Professional Writing and Communications for Business

PROFESSIONAL WRITING AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Some of the oldest examples of writing, such as that found in the above clay tablet, are professional writing. Ancient Sumerians used these tablets to record inventories of produce and grains and client accounts. Since then, professional writing has evolved technologically even while the core functions—accounting, correspondence, and communicating information—have largely remained unchanged. The printing press, for example, allowed writers to distribute information to a wider audience which led to advertising as well as copyright laws (Osei-Hwere & Osei-Hwere).

Figure 1. Sumerian tablet containing inventory records. © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

Computational technologies have had seismic impacts on the craft of professional writing. Desktop publishing and word processing software promoted new skills in design and layout. The commercialization of the internet in the late 1990s and early 2000s created a need for writers versed in "search engine optimization" and HTML to populate the rapidly expanding digital landscape of the web. Harnessing the "World Wide Web" to achieve almost immediate delivery and reception, "electronic mail" quickly became the primary mode of professional communication.

It wasn't long before the smartphone, a powerful pocket-sized computer with similar multimedia capabilities, became the preferred computational device for many. Mobile devices and "short message service" (SMS) functions further increased the speed with which people may communicate. Social media benefited from the widespread adoption of mobile devices, empowering users to compose, create, and publish to the world with a few finger flicks.

Cloud-based services such as Microsoft's Office 365 and Google Workplace have also improved collaboration. These productivity platforms include all the tools needed to create slide decks, spreadsheets, and documents, as well as share them with coworkers without ever leaving your desk.

In the autumn of 2022, OpenAI released ChatGPT, a tool that automatically creates human-quality writing using simple requests. Since then, many platforms we already use, such as Google and Microsoft, have added generative text tools as functions. With minimal effort, a user can compose a professional-looking email response, report, and presentation slides.

Throughout this remarkable period of human innovation, professional writing has not only remained important but has emerged as one of the most high-demand skills by employers of all fields: even with the automation of everyday writing tasks, writers are still needed to review, edit, and "humanize" written content. Intrapersonal communications in the workplace still rely on archaic genres like memos and emails to function, yet today's professionals must also be comfortable with basic programming concepts, information visualization, social media, and other concepts that were once the domain of others.

Today's reality is that those "others" will likely be **YOU**. According to a recent report published by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2019), there are very few in-house professional writers. This means that accountants are now writing their own disengagement letters, wealth managers are responsible for writing out plans for clients, and managers write supply chain policies. Human resources personnel must demonstrate sharp writing skills and apply those to presentations, reports, and many other formats for various audiences. For marketers, stylistic writing is a crucial component in a skillset that includes multimedia asset management and analytical skills.

The business professional is—more than anything else—a professional writer.

It is precisely *because* writing is such a crucial skill that global corporations like Microsoft, Google, Apple, and others have poured billions into developing writing tools that help professionals write better. Spell-checkers and auto-complete functions, now built into writing services like Microsoft Word and Google Docs, have eliminated much (though not all!) of our worry over spelling and grammar. Other tools like Grammarly help us polish our writing to be as clear as possible. At the time of this writing, ChatGPT still has an uncertain impact on the professional realms.

Yet writing consistently remains *the* professional skill employers cite as one of the most sorely lacking workplace skills. In their 2022 report, "The State of Business Communication," Grammarly reported that a staggering $1.2 trillion is lost each year by American businesses because of poor communication (p. 4). Although we would be wise to dig deeper into these numbers (poor writing is Grammarly's bread and butter!), we would be hard-pressed to find a professional that doesn't agree with the sentiment. A survey conducted by business writer Josh Bernoff (2016) revealed that over 80% of respondents implicated poor writing as a key inefficiency (p. 18). According to Bernoff, the reasons for this could be boiled down to poor training, the elimination of professional editors from most workplaces, and the distractions that come with reading on screens.

Although we can't do away with screen-reading (this is a digital resource after all), we can certainly do our best to develop our writing and editing skills. Our focus here is on clear, concise, and precise writing that clearly communicates your message to the reader. Although writing for marketing can be more evocative and compelling, the principles are the same.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Professional Writing and Communications for Business is an open educational resource (OER) created to help prepare emerging business professionals and students to develop the writing skills currently in demand. Instead of a textbook or writing manual, this work focuses on fundamental professional writing concepts rather than language-level instruction.

One significant lack of *Professional Writing and Communications for Business*, for example, is the lack of guidance regarding grammar, syntax, sentence structure, and other finer points. There are several reasons for this:

- I lack the expertise in those skills to speak to them adequately.
- Two outstanding resources, *Professional Writing Today,* by Sam Schecter, and *Technical and Professional Writing Genres,* by Michael Beilfuss, Staci Bettes, and Katrina Peterson cover a lot of ground. Several chapters from each have been incorporated into this OER for the convenience of my colleagues. See the References page for further information.
- Many professionals (and students) use tools like Grammarly as well as the built-in functions of their writing tools.
- Many of these tools, particularly Google Docs and Microsoft Word, have implemented AI assistants that can offer suggestions when prompted. I have added a chapter to help exploit these tools for these purposes.

The ambition of this resource is to be a "living document" that is regularly maintained and revised to reflect technological and professional changes as they emerge.

Several key principles motivate the guidance offered in this work. I've found these principles to be important in the classroom but even more so in the workplace.

- **Writing is a technology.** No one is born knowing how to write and it is a tool that must be learned. It is also a tool that is rarely mastered. Even professional journalists, authors, and professors need editors to proofread, make suggestions, and share their points of view.
- **Writing is hard and requires practice.** Like any technology, it takes time to acquire basic skills in writing. It takes many more to reveal your writing "voice," and only a few of us would ever be considered masters of the craft.

In its current version (Spring 2025), this resource is designed to work with Writing Foundations courses at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB) or another college. The specific course this resource has been created for, Professional Writing for Business Majors, focuses on the writing skills sought by regional business leaders, UWGB colleagues, and the students participating in my courses.

This work was reviewed and copyedited by Kephren Pritchett through the generous support of the Cofrin Library.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Kristopher (Kris) Purzycki, and I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Although I've been a writing, media, and humanities instructor for over a decade, this work also draws from my experiences as a designer, visual artist, public communications officer, and multimedia creator.

Professional Writing and Communications for Business was created to address the questions and concerns of the students who have participated in my courses. Their feedback has also helped revise much of the content herein. In that spirit, please direct any questions, critiques, and suggestions to me at purzyckk@uwgb.edu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to all students with the sincerest hopes that they find personal and professional success in a world that feels much more uncertain than when I was on that side of the desk.

Professional Writing and Communications for Business was only possible because of the OER Program at UWGB. Special thanks go to the directors of that program, especially Kate Farley, whose patience, collaboration, and memes made the development of this project a joy.

Thanks also go out to Carli Reinecke, our OER Librarian, who has proven to be a dedicated advocate of open-access resources and an invaluable guide in forming this work.

A huge thanks goes out to Kephren Pritchett, who reviewed and copyedited the resource. Her work was generously supported by Carli Reinecke and Paula Ganyard, Cofrin Library Director.

Special thanks also go out to Dr. Jennie Young, who took a gamble by replacing the textbook for WF 200 with this project.

Thanks to Dr. Paul Belanger, whose course materials helped determine which subjects to focus on. Since this project began, we've begun redesigning WF 200 to be more adaptive to generative AI, and his guidance and contributions are peppered throughout (most significantly, the "four-eyed" model used to organize this resource.

One of the priorities of this project has been to provide the flexibility to respond to trends and technologies, and this latest phase of the information age should ensure constant updates.

My thanks go out to all the individuals and teams whose efforts helped me develop *Professional Writing and Communications for Business*. To expedite matters, portions of two exceptional OER have been incorporated into this work: *Professional Writing Today,* by Sam Schecter, and *Technical and Professional Writing Genres,* by Michael Beilfuss, Staci Bettes, and Katrina Peterson.

Other Creative Commons-licensed works have also been used, as well as resources from our UW-Green Bay campus. The list of these resources follows:

- Beilfuss, M., Bettes S., and Peterson, K. Technical and professional writing genres. PressBooks. https://open.library.okstate.edu/technicalandprofessionalwriting/
- Schecter, S. Professional writing today: A functional approach. PressBooks. https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/communicating/
- University of Wisconsin-Green Department of Bay Career Planning & Professional Connections.
- University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Cofrin Library

ADAPTATION STATEMENT

Portions of *Business Communication for Success* have been incorporated as a section, "Group Communication, Teamwork, and Leadership." This work was produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) in 2010 by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. The 2015 adapted edition was produced by the

University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, and is available online at: http://open.lib.umn.edu/businesscommunication/. Please see the forward of the section for more details specific to this OER.

Portions from Arley Cruthers's *Business Writing for Everyone*, have also been adapted into this resource. Specifically, the chapters on "Emails," "Inclusive Language" and "Plain Language." *Business Writing For Everyone* is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

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PART I.

INSIGHTS: FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 1.

THE FOUR I'S: QUALITIES OF PROFESSIONAL WRITING

When my colleague Dr. Paul Belanger and I were redesigning our writing course, we often joked about the dizzying number of what I affectionately call the "C models" found in writing studies. These models are intended to be easy-to-remember formulae for recalling important tenets of professional writing. What we found funny was that these models vary in range from four up to ten. Arley Cruthers, whose excellent OER *Business Writing for Everyone* provided several chapters for this resource, includes a chapter on "Sailing the 7 Cs." It doesn't help that the professional organization for writing instructors—the Conference on College Composition and Communication—is commonly called the "4Cs."

Clarity, concision, consistency, and coherence are some of the most common among these C models. Dr. Belanger and I followed this pattern when devising a rubric that addressed generative artificial intelligence usage: connection, cognition, content, and construction. My colleague recently suggested we tweak our rubric and replace the C terms with comparable words that begin with the letter "I." This was due to Dr. Belanger's experience, "telling students that they put the 'I' into AI" (Teams chat, Jan. 13, 2025).

Brilliant!

Insight, information, implementation, and interconnection became the new rubric for our course and the guiding structure for this resource. Replacing "accountability" is also "integrity," a value we both find crucial for professional writing in the age of GAI. This revision, in turn, led to a welcome reorganization of this resource. Readers will likely encounter remnants of the original rubric and other "C models" used by the authors curated for this resource. Riffing off of a common taunt aimed at eyeglass-wearing folks like myself, what follows is an introduction to this "four-eyed" model and how each category is defined:

THE "FOUR-EYED" MODEL FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

What follows is an overview of the four pillars that help structure and organize this resource. This structure mimics the learning objectives of Dr. Belanger and my curriculum re-design of our business writing course. As mentioned, this re-design aims to accommodate high demand for the course. Ultimately, however, the criteria below address the changing demands *of students* by educators and future employers. The workforce is already changing and will continue to change. Our graduates will be expected to guide those organizations fortunate to hire them through these changes.

INSIGHT

One of the strengths of GAI is its capacity for illuminating connections among subjects. The flip side of this, however, is that these connections are not contextualized by the lived experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives of humans. These **insights** help us contextualize information and hopefully guide us to use that information for the betterment of our communities. One of the ways we strengthen our powers of insight is through **critical reading**, engaging with texts and interpreting them through our lived experience and world knowledge. GAI can help us with the *how,* but it takes human insight to understand *why.*

Applied critique can reveal a new understanding and innovations, which is reinforced through **reflection.** We take for granted that the information we take in has been processed over time through discourse, debate, and experimentation. Being a part of a professional discourse community requires sharing our insights. This **expression** of knowledge is a creative act that the developers of GAI have worked hard to echo through simulated insight. Without the human powers of insight, critique, and reflection, however, the responses provided by GAI tools should be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism.

INFORMATION

Before we express our newly-formed insights in a professional setting, it is best to check our perspectives and beliefs through research and other forms of verification. Producing **information** from our insights is a process that is slow. Conducting research, for example, takes time when done correctly. In laboratories and library stacks, we are engaging in various forms of experimentation, testing our insights and beliefs against the forces of nature as well as the debates of other experts. This process can be uncomfortable. Many of us do not like to be wrong and avoid confrontation. Transforming our insights into **information** and innovation, however, often demands that we revise—and even discard—our beliefs. This presents one of the principal challenges of our day. Information that is manipulated to misrepresent reality can have disastrous and lethal effects.

When our research is properly and ethically conducted, and we allow for our insights and perspectives to change in reflection to our findings, we avoid the risk of misinforming others. It is also a good method of ensuring that we are not engaging with misinformation—or worse, **disinformation,** the presenting of false information to manipulate others. ChatGPT and other GAI tools have, to date, struggled to overcome issues with misinformation (getting the facts wrong). The term “hallucinations” was often used to describe the tendency of GAI to *create* information that seemed genuine. ChatGPT’s job is to provide us with the information we want in a natural manner, so it is prone to generating **misinformation.** Which means that we often have to verify any responses these tools provide!

IMPLEMENTATION

Several years ago (before the release of ChatGPT), I noticed that the cover letters students were writing seemed similar. Although the writers of those letters did a good job of expressing interest in a job and sharing their experience, some of them shared similar grammatical styles and structures. For starters, it was *perfect.* Students consistently wrote with the mastery of most copyeditors. So consistent were these perfections, I found myself having to check grammar guidelines because they contradicted my own understanding of those arcane rules (turns out I was wrong!). In conversations with students, it turned out they were using Grammarly, a pumped-up spellchecker that also helps with grammar, syntax, and structure.

Grammarly and other tools are immensely helpful in “ironing out the wrinkles” in our writing—to a point. As students have pointed out, Grammarly and GAI tools iron out *too* many wrinkles. Everything sounds the same: flat and vanilla. It may be perfect writing, but it isn’t human. So while GAI should not be used to generate insights and cautiously used (if at all) to provide information, these tools do a decent job of implementing conventional forms into original work. Is there a catch? Of course.

As my example above illustrates, artificially-generated or edited language is "flat" and has become more recognizable as GAI-generated content takes over popular media. Words like "delve" and "leverage," for instance, have become signals that GAI tools were probably used. Consider this in light of the fact that we are extremely suspicious and distrusting of things that pretend to be human, and you can see why we should be reluctant to rely on ChatGPT too much—even for light editing!

Going forward, I anticipate that GAI will become better at adopting our individual "voice" and we will be able to generate content that actually sounds more like us (wrinkles and all). Even when that day comes, we should be cautious about relying on these technologies. Along with insight and information creation, the **implementation of our thinking is part of this recursive process of writing.** In organizing this very page, for example, I felt that the order of the "four eyes" was awkward and somewhat illogical. As I compose this section, I have found myself ping-ponging between this and other sections to make sure I'm consistent. Could ChatGPT help me with this? Perhaps. But I would be missing out on my own learning, curtailing the writing-thinking relationship that is vital (another Grammarly term) to our professional selves.

INTERFACE

The rote definition of **interface** is the point at which two or more complex systems interact with one another. We most often use the term to describe a form of technology: I am writing this using the keyboard to provide input to my computer; the monitor displays that the words I intended to type were input correctly; I click save on the website interface to ensure I don't lose my work. Several complex systems are in play—computational, internet networks, writing platforms—and engaged through a variety of interfaces. The primary form of interaction with GAI is also through interfaces. One of the reasons that GAI has become such a phenomenon is due to the "natural" way we humans can interface with enormously complex machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP) systems.

But this popular, computationally-focused definition often ignores that individual creatures are also complex systems. We interface with one another through face-to-face dialog, writing, images, artwork, music, games, text messages…The focus of this resource are those interfaces—the forms of communication we use to interface with other professionals—and strengthening our interfaces so that they are appropriate to our situation. As we will discuss, this requires an **audience-centered** approach that employs empathy and considers the needs of those we are communicating with. Whether it's one-on-one **peer review** or giving **presentations** to a room of professional colleagues, the content of our interfacing should always be guided by our audience.

INTEGRITY

One of the understated priorities of education is helping us develop personal codes of conduct that are the foundation of being good citizens. Across the United States, there are laws and policies that serve to create a national **ethical code** for the citizenry. These layers of policy, law, and rules are designed to inform the proper, acceptable behaviors expected of *all* people living in America. States apply another layer of educational standards that further reinforce those values prized by our regional communities. Both national and state policies are parsed out into guidelines and rules of conduct by school systems. In most classes, we begin each semester reviewing these ethical codes. In some courses, such as the Business Ethics course taught here at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, these are further unpacked, evaluated, and discussed.

Slightly different are the **moral codes** that guide our ability to distinguish right from wrong. Unlike ethics, morals may not be defined by policy and law but are often unspoken agreements between individuals in a community. Ideally, these morals help guide us to pursue **good** and avoid, or at least reduce, the **harm** done to others. Like laws, they change and adapt to new information. As history through today's news affirm, however, moral codes are as varied as individuals. We can't always agree on what's acceptable, nor do we define what is right and wrong the same.

I mention this because GAI has prompted us to pause and think about these codes. Writing courses the world over are wrestling with the morality of using GAI to conduct writing. Many instructors are sympathetic to the students and professionals who are being bombarded by different ethical and moral codes. Is using ChatGPT plagiarism? Is it cheating? Is using Grammarly to polish my writing acceptable? What about the spellchecker in my word processing software? Is Google search okay for research? What about Wikipedia? In my lifetime, there have been several of these "pauses" that have raised debates in our schools, making us confront long-standing ethical and moral codes. Unfortunately, our schools have become debate halls over this matter.

Why are these codes important? Because *trust* is important! In our academic writing, for example, it is why we quote others in a way that reflects their intentions and cite their work accordingly. As an instructor, it is how I recognize your integrity as a student. In business, trust is fundamental to building those relationships that are crucial to any successful business. Would you buy a product from a manufacturer who you knew compromised safety to increase profits? What about a restaurant reported to have failed multiple health inspections? Trust is a value that can be hard to win, but very easy to lose. Sometimes trust is built on fessing up, coming forward, and accepting the consequences.

Regardless of where GAI takes us, **accountability** is certain to become a highly-prized professional value going forward. Whether or not we use ChatGPT to assist us with writing, it is *we* who are responsible for our communications. Being accountable for our choices—even when they're not the best—is one facet of **professional integrity**, a code of conduct that includes honesty, fairness, transparency, and other qualities. This code is comparable to the academic integrity policies that discourage plagiarism and other ethical breaches.

A professional of **integrity** writes in a manner that reflects their adherence to these principles. At the college level, you are expected to act with integrity but also develop those ethical qualities that are important to your field. Just like writing classrooms worldwide, the world of business is currently wrestling with the effects that GAI will have on these codes. Is using ChatGPT plagiarism? Is using GAI to communicate confidential information to clients appropriate? There are many debates (and lawsuits) that are posing similar questions and it will be you—tomorrow's professional—that will have to be accountable for the new expectations, conventions, and ethics that will emerge.

A short, concluding section ("Integrity") that addresses the use of GAI in professional communications is currently being developed for this OER. In writing this section, I assume that readers will have knowledge about the rules their schools and employers have regarding GAI usage. I am not, at this time, equipped to direct writers in their morals either. This is simply because the expectations for GAI usage are so varied, dynamic, and fluid at this time.

The one certainty is that we will continue to be accountable for our writing, be expected to conduct our professional and personal affairs with integrity, and be ethical and moral citizens.

CHAPTER 2.

GENRE CONVENTIONS

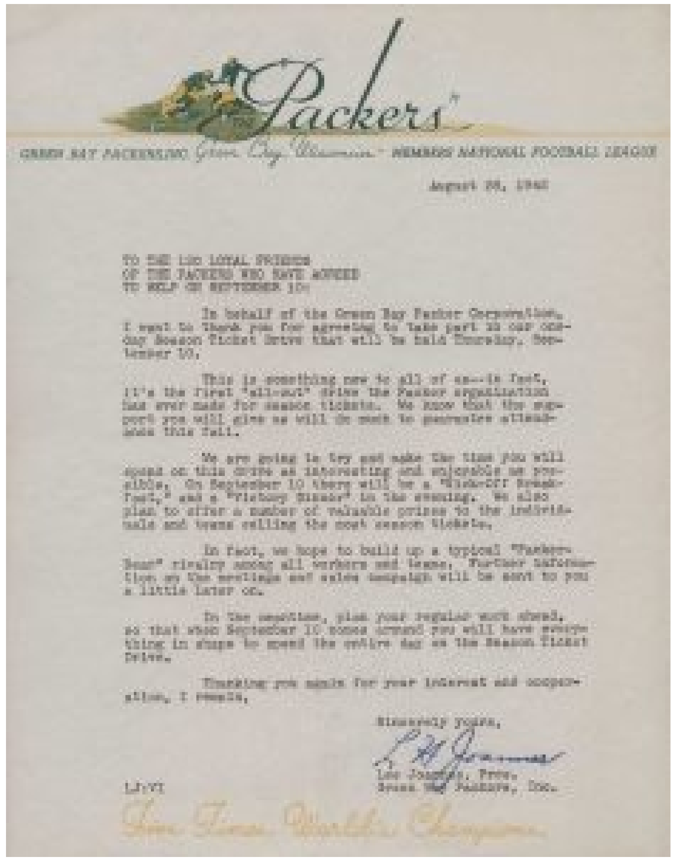


Fig. 1: Memo from Lee Joannes, Green Bay Packers President. Courtesy of the Cofrin Library Archives.

In a business writing context, **genre conventions** are standards we follow to meet professional expectations. These conventions apply to the **form** (style, formatting, and structure) as well as the **content** (language, tone, imagery) of the writing. Because a reader recognizes these conventions, they can more efficiently locate and review the information they need. Meeting the expectations of your reader is, therefore, extremely important, as defying those conventions can signal a lack of professionalism.

That's not to say these "traditions" of business writing are impervious to change. Consider the memo (fig. 1), for example. Because of technology and other changes, email has replaced memos for many uses. Still, more than just a list of necessary components, these conventions signal that the writer recognizes the expectations of a professional community. Because the values of those communities change over time, genre conventions may change as well to reflect the community's perspective.

On a practical level, following genre conventions regarding form is also important for efficient readability. For example, emails that adhere to professional standards contain a short yet specific subject line that can help the recipient determine the nature of the message without even opening it. Reports and other longer forms of writing also follow genre conventions but are often adapted to reflect an organization's in-house style and branding.

Incorporating genre conventions into personal branding can be a worthwhile challenge for those whose professions rely upon creativity and innovation. Custom-designed stationery, for instance, should provide the same information in a familiar fashion so that the recipient may still locate important contact information.

FOLLOW BUSINESS CONVENTIONS

Conventionality refers to your ability to conform to professional expectations (format, style, etc.). For instance, a résumé looks like a résumé, a report looks like a report, and an email looks like an email. Following conventions is important in business because it implicitly signals that you belong in the community. You know the rules, and you know how to follow them. Alternatively, if you break the mold, you do it with high-quality creativity so that your receiver has no doubt that you still know the rules and belong in the community.

Conventions of business communication are culturally bound. They differ from country to country and, to a lesser extent, from organization to organization or industry to industry. Generally, conventions remain fairly constant and slow to change, although they may change rapidly with new technologies or as societal standards change.

> This section is excerpted from *Business Communication: Five Core Competencies,* by Kristen Lucas; Jacob D. Rawlins; and Jenna Haugen

You can see some of the changes to conventions most vividly in how people dress for business, how email technologies have changed how people write memos, and how text messaging and instant messaging have changed the way people write emails. For example, dress codes have become decidedly more relaxed following the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] Communication has become somewhat more casual over the years, and it has become more common for business people to use emojis in emails.[3]

IDENTIFY AND FOLLOW CONVENTIONS

So, how do you identify conventions, especially in business writing and presentations? There are numerous examples provided in books, from how to write cover letters to how to develop a PowerPoint presentation. We won't go into details of all the different conventions here. Instead, we offer basic steps you can follow to learn what the conventions are for any type of message.

Gather Examples of a Particular Message Type (business letters, annual reports, etc.)

These will be most helpful if they are gathered from within your own company or at least your own industry. You can also search the Internet for examples of any kind of document.

Look for Similarities Across the Examples

These can be in how things are formatted (fonts, colors, white space), how content is ordered, or even how particular turns of phrase are used with regularity. The similarities you notice are the standards of the conventions.

For example, if you look at business letters, you will likely notice several similarities. Business letters normally appear on some form of company letterhead (i.e., the stationery with the company logo). The

1. [2]
2. [1]
3. [4]
4. [2]

information is ordered in the same way (date, name, and address of the receiver, a salutation, the letter itself, and a signature block). Paragraphs are single-spaced with blank lines in between. Those are the standards, and you should not deviate from them.

