement

Another simple pattern uses the **linking verb**, any form of the to be verb without an action verb:

The chain **reaction is** the basis of nuclear power.

The **debate** over nuclear power **has** often **been** bitter.

Folding and **faulting** of the earth's surface **are** important geologic processes.

Windspeed seems to be highest during the middle of the day.

The silicon solar **cell can be** difficult and expensive to manufacture.

Subject + verb + direct object

Another common sentence pattern uses the **direct object**:

Silicon conducts **electricity** in an unusual way.

The anti-reflective coating on the the silicon cell reduces **reflection** from 32 to 22 percent.

Prestressing of the concrete increases the load-carrying **capacity** of the members.

Subject + verb + indirect object + direct object

The sentence pattern with the **indirect object** and **direct object** is similar to the preceding pattern:

We are sending **you** the **balance** of the payment in this letter.

I am writing **her** about a number of problems that I have had with my Execucomp wordprocessor.

The supervisor mailed the **applicant** a **description** of the job.

I am writing **you** about a number of problems...

Austin, Texas, has recently built its **citizens** a **system** of bikelanes.

Subject + verb + direct object + object complement

The sentence pattern using the **[direct object]** and **object complement** is not common but worth knowing:

The walls are usually painted **black**.

The plant shutdown left the entire **area** an economic **disaster**.

The committee declared the new **design** a **breakthrough** in energy efficiency.

The low cost of the new computer made **competition** much too **difficult** for some of the other companies.

Passive voice pattern

The passive voice is not ordinarily considered a "pattern," but it is an important and often controversial construction. It reverses the subject and object and, in some cases, deletes the subject. (See the section on problems with the weak use of the passive.) Compare these example active and passive voice sentences:

Passive voice	**Active voice**
Saccharin is now permitted as an additive in food.	The FDA now permits saccharin as an additive in food.
This report is divided into three main sections.	I have divided this report into three main sections.
Windmills are classified as either lift or drag types.	Engineers classify windmills as either lift or drag types.
The valves used in engine start are controlled by a computer.	A computer usually controls the valves used in an engine start.
The remains of Troy were destroyed by later builders on the site.	Later builders on the site of Troy destroyed the remains of citadel.
Some restaurant locations can be leased.	You can lease some restaurant locations.

Simple sentence

> A simple sentence is one that contains **subject** and a **verb** and no other independent or dependent clause.
>
> **One** of the tubes **is attached** to the manometer part of the instrument indicating the pressure of the air within the cuff.
>
> To measure blood pressure, a **device** known as a sphygmomanometer and a **stethoscope are needed**. *(compound subject)*
>
> There **are** basically two **types** of stethoscopes. *(inverted subject and verb)*
>
> The **sphygmomanometer is** usually **covered** with cloth and **has** two rubber tubes attached to it. *(compound verb)*

Compound sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two or more independent clauses joined by a **coordinating conjunction** (*and*, *or*, *nor*, *but*, *yet*, *for*) and a comma, an adverbial conjunction and a semicolon, or a semicolon.

> In sphygmomanometers, too narrow a cuff can result in erroneously high readings, **and** too wide a cuff can result in erroneously low readings.
>
> Some cuffs hook together**;** others wrap or snap into place.

Compound predicates

A **predicate** is everything in the verb part of the sentence *after* the subject (unless the sentence uses inverted word order). A **compound predicate** is two or more predicates joined by a **coordinating conjunction**. Traditionally, the conjunction in a sentence consisting of just two compound predicates is not punctuated.

> Another library media specialist **has been using** Accelerated Reader for ten years **and has seen** great results.
>
> This cell phone app **lets users share pictures instantly with followers and categorize photos with hashtags**.

Basic Parts of the Sentence

Subject

The subject of a sentence is that noun, pronoun, or phrase or clause about which the sentence makes a statement.

Einstein's general **theory** of relativity has been subjected to many tests of validity over the years.

Although a majority of caffeine drinkers think of it as a stimulant, heavy **users** of caffeine say the substance relaxes them.

