

BUSINESS
COMMUNICATION
FOR SUCCESS



Business Communication for Success

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

About this Book

1: Effective Business Communication

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

2: Delivering Your Message

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

3: Understanding Your Audience

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

4: Effective Business Writing

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

5: Business Writing in Action

- 5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette
- 5.2: Memorandums
- 5.3: Letters
- 5.4: Business Proposal
- 5.5: Report
- 5.6: Résumé & Cover Letter
- 5.7: Sales Message
- 5.8: Additional Resources

6: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting

- [6.1: Formatting a Research Paper](#)
- [6.2: Citing and Referencing Techniques](#)
- [6.3: Creating a References Section \(Part 1\)](#)
- [6.4: Creating a References Section \(Part 2\)](#)
- [6.5: Using Modern Language Association \(MLA\) Style](#)
- [6.E: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting \(Exercises\)](#)

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

Licensing

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

About this Book

This page is a draft and is under active development.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Effective Business Communication

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

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

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

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

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

[1.2: What Is Communication?](#)

[1.3: Communication in Context](#)

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

[1.5: Additional Resources](#)

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1.1: Why Is It Important to Communicate Well?

Learning Objectives

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

Communication Influences Your Thinking about Yourself and Others

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

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

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

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

Communication Influences How You Learn

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

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

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

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

Communication Represents You and Your Employer

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

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

Communication Skills Are Desired by Business and Industry

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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1.2: What Is Communication?

Learning Objectives

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

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

Defining Communication

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eight Essential Components of Communication

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

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

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

Source

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

Message

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

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

Channel

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

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

Receiver

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

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

Feedback

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

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

Environment

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

Context

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

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

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



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

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

Interference

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

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

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

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

Two Models of Communication

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

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



Figure 1.2.2: Transactional Model of Communication

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

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

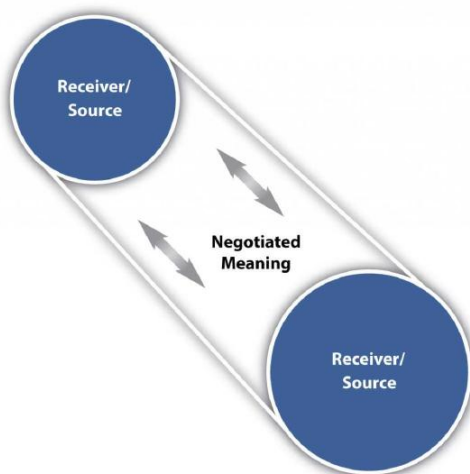


Figure 1.2.3: Constructivist Model of Communication

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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

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1.3: Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe five types of communication contexts.

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

Intrapersonal Communication

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

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

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

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

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

Interpersonal Communication

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

Group Communication

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

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

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

Public Communication

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

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

Mass Communication

How do you tell everyone on campus where and when all the classes are held? Would a speech from the front steps work? Perhaps it might meet the need if your school is a very small one. A written schedule that lists all classes would be a better alternative. How do you let everyone know there is a sale on in your store, or that your new product will meet their needs, or that your position on a political issue is the same as your constituents? You send a message to as many people as you can through mass communication. Does everyone receive mass communication the same way 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.

Exercises

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

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1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator

Learning Objectives

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

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

Communicator is Prepared

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

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

The Prepared Communicator is Organized

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

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

The Prepared Communicator is Clear

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

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

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

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

The Prepared Communicator is Concise and Punctual

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

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

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

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



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

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

Communicator is Ethical

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

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

The Ethical Communicator is Egalitarian

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

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

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

The Ethical Communicator is Respectful

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

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

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

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

The Ethical Communicator is Trustworthy

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

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

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

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

The “Golden Rule”

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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1.5: Additional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Delivering Your Message

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

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2.1: What is Language?

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

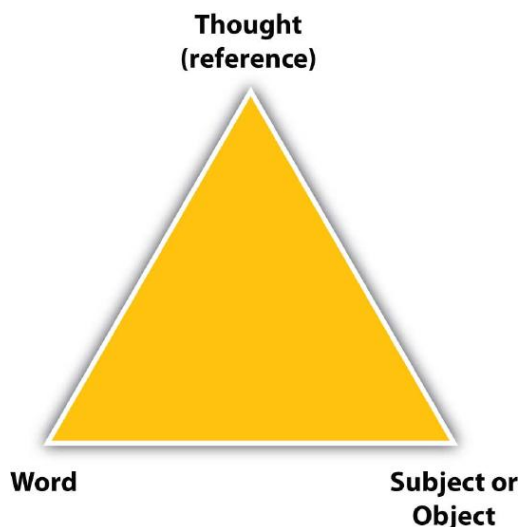


Figure 2.1.1: Semantic Triangle. Source: Adapted from Ogden and Richards.

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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

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

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2.2: Messages

Learning Objectives

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

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

Primary Message Is Not the Whole Message

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parts of a Message

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

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

Each of these parts has its own function.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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2.3: Principles of Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

Language Has Rules

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Reality Is Shaped by Our Language

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

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

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

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

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

Language Is Abstract

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

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

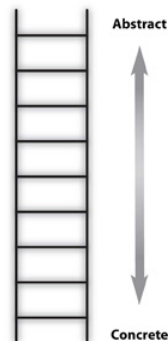


Figure 2.3.1: Abstraction Ladder. Source: Adapted from J. DeVito's Abstraction Ladder (DeVito, 1999).

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

Language Organizes and Classifies Reality

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

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

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

Cliché

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

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

Jargon

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

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

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

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

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

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

Slang

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

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

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

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

Sexist and Racist Language

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

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

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

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

Euphemisms

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

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

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

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

Doublespeak

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

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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

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2.5: Emphasis Strategies

Learning Objectives

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


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

Visual Communication

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

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

Table 2.5.1 Strategic Use of Visuals

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

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

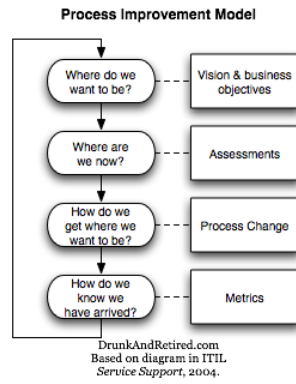


Figure 2.5.4: Michael Coté – Process Improvement Model – CC BY 2.0.

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

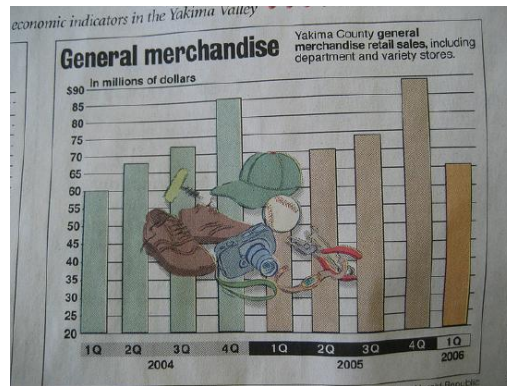


Figure 2.5.5: Jason Tester Guerrilla Future – CC BY-ND 2.0.

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



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

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

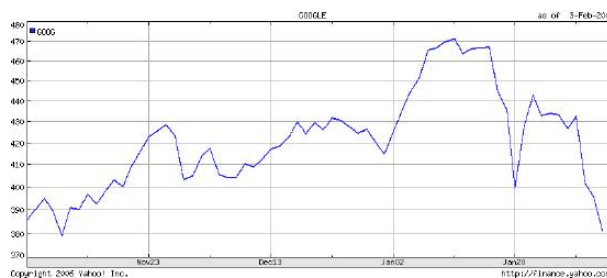


Figure 2.5.7: Michael Coté – GOOG at \$381.55 – CC BY 2.0.

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



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

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

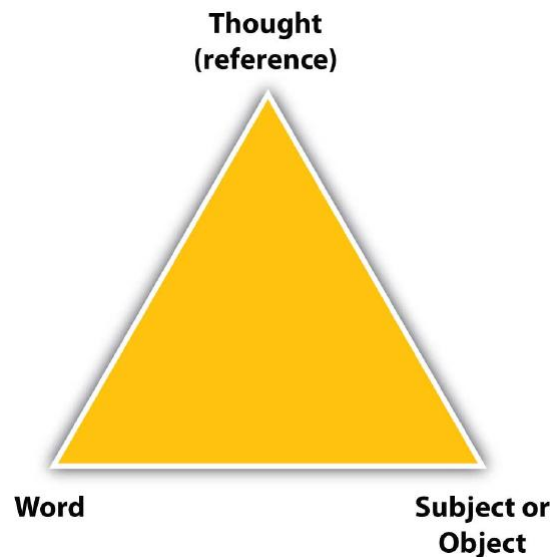


Figure 2.5.9: Sit in a chair, pretend to buckle up, look at the audience, pretend to drive, and then have a mock accident, turning your chair on its side.

Signposts

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

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

Internal Summaries and Foreshadowing

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

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

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

Repetition

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

References

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

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2.6: Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

Define Your Terms

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

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

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

Choose Precise Words

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

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

Table 2.6.1: Precisely What Are You Saying?

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

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

Consider Your Audience

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

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

Take Control of Your Tone

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

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

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

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

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

Check for Understanding

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

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

Be Results Oriented

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

References

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

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2.7: Additional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Understanding Your Audience

3.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication

3.2: Perception

3.3: Differences in Perception

3.4: Getting to Know Your Audience

3.5: Listening and Reading for Understanding

3.6: Additional Resources

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3.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Self-Concept

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

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

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

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

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

Table 3.1.1 Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

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

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

Beliefs are ideas based on our previous experiences and convictions and may not necessarily be based on logic or fact. You no doubt have beliefs on political, economic, and religious issues. These beliefs may not have been formed through rigorous study, but

you nevertheless hold them as important aspects of self. Beliefs often serve as a frame of reference through which we interpret our world. Although they can be changed, it often takes time or strong evidence to persuade someone to change a belief.

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

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

Self-Image and Self-Esteem

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

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

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

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

Looking-Glass Self

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

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

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

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

Can you anticipate the outcome? As you may guess, the students lived up to their teachers’ level of expectation. Even though the teachers were supposed to give appropriate attention and encouragement to all students, in fact they unconsciously communicated

special encouragement verbally and nonverbally to the special potential students. And these students, who were actually no more gifted than their peers, showed significant improvement by the end of the school year. This phenomenon came to be called the “Pygmalion effect” after the myth of a Greek sculptor named Pygmalion, who carved a marble statue of a woman so lifelike that he fell in love with her—and in response to his love she did in fact come to life and marry him (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Insel & Jacobson, 1975).

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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3.2: Perception

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Selection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Organization

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

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

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

Organization Schemes

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

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

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

Gestalt Principles of Organization

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

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

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

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

Table 3.2.1: Gestalt Principles of Organization

Principle	Definition	Example

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

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

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

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

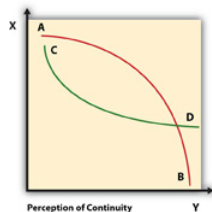


Figure 3.2.1 Continuity

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

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

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

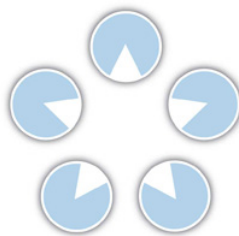


Figure 3.2.2: Do you see a ring of Pac-Man-like circles?

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

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

Interpretation

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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3.3: Differences in Perception

Learning Objectives

- Determine how perception differs between people.

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

Why Don't We All See Eye to Eye?

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

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

Individual Differences in Perception

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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3.4: Getting to Know Your Audience

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

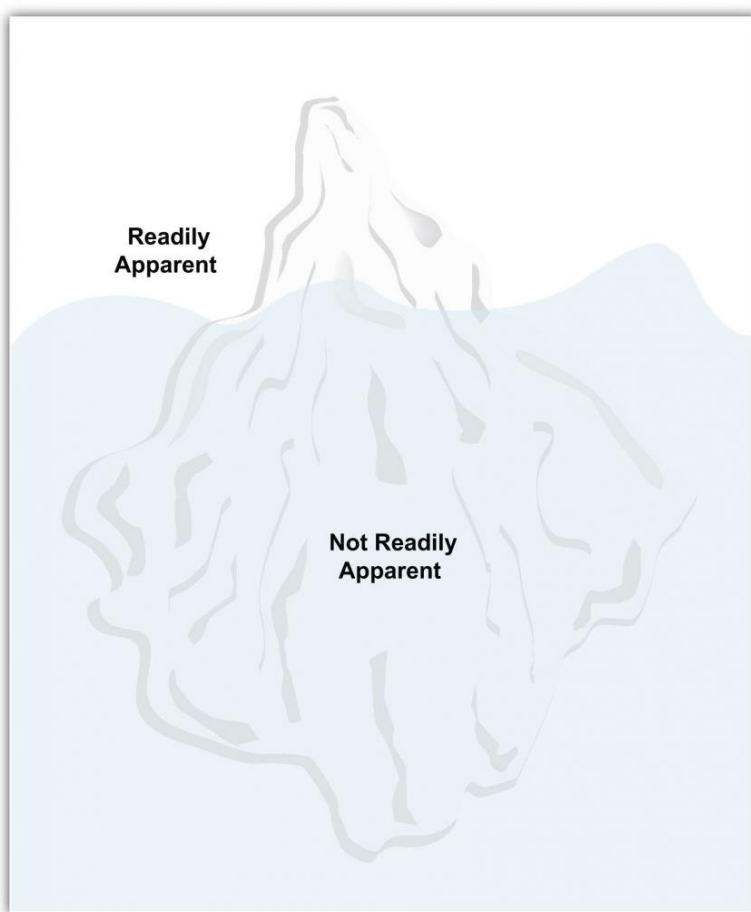


Figure 3.4.1 Iceberg Model

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

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

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

Demographic Traits

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

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

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

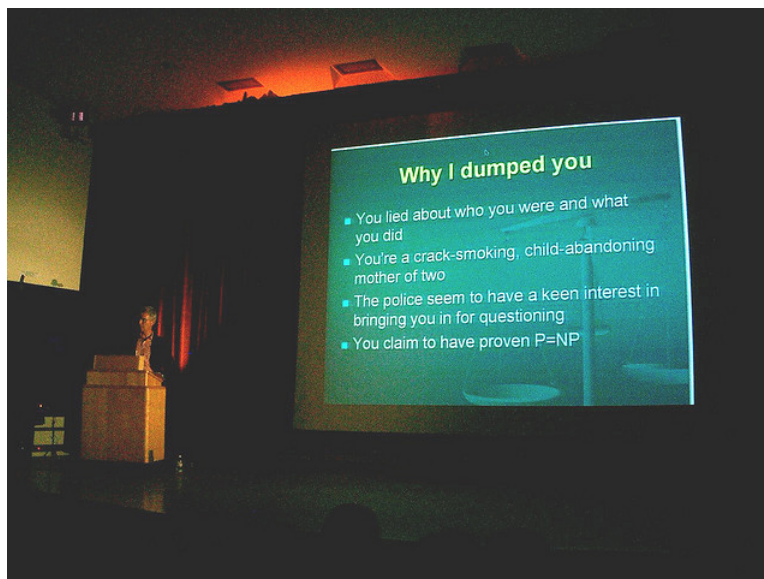


Figure 3.4.2: Tailor your message to your audience. Todd Lappin – [David Byrne’s “PowerPoint as art” lecture](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

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

Improving Your Perceptions of Your Audience

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

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

Table 3.4.1 Perceptual Strategies for Success

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

Fairness in Communication

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

communications.

Exercises

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

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3.5: Listening and Reading for Understanding

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

Active Listening and Reading

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

Here are some tips to facilitate active listening and reading:

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

When the Going Gets Tough

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

Here are some tips that may be helpful:

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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3.6: Additional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Effective Business Writing

4.1: Oral versus Written Communication

4.2: How Is Writing Learned?

4.3: Good Writing

4.4: Style in Written Communication

4.5: Principles of Written Communication

4.6: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Written Communication

4.7: Additional Resources

<https://pixabay.com/photos/write-plan-desk-notes-pen-writing-593333/>

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4.1: Oral versus Written Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

Table 4.1.1: Eight Essential Elements of Communication

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

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

Another way in which oral and written forms of communication are similar is that they can be divided into verbal and nonverbal categories. Verbal communication involves the words you say, and nonverbal communication involves how you say them—your tone of voice, your facial expression, body language, and so forth. Written communication also involves verbal and nonverbal dimensions. The words you choose are the verbal dimension. How you portray or display them is the nonverbal dimension, which can include the medium (e-mail or a printed document), the typeface or font, or the appearance of your signature on a letter. In this sense, oral and written communication are similar in their approach even as they are quite different in their application.

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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4.2: How Is Writing Learned?

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

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

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

Reading

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

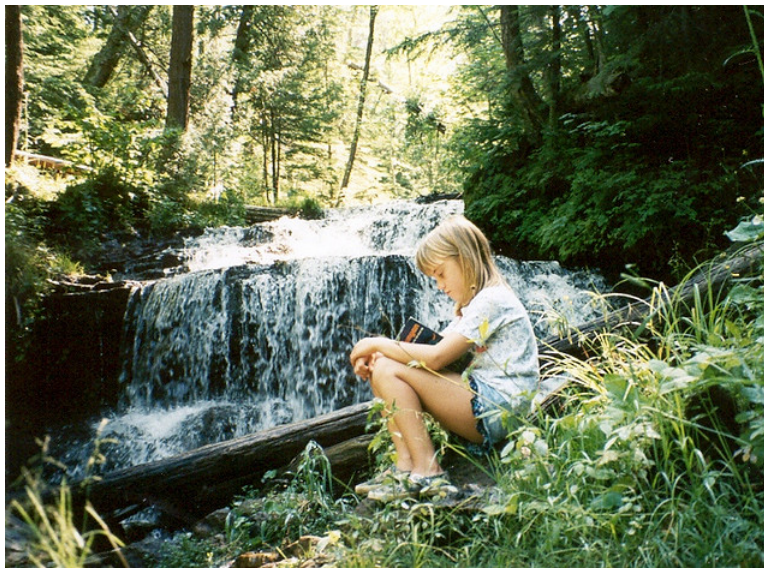


Figure 4.2.1: Reading is one of the most useful lifelong habits you can practice to boost your business communication skills. Julie Falk – [Emily Reading at Wagner Falls](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

Writing

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

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

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

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

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

Constructive Criticism and Targeted Practice

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

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

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

Critical Thinking

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

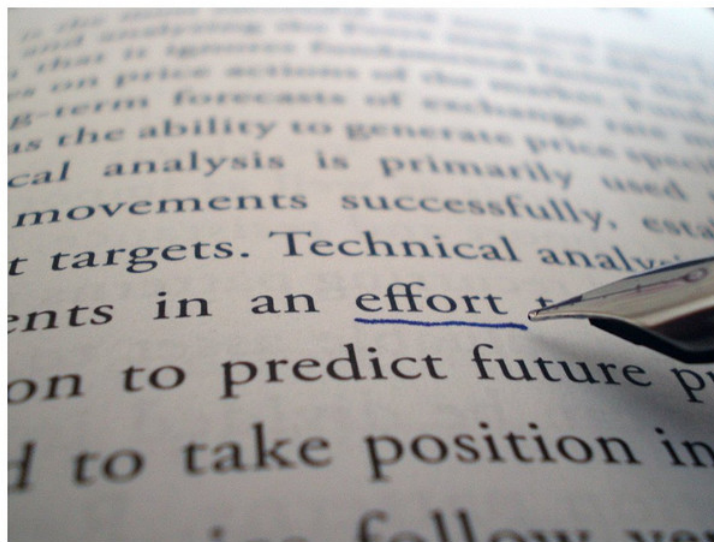


Figure 4.2.2: Excellence in writing comes from effort. Ramunas Geciauskas – [Effort II](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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4.3: Good Writing

Learning Objectives

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

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

Good business writing

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

Let's examine these qualities in more depth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

More Qualities of Good Writing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies

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

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

Table 4.3.1: Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies

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

Aristotle's Rhetorical Elements	Cognate Strategies	Focus	Example in Business Writing
	Expectation	Norms and anticipated outcomes	As is typical in our industry, we ship all merchandise FOB our warehouse. Prices are exclusive of any federal, state, or local taxes. Payment terms are net 30 days from date of invoice.
	Reference	Sources and frames of reference	According to an article in <i>Business Week</i> dated October 15, 2009, Doosan is one of the largest business conglomerates in South Korea.
Pathos	Tone	Expression	I really don't have words to express how grateful I am for all the support you've extended to me and my family in this hour of need. You guys are the best.
	Emphasis	Relevance	It was unconscionable for a member of our organization to shout an interruption while the president was speaking. What needs to happen now—and let me be clear about this—is an immediate apology.
	Engagement	Relationship	Faithful soldiers pledge never to leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield.

