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SEMESTER- I

BUSINESSS COMMUNICATION

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Uttarakhand Open University

AECC-E-101

Business Communication

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CONTENTS

Business Communication

UNIT 1 WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of two or more people or groups exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings. It is a basic human activity that enables individuals to communicate with one another and exchange ideas, feelings, and experiences. It is a fundamental part of human interaction and is essential for the functioning of any society. It is the process of transmitting information, ideas, and emotions from one person to another. In this unit, we will explore the different types of communication, the importance of effective communication, and strategies for improving communication skills. Whether you're communicating with colleagues, friends, or family, understanding the basics of communication can help you build stronger relationships and achieve your goals.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to discuss following topics:

- Define communication and describe communication as a process.
- Identify and describe all the essential components of communication.
- Identify and describe two models of communication.
- Understand various types of Communication
- The importance of Communication

1.3. WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4. PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

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

1. Source
2. Encoding
3. Message
4. Channel
5. Receiver
6. Decoding
7. Feedback

8, Environment

9. Context

10.Interference

1.4.1 SOURCE

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

1.4.2 ENCODING

Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. The message generated by the sender is encoded symbolically such as in the form of words, pictures, gestures, etc. before it is being conveyed. The encoder must determine how the message will be received by the audience, and make adjustments so the message is received the way they want it to be received.

The encoder uses a 'medium' to send the message — a phone call, email, text message, face-to-face meeting, or other communication tool. The level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages may vary. The encoder should also take into account any 'noise' that might interfere with their message, such as other messages, distractions, or influences.

1.4.3 MESSAGE

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

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

1.4.4 CHANNEL

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

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

1.4.5. RECEIVER

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

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

1.4.6. DECODING

The audience then 'decodes', or interprets, the message for themselves. **Decoding** is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: "I'm hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?" As your roommate receives the message, they decode your communication and turn it back into thoughts to make meaning.

1.4.7 FEEDBACK

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

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

1.4.8 ENVIRONMENT

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

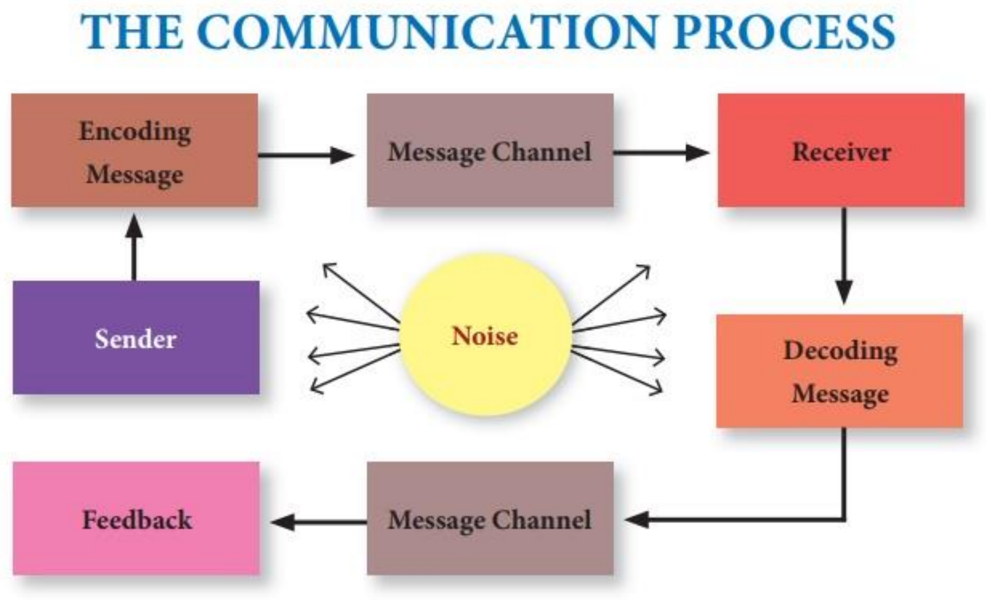
1.4.9. CONTEXT

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

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

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

The process can be easily understood through the help of the figure given below-



1.5 MODELS OF COMMUNICATIONS

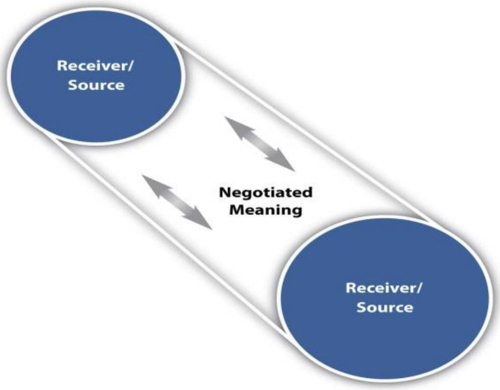
Researchers have observed that when communication takes place, the source and the receiver may send messages at the same time, often overlapping. You, as the speaker, will often play both roles, as source and receiver. You'll focus on the communication and the reception of your messages to the audience.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

1.5.1. INTERACTION MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

The **Interaction Model** of communication describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts (Schramm, 1997). Rather than illustrating communication as a linear, one-way process, the interaction model incorporates feedback, which makes communication a more interactive, two-way process. Feedback includes messages sent in response to other messages. For example, your instructor may respond to a point you raise during class discussion or you may point to the sofa when your roommate asks you where the remote control is. The inclusion of a feedback loop also leads to a more complex understanding of the roles of participants in a communication encounter. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, you alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

1.5.2. THE CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

In the **Constructivist Model** we focus on the negotiated meaning, or common ground, when trying to describe communication,



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

1.6. TYPES OF COMUNICATION

Here are the types of communication:

1. Verbal Communication

Words, whether spoken or written, are used in this sort of communication to communicate a message. It falls into two categories: written and oral. Face-to-face interactions, phone calls, and presentations all fall under the category of oral communication. Emails, letters, and text messages are all examples of written communication.

There Are Certain Measures Which Enhance This More Effectively

***Firm and Confident Voice**:* Firm and confident communication reflects the personality of the person. It gives more certainty of completing any task. So always be confident so that your ideas are more precise and specific.

***Active listening**:* A good listener always tends to listen to everyone’s perspective or viewpoints. Active listening helps in identifying each one’s problem or thoughts in a more clear way.

Ignore Filler Words: While giving a presentation, avoid using filler words such as yeah, like, so, etc. It might be distracting to your audiences. Try not to use them in official conferences or meetings.

2. Nonverbal Communication

Body language, facial emotions, and other nonverbal indicators are used in this style of communication to communicate a message. Examples include body language, posture, and vocal tone. Even more so than verbal communication, nonverbal communication has the potential to be strong and successfully convey a message.
Here are Certain Categories Where Non-Verbal Communication are Briefed Up

Positive Body Language: Always carry a positive body language where you can carry your confidence for performing any task. This type of communication gives support to your verbal talks and makes you more open to any kind of jobs.

Imitate non-verbal communication you find useful: Some facial expression or body language can be found helpful in an interview. If an interviewer has positively nodded his head, it gives a clear positive sign in a closed way, i.e. non-verbal communication.

3. Communication across Cultures

People from many cultural backgrounds exchange information and ideas through this style of communication. It can involve both verbal and nonverbal communication, and because of the varied languages, traditions, and values of other cultures, it can be difficult. In order to foster mutual understanding and cooperation between many cultures, intercultural communication is crucial.

4. Visual Communication

To transmit a message, this style of communication makes use of visual components including pictures, videos, and graphics. There are several ways to employ visual communication, including in charts, info-graphics, and advertising. It is frequently employed to simplify and enliven difficult information.

5. Interpersonal Communication

Information and ideas are exchanged between two or more persons during this style of conversation. It can take the shape of written messages, phone calls, or face-to-face interactions and can be formal or informal. Building and maintaining partnerships depend on interpersonal communication.

6. Mass Communications

In order to reach a big audience, this style of communication uses mass media, including television, radio, newspapers, and the internet. Information that needs to be widely disseminated is frequently done so through mass communication, such as news updates, ads, and PSAs.

7. Electronic communication

Digital technology, including the internet, social media, and mobile devices, are used in this sort of communication to spread a message. In recent years, digital communication has proliferated more widely, changing the way individuals communicate and exchange information.

1.7. IMPORTANCE OF COMUUNICATION

1. The Basis of Co-ordination

The manager explains to the employees the organizational goals, modes of their achievement and also the interpersonal relationships amongst them. This provides coordination between various employees and also departments. Thus, communications act as a basis for coordination in the organization.

2. Fluent Working

A manager coordinates the human and physical elements of an organization to run it smoothly and efficiently. This coordination is not possible without proper communication.

3. The Basis of Decision Making

Proper communication provides information to the manager that is useful for decision making. No decisions could be taken in the absence of information. Thus, communication is the basis for making the right decisions.

4. Increases Managerial Efficiency

The manager conveys the targets and issues instructions and allocates jobs to the subordinates. All of these aspects involve communication. Thus, communication is essential for the quick and effective performance of the managers and the entire organization.

5. Increases Cooperation and Organizational Peace

The two-way communication process promotes co-operation and mutual understanding amongst the workers and also between them and the management. This leads to less friction and thus leads to industrial peace in the factory and efficient operations.

6. Boosts Morale of the Employees

Good communication helps the workers to adjust to the physical and social aspects of work. It also improves good human relations in the industry. An efficient system of communication enables the management to motivate, influence and satisfy the subordinates which in turn boosts their morale and keeps them motivated.

1.8. MODAL QUESTIONS

1. Draw what you think communication looks like. Share your drawing with your classmates.
2. List three environmental cues and indicate how they influence your expectations for communication. Please share your results with your classmates.
3. How does context influence your communication? Consider the language and culture people grew up with, and the role these play in communication styles.
4. If you could design the perfect date, what activities, places, and/or environmental cues would you include to set the mood? Please share your results with your classmates.
5. Observe two people talking. Describe their communication. See if you can find all eight components and provide an example for each one.
6. What assumptions are present in transactional model of communication? Find an example of a model of communication in your workplace or classroom, and provide an example for all eight components.

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UNIT 2 EFFECTIVE BUSINESS WRITING

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Business writing is a type of writing that is used in a professional setting. It is a purposeful piece of writing that conveys relevant information to the reader in a clear, concise, and effective manner. It includes client proposals, reports, memos, emails, and notices. Proficiency in business writing is a critical aspect of effective communication in the workplace.

Effective business writing is like oil in the machine of your daily operations—it makes everything run much smoother. Improving the efficacy of your organization’s writing imparts many essential benefits:

- Boost productivity by reducing time spent writing and editing.

- Prevent miscommunications, inefficiencies, or project failures.

- Increase brand loyalty by enhancing the customer experience.

Allow your team to refine and develop their writing in different areas.

Ineffective communication can cause unnecessary confusion and complications at work. Your immediate relationships can suffer, your reputation is at risk, and your contributions are, literally, less meaningful. However, if you can improve your business writing, you can improve your effectiveness (and status) within your organization.

2.2. OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- What is written Communication
- Explain how written communication is similar to oral communication, and how it is different.
- Explain how reading, writing, and critical thinking contribute to becoming a good writer.

- Identify six basic qualities that characterize good business writing.
- Identify and explain the rhetorical elements and cognate strategies that contribute to good writing.
- Understand the rules that govern written language.
- Understand the legal implications of business writing.
- Describe some common barriers to written communication and how to overcome them.

2.3. ORAL VERSUS WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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

Oral and written forms of communication are similar in many ways. They both rely on the basic communication process, which consists of eight essential elements: source, receiver, message, channel, receiver, feedback, environment, context, and interference. Table 9.1 "Eight Essential Elements of Communication" summarizes these elements and provides examples of how each element might be applied in oral and written communication.

Table 9.1 Eight Essential Elements of Communication

Element of Communication	Definition	Oral Application	Written Application
1. Source	A source creates and communicates a message.	Jay makes a telephone call to Heather.	Jay writes an e-mail to Heather.
2. Receiver	A receiver receives the	Heather listens to	Heather reads Jay's

Element of Communication	Definition	Oral Application	Written Application
	message from the source.	Jay.	e-mail.
3. Message	The message is the stimulus or meaning produced by the source for the receiver.	Jay asks Heather to participate in a conference call at 3:15.	Jay's e-mail asks Heather to participate in a conference call at 3:15.
4. Channel	A channel is the way a message travels between source and receiver.	The channel is the telephone.	The channel is e-mail.
5. Feedback	Feedback is the message the receiver sends in response to the source.	Heather says yes.	Heather replies with an e-mail saying yes.
6. Environment	The environment is the physical atmosphere where the communication occurs.	Heather is traveling by train on a business trip when she receives Jay's phone call.	Heather is at her desk when she receives Jay's e-mail.
7. Context	The context involves the psychological expectations of the source and receiver.	Heather expects Jay to send an e-mail with the call-in information for the call. Jay expects to do so, and does.	Heather expects Jay to dial and connect the call. Jay expects Heather to check her e-mail for the call-in information

Element of Communication	Definition	Oral Application	Written Application
			so that she can join the call.
8. Interference	Also known as noise, interference is anything that blocks or distorts the communication process.	Heather calls in at 3:15, but she has missed the call because she forgot that she is in a different time zone from Jay.	Heather waits for a phone call from Jay at 3:15, but he doesn't call.

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

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

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

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

However, since written communication lacks the immediate feedback that is present in an oral conversation, you need to choose words and phrases even more carefully to promote accuracy, clarity, and understanding.

2.4. HOW IS WRITING LEARNED

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

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

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

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

2.4.1 READING

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

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

2.4.2 WRITING

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

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

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

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

2.4.3 CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND TARGETTED PRACTICE

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

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

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

2.4.4 CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking means becoming aware of your thinking process. It's a human trait that allows us to step outside what we read or write and ask ourselves, "Does this really make sense?" "Are there other, perhaps better, ways to explain this idea?" Sometimes our thinking is very abstract and becomes clear only through the process of getting thoughts down in words. As a character in E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* said, "How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?" (1976, p. 99). Did you really write what you meant to, and will it be easily understood by the reader? Successful writing forms a relationship with the audience, reaching the reader on a deep level that can be dynamic and motivating. In contrast, when writing fails to meet the audience's expectations, you already know the consequences: they'll move on.

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

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

2.5 GOOD WRITING

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

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

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

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

Perhaps the most universally useful strategy in capturing your reader's attention is to state how your writing can meet the reader's needs. If your document provides information to answer a question, solve a problem, or explain how to increase profits or cut costs, you may want to state this in the beginning. By opening with a "what's in it for me" strategy, you give your audience a reason to be interested in what you've written.

More Qualities of Good Writing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies

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

A second set of goals involves what are called cognate strategies, or ways of promoting understanding, developed in recent decades by Charles Kostelnick and David Rogers (1998). Like rhetorical elements, cognate strategies can be applied to public speaking, but they are also useful in developing good writing. Table 9.2 "Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies" describes these goals, their purposes, and examples of how they may be carried out in business writing.