Surrounding the secure landfill on all sides are impermeable barrier **walls**.
(inverted sentence pattern)

In a secure lanfill, the **soil** on top and the **cover** block storm water intrusion into the landfill.
(compound subject)

Verb phrase

The main verb, or verb phrase, of a sentence is a word or words that express an action, event, or a state of existence. It sets up a relationship between the subject and the rest of the sentence.

> The first high-level language to be widely accepted, FORTRAN, **was implemented** on an IBM 704 computer.
>
> Instruction in the source program **must be translated** into machine language. *(passive construction)*
>
> The operating system **controls** the translation of the source program and **carries** out supervisory functions. *(compound verb)*

Predicate

The predicate is the rest of the sentence coming after the subject. It can include the main verb, subject complement, direct object, indirect object, and object complement.

> The pressure in a pressurized water reactor **varies from system to system**.
>
> The pressure **is maintained at about 2250 pounds per square inch to prevent steam from forming**.
>
> The pressure **is then lowered to form steam at about 600 pounds per square inch**.
>
> In contrast, a boiling water reactor **operates at constant pressure**.

Subject complement

The subject complement is that noun, pronoun, adjective, phrase, or clause that comes after a linking verb (some form of the *be* verb):

> The maximum allowable concentration is ten **parts** H_2S per million parts breathable air.
>
> The deadening of the sense of smell caused by H_2S is the **result** of the effects of H_2S on the olfactory nerves of the brain.
>
> Continuous exposure to toxic concentrations of H_2S can be **fatal**.

Direct object

A direct object—a noun, pronoun, phrase, or clause acting as a noun—takes the action of the main verb. A direct object can be identified by putting *what?*, *which?*, or *whom?* in its place.

> The housing assembly of a mechanical pencil contains the mechanical **workings** of the pencil.
>
> Lavoisier used curved glass **discs** fastened together at their rims, with wine filling the space between, to focus the sun's rays to attain temperatures of 3000° F.
>
> The dust and smoke lofted into the air by nuclear explosions might cool the earth's **atmosphere** some number of degrees.
>
> A 20 percent fluctuation in average global temperature could reduce biological **activity**, shift weather **patterns**, and ruin **agriculture**.
> *(compound direct object)*
>
> The cooler temperatures brought about by nuclear war might end all **life** on earth.
>
> On Mariners 6 and 7, the two-axis scan platforms provided much more **capability** and **flexibility** for the scientific payload than those of Mariner 4.
> *(compound direct object)*

Indirect object

An indirect object—a noun, pronoun, phrase, or clause acting as a noun—receives the action expressed in the sentence. It can be identified by inserting *to* or *for*.

> In the application letter, tell *[to]* the potential **employer** that a resume accompanies the letter.
>
> The company is designing *[for]* senior **citizens** a new walkway to the park area.
>
> Do not send *[to]* the personnel **office** a resume unless someone there specifically requests it.

Object complement

An object complement—a noun or adjective coming after a direct object—adds detail to the direct object. To identify object complements, insert *[to be]* between the **direct object** and **object complement.**

The superviser found the **program** *[to be]* **faulty**.

The company considers the new **computer** *[to be]* a major **breakthrough**.

Most people think the space **shuttle** *[to be]* a major **step** in space exploration.

Problem Modifiers

A **modifier** is any element—a word, phrase, or clause—that adds information to a noun or pronoun in a sentence .Modifier problems occur when the word or phrase that a modifier is supposed to modify is unclear or absent, or when the modifier is located in the wrong place within the sentence. Modifier problems are usually divided into two groups: **misplaced modifiers** and **dangling modifiers**:

✓ Correcting misplaced modifiers

Sentence	*Problem*	Corrective Revision
They found out that the walkways had collapsed on the late evening news.	*Did the walkways collapse on the late evening news?*	On the late evening news, we heard that the walkways had collapsed.
The committee nearly spent a hundred hours investigating the accident.	*So how much time did the committee spend? A minute? An hour?*	The committee spent nearly a hundred hours investigating the accident.
The supervisor said after the initial planning the in-depth study would begin.	*Did the supervisor say it after the initial planning? And when will the study begin?*	The supervisor said that the in-depth study would begin after the initial planning