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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4.4: Style in Written Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

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

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

Colloquial

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

Colloquial language can be reflected in texting:

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

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

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

Casual

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

Formal

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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

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4.5: Principles of Written Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

Words Are Inherently Abstract

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

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

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

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

Words Are Governed by Rules

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

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

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

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

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

Words Shape Our Reality

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



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

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

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

Words and Your Legal Responsibility

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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4.6: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Written Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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

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

Do Sweat the Small Stuff

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

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

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

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

Get the Target Meaning

How would you interpret this message?

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

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

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

Six weeks later Mr. Sato received a second message:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Consider the Nonverbal Aspects of Your Message

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

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

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

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

Review, Reflect, and Revise

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaway

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

Exercises

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

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4.7: Additional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Business Writing in Action

5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette

5.2: Memorandums

5.3: Letters

5.4: Business Proposal

5.5: Report

5.6: Résumé & Cover Letter

5.7: Sales Message

5.8: Additional Resources

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5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the role of text messaging in business communication.
2. Write effective emails for both internal and external communication.
3. Demonstrate the appropriate use of netiquette.

Text messages and emails are part of our communication landscape, and skilled business communicators consider them a valuable tool to connect. Netiquette refers to etiquette, or protocols and norms for online communication.

Texting

Whatever digital device you use, written communication in the form of brief messages, or texting, has become a common way to connect. It is useful for short exchanges and is a convenient way to stay connected with others when talking on the phone would be cumbersome. Texting is not useful for long or complicated messages and careful consideration should be given to the audience.

It is often said that you can tell how old someone is by how he or she inputs a phone number on a cell phone. If the person uses his or her thumb while holding the digital device, that person may have been raised on video games and be adept at one-handed interfaces. If they hold the digital device with one hand and input the number with the other, they may be over thirty or may be less comfortable with some technological devices. Of course, there is no actual correlation between input and age, but it is a useful example to use when considering who your audience is when writing a text message. If the person texts with one-hand and knows all the abbreviations common to texting, you may be able to use similar codes to communicate effectively. If the person texts with two-hands, you are better off using fewer words and spelling them out. Texting can be a great tool for connecting while on the go, but consider your audience and your company, and choose words, terms, or abbreviations that will deliver your message.

Tips for Effective Business Texting

- Know your recipient. “? % dsct” may be an understandable way to ask a close associate what the proper discount is to offer a certain customer, but if you are writing a text to your boss, it might be wiser to write, “what % discount does Murray get on \$1K order?”
- Anticipate unintentional misinterpretation. Texting often uses symbols and codes to represent thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Given the complexity of communication, and the useful but limited tool of texting, be aware of its limitations and prevent misinterpretation with brief messages.
- Contacting someone too frequently can border on harassment. Texting is a tool. Use it when appropriate but don’t abuse it.

Email

Electronic mail, usually called email, is quite familiar to most students and workers. In business, it has largely replaced print hard copy letters for external (outside the company) correspondence, as well as taking the place of memos for internal (within the company) communication (Guffey, 2008). Email can be very useful for messages that have slightly more content than a text message, but it is still best used for fairly brief messages.

Many businesses use automated emails to acknowledge communications from the public or to remind associates that periodic reports or payments are due. You may also be assigned to “populate” a form email in which standard paragraphs are used but you choose from a menu of sentences to make the wording suitable for a particular transaction.

Emails may be informal in personal contexts, but business communication requires attention to detail, an awareness that your email reflects you and your company, and a professional tone so that it may be forwarded to any third party if needed. 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.

Tips for Effective Business Emails

- 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 “Holiday Schedule.”

- 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 understand your abbreviations.
- 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 email 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.
- Avoid using all caps. Capital letters are used on the Internet to communicate emphatic emotion or yelling and are considered rude.
- Test links. If you include a link, test it to make sure it works.
- 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.

Let’s look at an example of a business email.

Netiquette

We create personal pages, post messages, and interact via mediated technologies as a normal part of our careers, but how we conduct ourselves can leave a lasting image, literally. The photograph you posted on social media may have been seen by your potential employer, or that nasty remark in a post may come back to haunt you later. When the internet was new, Virginia Shea wrote out a series of ground rules for communication online that continue to serve us today.

Virginia Shea’s Rules of Netiquette

- Remember the human on the other side of the electronic communication.
- Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.
- Know where you are in cyberspace.
- Respect other people’s time and bandwidth.
- Make yourself look good online.
- Share expert knowledge.
- Keep flame wars under control.
- Respect other people’s privacy.
- Don’t abuse your power.
- Be forgiving of other people’s mistakes (Shea, 1994).

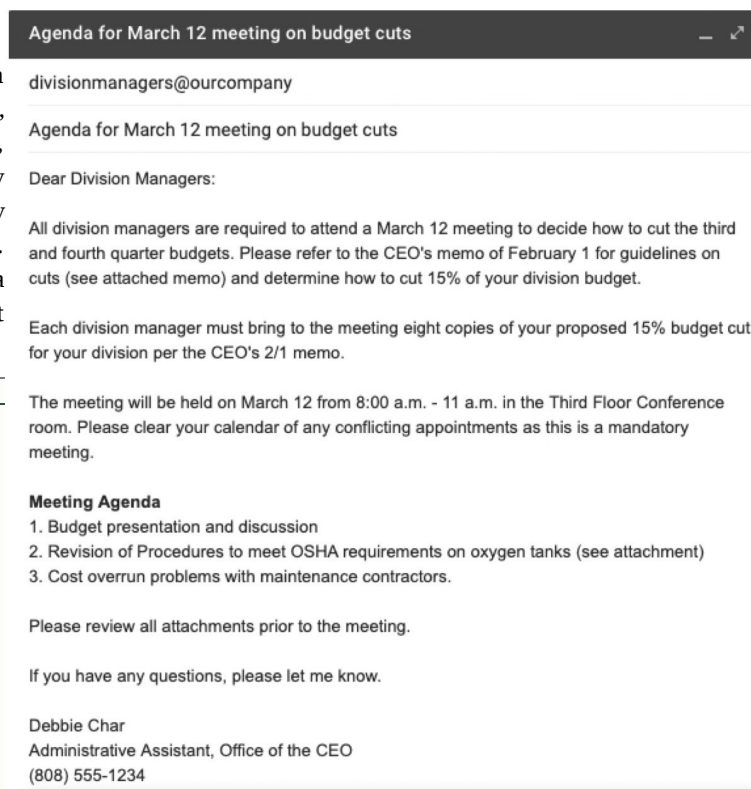


Figure 5.1.1: Example of a business email.

Her rules speak for themselves and remind us that the golden rule (treat others as you would like to be treated) is relevant wherever there is human interaction.

Key Takeaways

- A text message is a brief written message sent and received using a digital device. It is useful for informal, brief, time-sensitive communication.
- Email is useful for both internal and external business communications. The content and formatting of an email message should reflect professionalism and follow the rules of netiquette.
- Social customs that exist in traditional, live, human interaction also influence the rules and customs by which we interact with each other in the online environment.

Exercises

1. Find an example of an email that you wish you had never sent or received. Rewrite it to eliminate the characteristics that you find problematic. Share it with your classmates.
2. Choose at least three emails you have sent or received that are good examples of business communication. What makes them good examples? Could they be improved in any way? Share your suggestions with classmates.
3. When is email inappropriate? Why?
4. In your experience, how do people behave when they interact online? Share your observations with your classmates.

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5.2: Memorandums

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the purpose and format of a memo.
- Understand effective strategies for business memos.
- Write business memos.

Memos

A memo (or memorandum, meaning “reminder”) is normally used for communicating policies, procedures, or related official business within an organization. It is often written from a one-to-all perspective (like mass communication), broadcasting a message to an audience, rather than a one-on-one, interpersonal communication. It may also 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 occasionally includes 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 called the grapevine, and it is often characterized by rumor, gossip, 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 informal, 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 it may be wise to send a memo explaining the changes that are imminent. If a company wants employees to take action, they may also issue a memorandum. 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 often represent the business or organization’s interests. They may also include statements that align business and employee interest, and underscore common ground and benefit.

Memo Format

A memo has a header that clearly indicates who sent it and who the intended recipients are. Pay particular attention to the title of the individual(s) in this section. Date and subject lines are also present, followed by a message that contains a declaration, a discussion, and a summary.

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 clear purpose. The declaration in the opening uses a declarative sentence to announce the main topic. The discussion elaborates or lists major points associated with the topic, and the conclusion serves as a summary.

Let’s examine a sample memo.

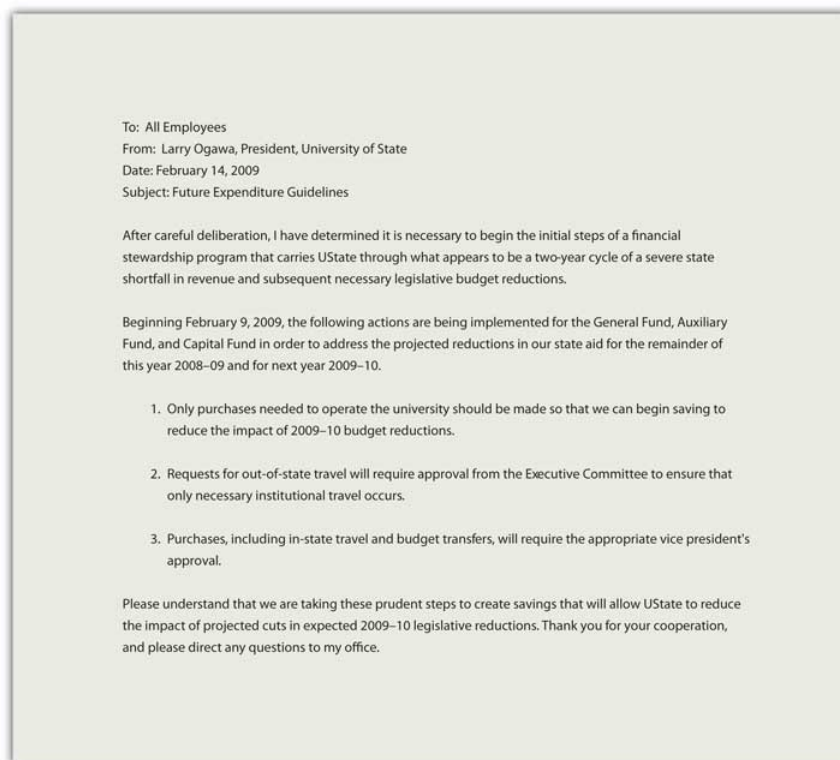


Figure 5.2.1

Five Tips for Effective Business Memos

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 known by all the employees of the organization, and if the memo is to be posted and distributed within the organization, the goal is clear and concise communication at all levels with no ambiguity.

Professional, Formal 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 or procedures, and may reference an existing or new policy in the employee manual, for example.

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

Some written business communication allows for a choice between direct and indirect formats, but memorandums are always direct. The purpose is clearly announced.

Objectivity

Memos are a place for just the facts, and should have an objective tone without personal bias, preference, or interest on display. Avoid subjectivity.

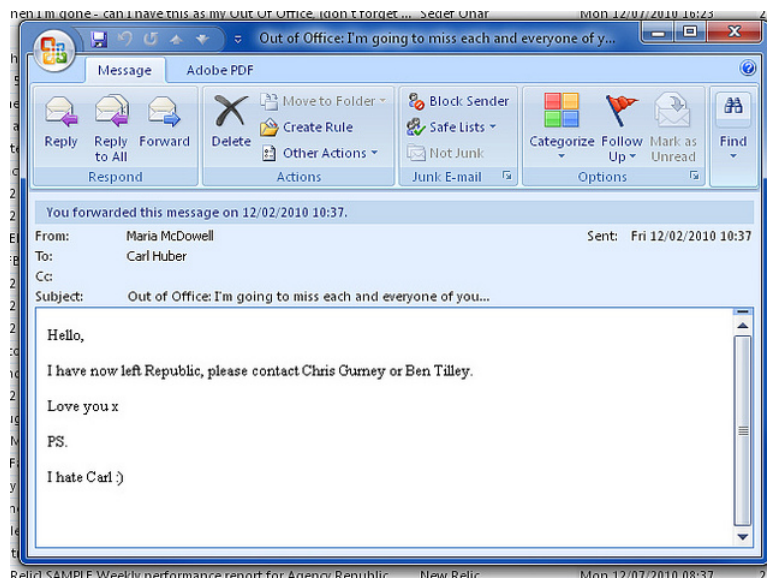


Figure 5.2.2: The words you choose represent you in your absence. Make sure they clearly communicate your message. wetwebwork – I probably shouldn't have called Maria the 4th best PM when she left... – CC BY 2.0.

Key Takeaways

- Memos are brief business documents usually used internally to inform or persuade employees concerning business decisions on policy, procedure, or actions.

Exercises

1. Find a memo from your work or business, or borrow one from someone you know. Share it with your classmates, observing confidentiality by blocking out identifying details such as the name of the sender, recipient, and company. Compare and contrast.
2. Write a memo informing your class that an upcoming holiday will be observed. Post and share with classmates.

References

- Bovee, C., & Thill, J. (2010). *Business communication essentials: a skills-based approach to vital business English* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lewis, L. (2009, February 13). *Panasonic orders staff to buy £1,000 in products*. Retrieved from <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/markets/japan/article5723942.ece>.

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5.3: Letters

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the purpose and format of a letter.
- Understand effective strategies for business letters.
- Describe the fifteen parts of a standard business letter.
- Write business letters.

Letters are brief messages sent to recipients that are often outside the organization (Bovee, C., & Thill, J., 2010). They are often printed on letterhead paper, and represent the business or organization in one or two pages. Shorter messages may include e-mails or memos, either hard copy or electronic, while reports tend to be three or more pages in length.

While e-mail and text messages may be used more frequently today, the effective business letter remains a common form of written communication. It can serve to introduce you to a potential employer, announce a product or service, or even serve to communicate feelings and emotions. We'll examine the basic outline of a letter and then focus on specific products or writing assignments.

All writing assignments have expectations in terms of language and format. The audience or reader may have their own idea of what constitutes a specific type of letter, and your organization may have its own format and requirements. This chapter outlines common elements across letters, and attention should be directed to the expectations associated with your particular writing assignment. There are many types of letters, and many adaptations in terms of form and content, but in this chapter, we discuss the fifteen elements of a traditional block-style letter.

Letters may serve to introduce your skills and qualifications to prospective employers, deliver important or specific information, or serve as documentation of an event or decision. Regardless of the type of letter you need to write, it can contain up to fifteen elements in five areas. While you may not use all the elements in every case or context, they are listed in Table 5.3.1.

Table 5.3.1: Elements of a Business Letter

Content	Guidelines
1. Return Address	This is your address where someone could send a reply. If your letter includes a letterhead with this information, either in the header (across the top of the page) or the footer (along the bottom of the page), you do not need to include it before the date.
2. Date	The date should be placed at the top, right or left justified, five lines from the top of the page or letterhead logo.
3. Inside Address	This is the recipient's address. Make it as complete as possible. Include titles and names if you know them.
4. Delivery (Optional)	Sometimes you want to indicate on the letter itself how it was delivered. This can make it clear to a third party that the letter was delivered via a specific method, such as certified mail (a legal requirement for some types of documents).
5. Recipient Note (Optional)	This is where you can indicate if the letter is personal or confidential.

Content	Guidelines

Content	Guidelines
6. Salutation	<p>A common salutation may be “Dear Mr. (full name).” But if you are unsure about titles (i.e., Mrs., Ms., Dr.), you may simply write the recipient’s name (e.g., “Dear Cameron Rai”) followed by a colon. A comma after the salutation is correct for personal letters, but a colon should be used in business. The salutation “To whom it may concern” is appropriate for letters of recommendation or other letters that are intended to be read by any and all individuals. If this is not the case with your letter, but you are unsure of how to address your recipient, make every effort to find out to whom the letter should be specifically addressed. For many, there is no sweeter sound than that of their name, and to spell it incorrectly runs the risk of alienating the reader before your letter has even been read. Avoid the use of impersonal salutations like “Dear Prospective Customer,” as the lack of personalization can alienate a future client.</p>
7. Introduction	<p>This is your opening paragraph, and may include an attention statement, a reference to the purpose of the document, or an introduction of the person or topic depending on the type of letter. An emphatic opening involves using the most significant or important element of the letter in the introduction. Readers tend to pay attention to openings, and it makes sense to outline the expectations for the reader up front. Just as you would preview your topic in a speech, the clear opening in your introductions establishes context and facilitates comprehension.</p>
8. Body	<p>If you have a list of points, a series of facts, or a number of questions, they belong in the body of your letter. You may choose organizational devices to draw attention, such as a bullet list, or simply number them. Readers may skip over information in the body of your letter, so make sure you emphasize the key points clearly. This is your core content, where you can outline and support several key points. Brevity is important, but so is clear support for main point(s). Specific, meaningful information needs to be clear, concise, and accurate.</p>
9. Conclusion	<p>An emphatic closing mirrors your introduction with the added element of tying the main points together, clearly demonstrating their relationship. The conclusion can serve to remind the reader, but should not introduce new information. A clear summary sentence will strengthen your writing and enhance your effectiveness. If your letter requests or implies action, the conclusion needs to make clear what you expect to happen. It is usually courteous to conclude by thanking the recipient for his or her attention, and to invite them to contact you if you can be of help or if they have questions. This paragraph reiterates the main points and their relationship to each other, reinforcing the main point or purpose.</p>

Content	Guidelines
10. Close	“Sincerely” or “Cordially” are standard business closing statements. (“Love,” “Yours Truly,” and “BFF” are closing statements suitable for personal correspondence, but not for business.) Closing statements are normally placed one or two lines under the conclusion and include a hanging comma, as in Sincerely,
11. Signature	Five lines after the close, you should type your name (required) and, on the line below it, your title (optional).
12. Preparation Line	If the letter was prepared, or word-processed, by someone other than the signatory (you), then inclusion of initials is common, as in MJD or abc.
13. Enclosures/Attachments	Just like an e-mail with an attachment, the letter sometimes has additional documents that are delivered with it. This line indicates what the reader can look for in terms of documents included with the letter, such as brochures, reports, or related business documents.
14. Courtesy Copies or “CC”	The abbreviation “CC” once stood for carbon copies but now refers to courtesy copies. Just like a “CC” option in an e-mail, it indicates the relevant parties that will also receive a copy of the document.
15. Logo/Contact Information	A formal business letter normally includes a logo or contact information for the organization in the header (top of page) or footer (bottom of page).

Strategies for Effective Letters

Remember that a letter has five main areas:

1. The heading, which establishes the sender, often including address and date
2. The introduction, which establishes the purpose
3. The body, which articulates the message
4. The conclusion, which restates the main point and may include a call to action
5. The signature line, which sometimes includes the contact information

A sample letter is shown in Figure 5.3.3.