Look for Differences Across the Examples

Now, look for ways in which the documents differ from each other. The differences demonstrate where there is wiggle room.

Things that might look different are varying fonts. Sometimes the salutation uses "Dear," and sometimes not. Sometimes the closing says "Sincerely," but other times it says "Regards," "Best," or something similar. Sometimes, paragraphs are indented, and sometimes they are not. Those are the areas of wiggle room. In those regards, you can use your judgment and personal preference to decide how you want to write the letter.

Check for Company Guidelines

Another thing to keep in mind is that your company may have its own strict guidelines for how it wants messages to be formatted. Company standards are more common in large companies than in small ones. For instance, your company may have a designated template to use for PowerPoint presentations that includes approved company colors, fonts, and logos. These can be called "brand standards," and they are particularly important if you are communicating with external receivers.

BREAK CONVENTIONS CAREFULLY

In some instances, you may decide you want to break the conventions to catch your receiver's attention. You can do this by exhibiting high-quality creativity. The catch is that any time you break the conventions, it must be both high quality *and* creative. Anything less risks looking like an unprofessional error. You have to decide whether the potential payoff of breaking the convention to catch attention is worth the risk of being judged as unprofessional or incompetent.

Résumés are a common document in which people break conventions. Let's face it: The job market is competitive, and you need to stand out. Unconventional approaches to résumés can include things like infographics, online portfolios, video showcases, and QR codes that link to websites or blogs.[5] Nontraditional formats like these can draw positive attention and show off your skills—especially if you are seeking a job in a creative field. But other human resource professionals warn that creative résumés may actually prevent you from getting called for an interview. If you are not sure about your ability to demonstrate both high quality and creativity, you are more likely to have a better outcome following the established conventions.

1. For a story about how dress codes have become more relaxed since the COVID-19 pandemic, check out Rachel Martin and Milton Guevara, "The Pandemic Has Changed Workplace Fashion. What Does That Mean to You?" *NPR*, July 7, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/07/07/1109317208/pandemic-workplace-fashion. ↲
2. Research has shown that when leaders use emojis, it can help them better communicate with their employees and reduce defensiveness. See Tomoko Yokoi and Jennifer Jordan, "Using Emojis to Connect with Your Team," *Harvard Business Review*, May 30, 2022, https://hbr.org/2022/05/using-emojis-to-connect-with-your-team. ↲

5. [6]

6. [3]

3. See Cheryl Vaughn, “The 7 Best Alternative Resume Formats for Professionals,” *Make Use Of*, February 19, 2022, https://www.makeuseof.com/best-alternative-resume-for-professionals/. ↲

GENRE VS. MEDIUM VS. PLATFORM

One important distinction to be mindful of is the difference between genre and **medium**. While genre refers to the type of document you are composing, the medium describes the method you are using to distribute that document. These two are similar in that the purpose and audience for your document will determine both. In the example above, the genre used is a memo while the medium is good old-fashioned paper!

To add to this, we might also consider the **platform** being used to distribute your documents. How would Mr. Joannes distribute his memo? At the time, it was probably snail mail sent through the post office. In this case, the post office is providing a **service** which is the foundation of any platform: identifying which service we use will likely be determined by the medium used but, more importantly, can help us better adapt our professional voice to that platform.

Reviewing each medium and platform is beyond the scope of this resource, but be sure to consider these factors for each professional writing genre we encounter.

Aisha, the Marketing Intern

Aisha, a marketing manager at a tech startup, has been asked to create a promotional piece about their new productivity app. Her boss, David, initially only offers vague instructions: “Get the word out there, Aisha! Make it exciting!”

As she sits down to plan, Aisha realizes she needs to clarify a few things before she starts creating. She heads to David’s office for a quick meeting.

“David, about this promo piece… to make sure I’m on the right track, can you help me figure out some specifics?”

“Sure thing, Aisha,” he replies. “What do you need?”

“First, what **genre** are we thinking? Should this be a blog post, a social media campaign, a video explainer, or something else entirely?”

David thinks for a moment. “You know, a video explainer would be great! Short, snappy, gets the point across.”

“Okay, great! Now, what about the **medium**? Should we create a high-definition video for our website, or maybe a simpler animated video for social media?”

“Let’s go for high-definition. We want to showcase how sleek and user-friendly the app is.”

“Perfect. So I’m thinking that the **platform** we will use to distribute this will be our website. We can also post high-def videos to our business profiles on YouTube and LinkedIn. These also provide low-res options which will help accessibility.”

"Excellent point, Aisha," David beams. "I hadn't thought about that. But what about email to clients and other social media platforms? Won't high def videos be too big?"

Aisha thinks for a second before responding. "For email," she begins, "we can share a thumbnail image with a link to the video. For social media accounts, we can also export lower resolution videos."

"Hot diggity, Aisha—that sounds perfect!"

—

Aisha leaves David's office with a clear understanding of her task. By determining the genre, medium, and platform, she can now create a targeted and effective promotional piece for the new app.

If we were to break this down into a rubric, we might come up with something like this:

Question	Genre	Medium	Platform
What type of content will best showcase the app and its features? What is the purpose of this promotional piece? What kind of tone and style should it have?	Video explainer	N/A – Medium is not relevant to the type of content, but rather its format.	N/A – Platform is about distribution, not the content itself.
What format will be most engaging and effective for our target audience? What level of visual quality do we need? What are our production resource constraints?	N/A – Genre is about the type of content, not its format.	High-definition video	N/A – Platform is about where content is shared, not the format of the content.
Where does our target audience spend their time online? What platforms will give us the best reach? What are the best platforms for sharing high-definition video content?	N/A – Genre is about the type of content, not its distribution.	N/A – Medium is about the format of the content, not its distribution.	Website, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram

GAI USAGE

This scenario and chart were generated by Google Gemini, a generative AI platform, and then edited by me. How do you think I used GAI to create these? What prompts do you think I used? Can you identify what edits I made to the scenario? What skills did I need to accomplish this?

CHAPTER 3.

FUNDAMENTAL PROFESSIONAL WRITING GENRES

Although there are many business writing genres, it is helpful to first focus on some fundamental formats and break down the qualities of each. This can help compare how each is different as well as the similarities between them. The table below provides an easy reference for the writing genres found in this resource.

Table 1. Breakdown of Fundamental Bus

Genre	Purpose	Audience	Content	
Formal Business Letter	To conduct business activities in a professional and formal manner	External audience, such as clients, customers, or partners	Typically includes a formal salutation, a clear and concise message, and a professional closing	W in co
Internal Memo	To communicate internally within an organization, often for announcements, updates, or policy changes	Internal audience, such as employees or colleagues within the same organization	Short and to the point, addressing a specific issue or topic	S li
Email	To communicate quickly and efficiently with individuals or groups, both internally and externally	Internal or external audiences	Can vary widely depending on the purpose and audience, but should be clear and concise	L m w co
Job Application Cover Letter	To express interest in a job opening and highlight the applicant's qualifications	Hiring managers or recruiters	Tailored to the specific job, emphasizing the applicant's skills and experiences relevant to the position	F a an
Press Release	To distribute news and announcements to media outlets and journalists	Journalists, editors, and the general public	Focuses on newsworthy events, providing key information and quotes for journalists to use	S h an
Business Plan	To outline the goals, strategies, and financial projections for a business or project	Investors, lenders, or internal stakeholders	Includes sections on the company's mission, products or services, market analysis, financial projections, and management team	F a in
Research Brief	To provide a concise summary of research findings or a specific topic	Includes a clear overview of the research question, methodology, key findings, and conclusions	Structured with headings and subheadings to organize information logically	C u la
LinkedIn Profile	To create an online professional presence and network with other professionals	Other professionals, potential employers, or recruiters	Includes sections on the individual's work experience, education, skills, and interests	S h so

Genre	Purpose	Audience	Content	
Presentation Slide Deck	To present information or ideas to an audience in a clear and concise manner	Typically includes a title slide, an introduction, body slides with supporting information, and a conclusion	Organized with a clear flow of information, using visuals and bullet points	C ap ar

GAI Usage

The table above was generated by uploading a PDF of this resource to Google Gemini. By providing GAI tools with content this way, we can limit and guide the responses provided. There was plenty of editing to do still. How might you use this approach in your GAI usage? What measures should we take to ensure the content produced is accurate and effective? How might we improve the integrity of this table?

CHAPTER 4.

RHETORICAL APPEALS

Like any form of communication, writing aims to establish and maintain (as well as occasionally sever) connections with an audience. In addition to defining "audience," this chapter also describes some ways to better assess and accommodate our readers. In addition, we'll consider some strategies for better understanding our audience's needs and how our writing can best address those needs.

You might be surprised to know that the foundation of modern communication strategies has deep roots in ancient Greece. Although Plato (~427–347 B.C.E.) advocated for clear and thoughtful speech, the philosopher was *not* especially fond of writing. In *Phaedrus* (~370 B.C.E.), he describes the written word as an "invention [that] will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory" (Bizzell & Herzberg 165). Although Plato was skeptical of writing, he offered many important teachings about the power of communication (even if he favored the spoken word over the written one). For Plato, knowledge was developed through engaged dialog rather than reading through an unresponsive text.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), on the other hand, was a champion of writing despite being one of Plato's students. In his notes and lectures collected in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle unpacks rhetoric as "the available means of persuasion" (Bizzell & Herzberg 181). Published nearly 2500 years ago, the *Rhetoric* presented many of the strategies used for communicating to this day. The majority of these strategies cannot be covered here. One important concept to discuss, however, is what we often refer to as the "rhetorical triangle." This triangle is comprised of three primary methods of persuasion*, ethos, pathos,* and *logos.*

- **Ethos** describes using one's credibility to develop a trusting connection with an audience. A diploma or certification, for example, is one way to demonstrate training and knowledge, therefore creating credibility. These "ethical" appeals can be subtle and less obvious but are extremely powerful.
- **Pathos** is the use of emotions to compel an audience to behave a certain way. These "passionate" appeals are often more overt than ethos but are exceptionally persuasive. Think about some of the advertisements you've seen—what emotions are used to convince you to buy products or check out a website?
- **Logos** is a complex rhetorical strategy that is essentially the use of "logic" and reasoning to persuade an audience. This appeal also relies upon evidence and proof to persuade an audience that your message is true. By extension, this sense of "truth" is implied in order, structure, and cohesive design.

As you may have guessed, these concepts are not exclusive nor distinct but overlap and blend. These appeals are also *subjective,* which means that they are interpreted differently by each individual. A politician, for example, may seem ethical and credible to many. For others, however, that same politician may be entirely unbelievable. Time, culture, background, social and economic status and many other factors also impact the rhetorical power of a text.

CHAPTER 5.

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Understanding one's **audience** is extremely important when composing effective communications. Although we might be able to define "audience," how do we get to know that audience well enough to connect with them? In this chapter, we'll first unpack the complex definition of the audience and then consider some fundamental strategies for connecting with various communities and individuals.

Photo by Derzsi Elekes Andor, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

AUDIENCE DEFINED

Everything from music to board games, smartphone interfaces to architecture, is designed with the audience, user, or player in mind. But what do we mean by "audience"? Who are they and how do their perspectives determine our message? Douglas Park once wrote that audience, "points to the final cause for which form exists, to the purposefulness—or its lack—that makes a certain piece of prose shapely and full of possibility or aimless and empty" (p. 247). Park is telling us, in other words, that the audience determines the design and goal of any work.

As you can guess, Park's definition provided here is a good start but only scratches the surface. When we post an update to social media, for example, we are not simply addressing one audience but several: family, friends, and colleagues, as well as their acquaintances. Have you ever edited a post to accommodate certain groups?

My own rough, general definition of "audience" is any individual or group who receives some form of communication. When we dig a little deeper into this definition, we can start to see how much more complicated the audience can be.

PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND PERIPHERAL AUDIENCES

Before we focus on the various aspects and qualities of audiences, let's first broaden our scope to identify which will be our priority. We should also be sure to consider those audiences that may be interested in our message even though they may not be directly invested.

In a professional setting, these questions and others are vital to sending the intended message. Should the language of an email be formal or can it be casual? How much background information do we need to provide in an annual report?

As important as it is to understand your audience, doing so is a bit more complicated. This section looks at some of the distinctions that may be considered when considering your audience.

Let's begin by distinguishing what we mean by *primary* and *secondary* audiences.

Primary Audience

A *primary audience* is one for which any form of communication is intended. My writing should be written according to my understanding of that person's needs and expectations. If I'm texting my friends, for example, my language reflects the informal quality of our relationship. On the other hand, if I'm writing a cover letter to a potential employer, my language is going to be formal, using clear language (and no emojis!).

In a private person-to-person setting, we are almost always writing to a primary audience. In a more public setting, our primary audience is often made up of individuals we want to communicate directly with. When I put together a music playlist online, I will add songs that I believe will interest an audience interested in a particular genre of music. I might also add some tracks that I think fit into the playlist and appeal to an audience.

In many cases, we will be familiar with our primary audience and know the best means of communicating with them. I don't typically have to think about *how* I'm going to text my family as we have known each other a long time. In a professional setting, we often need to communicate to primary audiences that we know very little or nothing about.

Meeting Your Primary Audience's Needs

In any case, the primary audience probably has a specific need or set of needs that must be addressed by your writing. Whether or not you are familiar with your audience, you should first assess what those needs are. Once those needs are recognized, they help determine several qualities of your writing.

Imagine that you receive an email from your supervisor asking about the status of a report that was due…yesterday. While your report is complete, you had forgotten to send it after completing some late-night revisions from home. You promptly begin writing a response. What does your supervisor *need*?

The report of course! You attach your completed report to the draft email and begin writing the response email. Although you are addressing your supervisor's need (to obtain the report), the fact that the report is late should also affect how you compose the actual email. Does your supervisor need to know why the report is late? Is your response formal and apologetic?

Many of these questions may seem obvious. What are some of the additional conditions that might also factor into your response? How comfortable are you with your supervisor? Is this your first time being late with a project?

Secondary Audience

While every instance of communication has a primary audience in mind, many situations demand we also consider our *secondary audiences.* These are the individuals and groups who may be interested in our writing even though they are not those we have in mind when communicating. Secondary audiences can be just as important as they may be impacted, often becoming our primary audience in the process.

Meeting Your Secondary Audience's Needs

Once we have identified our secondary audience, we can begin assessing what their needs may be. In many situations, we may want to focus on which of those needs align more closely with our purpose. For an instruction manual on how to build a coffee table, for example, our secondary audience may be those who want to see how difficult assembling the product might be. The information you provide may be important in their decision to purchase the product. Clear instructions are important, but offering additional methods for receiving help may also be a smart addition. Contact information for a helpline with a positive, reassuring message ("Need help? Call us!"), as well as clear imagery are other means.

Addressing the secondary audience is important but we should also be careful not to overwhelm the primary audience with information that may not be relevant. Providing alternative methods such as links to webpages with additional guidance is a good strategy.

Peripheral Audiences

Much of our professional communications occur online, on social media, or in public venues. Although good practice demands we consider primary and secondary audiences, it is best to also consider those audiences that are more circumstantial. These "hidden" audiences are those that we are not intentionally targeting with our message or product but may be affected in some way.

Meeting Your Peripheral Audience's Needs

Assessing the needs of the peripheral audience may not be a feasible priority. Peripheral audiences may be impacted by your writing so you should be considerate of their needs and perspectives even if you cannot tailor your message to them. Ideally, individuals from the periphery might be interested enough to pursue further information. There are occasions, however, when unanticipated audiences may take issue with your message. To address these issues, it is worth developing a mitigation plan for quickly responding to individuals or communities who are negatively impacted by your writing.

AUDIENCE INTEREST LEVEL

Once we distinguish our primary and secondary audiences, we can begin thinking about the range of interest levels with which audiences will engage with our work.

Intentional

An intentional audience is attentive to the work being communicated. They have likely sought out the information for a purpose. Examples include research articles and government information.

Engaged

An engaged audience is willing to invest resources (such as time and money) into the purpose conveyed through the work. When a non-profit organization requests volunteers, for example, it is hoping to entice individuals who are aligned with the purpose of that organization or event.

Agreeable

Unlike dismissive audiences, those that are agreeable will receive your work with more interest than a passive audience.

Passive

The passive audience encounters the work but is noncommittal to engaging with it further. A passive audience is likely to be secondary or peripheral but can become a primary audience if the work compels them to invest more interest.

Dismissive

Due to any number of factors, you'll eventually encounter an audience that simply rejects your work. While this cannot be avoided, it's worth considering those dismissive audiences to help define the scope of your message.

Hostile

Unfortunately, you may encounter audiences that are hostile to your work. There is no shortage of daily news featuring hostile responses to social media. Other examples include delivering bad news. A memo to employees letting them know that they will be laid off is an example of writing few of us ever want to compose.

AUDIENCE QUALITIES

In addition to interest levels, we also need to consider the various qualities of our audience. These qualities will help determine the language, terminology, design, attitude, and tone of our writing. The list below is only partial, however. What other audience qualities can you think of?

Uninformed

These are audiences that have little to no background information on your work. An example of this might be an instruction manual on how to build a wooden table for non-carpenters. The language therefore should avoid complex concepts and terminology that is more commonly used among experts.

Expert

Addressing an audience of experts means that you can present your work using terms and concepts that are likely to be familiar to the reader. One of the issues with a lot of technical writing, for example, is that it is often written for an audience of those familiar with fundamental concepts.

Social, economic, cultural

Works of professional and technical writing do not typically distinguish communities of different social, economic, or cultural backgrounds. Not *explicitly* at least. When we are considering our audience, however, it is important to use the opportunity to think about the perspectives of those outside our own communities. Cultural differences in language use, for example, are why we avoid clichés and figures of speech that may not be familiar to those for whom English is a second language.

Access and Accommodation

One of the principal challenges of modern technical and professional writers is writing in such a way that accommodates all readers regardless of physical ability. **Universal design**, for example, is an approach to communicating that better accommodates differences in sensory input (vision and hearing) as well as physical ability. We will discuss this extremely important concept at a later time.

CHAPTER 6.

PLAIN LANGUAGE

> Note: This chapter is excerpted from Arley Cruthers's *Business Writing for Everyone* (2021)

While there was a time when many business documents were written in the third person to give them the impression of objectivity, this formal style was often passive and wordy. Today, it has given way to active, clear, concise writing, sometimes known as "plain English" (Bailey, 2008). Plain language style involves everyday words and expressions in a familiar group context and may include contractions. Many people see plain language as an ethical means of communication. For example, one legal expert rewrote Instagram's terms of use to be in plain language, then showed her version to teenagers. They were shocked by what Instagram was able to do with their photos, and would not have consented if they had read the plain language version instead of the one written in complicated legal jargon.

No matter who your audience is, they will appreciate your ability to write using plain language. Here are five principles for writing in plain language:

PRINCIPLE 1: USE ACTIVE VOICE

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

Read these two sentences:

- Matt Damon left Harvard in the late 1980s to start his acting career.
- Matt Damon's acting career was started in the late 1980s when he left Harvard.

In the first sentence, left is an action verb that is paired with the subject, Matt Damon. If you ask yourself, "Who or what left?" the answer is Matt Damon. Neither of the other two nouns in the sentence—Harvard and career—"left" anything.

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

Writing in the Active Voice

Writing in active voice is easy once you understand the difference between active and passive voice. First, find the verb. Then, ask yourself who did the verb. Is the subject present?

Review Active vs. Passive Voice

Identify the sentences with active voice:

1. Mika kicked the ball.
2. The ball was kicked by Mika.
3. Great students attend Kwantlen Polytechnic University.
4. The university is attended by great students.
5. I made a mistake.
6. Mistakes were made.

Answers: 1, 3, and 5

Using the Passive Voice

While using the active voice is preferred, sometimes passive voice is the best option. For example, maybe you don't know who's responsible for an action or you don't want to place the blame on someone. For example, you might say "a lamp was broken at our recent party" to avoid saying who broke the lamp.

PRINCIPLE 2: USE COMMON WORDS INSTEAD OF COMPLEX WORDS

Sometimes, new communicators believe that large words feel more appropriate to a business environment. Also, the world is filled with wonderful, long words that are fun to use. Often, however, long words cause more confusion. Worse than that, they can exclude anyone who doesn't understand that particular word. Maybe you've had the experience of reading an academic article or textbook chapter and having to read the same sentence three times over to try to figure out what it was trying to say. Then, when you asked your instructor, they explained it in a simple way. If you've ever thought, "Why didn't they just say it simply from the beginning?" you can understand the power of plain language.

Again, the trick is to use words that are appropriate to the audience, the context and your purpose. As we've said, time is the biggest constraint, so simple words likely meet most audiences' needs. In specialized environments, however, more complex words are required. For example, a lawyer has to use specific, technical language to precisely lay out a case. A doctor has to use medical language to convey a patient's exact symptoms and diagnosis.

When you enter into a new workplace context, look at how your coworkers are writing to determine the level of formality the situation requires. You can also use one of the many free online tools such as Readability Formulas to determine the reading level of your writing. When you use these tools, you copy and paste some text into the tool and it will estimate the reading level.

PRINCIPLE #3: USE A POSITIVE TONE WHENEVER POSSIBLE

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

Examples:
Negative: Your car will not be ready for collection until Friday.
Positive: Your car will be ready for collection on Friday.
Negative: You did not complete the exam.
Positive: You will need to complete the exam.
Negative: Your holiday time is not approved until your manager clears it.
Positive: Your holiday time will be approved when your manager clears it.

Writers don't just create a positive tone on the sentence level. They can also create this tone by choosing what details to include. If something negative is unimportant to the reader, you can leave it out. Kitty O. Locker called the practice of using "positive emphasis" (Locker, 2016) to meet your audience's needs "You Attitude."

This is especially important if a situation is negative to you but not the audience. For example, imagine that you held a fundraiser that didn't raise as much money as you hoped. This might really impact your budget and the future of some programs you run. But if you're sending out an email with the goal of getting people to fill out a survey asking for ways to improve the fundraiser, none of this matters.

Read the following two examples, then ask yourself which version would make you more likely to fill out the survey:

Negative Details: Unfortunately, this year's Gala Under the Stars only raised half of its expected profit. This means that we will need to cancel our Little Stars after-school program and lay off part-time staff. Obviously, this is devastating to our organization, so we need to make sure it doesn't happen again. Please fill out this survey to help make the Gala Under the Stars better.

Positive Details: Help us make Gala Under the Stars even better next year. Fill out this five-minute survey and be entered into a draw for two movie tickets.

In the first example, the reader has to wade through negative details in order to get to the survey. They might not even read the email long enough to find out about the survey. In the second example, however, the benefit to reader (free tickets) and what's being asked of them (to fill out a survey) is listed first. Positive details don't just lead to a positive tone, they also help you fulfill the purpose of the communication.

PRINCIPLE 4: WRITE FOR YOUR READER

When you write for your readers and speak to an audience, you have to consider who they are and what they need to know. When readers know that you are concerned with their needs, they are more likely to be receptive to your message, and will be more likely to take the action you are asking them to and focus on important details.

Your message will mean more to your reader if they get the impression that it was written directly to them.

Organize your Document to Meet your Readers' Needs

When you write, ask yourself, "Why would someone read this message?" Often, it is because the reader needs a question answered. What do they need to know to prepare for the upcoming meeting, for example, or what new company policies do they need to follow? Think about the questions your readers will ask and then organize your document to answer them.

PRINCIPLE 5: KEEP WORDS AND SENTENCES SHORT (CONCISENESS)

It is easy to let your sentences become cluttered with words that do not add value to your message. Improve cluttered sentences by eliminating repetitive ideas, removing repeated words, and editing to eliminate unnecessary words.

Eliminating Repetitive Ideas

Unless you are providing definitions on purpose, stating one idea twice in a single sentence is redundant.

Removing Repeated Words

As a general rule, you should try not to repeat a word within a sentence. Sometimes you simply need to choose a different word, but often you can actually remove repeated words.

Example:
Original: The student who won the cooking contest is a very talented and ambitious student.
Revision: The student who won the cooking contest is very talented and ambitious.

Rewording to Eliminate Unnecessary Words

If a sentence has words that are not necessary to carry the meaning, those words are unneeded and can be removed.

Examples:
Original: Gagandeep has the ability to make the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.
Revision: Gagandeep makes the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.
Original: For his part in the cooking class group project, Malik was responsible for making the mustard reduction sauce.
Revision: Malik made the mustard reduction sauce for his cooking class group project.