✓ Correcting dangling modifiers

Sentence	*Problem*	Corrective Revision
Having damaged the previous one, a new fuse was installed in the car.	*Who damaged that fuse?*	Because the previous fuse had been damaged, a new one had to be installed. ***or*** Having damaged the previous one, I had to install a new fuse in my car.
After receiving the new dumb waiter, household chores became so much easier in the old mansion.	*Who received the dumb waiter?*	After we received the dumb waiter, it was immediately installed. ***or*** After receiving the dumb waiter, we immediately installed it.
Using a grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, a contraflow lane was designed for I-45 North.	*Who used that money?*	When the Urban Mass Transportation Administration granted funds to the city, planners began designing a contraflow lane for I-45 North. ***or*** Using a grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, city planners designed a contraflow lane for I-45 North.
Pointing out the productivity and health problems plaguing US workers, aerobic fitness programs may become much more common in American industry, according to the spokeswoman.	*Who pointed that out?*	Because of the productivity and health problems plaguing US workers, aerobic fitness programs may become much more common in American industry, according to the spokeswoman. ***or*** Pointing out the productivity and health problems plaguing US workers, the spokeswoman said that aerobic fitness programs may become much more common in American industry.

Tip! To correct misplaced modifier problems, you can usually relocate the misplaced modifier (the word or phrase). To correct dangling modifiers, you can rephrase the dangling modifier, or rephrase the rest of the sentence that it modifies.

Note: One particularly effective way to correct dangling modifiers is to create a summary appositive, that is, a noun or pronoun summarizing what was just said followed by an adjective clause:

Dangling modifier problems	***Summary appositive revisions***
Stars that were formed relatively recently should have higher concentrations of heavy elements than do the older stars, which is confirmed by observation.	Stars that were formed relatively recently should have higher concentrations of heavy elements than do the older stars, a prediction that is confirmed by observation.
Most astronomers now believe that the energy of quasars comes from giant black holes in the cores of the quasars, which fits the growing belief that black holes are present in the cores of many galaxies, our own included.	Most astronomers now believe that the energy of quasars comes from giant black holes in the cores of quasars, a theory that fits the growing belief that black holes are present in the cores of many galaxies, our own included.

Parallelism

Parallelism refers to the way that items in a series are worded. You want to use the same style of wording in a series of items—it makes it easier on the reader. Widely varied wording is distracting and potentially confusing to readers. Here are some examples, with revisions and some comments:

Creating parallelism

Problem: The report discusses **how telescopes work**, **what types are available**, **mounts, accessories**, and **techniques** for beginning star gazers. *(The "how" and the "why" clauses are not parallel to the "mounts," "accessories," and "techniques" phrases.)*

Revision: The report discusses how telescopes work; what types of telescopes, mounts, and accessories are available; and how to begin your hobby as a star gazer.

Problem: The report discusses **how telescopes work**, **what types are available**, **mounts, accessories**, and **techniques** for beginning star gazers. *(The "how" and the "why" clauses are not parallel to the "mounts," "accessories," and "techniques" phrases.)*

Revision*:* The report discusses how telescopes work; what types of telescopes, mounts, and accessories are available; and how to begin your hobby as a star gazer.

Problem*:* While the dialysis solution remains in the peritoneal cavity, the dialysis is achieved, a process that includes **the removal of nitrogenous wastes** and **correcting electrolyte imbalances and fluid overloads**. *(The "removal" phrase and the "correcting" phrase are not parallel to each other.)*

Revision: While the dialysis solution remains in the peritoneal cavity, the dialysis is achieved, a process that includes the removal of nitrogenous wastes and the correction of electrolyte imbalances and fluid overloads.

Problem: This report is intended for people **with some electronics background** but **have little or no knowledge of geophysical prospecting**. *(The "with" phrase is not parallel with the "have little" clause—this one is not even grammatical.)*

Revision: This report is intended for people with some electronics background but with little or no knowledge of geophysical prospecting.

Parallelism problems occur when different types of phrasing are used in the same areas of a document: such as for list items in a vertical list, or for all headings at a certain level within a specific part of a document. At times, working on parallelism of phrasing is pedantic and unnecessary. However, in many instances, parallel phrasing can give readers important cues about how to interpret information. A jumble of dissimilar styles of phrasing for similar elements can be confusing. Shown below are those different styles—don't mix 'em!