(1-inch margins on all sides of the letter)

1. **Return Address:** (if not in letterhead logo)
2. **Date:** 01/21/20XX
3. **Inside Address:** (the recipient's address)
4. **Delivery:** (Optional) USPS Certified Mail #12345
5. **Recipient Note:** (Optional) Confidential
6. **Salutation:** Dear Student X:
7. **Introduction:** This letter is to inform you that the myth of a paperless office, where you will not be required to produce hard copy letters on letterhead, is a myth.
8. **Body:** While email has largely replaced letter writing for many applications, there remain several reasons for producing a hard copy letter. The first reason is that you are required to write it for this class, as many employers still produce letters as a normal part of business communication, including documentation. Next, we must consider that paper sales in business have increased over the last decade, showing no signs of the decrease we would associate with the transition to the paperless office. Finally, business letters serve many functions, and your proficiency in the efficient and effective production will contribute to your personal and professional success.
9. **Conclusion:** Letter writing is a skill that will continue to be required in the business environment of today and tomorrow.
10. **Close:** Sincerely,
11. **Signature Line:** Scott McLean
12. **Preparation Line:** SM/ep
13. **Enclosures:** (Optional)
14. **Courtesy copies:** cc: Jenn Yee
15. **Logo/Contact information:** (Optional) At the top or bottom of the letter

Figure 5.3.3: Sample Business Letter

Always remember that letters represent you and your company in your absence. In order to communicate effectively and project a positive image,

- be clear, concise, specific, and respectful;
- each word should contribute to your purpose;
- each paragraph should focus on one idea;
- the parts of the letter should form a complete message;
- the letter should be free of errors.

Key Takeaways

- Letters are brief, print messages often used externally to inform or persuade customers, vendors, or the public.
- A letter has fifteen parts, each fulfilling a specific function.

Exercises

1. Create a draft letter introducing a product or service to a new client. Post and share with classmates.
2. Find a business letter (for example, an offer you received from a credit card company or a solicitation for a donation) and share it with your classmates. Look for common elements and points of difference.
3. Now that you have reviewed a sample letter, and learned about the five areas and fifteen basic parts of any business letter, write a business letter that informs a prospective client or customer of a new product or service.

Contributors

- Susan Wood, my own notes

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5.4: Business Proposal

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the basic elements of a business proposal.
2. Discuss the main goals of a business proposal.
3. Identify effective strategies to use in a business proposal.

An effective business proposal informs and persuades efficiently. It features many of the common elements of a report, but its emphasis on persuasion guides the overall presentation.

Let's say you work in a health care setting. What types of products or services might be put out to bid? If your organization is going to expand and needs to construct a new wing, it will probably be put out to bid. Everything from office furniture to bedpans could potentially be put out to bid, specifying a 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 to lower contract costs for goods and services is common practice.

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 speech, a business proposal makes the case for your product or service. 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.

Common Proposal Elements

Idea

Effective business proposals are built around a great idea or solution. While you may be able to present your normal product, service, or solution in an interesting way, you want your document and its solution to stand out against the background of competing proposals. What makes your idea different or unique? How can you better meet the needs of the company than other vendors? What makes you so special? 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. For example, don't consider just the cost of the unit but also its maintenance. How can maintenance be a part of your solution, distinct from the rest? In addition, your proposal may focus on a common product where you can anticipate several vendors at similar prices. How can you differentiate yourself from the rest by underscoring long-term relationships, demonstrated ability to deliver, or the ability to anticipate the company's needs? Business proposals need to have an attractive 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. Businesses 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 product or service. Every category is an opportunity to sell, and should reinforce your credibility, your passion, and the reason why your solution is simply the best.

Table 5.4.1: Business Proposal Format

Cover Page	Title page with 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 consider focusing on the relationship between you and the potential buyer and/or similar companies.
Proposal	The idea. <i>Who, what, where, when, why, and how.</i> Make it clear and concise. Don't waste words, and don't exaggerate. Use clear, well-supported reasoning 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.
Marketing Plan	Delivery is often the greatest challenge for Web-based services—how will people learn about you? If you are bidding on a gross lot of food service supplies, this may not apply to you, but if an audience is required for success, you will need a marketing plan.
Finance	What are the initial costs, when can revenue be anticipated, when will there be a return on investment (if applicable)? Again, the proposal may involve a one-time fixed cost, but if the product or service is to be delivered more than once, and extended financial plan noting costs across time is required.
Conclusion	Like a speech or essay, restate your main points clearly. Tie them together with a common theme and make your proposal memorable.

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

Ethos refers to credibility, pathos to passion and enthusiasm, and logos to logic or reason. All three elements are integral parts of your business proposal that require your attention. Who are you and why should we do business with you? 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. Your thorough understanding, and your demonstration of that understanding, communicates dedication and interest.

Each assertion requires substantiation, each point 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, relevant, and support your central assertion that your product or service is right for this client. Make sure you cite sources and indicate “according to” when you support your points. Be detailed and specific.

Professional

A 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, including contact information. 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 format that presents your document as you intended. Word processing files may have their formatting changed or adjusted based on factors you cannot control—like screen size—and information can shift out of place, making it difficult to understand. In this case, 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.

Effective, persuasive proposals are often brief, even limited to one page. “The one-page proposal has been one of the keys to my business success, and it can be invaluable to you too. Few decision-makers can ever afford to read more than one page when deciding if they are interested in a deal or not. This is even more true for people of a different culture or language,” said Adnan Khashoggi, a successful multibillionaire (Riley, 2002). Clear and concise proposals serve the audience well and limit the range of information to prevent confusion.

Two Types of Business Proposals

Solicited

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 everyone to see. A request for proposal (RFP), request for quotation (RFQ), and invitation for bid (IFB) are common ways to solicit business proposals for business, industry, and the government.

RFPs typically specify the product or service, guidelines for submission, and evaluation criteria. RFQs emphasize cost, though service and maintenance may be part of the solicitation. IRBs are often job-specific in that they encompass a project that requires a timeline, labor, and materials. For example, if 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.

Unsolicited

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, brochure-like 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 encourage you to resist the temptation to “shoot at every target and hope you hit at least one” (Baugh, L. S., and Hamper, R. J., 1995). A targeted proposal is your most effective approach, but recognize the importance of gaining company, service, or brand awareness as well as its limitations.

Sample Business Proposal

The Writing Help Tools Center is a commercial enterprise, and offers a clear (and free) example of a business proposal here:

www.writinghelp-central.com/sample-business-proposal.html

Key Takeaway

Business proposals need to target a specific audience.

Exercises

1. Prepare a business proposal in no more than two pages. Do not include actual contact information. Just as the example has employees named after colors, your (imaginary) company should have contact information that does not directly link to real businesses or you as an individual. Do not respond to point 12.
2. Search for an RFP (request for proposal) or similar call to bid, and post it to your class. Compare the results with your classmates, focusing on what is required to apply or bid.
3. Identify a product or service you would like to produce or offer. List three companies that you would like to sell your product or service to and learn more about them. Post your findings, making the link between your product or service and company needs. You may find the Web site on creating a business plan (<https://www.scu.edu/mobi/business-courses/starting-a-business/session-2-the-business-plan/#3>) useful when completing this exercise

References

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5.5: Report

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the main parts of a report.
2. Understand the different types of reports.
3. Write a basic report.

What Is a Report?

Reports are documents designed to record and convey information to the reader. Reports are part of any business or organization; from credit reports to police reports, they serve to document specific information for specific audiences, goals, or functions. The type of report is often identified by its primary purpose or function, as in an accident report, a laboratory report, a sales report, or even a book report. Reports are often analytical, or involve the rational analysis of information. Sometimes they simply “report the facts” with no analysis at all, but still need to communicate the information in a clear and concise format. Other reports summarize past events, present current data, and forecast future trends. While a report may have conclusions, propositions, or even a call to action, the demonstration of the analysis is the primary function. A sales report, for example, is not designed to make an individual sale. It is, however, supposed to report sales to date, and may forecast future sales based on previous trends. This chapter is designed to introduce you to the basics of report writing.



Figure 5.5.1: Choose a type of report by its function, and display the information in a vivid way that is easily understood. Pixabay – CC0 public domain.

Types of Reports

Reports come in all sizes, but are typically longer than a page and somewhat shorter than a book. The type of report depends on its function. The function of the report is its essential purpose, often indicated in the thesis or purpose statement. The function will also influence the types of visual content or visual aids, representing words, numbers, and their relationships to the central purpose in graphic, representational ways that are easy for the reader to understand. The function may also contribute to parameters like report length (page or word count) or word choice and readability. “Focusing on the content of your longer business documents is not only natural but necessary because doing so helps ensure complete, correct information” (Bovee, C., and Thill, J., 2010).

Reports vary by function, and they also vary by style and tradition. Within your organization, there may be employer-specific expectations that need to be addressed to meet audience expectations. This chapter discusses reports in general terms, focusing on common elements and points of distinction, but reference to similar documents where you work or additional examination of specific sample reports may serve you well as you prepare your own report.

Informational or Analytical Report?

There are two main categories for reports, regardless of their specific function or type. An informational report informs or instructs and presents details of events, activities, individuals, or conditions without analysis. An example of this type of “just the facts” report is a police accident report. The report will note the time, date, place, contributing factors like weather, and identification information for the drivers involved in an automobile accident. It does not establish fault or include judgmental statements. You should not see “Driver was falling down drunk” in a police accident report. Instead, you would see “Driver failed sobriety tests and

breathalyzer test and was transported to the station for a blood sample.” The police officer is not a trained medical doctor and is therefore not licensed to make definitive diagnoses, but can collect and present relevant information that may contribute to that diagnosis.

The second type of report is called an analytical report. An analytical report presents information with a comprehensive analysis to solve problems, demonstrate relationships, or make recommendations. An example of this report may be a field report by a Center for Disease Control (CDC) physician from the site of an outbreak of the H1N1 virus, noting symptoms, disease progression, steps taken to arrest the spread of the disease, and to make recommendations on the treatment and quarantine of subjects.

Table 5.5.3 includes common reports that, depending on the audience needs, may be informational or analytical.

Table 5.5.1: Types of Reports and Their Functions

Type	Function
1. Laboratory Report	Communicate the procedures and results of laboratory activities
2. Research Report	Study problems scientifically by developing hypotheses, collecting data, analyzing data, and indicating findings or conclusions
3. Field Study Report	Describe one-time events, such as trips, conferences, seminars, as well as reports from branch offices, industrial and manufacturing plants
4. Progress Report	Monitor and control production, sales, shipping, service, or related business process
5. Technical Report	Communication process and product from a technical perspective
6. Financial Report	Communication status and trends from a finance perspective
7. Case Study	Represent, analyze, and present lessons learned from a specific case or example
8. Needs Assessment Report	Assess the need for a service or product
9. Comparative Advantage Report	Discuss competing products or services with an analysis of relative advantages and disadvantages
10. Feasibility Study	Analyze problems and predict whether current solutions or alternatives will be practical, advisable, or produced the desired outcome(s)
11. Instruction Manuals	Communicate step-by-step instructions on the use of a product or service
12. Compliance Report	Document and indicate the extent to which a product or service is within established compliance parameters or standards
13. Cost-Benefit Analysis Report	Communicate costs and benefits of products or services.
14. Decision Report	Make recommendations to management and become tools to solve problems and make decisions
15. Benchmark Report	Establish criteria and evaluate alternatives by measuring against the establish benchmark criteria
16. Examination Report	Report or record data obtained from an examination of an item or conditions, including accidents and natural disasters
17. Physical Description report	Describe the physical characteristics of a machine, a device, or object
18. Literature Review	Present summaries of the information available on a given subject

How Are Reports Organized?

Reports vary by size, format, and function. You need to be flexible and adjust to the needs of the audience while respecting customs and guidelines. Reports are typically organized around six key elements:

1. Whom the report is about and/or prepared for
2. What was done, what problems were addressed, and 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

Pay attention to these essential elements when you consider your stakeholders, or those who have an interest in the report. That may include the person(s) the report is about, whom it is for, and the larger audience of the business, organization, or industry. Ask yourself who the key decision makers are who will read your report, who the experts or technicians will be, and how executives and workers may interpret your words and images. 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 in its own way, playing an important role in the representation and transmission of information.

Table 5.5.2: Ten Common Elements of a Report

Page	Element	Function	Example
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 Fly	Title only	This page is optional.	Feasibility Study of Oil Recovery from the X Tarpit Sands Location
3. Title Page	Label, report, features title, author, affiliation, date, and sometimes for whom the report was prepared		Feasibility Study of Oil Recovery from the X Tarpit Sands Location Peak Oilman, X Energy Corporation Prepared for X
4. Table of Contents	A list of the main parts of the report and their respective page numbers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract.....1 • Introduction.....2 • Background.....3
5. Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational abstract: highlight topic, methods, data, and results • Descriptive abstract: (All of the above without statements of conclusion or recommendations) 		This report presents the current status of the X tarpit sands, the study of oil recoverability, and the findings of the study with specific recommendations.

Page	Element	Function	Example
6. Introduction	Introduces the topic of the report		<i>Oil sands recovery processes include ways to extract and separate the bitumen from the clay, sand, and water that make up the tar sands. This study analyzes the feasibility of extraction and separation, including a comprehensive cost/benefits analysis, with specific recommendations.</i>
7. Body	Key elements of body include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Methodology • Results • Analysis and Recommendations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background: History of oil extraction and separation from tarpit sands. • Methodology: Specific analysis of the site based on accepted research methods. • Results: Data from the feasibility study. • Analysis and Recommendations: Analysis of the data and recommendations based on that analysis.

Page	Element	Function	Example
8. Conclusion	Concise presentation of findings	This portion clearly indicates the main results and their relation to recommended action or outcome.	
9. References	Bibliography or Works Cited	This part contains a list of citations.	
10. Appendix	Related supporting materials	This may include maps, analysis of soil samples, and field reports.	

Here is a checklist for ensuring that a report fulfills its goals.

1. Report considers the audience's needs
2. Format follows function of report
3. Format reflects institutional norms and expectations
4. Information is accurate, complete, and documented
5. Information is easy to read
6. Terms are clearly defined
7. Figures, tables, and art support written content
8. Figures, tables, and art are clear and correctly labeled
9. Figures, tables, and art are easily understood without text support
10. Words are easy to read (font, arrangement, organization)
11. Results are clear and concise
12. Recommendations are reasonable and well-supported

13. Report represents your best effort
14. Report speaks for itself without your clarification or explanation

Key Takeaway

Informational and analytical reports require organization and a clear purpose.

Exercises

1. Find an annual report for a business you would like to learn more about. Review it with the previous reading in mind and provide examples. Share and compare with classmates.
2. Write a report on a trend in business that you've observed, and highlight at least the main finding. For example, from the rising cost of textbooks to the online approach to course content, textbooks are a significant issue for students. Draw from your experience as you bring together sources of information to illustrate a trend. Share and compare with classmates.

References

Bovee, C., & Thill, J. (2010). *Business communication essentials: A skills-based approach to vital business English* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

5.5: Report is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

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5.6: Résumé & Cover Letter

Learning Objectives

1. Determine the content, organization, format, and general strategies for résumés and cover letters.
2. Demonstrate the content, organization, format, and general strategies for résumés and cover letters

Résumé

Résumés are flexible documents that can grow as you gain more education or more professional experience. A résumé is a summary of your educational background, employment experience, and skills. It is a way to communicate your qualifications for the desired position to an employer. Your résumé is your tool to market yourself and the key to getting an interview. Essentially, you are creating your résumé as a pitching, selling, and branding tool of yourself to potential employers.

There is no "best way" to write a résumé. However, there are some general guidelines, such as clarity, accuracy, and neatness, that should be followed. It is important to choose a résumé style and format that will work best for you and the job you are applying for. How do you decide what approach will be the best? Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help with the decision:

- What are the employer's needs in the position for which I am applying?
- What are my strengths for the job and how can I emphasize them?
- How can I format and organize the content of my résumé to show what I have to offer?

We will study three types of résumés: chronological, skills, and a combination of the two. Regardless of the format, employers have expectations for your résumé. They expect it to be clear, accurate, and up to date. This document represents you in your absence, and you want it to do the best job possible. You don't want to be represented by spelling or grammatical errors as they may raise questions about your education and attention to detail. Someone reading your résumé with errors will only wonder what kind of work you might produce that will poorly reflect on their company. There is going to be enough competition that you don't want to provide an easy excuse to dismiss your résumé at the start of the process. Do your best work the first time.

Components of a Résumé

Résumés have several basic elements that employers look for including your contact information, objective or goal, education and work experience, and so on. Each résumé format may organize the information in distinct ways based on the overall design strategy, but all information should be clear, concise, and accurate.

Contact Information

This section is often located at the top of the document. The first element of the contact information is your name. You should use your full, legal name even if you go by your middle name or use a nickname. There will plenty of time later to clarify what you prefer to be called, but all your application documents, including those that relate to payroll, your social security number, drug screenings, background checks, fingerprint records, transcripts, certificates or degrees, should feature your legal name. Other necessary information includes your address, phone number(s), and email address. If you maintain two addresses (e.g., a campus and a residential address), make it clear where you can be contacted by indicating the primary address. For business purposes, do not use an unprofessional email address like Imhot93@google.com or tutifruti@yahoo.com. Create a new email account if needed with an address suitable for professional use.



Figure 5.6.1: Sample Contact Information

Objective

The objective is one part of your résumé that is relatively simple to customize for an individual application. Your objective should reflect the audience's need to quickly understand how you will help the organization achieve its goals. Objectives are optional. Some people think objectives can be limiting. For example, Mary writes as her objective, "To receive the internship offered as the new event planner assistant." What about after she receives the internship? Does she not want to go further in the company? So, objectives could be limiting because there is no way to encompass everything you would like to do and accomplish within one objective.



Figure 5.6.2: Sample Objective

Education

Education should be included immediately after your contact information unless you have had significant work experiences in the field for which you are applying. In that case, education should be placed later in the résumé. List your education in reverse chronological order with your most recent degree first. Include the name of the school, its location, the degree you achieved or are working to achieve, and the graduation date or expected graduation date. Your GPA should be included only if it is above average. If there is a difference between the GPA in your major courses and your overall GPA, you may want to list them separately to demonstrate your success in your chosen field. You may also want to highlight relevant coursework that directly relates to the position. You should avoid adding anything about high school unless it is particularly impressive.

EDUCATION

Northern Arizona University–Yuma, Arizona, May 2009
Bachelor in Business Administration, Minor in Communication
Major GPA: 3.9/4.0
Overall GPA: 3.4/4.0

Related Course Work:

Business and Professional Speaking, Business English, Sales and Persuasion, Management

Figure 5.6.3: Sample Education Field

Work Experience

List in reverse chronological order your employment history. For each job, include the positions, company name, company location, dates of employment, duties and skills demonstrated or acquired. You may choose to use active, descriptive sentences or bulleted lists, but be consistent. Emphasize responsibilities that involved budgets, teamwork, supervision, and customer service when applying for positions in business and industry, but don't let emphasis become exaggeration. This document represents you in your absence, and if the information is false, at a minimum you could lose your job.

When describing your work experience, use action verbs, not nouns. Use strong verbs to show what you did at that job and avoid lifeless, uninteresting verbs. Lastly, make sure the verbs are [parallel](#).

WORK EXPERIENCE

Dolle Company, Yuma, AZ, August 2005–May 2009
Shift Manager, Lettuce Processing and Packaging

- Supervise 30 team members
- Develop, coordinate, implement, and evaluate shift schedule
- Address quality-control improvements, including employee training

Saveway Grocery, Yuma, AZ, August 2004–August 2005
Assistant Produce Manager, Vegetables

- Stock, order, and manage display of vegetables in produce department
- Supervise part-time staff as needed
- Manage produce budget, including purchase orders

Figure 5.6.4: Sample Work Experience

Achievements

Awards, recognitions, or other special circumstances should be included if they are outstanding and directly related to the job for which you are applying. Include the dates they were awarded and list them in reverse chronological order.

Volunteer Experience

Include information on present or former volunteering sites within your résumé. The information included should be the company name, location, and specific dates you volunteered. List these experiences in reverse chronological order.

Skills

Include any special skills that you have, such as being fluent in another language or being an expert in Microsoft applications. These skills can be what set you apart from the other applicants.

References

References are to be included at your own discretion. If you do list them on your résumé, it is common practice to list three. When choosing references, be sure to ask them if they are willing to be a reference before giving their information to a potential employer. If you choose not to include references on your résumé, you will need to include the statement "References available upon request" at the end of the résumé.