Avoid Expletive Pronouns (most of the time)

Many people create needlessly wordy sentences using expletive pronouns, which often take the form of "There is …" or "There are …."

Pronouns (e.g., I, you, he, she, they, this, that, who, etc.) are words that we use to replace nouns (i.e., people, places, things), and there are many types of pronouns (e.g., personal, relative, demonstrative, etc.). However, expletive pronouns are different from other pronouns because unlike most pronouns, they do not stand for a person, thing, or place; they are called expletives because they have no "value." Sometimes you will see expletive pronouns at the beginning of a sentence, sometimes at the end.

Examples:
There are a lot of reading assignments in this class.
I can't believe how many reading assignments *there are*!
Note: These two examples are *not* necessarily bad examples of using expletive pronouns. They are included to help you first understand what expletive pronouns are so you can recognize them.

The main reason you should generally avoid writing with expletive pronouns is that they often cause us to use more words in the rest of the sentence than we have to. Also, the empty words at the beginning tend to shift the more important subject matter toward the end of the sentence. The above sentences are not that bad, but at least they are simple enough to help you understand what expletive pronouns are. Here are some more examples of expletive pronouns, along with better alternatives.

Examples

Original: There are some people who love to cause trouble.
Revision: Some people love to cause trouble.
Original: There are some things that are just not worth waiting for.
Revision: Some things are just not worth waiting for.
Original: There is a person I know who can help you fix your computer.
Revision: I know a person who can help you fix your computer.

When you find yourself using expletives, always ask yourself if omitting and rewriting would give your reader a clearer, more direct, less wordy sentence. Can I communicate the same message using fewer words without taking away from the meaning I want to convey or the tone I want to create?

Choose Specific Wording

You will give clearer information if you write with specific rather than general words. Evoke senses of taste, smell, hearing, sight, and touch with your word choices. For example, you could say, “My shoe feels odd.” But this statement does not give a sense of why your shoe feels odd, since “odd” is an abstract word that does not suggest any physical characteristics. Or you could say, “My shoe feels wet.” This statement gives you a sense of how your shoe feels to the touch. It also gives a sense of how your shoe might look as well as how it might smell, painting a picture for your readers.

CHAPTER 7.

KEEP IT CONCISE: THE KISS PRINCIPLE

The KISS principle has less to do with a 1970s glam band, but is a saying to remind ourselves to keep our writing concise. The first mention of the KISS principle is attributed to an aircraft engineer named Kelly Johnson (Rich, 231). Johnson is best known for designing the SR-71 Blackbird, a long-range, high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft that could reach speeds up to MACH 3. After retirement, Johnson worked as a senior advisor with Lockheed. Here, his mantra, "Keep it simple, stupid," was a reminder to design with minimal unnecessary features and functions that could create conflicts.

Nowadays, the "stupid" is often replaced because the term can easily be interpreted as insulting. However, Johnson believed military machines should be designed so that someone in a combat zone could make repairs on the fly with basic tools. Therefore, the "stupid" is another adjective that describes the lack of technical complexity.

KEEP IT SHORT AND SIMPLE

Although not the person responsible for re-interpreting the principle, Susan Rooks, writing as the "Grammar Goddess," states that K.I.S.S. stands for "Keep it Short and Simple." According to Rooks, the application of the K.I.S.S. principle entails the following:

Consider the reader's understanding of the subject. What do they know? What do they need to know? Don't assume that they have the knowledge or perspective that you have—you're the expert! Remember that, as a professional, you have expertise your audience may not have. Don't assume that any concepts familiar to you are also to others. If you need to explain complex information

Keep sentences short. Less writing means less reading, which is important in busy professional environments. Shorter statements mean that your meaning and purpose must retain nearly as much meaning without losing clarity.

Stay away from jargon. Every profession uses jargon, or those terms and phrases familiar to practitioners in that field. Business professions use terms and acronyms that most readers (myself included) do not recognize or understand. In addition, many organizations have proprietary, or "in-house," language that outsiders aren't privy to. Jargon should be avoided in most forms of professional writing unless you are certain the audience will be familiar with them.

KEEP IT SHORT, SPECIFIC

I first encountered the KISS principle when taking computer programming courses. Although "stupid" was still included at that time (and may still be), I still appreciate the slightly different take of programmers, who applied it to ensure their programs would be easy to understand by other programmers. "One of the most important ways to do this is to write clear code," describes veteran software designer Martin Fowler, "making it easy to understand what the program is supposed to do" (martinfowler.com).

In other words, good programmers will create code that accomplishes a specific task as clearly and concisely as possible. If you're a non-programmer looking at a screen full of code, it probably looks like gibberish. It may be surprising that, ideally, even non-programmers should be able to understand what the program does by looking at the code. This would be accomplished the same way we write professionally!

In addition to Rook's strategies, use the following to keep your writing simple and specific:

- **Avoid generalizations**. Terms like "society" and "the world" imply a significance rarely appropriate to professional writing. With nearly 8 billion individuals inhabiting the Earth, few experiences are universal. If referring to a specific population, take time to identify them. Recognize differences as often as possible and avoid sweeping statements that rely on common sense. This is one of the true hallmarks of a thoughtful professional!
- **Use precise terminology when necessary.**
  Write out acronyms. Whenever we use an acronym, we write out the first usage, followed by the acronym in parentheses. For example: "As an instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB), I have taught numerous writing courses."
- **Use headings and subheadings strategically.** When you have a longer document, structure and organize your content using headings and subheads. Headings help categorize and manage your content, but too many can create more confusion. Avoid beginning each paragraph with a heading. Pay close attention to your hierarchy because screen readers also use these elements to read content aloud to those who use assistive devices. Please see the chapter in the Style section for more details.
- **Read your writing out loud.** For those prone to run-on sentences (like yours truly), reading out loud is a great way to catch over-complicated sentences. You will not only *hear* some spelling and grammar errors but also get a better sense of the cadence and tone that your audience will be reading in. If you feel like you're winded after reading—simplify!

CHAPTER 8.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Note: This chapter is excerpted from Arley Cruthers's *Business Writing for Everyone* (2024)

Good communicators include everyone and don't make assumptions about their readers. You can make your language more inclusive by:

- Using the singular "they" instead of "he or she." For example, instead of saying, "A communicator should understand his or her audience," you could say, "A communicator should understand their audience" or "Communicators should understand their audience."
- Being specific when discussing a person's identity and using the terminology they prefer. For example, instead of saying "Marilyn Gabriel is a First Nations person," you could say "Marilyn Gabriel is a member of the Kwantlen Nation." Usually, a person's disability isn't relevant, but if it is, use neutral and specific language. For example, instead of saying "Brent is confined to a wheelchair" (which is both inaccurate, negative, and vague), you could say "Brent uses a wheelchair" or "Brent has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair." When in doubt, ask the person what terminology they prefer.
- Question the assumptions that you make about your audience. Consider that many of your readers might not share the same cultural values or experiences. For example, before writing a sentence like "Every child waits all year for Christmas morning," consider that many of your readers might not have shared this experience.
- Avoid expressions or idioms that would be confusing to English language learners. Workplaces are increasingly global, and your writing should be understood by people from many different backgrounds.

Words and phrases also often have complex histories. For example, often we don't think twice about calling a decision "stupid" or "dumb," but these words have a long history rooted in harm against people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities. One way that we can address ableism, racism, sexism, xenophobia, fatphobia, and other forms of discrimination is to replace these words with words that are more precise. For example, saying "our manager's decision is stupid" is vague, whereas "our manager's decision will make life harder for the interns" or "our manager's decision ignores the data that Cody presented at the meeting last week" is much more specific.

You should be especially careful when writing about groups of people in a way that might reinforce stereotypes. For example, in his book *Elements of Indigenous Style*, Gregory Younging discusses how subtle bias can have a big impact when non-Indigenous people write about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. For example, instead of portraying Indigenous people as victims, focus on their "resilience, agency and future" (2018, p. 77). Instead of portraying an Indigenous culture as something static that existed in the past, focus on how that culture is thriving and changing.

PART II.

INFORMATION: RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Over this past summer, my home computer stopped working. Because I built the computer myself, I don't have a company like Dell or Apple to turn to for tech support. To identify which part (or parts) malfunctioned, I had to search online for guidance. I found numerous forums and sites with possible information, but most of them were not helpful or ads for software cleverly disguised as blog posts or articles.

I eventually found instructions that helped me identify the problem. By process of elimination, I was able to determine that the motherboard had expired. I then discovered that the motherboard was no longer being manufactured, which meant I had to now figure out a suitable replacement. Computer technology quickly becomes obsolete so I had to be sure to buy parts that were compatible. Before long, the cost of purchasing separate parts prompted me to question whether or not I should just buy a pre-built computer instead.

This led me to look up computer manufacturers…

Throughout this process, research skills were vital to determining the cause of the malfunction, the status of the part, the cost of replacement parts, and reliable computer brands. Much of my research turned up bad or unhelpful information. Many of my questions were answered, but those answers usually yielded more questions! Once I had the necessary information, I could compare my options, analyze the costs and benefits, and choose. Even though the pre-built computer cost more, I decided that the tech support and time it would take to build another computer from scratch made it worthwhile.

It may not seem obvious from this sad tale of my broken computer, but research is all about making an **argument**. These are rarely the type of arguments made on a debate stage or that involve obnoxious siblings, friends, or roommates. To make a professional argument, you are asserting a position and providing evidence that supports that position.

In this scenario, my research helped me construct an argument for buying a pre-built computer over building another one. In the world of business, research is also used to construct arguments. Should this candidate be hired?

Could a new pizza restaurant succeed in a particular neighborhood? What data can we use to determine whether or not a social media campaign is working? **What sorts of arguments are we making when we answer these questions? What questions are among the most asked in your field?**

In other words, conducting research is how we become part of the professional dialogue or "conversation." With sufficient research, we can help ourselves, our coworkers, supervisors, and clients make better, well-informed decisions. But business is also about connecting with others, identifying trends, solving problems, and identifying gaps in our existing resources. These are also—not so coincidentally—the same research skills that you need in your academic and professional careers!

The results of your research should confirm your argument while providing contextual information that helps situate your position in a specific context. A pizza restaurant in one neighborhood may not last long in another; a marketing campaign may perform incredibly well on Facebook while failing on Reddit.

Conducting research also helps develop our expertise in a subject, reinforcing our professional persona. When we engage in that "conversation" mentioned earlier, it demonstrates our dedication to the profession. Although flawed or weak arguments can also be valuable, presenting a well-researched argument establishes credibility among your peers and displays expertise.

In this chapter, we'll review research procedures that complement your professional writing. We'll distinguish **scholarly resources** from more popular ones, such as journalistic publications. Professional trade publications—which you may find yourself contributing to in your career—are also valuable sources to consider. We'll also review three fundamental forms of citing sources and some best practices for incorporating your research into your work.

We'll conclude the chapter by thinking about **misinformation** and the importance of verifying sources. As we'll examine, it is incredibly easy for anyone to compose and publish an article based on faulty or false information that appears to be an accurate work of quality research. Fortunately, there are usually clues that can help us distinguish works of misinformation from those that are more authentic.

Even more important than being aware of misinformation is the understanding that you—the researcher—are engaging in an ongoing dialogue about the subject you are researching. Applying the work of scholars and experts to answer your own research questions isn't enough! You must also be willing to question and critique those experts.

CHAPTER 9.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH

When beginning your research process, it is essential to consider a fundamental question: *why am I researching?* Is it to acquire a basic understanding of an unknown topic? Will your research be used to address information gaps in an existing project? Are you searching for expertise that reinforces an opinion or argument you may have? Or perhaps you're seeking conflicting views?
Answering this basic question will help determine the most effective research methods. Before we start scouring databases, however, consider what type of information we're looking for.

- **Quantitative research** involves gathering numerical data and then using statistical methods to analyze it. This type of research often includes surveys, experiments, and observational studies. It's commonly used in psychology, economics, and marketing, as well as health and social sciences.
- **Qualitative research** aims to understand human behaviors, experiences, emotions, and social contexts holistically, and it is often used in fields like sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education. Methods include conducting surveys, focus groups, observations, and case studies.
- **Mixed Methods Research** combines the above methods to comprehensively answer a question or problem. Researchers using this approach use data to corroborate qualitative findings; conversely, quantitative researchers may seek out observational data and interviews to help interpret their data into formats that are more accessible to audiences.

CHAPTER 10.

LOCATING GOOD SOURCES

For business professionals, much research is accomplished by searching for sources online using one of many tools like Google Scholar and library databases. If you are a student, you are likley expected to use a combination of primary and secondary sources to help support your thesis, proposal, or argument.

PRIMARY SOURCES

First-hand accounts of events such as reporting, footage, correspondence, as well as tangible artifacts are considered primary. Journalistic articles and interviews are also good primary sources.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Sources that interpret, analyze, or critique primary sources are referred to as secondary. Textbooks and academic journals are also examples of secondary sources that you should be familiar with.

Industrial and trade publications, which focus on issues, events, and trends in specific professions, are also good secondary sources as well as excellent ways to stay on top of your profession. Some specific examples include those for:

- **Marketers**: Adweek*, Ad Age*, and Campaign*
- **Accountants**: The CPA Journal, Accounting Today*, and Accountancy Age
- **Supply chain managers**: Industry Week, Supply and Demand Chain Executive, and Logistics Management*
- **Business owners**: Be sure to check for trade publications that are relevant to your business. There are also several publications that cover entrepreneurship including, Entrepreneur, Inc*., and Fortune Small Business
- **Financial Wizards**: In addition to venerable news publications like the Wall Street Journal*, financiers should also consult with Barron’s*, and Financial Times*
- **Human Resource personnel**: *People + Strategy* Journal is published by the Society for Human Resource Management—both are excellent sources as well as Human Resource Executive.

*Note: these publications offer student-rate subscriptions. Highly recommended!

For more information on primary and secondary sources, check out the UWGB Resource Guide.

CHAPTER 11.

VERIFYING SOURCES

Taking extra time to verify your sources can help better ensure the integrity of your research. Verification is more than simply checking to ensure that a source exists, however, but is also a method for determining the quality of the source.

There are several methods for verifying sources. We'll examine one: Lateral Reading. If you prefer catchy, relevant acronyms, check out Michael Caulfield's SIFT and Ellen Carey's P.R.O.V.E.N. method. These methods approach verification uniquely but draw from lateral reading as a starting point.

LATERAL READING

As you're reading this resource, you'll come across various links and citations. Did you click on any of them? One easy method for verifying a source is to browse the source for clues about the author's background and any affiliated organizations. What else has the author published? What is the purpose of any organizations that they are affiliated with? These questions can help you determine the credibility of the author(s).

How do you know this resource, Professional Writing and Communications for Business, is of quality? Why should you trust me—the author—as someone who has any expertise when it comes to talking about writing?

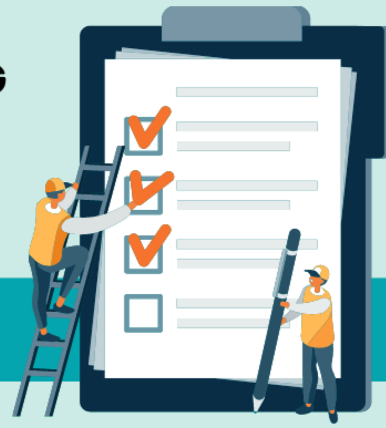
The easiest way would be to look me up and verify my credentials. When you Google my name, you'll find links to an outdated personal site, my LinkedIn profile and other social media accounts, a few events, and writing I've done. From my LinkedIn profile, you can tell I've taught writing since 2013, and before that, I worked as a "public relations specialist" and designer. From this information alone, I hope you are convinced I have enough experience teaching writing and writing professionally. You might also check my affiliations: can you assume that my employer, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, has checked and verified my experience and credentials?

Lateral reading is a technique for evaluating a source's credibility by comparing it to other sources. It involves reading "around" a resource to evaluate bias, inaccuracy, and hidden assumptions.

The UWGB Library offers a resource guide and infographic (shared below) that can help guide you through the process.

EVALUATING SOURCES USING

LATERAL READING



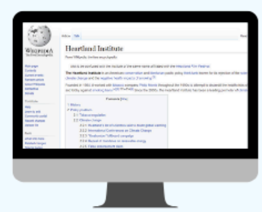
LEARN HOW TO EVALUATE SOURCES BY "READING LATERALLY"

WHAT IS LATERAL READING?

Lateral reading is when you **look outside of your source** to seek additional information about a source's credibility, reputation, funding sources, and biases.

UNFAMILIAR SOURCE

NEW BROWSWER TAB



INFO. ABOUT SOURCE

STRATEGIES

Learn how to laterally read by applying the strategies below to your evaluation.

START HERE

RESEARCH THE AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER

Open a new tab & perform a web search to see what *OTHER* sources say about the reputation of your author and the publisher of the information.

USE WIKIPEDIA

Wikipedia can be a great place to learn information about the publisher of your source, author, or your topic in general.

CHECK FOR CONSENSUS

Check other sources to see if you find significant contrasting claims. If you do, you may need to look at your source more closely.

BIAS & FACT CHECKER SITES

Take advantage of bias and fact checker websites that may have already done an evaluation of the publisher for you or fact checked a claim.

FIND THE ORIGINAL SOURCE

If your source is discussing a research study or following a story from another source, check the original source for accuracy.

"Evaluating Sources Using Lateral Reading" courtesy of the UWGB

CHAPTER 12.

ISSUES IN RESEARCHING

As a researcher, you are responsible for ensuring that the information you gather and use is valid. Additionally, it is also imperative that your research is presented correctly. The following are among the more problematic issues related to research.

MISINFORMATION & DISINFORMATION

The internet provides us access and connectivity to massive information stores for research. It also allows us to publish and share our research with others. Although this powerful tool enables creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial endeavors, it is also used for counterproductive—even harmful—purposes.

In *Digital Citizenship,* Sarah Gibbs (2021) defines misinformation as "wrong or misleading information." Gibbs further breaks this definition by noting that misinformation may not always be intentional but somewhat incomplete or unclearly presented information.

When someone *knowingly* presents flawed or false information, this is sometimes called **disinformation.** In recent years, the term **fake news** has been used to describe sources of information that knowingly broadcast incorrect, misleading, or false news stories to their audience. Accusations of being fake news are also cast on news sources when people disagree with the information being presented. This is made more difficult when organizations (such as Fox News) argue that their information is more for entertainment than factual information.

Misinformation is especially difficult to correct once consumed by an uncritical audience. Even when news organizations correct information, it can be difficult for those invested in that information to correct their own perspective (Cook, Ecker, & Lewandowsky, 2015). This can have deadly consequences: a recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that those communities who consumed misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic were the worst impacted by the illness.

Because of misinformation, it has become even more important for us to *genuinely* conduct our own research—not just present information that confirms our own beliefs. When conducting research, it is our responsibility to ensure that our sources are sound and verifiable. We should also be sure to cite our sources. This way, others can also verify the information we've provided!

PLAGIARISM

When at school, plagiarism is one of the biggest concerns of students, instructors, and administrators alike. This form of "academic misconduct" is, according to a 2010 study, a source of several negative responses, including confusion, fear, and anxiety about potential consequences (Gullifer and Tyson). With the popularization of ChatGPT (Barnett, 2023) and several high-profile cases of plagiarism in the news, the subject has become even more complex and concerning.

Simply put, plagiarism is sharing ideas and information while passing them off as your own work. We should never take credit for someone else's ideas—that goes without saying—but sometimes it can happen unintentionally:

Sometimes, writers **forget to add quotation marks** to a quote. This common yet simple mistake should be looked for when reviewing your work.

Improper paraphrasing can also be viewed as plagiarism. **Paraphrasing** is when we rework someone else's ideas in our own words. This is an important skill to practice because using others' words and ideas too much can detract from your own argument. It can also help maintain a consistent voice and tone in your work. There are several examples of paraphrasing on this page!

Inaccurate citations, which can prevent readers from verifying sources, are also considered plagiarism. Double-checking citations and references is an important part of the review process. Take time and ensure that your Works Cited and References pages are perfect!

For some examples of plagiarism, check out the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay library's resource guide on the subject.

CHAPTER 13.

BUSINESS PLANS

Developing and implementing a business plan can be a daunting task for most of us. We might assume that the creative practitioner—especially those without a background in business—would find this process even more challenging. When we think about what developing a business plan entails, however, we find that the creator is actually well-suited to meet this challenge: introspection, observation, and expression are traits of the successful entrepreneur!

A business plan can assist in translating those creative skills into tangible visions, bringing them into the world as a foundation for your practice. The challenge is speaking to your strengths, ideals, and aspirations in a clear manner that is easily structured. The formulaic structure of a business plan can feel constraining at first, so let's consider the purpose of this document:

WHAT IS A BUSINESS PLAN?

According to the United States Small Business Administration, a properly crafted business plan offers a, "roadmap for how to structure, run, and grow your new business." For organizations, the business plan is a way to share that roadmap with employees as a way to help navigate uncertainties and fluctuations in the market (Henry). The plan can also be instrumental in reminding individuals what the core values of the enterprise are.

For many artists, the business plan is an opportunity to *brand* their work. This is a different approach than those entrepreneurs who have a tangible product or process to pitch. Instead, the creator is pitching *themselves* as both product and process! Despite these differences, the important similarity is that the business plan *must* provide details that the investor, agent, grantor, or purchaser needs to proceed with consideration.

HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN?

There is no one true way of crafting a business plan and there numerous templates and models available online and within the shelves of how-to books. Some of the core components of most business plans include:

- Mission statement
- Problem
- Solution
- Target audience or market
- Budget and revenue stream
- Expenses
- Contingency plan

- Milestones

In *The Corporate Energy Strategist's Handbook*, Jimmy Jia states that it is most important to consider what the audience finds most important (p. 156). What information do they need first? For creative practitioners, knowing your audience is complicated because your immediate audience—an agent or publisher, for example—is often different from your ultimate, *ideal* audience; an editor or producer will want to be sure your work is profitable; an agent will want to be confident that they can adequately represent your work to potential publishers; a grant proposal reviewer will want to be sure that your work addresses the needs of the project.

Each of the statements below should be included in your business plan. The order you arrange them in, however, may change depending on who your immediate audience is.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary is a short, yet well-crafted summation of your values, objectives, and target market. Like any introduction, this should be written last—once you have the remainder of your business plan completed.

Mission Statement

Whether you're a corporate strategist or an up-and-coming author, your business plan should start with a **mission statement.** In this statement, you should address the following questions:

- **What** is your practice, your craft and process? What do you make?
- **Why** do you create? What values inspire you?
- **Who** will you be creating for?

The mission statement should be very clear and concise. A more conceptual mission statement may come off as unclear or obtuse. *But doesn't that convey the creative spirit of my work?* Consider what the audience for a business plan is after: consistency, reliability, and stability. An editor, for example, will want to know that you'll have the manuscript finished on time. A public arts commission that is offering grant support will want to also be sure that the project will be completed in a timely manner. The mission statement conveys these ideals.

Value Statement

The **value statement** can be an optional addition if you want to communicate how you identify with the purpose of a grant, or are aligned with a particular quality of a publisher. At a time when personal values are cultural capital, a value statement can help articulate how your work will also reflect a publisher or organization in the greater community. This is especially important for those just beginning their professional practice and may yet be relatively unknown.

Ideal Audience

Unlike a "target audience," which is typically a data-driven construct formed by demographics and analytics, the **ideal audience** is the community or audience that you have in mind when you are creating. Who is this community you are writing to? Who is that person you think will value your work because it "speaks" to them?

What are the needs and wants of this idealized audience? What are their problems you hope to alleviate? What is their desired lifestyle, their aspirations, and dreams? Following your value statement, a description of your ideal audience communicates your ability to connect with similar audiences being sought by the publisher or organization.

Your Voice. Your Niche. Your Brand

When discussing your creative work, it can be challenging to describe the qualities that distinguish your work from others. Your *voice* describes the signature characteristics of your work. To put it into marketing terms, this is your *brand.*

Are your characters realistic or satirical? Are you exceptional at describing fantasy settings? Do you specialize in honest (at times scathing even) commentary? You may also need to describe your genre and medium as well.