Parallelism styles

Questions	Noun Phrasing
How are groundwater samples collected? How should soil samples be handled? Must monitor wells be used to collect groundwater for laboratory analysis? What should the samples be analyzed for?	Method of groundwater sample collection Soil sample handling Purpose of monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis Purpose of soil sample analysis
Gerund Phrasing	**Sentences**
Collecting groundwater samples Handling soil samples Using monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis Analyzing samples	Groundwater samples must be collected properly. Soil samples must be handled using the specified method. Monitor wells must be used to collect groundwater for laboratory analysis. Samples must be analyzed for specific elements.
Infinitives	**Imperatives**
To collect groundwater samples To handle soil samples To use monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis To analyze samples	Collect groundwater samples. Handle soil samples properly. Use monitor wells in groundwater collection for laboratory analysis. Analyze samples.

Numbers vs. Words

The main hurdle to overcome is to learn that in business contexts, we use numerals in text—even ones below 10—if they are critical values. In other words, we break the rules that are taught in regular writing courses and that are used in normal publishing and copyediting practice. That's because in the business and scientific context, we are vitally interested in numbers, statistical data, even if it's a 2 or 5 or—yes—even a 0.

The difficulty is in defining the rules.

Number vs words

Rule: You should use numerals, not words, when the number is a key value, an exact measurement value, or both.

Example: In the sentence "Our computer backup system uses 4 mm tape" the numeral is a key element, just as it is in a recipe: "This recipe calls for 4 cups of unbleached flour." But consider this one: "There are four key elements that define a desktop publishing system." A word, not a numeral, is preferable here because—well, how to explain it? The number of elements is exact all right, but it's just no big deal. Four, five—who cares?

To summarize the rules that we normally apply:

- Don't start sentences with numerals—write the number out or, better yet, rephrase the sentence so that it doesn't begin the sentence.
- For decimal values less than 1, add a 0 before the decimal point: for example, .08 should be 0.08.
- Make a firm decision on how to handle 0 and 1 when they refer to key, exact values and stick with it. (Style varies wildly in business writing on these two villains.) Some styles choose to use words for these; they resign themselves to the slight inconsistency but better readability.
- Use numerals for important, exact values, even when those values are below 10.
- Use words for numerical values that are unimportant, such as in the sentence "There are six data types in the C programming language."

- When you must use fractions, avoid the symbols that may be available in the character set used by your software. Construct the fraction like this: 5-1/4. Be sure and put the hyphen between the whole number and the fraction.
- It would be nice if all fractions could be reset as decimals, but such is not the case when you have things like 1/8 floating around. Stay consistent with either decimals or fractions in these situations.
- Don't make numerical values look more exact than they are. For example, don't add ".00" to a dollar amount if the the amount is rounded or estimated.
- For large amounts, you can write things like 36 million or 45 billion, but, for some reason, *not* 23 thousand.
- Apply these rules in specific scientific contexts only. Be sensitive to what the standard practices are in the context in which you are writing.
- As for percentages, Microsoft style says spell out "percent," and to avoid use of the symbol except, for example, to save space in tables. Use the word "percent" and insert a space between it and the numeral. Always use a numeral with percent, no matter how small the numeral. Use "percentage" as a stand-alone noun. For example, Over 15 *percent* of my income goes to pet food and A big percentage of my income goes to pet food.

Examples of numbers vs. words

Here are some examples where these rules are applied:

Some 19 million tons of sulphur dioxide are discharged from US sources alone each year, and another 14 million tons from Canada.*(Using the number "19" and the word "million" indicates an approximate amount. "19,000,000" might make some readers think it was an exact amount.)*

It was not until after December 1952, when 4000 people died in London from air pollution in just a few days, that real gains in pollution-control legislation were made.

The US Army's standard airborne Doppler navigator weighs 28 lb (12.7 kg), requires 89 W of power, and operates at 13.325-GHz frequency.

All vitrain of the European classification, if more than 14 micrometers thick, has been regarded as anthraxylon.