Table: Rhetorical Elements and Cognate Strategies

Aristotle's Rhetorical Elements	Cognate Strategies	Focus	Example in Business Writing
Logos	Clarity	Clear understanding	An announcement will be made to the company later in the week, but I wanted to tell you personally that as of the first of next month, I will be leaving my position to accept a three-year assignment in our Singapore office. As soon as further details

Aristotle's Rhetorical Elements	Cognate Strategies	Focus	Example in Business Writing
			about the management of your account are available, I will share them with you.
	Conciseness	Key points	In tomorrow's conference call Sean wants to introduce the new team members, outline the schedule and budget for the project, and clarify each person's responsibilities in meeting our goals.
	Arrangement	Order, hierarchy, placement	Our department has matrix structure. We have three product development groups, one for each category of product. We also have a manufacturing group, a finance group, and a sales group; different group members are assigned to each of the three product categories. Within the matrix, our structure is flat, meaning that we have no group leaders. Everyone reports to Beth, the department manager.
Ethos	Credibility	Character, trust	Having known and worked with Jesse for more than five years, I can highly recommend him to take my place as your advisor. In addition to having superb qualifications, Jesse is known for his dedication,

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

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

2.6. STYLE IN WRITING COMMUNICATION

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

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

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

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

2.6.1 COLOQUIAL

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

Colloquial language can be reflected in texting:

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

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

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

2.6.2. CASUAL

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

2.6.2 FORMAL

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

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

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

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

2.7. PRINCIPLES OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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

2.7.1 WORDS ARE INHERENTLY ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

2.7.2 WORDS ARE GOVERNED BY RULES

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

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

All words are governed by rules, and the rules are vastly different from one language and culture to another. A famous example is the decision by Chevrolet to give the name "Nova" to one of its cars. In English, nova is recognized as coming from Latin meaning "new"; for those who have studied astronomy, it also refers to a type of star. When the Chevy Nova was introduced in Latin America, however, it was immediately ridiculed as the "car that doesn't go." Why? Because "nova" literally means "doesn't go" in Spanish.

By investigating sample names in a range of markets, you can quickly learn the rules surrounding words and their multiple meaning, much as you learned about subjects and objects, verbs and nouns, adjectives and adverbs when you were learning language. Long before you knew formal grammar terms, you observed how others communicate and learned by trial and error.

In business, error equals inefficiency, loss of resources, and is to be avoided. For Chevrolet, a little market research in Latin America would have gone a long way.

2.7.3. WORDS SHAPE OUR REALITY

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

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

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

2.7.4. WORDS ARE OUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

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

The rapid pace of technology means that the law cannot always stay current with the realities of business communication. Computers had been in use for more than twenty years before Congress passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, the first federal legislation to "move the nation's copyright law into the digital age" (United States Copyright Office, 1998). Think for a moment about the changes in computer use that have taken place since 1998, and you will realize how many new laws are needed to clarify what is fair and ethical, what should be prohibited, and who owns the rights to what.

For example, suppose your supervisor asks you to use your Facebook page or Twitter account to give an occasional "plug" to your company's products. Are you obligated to comply? If you later change jobs, who owns your posts or tweets—are they yours, or does your now-former employer have a right to them? And what about your network of "friends"? Can your employer use their contact information to send marketing messages? These and many other questions remain to be answered as technology, industry practices, and legislation evolve (Tahmincioglu, 2009). "Our product is better than X company's product. Their product is dangerous and you would be a wise customer to choose us for your product solutions."

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

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

2.8. MODAL QUESTIONS

7. You are your own company. What words describe you? Design a logo, create a name, and present your descriptive words in a way that gets attention. Share and compare with classmates.
8. 1. Interview one person whose job involves writing. This can include writing e-mails, reports, proposals, invoices, or any other form of business document. Where did this person learn to write? What would they include as essential steps to learning to write for success in business? Share your results with a classmate.
9. For five consecutive days, read the business section of your local newspaper or another daily paper. Write a one-page summary of the news that makes the most impression on you. Review your summaries and compare them with those of your classmates.

10. Practice filling out an online form that requires writing sentences, such as a job application for a company that receives applications online. How does this kind of writing compare with the writing you have done for other courses in the past? Discuss your thoughts with your classmates.

11. Choose a piece of business writing that attracts your interest. What made you want to read it?

12. Choose a piece of business writing and evaluate it according to the qualities of good writing presented in this section. Do you think the writing qualifies as "good"? Why or why not?

13. Identify the ethos, pathos, and logos in a document. Share and compare with classmates.

14. List three words or phrases that you would say to your friends. List three words or phrases that communicate similar meanings that you would say to an authority figure. Share and compare with classmates.

15. When is it appropriate to write in a casual tone? In a formal tone? Write a one- to two-page essay on this topic and discuss it with a classmate.

16. How does the intended audience influence the choice of words and use of language in a document? Think of a specific topic and two specific kinds of audiences. Then write a short example (250–500 words) of how this topic might be presented to each of the two audiences.

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UNIT 3 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is crucial to the existence and survival of humans as well as an individual. In other words, communication is the exchange of information between two entities. Every action of ours can be seen as a means to communicate. This exchange is not necessarily in words only. It could be a gesture like a raised eyebrow or waving to a friend when you spot them in a crowd. Communication means sharing something with another person or a group of people. A communication barrier is anything that comes in the way of receiving and understanding messages that one sends to another to convey his ideas, thoughts, or any other kind of information. These various barriers of communication block or interfere with the message that someone is trying to send. There are numerous barriers to effective communication that can come in the way. It happens because the message sent by the sender might not be understood exactly as it is meant to be. It can get distorted during the communication exchange. These different types of communication barriers can come at any stage in the process of communication. It can come because of the bias or stereotyping and generalization that exists in the workplace.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

A skilled communicator needs to have information about the different types of barriers to effective communication and try to prevent them. These barriers to effective communication can be overcome by active listening, reflection, etc. The communicator must seek feedback from the receiver of the information to check if the message was understood in its true sense. Communicating can be more of a challenge than you think, when you realize the many things that can stand in the way of effective communication. These include filtering, selective perception, information overload, emotional disconnects, lack of source familiarity or credibility, workplace gossip, semantics, gender differences, differences in meaning between Sender and Receiver, and biased language. Let's examine each of these barriers. The aim of this unit is to make you understand different ways in which the communication process can be improved. The unit also helps understand how the Receiver can enhance the probability of effective communication by engaging in active listening, which involves (1) giving one's full attention to the Sender and (2) checking for understanding by repeating the essence of the Message back to the Sender.

1.3. FILTERING

Filtering is the distortion or withholding of information to manage a person's reactions. Some examples of filtering include a manager who keeps her division's poor sales figures from her boss, the vice president, fearing that the bad news will make him angry. The old saying, "Don't shoot the messenger!" illustrates the tendency of Receivers (in this case, the vice president) to vent their negative response to unwanted Messages on the Sender. A gatekeeper (the vice president's assistant, perhaps) who doesn't pass along a complete Message is also filtering. The vice president may delete the e-mail announcing the quarter's sales figures before reading it, blocking the Message before it arrives.

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

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

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

- Past experience: Was the Sender rewarded for passing along news of this kind in the past, or was she criticized?
- Knowledge, perception of the speaker: Has the Receiver's direct superior made it clear that "no news is good news?"
- Emotional state, involvement with the topic, level of attention: Does the Sender's fear of failure or criticism prevent him from conveying the Message? Is the topic within his realm of expertise, increasing his confidence in his ability to decode it, or is he out of his comfort zone when it comes to evaluating the Message's significance? Are personal concerns impacting his ability to judge the Message's value?

Once again, filtering can lead to miscommunications in business. Each listener translates the Message into his or her own words, creating his or her own version of what was said

1.4. SELECTIVE PERCEPTION

Selective perception refers to filtering what we see and hear to suit our own needs. This process is often unconscious. Small things can command our attention when we're visiting a new place—a new city or a new company. Over time, however, we begin to make assumptions about the way things are on the basis of our past experience. Often, much of this process is unconscious. "We simply are bombarded with too much stimuli every day to pay equal attention to everything so we pick and choose according to our own needs (Pope, 2008)." Selective perception is a time-saver, a necessary tool in a complex culture. But it can also lead to mistakes.

Think back to the earlier example conversation between Bill, who was asked to order more toner cartridges, and his boss. Since Bill found his boss's to-do list to be unreasonably demanding, he assumed the request could wait. (How else could he do everything else on the list?) The boss, assuming that Bill had heard the urgency in her request, assumed that Bill would place the order before returning to the other tasks on her list.

Both members of this organization were using selective perception to evaluate the communication. Bill's perception was that the task of ordering could wait. The boss's perception was that her time frame was clear, though unstated. When two selective perceptions collide, a misunderstanding occurs.

1.5. INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Information overload can be defined as "occurring when the information processing demands on an individual's time to perform interactions and internal calculations exceed the supply or capacity of time available for such processing (Schick, et. al., 1990)." Messages reach us in countless ways every day. Some are societal—advertisements that we may hear or see in the course of our day. Others are professional—e-mails, and memos, voice mails, and conversations from our colleagues. Others are personal—messages and conversations from our loved ones and friends.

Add these together and it's easy to see how we may be receiving more information than we can take in. This state of imbalance is known as information overload. Experts note that information overload is "A symptom of the high-tech age, which is too much information for one human being to absorb in an expanding world of people and technology. It comes from all sources including TV, newspapers, and magazines as well as wanted and unwanted regular mail, e-mail and faxes. It has been exacerbated enormously because of the formidable number of results obtained from Web search engines (PC Magazine, 2008)."

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

1.6. EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTS

Emotional disconnects happen when the Sender or the Receiver is upset, whether about the subject at hand or about some unrelated incident that may have happened earlier. An effective communication requires a Sender and a Receiver who are open to speaking and listening to one another, despite possible differences in opinion or personality. One or both parties may have to put their emotions aside to achieve the goal of communicating clearly. A Receiver who is emotionally upset tends to ignore or distort what the Sender is saying. A Sender who is emotionally upset may be unable to present ideas or feelings effectively.

1.7. LACK OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Lack of source familiarity or credibility can derail communications, especially when humor is involved. Have you ever told a joke that fell flat? You and the Receiver lacked the common context that could have made it funny. (Or yes, it could have just been a lousy joke.) Sarcasm and irony are subtle, and potentially hurtful, commodities in business. It’s best to keep these types of communications out of the workplace as their benefits are limited, and their potential dangers are great. Lack of familiarity with the Sender can lead to misinterpreting humor, especially in less-rich information channels like e-mail. For example, an e-mail from Jill that ends with, “Men, like hens, should boil in vats of oil,” could be interpreted as antimale if the Receiver didn’t know that Jill has a penchant for rhyme and likes to entertain coworkers by making up amusing sayings.

Similarly, if the Sender lacks credibility or is untrustworthy, the Message will not get through. Receivers may be suspicious of the Sender’s motivations (“Why am I being told this?”). Likewise, if the Sender has communicated erroneous information in the past, or has created false emergencies, his current Message may be filtered.

Workplace gossip, also known as the grapevine, is a lifeline for many employees seeking information about their company (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Researchers agree that the grapevine is an inevitable part of organizational life. Research finds that 70% of all organizational communication occurs at the grapevine level (Crampton, 1998).

Employees trust their peers as a source of Messages, but the grapevine's informal structure can be a barrier to effective communication from the managerial point of view. Its grassroots structure gives it greater credibility in the minds of employees than information delivered through official channels, even when that information is false.

Some downsides of the office grapevine are that gossip offers politically minded insiders a powerful tool for disseminating communication (and self-promoting miscommunications) within an organization. In addition, the grapevine lacks a specific Sender, which can create a sense of distrust among employees—who is at the root of the gossip network? When the news is volatile, suspicions may arise as to the person or persons behind the Message. Managers who understand the grapevine's power can use it to send and receive Messages of their own. They also decrease the grapevine's power by sending official Messages quickly and accurately, should big news arise.

1.8. SEMANTICS

Semantics is the study of meaning in communication. Words can mean different things to different people, or they might not mean anything to another person. For example, companies often have their own acronyms and buzzwords (called business jargon) that are clear to them but impenetrable to outsiders. For example, at IBM, GBS is focusing on BPTS, using expertise acquired from the PwC purchase (which had to be sold to avoid conflicts of interest in light of SOX) to fend other BPO providers and inroads by the Bangalore tiger. Does this make sense to you? If not, here's the translation: IBM's Global Business Services (GBS) division is focusing on offering companies Business Process Transformation Services (BPTS), using the expertise it acquired from purchasing the management consulting and technology services arm of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), which had to sell the division because of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX, enacted in response to the major accounting scandals like the Enron). The added management expertise puts it above business process outsourcing (BPO) vendors who focus more on automating processes rather than transforming and improving them. Chief among these BPO competitors is Wipro, often called the "Bangalore tiger" because of its geographic origin and aggressive growth.

Given the amount of Messages we send and receive every day, it makes sense that humans try to find shortcuts—a way to communicate things in code. In business, this code is known as jargon. Jargon is the language of specialized terms used by a group or profession. It is common shorthand among experts and if used sensibly can be a quick and efficient way of communicating. Most jargon consists of unfamiliar terms, abstract words, nonexistent words, acronyms, and abbreviations, with an occasional euphemism thrown in for good measure. Every profession, trade, and organization has its own specialized terms (Wright, 2008). At first glance, jargon seems like a good thing—a quicker way to send an effective communication, the way text message abbreviations can send common messages in a shorter, yet understandable way. But that's not always how things happen. Jargon can be an obstacle to effective communication, causing listeners to tune out or fostering ill-feeling between partners in a conversation. When jargon rules the day, the Message can get obscured.

A key question to ask before using jargon is, "Who is the Receiver of my Message?" If you are a specialist speaking to another specialist in your area, jargon may be the best way to send a message while forging a professional bond—similar to the way best friends can communicate in code. For example, an information technology (IT) systems analyst communicating with another IT employee may use jargon as a way of sharing information in a way that reinforces the pair's shared knowledge. But that same conversation should be held in standard English, free of jargon, when communicating with staff members outside the IT group.

1.9. GENDER DIFFERENCES

Gender differences in communication have been documented by a number of experts, including linguistics professor Deborah Tannen in her best-selling book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Tannen, 1991). Men and women work together every day. But their different styles of communication can sometimes work against them. Generally speaking, women like to ask questions before starting a project, while men tend to "jump right in." A male manager who's unaware of how many women communicate their readiness to work may misperceive a ready employee as not ready.

Another difference that has been noticed is that men often speak in sports metaphors, while many women use their home as a starting place for analogies. Women who believe men are "only talking about the game" may be missing out on a chance to participate in a division's strategy and opportunities for teamwork and "rallying the troops" for success (Krotz, 2008).

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

Being aware of these gender differences can be the first step in learning to work with them, as opposed to around them. For example, keep in mind that men tend to focus more on competition, data, and orders in their communications, while women tend to focus more on cooperation, intuition, and requests. Both styles can be effective in the right situations, but understanding the differences is a first step in avoiding misunderstandings based on them.