Types of Résumés

As noted above, there are three main types of résumés: chronological, skills, and a combination of the two. Each type emphasizes a different component of the résumé. Chronological résumés emphasize education and work experience, skills résumés emphasize skills and abilities, and combination résumés seek to find a balance between the two. When deciding what type of résumé to create, choose one that is common to your industry. Every industry uses different types of résumés according to what the industry standard is.

Chronological Résumé

A chronological résumé lists information in reverse chronological order. Your information is organized under headings such as "Education," "Work Experience," and "Activities." Most college students will choose to list education first because students may have limited work experience. On a chronological résumé

- In the education section, the most recent educational degree (or a degree in progress) is listed first followed by any previous degrees. Include the type of the degree, the date of graduation, the name of the school, and the location of the school. You can also include any classes that pertain to the job you are applying for.
- In the work experience section, the most recent work experience is listed first followed by any prior work experience. Include the job title, dates of employment, and the place of employment, including its location. Skills gained from each job are listed under each job title, along with accomplishments and responsibilities.

Chronological résumés are useful for establishing a work history and for showcasing accomplishments made at each career position. Chronological résumés are the most common type of résumé and are a simple way to detail responsibilities held at different jobs.

This is an example of a chronological résumé.

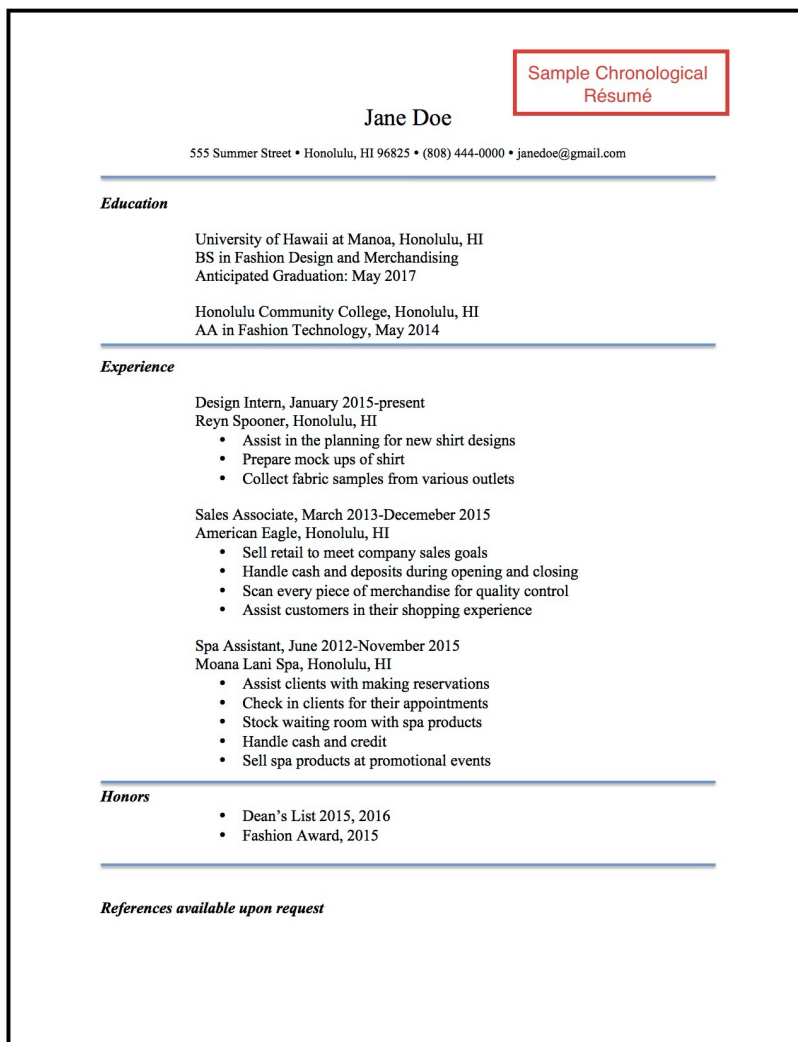


Figure 5.6.5: Sample Chronological Resume

Skills Résumé

A skills résumé organizes information around types of skills and abilities. Headings may include “Computer Skills,” “Foreign Languages,” and “Leadership Experience.” A skills résumé will list the skill and then explain when and how that particular skill was used. A skills résumé is useful for several reasons.

- Avoids repeating the same information under each job title
- Emphasizes skills and abilities (a college graduate’s work history may be from only part-time work, and a skills résumé will merely mention these positions)
- Deemphasizes gaps in an applicant's work history

Anytime attention should be focused away from work experience, a skills résumé is recommended.

This is an example of a skills résumé.

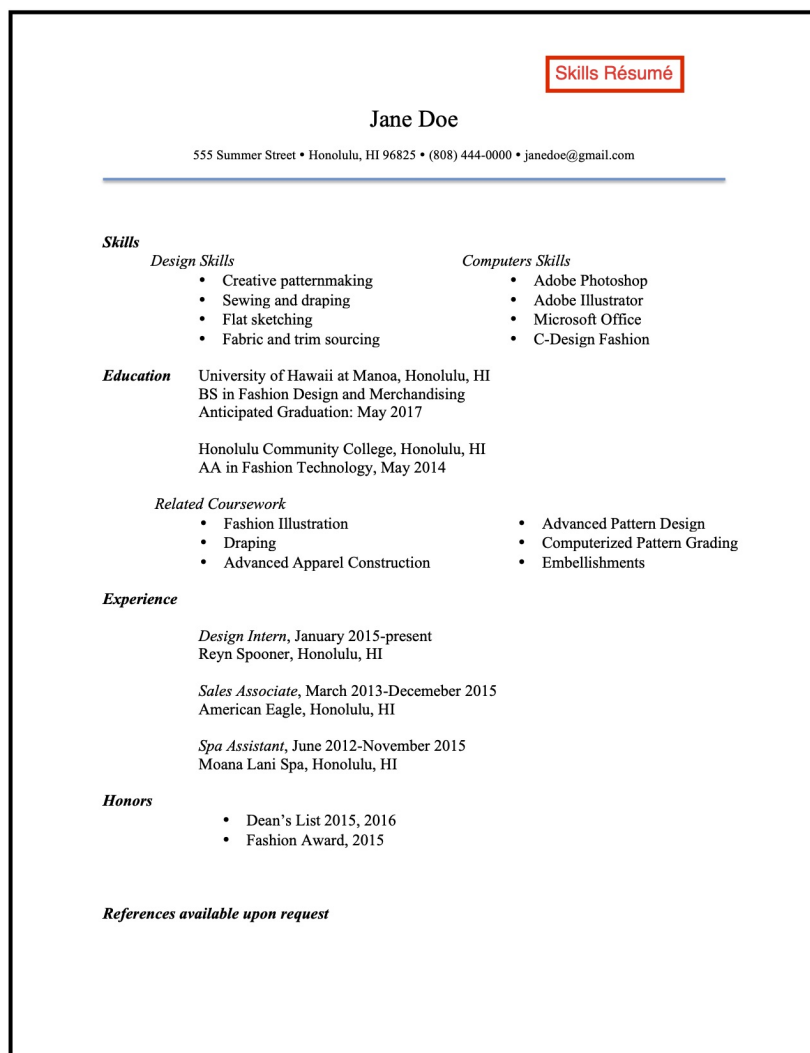


Figure 5.6.6: Sample Skills Resume

Combination Résumé

A combination résumé lists skills and abilities first but also lists accomplishments and responsibilities under specific job titles and experiences. A combination résumé allows an applicant to highlight specific skills that may be desired by the employer while also emphasizing job experience. Combination résumés are useful for applicants with an extensive job history in a highly specialized field. For example, applicants in computer programming may want to highlight their computer language skills before detailing their computer programming experience.

This is an example of a combination résumé.

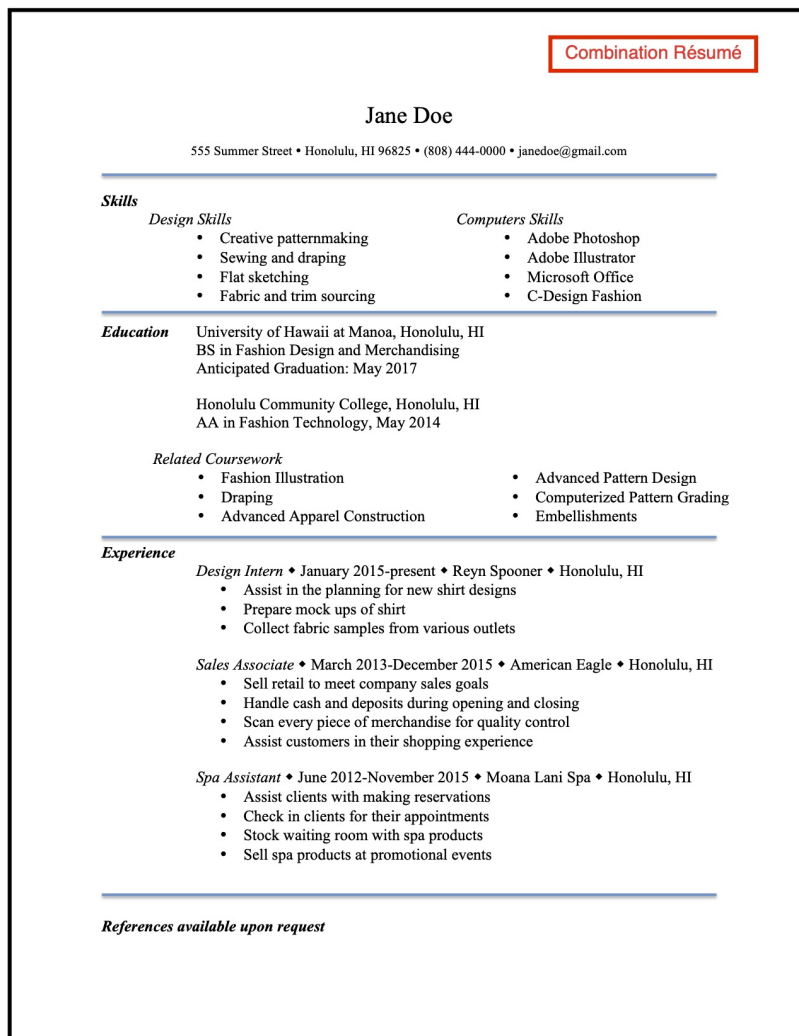


Figure 5.6.7: Sample Combination Resume

Designing your Résumé

Your résumé is the first step in obtaining an interview and potentially getting hired. A major question you want to ask yourself when creating your résumé is "How do I want the employer to see me?" You can create a résumé that is uniquely yours and that will stand apart from others by illustrating your personality within your résumé.

Simplicity: Do not clutter the page with unnecessary information. Keep your headings short, informative, to-the-point, and clear of graphics. Résumés should be concise and easy to read to ensure that the potential employer can find the information they need quickly. Generally, people look at these for about 30 seconds, so you want them to have a solid idea of your qualifications in less time than that.

Length: You may be tempted to extend your résumé to more than one page, but don't exceed that limit unless the additional page will feature specific, relevant information that represents several years of work that directly relates to the position. The person reading your résumé may be sifting through many applicants and will not spend time reading extra pages. Use the one-page format to put your best foot forward, remembering that you may never get a second chance to make a good first impression.

Consistency: Use the same formatting for similar sections on your résumé. Use line breaks, indents, and font variations to organize relevant information into sections. For example, you could use a different font for the headings. This will make your résumé more aesthetically pleasing. Make sure all headings are the same size and type (bold, italic, etc...).

Font: Use fonts that are easy to read. This is important for two reasons: 1) If you send an electronic version of your résumé as a Microsoft Word document, common font styles such as Arial or Times New Roman will likely transfer properly while less-common fonts may transfer improperly and be unreadable; 2) If you use a hard-to-read font, the reader may decide not to read the résumé if it is too challenging to read.

Verbs: When speaking of past tasks you performed at a previous job, verbs should be in the past tense form. If you are speaking of job tasks you currently perform, use the present tense. Use action verbs. Use a thesaurus as a resource in order to not repeat verbs.

Paper: If you are going to print your résumé, choose a fine grade paper. There are many paper options but using white or slightly off-white paper that is thicker than traditional printer paper is common practice. Avoid using colored paper to avoid sending the wrong impression to your reader. Remember, your résumé is the first glimpse into who you are.

Cover Letter

When you apply for a job using a printed résumé, it should be accompanied by a cover letter. This letter expands on some of what you mention in your résumé. Normally, this letter has at least four paragraphs: 1) an introduction that states the desired position; 2) education; 3) experience; and 4) conclusion. Since this letter is the first item an employer will see, it is vital that it be well designed and error free.

Functions of a cover letter

- Introduces you to a potential employer and explains what you can offer the employer.
- Shows your interest in a position.
- Describes how your education and experiences make you a prime candidate for the open position.

Components of a Cover letter

Cover Letters have four parts: an introduction, an education paragraph, an experience paragraph, and a conclusion.

Introduction: The introduction will

- State what job you are applying for and how you found out about the job opening
- Ask to be considered for the position
- Forecast the rest of the letter.

Education paragraph. For most students, this will come before the experience paragraph if they do not have much work experience. In this paragraph, highlight the educational experiences you have had that make you most qualified for the job. What parts of your education make you most qualified for the job? Write about your degree(s) and any courses, projects, or assignments related to the job you are applying for. This will show the employer why it would be to their advantage to hire you.

Experience paragraph. In this paragraph, you want to begin by writing about any job experience (paid or unpaid) that relates to the job you seek. Or, if you don't have similar experience but you have had several jobs, you could write about your broad job experience and what skills you have learned that will help you in the job for which you are applying. In addition to highlighting specific skills, this will show that you know what's involved with having and job and that you are more likely to have good work habits and a good work ethic.

Concluding Paragraph: The purpose of this paragraph is to encourage the employer to contact you for an interview. In this paragraph, you will

- Request an interview at the employer's convenience
- Provide your contact information
- Refer to your enclosed résumé.

Ethics in Cover Letters

It is important to practice good ethics even in the early stages of applying for a job. Unethical representation of yourself is not only unprofessional but in some instances it is illegal. Be confident with the skills and experiences you already have and represent them

honestly.

Some applicants believe that although lying in a cover letter is frowned upon, exaggeration is fine. However, employers may react to exaggeration in the same way as they do to lying. The skills and abilities you write about in a cover letter will be expected of you if you get the job. If you cannot perform as you stated, they can fire you. They will do this because it took time and money to hire you, and if they have to replace you right away, they will not be impressed.

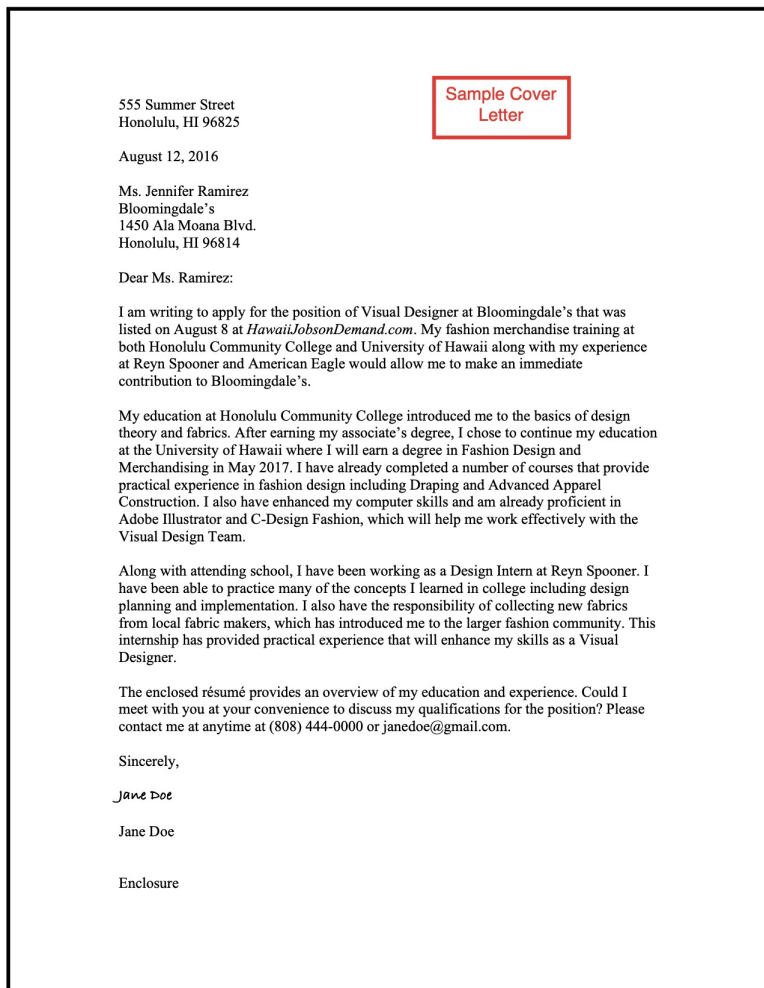


Figure 5.6.8: Sample Cover Letter

Key Takeaway

A résumé will represent your skills, education, and experience in your absence. Businesses increasingly scan résumés into searchable databases. A cover letter will expand on some of what you mention in a résumé.

Exercises

1. Find a job announcement with specific duties that represents a job that you will be prepared for upon graduation. Choose a type of résumé and prepare your résumé to submit to the employer as a class assignment. Your instructor may also request a scannable version of your résumé.
2. Conduct an online search for a functional or chronological résumé. Please post and share with your classmates.
3. Conduct an online search for job advertisements that detail positions you would be interested in, and note the key job duties and position requirements. Please post one example and share with your classmates.
4. When is a second page of your résumé justified? Explain.

5. Conduct an online search for resources to help you prepare your own résumé. Please post one link and a brief review of the Web site, noting what features you found useful and at least one recommendation for improvement.

References

- Bennett, S. A. (2005). *The elements of résumé style: Essential rules and eye-opening advice for writing résumés and cover letters that work*. AMACOM.
- Simons, W., & Curtis, R. (2004). *The Résumé.com guide to writing unbeatable résumés*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

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5.7: Sales Message

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss a basic sales message and identify its central purpose
2. Detail the main parts of a sales message and understand strategies for success

A sales message is the central persuasive message that intrigues, informs, persuades, calls to action, and closes the sale. Not every sales message will make a direct sale, but the goal remains. Whether your sales message is embedded in a letter, represented in a proposal, or broadcast across radio or television, the purpose stays the same.

Sales messages are often discussed in terms of reason versus emotion. Every message has elements of ethos, or credibility; pathos, or passion and enthusiasm; and logos, or logic and reason. If your sales message focuses exclusively on reason with cold, hard facts and nothing but the facts, you may appeal to some audience, but certainly not the majority. Buyers make purchase decisions on emotion as well as reason, and even if they have researched all the relevant facts about competing products, the decision may still come down to impulse, emotion, and desire. If your sales message focuses exclusively on emotion, with little or no substance, it may not be taken seriously. Finally, if your sales message does not appear to have credibility, the message will be dismissed. In the case of the sales message, you need to meet the audience's needs that vary greatly.

In general, appeals to emotion pique curiosity and get our attention, but some attention to reason and facts should also be included. That doesn't mean we need to spell out the technical manual on the product on the opening sale message, but basic information about design or features, in specific, concrete ways can help an audience make sense of your message and the product or service. Avoid using too many abstract terms or references, as not everyone will understand these. You want your sales message to do the work, not the audience.

Format for a Common Sales Message

A sales message has the five main parts of any persuasive message.

Table 5.7.1: Five Main Parts of a Persuasive Message

Attention Statement	Use humor, novelty, surprise, or the unusual to get attention.
Introduction	Build interest by appealing to common needs and wants, and include a purpose statement to set up expectations.
Body	Establish credibility, discuss attractive features, and compare with competitors, addressing concerns or potential questions before they are even considered.
Conclusion	Sum it up and offer solution steps or calls to action, motivating the audience to take the next step. The smaller the step, the more likely the audience will comply. Set up your audience for an effective closing.
Residual Message	Make the sale, make them remember you, and make sure your final words relate to the most important information, like a contact phone number.