DESCRIPTION OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

In this section, you'll lay out a "menu" of the skills you offer to a client. What are the tasks you're able to perform? What are your specialties? What services can you also provide? Don't overlook those services that may be secondary—even those that you might not be thrilled to offer! Some examples:

Fiction	Creative Non-Fiction	Social Media	Screenplays
Editing	SOPs	Manuals	Resumes
Correspondence	Technical Writing	Web Content	WordPress

While you will want to prioritize those skills that are relevant to your objective and audience, you should also include those that a client may find beneficial. Design skills, for example, indicate an appreciation or knowledge of layout and style treatments. Some secondary skills might include:

Layout	Outreach	Instructional Design	Livestreaming
Document Design	Media Relations	Video Capture	Broadcasting
Survey Design	Presentations	Audio Editing	Photography

You should also include so-called "soft skills," which describe your work process and how you work with others. Research and problem-solving skills are considered soft skills as well as collaboration and leadership. Although these skills might not be included in a "menu" of offerings, you may consider adding a short list of these qualities. Additional soft skills include:

Strong work ethic	Creativity	Adaptability	Project Management
Organization	Open to Criticism	Committed to Diversity	Goal Setting
Stress Management	Flexibility	Detail-oriented	Listening

How you indicate and describe these offerings and skills is up to you. A list may be a good way to stack up your secondary skills. Your primary, applied skills might be more elaborate and descriptive.

INDUSTRIES WORKED

Create a list of industries you have worked in. This is valuable because it displays the contexts in which you developed your skills. Working in restaurants, for example, teaches you a number of soft skills (communication, managing multiple tasks). Restaurant experience can also provide insights about the needs of the service industry: menus and promotion, outreach and employee communications.

WORKS

Develop a list of works you've completed and those currently being worked on. This is useful for demonstrating a work history but also provide yourself with documentation of your accomplishments. This list may be short *now* but it can provide a good reminder of what your objectives and goals are.

Completed works

You will also want to present a list of products and projects you've completed. These are published works as well as presentations given, apps you've developed, and lengthy projects you've collaborated on. *Include dates completed.*

Works in progress

In this section, you should also present a list of projects you're currently working on. This is important to indicate what your current focus is. Include products that are actively being designed, creative works that need to be revised, and accounts that are in negotiation. *Include anticipated dates of completion*.

Avoid listing ideas and "dream" projects

For most of us, this list is much longer than lists of our completed projects and those in progress. A good practice is to begin a document of ideas and keep track of your brainstorming. Because the business plan needs to be concise and precise, however, these should be kept separate. Consider these goals to work into your future plans!

PRODUCTION

Once you have thoroughly described *what* you can do, you'll want to describe your work process, schedule, and plan of operation.

EDUCATION

Although your previous and current education is important, it's crucial you are attentive to the areas for further development. Your formal training says a great deal about your goals and objectives at a specific time in your life and career. For the purposes of a résumé or CV, these are important to include. In a business plan, however, you want to focus on your growth and development.

- What areas do you need to improve?
- What skills do you need to thrive in your target market?

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PART III.

IMPLEMENTATION: CONSTRUCTION AND STYLE

INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSIONAL STYLE

Professional writers should always aspire to communicate as effectively as possible. As we've discussed, clarity and concision are the hallmarks of business writing. But how about the *look* of the document? How does the organization and design of a document affect the effectiveness of our communication?

USING STYLE FOR CLARITY

First, recall that writing for business purposes should be clearly written. Not only should our purpose be explicitly stated, we should also use language that is appropriate for the intended audience. This clarity of purpose also extends through the rest of our writing, and every word supports the delivery of our message.

The style with which we write should also add clarity. The **typeface** selected should be appropriate for the delivery method. **Bold type**, for example, highlights important words, phrases, and statements. **Headings** and **subheadings** can also organize the document so the reader can quickly locate important sections.

USING STYLE FOR CONSISTENCY

Communicating with a consistent voice is expected in the professional world. This is accomplished by establishing a style that works well with a brand. A unique style connected with an organization's brand can help consumers and audiences quickly connect with the product in some way. BMW, for example, is a brand of luxury vehicles that enforces strict adherence to the corporate style across all dealerships. Any dealers deviating from the consistency of the BMW brand receive multiple warnings before facing more serious financial consequences!

Even though you may not (yet) work for a global corporation like BMW, it is still important to be strategic with your professional writing style.

CHAPTER 14.

INTRODUCTION TO TYPE STYLE

Typestyle refers to the visual appearance of the writing and is a combination of **font**, **sizing**, **alignment**, **spacing**, and other factors.

In business communication, the choice of type style can have a profound impact on how the information is received and understood. Here's a breakdown of its importance. Although not often as important as the content of your writing, the type styles used should support the efficient communication of your message.

For many large organizations, a style guide will likely be provided as a reference so that your professional writing will be consistent. When a style guide is not available, it is useful to have a basic understanding of how type styles impact your writing.

A comprehensive look at type style for business is beyond the scope of this resource, but this section provides a broad overview of some fundamentals. As we'll discuss, knowing what makes a good professional style can be subjective—what type face represents your brand?—but should always work towards improving or supporting the following:

- **Readability and Accessibility**: The primary goal of professional writing is to communicate clearly and effectively. A well-chosen type style enhances readability, making it easier for the audience to understand the text. For example, a sans-serif font like Arial is often considered more readable for digital text, while a serif font like Times New Roman is traditionally used for printed material. Adequate font size and appropriate line spacing are also crucial for accessibility, especially for readers with visual impairments.

A visual comparison of Arial and Times New Roman fonts

- **Tone and Professionalism**: Type style contributes to the tone of the document. A more traditional font can convey formality and professionalism, while a more modern font might suggest innovation or creativity. The choice of type style should align with the purpose of the document and the expectations of the intended audience.

A visual comparison between Futura and Garamond fonts

What sort of font represents you? A classic, traditional typeface like Garamond or the sleek Futura font?

- ◦ **Hierarchy and Organization**: Different type styles and sizes are used to create a visual hierarchy in the text, making it easier for readers to navigate the document. Look at this very page, for example: there is a title as well as headings and body text to help guide you through the content in an organized fashion. Even this unordered list has bolded subheadings to make it easier to read.
- ◦ **Branding and Identity**: In business writing, type style can be a part of the organization's brand identity. Consistent use of a specific typeface across all documents and platforms helps build a recognizable brand image. UW-Green Bay, for instance, uses the Montserrat font for headings and Helvetica Neue for body copy on their web pages. UW-Madison uses slightly different fonts (primarily Verlag and Vitesse) to distinguish its campus from others in the system.

- **Emphasis and Highlighting**: Type styles like **bold**, *italic*, and <u>underline</u> emphasize important points or keywords in a text. This selective emphasis helps in drawing the reader's attention to critical pieces of information.

CHAPTER 15.

TYPEFACES AND FONTS

Public Sans is a typeface which includes the following fonts:

Public Sans

Public Sans Black

Public Sans Semibold

Public Sans Light, and many others…

A **typeface** is a designed style of lettering (also called a "family") that often includes a large set of variants called **fonts.** There are tens-of-thousands of available typefaces. Many must be purchased, while many more are offered for free. Public Sans (see above), is a free typeface that was designed by the U.S. Government to be used primarily for digital services. Typefaces are categorized according to their most prominent design features. The basic categories of professional quality typefaces are **serif** and **sans serif.** More designerly typestyles that are not often used professionally outside of logos are **script** and **decorative** typefaces.

SERIF

The extra strokes of these classic typefaces are best used for printed materials like books and pamphlets. Serif fonts are designed to guide the reader's eye across the page as effectively as possible, making it easier to read longer works. Some popular serif fonts are Times New Roman, Garamond, Cambria, and Georgia.

SANS SERIF

Typefaces that do not have extra strokes are categorized as **sans serif** and are generally used for writing that will be presented on a screen. American highway signs also use sans serif fonts because those typefaces are *faster* to read. Some popular sans serif fonts include Helvetica, Arial, Calibri, and Century Gothic.

"US Highway 53 – Wisconsin." Photo by Dougtone, 3 Sept, 2011 CC BY SA

There are many other typefaces that are not often found in professional writing except for occasional use in branding or marketing materials. Even then, they should be used sparingly and not for general purpose.

SCRIPTS

Typefaces that appear more like handwriting are categorized as **script**. These are not typically used for professional writing outside of design because they are more difficult to read.

Edwardian Script

Freestyle Script

DECORATIVE

These typefaces are often used for graphical works such as posters and not for routine professional writing.

Chiller

Broadway

CHAPTER 16.

TYPOGRAPHIC EMPHASIS

Emphasizing select portions of your writing can help direct the reader's attention. Care must be taken not to overuse these techniques, however, as it could have adverse effects and make your writing more difficult to read.

Bold Text

Bold text is a good example of using emphasis to highlight short portions of writing. For example, bolded text can help a reader quickly scan a large portion of text at the beginning of each item in an unordered list.

You can also use bolded text for the following:

- **Highlighting Key Information**: Used to make important details stand out.
- **Headings and Subheadings**: Helps in differentiating and organizing sections.
- **Drawing Attention to Warnings or Cautions**: Ensures critical warnings are noticed.
- **Stressing Terms or Concepts**: Emphasizes specific terms for focus or learning.

Italicized Text

Another method of highlighting our professional writing is to italicize specific terms or concepts. Titles of films, television series, and publications are italicized (ex. *Hyperion* is a book by Dan Simmons.), as are the names of vessels (ex. *Titanic*, *Voyager II*) and court cases (ex. *Brown v. Board of Education*).

<u>Underlined Text</u>

When I was younger, we used to underline book and movie titles. We rarely, if ever, underline our writing anymore, however, because the practice is now associated with the interactive hyperlinks found on web pages. Underlining text also adds more elements to a page or screen which reduces reading efficiency.

CHAPTER 17.

TYPE SIZE

Type is measured in **points**. A point is equal to 1/72 of an inch, which means that a 72-point font will be approximately an inch tall.

For most professional documents that are printed or presented on screen, the size of your type should be **11 or 12 points**.

For slide decks, **your type should be around 30 points for legibility.**

CHAPTER 18.

SPACING AND INDENTATION

One noticeable difference between academic and professional writing is the spacing and indentation used. You probably wrote essays for school using double-spaced lines, for example, to provide instructors with space to provide feedback. We rarely use double-spacing in professional writing. Some individuals may prefer double-spacing when reviewing drafts, but it will be reformatted before the distribution of the final draft. Like all professional writing, the efficiency of communications, genre conventions, and stylistic choice should help determine spacing levels. Sometimes, I select 1.15 spacing in Word when the typeface warrants it.

Indenting the first line in paragraphs is also used infrequently, especially when writing for the screen. The amount of blank, "negative" space should be considered when composing longer professional documents such as cover letters, reports, and memos. Too much spacing can be distracting, while too little can be exhausting to read. Many of our tools automatically set these elements for us, yet these default settings are not always preferred.

LINE SPACING

Line spacing is the measure between lines on the written page or screen. The space between lines is automatically adjusted to accommodate whatever font is used (approximately 130% of the font size). Double-spaced lines are typically reserved for academic writing. The space between lines should be set to single or 1.15. When drafting professional documents, 1.5 may be used.

SPACES BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS

Providing a small amount of space between paragraphs is a good method for relieving the strain of reading on screen. For Microsoft Word, the default is 8 pts. of spacing.

INDENTATION

For longer printed documents, a half-inch indentation can help distinguish the beginning of paragraphs. Instead of indentation, it is also acceptable to add space between paragraphs; the default in Microsoft Word is 8 pt. Indentations are not typically used when writing for the screen. Spacing between paragraphs is preferred.

Memos are not typically indented but incorporate added space between paragraphs instead.

MARGINS

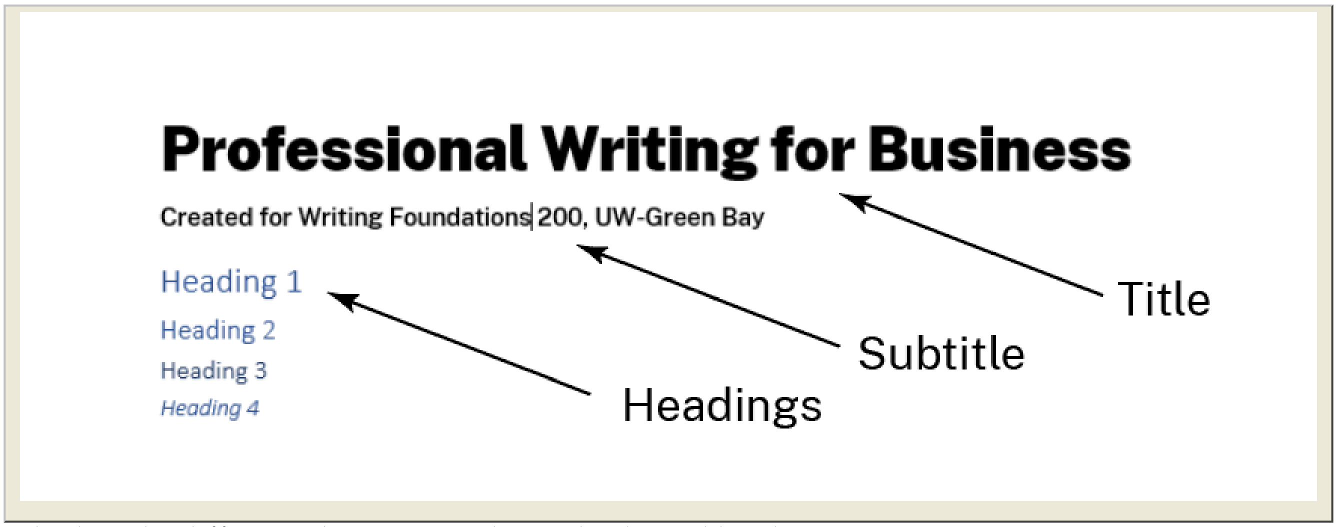
Margins for documents written on standard, 8.5 x 11 sized pages should be one inch on each side. If there is any design work, such as a letterhead on the page, be sure to retain the 1-inch margin. Do not increase the margin size for page numbers.

Review this for some spacing examples.

CHAPTER 19.

HEADINGS AND SUBHEADS

To help visually organize a longer document or web page, use headings and subheadings to designate each section and create a **hierarchy** of information. Proper use of headings can help readers quickly identify key focus areas when arranged in logical order. In longer documents, headings and subheadings help readers navigate to interesting sections.



A look at the difference between a title, a subtitle, and headings 1-4.

BENEFITS OF HEADINGS

When using many writing tools like Microsoft Word, headings and subheads are also used to generate tables of contents automatically. For audiences that use screen readers, headings and subheadings can help a listener quickly navigate to the desired section. Headings also contain HTML tags which enable web designers to link directly to those sections.
For marketers, subheadings can also be used as vehicles for keywords that help strengthen your search engine optimization (SEO) efforts.

LENGTH OF HEADINGS

Headings should describe—in 70 characters or less—the section that follows them. Besides being more efficient to read, a shorter heading is less likely to be impacted by size constraints.

WHEN TO USE SUBHEADINGS

If it makes sense to further break down the information in that section into subsections, smaller headings (subheadings) are used to distinguish those subsections further.
A section should contain *at least* two lines of writing beneath it.

How Many Subheadings?

This is subject to preference but I will only use subsections if I have at least three distinct subjects to focus on. Too many subsections and the hierarchy may become too congested with subsections. When there are more than 5 subsections, I try to combine some of them or create a whole new section.

CHAPTER 20.

LISTS

Ordered and unordered lists are essential in business writing, offering a clear and structured way to present information. **Ordered lists** use numbers or letters to show sequence, hierarchy, or priority, making them ideal for step-by-step instructions, rankings, or processes. **Unordered lists**, on the other hand, use bullet points or another visual element to group related items without implying order or precedence, making them practical for summarizing key points, listing features, or organizing ideas. Both enhance readability, help emphasize critical information, and allow readers to scan and understand content quickly.

ORDERED LISTS

Information that is best read in a specific order should be presented as an ordered list. Numbered lists are best used for instructions and items that are ranked. For example:

Example of Ranked List: Horizon League Top 5 (Jan. 13, 2024)

1. Green Bay Phoenix
2. Cleveland State Vikings
3. Purdue Fort Wayne Mastodons
4. Wright State Raiders
5. Detroit Mercy Titans

Example of Instructions: How to Change a Car Tire

1. **Secure the Vehicle**: Park your car on a flat, stable surface. Apply the parking brake and place wheel wedges under the opposite tires.
2. **Loosen the Lug Nuts**: Using a lug wrench, turn the lug nuts counterclockwise about ¼ to ½ of a turn, but do not remove them completely yet.
3. **Lift the Vehicle**: Place the jack under the vehicle frame near the tire that you are going to change. Raise the vehicle until the tire is about six inches off the ground.
4. **Remove and Replace the Tire**: Remove the lug nuts completely and remove the tire. Mount the spare tire on the lug bolts, then put the lug nuts on and tighten them by hand as much as possible.
5. **Lower the Vehicle and Tighten Lug Nuts**: Use the jack to lower the

vehicle so that the tire touches the ground but doesn't bear the full weight of the car. Tighten the lug nuts with the wrench, then lower the vehicle completely and remove the jack. Ensure the lug nuts are tightened fully.

Style choice: Notice how I bolded each point in the list above? This is so that the reader can more easily follow the instructions by scanning along the left-hand side of the list.

UNORDERED LISTS

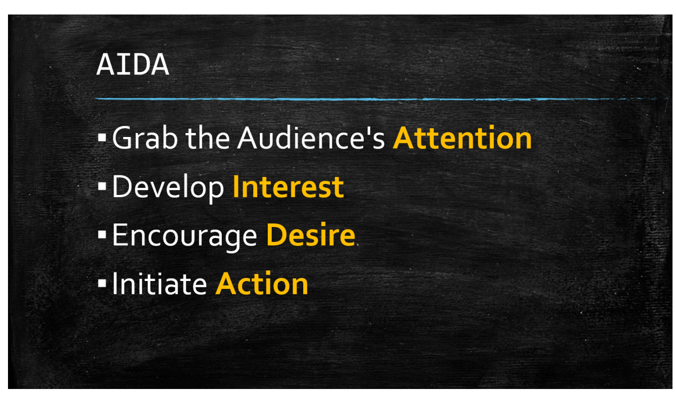
Unordered (or "bulleted") lists are ideal for grouping related items where sequencing is not as important. Unordered lists are good for presenting a list of features or summarizing key points in a slide presentation. Notice in the example below that even though there is no explicit order, the items are listed in a way that makes sense. The backpack is listed first, as it may be assumed to hold the remainder of the items. Each item is also bolded in this example, followed by a short description.

Example of an Unordered List: Items to Bring for a Day Hike

- **Backpack**: A comfortable, lightweight backpack to carry all your items.
- **Water**: At least 2 liters per person to stay hydrated.
- **Snacks**: Energy bars, trail mix, or fruit for sustenance.
- **Map and Compass/GPS**: For navigation, especially in areas with limited cell service.
- **Sun Protection**: Sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat to protect against sunburn.

Example of a Presentation Slide Containing an Unordered List

In this sample slide, an unordered list is used because the acronym AIDA provides the order.



Slide from a presentation about the AIDA Method. Source Kris Purzycki.

CHAPTER 21.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: STYLE GUIDES

WHAT IS A STYLE GUIDE?

For any organization, the development of one's brand is key to establishing a presence in the market. Through our brand, we articulate a specific "voice" and those desirable values that can connect us with a particular audience. Visual branding, such as a logo, used on everything from marketing campaigns and merchandising to professional stationery, creates a standard by which everyone may identify and make connections. When did you last strike up a conversation with someone because you recognized the logo on their shirt?

Beyond logo design, branding can also extend to the preferred typefaces, colors, and documents an organization uses. As the brand of an individual or organization grows, it becomes increasingly important to develop a professional **style guide**. These guides serve as a comprehensive manual for providing clear instructions on every brand element, ensuring everyone represents the organization consistently. Coca-Cola, for example, has trademark rights on a specific red called, appropriately enough, "Coke Red." For example, the style guide for the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay includes fonts, colors, and the desired placement of these elements on various professional documents. As in this example, many style guides also include guidance on preferred spellings, grammatical usage, formatting, and citation styles.

ACADEMIC STYLE GUIDES

You have probably worked with style guides already when assigned essays for school. Depending on the class, you were likely using one of a handful of **academic style guides** commonly used to lay out the conventions for formatting your essay or report, cite sources, and ensure consistency in your writing. Much like branding, style guides enhance your credibility and show that you recognize and appreciate the genre conventions of that field of study. Here are some summaries of the more popular academic styles.

APA Style (American Psychological Association)

APA is widely used in the social sciences and emphasizes clarity, objectivity, and the ethical presentation of data. Reports, white papers, and analytical documents are typically written using APA style as it provides clearly defined rules for using charts and figures. One benefit of APA is that the style may be adapted to meet the needs of an organization or publication.

MLA Style (Modern Language Association)

Majors in the humanities rely on MLA style, which focuses on citing sources in a clear, concise format. Whereas APA is used more for genres that use quantitative data, MLA is built for citing *qualitative* data. Case studies, cultural and audience analyses are often written in MLA formatting.

Chicago Style (University of Chicago Press)

Although coming from a major academic press, Chicago and its offshoots have become more popular in commercial use due to its versatility. Footnotes are the hallmark of Chicago style, a useful technique when creating visual forms of information like presentation slides and infographics.

AP Style (Associated Press)

Used in journalism and corporate communications, AP Style is unique in that it rarely uses formal citations but instead integrates sources into the writing itself. On the other hand, AP carries an extensive list of recommendations for abbreviations, proper nouns, dates, and numbers. AP focuses on concision and avoiding jargon so it is especially useful in journalism as well as corporate communications.

IEEE Style (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers)

Like MLA and APA, IEEE is designed to work especially well in a specific field of study. Used primarily for technical documents, the precision and structure of IEEE is most often used in technology sectors, information systems, project managements, and data analytics.

Academic style guides are more than just rules for formatting; they are tools for effective communication. As business writing students, mastering these guides prepares you to create professional documents that meet the standards of academia as well as industry. Understanding when and how to use different guides will help you adapt to the diverse demands of business and technical communication.

In my own professional experience, I've found that most organizations have incorporated one or more of the above styles into their own branding. Outside of higher education, in other words, I have rarely been asked to use MLA or APA. Instead, I have had to learn a proprietary, "in-house" style guide or create one for clients.

So what goes into an in-house or personal style guide? Many of the same components of the academic styles you've already worked with!

PERSONAL STYLE GUIDES

A personal style guide is a set of guidelines that you create for yourself to help you write consistently and effectively. It can be tailored to your individual writing style, preferences, and needs. Here are some important questions to help you consider your personal writing style:

- **Tone and style**: Consider the tone and style that you want to use in your writing. Do you prefer a formal or informal tone? Should your writing be conversational or more technical? Include guidelines on the type of language and vocabulary you prefer to use in your writing.
- **Formatting**: Consistency in formatting can help your writing look more polished and professional. Consider guidelines for headings, font sizes and types, paragraph spacing, and other elements of formatting.
- **Terminology and spelling**: If you frequently use technical terms or jargon in your writing, it may be helpful to create a list of preferred terms and spellings. This can help you ensure consistency and accuracy in your writing.

- **References and citations:** If you frequently use references or citations in your writing, it may be helpful to develop guidelines for how to cite sources, what types of sources to use, and how to format references and citations.
- **Writing process**: Consider developing guidelines for your writing process, including how to brainstorm ideas, organize your thoughts, and revise your writing.
- **Voice and audience**: Consider the voice and audience for your writing. Should your writing be more formal or conversational? Who is your target audience, and how can you tailor your writing to their needs and expectations?

Overall, a personal style guide is a tool for helping you write consistently and effectively. It should reflect your individual writing style and preferences, and include guidelines for tone and style, formatting, grammar and punctuation, terminology and spelling, references and citations, writing process, and voice and audience. By following your personal style guide, you can produce high-quality writing that meets your communication goals and reflects your unique voice and perspective.

SETTING UP YOUR STYLE GUIDE

Before setting up your style guide, be sure to do the following:

1. **Choose a specific context or audience for your style guide**. For example, you might create a style guide for writing technical documentation, business communication, academic writing, or social media content.
2. **Conduct research on existing style guides** for your chosen context or audience. You can use the internet, books, or other resources to find examples of style guides that are relevant to your project.
3. **Review the guidelines and best practices in the existing style guides** and take notes on what you find useful, effective, and relevant.
4. **Develop a set of guidelines and best practices** for your own style guide, using the information and insights you gained from your research. Consider issues such as tone, language, formatting, style, and referencing.
5. **Write your style guide**, making sure to clearly define and explain each guideline and best practice. Use clear and concise language, and provide examples and illustrations wherever possible.
6. **Review and edit your style guide** to ensure that it is consistent, coherent, and effective. Make any necessary changes or revisions based on feedback from peers or instructors.