1.10. BIASED LANGUAGE

Biased language can offend or stereotype others on the basis of their personal or group affiliation. The figure below provides a list of words that have the potential to be offensive in the left-hand column. The right-hand column provides more neutral words that you can use instead (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003; Swift, 2007).

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

Avoiding Biased Language. FIGURE 3.1.

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

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

Many companies offer new employees written guides on standards of speech and conduct. These guides, augmented by common sense and courtesy, are solid starting points for effective, respectful workplace communication. Tips for appropriate workplace speech include but are not limited to

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

1.11. DIFFERENCES IN MEANING

Differences in meaning often exist between the Sender and Receiver. *“Mean what you say, and say what you mean*.” It’s an easy thing to say. But in business, what do those words mean? Different words mean different things to different people. Age, education, and cultural background are all factors that influence how a person interprets words. The less we consider our audience, the greater our chances of miscommunication will be. When communication occurs in the cross-cultural context, extra caution is needed given that different words will be interpreted differently across cultures and different cultures have different norms regarding nonverbal communication. Eliminating jargon is one way of ensuring that our words will convey real-world concepts to others. Speaking to our audience, as opposed to about ourselves, is another. Nonverbal Messages can also have different meanings.

Figure 3.2.

1. *“V” for victory*. Use this gesture with caution! While in North America it signs victory or peace, in England and Australia it means something closer to “take this!”

Figure 3.3. 	2. *The “OK” gesture*. While in North America it means things are going well, in France it means a person is thought to be worthless, in Japan it refers to money, and in Brazil, Russia, and Germany it means something really not appropriate for the workplace.
Figure 3.4. 	3. The *“thumbs up*” means one in Germany, five in Japan, but a good job in North America. This can lead to confusion.
Figure 3.5.	4. *“Hook ‘em horns*.” This University of Texas rallying call looks like the horns of a bull. However, in Italy it means you are being

	tricked, while in Brazil and Venezuela it means you are warding off evil.
Figure 3.6. 	5. *Waving your hand*. In much of Europe waving your hand indicates a disagreement. However, in North America it is routinely used as a way to signal greetings or to get someone's attention.

GESTURES AROUND THE WORLD. Adapted from information in Axtell, R. E. (1998). *Gestures: The do's and taboos of body language around the world*. New York: John Wiley.

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

1.12. POOR LISTENING AND ACTIVE LISTENING

Former Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca lamented, “I only wish I could find an institute that teaches people how to listen. After all, a good manager needs to listen at least as much as he needs to talk (Iacocca & Novak, 1984).” Research shows that listening skills are related to promotions (Sypher, et. al., 1989). A Sender may strive to deliver a Message clearly. But the Receiver’s ability to listen effectively is equally vital to effective communication. The average worker spends 55% of her workdays listening. Managers listen up to 70% each day. But listening doesn’t lead to understanding in every case. Listening takes practice, skill, and concentration.

According to University of San Diego professor Phillip Hunsaker, “The consequences of poor listening are lower employee productivity, missed sales, unhappy customers, and billions of dollars of increased cost and lost profits. Poor listening is a factor in low employee morale and increased turnover because employees do not feel their managers listen to their needs, suggestions, or complaints (Alessandra, et. al., 1993).” Clearly, if you hope to have a successful career in management, it behooves you to learn to be a good listener.

Alan Gulick, a Starbucks spokesperson, puts better listening to work in pursuit of better profits. If every Starbucks employee misheard one $10 order each day, he calculates, their errors would cost the company a billion dollars annually. To teach its employees to listen, Starbucks created a code that helps employees taking orders hear the size, flavor, and use of milk or decaf coffee. The person making the drink echoes the order aloud.

How can you improve your listening skills? The Roman philosopher Cicero said, “Silence is one of the great arts of conversation.” How often have we been in conversation with someone else where we are not really listening but itching to convey our portion? This behavior is known as “rehearsing.” It suggests the Receiver has no intention of considering the Sender’s Message and intends to respond to an earlier point instead. Clearly, rehearsing is an impediment to the communication process. Effective communication relies on another kind of listening: active listening.

Active listening can be defined as giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times (Onet Center, 2008).Active listening creates a real-time relationship between the Sender and the Receiver by acknowledging the content and receipt of a Message. As we’ve seen in the Starbucks example, repeating and confirming a Message’s content offers a way to confirm that the correct content is flowing between colleagues. The process creates a bond between coworkers while increasing the flow and accuracy of messaging.

Carl Rogers, founder of the "person-centered" approach to psychology, formulated five rules for active listening:

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

The good news is that listening is a skill that can be learned (Brownell, 1990). The first step is to decide that we want to listen. Casting aside distractions, such as by reducing background or internal noise, is critical. The Receiver takes in the Sender's Message silently, without speaking. Second, throughout the conversation, show the speaker that you're listening. You can do this nonverbally by nodding your head and keeping your attention focused on the speaker. You can also do it verbally, by saying things like, "Yes," "That's interesting," or other such verbal cues. As you're listening, pay attention to the Sender's body language for additional cues about how they're feeling. Interestingly, silence plays a major role in active listening. During active listening, we are trying to understand what has been said, and in silence, we can consider the implications. We can't consider information and reply to it at the same time. That's where the power of silence comes into play. Finally, if anything is not clear to you, ask questions. Confirm that you’ve heard the message accurately, by repeating back a crucial piece like, “Great, I’ll see you at 2 p.m. in my office.” At the end of the conversation, a “thank you” from both parties is an optional but highly effective way of acknowledging each other’s teamwork.

In summary, active listening creates a more dynamic relationship between a Receiver and a Sender. It strengthens personal investment in the information being shared. It also forges healthy working relationships among colleagues by making Speakers and Listeners equally valued members of the communication process.

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1.14. MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Most people are poor listeners. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Please support your position.
2. Please share an example of how differences in shared meaning have affected you.
3. Give an example of selective perception.
4. Do you use jargon at or in your classes? If so, do you think it helps or hampers communication? Why or why not?
5. In your experience, how is silence used in communication? How does your experience compare with the recommended use of silence in active listening?

UNIT 4 DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study about how we deliver our message. There are certain aspects of communication, conveying the thoughts and ideas, it is possible that we cannot communicate the message to the audience properly. The proper delivery of messages primarily depends upon language. We will also cover the importance of language in communication and how, sometimes it can become a hurdle to people.

How do you communicate? How do you think? We use language as a system to create and exchange meaning with one another, and the types of words we use influence both our perceptions and others interpretation of our meanings. What kinds of words would you use to describe your thoughts and feelings, your preferences in music, cars, food, or other things that matter to you?

Imagine that you are using written or spoken language to create a bridge over which you hope to transport meaning, much like a gift or package, to your receiver. You hope that your meaning arrives relatively intact, so that your receiver receives something like what you sent. Will the package look the same to them on the receiving end? Will they interpret the package, its wrapping and colors, the way you intended? That depends. What is certain is that they will interpret it based on their framework of experience. The package represents your words arranged in a pattern that both the source (you) and the receiver (your audience) can interpret. The words as a package try to contain the meaning and deliver it intact, but they themselves are not the meaning. That lies within us. So is the package empty? Are the words we use empty? Without us to give them life and meaning, the answer is yes. Knowing what words will correspond to meanings that your audience holds within themselves will help you communicate more effectively. Knowing what meanings lie within you is your door to understanding yourself.

This chapter discusses the importance of delivering your message in words. It examines how the characteristics of language interact in ways that can both improve and diminish effective business communication. We will examine how language plays a significant role in how you perceive and interact with the world, and how culture, language, education, gender, race, and ethnicity all influence this dynamic process. We will look at ways to avoid miscommunication and focus on constructive ways to get your message delivered to your receiver with the meaning you intended.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to introduce you to the different aspects of communication and language, and to familiarize you with the problems that are commonly faced by the learners while learning a language or when there is no or incomplete knowledge of it. In this unit, you will learn about,

- language and its importance
- role of language in perception and the communication process
- three different types of messages and their functions

- key principles of verbal communication

4.3 WHAT IS LANGUAGE

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

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

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

We often call this code "language": a system of symbols, words, and/or gestures used to communicate meaning. Does everyone on earth speak the same language? Obviously, no. People are raised in different cultures, with different values, beliefs, customs, and different languages to express those cultural attributes. Language is a system of words used as symbols to convey ideas, and it has rules of syntax, semantics, and context. Words have meaning only when interpreted by the receiver of the message.

Even people who speak the same language, like speakers of English in London, New Delhi, or Cleveland, speak and interact using their own words that are community-defined, self-defined, and have room for interpretation. Within the United States, depending on the context and environment, you may hear colorful sayings that are quite regional, and may notice an accent, pace, or tone of communication that is distinct from your own. This variation in our use of language is a creative way to form relationships and communities, but can also lead to miscommunication.

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

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

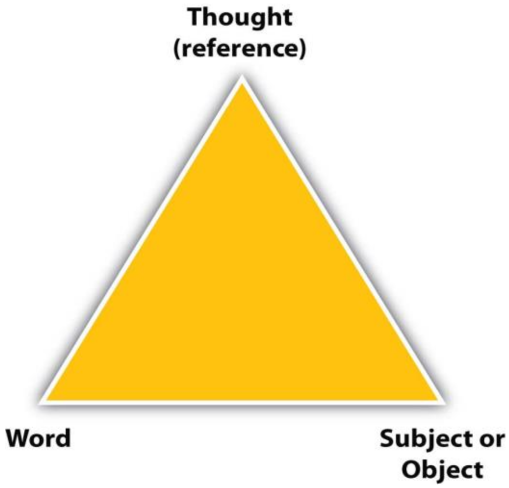
Sometimes we want our meaning to be crystal clear, and at other times, less so. We may even want to present an idea from a specific perspective, one that shows our company or business in a positive light. This may reflect our intentional manipulation of language to influence meaning, as in choosing to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

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

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

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

Figure - Semantic Triangle



Source: Adapted from Ogden and Richards.Odgen, C., & Richards, I. (1932). *The meaning of meaning: A study of the influence of language upon thought and of the science of symbolism*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & World.

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

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

The meaning, according to Hayakawa,Hayakawa, S. I.

(1978). *Language in thought and action*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. is within us, and the word serves as a link to meaning. What will your words represent to the listener? Will your use of a professional term enhance your credibility and be more precise with a knowledgeable audience, or will you confuse them?

4.4 MESSAGES

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

Primary Message Is Not the Whole Message

When considering how to effectively use verbal communication, keep in mind there are three distinct types of messages you will be communicating: primary, secondary, and auxiliary. Hasling, J. (1998). Audience, message, speaker. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parts of a Message

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

1. Attention statement
2. Introduction
3. Body
4. Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

1. What do I want my listeners or readers to remember?
2. What information do I want to have the audience retain or act upon?
3. What do I want the audience to do?

4.5 PRINCIPLES OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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

Language Has Rules

Language is a code, a collection of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meanings that are arranged according to the rules of syntax and are used to communicate.Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An introduction to human communication: Understanding and sharing* (p. 54). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

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

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

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

Semantic rules govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them.Martinich, A. P. (Ed.). (1996). *The philosophy of language* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It considers what words mean, or are intended to mean, as opposed to their sound, spelling, grammatical function, and so on. Does a given statement refer to other statements already communicated? Is the statement true or false? Does it carry a certain intent? What does the sender or receiver need to know in order to understand its meaning? These are questions addressed by semantic rules.

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

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

Our Reality Is Shaped by Our Language

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Malaysia, for example? Italy? Afghanistan? Or Bolivia? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. Or had been raised in the northeastern United States instead of the Southwest, or the Midwest instead of the Southeast. In any of these cases, you would not have the same identity you have today. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns, and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicated in different ways.

You didn't choose your birth, customs, values, traditions, or your language. You didn't even choose to learn to read this sentence or to speak with those of your community, but somehow you accomplished this challenging task. As an adult, you can choose to see things from a new or diverse perspective, but what language do you think with? It's not just the words themselves, or even how they are organized, that makes communication such a challenge. Your language itself, ever changing and growing, in many ways determines your reality.Whorf, B. L. (1956). Science and linguistics. In J. B. Carroll (Ed.), *Language, thought and reality* (pp. 207–219). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. You can't escape your language or culture completely, and always see the world through a shade or tint of what you've been taught, learned, or experienced.

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

Thomas KuhnKuhn, T. (1996). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (3rd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. makes the point that "paradigms, or a clear point of view involving theories, laws, and/or generalizations that provide a framework for understanding, tend to form and become set around key validity claims, or statements of the way things work."McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication* (p. 50). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. The paradigm, or worldview, may be individual or collective. And paradigm shifts are often painful. New ideas are always suspect, and usually opposed, without any other reason than because they are not already common. Ackerman, B. A. (1980). *Social justice in the liberal state*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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

In the same way, the makers of the Intel microprocessor once thought that a slight calculation error, unlikely to negatively impact 99.9 percent of users, was better left as is and hidden. Emery, V. (1996). The Pentium chip story: A learning experience. Retrieved from http://www.emery.com/1e/pentium.htm Like many things in the information age, the error was discovered by a user of the product, became publicly known, and damaged Intel's credibility and sales for years. Recalls and prompt, public communication in response to similar issues are now the industry-wide protocol.

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

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

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

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

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

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

With a common vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms, effective communication becomes a more distinct possibility. But what if we have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? That is essentially what we are doing when we translate a message. In such cases, language and culture can sometimes make for interesting twists. The *New York Times*Sterngold, J. (1998, November 15). Lost, and gained, in the translation. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com noted that the title of the 1998 film *There's Something About Mary* proved difficult to translate when it was released in foreign markets. The movie was renamed to capture the idea and to adapt to local audiences' frame of reference: In Poland, where blonde jokes are popular and common, the film title (translated back to English for our use) was *For the Love of a Blonde*. In France, *Mary at All Costs* communicated the idea, while in Thailand *My True Love Will Stand All Outrageous Events* dropped the reference to Mary altogether.

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

Language Is Abstract

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

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

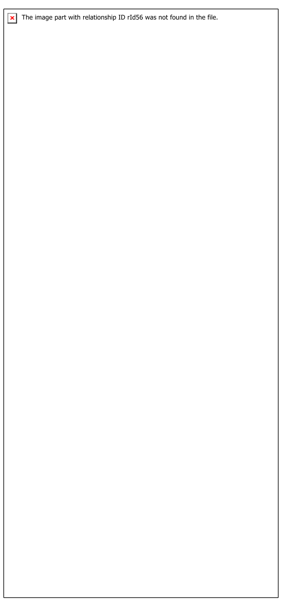


Figure Abstraction Ladder

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

Language Organizes and Classifies Reality

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

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

4.6. LANGUAGE CAN BE AN OBSTACLE TO COMMUNICATION

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

In an article titled "The Miscommunication Gap," Susan Washburn lists several undesirable results of poor communication in business:Washburn, S. (2008, February). The miscommunication gap. *ESI Horizons, 9*(2). Retrieved from http://www.esiintl.com/public/Library/html/200802HorizonsArticle1.asp?UnityID=8522516.1290

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

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

Cliché

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

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

Jargon

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

What words do you use to communicate information about your product? Is your audience familiar with your field and its specialized terms? As potential customers, they are probably somewhat knowledgeable in the field, but not to the extent that you and your coworkers are; even less so compared to the "techies" who developed the product. For your presentation to succeed, your challenge is to walk a fine line between using too much profession-specific language on the one hand, and "talking down" to your audience on the other hand.