Getting Attention

Your sales message will compete with hundreds of other messages and you want it to stand out (Price, D., 2005). One effective way to do that is to make sure your attention statement(s) and introduction clearly state how the reader or listener will benefit.

- Will the product or service save time or money?
- Will it make them look good?
- Will it entertain them?
- Will it satisfy them?

Regardless of the product or service, the audience is going to consider first what is in it for them. A benefit is what the buyer gains with the purchase and is central to your sales message. They may gain social status, popularity, sex appeal, or even reduce or eliminate something they don't want. Your sales message should clearly communicate the benefits of your product or service (Winston, W., and Granat, J., 1997).

Sales Message Strategies for Success

Your product or service may sell itself, but if you require a sales message, you may want to consider these strategies for success:

1. **Start with your greatest benefit.** Use it in the headline, subject line, caption, or attention statement. Audiences tend to remember the information from the beginning and end of a message, but have less recall about the middle points. Make your first step count by highlighting the best feature first.
2. **Take baby steps.** One thing at a time. Promote, inform, and persuade on one product or service at a time. You want to hear “yes” and make the associated sale, and if you confuse the audience with too much information, too many options, steps to consider, or related products or service, you are more likely to hear “no” as a defensive response as the buyer tries not to make a mistake. Avoid confusion and keep it simple.
3. **Know your audience.** The more background research you can do on your buyer, the better you can anticipate their specific wants and needs and individualize your sales message to meet them.
4. **Lead with emotion, follow with reason.** Gain the audience's attention with drama, humor, or novelty and follow with specific facts that establish your credibility, provide more information about the product or service, and lead to your call to action to make the sale.

These four steps can help improve your sales message, and your sales. Invest your time in planning and preparation, and consider the audience's needs as you prepare your sales message.

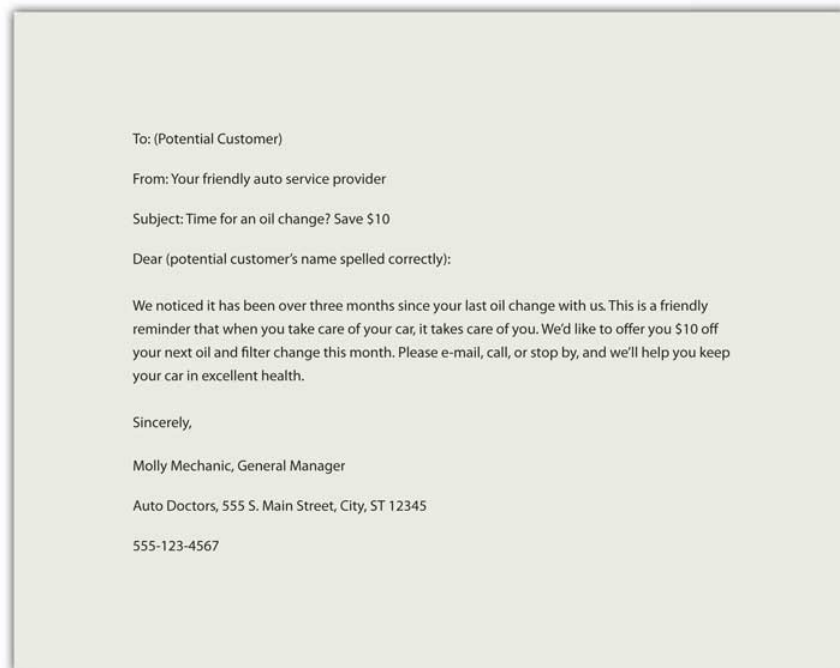


Figure 5.7.1: Sample E-mail Sales Message

Key Takeaway

A sales message combines emotion and reason, and reinforces credibility, to create interest in a product or service that leads to a sale.

Exercises

1. Create your own e-mail sales message in a hundred words or less. Share it with the class.
2. Identify one sales message you consider to be effective. Share it with classmates and discuss why you perceive it to be effective.

3. Please consider one purchase you made recently. What motivated you to buy and why did you choose to complete the purchase? Share the results with your classmates.
4. Are you more motivated by emotion or reason? Ask ten friends that question and post your results.

References

- Price, D. (2005, October 30). *How to communicate your sales message so buyers take action now!* Retrieved June 14, 2009, from ezinearticles.com: <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-To-Communicate-Your-Sales-Message-So-Buyers-Take-Action-Now!&id=89569>.
- Winston, W., & Granat, J. (1997). *Persuasive advertising for entrepreneurs and small business owners: How to create more effective sales messages*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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5.8: Additional Resources

Visit NetLingo for some common texting abbreviations. <http://www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php>

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University includes an area on e-mail etiquette. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/636/01>

Shea's Netiquette online is another useful source. <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/book/index.html>

The *New York Times* blog "Gadgetwise: Getting Smart About Personal Technology" discusses an ever-changing variety of questions related to netiquette. <http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com>

The OWL at Purdue also includes pages on memo writing and a sample memo. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/590/01>; <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/590/04>

For 642 sample letters, from cover letters to complaints, go to this site. www.4hb.com/letters

Visit this Negotiations.com page for information on writing a request for proposal, quotation, and information. <http://www.negotiations.com/articles/procurement-terms>

Visit this site for additional proposal writing tips. www.4hb.com/0350tipwritebizproposal.html

TechSoup offers a sample Request for Proposal. <http://www.techsoup.org/support/articles-and-how-tos/rfp-library>

Your online profile counts as much as your résumé. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105483848&sc=nl&cc=es-20090628>

Read a *Forbes* article on "Ten Ways to Torpedo Your Sales Pitch." http://www.forbes.com/2007/08/01/microsoft-ebay-symantec-ent-sales-cx_mf_0801byb07_torpedo.html

Direct mail and other sales copy written by Susanna Hutcheson. <http://www.powerwriting.com/port.html>

Visit this site for tips on how to write a public service announcement (PSA). www.essortment.com/tips-write-public-service-announcement-34787.html

The National Institute of Justice provides guidelines on writing a PSA. www.nij.gov/topics/courts/restorative-justice/marketing-media/pages/psa.aspx

The AdCouncil provides a range of examples. <http://www.adcouncil.org/Our-Campaigns>

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting

- 6.1: Formatting a Research Paper
- 6.2: Citing and Referencing Techniques
- 6.3: Creating a References Section (Part 1)
- 6.4: Creating a References Section (Part 2)
- 6.5: Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Style
- 6.E: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting (Exercises)

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6.1: Formatting a Research Paper

Learning Objectives

- Identify the major components of a research paper written using American Psychological Association (APA) style.
- Apply general APA style and formatting conventions in a research paper.

In this chapter, you will learn how to use APA style, the documentation and formatting style followed by the American Psychological Association, as well as MLA style, from the Modern Language Association. There are a few major formatting styles used in academic texts, including AMA, Chicago, and Turabian:

- AMA (American Medical Association) for medicine, health, and biological sciences
- APA (American Psychological Association) for education, psychology, and the social sciences
- Chicago—a common style used in everyday publications like magazines, newspapers, and books
- MLA (Modern Language Association) for English, literature, arts, and humanities
- Turabian—another common style designed for its universal application across all subjects and disciplines

While all the formatting and citation styles have their own use and applications, in this chapter we focus our attention on the two styles you are most likely to use in your academic studies: APA and MLA.

If you find that the rules of proper source documentation are difficult to keep straight, you are not alone. Writing a good research paper is, in and of itself, a major intellectual challenge. Having to follow detailed citation and formatting guidelines as well may seem like just one more task to add to an already-too-long list of requirements.

Following these guidelines, however, serves several important purposes. First, it signals to your readers that your paper should be taken seriously as a student's contribution to a given academic or professional field; it is the literary equivalent of wearing a tailored suit to a job interview. Second, it shows that you respect other people's work enough to give them proper credit for it. Finally, it helps your reader find additional materials if he or she wishes to learn more about your topic.

Furthermore, producing a letter-perfect APA-style paper need not be burdensome. Yes, it requires careful attention to detail. However, you can simplify the process if you keep these broad guidelines in mind:

- **Work ahead whenever you can.** Chapter 11 includes tips for keeping track of your sources early in the research process, which will save time later on.
- **Get it right the first time.** Apply APA guidelines as you write, so you will not have much to correct during the editing stage. Again, putting in a little extra time early on can save time later.
- **Use the resources available to you.** In addition to the guidelines provided in this chapter, you may wish to consult the APA website at <http://www.apa.org> or the Purdue University Online Writing lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>, which regularly updates its online style guidelines.

General Formatting Guidelines

This chapter provides detailed guidelines for using the citation and formatting conventions developed by the American Psychological Association, or APA. Writers in disciplines as diverse as astrophysics, biology, psychology, and education follow APA style. The major components of a paper written in APA style are listed in the following box.

These are the major components of an APA-style paper:

1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Body, which includes the following:
 - Headings and, if necessary, subheadings to organize the content
 - In-text citations of research sources
4. References page

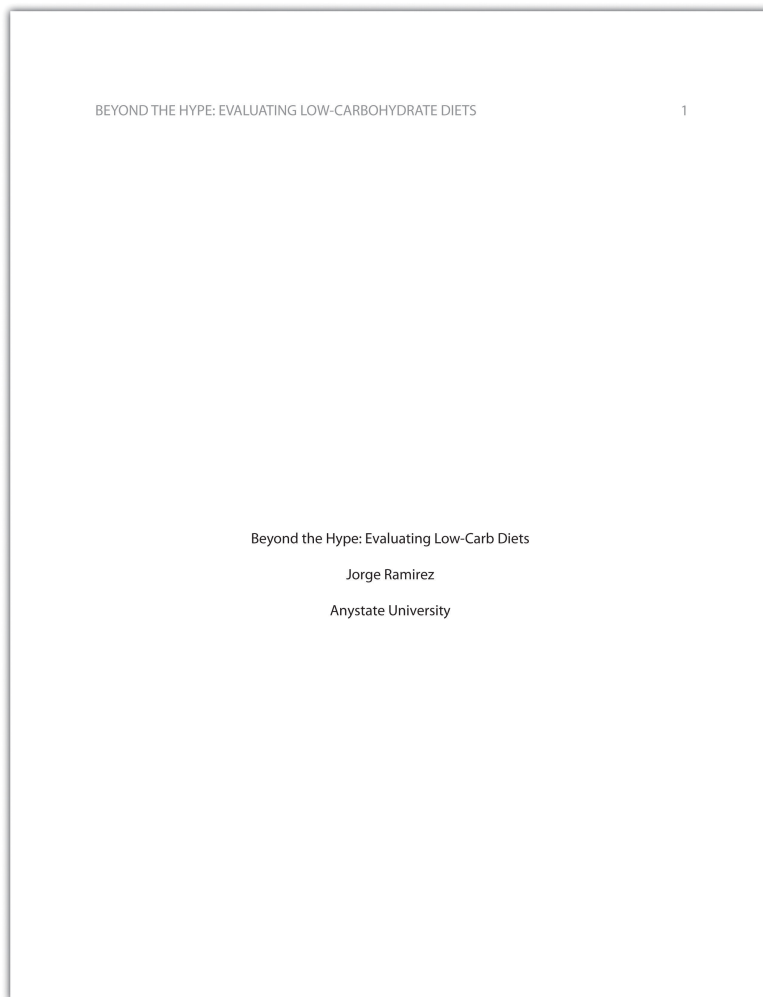
All these components must be saved in one document, not as separate documents.

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. Your title page should look like the following example.



Abstract

The next page of your paper provides an abstract, or brief summary of your findings. An abstract does not need to be provided in every paper, but an abstract should be used 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.

In Chapter 12, you read a paper written by a student named Jorge, who researched the effectiveness of low-carbohydrate diets. Read Jorge's abstract. Note how it sums up the major ideas in his paper without going into excessive detail.

Abstract

Low-carbohydrate diets have become increasingly popular. Supporters claim they are notably more effective than other diets for weight loss and provide other health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels; however, some doctors believe these diets carry potential long-term health risks. A review of the available research literature indicates that low-carbohydrate diets are highly effective for short-term weight loss but that their long-term effectiveness is not significantly greater than other common diet plans. Their long-term effects on cholesterol levels and blood pressure are unknown; research literature suggests some potential for negative health outcomes associated with increased consumption of saturated fat. This conclusion points to the importance of following a balanced, moderate diet appropriate for the individual, as well as the need for further research.

? Exercise 6.1.1

Write an abstract summarizing your paper. Briefly introduce the topic, state your findings, and sum up what conclusions you can draw from your research. Use the word count feature of your word-processing program to make sure your abstract does not exceed one hundred fifty words.

📌 Tip

Depending on your field of study, you may sometimes write research papers that present extensive primary research, such as your own experiment or survey. In your abstract, summarize your research question and your findings, and briefly indicate how your study relates to prior research in the field.

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 APA guidelines.

Use these general guidelines to format the paper:

1. Set the top, bottom, and side margins of your paper at 1 inch.
2. Use double-spaced text throughout your paper.
3. Use a standard font, such as Times New Roman or Arial, in a legible size (10- to 12-point).
4. Use continuous pagination throughout the paper, including the title page and the references section. Page numbers appear flush right within your header.

5. 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. Additional details from Jorge's paper are provided.



Abstract

Low-carbohydrate diets have become increasingly popular. Supporters claim they are notably more effective than other diets for weight loss and provide other health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels; however, some doctors believe these diets carry potential long-term health risks. A review of the available research literature indicates that low-carbohydrate diets are highly effective for short-term weight loss but that their long-term effectiveness is not significantly greater than other common diet plans. Their long-term effects on cholesterol levels and blood pressure are unknown; research literature suggests some potential for negative health outcomes associated with increased consumption of saturated fat. This conclusion points to the importance of following a balanced, moderate diet appropriate for the individual, as well as the need for further research.

? Exercise 6.1.2

Begin formatting the final draft of your paper according to APA guidelines. You may work with an existing document or set up a new document if you choose. Include the following:

- Your title page
- The abstract you created in Exercise 1
- Correct headers and page numbers for your title page and abstract

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 greatest to least importance:

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.

Visually, the hierarchy of information is organized as indicated in Table 13.1 “Section Headings”.

Table 13.1 - Section Headings

Level of Information	Text Example
Level 1	Heart Disease
Level 2	Lifestyle Factors That Reduce Heart Disease Risk
Level 3	Exercising regularly.
Level 4	<i>Aerobic exercise.</i>
Level 5	<i>Country line dancing.</i>

A college research paper may not use all the heading levels shown in Table 13.1 “Section Headings”, but you are likely to encounter them in academic journal articles that use APA style. For a brief paper, you may find that level 1 headings suffice. Longer or more complex papers may need level 2 headings or other lower-level headings to organize information clearly. Use your outline to craft your major section headings and determine whether any subtopics are substantial enough to require additional levels of headings.

? Exercise 6.1.3

Working with the document you developed in Note 13.11 “Exercise 2”, begin setting up the heading structure of the final draft of your research paper according to APA guidelines. Include your title and at least two to three major section headings, and follow the formatting guidelines provided above. If your major sections should be broken into subsections, add those headings as well. Use your outline to help you.

Because Jorge used only level 1 headings, his Exercise 3 would look like the following:

Level of Information	Text Example
Level 1	Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets
Level 1	Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss
Level 1	Other Long-Term Health Outcomes
Level 1	Conclusion

Citation Guidelines

In-Text Citations

Throughout the body of your paper, include a citation whenever you quote or paraphrase material from your research sources. As you learned in Chapter 11, 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, it is also required that you 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.

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.

Addiction researchers caution that “junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive” (Epstein, 2010, p. 137).

Here, 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.

As noted in the book *Junk Food, Junk Science* (Epstein, 2010, p. 137), “junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive.”

Here, the writer chose to mention the source title in the sentence (an optional piece of information to include) and followed the title with a parenthetical citation. Note that the parenthetical citation is placed **before** the comma that signals the end of the introductory phrase.

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).

Another variation is to introduce the author and the source title in your sentence and include the publication date and page number in parentheses within the sentence or at the end of the sentence. 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 nonprint sources, such as websites and personal interviews. Section 13.2 and Section 13.3 provide extensive guidelines for citing a variety of source types.

✓ writing at work

APA is just one of several different styles with its own guidelines for documentation, formatting, and language usage. Depending on your field of interest, you may be exposed to additional styles, such as the following:

- **MLA style.** Determined by the Modern Languages Association and used for papers in literature, languages, and other disciplines in the humanities.
- **Chicago style.** Outlined in the *Chicago Manual of Style* and sometimes used for papers in the humanities and the sciences; many professional organizations use this style for publications as well.
- **Associated Press (AP) style.** Used by professional journalists.

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 desired.

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 line are indented five spaces. Review the following example. (Section 13.3 provides extensive guidelines for formatting reference entries for different types of sources.)

- the way. In The Nutrition Source. Retrieved from <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/carbohydrates-full-story/index.html#good-carbs-not-no-carbs>
- HealthDay. (2010). *Low-fat diets beat low-carb regimen long term*. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_95861.html
- Hirsch, J. (2004). The low-carb evolution: Be reactive with low-carb products but proactive with nutrition. *Nutraceuticals World*. Retrved from <http://www.nutraceuticalsworld.com/contents/view/13321>
- Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER). (2010). Weight-loss options: 6 common diet plans. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/weight-loss/NU00616/METHOD=print>
- McMillan-Price, J., Petocz, P., Atkinson, F., O'Neill, K., Samman, S., Steinbeck, K...Brand-Miller, J. (2006, July). Comparison of 4 diets of varying glycemic load on weight loss and cardiovascular risk reduction in overweight and obese young adults: A randomized controlled trial. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166(14), 1466–1475. Retrieved from <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/166/14/1466>
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. (2010). What I need to know about eating and diabetes. In *National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse*. Retrieved from http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/eating_ez/index.htm
- Reuters Health. (2010). *Low-carb diet can increase bad cholesterol levels*. Retrieved from http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_95708.html
- Seppa, N. (2008). Go against the grains, diet study suggests: Low-carb beats low-fat in weight loss, cholesterol. *Science News*, 174(4), 25. <http://www.sciencenews.org/view/issue/id/34757>

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. (2010). What I need to know about eating and diabetes. In *National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse*. Retrieved from http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/eating_ez/index.htm

Reuters Health. (2010). *Low-carb diet can increase bad cholesterol levels*. Retrieved from http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_95708.html

Seppa, N. (2008). Go against the grains, diet study suggests: Low-carb beats low-fat in weight loss, cholesterol. *Science News*. 174(4), 25. <http://www.sciencenews.org/view/issue/id/34757>

 Tip

In APA style, book and article titles are formatted in sentence case, not title case. Sentence case means that only the first word is capitalized, along with any proper nouns.

Key Takeaways

- Following proper citation and formatting guidelines helps writers ensure that their work will be taken seriously, give proper credit to other authors for their work, and provide valuable information to readers.
- Working ahead and taking care to cite sources correctly the first time are ways writers can save time during the editing stage of writing a research paper.
- APA papers usually include an abstract that concisely summarizes the paper.
- APA papers use a specific headings structure to provide a clear hierarchy of information.
- In APA papers, in-text citations usually include the name(s) of the author(s) and the year of publication.
- In-text citations correspond to entries in the references section, which provide detailed bibliographical information about a source.

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6.2: Citing and Referencing Techniques

Learning Objectives

- Apply American Psychological Association (APA) style formatting guidelines for citations.

This section covers the nitty-gritty details of in-text citations. You will learn how to format citations for different types of source materials, whether you are citing brief quotations, paraphrasing ideas, or quoting longer passages. You will also learn techniques you can use to introduce quoted and paraphrased material effectively. Keep this section handy as a reference to consult while writing the body of your paper.

Formatting Cited Material: The Basics

As noted in previous sections of this book, in-text citations usually provide the name of the author(s) and the year the source was published. For direct quotations, the page number must also be included. Use past-tense verbs when introducing a quote—“Smith found...” and not “Smith finds...”