In 1971, 11 countries accounted for about 91 percent of world production of coal.

The Department of the Interior has just published a report that reviews 65 different coal gasification processes.

Combustion turbines total about 8% of the total installed capability of US utility systems and supply less than 3% of the total energy generated.

Internal combustion engines in small power plants account for about 1% of the total power-system generating capability of the US.

The water-cement ratio will generally range from 4 gal of water per sack of cement to about 9 gal per sack. *(These are exact values here; in business writing, use the numeral even if it is below 10.)*

The problem is located in piston number 6. *(When there are enumerated items or parts, business writing uses the number, as in this example. But notice that no "#" or "No." is used.)*

The signal occurs in 6-second intervals.

The order is for 6-, 8-, and 12-foot two-by-fours.

Use Code 3 if a system shutdown occurs.

Mined coals commonly contain between 5 and 15 percent mineral matter.

The above illustration shows a 20-unit coaxial cable with 9 working coaxial pairs and 2 standby coaxials, which automatically switch in if the electronics of the regular circuits fail.

There are 59 different species of the coffee shrub, but only 4 are of commercial importance.

Most grinds of coffee contain particles ranging in size from 0.023 to 0.055 inches in diameter.

Using carrier frequencies between 0.535 MHz and 1.605 MHz in the US, AM broadcasting stations sprang up all over the country beginning in the 1910s.

As a base from which to work, 2-1/2 to 3 gal of water are needed for each sack of cement for complete hydration and maximum strength. *(These are exact values; therefore, in the business-writing context, we use numerals. Notice how fractional values are handled: put a hyphen between the whole number and the fraction to prevent misreading.)*

The order for twelve 30-foot beams was placed yesterday.

The order was for 30 fifteen-gallon tubs.

They used six 8-pound sacks of nails.

The microprocessors of the 70s and 80s operated under the control of clocks running at 1 to 5 MHz, that is, 1 to 5 million counts per second.

Your eye has a bandwidth of 370 trillion Hz, the visible spectrum.

Transmission rates on ETHERNET range from 1 to 10 megabits per second (0.125 to 1.25 million bytes per second).

In 1978, the satellite carriers' revenues were about $88 million, and by 1986, they are expected to reach $800 million.

Most communications satellites are in geostationary orbit: at an altitude of 22,300 miles over the surface of the earth and at a distance of 26,260 miles from the center of the earth (the earth's radius being 3960 miles).

Aggregates constitute about 70 percent of a concrete mix.

Uniform compaction of 95% or better of standard AASHO densities is recommended.

In her textbook, Chapter 7 discusses the different audiences of technical prose and translation techniques for communicating effectively with the less specialized ones.

The wheels of the four-wheel tractor give it increased speed over the Crawler, but because of the weight distribution over four wheels rather than over two wheels or tracks, this vehicle has less traction.

Hundreds of thousands of people will have purchased microcomputers by the end of 1980. Tens of millions of them will bought them by the end of the century.

There are two telephones in service today for every three people in the US.

In 1965, Dr. Gordon Moore announced his "law" that the complexity of a chip would double every year for ten years. *(Use the word "ten" here because it is not an exact amount.)*

The typical stand-alone microcomputer system consists of seven physical components. *(Use the word "seven" here because, even though it seems like an exact amount, it is not a key value. It doesn't have the same significance as the "7"would have in "7 quarts of oil.")*

If you are using page-zero addressing, use a RAM for memory page zero.

Primary fuel cells are those through which reactants are passed only one time.

Before recharging, a zinc-carbon battery must have a working voltage not less than one volt. *(Even in business-writing contexts, rules for one and zero vary. Just pick a style and stay with it. Using the word "one" is the standard in this example.)*

Japan has roughly one-third of the US production of dry batteries. *(In running text, always write out fraction like this, and hyphenate them. However, you'd still write "5-1/2 inches.")*

The radial fractures are so extensive that they are the dominant structural element over half of Mars's surface. *(And just to be sure, "half" by itself in running text is always a word.)*

A nanosecond is one-billionth of a second.