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

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

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

Slang

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

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

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

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

Sexist and Racist Language

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

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

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

Euphemisms

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

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

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

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

Doublespeak

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

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

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

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

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

4.7. IMPROVING VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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

Define Your Terms

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

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

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

Choose Precise Words

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

Table 4.1 "Precisely What Are You Saying?" lists some examples of phrases that are imprecise and precise. Which one evokes a more dynamic image in your imagination?

Table 4.1 Precisely What Are You Saying?

The famous writer William Safire died in 2009; he was over seventy.	The former Nixon speech writer, language authority, and *New York Times* columnist William Safire died of pancreatic cancer in 2009; he was seventy-nine.
Clumber spaniels are large dogs.	The Clumber Spaniel Club of America describes the breed as a “long, low, substantial dog,” standing 17 to 20 inches high and weighing 55 to 80 pounds.
It is important to eat a healthy diet during pregnancy.	Eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy products can improve your health during pregnancy and boost your chances of having a healthy baby.

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

Consider Your Audience

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

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

Take Control of Your Tone

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

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

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

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

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

Check for Understanding

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

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

Be Results Oriented

At the end of the day, the assignment has to be complete. It can be a challenge to balance the need for attention to detail with the need to arrive at the end product—and its due date. Stephen Covey Covey, S. (1989). The seven habits of highly effective people. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. suggests beginning with the end in mind as one strategy for success. If you have done your preparation, know your assignment goals, desired results, have learned about your audience and tailored the message to their expectations, then you are well on your way to completing the task. No document or presentation is perfect, but the goal itself is worthy of your continued effort for improvement.

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

4. 8. MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What is language? What are some of the major components of language?

2. Write a note on verbal communication and its principles.

3. Describe how language can become an obstacle to communication?

4. What are the ways to improve communication?

4.9. REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benjamin Lee Whorf was one of the twentieth century's foremost linguists. Learn more about his theories of speech behavior by visiting this site. http://grail.cba.csuohio.edu/~somos/whorf.html Visit Infoplease to learn more about the eminent linguist (and U.S. senator) S. I. Hayakawa.

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UNIT 5 UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study about the importance of knowing the audience and how to better communicate with people. Communicating involves the translation of your thoughts and ideas to words. Speaking or writing involves sharing your perspective with others. If you talk to yourself, the action reflects the communication process, but you play the role of audience. In your head, you may make sense of your words and their meaning, but when I hear what you said, what you meant may escape me. I might not “get it” because I don’t know you, your references, your perspectives, your word choices, or your underlying meaning and motivation for speaking in the first place. In this chapter we’ll discuss perspectives, and how people perceive information, as we learn how communication is an imperfect bridge to understanding. It requires our constant attention, maintenance, and effort.

Knowing your audience involves understanding others, and their perspectives, to see if they understand your words, examples, or the frames of reference you use to communicate your experiences, points, and conclusions. Ask yourself when you last had a miscommunication with someone. No doubt it was fairly recently, as it is for most people.

It’s not people’s fault that language, both verbal and nonverbal, is an imperfect system. We can, however, take responsibility for the utility and limitations of language to try to gain a better understanding of how we can communicate more effectively. As a communicator, consider both the role of the speaker and the audience and not only what and how you want to communicate but also what and how your audience needs you to communicate with them in order to present an effective message.

Take, for example, the word “love.” Yes, we recognize those four little letters all in a row, but what does it really mean? You can use it to describe the feelings and emotions associated with your mother, a partner, or perhaps your dog. Or you might say you love chocolate cake. Does your use of the word in any given context allow the audience to get any closer to what you mean by this word, “love”? The key here is context, which provides clues to how you mean the

word and what its use means to you. The context allows you to close the gap between your meaning of "love" and what the receiver, or audience, has in their range of understanding of the same word. Your experiences are certainly different, but through clues, contexts, and attempts to understand each other's perspectives, we can often communicate more effectively.
This gives rise to an issue: how do I deal with twenty or twenty-five "perspectives" in a classroom or a reading audience of infinite size and try to narrow the gap with each audience member? Before we tackle this question, let's first follow the advice given by the character Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "To thine own self be true." This relates to the notion that you need to know yourself, or your perspective, before you can explore ways to know others and communicate more effectively. You will examine how you perceive stimuli, choosing some information over others, organizing the information according to your frame of reference, and interpreting it, deciding what it means to you and whether you should remember it or just ignore it and move on. We can recognize that not everyone tunes in to the same music, trends in clothing, or even classes, so experiences or stimuli can have different meanings. Still, we can find common ground and communicate effectively.

5.2. OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will have a clear picture of:

- the factors that contribute to self-concept
- concept of perception
- how perception differs between people
- the importance of becoming an active listener and reader

5.3. SELF-UNDERSTANDING IS FUNDAMENTAL TO COMMUNICATION

Your sense of self comes through in your oral and written presentations. Public communication starts with intrapersonal communication, or communication with yourself. You need to know what you want to say before you can say it to an audience.

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

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

The communication process itself is the foundation for oral and written communication. Whether we express ourselves in terms of a live, face-to-face conversation or across a voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) chat via audio and visual channels, emoticons (:)), and abbreviations (IMHO [In My Humble Opinion]), the communication process remains the same. Imagine that you are at work and your Skype program makes the familiar noise indicating that someone wants to talk. Your caller ID tells you that it is a friend. You also know that you have the report right in front of you to get done before 5:00 p.m. Your friend is quite a talker, and for him everything tends to have a “gotta talk about it right now” sense of urgency. You know a little bit about your potential audience or conversational partner. Do you take the call? Perhaps you chat back “Busy, after 5,” only to have him call again. You interpret the ring as his insistent need for attention, but you have priorities. You can choose to close the Skype program, stop the ringing, and get on with your report, but do you? Communication occurs on many levels in several ways.

Self-Concept

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

Carol Dweck, a psychology researcher at Stanford University, states that "something that seems like a small intervention can have cascading effects on things we think of as stable or fixed, including extroversion, openness to new experience, and resilience" (Begley, 2008, p.14). Your personality and expressions of it, like oral and written communication, were long thought to have a genetic component. But, says Dweck, "More and more research is suggesting that, far from being simply encoded in the genes, much of personality is a flexible and dynamic thing that changes over the life span and is shaped by experience" (Begley, 2008, p.14). If you were told by someone that you were not a good speaker, know this: You can change. You can shape your performance through experience, and a business communication course, a mentor at work, or even reading effective business communication authors can result in positive change.

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

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

One point of discussion useful for our study about ourselves as communicators is to examine our attitudes, beliefs, and values. These are all interrelated, and researchers have varying theories as to which comes first and which springs from another. We learn our values, beliefs, and attitudes through interaction with others. Table 5.1 "Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values" defines these terms and provides an example of each.

Table 5.1 Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

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

	behavior		important.

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

Beliefs are ideas based on our previous experiences and convictions and may not necessarily be based on logic or fact. You no doubt have beliefs on political, economic, and religious issues. These beliefs may not have been formed through rigorous study, but you nevertheless hold them as important aspects of self. Beliefs often serve as a frame of reference through which we interpret our world. Although they can be changed, it often takes time or strong evidence to persuade someone to change a belief.

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

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

Self-Image and Self-Esteem

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

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

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

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

Looking-Glass Self

In addition to how we view ourselves and feel about ourselves, of course, we often take into consideration the opinions and behavior of others. Charles Cooley's (1922) looking-glass self reinforces how we look to others and how they view us, treat us, and interact with us to gain insight of our identity. We place an extra emphasis on parents, supervisors, and on those who have some degree of control over us when we look at others. Developing a sense of self as a communicator involves balance between constructive feedback from others and constructive self-affirmation. You judge yourself, as others do, and both views count.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

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

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

Can you anticipate the outcome? As you may guess, the students lived up to their teachers' level of expectation. Even though the teachers were supposed to give appropriate attention and encouragement to all students, in fact they unconsciously communicated special encouragement verbally and nonverbally to the special potential students. And these students, who were actually no more gifted than their peers, showed significant improvement by the end of the school year. This phenomenon came to be called the "Pygmalion effect" after the myth of a Greek sculptor named Pygmalion, who carved a marble statue of a woman so lifelike that he fell in love with her—and in response to his love she did in fact come to life and marry him (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Insel & Jacobson, 1975).

In more recent studies, researchers have observed that the opposite effect can also happen: when students are seen as lacking potential, teachers tend to discourage them or, at a minimum, fail to give them adequate encouragement. As a result, the students do poorly (Schugurensky, 2009). *Pygmalion in the Classroom* was followed by many other school-based studies that examined these mechanisms in detail from different perspectives. Prominent among the works on this subject conducted by U.S. scholars are Rist's (1970) "Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education"; Anyon's (1980) "Social class and the hidden curriculum of work"; Oakes's (1985) *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*; and Sadker & Sadker's (1994) *Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls*.

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

The concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which someone's behavior comes to match and mirror others' expectations, is not new. Robert Rosenthal, a professor of social psychology at Harvard, has observed four principles while studying this interaction between expectations and performance (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999):

1. We form certain expectations of people or events.
2. We communicate those expectations with various cues, verbal and nonverbal.
3. People tend to respond to these cues by adjusting their behavior to match the expectations.

4. The outcome is that the original expectation becomes true.

5.4. PERCEPTION

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

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

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

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

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

People use conventions to guide them every day. On which side of the plate will you find the spoon? In a formal place setting, the answer is "right." If, however, you are at a potluck supper, you may be handed a plate with all your utensils, including the spoon, just sitting on top. Or you might find a pile of spoons next to the plates and have to get one for yourself. In each case there are a set of conventions in place that we use to guide behavior and establish expectations. At a formal dinner, eating with your fingers might be unconventional or even rude. The same actions at a potluck might be the dominant convention, as in everyone is doing it.

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

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

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

Selection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Organization

Organization is the process of sorting information into logical categories or series. We often take things we perceive and organize them into categories based on what we have perceived previously. Think back to the Gatorade video. Suppose the speaker started out with an attention statement and quickly moved to highlight three main points in the introduction. While the attention statement got you, by the second main point you were already starting to think, “This is going to be just another speech on how great Gatorade is for my body.” You may think this because you have already heard other speakers presented similar information and you classify what you think this presentation is going to be in relation to your previous experiences.

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

Organization Schemes

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

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

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

Gestalt Principles of Organization

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

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

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

In your presentations, if you jump from topic to topic or go off on a tangent, what happens to the listener’s ability to listen and follow you effectively? Why make barriers for your audience when you’ve worked so hard to get their attention? How does this relate to Gestalt principles? By failing to recognize our natural tendency to want ideas, shapes, or words to make sense, the author is confusing the reader. What happens when the reader is confused? He or she moves on to something else, and leaves your writing behind. The opposite of clear and concise, confused, and poorly organized writing can distract and defeat even the most motivated of readers. Table 5.2 "Gestalt Principles of Organization" lists some of the Gestalt organization principles.

Table 5.2 Gestalt Principles of Organization

Principle	Definition	Example
Proximity	Organization based on relationship of space to objects	Next to me on the beach, I see my daughter playing with her pail and shovel; in the middle distance, a trio of kayakers paddle by; farther away, I see several power boats, and in the far distance, the green shore of Long Island.
Continuity	Drawing connections between things that occur in sequence	I am beginning to notice a pattern in the absentee rate in our department. For the past year, more workers have been absent on the first Friday of the month than on other days. I expect we will again have many absences next Friday, as it is the first Friday of the month.
Similarity	Grouping things or concepts by properties they share	To make appliquéd candles (Ruffman, 2007) you will need the following: 1. Decorative material to appliqué: floral (fresh flowers, pine needles, or leaves), homey (dried beans or grains) or folksy (small

		nuts and bolts) 2. Candle body: fat candles (at least 4" diameter to keep dried flowers away from flame), natural colored wax (sheets or chunks of beeswax or paraffin) 3. Tools: a microwave flower press, a ½-inch paintbrush, a tin pie plate, a chip carving knife or v-tool
Uniformity/Homogeneity	Noting ways in which concepts or objects are alike	Armored personnel carriers include the Stryker, LAV, Pandur, M113 Armored Personnel Carrier, Amphibious Assault Vehicle, Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, Grizzly APC, Rhino Runner, Bison (armored personnel carrier), and Mamba APC.
Figure and Ground	Emphasis on a single item that stands out from its surroundings	On a rock in Copenhagen Harbor stands the small statue of The Little Mermaid, a memorial to one of Denmark's most beloved citizens, Hans Christian Andersen.

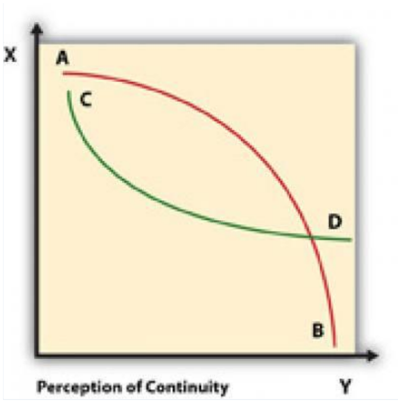
Symmetry	Balancing objects or ideas equally from one side to the other	Representing the conservative viewpoint was *Wall Street Journal* correspondent John Emshwiller; the liberal viewpoint was argued by *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman.
Closure	Tendency to use previous knowledge to fill in the gaps in an incomplete idea or picture	The wording of the memo was, “It is important for all employees to submit their health insurance enrollment selections no than November 1,” but everyone understood that it should have said, “no later than November 1.”

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

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

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

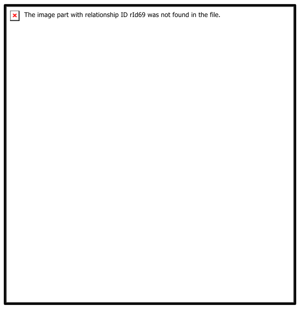
Figure Continuity



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

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

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



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

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

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

Interpretation

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

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

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

5.5. DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION

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

Why Don't We All See Eye to Eye?

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

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

Individual Differences in Perception

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.6. GETTING TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

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

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

- How big is the audience?
- What are their backgrounds, gender, age, jobs, education, and/or interests?
- Do they already know about your topic? If so, how much?
- Will other materials be presented or available? If so, what are they, what do they cover, and how do they relate to your message?
- How much time is allotted for your presentation, or how much space do you have for your written document? Will your document or presentation stand alone or do you have the option of adding visuals, audio-visual aids, or links?