WRITING THE INTRODUCTION

Some questions to address in your style guide introduction include:

- What context or audience did you choose for your style guide, and why? What were some of the key considerations or challenges specific to this context or audience?
- What guidelines and best practices did you include in your style guide, and why? What did you find useful or effective about the guidelines and best practices in existing style guides, and

how did you adapt them for your own project?

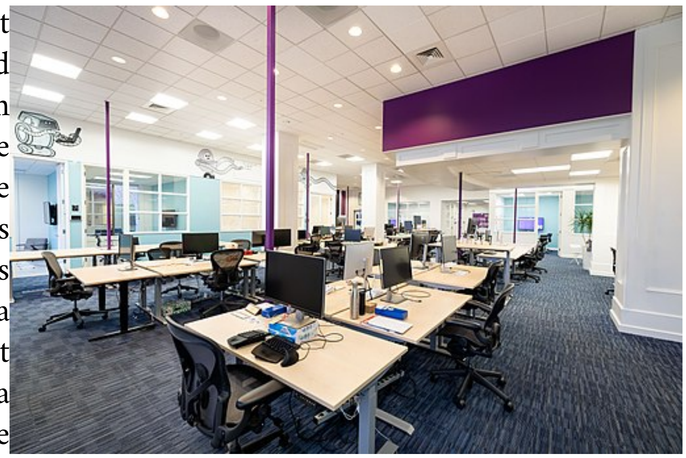
- How did you ensure consistency and coherence in your style guide? What tools or strategies did you use to achieve this?
- What feedback did you receive on your style guide, and how did you incorporate this feedback into your final product? What changes or revisions did you make, and why?
- If you were to create another style guide in the future, what lessons would you take from this project? What would you do differently, and what would you keep the same?

Other Components to Include

Your style guide should be a reflection of you, your personality, and professional experiences and aspirations. What it should demonstrate is an attention to the purpose and audience and how those concepts are expressed through small design choices.

PART IV.

INTERFACE: YOUR PROFESSIONAL VOICE



Today's workplace is a dynamic environment that is undergoing numerous changes. The widespread shift from working in person to working from home, for example, has radically altered how we communicate with one another. Job markets have meanwhile become increasingly competitive as employees search for the best opportunities among employers who struggle to maintain a stable workforce. Meanwhile, new tools built from artificial intelligence technologies have had a profound impact on every occupation and the skills required of the workforce.

Despite these exciting challenges, one skill remains in constant—if not higher—demand: good writing skills. AI tools like ChatGPT have teased a likely future where mundane writing tasks might someday be accomplished with a few strategic prompts. But the ability to connect with audiences, new clients, and consumers demands we make those intrapersonal connections that AI is incapable of simulating. Understanding the specific needs and desires of others while being attentive to their individual cultural, physical, and social perspectives, for example, is a distinctly human trait—one that is conveyed in our writing.

Making Connections

Correspondence and other forms of direct communication are forms of writing in which these skills are required. A job application cover letter, for example, remains a necessity despite recent skepticism about whether it is still necessary. Résumés have also changed of late, but if you're thinking that a snappy, creative video résumé means you're off the hook, think again: even a video introduction requires a well-crafted script. The résumé, whether it's on your hard drive or LinkedIn, persists as a minimum requirement that should be maintained.

Over the next few chapters, we're going to work on some conventional types of writing. Our first unit delves into some of the fundamental writing genres that remain important in the professional realm. We will work through some of these—the email, memo, and cover letter—because they are, at the very least, a crucial foundation for your professional experience. You probably have written many of these before and have copies on hand. Memos, on the other hand, might be a little less familiar. Our goal here is to gain experience with them because, as we'll discuss, many of the new, creative approaches still rely on older genres.

Sources

Image: "Rockset Office in San Mateo, California." by Rodbauer, CC BY-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 22.

INTRODUCTION: CORRESPONDENCE AND EMAIL

"A letter that is unattractive in appearance leads the reader to feel instinctively that the subject shares this quality."
~ Harrison McJohnston, *Business Correspondence,* 1919

INTRODUCTION

According to a recent poll conducted by Grammarly (2021), American businesses lose an estimated $1.2 *trillion* each year due to poor communication practices[1]. The vast majority of business leaders surveyed for the report agree that good communication skills are vital and that candidates' writing skills are being increasingly scrutinized. In a different study, over 90% of business leaders confirmed that an applicant's poor writing had hurt their candidacy (Droz & Jacobs, 2019). In other words, writing skills are crucial to the workforce—so much so that those skills help set us apart from the rest of the applicants in today's competitive job market.

So why *is* writing so important to business?

Broadly speaking, your writing represents your professional self and your perspective toward the organization you're writing to or on behalf of. As we'll discuss in a moment, your attitudes toward the organization you're writing for, your understanding of your audience's needs, and even your level of expertise are reflected in how you write. In the business world, your writing expresses a range of values—trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity, to name a few—that potential customers and clients need to perceive to respond positively. This is especially true for writing genres in which professionals must initiate action through direct contact.

Most of this contact happens in emails, letters, memos, as well as text messages. Writing these forms of **correspondence** makes up the day-to-day work of the business professional: attracting new clients, alerting personnel to new work processes, and promoting new products are just a few functions of correspondence.

Correspondence can be both *internal* and *external.* Internal correspondence is writing sent to others within the same organization. These are typically memos, emails, and text messages. The most popular forms of external correspondence sent outside the organization include emails and letters. For example, let's say I'm the manager of a small business. I have assigned a report to one of my recently hired employees and have scheduled an afternoon meeting with them to review their findings. That is, until I receive this email (see fig. 1):

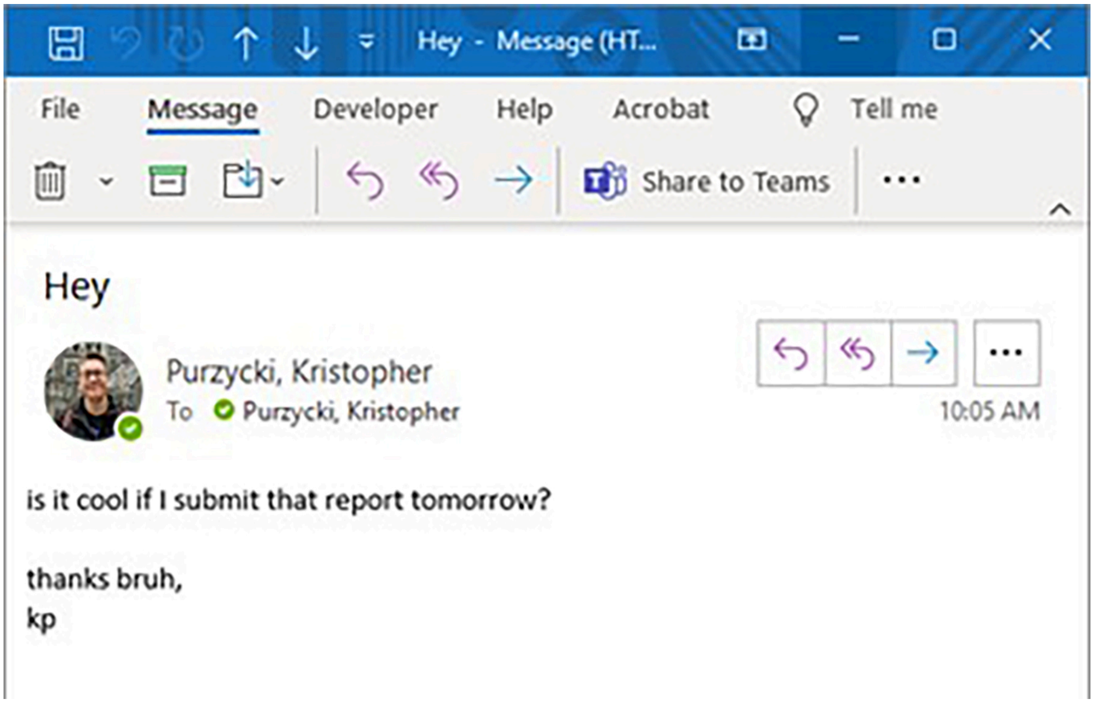


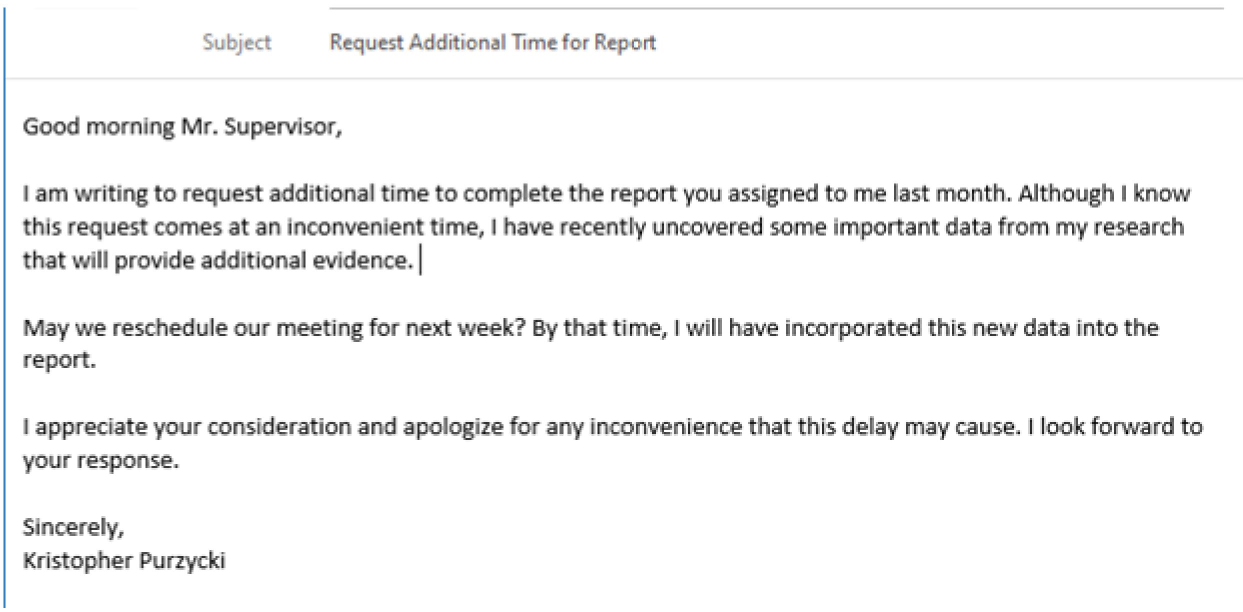
Figure 1. Bad email. Screen capture by author.

Although it's baffling why I would hire someone with the same name, this email is equally confounding! The message is clear: my doppelganger employee is unprepared to discuss their report. While I might be willing to accept this setback as a minor inconvenience, the writing is more troublesome: the informal tone, lack of justification for the delay, and grammar issues present some concerns to me as the manager. Why? After all—they're just words!

Consider how this message represents the person making the request. The subject line, "Hey," is incredibly informal (even if it's addressed to myself) and fails to mention what the email is about. The language I'm using is both grammatically incorrect and oddly casual—especially for someone who is asking their manager for extra time on a report.

There is also an absence of information that helps justify the request. Why does the employee need more time? Why have they waited until the last possible moment to make this request? Based on the closing, "Thanks, bruh," the employee seems to assume that the delay is approved. The employee also demonstrates a lack of respect for authority—not a good strategy for someone who is asking for extra time to complete an assigned task.

Here is the same email written more professionally (see fig. 2). Notice the difference?


Subject Request Additional Time for Report

Good morning Mr. Supervisor,

I am writing to request additional time to complete the report you assigned to me last month. Although I know this request comes at an inconvenient time, I have recently uncovered some important data from my research that will provide additional evidence.

May we reschedule our meeting for next week? By that time, I will have incorporated this new data into the report.

I appreciate your consideration and apologize for any inconvenience that this delay may cause. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,
Kristopher Purzycki

Figure 2. Better email. Screen capture by author.

While we all make mistakes, these are not qualities we like to see in the professional environment. Someone who writes carelessly is likely to make mistakes in other work areas. Employees who don't recognize organizational hierarchies and protocols may not know client relations.

In other words, **professional writing is more than words strung together**. They're a reflection of our personalities, values, and skills. In our correspondence, our professional selves come through in our writing.

WHY PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE IS IMPORTANT

Professional correspondence reflects your professionalism. Correspondence is how we represent our professional selves to our colleagues, customers, and communities. Why does an email to your supervisor take more time than one to a friend? Simply because we recognize our audience, our role, and the level of care we must use in our writing.

These are what we refer to as **stakes**. For friends and family, the stakes are usually pretty low—our roles are familiar and comfortable. However, the stakes are a bit higher when writing in a professional setting. Linguist Kim Sydow Campbell (2014) speaks to this, noting that "[your] audience determines your reputation based on what you put into that email message. To succeed, you have to be able to predict how they will interpret what you wrote." Understanding your **audience**, in other words, is of utmost importance and will help your writing "make sense" as well as determine which roles you must take up.

Professional correspondence needs to make sense. If good professional communication skills are invaluable in the world of business, correspondence is the most prolific genre. Reports, spreadsheets, and proposals are significant. But it is the letter, email, and memo that we use to share ideas, inspire action, and drive relationships. It's how things get done! Anne Surma (2013) stresses how important it is that professional writing "make sense" (p.21). While this may seem obvious, Surma unpacks this common phrase, describing how complex and significant this task is; in addition to making sense mechanically (grammar, spelling, etc.), professional writing also makes sense in other ways:

- **Business sense**: is the writing considerate of the organizational impact? Is that email necessary?

- **Literary sense**: is the writing clear and effective?
- **Political sense**: does the writing respect the organization's hierarchy? Does the writing respect the agendas and protocols of the organization and community?
- **Rational sense**: Is the argument logical and thoughtfully organized?
- **Emotional sense**: is the tone professional and composed in an appropriate manner?
- **Aesthetic sense**: does the writing *look* good? Is it clean and organized?
- **Social sense**: Does the writing respect the social and cultural expectations of the organization and the *community?*

These considerations should factor into every work of professional writing and help the writer determine which *role*—or voice—they must write in.

The professional writer has many roles to play. If "making sense" wasn't difficult enough, the business professional must also be adept at writing in multiple voices. The foremost reason for this is that so many *audiences* must be addressed. As Christopher Tribble (2004) studied, written correspondence is the principal form of relationship building, demanding that the professional be able to take on multiple roles (p. 290). If you're an accountant explaining finances to a client, you're taking on the role of a *guide*. To sever ties with a client, you'll need to take on the *litigator role* in crafting your disengagement letter.

As another example, consider the social media influencers and how important it is to be attentive to followers' values and care about dominant trends to develop their audience. Depending on the approach, that influencer might be taking up the role of *artist, traveler, model*, or *activist.* When you add video, imagery, and music to the mix, the social media marketer becomes a *producer* and *multimedia editor.*

This is why describing those goals clearly in your writing is important. Many of us have exciting, innovative ideas—new concepts, procedures, and inventions we want to make real. The challenge is effectively presenting those ideas in a format that provides direction on making those ideas happen.

If you're reading this, we can assume you are familiar with emails and text messages. But how often have you written a professional letter? Maybe you've written a cover letter, but even those are becoming outdated. It's even more unlikely that you've written memos, an internal form of correspondence that has been displaced by email somewhat but is still a preferred mode of communicating with employees but also a method of record keeping.

> Many of the terms bolded in this resource are further explained in the glossary.

This week, we will look at some of the more prominent forms of correspondence in the business world: emails, memos, and cover letters. For each of these, we'll examine what are known as **genre conventions**. Simply put, these qualities are associated with different types of media. The genre conventions of a horror movie, for example, include suspenseful music, dark and ominous visuals, and a few surprising moments that might make us jump out of our seats.

Fans of horror movies might also distinguish between different **sub-genres**. While all share most of these conventions, sub-genres have their own set of conventions that set them apart. Zombie horror, for example, typically features some undead variation, while psychological horror relies more on mental tricks to fool the audience.

For professional writing, it is important to recognize the conventions that distinguish the genre from other forms of communication. The conventions of professional writing include a formal tone and clear, efficient writing free of spelling and grammatical errors.

We'll look at several sub-genres of correspondence including memos, and cover letters. Each of these has its conventions that make them distinct. Let's first take a more in-depth look at emails as the most popular form of professional correspondence.

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[1] *Note: It's worth mentioning that Grammarly produces tools to help professionals write better. While this doesn't necessarily mean that these statistics are false, we should recognize that the company has a motivation to research, curate, and present information in such a way that it makes their product look more valuable.*

CHAPTER 23.

EMAILS

Author's Note: This chapter is excerpted from Arley Cruthers's *Business Writing for Everyone* and was edited for consistency with the course. In the introduction to this section, we examined an example of a lousy email alongside a more professional version. To expand on this some more, let's unpack the proper composition and structure of an email. Despite being the most prolific form of business correspondence, I have found that emails are where the most fundamental professional writing practices are overlooked. Cruthers offers an excellent overview of email structure and how we should be mindful of the expectations of professional audiences.

While it may be used like text messaging, or synchronous chatting, and it can be delivered to a cell phone, email remains an **asynchronous** communication tool. In business, email 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.

Author's Note: Consider the type and timing of the response you expect from your correspondence. Emails should typically be responded to in 24 hours or less, depending on the urgency. Although the expectations vary, you should also consider the time of day and week you send your emails. Each individual and organization may have its own guidelines (check out the syllabus for my own!).

Emails may be informal in personal contexts, but business communication requires attention to detail, 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 or CEO.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS EMAILS

If you're struggling to write an email, err on the side of **not wasting the reader's time**. Many readers get hundreds of emails a day. While a reader might sit down to read a letter or a memo, they will usually spend a few seconds scanning an email for relevant information before moving on to the next one.

Unless your email is sensitive or you are breaking bad news, it's nearly always a good idea to state the main point of the email clearly and to clearly tell the audience what you want them to do.

It may be helpful for you to think of this as building a frame around your email. In the first part of the frame, you open by telling the reader **why you're writing** and clearly state your purpose. If you are making a request, you may want to follow this with a justification of some context as to why you are making the request. Then, in the body, you give the main message. In the bottom part of the frame, you end by telling the reader what to do next. This is what we frequently refer to as a "call to action."

Here's an example. The grey shaded parts represent the frame.

> Frame: I'm writing to congratulate you on being named Employee of the Month.

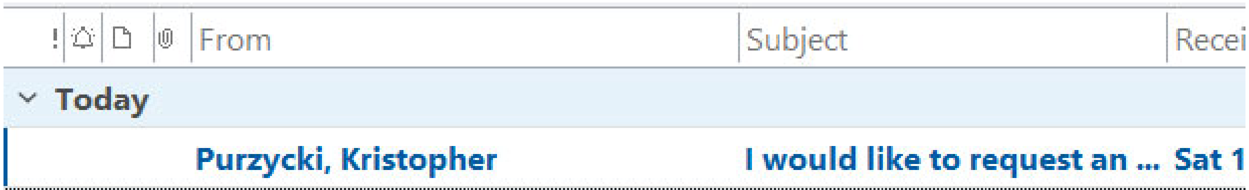
> In your nomination form, your manager noted that you've always had exceptional customer service skills, but last month you stood out by helping an elderly customer troubleshoot her computer issues. Your patience and dedication was inspirational to the rest of the team.

> Frame: We would like to present you with a certificate and your $100 cheque at the staff meeting on Monday, June 5th. Please confirm whether or not you'll be in attendance so we can plan accordingly.
>
> Congratulations once again. We are lucky to have you part of our team!

First, the writer tells exactly why they're writing. Then, they provide the supporting details. Last, they tell the reader what to do (confirm whether or not they'll be at the meeting).

> Author's note: Review the "Anatomy of an Email" handout for an illustrated overview of email structure.

Here are some more tips for sending successful 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). Be sure to use the formal title when first communicating with an individual. They may suggest dropping the formal title as the connection builds but defer to their preference.
- 

  Screen capture of email client window. The subject column is too narrow to display a long Subject line.

  Subject lines should be clear, brief, and specific. This helps the recipient understand the essence of the message. For example, "Proposal attached" or "Your question of 10/25." Be aware that many email clients will not display the full Subject line (see above) if the recipient has not expanded the Subject column. Keep the subject short enough to avoid misinterpretation.
- **Do not insert the recipient email address until you are ready to send.** A good preventative measure to avoid the potential embarrassment of prematurely sending emails. Hitting "send" without a recipient address will prevent the email from being sent.
- **Your email should have one purpose**. If you find yourself covering more than one topic in your email, you should consider sending multiple emails so that your reader does not miss important information.
- **Be brief.**
- **Use a clear format**. Include line breaks between sentences or divide your message into brief paragraphs for ease of reading.
- **Close with a signature**. Identify yourself by creating a signature block that automatically contains your name and business contact information. It is becoming increasingly common for businesses to add First Nations Land Acknowledgements to their email signatures. For example, at Kwantlen, we can use: "At KPU we work, study, and live in a region south of the Fraser River which overlaps with the unceded traditional and ancestral lands of the Kwantlen, Musqueam, Katzie, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen, Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem peoples."
- **Reread, revise, and review**. Catch and correct spelling and grammar mistakes before you press "send." It will take more time and effort to undo the problems caused by a hasty, poorly written email than to get it right the first time.
- **Reply promptly**. Watch out for an emotional response—never reply in anger—but make a habit of replying to all emails within 24 hours, even if only to say that you will provide the requested information in 48 or 72 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.
- **If you include a link**, test it to make sure it is complete.

- **Announce email attachments in your message**.
- **Give feedback or follow up**. If you don't get a response in 24 hours, email or call. Spam filters may have intercepted your message, so your recipient may never have received it.

Sample Standard Email

To: Harriet Adamo, Physical Plant Manager, XYZ Corporation

From: Mel Vargas, Construction Site Manager, Maxim Construction

Sent: Monday, 10/25/2019 8:14 AM

Subject: Construction Interruptions

Harriet,

I know employees of XYZ Corp. are looking forward to moving into the new ABC Street building in January, but recently groups of employees who do not have business here have been walking through the building. These visits create a safety hazard, interrupt the construction workers, and could put your occupancy date in jeopardy.

Would you please instruct your staff members who haven't already been moved to ABC Street to stay out of the building? If they need to meet here with someone who has already moved, they should conduct their business and leave promptly via the nearest staircase.

We need to avoid further interruptions so our construction workers can get the building ready for occupancy on schedule. If you have any questions, please call me.

Thanks,

Mel

Melvin R. Vargas

Construction Site Manager, Maxim Construction Co.

1234 Main St, Big City, Canada

(111) 222-3333 ext. 4444

Work Cited

Guffey, M. (2008). Essentials of business communication (7th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson/Wadsworth.

CHAPTER 24.

MEMOS

Memoranda (memos, for short) are forms of professional correspondence primarily used to communicate with others within an organization. Many formatting conventions of a memo should seem similar to its digital descendant—the email. Like emails, memos are written and distributed to provide updates, publish announcements, and request specific actions.

Why write a memo rather than send an email?

To start with the practical, the fact is that many employees (such as those in industrial and service sectors) don't have ready access to email. Even those with access may not check email regularly. A memo may be printed out and posted to areas where employees frequent.

Another purpose of the memo is that it serves as a snapshot of a moment in an organization's history. It may be hard to believe but, in the early days of the Green Bay Packers, volunteers were recruited to sell season tickets. From the 1942 memo from Lee Joannes, we get an idea of what incentives were offered to volunteers as well as the organizational vision for the team and the growing football league. (Courtesy of the Cofrin Library Archives.)

A memo is therefore also a form of archiving for an organization and may contain short-form reports, meeting notes, or summaries of longer reports. Policy memos are a specific sub-genre of memo that communicate changes in organizational structure, protocols, and procedures.

A memo's audience is almost always known and its distribution is strictly limited to within an organization. Memos may be accessible to the public and should be written as such—no private information should be included. The tone and style of memo writing are both objective and written from a first-person plural perspective.

A CEO, for example, will send memos to employees announcing new products being released. Human resources might post memos announcing new hires or policy changes that impact the workplace. While this information might go out as an email as well, the memo should contain more details and be written in a highly-polished, clear format.