Inside the UP are three 16-bit registers. *(When you have two separate numerical values side by side, one has to be a word, and the other a numeral. Styles vary here, but make the numeral the higher number. Contrast with the next example.)*

Data from the frequency counter take the form of 16 seven-bit ASCII words.

Sales of batteries have increased from $510 million on the average during 1957-1959 to $867 million in 1966 and are projected to exceed $1.8 billion in 1980.

The speed of light is roughly 300 million meters per second.

Fifty-three representatives of different software development companies showed up at the meeting. *(Never start a sentence with a numeral in any writing context. With this example, some rewriting might be a wise idea to get the numerical out of the beginning of the sentence, as in the following rewrite.)*

At the meeting, 53 representatives of different software development companies showed up.

Symbols and Abbreviations

In business-writing contexts, you may often have to decide whether to use " or ' for inches or feet or whether to use inches, in, or in.

Symbols and abbreviations are distracting to readers; they are different from the normal flow of words. However, there are plenty of cases where the written-out version is more distracting than the symbol or abbreviation. Also, the context (specifically, technical or nontechnical) has a lot to do with which to use.

Imagine a document that has only one or two references to numerical measurements in inches. There is no reason to use symbols or abbreviations here—just write the thing out. But imagine a document with numerous feet and inch references: using symbols or abbreviations in this case is better, more readable, more efficient for both reader and writer.

But which? Imagine the amount of foot and inch references there would be in a carpentry project (for example, a dog house). In this case, the symbols, " and ' would be preferable. However, this would be an extreme case; otherwise, use the abbreviations.

When you use symbols, especially for feet, inches, and some math symbols, use a symbols-type font. Avoid the "smart" quotes for feet and inches. Use the multiplication symbol for measurement contexts.

Which are the standard symbols and abbreviations to use? Go with the standards in the field in which you are writing, or with those found in a standard reference book such as a dictionary. Don't make them up yourself (for example, "mtrs" for meters)!

What about plurals? Very few abbreviations take an *s* to indicate plural: for example 5 in. means 5 inches. For the few that you think might take the *s*, check a dictionary.

What about obscure abbreviations and symbols? If you are concerned that readers might not recognize the abbreviation or symbol, write its full name in regular text and then put the abbreviation and symbol in parentheses just after the first occurrence of that full name.

Abbreviations and symbols in text

High resolution displays use larger video bandwidths, up to 30 MHz or more.

Most touch-sensitive displays use a matrix of either LED/photodiodes or transparent capacitor arrays to detect a physical touch.

The part of the memory that is easily alterable by the operator consists of RAM chips.

A satellite in geostationary orbit looks at the earth with a cone angle of 17.3θ corresponding to an arc of 18,080 km along the equator.

The arc from 53θ W to 139θ W will cover 48 states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) and is said to provide conus coverage.

Fairchild Industries, Inc., was an early participant in commercial satellites.

The voice was compressed from the usual 64-kb/s pulse code modulation (PCM) to 32 kb/s per channel by near-instantaneous companding (a modified PCM technique).

Terrestrial microwave radio communications require repeaters spaced every 20 to 40 mi from each other.

Over a period of several days the spacecraft is tracked from the ground and positioned on station (i.e., in the preassigned orbital spot) in order to commence operations.

A velocity increment of approximately 155 ft/s per year is required to correct drift problems in satellites.

The ancient battery-like objects made by the Parthians in 250 BC were thin sheets of copper soldered into a cylinder 1.125 cm long and 2.6 cm in diameter.

The standard electrodes are the normal and the 0.1 normal (N) calomel electrodes in which the system is Hg|KCl solution saturated with HgCl.

Such batteries contain 4400 cc of water in which NaOH is dissolved.

Water pressure in the heat recovery loop can be as much as 25 psig.

General Proofreading Tips

- Take a break between writing and proofreading.
- Revise first, edit second.
- Proofread for one element at a time. For example, on one reading, focus only on punctuation.
- Know your own common mistakes and search for them in your text.
- Read the text out loud to pay more attention to what is actually on the paper.
- Read backward to slow down and to avoid skimming the document.
- Ask someone else to read your document for you and to provide feedback.
- Do not rely on spellcheck but pay attention to spellcheck's suggestions.

All links live as of June 2021.

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