Demographic Traits

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

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

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

Tailor your message to your audience.

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

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

Improving Your Perceptions of Your Audience

The better you can understand your audience, the better you can tailor your communications to reach them. To understand them, a key step is to perceive clearly who they are, what they are interested in, what they need, and what motivates them. This ability to perceive is important with audience members from distinct groups, generations, and even cultures. William Seiler and Melissa Beall (2000) offer us six ways to improve our perceptions, and therefore improve our communication, particularly in public speaking; they are listed in Table 5.3 "Perceptual Strategies for Success".

Table 5.3 Perceptual Strategies for Success

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

Check your perceptions	By learning to observe, and acknowledging our own perceptions, we can avoid assumptions, expand our understanding, and improve our ability to communicate across cultures.

Fairness in Communication

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

In a report on intercultural communication, V. Lynn Tyler (1978) offers us some insight into these audience expectations, which can be summarized as the need to be fair to your audience. One key fairness principle is reciprocity, or a relationship of mutual exchange and interdependence. Reciprocity has four main components: mutuality, non-judgmentalism, honesty, and respect.

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

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

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

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

5.7. LISTENING AND READING FOR UNDERSTANDING

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

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

Active Listening and Reading

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

Here are some tips to facilitate active listening and reading:

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

When the Going Gets Tough

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

Here are some tips that may be helpful:

- **Set aside a special time**. To have a difficult conversation or read bad news, set aside a special time when you will not be disturbed. Close the door and turn off the TV, music player, and instant messaging client.
- **Don't interrupt**. Keep silent while you let the other person "speak his piece." If you are reading, make an effort to understand and digest the news without mental interruptions.
- **Be nonjudgmental**. Receive the message without judgment or criticism. Set aside your opinions, attitudes, and beliefs.
- **Be accepting**. Be open to the message being communicated, realizing that acceptance does not necessarily mean you agree with what is being said.
- **Take turns**. Wait until it is your turn to respond, and then measure your response in proportion to the message that was

delivered to you. Reciprocal turn-taking allows each person have his say.

- **Acknowledge**. Let the other person know that you have listened to the message or read it attentively.
- **Understand**. Be certain that you understand what your partner is saying. If you don't understand, ask for clarification. Restate the message in your own words.
- **Keep your cool**. Speak your truth without blaming. A calm tone will help prevent the conflict from escalating. Use "I" statements (e.g., "I felt concerned when I learned that my department is going to have a layoff") rather than "you" statements (e.g., "you want to get rid of some of our best people").

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

5.8. MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to know about self-concept and self-esteem?

2. What is perception? How does it differ between people?

3. Write a note on the ways to engage the audience in a better way.

4. Write a note on the importance of active listening and reading in communication.

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UNIT 6 NON-VERBAL DELIVERY

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will understand what non-verbal communication is and what are the key aspects of non-verbal communication. It's not just what you say but how you say it. Choose a speech to watch. Examples may include famous speeches by historical figures like Martin Luther King Jr. or Winston Churchill, current elected officials, or perhaps candidates for local and state office that may be televised. Other examples could be from a poetry slam, a rap performance, or a movie. Watch the presentation without sound and see what you observe. Does the speaker seem comfortable and confident? Aggressive or timid? If possible, repeat the speech a second time with the sound on. Do your perceptions change? What patterns do you observe?

Invasion of space. When someone "invades" your space, how do you feel? Threatened, surprised, interested, or repulsed? We can learn a lot from each other as we come to be more aware of the normative space expectations and boundaries. Set aside ten minutes where you can "people watch" in a public setting. Make a conscious effort to notice how far apart they stand from people they communicate. Record your results. Your best estimate is fine and there is no need to interrupt people, just watch and record. Consider noting if they are male or female, or focus only on same-sex conversations. When you have approximate distances for at least twenty conversations or ten minutes have passed, add up the results and look for a pattern. Compare your findings with those of a classmate.

Have you ever been in class and found it hard to listen to the professor, not because he or she wasn't well informed or the topic wasn't interesting or important to you, but because the style of presentation didn't engage you as a listener? If your answer is yes, then you know that you want to avoid making the same mistake when you give a presentation. It's not always what you say, but how you say it that makes a difference. We sometimes call this "body language," or "nonverbal communication," and it is a key aspect of effective business communication.

How do you know when your boss or instructors are pleased with your progress (or not)? You might know from the smiles on their faces, from the time and attention they give you, or perhaps in other nonverbal ways, like a raise, a bonus, or a good grade. Whether the interaction takes place face-to-face, or at a distance, you can still experience and interpret nonverbal responses.

Sometimes we place more emphasis on nonverbal aspects of communication that they warrant. Suppose you have just gotten home from your first date with Amanda and you feel it went very well. How soon should afterward should you call Amanda? There are lots of advice columns, informal rules and customs, and friends with opinions to offer you suggestions, but you know what is right for you. You also know that texting her at five o'clock the next morning might be a bit early. You may choose to wait until a coffee break around 10 a.m. to send a short text message, and realize that you might not get a response until later that afternoon.

Does the lack of an immediate response have any meaning? Does it mean Amanda is less interested in you than you are in her? While you might give it more attention than it deserves, and maybe let it weigh on your mind and distract you from other tasks, the time interval for responding may not have as much intentional meaning as you think. It might mean that Amanda has a different sense of time urgency than you do, or that she simply didn't receive your message until later.

Timing is an important aspect of nonverbal communication, but trying to understand what a single example of timing means is challenging. Context may make a difference. For example, if you have known someone for years who has always responded promptly to your e-mails or texts, but now that person hasn't responded in over a day, you may have reason for concern. That person's behavior doesn't match what you are familiar with, and this sudden, unexplained change in the established pattern may mean that you need to follow up.

6.2. OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will have a clear picture of:

- the principles of nonverbal communication
- types of nonverbal communication
- how to use movement to increase the effectiveness of your presentation
- how to use visual aids effectively in your presentation
- three ways to improve nonverbal communication
-

6.3. PRINCIPLES OF NON-VERBAL COMUNICATION

Nonverbal Communication Is Fluid

Chances are you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood, or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, meaning is even harder to discern. We can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof "dictionary" of how to interpret nonverbal messages. Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture and where you stand as you communicate. It can help or hinder the clear understanding of your message, but it doesn't reveal (and can even mask) what you are really thinking. Nonverbal communication is far from simple, and its complexity makes our study and our understanding a worthy but challenging goal.

Where does a wink start and a nod end? Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Confused? Try to focus on just one element of nonverbal communication and it will soon get lost among all the other stimuli. Let's consider eye contact. What does it mean by itself without context, chin position, or eyebrows to flag interest or signal a threat? Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one to the next, making it a challenge to interpret one element, or even a series of elements.

We perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. We did one task, we're doing another task now, and we are planning on doing something else all the time. Sometimes we place more emphasis on the future, or the past, forgetting that we are actually living in the present moment whether we focus on "the now" or not. Nonverbal communication is always in motion, as long as we are, and is never the same twice.

Nonverbal communication is irreversible. In written communication, you can write a clarification, correction, or retraction. While it never makes the original statement go completely away, it does allow for correction. Unlike written communication, oral communication may allow "do-overs" on the spot: you can explain and restate, hoping to clarify your point. You can also dig the hole you are in just a little bit deeper. The old sayings "when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging" and "open mouth, insert foot" can sometimes apply to oral communications. We've all said something we would give anything to take back, but we all know we can't. Oral communication, like written communication, allows for some correction, but it still doesn't erase the original message or its impact. Nonverbal communication takes it one step further. You can't separate one nonverbal action from the context of all the other verbal and nonverbal communication acts, and you can't take it back.

In a speech, nonverbal communication is continuous in the sense that it is always occurring, and because it is so fluid, it can be hard to determine where one nonverbal message starts and another stops. Words can be easily identified and isolated, but if we try to single out a speaker's gestures, smile, or stance without looking at how they all come together in context, we may miss the point and draw the wrong conclusion. You need to be conscious of this aspect of public speaking because, to quote another old saying, "Actions speak louder than words." This is true in the sense that people often pay more attention to your nonverbal expressions more than your words. As a result, nonverbal communication is a powerful way to contribute to (or detract from) your success in communicating your message to the audience.

Nonverbal Communication Is Fast

Let's pretend you are at your computer at work. You see that an e-mail has arrived, but you are right in the middle of tallying a spreadsheet whose numbers just don't add up. You see that the e-mail is from a coworker and you click on it. The subject line reads "pink slips." You could interpret this to mean a suggestion for a Halloween costume, or a challenge to race for each other's car ownership, but in the context of the workplace you may assume it means layoffs.

Your emotional response is immediate. If the author of the e-mail could see your face, they would know that your response was one of disbelief and frustration, even anger, all via your nonverbal communication. Yes, when a tree falls in the forest it makes a sound, even if no one is there to hear it. In the same way, you express yourself via nonverbal communication all the time without much conscious thought at all. You may think about how to share the news with your partner, and try to display a smile and a sense of calm when you feel like anything but smiling.

Nonverbal communication gives our thoughts and feelings away before we are even aware of what we are thinking or how we feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your nonverbal communication includes both intentional and unintentional messages, but since it all happens so fast, the unintentional ones can contradict what you know you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react.

Nonverbal Communication Can Add to or Replace Verbal Communication

People tend to pay more attention to how you say it than what you actually say. In presenting a speech this is particularly true. We communicate nonverbally more than we engage in verbal communication, and often use nonverbal expressions to add to, or even replace, words we might otherwise say. We use a nonverbal gesture called an illustrator to communicate our message effectively and reinforce our point. Your coworker Andrew may ask you, "Barney's Bar after work?" as he walks by, and you simply nod and say "yeah." Andrew may respond with a nonverbal gesture, called an emblem, by signaling with the "OK" sign as he walks away.

In addition to illustrators or emblematic nonverbal communication, we also use regulators. "Regulators are nonverbal messages which control, maintain or discourage interaction."McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. For example, if someone is telling you a message that is confusing or upsetting, you may hold up your hand, a commonly recognized regulator that asks the speaker to stop talking.

Let's say you are in a meeting presenting a speech that introduces your company's latest product. If your audience members nod their heads in agreement on important points and maintain good eye contact, it is a good sign. Nonverbally, they are using regulators encouraging you to continue with your presentation. In contrast, if they look away, tap their feet, and begin drawing in the margins of their notebook, these are regulators suggesting that you better think of a way to regain their interest or else wrap up your presentation quickly.

"Affect displays are nonverbal communication that express emotions or feelings."McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication* (p. 77). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. An affect display that might accompany holding up your hand for silence would be to frown and shake your head from side to side. When you and Andrew are at Barney's Bar, smiling and waving at coworkers who arrive lets them know where you are seated and welcomes them.

"Adaptors are displays of nonverbal communication that help you adapt to your environment and each context, helping you feel comfortable and secure."McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication* (p. 77). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. A self-adaptor involves you meeting your need for security, by playing with your hair for example, by adapting something about yourself in way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose. Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior. An object-adaptor involves the use of an object in a way for which it was not designed. You may see audience members tapping their pencils, chewing on them, or playing with them, while ignoring you and your presentation. Or perhaps someone pulls out a comb and repeatedly rubs a thumbnail against the comb's teeth. They are using the comb or the pencil in a way other than its intended design, an object-adaptor that communicates a lack of engagement or enthusiasm in your speech.

Intentional nonverbal communication can complement, repeat, replace, mask, or contradict what we say. When Andrew invited you to Barney's, you said, "Yeah" and nodded, complementing and repeating the message. You could have simply nodded, effectively replacing the "yes" with a nonverbal response. You could also have decided to say no, but did not want to hurt Andrew's feelings. Shaking your head "no" while pointing to your watch, communicating work and time issues, may mask your real thoughts or feelings. Masking involves the substitution of appropriate nonverbal communication for nonverbal communication you may want to display. McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication* (p. 77). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Finally, nonverbal messages that conflict with verbal communication can confuse the listener. Table 11.1 "Some Nonverbal Expressions" summarizes these concepts.

Table 6.1 Some Nonverbal Expressions

Term	**Definition**
Adaptors	Help us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods
Affect Displays	Express emotions or feelings
Complementing	Reinforcing verbal communication
Contradicting	Contradicting verbal communication
Emblems	Nonverbal gestures that carry a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words
Illustrators	Reinforce a verbal message
Masking	Substituting more appropriate displays for less appropriate displays
Object-Adaptors	Using an object for a purpose other than its intended design
Regulators	Control, encourage or discourage interaction

Repeating	Repeating verbal communication
Replacing	Replacing verbal communication
Self-Adaptors	Adapting something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose

Nonverbal Communication Is Universal

Consider the many contexts in which interaction occurs during your day. In the morning, at work, after work, at home, with friends, with family, and our list could go on for quite awhile. Now consider the differences in nonverbal communication across these many contexts. When you are at work, do you jump up and down and say whatever you want? Why or why not? You may not engage in that behavior because of expectations at work, but the fact remains that from the moment you wake until you sleep, you are surrounded by nonverbal communication.

If you had been born in a different country, to different parents, and perhaps as a member of the opposite sex, your whole world would be quite different. Yet nonverbal communication would remain a universal constant. It may not look the same, or get used in the same way, but it will still be nonverbal communication in its many functions and displays.

Nonverbal Communication Is Confusing and Contextual

Nonverbal communication can be confusing. We need contextual clues to help us understand, or begin to understand, what a movement, gesture, or lack of display means. Then we have to figure it all out based on our prior knowledge (or lack thereof) of the person and hope to get it right. Talk about a challenge. Nonverbal communication is everywhere, and we all use it, but that doesn’t make it simple or independent of when, where, why, or how we communicate.

Nonverbal Communication Can Be Intentional or Unintentional

Suppose you are working as a salesclerk in a retail store, and a customer communicated frustration to you. Would the nonverbal aspects of your response be intentional or unintentional? Your job is to be pleasant and courteous at all times, yet your wrinkled eyebrows or wide eyes may have been unintentional. They clearly communicate your negative feelings at that moment. Restating your wish to be helpful and displaying nonverbal gestures may communicate “no big deal,” but the stress of the moment is still “written” on your face.

Can we tell when people are intentionally or unintentionally communicating nonverbally? Ask ten people this question and compare their responses. You may be surprised. It is clearly a challenge to understand nonverbal communication in action. We often assign intentional motives to nonverbal communication when in fact their display is unintentional, and often hard to interpret.

Nonverbal Messages Communicate Feelings and Attitudes

Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond offer us three additional principals of interpersonal nonverbal communication that serve our discussion. One is that you often react faster than you think. Your nonverbal responses communicate your initial reaction before you can process it through language or formulate an appropriate response. If your appropriate, spoken response doesn’t match your nonverbal reaction, you may give away your true feelings and attitudes.Beebe, S. [Steven], Beebe, S. [Susan], & Redmond, M. (2002). *Interpersonal communication relating to others* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Albert Mehrabian asserts that we rarely communicate emotional messages through the spoken word. According to Mehrabian, 93 percent of the time we communicate our emotions nonverbally, with at least 55 percent associated with facial gestures. Vocal cues, body position and movement, and normative space between speaker and receiver can also be clues to feelings and attitudes.Mehrabian, A. (1972). *Nonverbal communication*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Atherton.