HOW TO WRITE A MEMO

As is found in most forms of professional writing, the memo is a finely-crafted document that prioritizes clarity and concision. Because memos usually contain policy changes and are used for recordkeeping, writing them usually demands several rounds of drafting, reviewing by management, and revising.

Unless sent on behalf of or from top administrators and managers, memos should be written in the first-person plural form (we, our, ours) to suggest inclusion and organizational cohesion.

Keeping in mind that the purpose of memos is to provide clear instruction or information, first consider the fundamental questions that the reader will need answered. According to the School of Public Policy at the The University of Chicago, there are four questions that should be addressed by your memo:

First, describe what is happening. This information should be clearly described in the introductory paragraph. What changes are occurring? What new tools or procedures will be implemented? Which policies are changing and what are those changes?

Because changes are usually implemented to address a problem, you should then describe the ideal state or describe what should be happening. These are the "criteria of success" that measure how an organization is performing.

In most cases (especially if transparency is of value), you will then want to also answer, why is this happening? Describe the motivation for implementing any changes as clearly as possible. Keep in mind that memos can find their way into the public view so private, proprietary information should be avoided. Providing contact information at the end of the memo can help administrators address questions that touch on private matters.

If the change is significant, memos should also indicate what operations, policies, or procedures are currently working.

Finally, be sure to address the important question, what's next?

Review the Anatomy of a Memo handout for additional guidance.

CHAPTER 25.

COVER LETTERS

Note: This chapter is an excerpt from Technical and Professional Writing Genres, by Michael Beilfuss, Staci Bettes, and Katrina Peterson. Some edits made for consistency.

In the era of social media, the idea of writing an application letter to introduce your résumé may seem outdated. However, the application letter still serves several crucial functions. If the résumé is characterized by breadth (giving a broad overview of your qualifications), the application letter is characterized by depth (choosing a few most significant qualifications to cover in detail).

Written in paragraphs rather than bullet points, this letter is the first writing sample your employer will see from you. It offers an opportunity to market your unique qualifications and to show how you will fit with the culture of the company. An effective application letter will create a picture of you as a potential employee and inspire a potential employer to learn more about you.

Keep the following tips in mind as you write your cover letter:

- Your letter is essentially an **argument** for why you should be granted an interview. Make sure to support the claim that you are qualified for the position with evidence. Don't just tell the employer how you are qualified, **show** them with clear, descriptive examples.
- **Demonstrate your authority by speaking in detail about your qualifications.** It is best to share a specific process or project you were involved in that demonstrates your skills. For example, "As a publication supervisor, I was responsible for print scheduling, assigning designs, and facilitating the overall workflow to produce a bi-monthly consumer magazine."
- **Show the reader you have the skills and abilities necessary to do the job.** The more detail you offer and the more precise your language is, the more the reader can picture you doing the job. Do your best to connect your qualifications with the needs of the potential employer.
- **Consider your audience carefully as you craft your letter.** What is the job listing asking for? What do you know about the values of the hiring individual or organization? Knowing what is important to an organization is not only a good way of connecting, it is helpful to determine whether or not you will be a good fit.
- **Conduct additional research** to help you connect with the company and to choose the appropriate tone, level of formality, and level of technicality. Browsing a company's website and social media accounts is an excellent way to gain insights into its values.

At some point, you may ask yourself, "Is it worth writing an application letter knowing it might never be read?" **The short answer is yes.** Some recruiters go straight to the résumé and make an initial decision, while others carefully weigh the information in the letter. There is no way of knowing which will be the case, so you are better off putting your best foot forward every time. A well-written application letter is an opportunity to present yourself well and influence a recruiter, so always take full advantage of that opportunity. It can also be viewed as your first conversation with a future employer, so its quality should be exceptional.

STAND OUT FROM THE COMPETITION

When writing an application letter, remember that you have competition. Your audience is a professional who screens and hires job applicants—someone who may look through dozens or even hundreds of other applications on the day yours is received. The immediate objective of your application letter and accompanying résumé is to attract this person's attention. The ultimate goal is to obtain an interview. As you write your application letter, strive to complete three tasks:

- Catch the reader's attention favorably,
- Convince the reader that you are a qualified candidate for the job, and
- Leave a lasting impression

Many people use the terms application letter and cover letter interchangeably. It is good to keep in mind, however, that they may refer to different business writing genres. The letter of application is much like a sales letter in which you market your skills, abilities, and knowledge. The term cover letter may refer to a document of transmittal sent with faxes or emails. It identifies an item being sent, the person to whom it is being sent, and its reason, providing a permanent record of the transmittal for both the writer and the reader.

DECIPHERING THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Most job descriptions can be copied from the employer's website. The previous section (Finding Job Openings) shares additional ideas on how to search for job ads. Once you have identified a position that interests you, copy the job description into a Word document. (If you only have a hard copy of the ad, it might be worthwhile to type it into a new Word document, so that you can copy pertinent phrases from the job description into your letter.) You can complete two prewriting steps before writing to decipher the job description: 1) List each skill and qualification on a separate line and 2) Group like with like. If communication skills are listed as important, in addition to giving presentations, list one after the other. An example of a job description and the deciphering process is given below.

Sample Job Description

Entry-Level Sales

The CML Company, a leading provider of recruiting and staffing services, is currently seeking motivated, career-oriented individuals to join our recruiting team. Our recruiters work with our clients and inside sales team identifying, screening, interviewing, and presenting qualified candidates for contract and permanent positions. CML promotes from within. Entry-level sales staff start as recruiters. Once they master that role and have a desire to become a member of our sales team, they can be considered for promotion. Qualified candidates for the recruiter position will:

- Develop recruiting strategies designed to identify qualified candidates through various recruiting tools.
- Evaluate candidates' strengths compared with clients' requirements by evaluating, screening, and interviewing the candidate.
- Negotiate wage rates and other terms and conditions of employment with candidates and gain commitment from candidates for current and future job requirements.
- Complete necessary pre-employment processes, including reference and background checks and drug tests.
- Work with account executives to identify top accounts, client skill sets, and key market segments, and to assess clients' staffing requirements.
- Interact effectively with others to create a productive team environment.
- Communicate with peers by sharing recruiting best practices and providing accurate, thorough documentation on contract employees in our applicant-tracking system.
- Maintain relationships with industry contacts to provide customer service, gain industry knowledge, and get referrals and sales leads.

Qualified candidates for the recruiter position must also:

- Have a bachelor's degree or related sales or recruiting experience.
- Be available to work before and after typical office hours as work may demand.
- Possess strong written and oral English communication skills.
- Be familiar with Microsoft Word and MS Outlook (or similar email applications).
- Have work experience in a service-oriented business.
- Reflect a desire to learn and advance in a fast-paced sales environment, and be capable of regularly using good judgment and discretion to accomplish goals.
- Be currently authorized to work in the United States for any employer.

As you consider the preceding sample, study each component of the job description and how it relates to your skills so that you can apply for and gain an interview for the position. Also, simplify the job ad description as you list and group. Your streamlined (second) list of requirements might look something like this:

Sample Deciphering Process

Requirements:

- Bachelor's degree
- Able to work flexible, long hours
- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Computer literate
- Desire to learn in a fast-paced sales environment
- Good judgment
- Discretion
- Authorized to work in the U.S.

As you compare your abilities and credentials to your list(s), ask yourself how closely your qualifications match the items listed. Do your skills match all of these requirements or the vast majority of them? Highlight the skills that match and consider where you might reference them directly in your job letter. Your next step might involve identifying and writing down any requirements that are NOT stated directly. For example, the job ad seems to imply: that individuals must be motivated, they must have the ability to master the work, and they must have a desire to be a part of the sales team in order to be promoted.

Do not rule yourself out if every requirement does not match. Instead, think of something somewhat related. For example, if you have never worked in a fast-paced sales environment, focus on your desire to learn. Highlight the fact that you have observed fast-paced sales environments and those situations appeal to you. At the very least, you could use the fact that you have always been very proactive in completing tasks as efficiently as possible. Or maybe you have taken a course or two in economics or marketing that might have provided relevant knowledge. In contrast, if you are a strong match for most requirements, generate specific, results-oriented examples to demonstrate these skills.

Oftentimes, you will not have a clear indication as to which skills are more important than others in the job ad, so use your best judgment call. Treat each skill as if it is the most important. For instance, when considering communication skills, have a specific, results-oriented example of your verbal and written skills. At some point, however, you will want to select the three skills you think are most important, match them to your strongest skills, and then write your cover letter. These three skills, if positioned properly, will make the case for why you should be hired.

COVER LETTER FORMAT

The format below is a visual guide provided by the UW-Green Bay Career Planning and Professional Connections department. Descriptions of each section follow.

COVER LETTER FORMAT

1234 Main Street
Green Bay, WI 54301
September 24, 2XXX

First Name Last Name
Title
Organization/company name
Street address
City, State Zip

Dear First Name Last Name:

Opening Paragraph

- Identify the position for which you are applying, or the type of position you are seeking.
- Mention how you learned about the position (name of contact, where it was posted, etc.)
- Why are you interested in this position/this organization?

Middle Paragraph(s) (one to three)

- The purpose of this section of the letter is to match yourself to the position.
- Focus on your related skills, education, and experience. What can you ***do*** for this organization?
- Be positive in content, tone, word choice, and expectations (i.e., do not come across as negative or pessimistic, and do not focus on what you are lacking).
- Group similar items together in a paragraph. Examples of paragraph themes include: skills, work and internship experience, education, or personal qualities.
- If a job posting has listed specific skills, identify how you have demonstrated those skills.

Closing Paragraph

- Reiterate your interest or enthusiasm for the position.
- Indicate that you would like the opportunity for an interview.
- Identify what kind of follow-up is expected (e.g., "Please contact me at 920-465-2163 …").
- Thank the reader for his/her time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Your Name

Note: A handwritten signature should appear after "Sincerely" with "Your Name" printed below it if you are sending a hard copy letter.

FORMAT AND STRUCTURE

Formatting of all business letters—but especially the application letter—must be neat and professional. It is recommended that you use left alignment for all text, since various software programs can wreak havoc with indentations and tabs. Common business letter formats include the block letter, the semi-block letter, the alternative letter, and the simplified letter. Block format, among the most widely used business letter formats, is recommended for application letters. The application letter includes five main sections:

- Heading and greeting/salutation
- Introductory paragraph
- Middle paragraphs
- Closing paragraph
- Complimentary close

The heading contains the writer's address and the date of the letter. The writer's name is not included; only a date is needed in headings on letterhead stationery. Next comes the inside address, which shows the name and address of the recipient of the letter. This information can help prevent confusion at the recipient's offices. Also, if the recipient has moved, the inside address helps to determine what to do with the letter. In the inside address, include the appropriate title of respect of the recipient, and copy the company's name exactly as that company writes it. When you have the names of individuals, remember to address them appropriately: Mrs., Ms., Mr., Dr., etc. If you are not sure what is correct for an individual, do some extra online research and/or consider using the title that the individual prefers. Another standard rule of thumb is to use Ms. if unsure of a woman's marital status.

The **greeting or salutation** directly addresses the recipient of the letter and is followed by a colon. If you do not know the recipient's gender, you may use the full name. Again, the best solution is to do some extra research or make a quick, anonymous phone call to the organization and ask for a name. In some cases, you may address the salutation to a department name, committee name, or position name: Dear Personnel Department, Dear Recruitment Committee, or Dear Hiring Committee.

In the **introductory paragraph**, you introduce yourself to the hiring manager or recruiter. The paragraph should include these general items:

- Why you are contacting them (to apply for X position—give its specific name).
- How you heard about the position (for example, give the name of the website where you found the ad).
- The date of the ad if applicable.
- What the minimum requirements for the job are, and how you meet them (for example, if the job requires a degree and three years of experience, you will want to mention right away that you meet these requirements).

- Something specific about the company or the job itself that has made you interested in the position (for example, does the company have a good environmental track record? Do they mention on their website that they like to promote from within? Have they won awards? Are they working on any projects that pique your interests?).

When the Job ad requires...	You might write...
Introductory lab experience	During the summer of 2016, I interned for Johnson & Johnson, where I acted as the assistant laboratory supervisor. I was tasked with performing gram stain testing, assessing bacterial antibiotic resistance, and completing routine safety checks.
Strong writing skills	During fall of 2019, I took Technical Writing at OSU, where I created documents in the following professional writing genres: emails, business letters, technical instructions, internal proposals, and external analytical reports.

The **middle paragraphs** of the cover letter should make the case for why you would be an exceptional hire. Select two to four strengths necessary to excel and assign each strength to a bulleted section or brief paragraph. Boldly indicate your strengths and include your best examples of how you excel at each strength. For a one-page application letter, some candidates have two paragraphs, while others have three. Oftentimes, one of these paragraphs will focus on education and the ways it has prepared the candidate for the position, while another discusses work experience and applies skills learned to the position. Anything listed as a strength in the résumé needs to include visible proof of that strength. For example, if you mention having strong interpersonal skills, be sure to give a concrete example, like writing about a course that required group work to finish a large project. Again, be specific. Show exactly how the event built or showcased the skill you reference.

The **closing paragraph** should reiterate any major points or takeaways that you want readers to remember. It will likely do the following:

- Restate your interest.
- Highlight how your strengths mesh well with the required skills.
- If applicable, inform them when you will contact them within a certain time period.
- Invite them to contact you (and include contact information, typically your professional email address).
- Refer them to your enclosed résumé.
- Thank them for their time and consideration.

The final element of the business letter is called the **complimentary close**. Other common ones are *Sincerely yours*, *Respectfully*, or *Thank you*. Notice that only the first letter is capitalized, and it is always followed by a comma. Usually, you type your name four lines below the complimentary close and—if the letter is a physical copy—sign your full name in between.

Concluding Thoughts

Preparation and practice are critical to every step of the job search process, and the cover letter is no different. Five actions can help make your cover letter compelling:

- Make a list of your top ten strengths.
- List your top five weaknesses (areas you would like to strengthen).
- Decipher the job description to identify each separate skill and qualification.
- Compare the two lists to see if they are in alignment. Also identify the gaps—does the job description list something that you haven't done?
- Highlight your top skills that align with the job description as you will use them in Other strengths and skills could include (in alphabetical order).

CHAPTER 26.

PEER REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a coach, friend, or relative show you a different way of doing or seeing something? Perhaps your golf swing needed some adjustment or someone pointed out an easter egg you missed in a movie. If significant enough, perhaps these suggestions not only improved your experience but changed the way you play golf or watch films.

When it comes to writing, however, providing and receiving advice can be challenging. But reviewing writing with a peer can help both appreciate the activity of writing so much more. In this section, we're going to consider some ways to approach feedback as a way to engage our writing in more meaningful ways. This starts with changing our perspective about peer review itself and seeing it as a vital part of the *entire* writing process!

What Exactly is Peer Review?

Let's start by unpacking what we mean by "peer review." Broadly stated, this is a process in which work created by an individual or group is taken up by another for the purpose of verification, validation, and quality control. Peer review is how we ensure that our information is correct. In the sciences, this process is used to verify research and findings and has been an important part of the scientific method for over 350 years!

Other fields have their own peer review standards. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), for example, requires its members to adhere to a particular type of peer review to maintain affiliation with the organization. This proprietary form of peer review is more focused on a firm's operations and engagements but still uses standards to guide the reviewers' suggestions (2022).

For professionals, peer review can ensure that our writing is mechanically sound but also that our information is correct. Consider that we each have a set of values, goals, experiences, and perspectives that can motivate and affect our work. Think about how your vocabulary and mastery of grammar and spelling has improved over time. You have also conducted research and incorporated your findings into projects. In addition, think about how your experience and education in your field has provided you with additional tools (such as terminology and methods) that also inform your writing. All of these qualities are reflected in your writing!

Now consider your peers. Each has a *different* set of values and skills as well as backgrounds and experiences. When it comes to research, they may have encountered different sources. Their experience and expertise can offer unique perspectives that could improve your work. In the peer review process, these two perspectives—yours and your peer's—wrestle with the work being examined. We're not just talking about better spelling but better ideas! A good peer reviewer will also help clarify your own expertise in areas where you might provide more explanation.

When Do We Conduct Peer Review?

As a writing student *and* instructor, my experience with peer review has been the traditional extra task tacked on after the writing assignment is complete. In school, this can be especially frustrating if we'd rather not think about the assignment after it's been submitted. Now we have to review someone else's work? Isn't my instructor supposed to be doing this anyways?

I argue that peer review is an ongoing part of the writing process—not just an afterthought. One of the reasons for this is that peer review should be a conversation about the work. It should illuminate new ideas as well as offer guidance on writing clarity and effectiveness. This is not what typically happens in the writing classroom: I hand you my essay; you check the essay, make some suggestions and hand it back to me; I edit my essay according to your suggestions and submit it in time for the deadline. No conversation. No engagement.

This is a generalization I offer to present an alternative. What if, instead of an afterthought, we expanded peer review to make it more helpful?

- **Peer review starts with the writer.** In her list of peer review essentials, Suzan Last (2019) begins by pointing out that, to be of benefit, the writing must be of the highest quality the writer can muster. Too many minor spelling errors will become a distraction from "big picture" concerns like a lack of evidence or concepts that need to be expanded upon. More importantly, Last suggests that the writer discuss the work with the reviewer first. What are the concerns? What specific feedback is being requested? This is very important if the reviewer is unfamiliar with the subject matter.
- **Review for ideas, not mechanics.** One of the biggest misconceptions about peer review is that the reviewer must catch every minor mechanical error such as spelling and grammar. As mentioned above, the main goal of peer review is to get someone else's unique perspective. While mechanics are important, focusing on concepts and ideas will be invaluable. That is, for the first round of review. For now, you want the reviewer to pose questions and expand ideas. We'll talk about the review process a bit later.
- **Expect several rounds of peer review.** If the first review is focused on concepts and ideas, the writer being reviewed should anticipate having to expand and elaborate on ideas. This will entail more writing and perhaps more research so plan accordingly. Subsequent reviews will take less time (perhaps) but it's important to build time into your writing process to accommodate extensive revision.

How to Give Good Peer Review

Your colleague or classmate has given you their writing for review. Now what?

If your colleague has sent you a digital version, save a copy to your computer and rename the file to something distinct. This will prevent your reviewed file, when returned to the writer, from overwriting the original copy. Your word processing software likely has tools for reviewing purposes. If it's a printed copy, you will want to take notes directly on the copy but also have additional paper for writing out lengthier comments.

1. **Prepare and Gather Information from the Writer.** First, make sure you have the necessary information needed to adequately review the work. Who is the audience? What is the purpose? Are there any other details that are important to know while reviewing? Has the

writer provided you with some specific areas to focus on? If not, be sure to ask! As the reviewer, you may also want to be sure you have the time to provide a proper review. The writer should also give you enough time.

2. **Set aside time.** As discussed, peer review should not be an afterthought and therefore given time to be conducted properly. For most academic journals, peer reviews can take months! When your colleague is able to take time to review, a reasonable amount of time to review a single page would be approximately 15 minutes—10 minutes of reading and 5 or more writing comments. Of course, this time will vary depending on the subject matter, the reviewer, and the quality of the writing (remember to submit your best draft!)
3. **Conducting the review.** You've cleared your calendar for the next 15 minutes and have closed your browser (focus!) and so it's time to conduct your review. Before you begin there are a few considerations you'll want to keep in mind:
    1. **Give the writing a focused first read.** Try to withhold comments and suggestions during this first read. Get a sense of what the writer is attempting to accomplish. Is their purpose clear? Is the length appropriate to the type of writing? Is it easy to read?
    2. **Take notes.** Gather your thoughts so that you can share them with the writer in a clear and effective manner. What words come to mind when reading this work? What is the thesis or purpose of the writing?
    3. **Pose questions instead of giving directions.** Remember that peer review is a conversation. Linda Nilson (2003) argued that many of the questions we ask writers are not as helpful as they could be (p. 35). Instead, she says, our questions should not ask for judgments nor opinions but instead focus on conceptual, yet specific, details (p. 36). For instance, compare the two questions:
        1. "Does the essay prove it's point? If not, why not?"
           vs.
        2. "What are the writer's justifications for taking the positions that he or she does?"

Note the tone and level of specificity asked. The first question is vague and a bit blunt sounding. The second question is more targeted, asking for specific details. There's also a lack of interpretation being asked of the reviewer.

1. **Describe, evaluate, and suggest.** Bill Hart-Davidson (2014) offers a simple, three-step model for conducting peer review. First, the reviewer should offer a **description** of what they are reading. This perspective of the reviewer may help the writer determine whether or not their intended meaning is being effectively communicated. Then, he suggests, the reviewer should **evaluate** the writing against the criteria. If the writer, for instance, is concerned about the quality of their evidence, the reviewer can offer some objective standards like citation practices. Once the reviewer has evaluated the writing, then they may offer **suggestions** on how to improve the work.
2. **Use a simple rubric to evaluate writing.** A rubric can help the reviewer keep track of various qualities of the writing. A rubric is a checklist or set of categories and concepts that are most important. You have probably seen rubrics used in the assessment of your work. Keeping your

rubric simple keeps it manageable. See the example at the end of this section.

3. **Don't edit.** As Suzan Last recommends, "your job is reviewer, not editor." The reviewer's responsibility is to identify areas of improvement not make the corrections. Making changes for the writer may seem helpful but it is preventing the writer from making the change which will help improve their writing!
4. **Two kinds of comments.** In addition to comments and suggestions made in the margins or within the text, you should also provide a lengthier comment that offers "big picture" suggestions. This would include your first impressions, positive moments, as well as areas where you've focused your suggestions.
5. **Identify specific areas when making suggestions.** When making comments, be sure those comments are addressing specific areas of concern. For example, if a writer consistently misspells "accommodate" (as I tend to do), you would highlight one instance and recommend they correct each instance.
6. **Use a constructive and positive voice when writing feedback.** The reviewer is there to help the writer. If you approach your review with a supportive attitude, your comments will reflect the conversational quality of peer review. Your tone should also be courteous. Remember that we all have writing wrinkles that need to be ironed out—offer feedback in the voice you would like used when it's your time to be reviewed!

CONCLUSION: PEER REVIEW AS PROFESSIONALISM

The peer review process is central to many occupations and the development of a productive workplace. By comparison, providing feedback about a colleague's writing is far less complex than the peer review processes found in most fields: accountants have stringent protocols as do nurses and scientists, as well as creative professionals.

Ultimately, we want our peer review process to highlight the collaboration and congeniality of the professional environment. The conversation that emerges will not only help the writer develop their writing but also inform the reviewer's writing through the encounter with a different perspective. In this way, the peer review process is a way of getting to know your colleagues, facilitate comradery, and build trust.

The collaborative nature of peer review not only helps reinforce the relationships with colleagues but also with clients; peer review is excellent practice for working with clients and can help us recognize a client's needs when they might not have the ability to effectively communicate those needs. With practice, even the most challenging of clients may be offered suggestions that can help mitigate their vision with what is feasible.

RUBRIC EXAMPLE

Rubrics can be as complex or as simple as you like but they should be helpful in structuring your evaluation. One example is the following, based on two categories, **mechanics** and **genre** as well as two qualities, **form** and **content.**

- **Content** refers to the more nuanced quality of our writing, this is what we are trying to say
- **Form** refers to the structure and design of your writing; this is how we are saying it

- Writing **mechanics** are the rules that help support the effective communication of our message
- The **genre** is the category of writing used to deliver that message

This creates a rubric that looks like the one below. Some of the items that would fall under each quadrant are also included. You should add others based on your expertise, experience and the requests of the reviewer.

	Form	**Content**
Mechanics	Grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure	Word choice, appropriate language, tone, clarity
Genre	Conforms to professional standards, conventions, and expectations of genre as well as formatting and design	Formality, clarity of purpose

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CHAPTER 27.

OUTREACH: PRESS RELEASES

When we want to get the word out about new products, promote an upcoming event, or share noteworthy news, the **press release** is one of the most powerful tools available to an organization. These forms of professional outreach are event summaries sent to publications and other media outlets. If the outlet's editor is interested in the event, they will likely respond for more information, compose a story on your event, and share your news with their audience. Because of the potential outreach and promotional benefits, the press release must be carefully crafted to appeal to the publisher as well as the audience of the publication.

At first glance, the press release is a relatively short and straightforward document. It is worth reiterating, however, that when we submit a release to a publication, we are requesting that others share our message. A reviewing editor will determine whether or not to pursue the story based on how relevant the announcement is to their audience and the professionalism of the release itself. If picked up as a story, the publication will likely tailor your message to their particular audience, but you must still provide suitable content.

