

2.4.17: Audience

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of audience to business communication

The purpose of communication is to have the sender's idea in mind reach the receiver's mind with identical understanding.

Yet, communicating is not as simple and transparent as the image below suggests. Communication is surrounded by potential pitfalls and myriad opportunities for the main point to be lost or altered. Let's take a look at Figure 1 to see a diagram of a communication system.

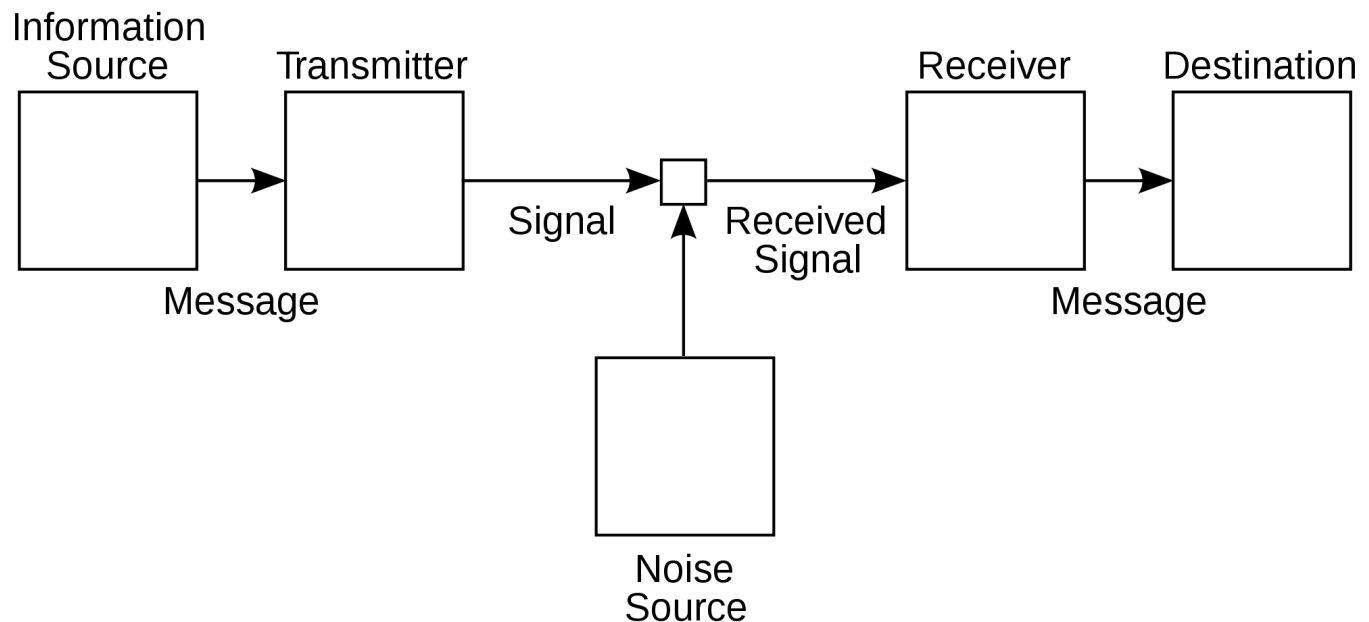


Figure 1. Shannon's diagram of a general communication system.

Perhaps you are surprised to realize there is more than one audience for a message. There is the primary audience or receiver of the communication: this is the direct audience, who we'll focus on in this module. In Module 6: Reports, we'll also discuss indirect or remote audiences; these others include those who may see the communication even if they are not intended as a target of the communication. In this module, the direct audience is the focus. A good communicator is mindful of the other potential audiences when they start writing since doing so can help advance the company and advance a career.

The direct audience is the receiver of the business communication. This person or group of people might be internal or external to the sender's organization. The relationship to the organization may impact the formality of the wording and the candor of the message. When new to business writing, be sure to check the tone with appropriate staff.

Tone varies based on the power relationship of the sender to the receiver. The audience may be in one of three power positions relative to the sender summarized by the labels **upward**, **downward**, or **horizontal** communication.

Downward and Upward Communication

Downward communication flows from the managerial and executive levels to the staff through formal channels such as policy manuals, rules and regulations and organizational charts. Upward communication is initiated by staff and directed at executives; it frequently takes the form of a complaint or a request. Horizontal communication occurs when colleagues meet to discuss issues of common interest, resolve problems and share information.

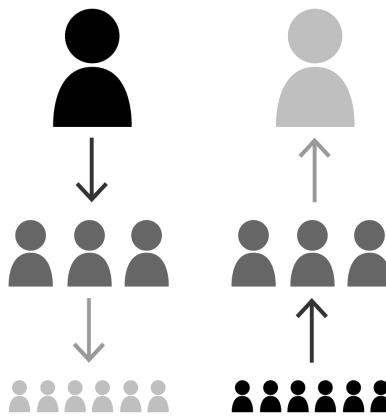


Figure 2. Upwards and downwards communication

Horizontal Communication

When the flow of information is from peers in an organizational level to one or more of similar rank it is called horizontal communication.

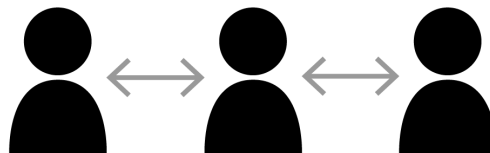


Figure 3. Horizontal communication

This form of communication helps employees express information and ideas as well as coordinating the organization's work.

✓ Talking across Different Levels

Direction and purpose	You should say . . .	You shouldn't say . . .	Why?
Upward communication: an employee emailing the boss to request a day off	"Mr Sanchez, may I have Friday off?"	"Mr Sanchez, I'm going to take Friday off. Ok?"	Deferential (formal title) and request rather than statement or demand
Downward communication: a manager emailing his work team to let them know he is off on Friday.	"Team, I'm out of the office Friday. Please hold any issues until Monday."	"Team, do you mind if I take Friday off?"	Tone of authority not permissive.
Horizontal communication: an employee letting co-workers know about an upcoming vacation day.	"Hi all. I'll be out on Friday. Can you handle anything that comes in or take a message for Monday?"	"I won't be in tomorrow."	Tone is peer to peer compared to the other samples. Be sure to include any information about potential coverage your peers may need to complete while you're gone.

Notice in each of the three sample messages that even in their few words, knowing the upward, downward or horizontal position of the receiver impacted the tone and phrasing of the message.

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