Is your first emotional response always an accurate and true representation of your feelings and attitudes, or does your emotional response change across time? We are all changing all the time, and sometimes a moment of frustration or a flash of anger can signal to the receiver a feeling or emotion that existed for a moment, but has since passed. Their response to your communication will be based on that perception, even though you might already be over the issue. This is where the spoken word serves us well. You may need to articulate clearly that you were frustrated, but not anymore. The words spoken out loud can serve to clarify and invite additional discussion.

We Believe Nonverbal Communication More than Verbal

Building on the example of responding to a situation with facial gestures associated with frustration before you even have time to think of an appropriate verbal response, let's ask the question: what would you believe, someone's actions or their words? According to William Seiler and Melissa Beall, most people tend to believe the nonverbal message over the verbal message. People will often answer that "actions speak louder than words" and place a disproportionate emphasis on the nonverbal response. Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: Making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Humans aren't logical all the time, and they do experience feelings and attitudes that change. Still, we place more confidence in nonverbal communication, particularly when it comes to lying behaviors. According to Miron Zuckerman, Bella DePaulo, and Robert Rosenthal, there are several behaviors people often display when they are being deceptive: Zuckerman, M., DePaulo, B., & Rosenthal, R. (1981). Verbal and nonverbal communication of deception. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 14*, 1–59.

- Reduction in eye contact while engaged in a conversation
- Awkward pauses in conversation
- Higher pitch in voice
- Deliberate pronunciation and articulation of words
- Increased delay in response time to a question
- Increased body movements like changes in posture
- Decreased smiling
- Decreased rate of speech

If you notice one of more of the behaviors, you may want to take a closer look. Over time we learn people's patterns of speech and behavior, and form a set of expectations. Variation from their established patterns, combined with the clues above, can serve to alert you to the possibility that something deserves closer attention.

Our nonverbal responses have a connection to our physiological responses to stress, such as heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductivity. Polygraph machines (popularly referred to as “lie detectors”) focus on these physiological responses and demonstrate anomalies, or variations. While movies and TV crime shows may make polygraphs look foolproof, there is significant debate about whether they measure dishonesty with any degree of accuracy.

Can you train yourself to detect lies? It is unlikely. Our purpose in studying nonverbal communication is not to uncover dishonesty in others, but rather to help you understand how to use the nonverbal aspects of communication to increase understanding.

Nonverbal Communication Is Key in the Speaker/Audience Relationship

When we first see each other, before anyone says a word, we are already sizing each other up. Within the first few seconds we have made judgments about each other based on what we wear, our physical characteristics, even our posture. Are these judgments accurate? That is hard to know without context, but we can say that nonverbal communication certainly affects first impressions, for better or worse. When a speaker and the audience first meet, nonverbal communication in terms of space, dress, and even personal characteristics can contribute to assumed expectations. The expectations might not be accurate or even fair, but it is important to recognize that they will be present. There is truth in the saying, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Since beginnings are fragile times, your attention to aspects you can control, both verbal and nonverbal, will help contribute to the first step of forming a relationship with your audience. Your eye contact with audience members, use of space, and degree of formality will continue to contribute to that relationship.

As a speaker, your nonverbal communication is part of the message and can contribute to, or detract from, your overall goals. By being aware of them, and practicing with a live audience, you can learn to be more aware and in control.

6.4. TYPES OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Now that we have discussed the general principles that apply to nonverbal communication, let's examine eight types of nonverbal communication to further understand this challenging aspect of communication:

1. Space
2. Time
3. Physical characteristics
4. Body movements
5. Touch
6. Paralanguage
7. Artifacts
8. Environment

Space

When we discuss space in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often associated with social rank and is an important part of business communication. Who gets the corner office? Why is the head of the table important and who gets to sit there?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a rural area or a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing "too close" for comfort and not know it.

Edward T. Hall, serving in the European and South Pacific Regions in the Corps of Engineers during World War II, traveled around the globe. As he moved from one place to another, he noticed that people in different countries kept different distances from each other. In France, they stood closer to each other than they did in England. Hall wondered why that was and began to study what he called proxemics, or the study of the human use of space and distance in communication. Hall, E. T. (1963). Proxemics: The study of man's spacial relations and boundaries. In Iago Galdston (Ed.), *Man's image in medicine and anthropology* (pp. 422–445). New York, NY: International Universities Press.

In *The Hidden Dimension*, he indicated there are two main aspects of space: territory and personal space. Hall drew on anthropology to address the concepts of dominance and submission, and noted that the more powerful person often claims more space. This plays an important role in modern society, from who gets the corner office to how we negotiate space between vehicles. Road rage is increasingly common where overcrowding occurs, and as more vehicles occupy the same roads, tensions over space are predictable.

Territory is related to control. As a way of establishing control over your own room, maybe you painted it your favorite color, or put up posters that represent your interests or things you consider unique about yourself. Families or households often mark their space by putting up fences or walls around their houses. This sense of a right to control your space is implicit in territory. Territory means the space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.

The second aspect Hall highlights is personal space, or the "bubble" of space surrounding each individual. As you walk down a flight of stairs, which side do you choose? We may choose the right side because we've learned that is what is expected, and people coming up the same stair choose their right. The right choice insures that personal space is not compromised. But what happens when some comes up the wrong side? They violate the understood rules of movement and often correct themselves. But what happens if they don't change lanes as people move up and down the stairs? They may get dirty looks or even get bumped as people in the crowd handle the invasion of "their" space. There are no lane markers, and bubbles of space around each person move with them, allowing for the possibility of collision.

We recognize the basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for space vary greatly by culture. You may perceive that in your home people sleep one to each bed, but in many cultures people sleep two or more to a bed and it is considered normal. If you were to share that bed, you might feel uncomfortable, while someone raised with group sleeping norms might feel uncomfortable sleeping alone. From where you stand in an aerobics class in relation to others, to where you place your book bag in class, your personal expectations of space are often at variance with others.

As the context of a staircase has norms for nonverbal behavior, so does the public speaking context. In North America, eye contact with the audience is expected. Big movements and gestures are not generally expected and can be distracting. The speaker occupies a space on the “stage,” even if it’s in front of the class. When you occupy that space, the audience will expect to behave in certain ways. If you talk to the screen behind you while displaying a PowerPoint presentation, the audience may perceive that you are not paying attention to them. Speakers are expected to pay attention to, and interact with, the audience, even if in the feedback is primarily nonverbal. Your movements should coordinate with the tone, rhythm, and content of your speech. Pacing back and forth, keeping your hands in your pockets, or crossing your arms may communicate nervousness, or even defensiveness, and detract from your speech.

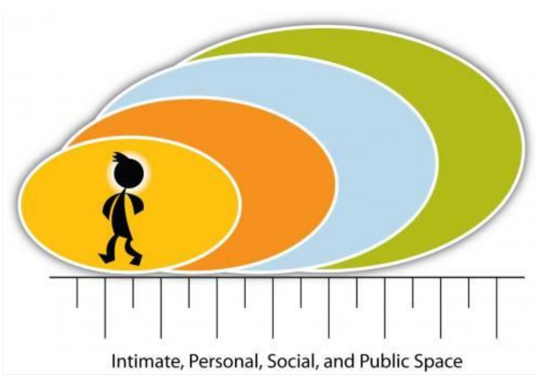


Figure Space: Four Main Categories of Distance

As a general rule, try to act naturally, as if you were telling a friend a story, so that your body will relax and your nonverbal gestures will come more naturally. Practice is key to your level of comfort; the more practice you get, the more comfortable and less intimidating it will seem to you.

Hall articulated four main categories of distance used in communication as shown in Figure "Space: Four Main Categories of Distance".Hall, E. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Time

Do you know what time it is? How aware you are of time varies by culture and normative expectations of adherence (or ignorance) of time. Some people, and the communities and cultures they represent, are very time-oriented. The Euro Railways trains in Germany are famous for departing and arriving according to the schedule. In contrast, if you take the train in Argentina, you'll find that the schedule is more of an approximation of when the train will leave or arrive.

"Time is money" is a common saying across many cultures, and reveals a high value for time. In social contexts, it often reveals social status and power. Who are you willing to wait for? A doctor for an office visit when you are sick? A potential employer for a job interview? Your significant other or children? Sometimes we get impatient, and our impatience underscores our value for time.

When you give a presentation, does your audience have to wait for you? Time is a relevant factor of the communication process in your speech. The best way to show your audience respect is to honor the time expectation associated with your speech. Always try to stop speaking before the audience stops listening; if the audience perceives that you have "gone over time," they will be less willing to listen. This in turn will have a negative impact on your ability to communicate your message.

Suppose you are presenting a speech that has three main points. Your audience expects you to regulate the time and attention to each point, but if you spend all your time on the first two points and rush through the third, your speech won't be balanced and will lose rhythm. The speaker occupies a position of some power, but it is the audience that gives them that position. By displaying respect and maintaining balance, you will move through your points more effectively.

When you order a meal at a fast food restaurant, what are your expectations for how long you will have to wait? When you order a pizza online for delivery, when do you expect it will arrive? If you order cable service for your home, when do you expect it might be delivered? In the first case, you might measure the delivery of a hamburger in a matter of seconds or minutes, and perhaps thirty minutes for pizza delivery, but you may measure the time from your order to working cable in days or even weeks. You may even have to be at your home from 8 a.m. to noon, waiting for its installation. The expectations vary by context, and we often grow frustrated in a time-sensitive culture when the delivery does not match our expectations.

In the same way, how long should it take to respond to a customer's request for assistance or information? If they call on the phone, how long should they be on hold? How soon should they expect a response to an e-mail? As a skilled business communicator, you will know to anticipate normative expectations and do your best to meet those expectations more quickly than anticipated. Your prompt reply or offer of help in response to a request, even if you cannot solve the issue on the spot, is often regarded positively, contributing to the formation of positive communication interactions.

Across cultures the value of time may vary. Some Mexican American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 p.m., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn't start until after 9 p.m. Similarly in France, an 8 p.m. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 p.m. means 8 p.m., and latecomers may not be welcome. Some Native Americans, particularly elders, speak in well-measured phrases and take long pauses between phrases. They do not hurry their speech or compete for their turn, knowing no one will interrupt them.McLean, S. (1998). Turn-taking and the extended pause: A study of interpersonal communication styles across generations on the Warm Springs Indian reservation. In K. S. Sitaram & M. Prosser (Eds.), *Civic discourse: Multiculturalsim, cultural diversity, and global communication* (pp. 213–227). Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing Company. Some Orthodox Jews observe religious days when they do not work, cook, drive, or use electricity. People around the world have different ways of expressing value for time.

Physical Characteristics

You didn't choose your birth, your eye color, the natural color of your hair, or your height, but people spend millions every year trying to change their physical characteristics. You can get colored contacts; dye your hair; and if you are shorter than you'd like to be, buy shoes to raise your stature a couple of inches. You won't be able to change your birth, and no matter how much you stoop to appear shorter, you won't change your height until time and age gradually makes itself apparent. If you are tall, you might find the correct shoe size, pant length, or even the length of mattress a challenge, but there are rewards. Have you ever heard that taller people get paid more?Burnham, T., & Phelan, J. (2000). *Mean genes: From sex to money to food: Taming our primal instincts*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus. There is some truth to that idea. There is also some truth to the notion that people prefer symmetrical faces (where both sides are equal) over asymmetrical faces (with unequal sides; like a crooked nose or having one eye or ear slightly higher than the other).Burnham, T., & Phelan, J. (2000). *Mean genes: From sex to money to food: Taming our primal instincts*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.

Regardless of your eye or hair color, or even how tall you are, being comfortable with yourself is an important part of your presentation. Act naturally and consider aspects of your presentation you can control in order to maximize a positive image for the audience.

Body Movements

The study of body movements, called kinesics, is key to understanding nonverbal communication. Since your actions will significantly contribute to the effectiveness of your business interactions, let's examine four distinct ways body movements that complement, repeat, regulate, or replace your verbal messages.

Body movements can complement the verbal message by reinforcing the main idea. For example, you may be providing an orientation presentation to a customer about a software program. As you say, "Click on this tab," you may also initiate that action. Your verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce each other. You can also reinforce the message by repeating it. If you first say, “Click on the tab,” and then motion with your hand to the right, indicating that the customer should move the cursor arrow with the mouse to the tab, your repetition can help the listener understand the message.

In addition to repeating your message, body movements can also regulate conversations. Nodding your head to indicate that you are listening may encourage the customer to continue asking questions. Holding your hand up, palm out, may signal them to stop and provide a pause where you can start to answer.

Body movements also substitute or replace verbal messages. Ekman and Friesen found that facial features communicate to others our feelings, but our body movements often reveal how intensely we experience those feelings.Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. (1967). Head and body cures in the judgment of emotions: A reformulation. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 24*, 711–724. For example, if the customer makes a face of frustration while trying to use the software program, they may need assistance. If they push away from the computer and separate themselves physically from interacting with it, they may be extremely frustrated. Learning to gauge feelings and their intensity as expressed by customers takes time and patience, and your attention to them will improve your ability to facilitate positive interactions.

Touch

Touch in communication interaction is called haptics, and William Seiler and Meliss BeallSeiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: Making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. identify five distinct types of touch, from impersonal to intimate, as listed in Table 11.2 "Types of Touch".

Table 6.2 Types of Touch

Term	**Definition**
1. Functional-Professional Touch	Medical examination, physical therapy, sports coach, music

	teacher
2. Social-Polite Touch	Handshake
3. Friendship-Warmth Touch	Hug
4. Love-Intimacy Touch	Kiss between family members or romantic partners
5. Sexual-Arousal Touch	Sexual caressing and intercourse

Before giving your presentation, you may interact with people by shaking hands and making casual conversation. This interaction can help establish trust before you take the stage. While speaking in public we do not often touch people in the audience, but we do interact with visual aids, our note cards, and other objects. How we handle them can communicate our comfort level. It's always a good idea to practice using the technology, visual aids, or note cards you will use in a speech during a practice session. Using the technology correctly by clicking the right button on the mouse or pressing the right switch on the overhead projector can contribute to your credibility.

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the exception to the definition of nonverbal communication. You may recall that we defined nonverbal communication as not involving words, but paralanguage exists when we are speaking, using words. Paralanguage involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including tone, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

Perhaps you've also heard of a pregnant pause, a silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning. The meaning itself may be hard to understand or decipher, but it is there nonetheless. For example, your coworker Jan comes back from a sales meeting speechless and with a ghost-white complexion. You may ask if the meeting went all right. "Well, ahh…" may be the only response you get. The pause speaks volumes. Something happened, though you may not know what. It could be personal if Jan's report was not well received, or it could be more systemic, like the news that sales figures are off by 40 percent and pink slips may not be far behind.

Silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought, or serve as a sign of respect. Keith Basso quotes an anonymous source as stating, "It is not the case that a man who is silent says nothing."Basso, K. A. (1970). To give up on words: Silence in western Apache culture. In D. Carbaugh (Ed.), *Cultural communication and intercultural contact* (pp. 301–318). Hillsdale, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum. Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say. In addition, both Basso and Susan Philips found that traditional speech among Native Americans places a special emphasis on silence. Philips, S. (1983). *The invisible culture: Communication in the classroom and community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation*. Chicago, IL: Waveland Press.

Artifacts

Do you cover your tattoos when you are at work? Do you know someone who does? Or perhaps you know someone who has a tattoo and does not need to cover it up on their job? Expectations vary a great deal, but body art or tattoos are still controversial in the workplace. According to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*,Kinsman, M. (2001, August 20). Tattoos and nose rings. *San Diego Union-Tribune*, p. C1.

- 20 percent of workers indicated their body art had been held against them on the job.
- 42 percent of employers said the presence of visible body art lowered their opinion of workers.
- 44 percent of managers surveyed have body art.
- 52 percent of workers surveyed have body art.
- 67 percent of workers who have body art or piercings cover or remove them during work hours.

In your line of work, a tattoo might be an important visual aid, or it might detract from your effectiveness as a business communicator. Body piercings may express individuality, but you need to consider how they will be interpreted by employers and customers.

Artifacts are forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept. They can include rings and tattoos, but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to cars, watches, briefcases, purses, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround ourselves with communicates something about our sense of self. They may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality, and group membership or affiliation. Paying attention to a customer's artifacts can give you a sense of the self they want to communicate, and may allow you to more accurately adapt your message to meet their needs.

Environment

Environment involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context. More than the tables and chairs in an office, environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process. The perception of one's environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, Google is famous for its work environment, with spaces created for physical activity and even in-house food service around the clock. The expense is no doubt considerable, but Google's actions speak volumes. The results produced in the environment, designed to facilitate creativity, interaction, and collaboration, are worth the effort.

6.5. MOVEMENT IN YOUR SPEECH

At some point in your business career you will be called upon to give a speech. It may be to an audience of one on a sales floor, or to a large audience at a national meeting. You already know you need to make a positive first impression, but do you know how to use movement in your presentation? In this section we'll examine several strategies for movement and their relative advantages and disadvantages.

Customers and audiences respond well to speakers who are comfortable with themselves. Comfortable doesn't mean overconfident or cocky, and it doesn't mean shy or timid. It means that an audience is far more likely to forgive the occasional "umm" or "ahh," or the nonverbal equivalent of a misstep, if the speaker is comfortable with themselves and their message.

Let's start with behaviors to avoid. Who would you rather listen to: a speaker who moves confidently across the stage or one who hides behind the podium; one who expresses herself nonverbally with purpose and meaning or one who crosses his arms or clings to the lectern?

Audiences are most likely to respond positively to open, dynamic speakers who convey the feeling of being at ease with their bodies. The setting, combined with audience expectations, will give a range of movement. If you are speaking at a formal event, or if you are being covered by a stationary camera, you may be expected to stay in one spot. If the stage allows you to explore, closing the distance between yourself and your audience may prove effective. Rather than focus on a list of behaviors and their relationship to environment and context, give emphasis to what your audience expects and what you yourself would find more engaging instead.

Novice speakers are often told to keep their arms at their sides, or to restrict their movement to only that which is absolutely necessary. If you are in formal training for a military presentation, or forensics (speech and debate) competition, this may hold true. But in business and industry, "whatever works" rules the day. You can't say that expressive gestures—common among many cultural groups, like arm movement while speaking—are not appropriate when they are, in fact, expected.

The questions are, again, what does your audience consider appropriate and what do you feel comfortable doing during your presentation? Since the emphasis is always on meeting the needs of the customer, whether it is an audience of one on a sales floor or a large national gathering, you may need to stretch outside your comfort zone. On that same note, don't stretch too far and move yourself into the uncomfortable range. Finding balance is a challenge, but no one ever said giving a speech was easy.

Movement is an important aspect of your speech and requires planning, the same as the words you choose and the visual aids you design. Be natural, but do not naturally shuffle your feet, pace back and forth, or rock on your heels through your entire speech. These behaviors distract your audience from your message and can communicate nervousness, undermining your credibility.

Positions on the Stage

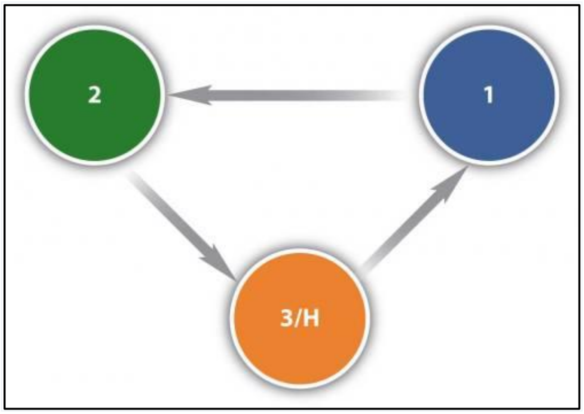


Figure Speaker's Triangle

In a classical speech presentation, positions on the stage serve to guide both the speaker and the audience through transitions. The speaker's triangle (see Figure "Speaker's Triangle") indicates where the speaker starts in the introduction, moves to the second position for the first point, across for the second point, then returns to the original position to make the third point and conclusion. This movement technique can be quite effective to help you remember each of your main points. It allows you to break down your speech into manageable parts, and putting tape on the floor to indicate position is a common presentation trick. Your movement will demonstrate purpose and reinforce your credibility.

Gestures

Gestures involve using your arms and hands while communicating. Gestures provide a way to channel your nervous energy into a positive activity that benefits your speech and gives you something to do with your hands. For example, watch people in normal, everyday conversations. They frequently use their hands to express themselves.

Do you think *they* think about how they use their hands? Most people do not. Their arm and hand gestures come naturally as part of their expression, often reflecting what they have learned within their community.

For professional speakers this is also true, but deliberate movement can reinforce, repeat, and even regulate an audience's response to their verbal and nonverbal messages. You want to come across as comfortable and natural, and your use of your arms and hands contributes to your presentation. We can easily recognize that a well-chosen gesture can help make a point memorable or lead the audience to the next point.

As professional speakers lead up to a main point, they raise their hand slightly, perhaps waist high, often called an anticipation step. The gesture clearly shows the audience your anticipation of an upcoming point, serving as a nonverbal form of foreshadowing.

The implementation step, which comes next, involves using your arms and hands above your waist. By holding one hand at waist level pointing outward, and raising it up with your palm forward, as in the "stop" gesture, you signal the point. The nonverbal gesture complements the spoken word, and as students of speech have noted across time, audiences respond to this nonverbal reinforcement. You then slowly lower your hand down past your waistline and away from your body, letting go of the gesture, and signaling your transition.

The relaxation step, where the letting go motion complements your residual message, concludes the motion.

Facial Gestures

As you progress as a speaker from gestures and movement, you will need to turn your attention to facial gestures and expressions. Facial gestures involve using your face to display feelings and attitudes nonverbally. They may reinforce, or contradict, the spoken word, and their impact cannot be underestimated. As we have discussed, people often focus more on how we say something than what we actually say, and place more importance on our nonverbal gestures.Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and* *attitudes* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. As in other body movements, your facial gestures should come naturally, but giving them due thought and consideration can keep you aware of how you are communicating the nonverbal message.

Facial gestures should reflect the tone and emotion of your verbal communication. If you are using humor in your speech, you will likely smile and wink to complement the amusement expressed in your words. Smiling will be much less appropriate if your presentation involves a serious subject such as cancer or car accidents. Consider how you want your audience to feel in response to your message, and identify the facial gestures you can use to promote those feelings. Then practice in front of a mirror so that the gestures come naturally.

The single most important facial gesture (in mainstream U.S. culture) is eye contact.Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: Making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Eye contact refers to the speaker's gaze that engages the audience members. It can vary in degree and length, and in many cases, is culturally influenced. Both in the speaker's expectations and the audience member's notion of what is appropriate will influence normative expectations for eye contact. In some cultures, there are understood behavioral expectations for male gaze directed toward females, and vice versa. In a similar way, children may have expectations of when to look their elders in the eye, and when to gaze down. Depending on the culture, both may be nonverbal signals of listening. Understanding your audience is critical when it comes to nonverbal expectations.

When giving a presentation, avoid looking over people's heads, staring at a point on the wall, or letting your eyes dart all over the place. The audience will find these mannerisms unnerving. They will not feel as connected, or receptive, to your message and you will reduce your effectiveness. Move your eyes gradually and naturally across the audience, both close to you and toward the back of the room. Try to look for faces that look interested and engaged in your message. Do not to focus on only one or two audience members, as audiences may respond negatively to perceived favoritism. Instead, try to give as much eye contact as possible across the audience. Keep it natural, but give it deliberate thought.

6.6. VISUAL AIDS

Almost all presentations can be enhanced by the effective use of visual aids. These can include handouts, overhead transparencies, drawings on the whiteboard, PowerPoint slides, and many other types of props. Visual aids are an important nonverbal aspect of your speech that you can control. Once you have chosen a topic, you need to consider how you are going to show your audience what you are talking about.

Have you ever asked for driving directions and not understood someone's response? Did the person say, "Turn right at Sam's Grocery Store, the new one" or "I think you will turn at the second light, but it might be the third one"? Chances are that unless you know the town well or have a map handy, the visual cue of a grocery store or a traffic light might be insufficient to let you know where to turn. Your audience experiences the same frustration, or sense of accomplishment, when they get lost or find their way during your speech. Consider how you can express yourself visually, providing common references, illustrations, and images that lead the audience to understand your point or issue.

Visual aids accomplish several goals:

- Make your speech more interesting
- Enhance your credibility as a speaker
- Serve as guides to transitions, helping the audience stay on track
- Communicate complex or intriguing information in a short period of time
- Reinforce your verbal message
- Help the audience use and retain the information

Purpose, Emphasis, Support, and Clarity

When you look at your own presentation from an audience member's perspective, you might consider how to distinguish the main points from the rest of the information. You might also consider the relationships being presented between ideas or concepts, or how other aspects of the presentation can complement the oral message.

Your audience naturally will want to know why you are presenting the visual aid. The purpose for each visual aid should be clear, and almost speak for itself. If you can't quickly grasp the purpose of a visual aid in a speech, you have to honestly consider whether it should be used in the first place. Visual aids can significantly develop the message of a speech, but they must be used for a specific purpose the audience can easily recognize.

Perhaps you want to highlight a trend between two related issues, such as socioeconomic status and educational attainment. A line graph might show effectively how, as socioeconomic status rises, educational attainment also rises. This use of a visual aid can provide emphasis, effectively highlighting key words, ideas, or relationships for the audience.

Visual aids can also provide necessary support for your position. Audience members may question your assertion of the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment. To support your argument, you might include on the slide, "According to the U.S. Department of Education Study no. 12345," or even use an image of the Department of Education Web page projected on a large screen. You might consider showing similar studies in graphic form, illustrating similarities across a wide range of research.

Clarity is key in the use of visual aids. One way to improve clarity is to limit the number of words on a PowerPoint slide. No more than ten words per slide, with a font large enough to be read at the back of the room or auditorium, is a good rule of thumb. Key images that have a clear relationship to the verbal message can also improve clarity. You may also choose to illustrate the same data successively in two distinct formats, perhaps a line graph followed by two pie graphs. Your central goal is to ensure your visual aid is clear.

Methods and Materials

If you have been asked to give a presentation on a new product idea that a team within your organization is considering, how might you approach the challenge? You may consider a chronological organization pattern, starting with background, current market, and a trend analysis of what is to come—fair enough, but how will you make it vivid for your audience? How to represent information visually is a significant challenge, and you have several options.

You may choose to use a chart or diagram to show a timeline of events to date, from the first meeting about the proposed product to the results from the latest focus group. This timeline may work for you, but let's say you would like to get into the actual decision-making process that motivated your team to design the product with specific features in the first place. You may decide to use decision trees (or tree diagrams) showing the variables and products in place at the beginning of your discussions, and how each decision led to the next, bringing you to the decision-making point where you are today.

To complement this comprehensive guide and help make a transition to current content areas of questions, you may use a bar or pie graph to show the percentage of competing products in the market. If you have access to the Internet and a projector, you may use a topographical map showing a three-dimensional rendering of the local areas most likely to find your product attractive. If actual hills and valleys have nothing to do with your project, you can still represent the data you have collected in three dimensions. Then you may show a comparable graph illustrating the distribution of products and their relative degree of market penetration.

Finally, you may move to the issue of results, and present the audience with a model of your product and one from a competitor, asking which they prefer. The object may be just the visual aid you need to make your point and reinforce the residual message. When we can see, feel, touch, or be in close proximity to an object it often has a greater impact. In a world of digital images and special effects, objects presented in real time can still make a positive effect on the audience.

Additional visual aids you may choose include—but are not limited to—sound and music, video, and even yourself. If your speech is about how to use the product, your demonstration may just be the best visual aid.

You will want to give some thought to how to portray your chart, graph, or object when it's time to use your visual aids. The chalk or white board is common way of presenting visual aids, but it can get messy. Your instructor may write key words or diagrams on the boards while discussing a textbook chapter, but can you read his or her writing? The same lesson holds true for you. If you are going to use a white board and have a series of words on it, write them out clearly before you start your presentation.

Flip charts on a pedestal can also serve to show a series of steps or break a chart down into its basic components. A poster board is another common way of organizing your visual aids before a speech, but given its often one-time use, it is losing out to the computer screen. It is, however, portable and allows you a large "blank page" with which to express your ideas.

Handouts may also serve to communicate complex or detailed information to the audience, but be careful never to break handout rule number one: never give handouts to the audience at the beginning of your speech. Where do you want the audience to look—at you or at the handout? Many novice speakers might be tempted to say the handout, but you will no doubt recognize how that diverts and divides the audience's attention. People will listen to the words from the handout in their minds and tune you out. They will read at their own pace and have questions. They may even be impolite enough to use them as fans or paper airplanes. Handouts can be your worst enemy. If you need to use one, state at the beginning of the speech that you will be providing one at the conclusion of your presentation. This will alleviate the audience's worry about capturing all your content by taking notes, and keep their attention focused on you while you speak.

Transparencies and slides have been replaced by computer-generated slide show programs like PowerPoint by Microsoft, which we will discuss in greater detail later in this section. These programs can be very helpful in presenting visual information, but because computers and projectors sometimes break down and fail to work as planned, you need a plan B. You may need a poster board, or to write on the whiteboard or to have a handout in reserve, but a Plan B is always a good idea when it comes to presentations that integrate technology. You may arrive at your destination and find the equipment is no longer available, is incompatible with your media storage device, or is simply not working, but the show must go on.