But this complicates matters because you're pulling double-duty writing to both the publication and that publication's audience. Because of this, you can add promotional language to the professional standards we've discussed so far: this is the essence of marketing. The key is to keep your writing clear and concise while providing enough detail and content so that the publication can compose their own story if they choose to. All of this while maintaining professionalism and formality! Public communicators, marketers, and event planners use press releases for various purposes. One of the essential functions of press releases is to connect your organization with the public. Press releases are generally addressed to publication editors or other organizations interested in your release's subject.

Promoting your event in an objective tone. Regardless of the subject matter, a press release is typically written to promote a specific event. Unlike other marketing materials that may use more expressive language, the press release maintains a neutral tone to not seem too biased. In part, editors prefer an objective voice because this mimics the journalistic approach to writing. On a more practical level, some publications will copy portions of the release for use in any materials written from the release. In my experience, some editors also dislike aggressively promotional releases.

Providing just enough content to pique interest. Keeping in mind that the goal of the press release is to convince the editor to follow up on the story, a strategy for composing press releases is to provide *just enough* information so that the editor wants to find out more. Providing quotations, for example, is an excellent way to develop a personal connection while controlling the story you want to tell. With too many quotes or quotes that share too many specifics, the editor or reporter may not have any reason to follow up! Provide quotes that speak to generalities and the "spirit" of the event, but spare some details for later.

Timing is important. Beyond the writing, reviewing, and revising, knowing when to distribute the press release is also significant. Send the release too early and it may be circulated across media channels with time enough for the public to forget. A release that is received too close to the event will not provide the publication with enough time to follow up and create a story.

FORMATTING

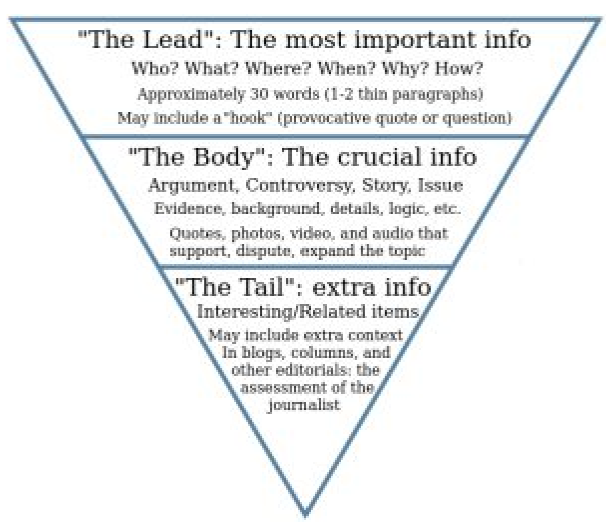
While the "voice" of your press release may take practice, the formatting of this genre is fairly standardized. These conventions are important because they allow the editor or producer to efficiently scan your release without having to search for essential details. Be sure to include the following elements in your press release:

HEADER INFORMATION

There are several crucial components to the press release header:

- Include your letterhead, logo, or branding at the top of your release to convey authenticity.
- **Release timing.** Sometimes referred to as the "release date," this information helps communicate what stage the release is at.
    - When being circulated internally for review and revision, the release should be labeled **DRAFT**. Highlighting this in some way can help prevent early distribution.
    - When the release is ready for submission and potential publication, label the release as **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**.
    - In some cases, it may be worth sending out a pre-emptive release well in advance of the event. For an especially newsworthy announcement, this can help the publisher plan accordingly and gather additional information. In these cases, label the release as **FOR FUTURE RELEASE**. *Author's note: labelling releases this way is not recommended as the release could inadvertently be published earlier than anticipated.*
- A catchy, concise headline should tell the reader the **WHAT** and **WHEN.** Headlines should stand out from the rest of the release. ALL CAPS and **bolded** is a common method.
- **Sub-headline.** Although not always included, a good sub-headline will provide the reader with qualifying information such as the **HOW** and **WHY**.

BODY OF PRESS RELEASE



The body of a press release also conforms to a generic formula. Paragraphs are short and follow a journalistic structure called the "inverted pyramid" method. To use this approach, begin your release by first providing the most important facts that the reader *needs* to know. These details are followed by additional information that is organized from most to least important.

Other important elements to include are:

- **Date and Place Line.** This is the geographic location and date of the event or announcement in the following order: City, State, Month, Day. The location is often written in all caps while the date is not. The entire line should be bold to stand out.

    - **Compelling introduction.** Following the "inverted pyramid" formula, introduce your event by sharing important information. Remember that this paragraph should also be compelling without relying on expressive language.
    - **Body paragraphs.** Continue to describe the event, providing interesting information, quotations from individuals involved, and any historical details worth sharing.
    - **Call to Action.** What do you want your audience to *do*? Reiterate the next steps.
    - **About/Boilerplate.** This concluding paragraph describes the organization and may include a short history and its purpose.
- **End Notification.** Indicated by a series of three number signs -###-, this line indicates the end of the release. Another less-common way to accomplish this is with **-30-.**
- **Contact Information**. Provide the name, phone number, and email address of the person to contact.

***Author's note*: When working as a public communications officer, I discovered that many press releases are published in media outlets without any follow-up by editors or reporters. Instead, the press release is copied word-for-word and edited slightly. Be aware of this possibility when sending out your releases!**

The inverted pyramid model complements the **AIDA** method, a marketing formula used to compose promotional materials. Simply put, the AIDA method is as follows:

- **Attention.** Encourage the reader's **attention** using compelling language such as action verbs and clear, concise statements. A headline written and formatted to stand out is a good start. In a single line, announce **what the event is**. Alternatively, you might also identify **who is being recognized and their accomplishment**. In the sub-headline, you can expand on this information by describing **how** or **why** this event or announcement is significant.
- **Interest.** Once the reader has been "hooked" by the headline, begin to generate **interest** by providing specific details that will resonate most with the reader. Using clear, concise statements, tell the reader precisely what is being announced. Avoid overly expressive language and fluffy language that may seem vague—or worse—inauthentic.
- **Desire/Decision**. With all of the relevant information, your release should evoke the **desire** to pursue the story. This should be accomplished in 3–4 short paragraphs in which you provide more in-depth information. Using quotes that the publication may use is an excellent strategy. Alternatively, the "D" in AIDA can also represent the point at which you prompt your reader to **decide** whether or not to pursue the story in press releases.
- **Action.** Regarding press releases, the **action** we want the reader to take up is to request more information to develop the story further. This is accomplished with the section of your press release that provides contact information. Provide the name, phone number, and email address for a point-of-contact person and invite interviews. In addition, we can indicate what materials (images, reports, data, etc.) are available upon request.

Works Cited

Image credit: "Inverted pyramid in comprehensive form" by Christopher Schwartz is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

CHAPTER 28.

CREATING YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE

Your LinkedIn profile represents your online professional persona. Be mindful that your profile is public and should be revised regularly. Posting to LinkedIn like you would any other social media platform is also important for maintaining a presence on the platform.

If you are creating your LinkedIn profile for the first time, you will benefit from LinkedIn's guidance which will take you through the steps to creating one. If you've already set up a profile, review the steps below to ensure your LinkedIn presence is as engaging as possible!

Please be aware that the steps below reflect the process at the time of this writing and will likely change over time.

1. **Sign Up and Create Your Account:** Visit www.linkedin.com and sign in using one of the most appropriate options. When selecting **New to LinkedIn?,** you will be prompted to provide a preferred email address and create a secure password. After agreeing to the terms, you'll be prompted to provide your first and last name. You'll then be asked to complete a security check.
2. **Add Basic Information:** LinkedIn will guide you through adding basic information such as location, job interests, and the industry you work in. This basic information will help LinkedIn provide more relevant job opportunities and connections.
3. **Upload a Professional Profile Picture:** A professional profile picture is essential on LinkedIn. Ensure the photo is clear, professional, and appropriately represents you and your industry. Be sure that the image is large enough: the dimensions of your photo should be at least 400×400 pixels with a maximum size of 8MB.
4. **Create a Compelling Headline:** Your headline should quickly convey who you are and what you do. It's one of the first things people see, so make it engaging.
    - **Keep it Concise**: LinkedIn allows you 220 characters for your headline, so it's essential to be concise and clear.
    - **Define Your Goal**: Are you looking for a job? Are you trying to build your professional network? Or are you trying to establish yourself as a thought leader in your industry? Define your goal, as it will guide the tone and content of your headline.
    - **Use Relevant Keywords**: Include relevant keywords to your industry or role. This not only makes your headline more compelling but also improves your visibility in LinkedIn searches. Avoid cliches, jargon, slang, and other figures of speech.
    - **Be Specific**: Your headline should be specific and focused. Instead of "Experienced marketing professional," you could say "Digital Marketing Specialist with expertise in SEO and Content Strategy."

- **Highlight Your Values**: What makes you unique? What do you bring to the table? Highlight these points in your headline. For example, "Bilingual Customer Service Specialist improving client relations for global brands."
- **Proofread**: Make sure your headline is free of spelling or grammatical errors.

5. **Write Your About Section:** The **About** section on LinkedIn, formerly known as the **Summary**, is where you can elaborate on your professional experiences, skills, goals, and unique value propositions in more detail. Think of this as an abbreviated cover letter—if most of your LinkedIn profile lists your skills, experiences, and qualifications, this is where you offer more of your personality! Here are some steps to help you write a compelling "About" section:
   - **Write it in the first person.**
   - **Start with a Strong Opening:** The first few lines of your "About" section are crucial. Make them engaging and invite readers to keep scrolling. Introduce yourself, your professional role, and your area of expertise.
   - **Tell Your Story:** In a concise, yet engaging manner, tell your professional story. What have been your key achievements? What are you passionate about? How have you made an impact in your roles?
   - **Highlight Key Skills and Experiences:** Describe your essential skills and how you've applied them in various roles. Don't just list your skills; provide context to illustrate how you've utilized these skills effectively.
   - **Personalize Your Content:** The **About** section is not just about your professional side. Include a bit about who you are outside of work. You may be passionate about a cause, have a unique hobby, or have traveled extensively. A few personal touches (hobbies, pets, family) can also be good personal additions to help build connections. Avoid sharing anything private—remember that these are public profiles!
   - **Use Relevant Keywords:** Like the headline, incorporate industry-related keywords into your **About** section. This can help improve the visibility of your profile in LinkedIn search results.
   - **Include a Call to Action:** What would you like readers to do next? Encourage them to get in touch, check out your portfolio, or whatever next step you want them to take.
   - **Proofread:** Make sure your **About** section is free from grammatical and spelling errors. Read it out loud to ensure it sounds natural and is easy to understand. Very important!

Remember, LinkedIn allows you up to 2,600 characters in the "About" section, so use this space wisely to create a comprehensive and captivating overview of your professional self. Here's an example:

Marketing Director with over 10 years of experience developing effective marketing strategies for multinational FMCG brands. I've led teams to deliver successful campaigns that increased brand awareness by 50% and achieved a 30% increase in sales. I'm skilled in Digital Marketing, Brand Management, and Market Research. Outside of work, I volunteer for an animal rescue, reinforcing my belief in community service. I'm *always open to connecting with like-minded professionals and exploring innovative marketing ideas. Feel free to reach out!*

- **Detail Your Experience:** List your work history, similar to how you would for a traditional resume. Include the company, position title, time period, and description of your responsibilities and achievements for each role. Start each responsibility, duty, and project with strong action verbs. Starting with the most recent, work your way backward chronologically.
- **List Your Skills:** You can list up to 50 skills, but the top three are what your network will see (and have the opportunity to endorse) without having to click "see more." Be sure to list the most relevant and impressive skills first.
- **Add Your Education:** Include schools you attended, degrees earned, and fields of study. You can also add activities and societies you were part of during those times.
- **Request Recommendations:** Recommendations add credibility to your profile. Contact colleagues, managers, or professors who can provide a positive and accurate testimonial of your work.
- **Customize Your URL:** LinkedIn automatically generates a URL for your profile, but you can (and should) customize it to include your name. A personalized URL is easier to share and looks better on a resume or business card.
- **Join Groups:** Groups are a great way to connect with people in your industry or with similar interests. It also allows you to engage in discussions and share your expertise.
- **IMPORTANT: Adjust Your Privacy Settings:** Depending on your comfort level, change who can see your profile, send invitations, etc. Adjust these settings in the "Privacy & Settings" section. Like any social media platform, you will likely encounter spam and fake accounts, so be aware of any potential scams. You can (and should) ignore any connections that seem suspicious.
- **Build Your Network:** Connect with colleagues, classmates, and friends. As your network grows, LinkedIn will suggest people you may know based on mutual connections and similar industries.

Remember to keep your profile updated as you gain new skills and experiences. An up-to-date profile is more attractive to potential employers and connections.

CHAPTER 29.

BUILDING YOUR LINKEDIN NETWORK

After you've completed your profile, it's time to start connecting with organizations and other professionals. Building your LinkedIn network requires a strategic and thoughtful approach. Here are some steps to help you grow your LinkedIn network effectively:

1. **Personalize Connection Requests:** Whenever you send a connection request, customize the default message. Briefly explain why you'd like to connect, where you met, or what common interests you share. People are more likely to accept connection requests that are personalized.
2. **Engage with Content:** Like, share, and comment on posts from your connections. This will make you more visible in your network and show you're engaged in your industry.
3. **Post Regularly:** Share articles, blog posts, or updates relevant to your industry. Regular posting not only keeps you in the mind of your current connections but also attracts new ones.
4. **Join Groups:** LinkedIn groups are a great place to connect with professionals who share your interests or are in your industry. Participate in discussions, share valuable content, and connect with other group members.
5. **Use the "Alumni" Feature:** LinkedIn's **Alumni** feature allows you to connect with individuals who attended the same school as you. This can be a great way to expand your network.
6. **Connect with "People You May Know":** LinkedIn suggests **People You May Know** based on your existing connections, industries, and shared companies or schools. Review these suggestions regularly for potential connections.
7. **Follow Influencers:** Following LinkedIn influencers in your industry can increase your visibility among like-minded professionals, offer valuable insights, and help grow your network.
8. **Ask for Introductions:** If you're looking to connect with someone who's a second or third-degree connection, ask a mutual connection for an introduction.
9. **Attend or Host LinkedIn Live Sessions:** Engaging in LinkedIn Live sessions allows you to interact with other attendees and hosts, helping to grow your network organically.

Remember, networking is not just about growing your connections but about building meaningful relationships. It's essential to stay active, engage with your connections regularly, and offer value where you can.

PART V.

EXTRA: GROUP COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK, AND LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 30.

GROUP COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK, AND LEADERSHIP

Note: this section was originally published in Business Communication for Success.

GROUP COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK, AND LEADERSHIP

> Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.
> –Andrew Carnegie
>
> Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
> –Margaret Mead

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 31.

GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING

Learning Objectives

Identify and describe how to implement seven steps for group problem-solving.

No matter who you are or where you live, problems are an inevitable part of life. This is true for groups as well as for individuals. Some groups—especially work teams—are formed specifically to solve problems. Other groups encounter problems for a wide variety of reasons. Within a family group, a problem might be that a daughter or son wants to get married and the parents do not approve of the marriage partner. In a work group, a problem might be that some workers are putting in more effort than others, yet achieving poorer results. Regardless of the problem, having the resources of a group can be an advantage, as different people can contribute different ideas for how to reach a satisfactory solution.

Once a group encounters a problem, the questions that come up range from "Where do we start?" to "How do we solve it?" While there are many ways to approach a problem, the American educational philosopher John Dewey's reflective thinking sequence has stood the test of time. This seven-step process (Adler, R., 1996) has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure. If you are member of a group that needs to solve a problem and don't know where to start, consider these seven simple steps:

1. Define the problem
2. Analyze the problem
3. Establish criteria
4. Consider possible solutions
5. Decide on a solution
6. Implement the solution
7. Follow up on the solution

Let's discuss each step in detail.

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

If you don't know what the problem is, how do you know you can solve it? Defining the problem allows the group to set boundaries of what the problem is and what it is not and to begin to formalize a description or definition of the scope, size, or extent of the challenge the group will address. A problem that is too broadly defined can overwhelm the group. If the problem is too narrowly defined, important information will be missed or ignored.

In the following example, we have a Web-based company called Favorites that needs to increase its customer base and ultimately sales. A problem-solving group has been formed, and they start by formulating a working definition of the problem.

Too broad: "Sales are off, our numbers are down, and we need more customers."

More precise: "Sales have been slipping incrementally for six of the past nine months and are significantly lower than a seasonally adjusted comparison to last year. Overall, this loss represents a 4.5 percent reduction in sales from the same time last year. However, when we break it down by product category, sales of our nonedible products have seen a modest but steady increase, while sales of edibles account for the drop off and we need to halt the decline."

ANALYZE THE PROBLEM

Now the group analyzes the problem, trying to gather information and learn more. The problem is complex and requires more than one area of expertise. Why do nonedible products continue selling well? What is it about the edibles that is turning customers off? Let's meet our problem solvers at Favorites.

Kevin is responsible for customer resource management. He is involved with the customer from the point of initial contact through purchase and delivery. Most of the interface is automated in the form of an online "basket model," where photographs and product descriptions are accompanied by "buy it" buttons. He is available during normal working business hours for live chat and voice chat if needed, and customers are invited to request additional information. Most Favorites customers do not access this service, but Kevin is kept quite busy, as he also handles returns and complaints. Because Kevin believes that superior service retains customers while attracting new ones, he is always interested in better ways to serve the customer. Looking at edibles and nonedibles, he will study the cycle of customer service and see if there are any common points—from the main Web page, through the catalog, to the purchase process, and to returns—at which customers abandon the sale. He has existing customer feedback loops with end-of-sale surveys, but most customers decline to take the survey and there is currently no incentive to participate.

Mariah is responsible for products and purchasing. She wants to offer the best products at the lowest price, and to offer new products that are unusual, rare, or exotic. She regularly adds new products to the Favorites catalog and culls underperformers. Right now she has the data on every product and its sales history, but it is a challenge to represent it. She will analyze current sales data and produce a report that specifically identifies how each product—edible and nonedible—is performing. She wants to highlight "winners" and "losers" but also recognizes that today's "losers" may be the hit of tomorrow. It is hard to predict constantly changing tastes and preferences, but that is part of her job. It's not all science, and it's not all art. She has to have an eye for what will catch on tomorrow while continuing to provide what is hot today.

Suri is responsible for data management at Favorites. She gathers, analyzes, and presents information gathered from the supply chain, sales, and marketing. She works with vendors to make sure products are available when needed, makes sales predictions based on past sales history, and assesses the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

The problem-solving group members already have certain information on hand. They know that customer retention is one contributing factor. Attracting new customers is a constant goal, but they are aware of the well-known principle that it takes more effort to attract new customers than to keep existing ones. Thus, it is important to insure a quality customer service experience for existing customers and encourage them to refer friends. The group needs to determine how to promote this favorable customer behavior.

Another contributing factor seems to be that customers often abandon the shopping cart before completing a purchase, especially when purchasing edibles. The group members need to learn more about why this is happening.

ESTABLISH CRITERIA

Establishing the criteria for a solution is the next step. At this point, information is coming in from diverse perspectives, and each group member has contributed information from their perspective, even though there may be several points of overlap.

Kevin: Customers who complete the postsale survey indicate that they want to know (1) what is the estimated time of delivery, (2) why a specific item was not in stock and when it will be available, and (3) why their order sometimes arrives with less than a complete order, with some items back-ordered, without prior notification.

He notes that a very small percentage of customers complete the postsale survey, and the results are far from scientific. He also notes that it appears the interface is not capable of cross-checking inventory to provide immediate information concerning back orders, so that the customer "buys it" only to learn several days later that it was not in stock. This seems to be especially problematic for edible products, because people may tend to order them for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. But we don't really know this for sure because of the low participation in the postsale survey.

Mariah: There are four edible products that frequently sell out. So far, we haven't been able to boost the appeal of other edibles so that people would order them as a second choice when these sales leaders aren't available. We also have several rare, exotic products that are slow movers. They have potential, but currently are underperformers.

Suri: We know from a zip code analysis that most of our customers are from a few specific geographic areas associated with above-average incomes. We have very few credit cards declined, and the average sale is over $100. Shipping costs represent on average 8 percent of the total sales cost. We do not have sufficient information to produce a customer profile. There is no specific point in the purchase process where basket abandonment tends to happen; it happens fairly uniformly at all steps.

CONSIDER POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

The group has listened to each other and now starts to brainstorm ways to address the challenges they have addressed while focusing resources on those solutions that are more likely to produce results.

Kevin: Is it possible for our programmers to create a cross-index feature, linking the product desired with a report of how many are in stock? I'd like the customer to know right away whether it is in stock, or how long they may have to wait. As another idea, is it possible to add incentives to the purchase cycle that won't negatively impact our overall profit? I'm thinking a small volume discount on multiple items, or perhaps free shipping over a specific dollar amount.

Mariah: I recommend we hold a focus group where customers can sample our edible products and tell us what they like best and why. When the best sellers are sold out, could we offer a discount on related products to provide an instant alternative? We might also cull the underperforming products with a liquidation sale to generate interest.

Suri: If we want to know more about our customers, we need to give them an incentive to complete the postsale survey. How about a 5 percent off coupon code for the next purchase to get them to return and to help us better identify our customer base? We may also want to build in a customer referral rewards program, but it all takes better data in to get results out. We should also explore the supply side of the business by getting a more reliable supply of the leading products and trying to get discounts that are more advantageous from our suppliers, especially in the edible category.

DECIDE ON A SOLUTION

Kevin, Mariah, and Suri may want to implement all the solution strategies, but they do not have the resources to do them all. They'll complete a cost-benefit analysis, which ranks each solution according to its probable impact. The analysis is shown in Table 19.6 "Cost-Benefit Analysis".

Table 11.6 Cost-Benefit Analysis

Source	Proposed Solution	Cost	Benefit	Comment
Kevin	Integrate the cross-index feature	High	High	Many of our competitors already have this feature
	Volume discount	Low	Medium	May increase sales slightly
	Free shipping	Low	Low	This has a downside in making customers more aware of shipping costs if their order doesn't qualify for free shipping
Mariah	Hold a focus group to taste edible products	High	Medium	Difficult to select participants representative of our customer base
	Search for alternative products to high performers	Medium	Medium	We can't know for sure which products customers will like best
	Liquidate underperformers	Low	Low	Might create a "bargain basement" impression inconsistent with our brand
Suri	Incentive for postsale survey completion	Low	Medium	Make sure the incentive process is easy for the customer
	Incentive for customer referrals	Low	Medium	People may feel uncomfortable referring friends if it is seen as putting them in a marketing role
	Find a more reliable supply of top-selling edibles	Medium	High	We already know customers want these products
	Negotiate better discounts from vendors	Low	High	If we can do this without alienating our best vendors, it will be a win-win

Now that the options have been presented with their costs and benefits, it is easier for the group to decide which courses of action are likely to yield the best outcomes. The analysis helps the group members to see beyond the immediate cost of implementing a given solution. For example, Kevin's suggestion of offering free shipping won't cost Favorites much money, but it also may not pay off in customer goodwill. And even though Mariah's suggestion of having a focus group might sound like a good idea, it will be expensive and its benefits are questionable.

A careful reading of the analysis indicates that Kevin's best suggestion is to integrate the cross-index feature in the ordering process so that customers can know immediately whether an item is in stock or on back order. Mariah, meanwhile, suggests that searching for alternative products is probably the most likely to benefit Favorites, while Suri's two supply-side suggestions are likely to result in positive outcomes.

IMPLEMENT THE SOLUTION

Kevin is faced with the challenge of designing the computer interface without incurring unacceptable costs. He strongly believes that the interface will pay for itself within the first year—or, to put it more bluntly, that Favorites' declining sales will get worse if the Web site does not have this feature soon. He asks to meet with top management to get budget approval and secures their agreement, on one condition: he must negotiate a compensation schedule with the Information Technology consultants that includes delayed compensation in the form of bonuses after the feature has been up and running successfully for six months.

Mariah knows that searching for alternative products is a never-ending process, but it takes time and the company needs results. She decides to invest time evaluating products that competing companies currently offer, especially in the edible category, on the theory that customers who find their desired items sold out on the Favorites Web site may have been buying alternative products elsewhere instead of choosing an alternative from Favorites's product lines.