Formatting Brief Quotations

For brief quotations—fewer than forty words—use quotation marks to indicate where the quoted material begins and ends, and cite the name of the author(s), the year of publication, and the page number where the quotation appears in your source. Remember to include commas to separate elements within the parenthetical citation. Also, avoid redundancy. If you name the author(s) in your sentence, do not repeat the name(s) in your parenthetical citation. Review following the examples of different ways to cite direct quotations.

Chang (2008) emphasized that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (p. 49).

The author’s name can be included in the body of the sentence or in the parenthetical citation. Note that when a parenthetical citation appears at the end of the sentence, it comes **after** the closing quotation marks and **before** the period. The elements within parentheses are separated by commas.

- *Weight Training for Women* (Chang, 2008) claimed that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (p. 49).
- *Weight Training for Women* claimed that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (Chang, 2008, p. 49).

Including the title of a source is optional.

In Chang’s 2008 text *Weight Training for Women*, she asserts, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (p. 49).

The author’s name, the date, and the title may appear in the body of the text. Include the page number in the parenthetical citation. Also, notice the use of the verb *asserts* to introduce the direct quotation.

“Engaging in weight-bearing exercise,” Chang asserts, “is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (2008, p. 49).

You may begin a sentence with the direct quotation and add the author’s name and a strong verb before continuing the quotation.

Formatting Paraphrased and Summarized Material

When you paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you follow the same guidelines previously provided, except that you are not required to provide the page number where the ideas are located. If you are summing up the main findings of a research article, simply providing the author’s name and publication year may suffice, but if you are paraphrasing a more specific idea, consider including the page number.

Read the following examples.

Chang (2008) pointed out that weight-bearing exercise has many potential benefits for women.

Here, the writer is summarizing a major idea that recurs throughout the source material. No page reference is needed.

Chang (2008) found that weight-bearing exercise could help women maintain or even increase bone density through middle age and beyond, reducing the likelihood that they will develop osteoporosis in later life (p. 86).

Although the writer is not directly quoting the source, this passage paraphrases a specific detail, so the writer chose to include the page number where the information is located.

Tip

Although APA style guidelines do not require writers to provide page numbers for material that is not directly quoted, your instructor may wish you to do so when possible.

Check with your instructor about his or her preferences.

Formatting Longer Quotations

When you quote a longer passage from a source—forty words or more—use a different format to set off the quoted material. Instead of using quotation marks, create a block quotation by starting the quotation on a new line and indented five spaces from the margin. Note that in this case, the parenthetical citation comes **after** the period that ends the sentence. Here is an example:

In recent years, many writers within the fitness industry have emphasized the ways in which women can benefit from weight-bearing exercise, such as weightlifting, karate, dancing, stair climbing, hiking, and jogging. Chang (2008) found that engaging in weight-bearing exercise regularly significantly reduces women's risk of developing osteoporosis. Additionally, these exercises help women maintain muscle mass and overall strength, and many common forms of weight-bearing exercise, such as brisk walking or stair climbing, also provide noticeable cardiovascular benefits. (p. 93)

Exercise 6.2.1

Review the places in your paper where you cited, quoted, and paraphrased material from a source with a single author. Edit your citations to ensure that

- each citation includes the author's name, the date of publication, and, where appropriate, a page reference;
- parenthetical citations are correctly formatted;
- longer quotations use the block-quotation format.

If you are quoting a passage that continues into a second paragraph, indent five spaces again in the first line of the second paragraph. Here is an example:

In recent years, many writers within the fitness industry have emphasized the ways in which women can benefit from weight-bearing exercise, such as weightlifting, karate, dancing, stair climbing, hiking, and jogging. Chang (2008) found that engaging in weight-bearing exercise regularly significantly reduces women's risk of developing osteoporosis. Additionally, these exercises help women maintain muscle mass and overall strength, and many common forms of weight-bearing exercise, such as brisk walking or stair climbing, also provide noticeable cardiovascular benefits.

It is important to note that swimming cannot be considered a weight-bearing exercise, since the water supports and cushions the swimmer. That doesn't mean swimming isn't great exercise, but it should be considered one part of an integrated fitness program. (p. 93)

Tip

Be wary of quoting from sources at length. Remember, your ideas should drive the paper, and quotations should be used to support and enhance your points. Make sure any lengthy quotations that you include serve a clear purpose. Generally, no more than 10–15 percent of a paper should consist of quoted material.

Introducing Cited Material Effectively

Including an introductory phrase in your text, such as “Jackson wrote” or “Copeland found,” often helps you integrate source material smoothly. This citation technique also helps convey that you are actively engaged with your source material.

Unfortunately, during the process of writing your research paper, it is easy to fall into a rut and use the same few dull verbs repeatedly, such as “Jones said,” “Smith stated,” and so on.

Punch up your writing by using strong verbs that help your reader understand how the source material presents ideas. There is a world of difference between an author who “suggests” and one who “claims,” one who “questions” and one who “criticizes.” You do not need to consult your thesaurus every time you cite a source, but do think about which verbs will accurately represent the ideas and make your writing more engaging. The following chart shows some possibilities.

Strong Verbs for Introducing Cited Material		
ask	suggest	question
explain	assert	claim
recommend	compare	contrast
propose	hypothesize	believe
insist	argue	find
determine	measure	assess
evaluate	conclude	study
warn	point out	sum up

? Exercise 6.2.2

Review the citations in your paper once again. This time, look for places where you introduced source material using a signal phrase in your sentence.

1. Highlight the verbs used in your signal phrases, and make note of any that seem to be overused throughout the paper.
2. Identify at least three places where a stronger verb could be used.
3. Make the edits to your draft.

✓ writing at work

It is important to accurately represent a colleague’s ideas or communications in the workplace. When writing professional or academic papers, be mindful of how the words you use to describe someone’s tone or ideas carry certain connotations. Do not say a source *argues* a particular point unless an argument is, in fact, presented. Use lively language, but avoid language that is emotionally charged. Doing so will ensure you have represented your colleague’s words in an authentic and accurate way.

Formatting In-Text Citations for Other Source Types

These sections discuss the correct format for various types of in-text citations. Read them through quickly to get a sense of what is covered, and then refer to them again as needed.

Print Sources

This section covers books, articles, and other print sources with one or more authors.

A Work by One Author

For a print work with one author, follow the guidelines provided in [Section 13.1](#). Always include the author’s name and year of publication. Include a page reference whenever you quote a source directly. (See also the guidelines presented earlier in this chapter about when to include a page reference for paraphrased material.)

- Chang (2008) emphasized that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (p. 49).
- Chang (2008) pointed out that weight-bearing exercise has many potential benefits for women.

Two or More Works by the Same Author

At times, your research may include multiple works by the same author. If the works were published in different years, a standard in-text citation will serve to distinguish them. If you are citing multiple works by the same author published in the same year, include a lowercase letter immediately after the year. Rank the sources in the order they appear in your references section. The source listed first includes an *a* after the year, the source listed second includes a *b*, and so on.

Rodriguez (2009a) criticized the nutrition-supplement industry for making unsubstantiated and sometimes misleading claims about the benefits of taking supplements. Additionally, he warned that consumers frequently do not realize the potential harmful effects of some popular supplements (Rodriguez, 2009b).

Tip

If you have not yet created your references section, you may not be sure which source will appear first. See [Section 13.3](#) for guidelines—or assign each source a temporary code and highlight the in-text citations so you remember to double-check them later on.

Works by Authors with the Same Last Name

If you are citing works by different authors with the same last name, include each author's initials in your citation, whether you mention them in the text or in parentheses. Do so even if the publication years are different.

- J. S. Williams (2007) believes nutritional supplements can be a useful part of some diet and fitness regimens. C. D. Williams (2008), however, believes these supplements are overrated.
- According to two leading researchers, the rate of childhood obesity exceeds the rate of adult obesity (K. Connelley, 2010; O. Connelley, 2010).
- Studies from both A. Wright (2007) and C. A. Wright (2008) confirm the benefits of diet and exercise on weight loss.

A Work by Two Authors

When two authors are listed for a given work, include both authors' names each time you cite the work. If you are citing their names in parentheses, use an ampersand (&) between them. (Use the word *and*, however, if the names appear in your sentence.)

- As Garrison and Gould (2010) pointed out, “It is never too late to quit smoking. The health risks associated with this habit begin to decrease soon after a smoker quits” (p. 101).
- As doctors continue to point out, “It is never too late to quit smoking. The health risks associated with this habit begin to decrease soon after a smoker quits” (Garrison & Gould, 2010, p. 101).

A Work by Three to Five Authors

If the work you are citing has three to five authors, list all the authors' names the first time you cite the source. In subsequent citations, use the first author's name followed by the abbreviation *et al.* (*Et al.* is short for *et alia*, the Latin phrase for “and others.”)

- Henderson, Davidian, and Degler (2010) surveyed 350 smokers aged 18 to 30.
- One survey, conducted among 350 smokers aged 18 to 30, included a detailed questionnaire about participants' motivations for smoking (Henderson, Davidian, & Degler, 2010).

Note that these examples follow the same ampersand conventions as sources with two authors. Again, use the ampersand only when listing authors' names in parentheses.

- As Henderson *et al.* (2010) found, some young people, particularly young women, use smoking as a means of appetite suppression.
- Disturbingly, some young women use smoking as a means of appetite suppression (Henderson *et al.*, 2010).

Note how the phrase *et al.* is punctuated. No period comes after *et*, but *al.* gets a period because it is an abbreviation for a longer Latin word. In parenthetical references, include a comma after *et al.* but not before. Remember this rule by mentally translating the citation to English: “Henderson and others, 2010.”

A Work by Six or More Authors

If the work you are citing has six or more authors, list only the first author's name, followed by *et al.*, in your in-text citations. The other authors' names will be listed in your references section.

Researchers have found that outreach work with young people has helped reduce tobacco use in some communities (Costello et al., 2007).

A Work Authored by an Organization

When citing a work that has no individual author(s) but is published by an organization, use the organization's name in place of the author's name. Lengthy organization names with well-known abbreviations can be abbreviated. In your first citation, use the full name, followed by the abbreviation in square brackets. Subsequent citations may use the abbreviation only.

- It is possible for a patient to have a small stroke without even realizing it (American Heart Association [AHA], 2010).
- Another cause for concern is that even if patients realize that they have had a stroke and need medical attention, they may not know which nearby facilities are best equipped to treat them (AHA, 2010).

? Exercise 6.2.3

1. Review the places in your paper where you cited material from a source with multiple authors or with an organization as the author. Edit your citations to ensure that each citation follows APA guidelines for the inclusion of the authors' names, the use of ampersands and *et al.*, the date of publication, and, where appropriate, a page reference.
2. Mark any additional citations within your paper that you are not sure how to format based on the guidelines provided so far. You will revisit these citations after reading the next few sections.

A Work with No Listed Author

If no author is listed and the source cannot be attributed to an organization, use the title in place of the author's name. You may use the full title in your sentence or use the first few words—enough to convey the key ideas—in a parenthetical reference. Follow standard conventions for using italics or quotation marks with titles:

- Use italics for titles of books or reports.
- Use quotation marks for titles of articles or chapters.
- “Living With Diabetes: Managing Your Health” (2009) recommends regular exercise for patients with diabetes.
- Regular exercise can benefit patients with diabetes (“Living with Diabetes,” 2009).
- Rosenhan (1973) had mentally healthy study participants claim to be experiencing hallucinations so they would be admitted to psychiatric hospitals.

A Work Cited within Another Work

To cite a source that is referred to within another secondary source, name the first source in your sentence. Then, in parentheses, use the phrase *as cited in* and the name of the second source author.

Rosenhan's study “On Being Sane in Insane Places” (as cited in Spitzer, 1975) found that psychiatrists diagnosed schizophrenia in people who claimed to be experiencing hallucinations and sought treatment—even though these patients were, in fact, imposters.

Two or More Works Cited in One Reference

At times, you may provide more than one citation in a parenthetical reference, such as when you are discussing related works or studies with similar results. List the citations in the same order they appear in your references section, and separate the citations with a semicolon.

Some researchers have found serious flaws in the way Rosenhan's study was conducted (Dawes, 2001; Spitzer, 1975).

Both of these researchers authored works that support the point being made in this sentence, so it makes sense to include both in the same citation.

A Famous Text Published in Multiple Editions

In some cases, you may need to cite an extremely well-known work that has been repeatedly republished or translated. Many works of literature and sacred texts, as well as some classic nonfiction texts, fall into this category. For these works, the original date of publication may be unavailable. If so, include the year of publication or translation for your edition. Refer to specific parts or chapters if you need to cite a specific section. Discuss with your instructor whether he or she would like you to cite page numbers in this particular instance.

In *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Freud explains that the “manifest content” of a dream—what literally takes place—is separate from its “latent content,” or hidden meaning (trans. 1965, lecture XXIX).

Here, the student is citing a classic work of psychology, originally written in German and later translated to English. Since the book is a collection of Freud’s lectures, the student cites the lecture number rather than a page number.

An Introduction, Foreword, Preface, or Afterword

To cite an introduction, foreword, preface, or afterword, cite the author of the material and the year, following the same format used for other print materials.

Electronic Sources

Whenever possible, cite electronic sources as you would print sources, using the author, the date, and where appropriate, a page number. For some types of electronic sources—for instance, many online articles—this information is easily available. Other times, however, you will need to vary the format to reflect the differences in online media.

Online Sources without Page Numbers

If an online source has no page numbers but you want to refer to a specific portion of the source, try to locate other information you can use to direct your reader to the information cited. Some websites number paragraphs within published articles; if so, include the paragraph number in your citation. Precede the paragraph number with the abbreviation for the word *paragraph* and the number of the paragraph (e.g., para. 4).

As researchers have explained, “Incorporating fresh fruits and vegetables into one’s diet can be a challenge for residents of areas where there are few or no easily accessible supermarkets” (Smith & Jones, 2006, para. 4).

Even if a source does not have numbered paragraphs, it is likely to have headings that organize the content. In your citation, name the section where your cited information appears, followed by a paragraph number.

The American Lung Association (2010) noted, “After smoking, radon exposure is the second most common cause of lung cancer” (What Causes Lung Cancer? section, para. 2).

This student cited the appropriate section heading within the website and then counted to find the specific paragraph where the cited information was located.

If an online source has no listed author and no date, use the source title and the abbreviation *n.d.* in your parenthetical reference.

It has been suggested that electromagnetic radiation from cellular telephones may pose a risk for developing certain cancers (“Cell Phones and Cancer,” n.d.).

Personal Communication

For personal communications, such as interviews, letters, and e-mails, cite the name of the person involved, clarify that the material is from a personal communication, and provide the specific date the communication took place. Note that while in-text citations correspond to entries in the references section, personal communications are an exception to this rule. They are cited only in the body text of your paper.

J. H. Yardley, M.D., believes that available information on the relationship between cell phone use and cancer is inconclusive (personal communication, May 1, 2009).

✓ writing at work

At work, you may sometimes share information resources with your colleagues by photocopying an interesting article or forwarding the URL of a useful website. Your goal in these situations and in formal research citations is the same. The goal is to provide enough information to help your professional peers locate and follow up on potentially useful information. Provide as much specific information as possible to achieve that goal, and consult with your professor as to what specific style he or she may prefer.

? Exercise 6.2.4

Revisit the problem citations you identified in Exercise 3—for instance, sources with no listed author or other oddities. Review the guidelines provided in this section and edit your citations for these kinds of sources according to APA guidelines.

Key Takeaways

- In APA papers, in-text citations include the name of the author(s) and the year of publication whenever possible.
- Page numbers are always included when citing quotations. It is optional to include page numbers when citing paraphrased material; however, this should be done when citing a specific portion of a work.
- When citing online sources, provide the same information used for print sources if it is available.
- When a source does not provide information that usually appears in a citation, in-text citations should provide readers with alternative information that would help them locate the source material. This may include the title of the source, section headings and paragraph numbers for websites, and so forth.
- When writing a paper, discuss with your professor what particular standards he or she would like you to follow.

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6.3: Creating a References Section (Part 1)

Learning Objectives

- Apply American Psychological Association (APA) style and formatting guidelines for a references section.

This section provides detailed information about how to create the references section of your paper. You will review basic formatting guidelines and learn how to format bibliographical entries for various types of sources. This section of Chapter 13, like the previous section, is meant to be used as a reference tool while you write.

Formatting the References Section: The Basics

At this stage in the writing process, you may already have begun setting up your references section. This section may consist of a single page for a brief research paper or may extend for many pages in professional journal articles. As you create this section of your paper, follow the guidelines provided here.

Formatting the References Section

To set up your references section, use the insert page break feature of your word-processing program to begin a new page. Note that the header and margins will be the same as in the body of your paper, and pagination continues from the body of your paper. (In other words, if you set up the body of your paper correctly, the correct header and page number should appear automatically in your references section.) See additional guidelines below.

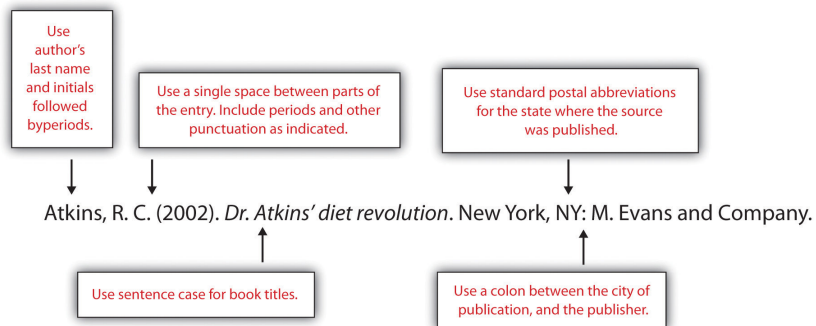
Formatting Reference Entries

Reference entries should include the following information:

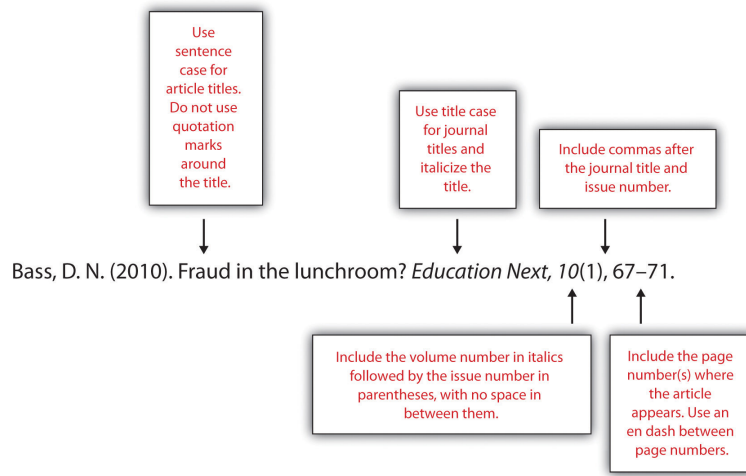
- The name of the author(s)
- The year of publication and, where applicable, the exact date of publication
- The full title of the source
- For books, the city of publication
- For articles or essays, the name of the periodical or book in which the article or essay appears
- For magazine and journal articles, the volume number, issue number, and pages where the article appears
- For sources on the web, the URL where the source is located

See the following examples for how to format a book or journal article with a single author.

✓ Sample Book Entry



✓ Sample Journal Article Entry



The following box provides general guidelines for formatting the reference page. For the remainder of this chapter, you will learn about how to format bibliographical entries for different source types, including multiauthor and electronic sources.

Formatting the References Section: APA General Guidelines

1. Include the heading *References*, centered at the top of the page. The heading should not be boldfaced, italicized, or underlined.
2. Use double-spaced type throughout the references section, as in the body of your paper.
3. Use hanging indentation for each entry. The first line should be flush with the left margin, while any lines that follow should be indented five spaces. Note that hanging indentation is the opposite of normal indenting rules for paragraphs.
4. List entries in alphabetical order by the author's last name. For a work with multiple authors, use the last name of the first author listed.
5. List authors' names using this format: Smith, J. C.
6. For a work with no individual author(s), use the name of the organization that published the work or, if this is unavailable, the title of the work in place of the author's name.
7. For works with multiple authors, follow these guidelines:
 - For works with up to seven authors, list the last name and initials for each author.
 - For works with more than seven authors, list the first six names, followed by ellipses, and then the name of the last author listed.
 - Use an ampersand before the name of the last author listed.
8. Use title case for journal titles. Capitalize all important words in the title.
9. Use sentence case for all other titles—books, articles, web pages, and other source titles. Capitalize the first word of the title. Do not capitalize any other words in the title except for the following:
 - Proper nouns
 - First word of a subtitle
 - First word after a colon or dash
10. Use italics for book and journal titles. Do not use italics, underlining, or quotation marks for titles of shorter works, such as articles.

