

2.4.18: The Right Message

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the importance of writing a clear and focused message in business
- Differentiate between types for writing positive, negative, and persuasive messages

Most have heard the phrase “everything but the kitchen sink” which describes a situation in which almost nothing is left out. This phrase can easily be used when the intended communication has included far too much information. We live in a fast-paced world, so getting to the point is a valued time-saver. Having someone explain how to build a watch on the way to answering the question, “What time is it?” clearly demonstrates a speaker who has lost track of the primary purpose of the communication.

Here is an all-too-common example of the irritation and time that is lost in business communications when a purpose is not established.

Date: 7/2/17

To: Julie Johnson <jjohnson@buildathing.com>

From: Suri Tanaka <stanaka@goodhomesremodel.com>

Re: Remodel Project

Management is really pleased with the progress made on the remodel. There were four employee focus group meetings held and two meetings with the architects. Just last week, the architects brought back the layouts for the back offices and employee break room.

This new drawing included couches, kitchen facilities and many outlets to recharge electronics. Can you each provide some feedback on this design? With some of the ergonomic furniture choices, the project started to look like it would be exceeding the budget by 10 percent.

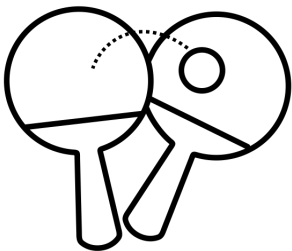
Management needs employee feedback on areas where some of the improvements could be delayed.

Best,

Suri

Judging from the first sentence of the message, this email is a report on the status of the remodel. It is easy to set this message aside if it is a busy day (or week!). Looking more closely, it becomes apparent this is not a status message, but a request for input. When creating business message the writer must narrow the communication and organize the communication to highlight the primary purpose. Let the receiver know what is expected of the him or her early in the message.

You may be asking, “What does purpose of a business communication mean?” The answer is that the primary purpose of every business communication is to deliver information clearly and efficiently. Clear communication ensures the receiver understands the intended message. Efficient communication ensures the message is communicated quickly without a lot of ping-ponging back and forth. For example, imagine someone sends out a message about the team meeting next week on Tuesday in the main conference room but forgets the time of the meeting. A flurry of messages then fly back and forth, filling everyone’s inboxes.



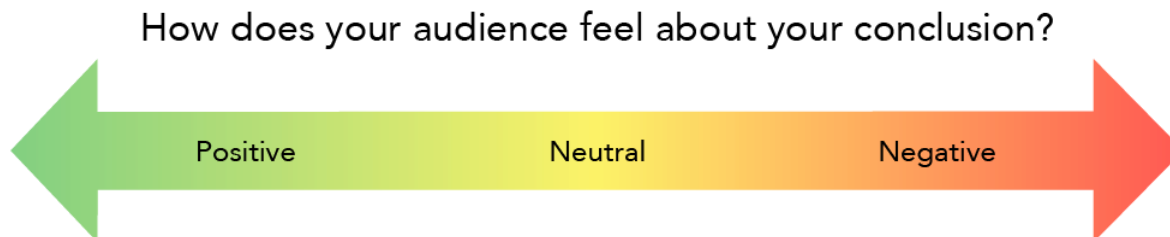
In a less obvious manner, this ping-pong of communications comes when the initial message invites a response but does not show consideration of the user because it omits needed background. “Management decided to hold the company picnic on Tuesday May 13 at the Southside park. Please bring....” This message generates a flurry of emails about “Who will be the back-up staying in the office?” and “What happens in case of rain?” It is likely the sender has the answers to all these questions but did not think about how the receiver(s) might need to know this as well.

In order to avoiding the ping-pong of communication you must ensure these two things:

- The sender's idea is clearly received by the audience
- The communication provides just what the receiver needs to know: not too much and not too little

Positive, Negative, and Persuasive Messages

All business messages fit across to two broad categories with an overlapping third category. There are communications where the receiver is expected to have a positive or neutral reaction, and there are communications about which receivers may have a more negative reaction. The image of the continuum below is focused on audience reaction to a message.



We'll discuss exactly how to write these messages later in this module when we discuss the three-part writing process. For now we'll focus on how to determine which type of message fits your audience.

Positive Messages

Positive messages include messages where the audience is expected to react in a neutral to positive manner. Positive messages tend to consist of routine or good news. These messages might be items such as congratulations, confirmations, directions, simple credit requests, or credit approvals. Also included in this category might be denials that are somewhat routine or expected. This could be something like a parking lot closure that inconveniences employees, but in a minor way. As strange as this sounds, sympathy messages are in this category as well. Sympathy messages are routine since they will not be a surprise to the receiver.

Consider the message to be a positive message structure when:

- The receiver likes or expects this news (product shipped on time)
- The receiver needs little education or background to understand the news (travel arrangement for the conference)
- The receiver considers the message routine, even if not completely positive (parking lot closed for three days for new striping)

Negative Messages

Negative messages include messages where the audience is expected to react in a negative manner. Negative messages consist of bad news. In these messages, the sender's goal is to convey the bad news in a manner that preserves the business relationship. While the sender must deliver bad news, the sender wants to avoid an employee quitting or a customer finding another vendor. These messages might be items such as refusal to provide a refund, cancellation of an event, inability to support an event and more.

Consider the message to be a negative communication when:

- The receiver may be displeased (cost for repair is the receiver's, not the utility company's)
- The receiver needs a little persuasion (new log-on procedure takes longer but is more secure)
- The receiver may be somewhat uncomfortable (new badging system underway because employees have been sharing badges)

Persuasive Messages

The third, overlapping category is persuasive messages. With this category, the audience is expected to need encouragement in order to act as the sender desires. In some cases, the receiver is more like a positive audience; for example, when you're asking for a recommendation letter or when you're inviting someone to attend an after-hours work function. In other cases, the receiver is more like a negative audience; for example, when you're requesting additional payment as a result of a shared error or when you're providing an extension to an impending due date.

Consider the message a persuasive communication when:

- The receiver may be reluctant (please speak to the new employee group)
- The receiver is being asked a favor (please write recommendation letter)

- The receiver may be invited to something somewhat outside regular duties (please supervise a new book club that will meet on campus after work)

? Practice Questions

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