Suri decides to approach the vendors of the four frequently sold-out products and ask point blank, "What would it take to get you to produce these items more reliably in greater quantities?" By opening the channel of communication with these vendors, she is able to motivate them to make modifications that will improve the reliability and quantity. She also approaches the vendors of the less popular products with a request for better discounts in return for their cooperation in developing and test-marketing new products.

FOLLOW UP ON THE SOLUTION

Kevin: After several beta tests, the cross-index feature was implemented and has been in place for thirty days. Now customers see either "in stock" or "available [mo/da/yr]" in the shopping basket. As expected, Kevin notes a decrease in the number of chat and phone inquiries to the effect of, "Will this item arrive before my wife's birthday?" However, he notes an increase in inquiries asking, "Why isn't this item in stock?" It is difficult to tell whether customer satisfaction is higher overall.

Mariah: In exploring the merchandise available from competing merchants, she got several ideas for modifying Favorites' product line to offer more flavors and other variations on popular edibles. Working with vendors, she found that these modifications cost very little. Within the first thirty days of adding these items to the product line, sales are up. Mariah believes these additions also serve to enhance the Favorites brand identity, but she has no data to back this up.

Suri: So far, the vendors supplying the four top-selling edibles have fulfilled their promise of increasing quantity and reliability. However, three of the four items have still sold out, raising the question of whether Favorites needs to bring in one or more additional vendors to produce these items. Of the vendors with which Favorites asked to negotiate better discounts, some refused, and two of these were "stolen" by a competing merchant so that they no longer sell to Favorites. In addition, one of the vendors that agreed to give a better discount was unexpectedly forced to cease operations for several weeks because of a fire.

This scenario allows us to see that the problem may have several dimensions as well as solutions, but resources can be limited and not every solution is successful. Even though the problem is not immediately resolved, the group problem-solving pattern serves as a useful guide through the problem-solving process.

Key Takeaways

Group problem solving can be an orderly process when it is broken down into seven specific stages.

Exercises

1. Think of a problem encountered in the past by a group of which you are a member. How did the group solve the problem? How satisfactory was the solution? Discuss your results with your classmates.
2. Consider again the problem you described in Exercise 1. In view of the seven-step framework, which steps did the group utilize? Would following the full seven-step framework have been helpful? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.
3. Research one business that you would like to know more about and see if you can learn about how they communicate in groups and teams. Compare your results with those of classmates.
4. Think of a decision you will be making some time in the near future. Apply the cost-benefit analysis framework to your decision. Do you find this method helpful? Discuss your results with classmates.

CHAPTER 32.

GROUP LIFE CYCLES AND MEMBER ROLES

Learning Objectives

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

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

GROUP LIFE CYCLE PATTERNS

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

In the same way, groups experience similar steps and stages and take on many of the characteristics we associate with life (Moreland, R. and Levine, J., 1982). They grow, overcome illness and dysfunction, and transform across time. No group, just as no individual, lives forever.

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

In order to better understand group development and its life cycle, many researchers have described the universal stages and phases of groups. While there are modern interpretations of these stages, most draw from the model proposed by Bruce Tuckman. This model, shown in Table 11.2 "Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development", specifies the usual order of the phases of group development, and allows us to predict several stages we can anticipate as we join a new group.

Table 11.2 Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development

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

Tuckman begins with the forming stage as the initiation of group formation. This stage is also called the orientation stage because individual group members come to know each other. Group members who are new to each other and can't predict each other's behavior can be expected to experience the stress of uncertainty. Uncertainty theory states that we choose to know more about others with whom we have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown (Berger, C. and Calabrese, R., 1975; Berger, C., 1986; Gudykunst, W., 1995). The more we know about others and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts. If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later in the week. Individuals are initially tentative and display caution as they begin to learn about the group and its members.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LIFE CYCLE OF MEMBER ROLES

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so the group members fulfill different roles during this life cycle. These roles, proposed by Richard Moreland and John Levine, are summarized in Table 11.3 "Life Cycle of Member Roles".

Table 11.3 Life Cycle of Member Roles

1. Potential Member	Curiosity and interest
2. New Member	Joined the group but still an outsider and unknown
3. Full Member	Knows the "rules" and is looked to for leadership
4. Divergent Member	Focuses on differences
5. Marginal member	No longer involved
6. Ex-Member	No longer considered a member

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

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

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

After careful consideration, you decide to take the job offer and start the next week. The projects look interesting, you'll be gaining valuable experience, and the commute to work is reasonable. Your first day on the job is positive, and they've assigned you a mentor. The conversations are positive, but you feel lost at times, as if they are speaking a language you can't quite grasp. As a new group member, your level of acceptance will increase as you begin learning the group's rules, spoken and unspoken (Fisher, B. A., 1970). You will gradually move from the potential member role to the role of new group member as you learn to fit into the group.

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

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

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

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

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

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE MEMBER ROLES

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Table 11.4 "Positive Roles" (Beene, K. and Sheats, P., 1948; McLean, S., 2005) and Table 11.5 "Negative Roles" (Beene, K. and Sheats, P., 1948; McLean, S., 2005) list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting (Beene, K. and Sheats, P., 1948; McLean, S., 2005).

Table 11.4 Positive Roles

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

Table 11.5 Negative Roles

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

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

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

The group is together because they have a purpose or goal, and normally, they are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that. If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. But if that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behavior, then the behavior becomes a problem. A skilled business communicator will learn to recognize the difference, even when positive and negative aren't completely clear.

Key Takeaways

Groups and their individual members come together and grow apart in predictable patterns.

Exercises

1. Is it possible for an outsider (a nongroup member) to help a group move from the storming stage to the norming stage? Explain your answer and present it to the class.
2. Think of a group of which you are a member and identify some roles played by group members, including yourself. Have your roles, and those of others, changed over time? Are some roles more positive than others? Discuss your answers with your classmates.
3. In the course where you are using this book, think of yourself and your classmates as a group. At what stage of group formation are you currently? What stage will you be at when the school year ends?

4. Think of a group you no longer belong to. At what point did you become an ex-member? Were you ever a marginal group member or a full member? Write a two- to three-paragraph description of the group, how and why you became a member, and how and why you left. Share your description with a classmate.

CHAPTER 33.

WHAT IS A GROUP?

Learning Objectives

1. Define groups and teams.
2. Discuss how primary and secondary groups meet our interpersonal needs.
3. Discuss how groups tend to limit their own size and create group norms.

Let's get into a time machine and travel way, way back to join early humans in prehistoric times. Their needs are like ours today: they cannot exist or thrive without air, food, and water—and a sense of belonging. How did they meet these needs? Through cooperation and competition. If food scarcity was an issue, who got more and who got less? This serves as our first introduction to roles, status and power, and hierarchy within a group. When food scarcity becomes an issue, who gets to keep their spoon? In some Latin American cultures, having a job or earning a living is referred to by the slang term *cuchara*, which literally means "spoon" and figuratively implies food, safety, and security.

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

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

TYPES OF GROUPS IN THE WORKPLACE

As a skilled business communicator, learning more about groups, group dynamics, management, and leadership will serve you well. Mergers, forced sales, downsizing, and entering new markets all call upon individuals within a business or organization to become members of groups. In the second of the "Introductory Exercises" for this chapter, you were asked to list the professional (i.e., work-related) groups you interact with in order of frequency. What did your list include? Perhaps you noted your immediate coworkers, your supervisor and other leaders in your work situation, members of other departments with whom you communicate, and the colleagues who are also your personal friends during off-work times. Groups may be defined by function. They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by the relationships within them. Groups can also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs.

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

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

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

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

Through conversations and a shared sense that you and your coworkers belong together, you meet many of your basic human needs, such as the need to feel included, the need for affection, and the need for control (Schutz, W., 1966). In a work context, "affection" may sound odd, but we all experience affection at work in the form of friendly comments like "good morning," "have a nice weekend," and "good job!" Our professional lives also fulfill more than just our basic needs (i.e., air, food, and water, as well as safety). While your work group may be gathered together with common goals, such as to deliver the mail in a timely fashion to the corresponding departments and individuals, your daily interactions may well go beyond this functional perspective.

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

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GROUPS

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

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

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

IF TWO'S COMPANY AND THREE'S A CROWD, WHAT IS A GROUP?

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

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

The larger the group grows, the more likely it is to subdivide. Analysis of these smaller, or microgroups, is increasingly a point of study as the Internet allows individuals to join people of similar mind or habit to share virtually anything across time and distance. A microgroup is a small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or association with a larger group. With each additional group member the number of possible interactions increases (Harris, T., and Sherblom, J., 1999; McLean, S., 2003).

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

In Table 11.1 "Possible Interaction in Groups", you can quickly see how the number of possible interactions grows according to how many people are in the group. At some point, we all find the possible and actual interactions overwhelming and subdivide into smaller groups. For example, you may have hundreds of friends on Facebook or another social network, but how many of them do you regularly communicate with? You may be tempted to provide a number greater than eight, but if you exclude the "all to one" messages, such as a general tweet to everyone (but no one person in particular), you'll find the group norms will appear.

Table 11.1 Possible Interaction in Groups

Number of Group Members	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of Possible Interactions	2	9	28	75	186	441	1,056

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

If there are more than eight members, it becomes a challenge to have equal participation, where everyone has a chance to speak, listen, and respond. Some will dominate, others will recede, and smaller groups will form. Finding a natural balance within a group can also be a challenge. Small groups need to have enough members to generate a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas, information, and interaction, but not so many people that what each brings cannot be shared (Galanes, G., Adams, K., and Brilhart, J., 2000).

Key Takeaways

Forming groups fulfills many human needs, such as the need for affiliation, affection, and control; individuals also need to cooperate in groups to fulfill basic survival needs.

Exercises

1. Think of the online groups you participate in. Forums may have hundreds or thousands of members, and you may have hundreds of friends on Facebook or other social networks, but how many do you regularly communicate with? Exclude the "all-to-one" messages, such as a general tweet to everyone (but no one person in particular). Do you find that you gravitate toward the group norm of eight or fewer group members? Discuss your answer with your classmates.
2. What are some of the primary groups in your life? How do they compare with the secondary groups in your life? Write a two- to three-paragraph description of these groups and compare it with a classmate's description.
3. What group is most important to people? Create a survey with at least two questions, identify a target sample size, and conduct your survey. Report how you completed the activity and your findings. Compare the results with those of your classmates.
4. Are there times when it is better to work alone rather than in a group? Why or why not? Discuss your opinion with a classmate.

CHAPTER 34.

TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

Learning Objectives

1. Define teamwork and explain how to overcome various challenges to group success.
2. Describe the process of leader development.
3. Describe several different leadership styles and their likely influence on followers.

Two important aspects of group communication—especially in the business environment—are teamwork and leadership. You will work in a team and at some point may be called on to lead. You may emerge to that role as the group recognizes your specific skill set in relation to the task, or you may be appointed to a position of responsibility for yourself and others. Your communication skills will be your foundation for success as a member and as a leader. Listen and seek to understand both the task and your group members as you become involved with the new effort. Have confidence in yourself and inspire the trust of others. Know that leading and following are both integral aspects of effective teamwork.

TEAMWORK

Teamwork is a compound word, combining team and work. Teams are a form of group normally dedicated to production or problem solving. That leaves us with the work. This is where our previous example on problem solving can serve us well. Each member of the team has skills, talents, experience, and education. Each is expected to contribute. Work is the activity, and while it may be fun or engaging, it also requires effort and commitment, as there is a schedule for production with individual and group responsibilities. Each member must fulfill his or her own obligations for the team to succeed, and the team, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest member. In this context we don't measure strength or weakness at the gym, but in terms of productivity.

Teams can often achieve higher levels of performance than individuals because of the combined energies and talents of the members. Collaboration can produce motivation and creativity that may not be present in single-contractor projects. Individuals also have a sense of belonging to the group, and the range of views and diversity can energize the process, helping address creative blocks and stalemates. By involving members of the team in decision-making, and calling upon each member's area of contribution, teams can produce positive results.

Teamwork is not without its challenges. The work itself may prove a challenge as members juggle competing assignments and personal commitments. The work may also be compromised if team members are expected to conform and pressured to go along with a procedure, plan, or product that they themselves have not developed. Groupthink, or the tendency to accept the group's ideas and actions in spite of individual concerns, can also compromise the process and reduce efficiency. Personalities and competition can play a role in a team's failure to produce.

We can recognize that people want to belong to a successful team, and celebrating incremental gains can focus the attention on the project and its goals. Members will be more willing to express thoughts and opinions, and follow through with actions, when they perceive that they are an important part of the team. By failing to include all the team members, valuable insights may be lost in the rush to judgment or production. Making time for planning, and giving each member time to study, reflect, and contribute can allow them to gain valuable insights from each other, and may make them more likely to contribute information that challenges the status quo. Unconventional or "devil's advocate" thinking may prove insightful and serve to challenge the process in a positive way, improving the production of the team. Respect for divergent views can encourage open discussion.

John Thill and Courtland Bovee provide a valuable list to consider when setting up a team, which we have adapted here for our discussion:

- Select team members wisely
- Select a responsible leader
- Promote cooperation
- Clarify goals
- Elicit commitment
- Clarify responsibilities
- Instill prompt action
- Apply technology
- Ensure technological compatibility
- Provide prompt feedback

Group dynamics involve the interactions and processes of a team and influence the degree to which members feel a part of the goal and mission. A team with a strong identity can prove to be a powerful force, but it requires time and commitment. A team that exerts too much control over individual members can run the risk or reducing creative interactions and encourage tunnel vision. A team that exerts too little control, with attention to process and areas of specific responsibility, may not be productive. The balance between motivation and encouragement, and control and influence, is challenging as team members represent diverse viewpoints and approaches to the problem. A skilled business communicator creates a positive team by first selecting members based on their areas of skill and expertise, but attention to their style of communication is also warranted. Individuals that typically work alone or tend to be introverted may need additional encouragement to participate. Extroverts may need to be encouraged to listen to others and not dominate the conversation. Teamwork involves teams and work, and group dynamics play an integral role in their function and production.

LEADERSHIP

Whether or not there is a “natural leader,” born with a combination of talents and traits that enable a person to lead others, has been a subject of debate across time. In a modern context, we have come to recognize that leadership comes in many forms and representations. Once it was thought that someone with presence of mind, innate intelligence, and an engaging personality was destined for leadership, but modern research and experience shows us otherwise. Just as a successful heart surgeon has a series of skill sets, so does a dynamic leader. A television producer must both direct and provide space for talent to create, balancing control with confidence and trust. This awareness of various leadership styles serves our discussion as groups and teams often have leaders, and they may not always be the person who holds the title, status, or role.

Leaders take on the role because they are appointed, elected, or emerge into the role. The group members play an important role in this process. An appointed leader is designated by an authority to serve in that capacity, irrespective of the thoughts or wishes of the group. They may serve as the leader and accomplish all the designated tasks, but if the group does not accept their role as leader, it can prove to be a challenge. As Bruce Tuckman notes, “storming” occurs as group members come to know each other and communicate more freely, and an appointed leader who lacks the endorsement of the group may experience challenges to his or her authority.

A democratic leader is elected or chosen by the group, but may also face serious challenges. If individual group members or constituent groups feel neglected or ignored, they may assert that the democratic leader does not represent their interests. The democratic leader involves the group in the decision-making process, and insures group ownership of the resulting decisions and actions as a result. Open and free discussions are representative of this process, and the democratic leader acknowledges this diversity of opinion.

An emergent leader contrasts the first two paths to the role by growing into the role, often out of necessity. The appointed leader may know little about the topic or content, and group members will naturally look to the senior member with the most experience for leadership. If the democratic leader fails to bring the group together, or does not represent the whole group, subgroups may form, each with an informal leader serving as spokesperson.

TYPES OF LEADERS

We can see types of leaders in action and draw on common experience for examples. The heart surgeon does not involve everyone democratically, is typically appointed to the role through earned degrees and experience, and resembles a military sergeant more than a politician. The autocratic leader is self-directed and often establishes norms and conduct for the group. In some settings we can see that this is quite advantageous, such as open-heart surgery or during a military exercise, but it does not apply equally to all leadership opportunities.

Contrasting the autocrat is the laissez-faire, or "live and let live" leader. In a professional setting, such as a university, professors may bristle at the thought of an autocratic leader telling them what to do. They have earned their role through time, effort, and experience and know their job. A wise laissez-faire leader recognizes this aspect of working with professionals and may choose to focus efforts on providing the professors with the tools they need to make a positive impact. Imagine that you are in the role of a television director and you have a vision or idea of what the successful pilot program should look like. The script is set, the lighting correct, and the cameras are in the correct position. You may tell people what to do and where to stand, but you remember that your job is to facilitate the overall process. You work with talent, and creative people are interesting on camera. If you micromanage your actors, they may perform in ways that are not creative and that will not draw audiences. If you let them run wild through improvisation, the program may not go well at all. Balancing the need for control with the need for space is the challenge of the laissez-faire leader.

Not all leaders are autocrats or laissez-faire leaders. Thomas Harris and John Sherblom specifically note three leadership styles that characterize the modern business or organization, and reflect our modern economy. We are not born leaders but may become them if the context or environment requires our skill set. A leader-as-technician role often occurs when we have skills that others do not. If you can fix the copy machine at the office, your leadership and ability to get it running again are prized and sought-after skills. You may instruct others on how to load the paper or how to change the toner, and even though your pay grade may not reflect this leadership role, you are looked to by the group as a leader within that context. Technical skills, from Internet technology to facilities maintenance, may experience moments where their particular area of knowledge is required to solve a problem. Their leadership will be in demand.

The leader-as-conductor involves a central role of bringing people together for a common goal. In the common analogy, a conductor leads an orchestra and integrates the specialized skills and sounds of the various components the musical group comprises. In the same way, a leader who conducts may set a vision, create benchmarks, and collaborate with a group as they interpret a set script. Whether it is a beautiful movement in music or a group of teams that comes together to address a common challenge, the leader-as-conductor keeps the time and tempo of the group.

Coaches are often discussed in business-related books as models of leadership for good reason. A leader-as-coach combines many of the talents and skills we've discussed here, serving as a teacher, motivator, and keeper of the goals of the group. A coach may be autocratic at times, give pointed direction without input from the group, and stand on the sidelines while the players do what they've been trained to do and make the points. The coach may look out for the group and defend it against bad calls, and may motivate players with words of encouragement. We can recognize some of the behaviors of coaches, but what specific traits have a positive influence on the group? Thomas Peters and Nancy Austin identify five important traits that produce results:

1. Orientation and education
2. Nurturing and encouragement
3. Assessment and correction
4. Listening and counseling
5. Establishing group emphasis

Coaches are teachers, motivators, and keepers of the goals of the group. There are times when members of the team forget that there is no "I" in the word "team." At such times, coaches serve to redirect the attention and energy of the individuals to the overall goals of the group. They conduct the group with a sense of timing and tempo, and at times, they relax and let the members demonstrate their talents. Through their listening skills and counseling, they come to know each member as an individual, but keep the team focus for all to see. They set an example. Coaches, however, are human and by definition are not perfect. They can and do prefer some players over others and can display less than professional sideline behavior when they don't agree with the referee, but the style of leadership is worthy of your consideration in its multidisciplinary approach. Coaches use more than one style of leadership and adapt to the context and environment. A skilled business communicator will recognize that this approach has its merits.

Key Takeaways

Teamwork allows individuals to share their talents and energy to accomplish goals. An effective leader facilitates this teamwork process.

Exercises

1. Do you prefer working in a group or team environment, or working individually? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Discuss your thoughts with classmates.
2. Imagine that you could choose anyone you wanted to be on a team with you. Who would you choose, and why? Write a two- to three-paragraph description and share it with a classmate.
3. Think of a leader you admire and respect. How did this individual become a leader—for example, by appointment, democratic selection, or emergence? How would you characterize this leader's style—is the leader autocratic or laissez-faire, a technician, or a coach?

CHAPTER 35.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to prepare for and conduct business meetings.
2. Understand how to use technology to aid in group communications.
3. Understand the basic principles of organizational communication.

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

PREPARATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONDUCTING THE MEETING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MINUTES

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

USING TECHNOLOGY TO FACILITATE MEETINGS

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

AUDIO-ONLY INTERACTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AUDIO-VISUAL INTERACTIONS

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

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

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

SOCIAL MEDIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Businesses and companies are often described in terms we normally associate with family, from relationships between siblings, to dominant-subordinate roles between parents and children, and the role of praise and correction. Organizational communication, or the study of the communication context, environment, and interaction within an organization, was once the domain of speech communication departments. Modern business schools now view the study of organizational communication as an integral part of the curriculum, noting the interdependent relationships of productivity, climate, and interaction between individuals within the organization (internal) and related to the organization (external), such as suppliers or customers.

Organizations have communication needs and challenges just like a family, a group, or a community. We can examine the study of communication within an organization, noting common interactive practices like performance reviews, newsletters, supervisor and direction, and the flow of information throughout the organization. We can also study the practices of the organization as they relate to other organizations and the media, as in public relations, crisis communication plans, and interorganizational interaction. Research into these areas often emphasizes the outcome, in terms of increased productivity and more effective strategic communication systems (Tucker, M., Meyer, G., and Westman, J., 1986). Change management, knowledge management, organizational culture, leaderships, and strategic planning often include elements of organizational communication, and again examine communication from the perspective of efficiency and effectiveness.

As a skilled business writer or communicator, you can see that the study of organizational communication can serve to inform you on the lessons learned by other companies, which are often represented in research publications, to improve the processes in place within your organization. For example, crisis management once was a knee-jerk reaction to a situation, one that caused businesses and companies to experience chaos and information management in unanticipated ways, leading to mistakes and damaging reputations. Crisis communication plans are now a common feature in business, outlining roles and responsibilities, as well as central communication coordination and how to interact with media. Supervisors and employees then have a guide to serve everyone, much like a common playbook in organized sports like football, where everyone knows everyone else's position on the field once an emergency occurs.

Key Takeaways

Meetings require planning, choice of appropriate technology, and understanding of organizational communication.

Exercises

1. Take notes in one of your classes as if they were the official minutes of a meeting. Does the class "meeting" have a purpose? What preparations were made and what technology was used? Is there a follow-up or a plan for the next class meeting? Compare your notes with another student to see if you understood all the information conveyed in the class.
2. Collaborate with one or more classmates and contribute to a computing cloud or a wiki. What was the activity like? Did you learn new information that you would not have learned by studying individually?
3. Make an audio recording of your voice and listen to it. Are there aspects of your voice quality, pronunciation, or delivery style that you would like to improve? Practice daily and make more recordings until you notice improvement.

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GLOSSARY

audience

In a business writing context, **audience** refers to the intended recipient or recipients of a piece of communication. Understanding your audience is crucial for crafting effective messages that achieve their desired purpose.

correspondence

This genre of writing refers to the exchange of written or typed information to conduct business activities. Essentially, all the official written communication occurs within a company or between different companies.

disinformation

False or misleading information deliberately created and spread to deceive or manipulate an audience. *Example*: A company might release false statistics about a competitor's product to harm their reputation.

fake news

Fabricated or intentionally misleading information presented as legitimate news, often to influence public opinion or generate attention.

genre conventions

Genre conventions are the typical characteristics, features, and expectations associated with a specific type of writing.

Example: A business letter typically includes a formal salutation (e.g., "Dear Mr. Smith"), a clear and concise message, and a professional closing (e.g., "Sincerely"). These elements are genre conventions for business letters.

(see also "sub-genres"

memoranda (memos)

Memoranda (or memos) are brief, informal written documents used for internal communication within an organization.

Example: A memo could be used to announce a change in office policy, remind employees of an upcoming meeting, or provide a quick update on a project.

paraphrasing

The act of restating someone else's ideas or information in your own words while retaining the original meaning. The reference should still be listed and cited appropriately.

Example:

Original Quote:

“Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge” (Sinek, 2014, p. 7).

Paraphrase:

According to Sinek (2014), leadership involves prioritizing the well-being of those you are responsible for rather than simply exerting authority.

Reference:

Sinek, S. (2014). *Leaders eat last: Why some teams pull together and others don't*. Penguin.

stakes

The potential gains or losses associated with a particular decision or course of action. In business, stakes often include financial gains or losses but can also include reputation, market share, customer satisfaction, and other factors.

sub-genres

Sub-genres are more specific categories within a larger genre, each with its own distinct conventions.

Example: While business writing is a genre, sub-genres within it include emails, proposals, reports, and memos. Each has its own specific conventions, such as the informal style often used in emails compared to the more formal tone of a business proposal.

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