? Exercise 6.3.1

Set up the first page of your references section and begin adding entries, following the APA formatting guidelines provided in this section.

1. If there are any simple entries that you can format completely using the general guidelines, do so at this time.
2. For entries you are unsure of how to format, type in as much information as you can, and highlight the entries so you can return to them later.

Formatting Reference Entries for Different Source Types

As is the case for in-text citations, formatting reference entries becomes more complicated when you are citing a source with multiple authors, citing various types of online media, or citing sources for which you must provide additional information beyond the basics listed in the general guidelines. The following guidelines show how to format reference entries for these different situations.

Print Sources: Books

For book-length sources and shorter works that appear in a book, follow the guidelines that best describes your source.

A Book by Two or More Authors

List the authors' names in the order they appear on the book's title page. Use an ampersand before the last author's name.

Campbell, D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

An Edited Book with No Author

List the editor or editors' names in place of the author's name, followed by *Ed.* or *Eds.* in parentheses.

Myers, C., & Reamer, D. (Eds.). (2009). *2009 nutrition index*. San Francisco, CA: HealthSource, Inc.

An Edited Book with an Author

List the author's name first, followed by the title and the editor or editors. Note that when the editor is listed after the title, you list the initials before the last name.

Capitalize "Ed." when
the abbreviation
refers to an editor.

Dickinson, E. (1959). *Selected poems & letters of Emily Dickinson*. R. N. Linscott (Ed.).
Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Tip

The previous example shows the format used for an edited book with one author—for instance, a collection of a famous person's letters that has been edited. This type of source is different from an anthology, which is a collection of articles or essays by different authors. For citing works in anthologies, see the guidelines later in this section.

A Translated Book

Include the translator's name after the title, and at the end of the citation, list the date the original work was published. Note that for the translator's name, you list the initials before the last name.

Freud, S. (1965). *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis* (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton. (Original work published 1933).

A Book Published in Multiple Editions

If you are using any edition other than the first edition, include the edition number in parentheses after the title.

Do not capitalize "ed" when the abbreviation refers to an edition of a book.

Berk, L. (2001). *Development through the lifespan* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

A Chapter in an Edited Book

List the name of the author(s) who wrote the chapter, followed by the chapter title. Then list the names of the book editor(s) and the title of the book, followed by the page numbers for the chapter and the usual information about the book's publisher.

Hughes, J. R., & Pierattini, R. A. (1992). An introduction to pharmacotherapy for mental disorders. In J. Grabowski & G. VandenBos (Eds.), *Psychopharmacology* (pp. 97–125). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Include the abbreviation "pp." when listing the pages where a chapter or article appears in a book.

A Work That Appears in an Anthology

Follow the same process you would use to cite a book chapter, substituting the article or essay title for the chapter title.

Beck, A. T., & Young, J. (1986). College blues. In D. Goleman & D. Heller (Eds.), *The pleasures of psychology* (pp. 309–323). New York, NY: New American Library.

Include the abbreviation "pp." when listing the pages where a chapter or article appears in a book.

An Article in a Reference Book

List the author's name if available; if no author is listed, provide the title of the entry where the author's name would normally be listed. If the book lists the name of the editor(s), include it in your citation. Indicate the volume number (if applicable) and page numbers in parentheses after the article title.

The census. (2006). In J. W. Wright (Ed.), *The New York Times 2006 almanac* (pp. 268–275). New York, NY: Penguin.

Capitalize proper nouns that appear in a book title.

Two or More Books by the Same Author

List the entries in order of their publication year, beginning with the work published first.

- Swedan, N. (2001). *Women's sports medicine and rehabilitation*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers.
- Swedan, N. (2003). *The active woman's health and fitness handbook*. New York, NY: Perigee.

If two books have multiple authors, and the first author is the same but the others are different, alphabetize by the second author's last name (or the third or fourth, if necessary).

- Carroll, D., & Aaronson, F. (2008). *Managing type II diabetes*. Chicago, IL: Southwick Press.
- Carroll, D., & Zuckerman, N. (2008). *Gestational diabetes*. Chicago, IL: Southwick Press.

Books by Different Authors with the Same Last Name

Alphabetize entries by the authors' first initial.

Smith, I. K. (2008). *The 4-day diet*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Capitalize the first word of a subtitle.

Smith, S. (2008). *The complete guide to Navy Seal fitness: Updated for today's warrior elite* (3rd ed.). Long Island City, NY: Hatherleigh Press.

A Book Authored by an Organization

Treat the organization name as you would an author's name. For the purposes of alphabetizing, ignore words like *The* in the organization's name. (That is, a book published by the American Heart Association would be listed with other entries whose authors' names begin with A.)

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders DSM-IV* (4th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

A Book-Length Report

Format technical and research reports as you would format other book-length sources. If the organization that issued the report assigned it a number, include the number in parentheses after the title. (See also the guidelines provided for citing works produced by government agencies.)

Jameson, R., & Dewey, J. (2009). *Preliminary findings from an evaluation of the president's physical fitness program in Pleasantville school district*. Pleasantville, WA: Pleasantville Board of Education.

A Book Authored by a Government Agency

Treat these as you would a book published by a nongovernment organization, but be aware that these works may have an identification number listed. If so, include it in parentheses after the publication year.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *The decennial censuses from 1790 to 2000* (Publication No. POL/02-MA). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Offices.

? Exercise 6.3.2

Revisit the references section you began to compile in Exercise 1. Use the guidelines provided to format any entries for book-length print sources that you were unable to finish earlier.

Review how Jorge formatted these book-length print sources:

Atkins, R. C. (2002). *Dr. Atkins' diet revolution*. New York, NY: M. Evans and Company.

Agatson, A. (2003). *The South Beach diet*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.

Print Sources: Periodicals

An Article in a Scholarly Journal

Include the following information:

- Author or authors' names
- Publication year
- Article title (in sentence case, without quotation marks or italics)
- Journal title (in title case and in italics)
- Volume number (in italics)
- Issue number (in parentheses)

- Page number(s) where the article appears

DeMarco, R. F. (2010). Palliative care and African American women living with HIV. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 49(5), 1–4.

An Article in a Journal Paginated by Volume

In these types of journals, page numbers for one volume continue across all the issues in that volume. For instance, the winter issue may begin with page 1, and in the spring issue that follows, the page numbers pick up where the previous issue left off. (If you have ever wondered why a print journal did not begin on page 1, or wondered why the page numbers of a journal extend into four digits, this is why.) Omit the issue number from your reference entry.

Wagner, J. (2009). Rethinking school lunches: A review of recent literature. *American School Nurses' Journal*, 47, 1123–1127.

An Abstract of a Scholarly Article

At times you may need to cite an abstract—the summary that appears at the beginning—of a published article. If you are citing the abstract only, and it was published separately from the article, provide the following information:

- Publication information for the article
- Information about where the abstract was published (for instance, another journal or a collection of abstracts)

Use this format for abstracts published in a collection of abstracts.



Romano, S. (2005). Parental involvement in raising standardized test scores. [Abstract].
Elementary Education Abstracts, 19, 36.

Use this format for abstracts published in another journal.



Simpson, M. J. (2008). Assessing educational progress: Beyond standardized testing.
Journal of the Association for School Administrative Professionals, 35(4), 32–40.
Abstract obtained from *Assessment in Education*, 2009, 73(6), Abstract No. 537892.

A Journal Article with Two to Seven Authors

List all the authors' names in the order they appear in the article. Use an ampersand before the last name listed.

- Barker, E. T., & Bornstein, M. H. (2010). Global self-esteem, appearance satisfaction, and self-reported dieting in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 30(2), 205–224.
- Tremblay, M. S., Shields, M., Laviolette, M., Craig, C. L., Janssen, I., & Gorber, S. C. (2010). Fitness of Canadian children and youth: Results from the 2007–2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. *Health Reports*, 21(1), 7–20.

A Journal Article with More Than Seven Authors

List the first six authors' names, followed by a comma, an ellipsis, and the name of the last author listed. The article in the following example has sixteen listed authors; the reference entry lists the first six authors and the sixteenth, omitting the seventh through the fifteenth.

Straznicky, N. E., Lambert, E. A., Nestel, P. J., McGrane, M. T., Dawood, T., Schlaich, M. P., ... Lambert, G. W. (2010). Sympathetic neural adaptation to hypocaloric diet with or without exercise training in obese metabolic syndrome subjects. *Diabetes*, 59(1), 71–79.

Because some names are omitted, use a comma and an ellipsis, rather than an ampersand, before the final name listed.

✓ Writing at Work

The idea of an eight-page article with sixteen authors may seem strange to you—especially if you are in the midst of writing a ten-page research paper on your own. More often than not, articles in scholarly journals list multiple authors. Sometimes, the authors actually did collaborate on writing and editing the published article. In other instances, some of the authors listed may have contributed to the research in some way while being only minimally involved in the process of writing the article. Whenever you collaborate with colleagues to produce a written product, follow your profession’s conventions for giving everyone proper credit for their contribution.

A Magazine Article

After the publication year, list the issue date. Otherwise, treat these as you would journal articles. List the volume and issue number if both are available.

List the month after the year. For weekly magazines, list the full date, e.g. "March 8, 2010"

Marano, H. E. (2010, March/April). Keen cuisine: Dairy queen. *Psychology Today*, 43(2), 58.

A Newspaper Article

Treat these as you would magazine and journal articles, with one important difference: precede the page number(s) with the abbreviation *p.* (for a single-page article) or *pp.* (for a multipage article). For articles whose pagination is not continuous, list all the pages included in the article. For example, an article that begins on page A1 and continues on pages A4 would have the page reference A1, A4. An article that begins on page A1 and continues on pages A4 and A5 would have the page reference A1, A4–A5.

Corwin, C. (2009, January 24). School board votes to remove soda machines from county schools. *Rockwood Gazette*, pp. A1–A2. ←

Include the section in your page reference.

A Letter to the Editor

After the title, indicate in brackets that the work is a letter to the editor.

Jones, J. (2009, January 31). Food police in our schools [Letter to the editor]. *Rockwood Gazette*, p. A8.

A Review

After the title, indicate in brackets that the work is a review and state the name of the work being reviewed. (Note that even if the title of the review is the same as the title of the book being reviewed, as in the following example, you should treat it as an article title. Do not italicize it.)

Penhollow, T. M., & Jackson, M.A. (2009). Drug abuse: Concepts, prevention, and cessation [Review of the book *Drug abuse: Concepts, prevention, and cessation*]. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 33(5), 620–622.

↑
Italicize the title of the reviewed book only where it appears in brackets.

? Exercise 6.3.3

Revisit the references section you began to compile in Exercise 1. Use the guidelines provided above to format any entries for periodicals and other shorter print sources that you were unable to finish earlier.

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6.4: Creating a References Section (Part 2)

Electronic Sources

Citing Articles from Online Periodicals: URLs and Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs)

Whenever you cite online sources, it is important to provide the most up-to-date information available to help readers locate the source. In some cases, this means providing an article's URL, or web address. (The letters *URL* stand for uniform resource locator.) Always provide the most complete URL possible. Provide a link to the specific article used, rather than a link to the publication's homepage.

As you know, web addresses are not always stable. If a website is updated or reorganized, the article you accessed in April may move to a different location in May. The URL you provided may become a dead link. For this reason, many online periodicals, especially scholarly publications, now rely on DOIs rather than URLs to keep track of articles.

A DOI is a Digital Object Identifier—an identification code provided for some online documents, typically articles in scholarly journals. Like a URL, its purpose is to help readers locate an article. However, a DOI is more stable than a URL, so it makes sense to include it in your reference entry when possible. Follow these guidelines:

- If you are citing an online article with a DOI, list the DOI at the end of the reference entry.
- If the article appears in print as well as online, you do not need to provide the URL. However, include the words *Electronic version* after the title in brackets.
- In other respects, treat the article as you would a print article. Include the volume number and issue number if available. (Note, however, that these may not be available for some online periodicals).

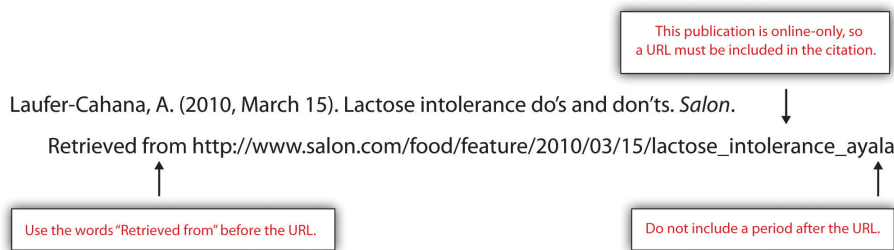
An Article from an Online Periodical with a DOI

List the DOI if one is provided. There is no need to include the URL if you have listed the DOI.

Bell, J. R. (2006). Low-carb beats low-fat diet for early losses but not long term. *OBGYN News*, 41(12), 32. doi:10.1016/S0029-7437(06)71905-X

An Article from an Online Periodical with No DOI

List the URL. Include the volume and issue number for the periodical if this information is available. (For some online periodicals, it may not be.)



Note that if the article appears in a print version of the publication, you do not need to list the URL, but do indicate that you accessed the electronic version.

Robbins, K. (2010, March/April). Nature's bounty: A heady feast [Electronic version]. *Psychology Today*, 43(2), 58.

A Newspaper Article

Provide the URL of the article.

McNeil, D. G. (2010, May 3). Maternal health: A new study challenges benefits of vitamin A for women and babies. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/he...tml?ref=health

An Article Accessed through a Database

Cite these articles as you would normally cite a print article. Provide database information only if the article is difficult to locate.

Tip

APA style does not require writers to provide the item number or accession number for articles retrieved from databases. You may choose to do so if the article is difficult to locate or the database is an obscure one. Check with your professor to see if this is something he or she would like you to include.

An Abstract of an Article

Format these as you would an article citation, but add the word *Abstract* in brackets after the title.

Bradley, U., Spence, M., Courtney, C. H., McKinley, M. C., Ennis, C. N., McCance, D. R....Hunter, S. J. (2009). Low-fat versus low-carbohydrate weight reduction diets: Effects on weight loss, insulin resistance, and cardiovascular risk: A randomized control trial [Abstract]. *Diabetes*, 58(12), 2741–2748. diabetes.diabetesjournals.org...00098.abstract

A Nonperiodical Web Document

The ways you cite different nonperiodical web documents may vary slightly from source to source, depending on the information that is available. In your citation, include as much of the following information as you can:

- Name of the author(s), whether an individual or organization
- Date of publication (Use *n.d.* if no date is available.)
- Title of the document
- Address where you retrieved the document

If the document consists of more than one web page within the site, link to the homepage or the entry page for the document.

American Heart Association. (2010). *Heart attack, stroke, and cardiac arrest warning signs*. Retrieved from <http://www.americanheart.org/present...dentifier=3053>

An Entry from an Online Encyclopedia or Dictionary

Because these sources often do not include authors' names, you may list the title of the entry at the beginning of the citation. Provide the URL for the specific entry.

Addiction. (n.d.) In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/addiction>

Data Sets

If you cite raw data compiled by an organization, such as statistical data, provide the URL where you retrieved the information. Provide the name of the organization that sponsors the site.

US Food and Drug Administration. (2009). *Nationwide evaluation of X-ray trends: NEXT surveys performed* [Data file]. Retrieved from www.fda.gov/Radiation-Emittin...EvaluationofX-RayTrendsNEXT/ucm116508.htm

Graphic Data

When citing graphic data—such as maps, pie charts, bar graphs, and so on—include the name of the organization that compiled the information, along with the publication date. Briefly describe the contents in brackets. Provide the URL where you retrieved the information. (If the graphic is associated with a specific project or document, list it after your bracketed description of the contents.)

US Food and Drug Administration. (2009). [Pie charts showing the percentage breakdown of the FDA's budget for fiscal year 2005]. *2005 FDA budget summary*. Retrieved from [mhttp://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/Reports.../ucm117231.htm](http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/Reports.../ucm117231.htm)

An Online Interview (Audio File or Transcript)

List the interviewer, interviewee, and date. After the title, include bracketed text describing the interview as an “Interview transcript” or “Interview audio file,” depending on the format of the interview you accessed. List the name of the website and the URL where you retrieved the information. Use the following format.

Davies, D. (Interviewer), & Pollan, M. (Interviewee). (2008). *Michael Pollan offers president food for thought* [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from National Public Radio website: www.npr.org/templates/transcr...ryId=100755362

An Electronic Book

Electronic books may include books available as text files online or audiobooks. If an electronic book is easily available in print, cite it as you would a print source. If it is unavailable in print (or extremely difficult to find), use the format in the example. (Use the words *Available from* in your citation if the book must be purchased or is not available directly.)

Chisholm, L. (n.d.). *Celtic tales*. Retrieved from http://www.childrenslibrary.org/icdl/BookReader?bookid=chicelt_00150014&twoPage=false&route=text&size=0&fullscreen=false&pnum1=1&lang=English&ilang=English

A Chapter from an Online Book or a Chapter or Section of a Web Document

These are treated similarly to their print counterparts with the addition of retrieval information. Include the chapter or section number in parentheses after the book title.

Hart, A. M. (1895). Restoratives—Coffee, cocoa, chocolate. In *Diet in sickness and in health* (VI). Retrieved from www.archive.org/details/dieti...ssin00hartrich

A Dissertation or Thesis from a Database

Provide the author, date of publication, title, and retrieval information. If the work is numbered within the database, include the number in parentheses at the end of the citation.

Italicize the titles of theses and dissertations.



Coleman, M. D. (2004). *Effect of a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet on bone mineral density, biomarkers of bone turnover, and calcium metabolism in healthy premenopausal females*. Retrieved from Virginia Tech Digital Library & Archives: Electronic Theses and Dissertations. (etd-07282004-174858)

Computer Software

For commonly used office software and programming languages, it is not necessary to provide a citation. Cite software only when you are using a specialized program, such as the nutrition tracking software in the following example. If you download software from a website, provide the version and the year if available.

Internet Brands, Inc. (2009). FitDay PC (Version 2) [Software]. Available from www.fitday.com/Pc/PcHome.html?gcid=14

A Post on a Blog or Video Blog

Citation guidelines for these sources are similar to those used for discussion forum postings. Briefly describe the type of source in brackets after the title.

Do not italicize the titles of blog or video blog postings.



Fazio, M. (2010, April 5). Exercising in my eighth month of pregnancy [Web log comment]. Retrieved from <http://somanyposts.com/~faziom/postID=67>

✓ writing at work

Because the content may not be carefully reviewed for accuracy, discussion forums and blogs should not be relied upon as a major source of information. However, it may be appropriate to cite these sources for some types of research. You may also participate in discussion forums or comment on blogs that address topics of personal or professional interest. Always keep in mind that when you post, you are making your thoughts public—and in many cases, available through search engines. Make sure any posts that can easily be associated with your name are appropriately professional, because a potential employer could view them.

A Television or Radio Broadcast

Include the name of the producer or executive producer; the date, title, and type of broadcast; and the associated company and location.

West, Ty. (Executive producer). (2009, September 24). *PBS special report: Health care reform* [Television broadcast]. New York, NY, and Washington, DC: Public Broadcasting Service.

A Television or Radio Series or Episode

Include the producer and the type of series if you are citing an entire television or radio series.

Couture, D., Nabors, S., Pinkard, S., Robertson, N., & Smith, J. (Producers). (1979). *The Diane Rehm show* [Radio series]. Washington, DC: National Public Radio.

To cite a specific episode of a radio or television series, list the name of the writer or writers (if available), the date the episode aired, its title, and the type of series, along with general information about the series.

Bernanke, J., & Wade, C. (2010, January 10). Hummingbirds: Magic in the air [Television series episode]. In F. Kaufman (Executive producer), *Nature*. New York, NY: WNET.

A Motion Picture

Name the director or producer (or both), year of release, title, country of origin, and studio.

Spurlock, M. (Director/producer), Morley, J. (Executive producer), & Winters, H. M. (Executive producer). (2004). *Super size me*. United States: Kathbur Pictures in association with Studio on Hudson.

A Recording

Name the primary contributors and list their role. Include the recording medium in brackets after the title. Then list the location and the label.

- Smith, L. W. (Speaker). (1999). *Meditation and relaxation* [CD]. New York, NY: Earth, Wind, & Sky Productions.
- Székely, I. (Pianist), Budapest Symphony Orchestra (Performers), & Németh, G. (Conductor). (1988). *Chopin piano concertos no. 1 and 2* [CD]. Hong Kong: Naxos.

A Podcast

Provide as much information as possible about the writer, director, and producer; the date the podcast aired; its title; any organization or series with which it is associated; and where you retrieved the podcast.

Kelsey, A. R. (Writer), Garcia, J. (Director), & Kim, S. C. (Producer). (2010, May 7). Lies food labels tell us. *Savvy consumer podcasts* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from www.savvyconsumer.org/podcasts/050710

? Exercise 6.4.4

Revisit the references section you began to compile in Exercise 1.

1. Use the APA guidelines provided in this section to format any entries for electronic sources that you were unable to finish earlier.
2. If your sources include a form of media not covered in the APA guidelines here, consult with a writing tutor or review a print or online reference book. You may wish to visit the website of the American Psychological Association at <http://www.apa.org> or the Purdue University Online Writing lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>, which regularly updates its online style guidelines.
3. Give your paper a final edit to check the references section.

Key Takeaways

In APA papers, entries in the references section include as much of the following information as possible:

- **Print sources.** Author(s), date of publication, title, publisher, page numbers (for shorter works), editors (if applicable), and periodical title (if applicable).
- **Online sources (text-based).** Author(s), date of publication, title, publisher or sponsoring organization, and DOI or URL (if applicable).
- **Electronic sources (non-text-based).** Provide details about the creator(s) of the work, title, associated company or series, and date the work was produced or broadcast. The specific details provided will vary depending on the medium and the information that is available.
- **Electronic sources (text-based).** If an electronic source is also widely available in print form, it is sometimes unnecessary to provide details about how to access the electronic version. Check the guidelines for the specific source type.

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6.5: Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Style

Learning Objectives

- Identify the major components of a research paper written using MLA style.
- Apply general Modern Language Association (MLA) style and formatting conventions in a research paper.

We have addressed American Psychological Association (APA) style, as well as the importance of giving credit where credit is due, so now let's turn our attention to the formatting and citation style of the Modern Language Association, known as MLA style.

MLA style is often used in the liberal arts and humanities. Like APA style, it provides a uniform framework for consistency across a document in several areas. MLA style provides a format for the manuscript text and parenthetical citations, or in-text citations. It also provides the framework for the works cited area for references at the end of the essay. MLA style emphasizes brevity and clarity. As a student writer, it is to your advantage to be familiar with both major styles, and this section will outline the main points of MLA as well as offer specific examples of commonly used references. Remember that your writing represents you in your absence. The correct use of a citation style demonstrates your attention to detail and ability to produce a scholarly work in an acceptable style, and it can help prevent the appearance or accusations of plagiarism.

If you are taking an English, art history, or music appreciation class, chances are that you will be asked to write an essay in MLA format. One common question goes something like “What’s the difference?” referring to APA and MLA style, and it deserves our consideration. The liberal arts and humanities often reflect works of creativity that come from individual and group effort, but they may adapt, change, or build on previous creative works. The inspiration to create something new, from a song to a music video, may contain elements of previous works. Drawing on your fellow artists and authors is part of the creative process, and so is giving credit where credit is due.

A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be aware of the works that you used to create it. Readers want to examine your sources to see if you know your subject, to see if you missed anything, or if you offer anything new and interesting. Your new or up-to-date sources may offer the reader additional insight on the subject being considered. It also demonstrates that you, as the author, are up-to-date on what is happening in the field or on the subject. Giving credit where it is due enhances your credibility, and the MLA style offers a clear format to use.

Uncredited work that is incorporated into your own writing is considered plagiarism. In the professional world, plagiarism results in loss of credibility and often compensation, including future opportunities. In a classroom setting, plagiarism results in a range of sanctions, from loss of a grade to expulsion from a school or university. In both professional and academic settings, the penalties are severe. MLA offers artists and authors a systematic style of reference, again giving credit where credit is due, to protect MLA users from accusations of plagiarism.

MLA style uses a citation in the body of the essay that links to the works cited page at the end. The in-text citation is offset with parentheses, clearly calling attention to itself for the reader. The reference to the author or title is like a signal to the reader that information was incorporated from a separate source. It also provides the reader with information to then turn to the works cited section of your essay (at the end) where they can find the complete reference. If you follow the MLA style, and indicate your source both in your essay and in the works cited section, you will prevent the possibility of plagiarism. If you follow the MLA guidelines, pay attention to detail, and clearly indicate your sources, then this approach to formatting and citation offers a proven way to demonstrate your respect for other authors and artists.

Five Reasons to Use MLA Style

1. To demonstrate your ability to present a professional, academic essay in the correct style
2. To gain credibility and authenticity for your work
3. To enhance the ability of the reader to locate information discussed in your essay
4. To give credit where credit is due and prevent plagiarism
5. To get a good grade or demonstrate excellence in your writing

Before we transition to specifics, please consider one word of caution: consistency. If you are instructed to use the MLA style and need to indicate a date, you have options. For example, you could use an international or a US style:

- **International style:** 18 May 1980 (day/month/year)
- **US style:** May 18, 1980 (month/day/year)

If you are going to the US style, be consistent in its use. You'll find you have the option on page 83 of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition. You have many options when writing in English as the language itself has several conventions, or acceptable ways of writing particular parts of speech or information. For example, on the next page our *MLA Handbook* addresses the question:

Which convention is preferred in MLA style:

twentieth century
Twentieth Century
20th century
20th Century

You are welcome to look in the *MLA Handbook* and see there is one preferred style or convention (you will also find the answer at end of this section marked by an asterisk [*]). Now you may say to yourself that you won't write that term and it may be true, but you will come to a term or word that has more than one way it can be written. In that case, what convention is acceptable in MLA style? This is where the *MLA Handbook* serves as an invaluable resource. Again, your attention to detail and the professional presentation of your work are aspects of learning to write in an academic setting.

Now let's transition from a general discussion on the advantages of MLA style to what we are required to do to write a standard academic essay. We will first examine a general "to do" list, then review a few "do not" suggestions, and finally take a tour through a sample of MLA features. Links to sample MLA papers are located at the end of this section.

General MLA List

1. Use standard white paper (8.5 × 11 inches).
2. Double space the essay and quotes.
3. Use Times New Roman 12-point font.
4. Use one-inch margins on all sides
5. Indent paragraphs (five spaces or 1.5 inches).
6. Include consecutive page numbers in the upper-right corner.
7. Use italics to indicate a title, as in *Writing for Success*.
8. On the first page, place your name, course, date, and instructor's name in the upper-left corner.
9. On the first page, place the title centered on the page, with no bold or italics and all words capitalized.
10. On all pages, place the header, student's name + one space + page number, 1.5 inches from the top, aligned on the right.

Tip

Depending on your field of study, you may sometimes write research papers in either APA or MLA style. Recognize that each has its advantages and preferred use in fields and disciplines. Learn to write and reference in both styles with proficiency.

Title Block Format

You never get a second chance to make a first impression, and your title block (not a separate title page; just a section at the top of the first page) makes an impression on the reader. If correctly formatted with each element of information in its proper place, form, and format, it says to the reader that you mean business, that you are a professional, and that you take your work seriously, so it should, in turn, be seriously considered. Your title block in MLA style contributes to your credibility. Remember that your writing represents you in your absence, and the title block is the tailored suit or outfit that represents you best. That said, sometimes a separate title page is necessary, but it is best both to know how to properly format a title block or page in MLA style and to ask your instructor if it is included as part of the assignment.

Your name
Instructor
Course number
Date
Title of Paper

Paragraphs and Indentation

Make sure you indent five spaces (from the left margin). You'll see that the indent offsets the beginning of a new paragraph. We use paragraphs to express single ideas or topics that reinforce our central purpose or thesis statement. Paragraphs include topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusion or transitional sentences that link paragraphs together to support the main focus of the essay.

Tables and Illustrations

Place tables and illustrations as close as possible to the text they reinforce or complement. Here's an example of a table in MLA.

Table 13.2

Sales Figures by Year	Sales Amount (\$)
2007	100,000
2008	125,000
2009	185,000
2010	215,000

As we can see in Table 13.2, we have experienced significant growth since 2008.

This example demonstrates that the words that you write and the tables, figures, illustrations, or images that you include should be next to each other in your paper.

Parenthetical Citations

You must cite your sources as you use them. In the same way that a table or figure should be located right next to the sentence that discusses it (see the previous example), parenthetical citations, or citations enclosed in parenthesis that appear in the text, are required. You need to cite all your information. If someone else wrote it, said it, drew it, demonstrated it, or otherwise expressed it, you need to cite it. The exception to this statement is common, widespread knowledge. For example, if you search online for MLA resources, and specifically MLA sample papers, you will find many similar discussions on MLA style. MLA is a style and cannot be copyrighted because it is a style, but the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* can be copyright protected. If you reference a specific page in that handbook, you need to indicate it. If you write about a general MLA style issue that is commonly covered or addressed in multiple sources, you do not. When in doubt, reference the specific resource you used to write your essay.

Your in-text, or parenthetical, citations should do the following:

- Clearly indicate the specific sources also referenced in the works cited
- Specifically identify the location of the information that you used
- Keep the citation clear and concise, always confirming its accuracy

Works Cited Page

After the body of your paper comes the works cited page. It features the reference sources used in your essay. List the sources alphabetically by last name, or list them by title if the author is not known as is often the case of web-based articles. You will find links to examples of the works cited page in several of the sample MLA essays at the end of this section.

As a point of reference and comparison to our APA examples, let's examine the following three citations and the order of the information needed.

Citation Type	MLA Style	APA Style
Website	Author's Last Name, First Name. Title of the website. Publication Date. Name of Organization (if applicable). Date you accessed the website. <URL>.	Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Date of publication). Title of document. Retrieved from URL

Note: The items listed include proper punctuation and capitalization according to the style's guidelines.

Citation Type	MLA Style	APA Style
Online article	Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." Title of the website. Date of publication. Organization that provides the website. Date you accessed the website.	Author's Last name, First Initial. (Date of publication). Title of article. <i>Title of Journal, Volume</i> (Issue). Retrieved from URL
Book	Author's Last Name, First Name. <i>Title of the Book</i> . Place of Publication: Publishing Company, Date of publication.	Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Date of publication). <i>Title of the book</i> . Place of Publication: Publishing Company.

Note: The items listed include proper punctuation and capitalization according to the style's guidelines.

? Exercise 6.5.1

In [Section 13.1](#), you created a sample essay in APA style. After reviewing this section and exploring the resources linked at the end of the section (including California State University–Sacramento's clear example of a paper in MLA format), please convert your paper to MLA style using the formatting and citation guidelines. You may find it helpful to use online applications that quickly, easily, and at no cost convert your citations to MLA format.

? Exercise 6.5.2

Please convert the APA-style citations to MLA style. You may find that online applications can quickly, easily, and at no cost convert your citations to MLA format. There are several websites and applications available free (or as a free trial) that will allow you to input the information and will produce a correct citation in the style of your choice. Consider these two sites:

- <http://www.noodletools.com>
- <http://citationmachine.net>

Hint: You may need access to the Internet to find any missing information required to correctly cite in MLA style. This demonstrates an important difference between APA and MLA style—the information provided to the reader.

Sample Student Reference List in APA Style	
1	Brent, D. A., Poling, K. D., & Goldstein, T. R. (2010). <i>Treating depressed and suicidal adolescents: A clinician's guide</i> . New York, NY: Guilford Press.
MLA	
2	Dewan, S. (2007, September 17). Using crayons to exorcise Katrina. <i>The New York Times</i> . Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/ar...gn/17ther.html
MLA	
3	Freud, S. (1955). Beyond the pleasure principle. In <i>The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud</i> . (Vol. XVII, pp. 3–66). London, England: Hogarth.
MLA	
4	Henley, D. (2007). Naming the enemy: An art therapy intervention for children with bipolar and comorbid disorders. <i>Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association</i> , 24(3), 104–110.
MLA	

Sample Student Reference List in APA Style

5	Hutson, M. (2008). Art therapy: The healing arts. <i>Psychology Today</i> . Retrieved from www.psychologytoday.com/artic...e-healing-arts
MLA	
6	Isis, P. D., Bus, J., Siegel, C. A., & Ventura, Y. (2010). Empowering students through creativity: Art therapy in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. <i>Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association</i> , 27(2), 56–61.
MLA	
7	Johnson, D. (1987). The role of the creative arts therapies in the diagnosis and treatment of psychological trauma. <i>The Arts in Psychotherapy</i> , 14, 7–13.
MLA	
8	Malchiodi, C. (2006). <i>Art therapy sourcebook</i> . New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
MLA	
9	Markel, R. (Producer). (2010). <i>I'm an artist</i> [Motion picture]. United States: Red Pepper Films.
MLA	
10	Kelley, S. J. (1984). The use of art therapy with sexually abused children. <i>Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health</i> , 22(12), 12–28.
MLA	
11	Pifalo, T. (2008). Why art therapy? <i>Darkness to light: Confronting child abuse with courage</i> . Retrieved from www.darkness2light.org/KnowAb...rt_therapy.asp
MLA	
12	Rubin, J. A. (2005). <i>Child art therapy</i> (25th ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.
MLA	
13	Schimek, J. (1975). A critical re-examination of Freud's concept of unconscious mental representation. <i>International Review of Psychoanalysis</i> , 2, 171–187.
MLA	
14	Strauss, M. B. (1999). <i>No talk therapy for children and adolescents</i> . New York, NY: Norton.
MLA	
15	Thompson, T. (2008). <i>Freedom from meltdowns: Dr. Thompson's solutions for children with autism</i> . Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
MLA	

Useful Sources of Examples of MLA Style

- Arizona State University Libraries offers an excellent resource with clear examples.
 - <http://libguides.asu.edu/content.php...97&sid=1132964>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab includes sample pages and works cited.
 - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01>
- California State University–Sacramento’s Online Writing Lab has an excellent visual description and example of an MLA paper.
 - www.csus.edu/owl/index/mla/mla_format.htm
- SUNY offers an excellent, brief, side-by-side comparison of MLA and APA citations.
 - www.sunywcc.edu/LIBRARY/resea...A_08.03.10.pdf
- Cornell University Library provides comprehensive MLA information on its Citation Management website.
 - <http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla>
- The University of Kansas Writing Center is an excellent resource.
 - www.writing.ku.edu/guides

* (a) is the correct answer to the question at the beginning of this section. The *MLA Handbook* prefers “twentieth century.”

Key Takeaways

- MLA style is often used in the liberal arts and humanities.
- MLA style emphasizes brevity and clarity.
- A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be informed of the works you used to create it.
- MLA style uses a citation in the body of the essay that refers to the works cited section at the end.
- If you follow MLA style, and indicate your source both in your essay and in the works cited section, you will prevent the possibility of plagiarism.

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6.E: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting (Exercises)

1. In this chapter, you learned strategies for using APA and MLA style documentation and formatting in a research paper. Locate a source that uses APA or MLA style, such as an article in a professional journal in the sciences or social sciences. Identify these key components of an APA or MLA paper in your example: the abstract, section heads, in-text citations, and references list.

2. Check one of your assignments for correct APA or MLA formatting and citations. (You may wish to conduct this activity in two sessions—one to edit the body of the paper and one to edit the references section.) Check for the following:

- All components of an APA or MLA paper are included.
- The title page (or title block) and body of the paper are correctly formatted.
- In-text, or parenthetical, citations are complete and correctly formatted.
- Sources cited within the paper match the sources listed in the references or works cited section.
- The references or works cited section uses correct formatting and lists entries in alphabetical order.

3. As electronic media continually change, guidelines for citing electronic sources are continually updated. Identify three new or emerging forms of electronic media not listed in this text—for instance, virtual communities, such as Second Life, or social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and MySpace. Answer the following questions:

- Under what circumstances would this media be a useful source of information for a research paper? How might students use these sources to conduct research five or ten years from now?
- What information would a student need to provide if citing this source? Why?
- Develop brief guidelines for how to cite the emerging media source types you identified.

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Index

A

abstract

[4.5: Principles of Written Communication](#)

AP style

[6.1: Formatting a Research Paper](#)

Auxiliary messages

[2.2: Messages](#)

B

Bypassing

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

C

Casual language

[4.4: Style in Written Communication](#)

Cliché

[2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)

colloquial language

[4.4: Style in Written Communication](#)

critical thinking

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

D

Doublespeak

[2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)

E

ethos

[4.3: Good Writing](#)

Euphemism

[2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)

external communications

[4.4: Style in Written Communication](#)

F

Formal language

[4.4: Style in Written Communication](#)

I

internal communications

[4.4: Style in Written Communication](#)

J

Jargon

[2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)

L

language

[2.1: What is Language?](#)

libel

[4.5: Principles of Written Communication](#)

logo

[5.7: Sales Message](#)

logos

[4.3: Good Writing](#)

M

Memorandums

[5.2: Memorandums](#)

miscommunication

[2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)

N

netiquette

[5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette](#)

O

Oral communication

[4.1: Oral versus Written Communication](#)

P

paradigm

[2.3: Principles of Verbal Communication](#)

pathos

[4.3: Good Writing](#)

perception

[3.2: Perception](#)

Plagiarism

[4.5: Principles of Written Communication](#)

preunderstanding

[3.2: Perception](#)

Primary messages

[2.2: Messages](#)

R

Résumé

[5.6: Résumé & Cover Letter](#)

reflection

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

report

[5.5: Report](#)

S

Sales Message

[5.7: Sales Message](#)

Secondary messages

[2.2: Messages](#)

Slang

[2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication](#)

T

Text

[5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette](#)

W

Written Communication

[4.1: Oral versus Written Communication](#)

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 - [TitlePage - Undeclared](#)
 - [InfoPage - Undeclared](#)
 - [Table of Contents - Undeclared](#)
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 - [1.2: What Is Communication? - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.3: Communication in Context - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.4: Your Responsibilities as a Communicator - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.5: Additional Resources - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
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 - [2.1: What is Language? - Undeclared](#)
 - [2.2: Messages - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.3: Principles of Verbal Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.4: Language Can be an Obstacle to Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.5: Emphasis Strategies - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.6: Improving Verbal Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.7: Additional Resources - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3: Understanding Your Audience - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.2: Perception - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.3: Differences in Perception - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.4: Getting to Know Your Audience - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.5: Listening and Reading for Understanding - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.6: Additional Resources - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4: Effective Business Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.1: Oral versus Written Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.2: How Is Writing Learned? - Undeclared](#)
 - [4.3: Good Writing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.4: Style in Written Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.5: Principles of Written Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.6: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Written Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.7: Additional Resources - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5: Business Writing in Action - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.1: Text, E-mail, and Netiquette - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.2: Memorandums - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.3: Letters - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.4: Business Proposal - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.5: Report - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.6: Résumé & Cover Letter - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.7: Sales Message - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.8: Additional Resources - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6.E: APA and MLA Documentation and Formatting \(Exercises\) - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6.1: Formatting a Research Paper - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
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 - [6.3: Creating a References Section \(Part 1\) - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6.4: Creating a References Section \(Part 2\) - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6.5: Using Modern Language Association \(MLA\) Style - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Back Matter - Undeclared](#)
 - [Index - Undeclared](#)
 - [Glossary - Undeclared](#)

- [Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*](#)