Video clips, such as those you might find on YouTube, can also be effective visual aids. However, as with handouts, there is one concern: You don't want the audience to want to watch the video more than they want to tune into your presentation. How do you prevent this? Keep the clip short and make sure it reinforces the central message of your presentation. Always stop speaking before the audience stops listening, and the same holds true for the mesmerizing force of moving images on a screen. People are naturally attracted to them and will get "sucked into" your video example rather quickly. Be a good editor, introduce the clip and state what will happen out loud, point out a key aspect of it to the audience while it plays (overlap), and then make a clear transitional statement as you turn it off. Transitions are often the hardest part of any speech as the audience can get off track, and video clips are one of the most challenging visual aids you can choose because of their power to attract attention. Use that power wisely.

Preparing Visual Aids

Get started early so that you have time to create or research visual aids that will truly support your presentation, not just provide "fluff." Make sure you use a font or image large enough to be legible for those in the back of the room, and that you actually test your visual aids before the day of your presentation. Ask a friend to stand at the back of the room and read or interpret your visual aid. If you are using computer-generated slides, try them out in a practice setting, not just on your computer screen. The slides will look different when projected. Allow time for revision based on what you learn.

Your visual aids should meet the following criteria:

- *Big*. They should be legible for everyone, and should be "back row certified."
- *Clear*. Your audience should "get it" the first time they see it.
- *Simple*. They should serve to simplify the concepts they illustrate.
- *Consistent*. They should reinforce continuity by using the same visual style.

Using Visual Aids

Here are three general guidelines to follow when using visual aids.McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Here are some *do*s and *don't*s:

1. Do make a clear connection between your words and the visual aid for the audience.
2. Do not distract the audience with your visual aid, blocking their view of you or adjusting the visual aid repeatedly while trying to speak.
3. Do speak to your audience—not to the whiteboard, the video, or other visual aids.

The timing of your presentation, and of your visual aids, can also have good or bad consequences. According to a popular joke, a good way to get your boss to approve just about anything is to schedule a meeting after lunch, turn the lights down, and present some boring PowerPoint slides. While the idea of a drowsy boss signing off on a harebrained project is amusing, in reality you will want to use visual aids not as a sleeping potion but as a strategy to keep your presentation lively and interesting.

Becoming proficient at using visual aids takes time and practice, and the more you practice before your speech, the more comfortable you will be with your visual aids and the role they serve in illustrating your points. Planning ahead before speaking will help, but when it comes time to actually give your speech, make sure they work for the audience as they should. Speaking to a visual aid (or reading it with your back to the audience) is not an effective strategy. You should know your material well enough that you refer to a visual aid, not rely on it.

Using PowerPoint as a Visual Aid

PowerPoint and similar visual representation programs can be an effective tool to help audiences remember your message, but they can also be an annoying distraction to your speech. How you prepare your slides and use the tool will determine your effectiveness.

PowerPoint is a slideware program that you have no doubt seen used in class, presentation at work, or perhaps used yourself to support a presentation. PowerPoint and similar slideware programs provide templates for creating electronic slides to present visual information to the audience, reinforcing the verbal message. You'll be able to import, or cut and paste, words from text files, images, or video clips to create slides to represent your ideas. You can even incorporate Web links. When using any software program, it's always a good idea to experiment with it long before you intend to use it, explore its many options and functions, and see how it can be an effective tool for you.

Video Clip

Intercultural Communication PowerPoint slides can connect words with images.

At first, you might be overwhelmed by the possibilities, and you might be tempted to use all the bells, whistles, and sound effects, not to mention the tumbling, flying, and animated graphics. If used wisely, a dissolve or key transition can be like a well-executed scene from a major motion picture film and lead your audience to the next point. But if used indiscriminately, it can annoy the audience to the point where they cringe in anticipation of the sound effect at the start of each slide. This danger is inherent in the tool, but you are in charge of it and can make wise choices that enhance the understanding and retention of your information.

The first point to consider is what is the most important visual aid? The answer is you, the speaker. You will facilitate the discussion, give life to the information, and help the audience correlate the content to your goal or purpose. You don't want to be in a position where the PowerPoint presentation is the main focus and you are on the side of the stage, simply helping the audience follow along. It should support you in your presentation, rather than the other way around. Just as there is a number one rule for handouts, there is also one for PowerPoints: do not use PowerPoints as a read-aloud script for your speech. The PowerPoints should amplify and illustrate your main points, not reproduce everything you are going to say.

Your pictures are the second area of emphasis you'll want to consider. The tool will allow you to show graphs, charts and illustrate relationships that words may only approach in terms of communication, but your verbal support of the visual images will make all the difference. Dense pictures or complicated graphics will confuse more than clarify. Choose clear images that have an immediate connection to both your content and the audience, tailored to their specific needs. After images, consider only key words that can be easily read to accompany your pictures. The fewer words the better: try to keep each slide to a total word count of less than ten words. Do not use full sentences. Using key words provides support for your verbal discussion, guiding you as well as your audience. The key words can serve as signposts or signal words related to key ideas.

A natural question at this point is, "How do I communicate complex information simply?" The answer comes with several options. The visual representation on the screen is for support and illustration. Should you need to communicate more technical, complex, or in-depth information in a visual way, consider preparing a handout to distribute at the conclusion of your speech. You may also consider using a printout of your slide show with a "notes" section, but if you distribute it at the beginning of your speech, you run the risk of turning your presentation into a guided reading exercise and possibly distracting or losing members of the audience. Everyone reads at a different pace and takes notes in their own way. You don't want to be in the position of going back and forth between slides to help people follow along.

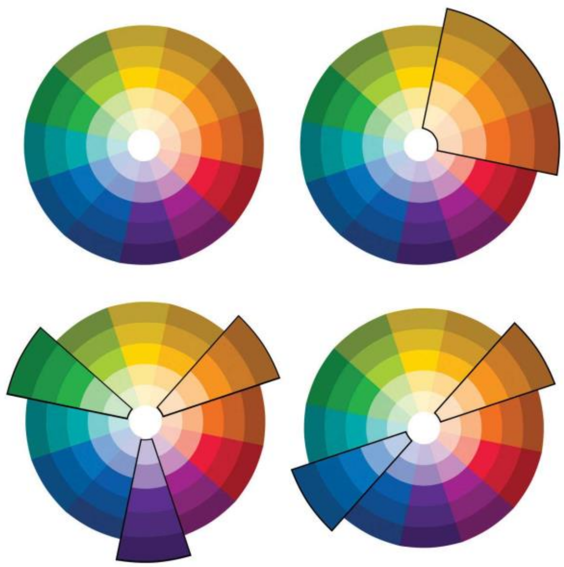
Another point to consider is how you want to use the tool to support your speech and how your audience will interpret its presentation. Most audiences wouldn't want to read a page of text—as you might see in this book—on the big screen. They'll be far more likely to glance at the screen and assess the information you present in relation to your discussion. Therefore, it is key to consider one main idea, relationship, or point per slide. The use of the tool should be guided with the idea that its presentation is for the audience's benefit, not yours. People often understand pictures and images more quickly and easily than text, and you can use this to your advantage, using the knowledge that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Use of Color

People love color, and understandably your audience will appreciate the visual stimulation of a colorful presentation. If you have ever seen a car painted a custom color that just didn't attract you, or seen colors put together in ways that made you wonder what people were thinking when they did that, you will recognize that color can also distract and turn off an audience.

Color is a powerful way to present information, and the power should be used wisely. You will be selecting which color you want to use for headers or key words, and how they relate the colors in the visual images. Together, your images, key words, and the use of color in fonts, backgrounds, table, and graphs can have a significant impact on your audience. You will need to give some thought and consideration to what type of impact you want to make, how it will contribute or possibly distract, and what will work well for you to produce an effective and impressive presentation.

There are inherent relationships between colors, and while you may have covered some of this information in art classes you have taken, it is valuable to review here. According to the standard color wheel, colors are grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories. Primary colors are the colors from which other colors are made through various combinations. Secondary colors represent a combination of two primary colors, while tertiary colors are made from combinations of primary and secondary colors.



- *Primary colors*. Red, blue and yellow
- *Secondary colors*. Green, violet, and orange
- *Tertiary colors*. Red-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green, yellow-orange, and yellow-green

Colors have relationships depending on their location on the wheel. Colors that are opposite each other are called complementary and they contrast, creating a dynamic effect. Analogous colors are located next to each other and promote harmony, continuity, and sense of unity.

Your audience comes first: when considering your choice of colors to use, legibility must be your priority. Contrast can help the audience read your key terms more easily. Also, focus on the background color and its relation to the images you plan to incorporate to insure they complement each other. Consider repetition of color, from your graphics to your text, to help unify each slide. To reduce visual noise, try not to use more than two or three additional colors. Use colors sparingly to make a better impact, and consider the use of texture and reverse color fonts (the same as a background or white) as an option.

Be aware that many people are blue-green colorblind, and that red-green colorblindness is also fairly common. With this in mind, choose colors that most audience members will be able to differentiate. If you are using a pie chart, for example, avoid putting a blue segment next to a green one. Use labeling so that even if someone is totally colorblind they will be able to tell the relative sizes of the pie segments and what they signify.

Color is also a matter of culture. Some colors may be perceived as formal or informal, or masculine or feminine. Recognize that red is usually associated with danger, while green signals “go.” Make sure the color associated with the word is reflected in your choice. If you have a key word about nature, but the color is metallic, the contrast may not contribute to the rhetorical situation and confuse the audience.

Seeking a balance between professionalism and attractiveness may seem to be a challenge, but experiment and test your drafts with friends to see what works for you. Also consider examining other examples, commonly available on the Internet, but retain the viewpoint that not everything online is effective nor should it be imitated. There are predetermined color schemes already incorporated into PowerPoint that you can rely on for your presentation.

We’ve considered color in relation to fonts and the representation of key words, but we also need to consider font size and selection. PowerPoint will have default settings for headlines and text, but you will need to consider what is most appropriate for your rhetorical situation. Always think about the person sitting in the back of the room. The title size should be at least forty points, and the body text (used sparingly) should be at least thirty-two points.

One good principle they highlight is that sans serif fonts such as Arial work better than serif fonts like Times New Roman for images projected onto a screen. The thin lines and extra aspects to serif the font may not portray themselves well on a large screen or contribute to clarity. To you this may mean that you choose Arial or a similar font to enhance clarity and ease of reading. Bullets, the use of space, similarity, and proximity all pertain to the process of perception, which differs from one person to another.

Helpful Hints for Visual Aids

As we've discussed, visual aids can be a powerful tool when used effectively, but can also run the risk of dominating your presentation. As a speaker, you will need to consider your audience and how the portrayal of images, text, graphic, animated sequences, or sound files will contribute or detract from your presentation. Here is a brief list of hints to keep in mind as you prepare your presentation.

- Keep visual aids simple.
- Use one key idea per slide.
- Avoid clutter, noise, and overwhelming slides.
- Use large, bold fonts that the audience can read from at least twenty feet from the screen.
- Use contrasting colors to create a dynamic effect.
- Use analogous colors to unify your presentation.
- Use clip art with permission and sparingly.
- Edit and proofread each slide with care and caution.
- Use copies of your visuals available as handouts after your presentation.
- Check the presentation room beforehand.
- With a PowerPoint presentation, or any presentation involving technology, have a backup plan, such as your visuals printed on transparencies, should unexpected equipment or interface compatibility problems arise

Becoming proficient at using visual aids takes time and practice. The more you practice before your speech, the more comfortable you will be with your visual aids and the role they serve in illustrating your message. Giving thought to where to place visual aids before speaking helps, but when the time comes to actually give your speech, make sure you reassess your plans and ensure that they work for the audience as they should. Speaking to a visual aid (or reading it to the audience) is not an effective strategy. Know your material well enough that you refer to your visual aids, not rely on them.

6.7. NON-VERBAL STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of business communication, from the context of an interpersonal interaction to a public presentation. It is a dynamic, complex, and challenging aspect of communication. We are never done learning and adapting to our environment and context, and improving our understanding of nonverbal communication comes with the territory.

When your audience first sees you, they begin to make judgments and predictions about you and your potential, just as an employer might do when you arrive for a job interview. If you are well dressed and every crease is ironed, your audience may notice your attention to detail. Wearing jeans with holes, a torn T-shirt, and a baseball cap would send a different message. Neither style of dress is "good" or "bad, but simply appropriate or inappropriate depending on the environment and context. Your skills as an effective business communicator will be called upon when you contemplate your appearance. As a speaker, your goal is to create common ground and reduce the distance between the audience and yourself. You want your appearance to help establish and reinforce your credibility.

In order to be a successful business communicator, you will need to continually learn about nonverbal communication and its impact on your interactions. Below are three ways to examine nonverbal communication.

Watch Reactions

Market research is fundamental to success in business and industry. So, too, you will need to do a bit of field research to observe how, when, and why people communicate the way they do. If you want to be able to communicate effectively with customers, you will need to anticipate not only their needs, but also how they communicate. They are far more likely to communicate with someone whom they perceive as being like them, than with a perceived stranger. From dress to mannerisms and speech patterns, you can learn from your audience how to be a more effective business communicator.

Enroll an Observer

Most communication in business and industry involves groups and teams, even if the interpersonal context is a common element. Enroll a coworker or colleague in your effort to learn more about your audience, or even yourself. They can observe your presentation and note areas you may not have noticed that could benefit from revision. Perhaps the gestures you make while speaking tend to distract rather than enhance your presentations. You can also record a video of your performance and play it for them, and yourself, to get a sense of how your nonverbal communication complements or detracts from the delivery of your message.

Focus on a Specific Type of Nonverbal Communication

What is the norm for eye contact where you work? Does this change or differ based on gender, age, ethnicity, cultural background, context, environment? Observation will help you learn more about how people communicate; looking for trends across a specific type of nonverbal communication can be an effective strategy. Focus on one behavior you exhibit on your videotape, like pacing, body movements across the stage, hand gestures as you are making a point, or eye contact with the audience.

6.8. MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on non-verbal communication and its types.

2. What are some of the important principles of non-verbal communication.

3. Why is movement important in speech?

4. What role do gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc. play in conveying a message?

5. What do you understand by visual aids?

6. What are the ways to improve non-verbal communication?

6.9. REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Unit 7 Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Business Skills

7.1. INTRODUCTION

People often confuse between intrapersonal and interpersonal business skills of communication. They are actually opposites, and not interchangeable at all! The word “intra” means inside a person or a group and “inter” means between people or groups. Both are important in their own ways. Let’s discuss Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Business Skills.

When we ask the question, “What are you doing?” the answer invariably involves communication; communication with self, with others, in verbal (oral and written) and nonverbal ways. How do we come to this and how does it influence our experience within the business environment? How do we come to enter a new community through a rite of initiation, often called a job interview, only to find ourselves lost as everyone speaks a new language, the language of the workplace? How do we negotiate relationships, demands for space and time, across meetings, collaborative efforts, and solo projects? This chapter addresses several of these issues as we attempt to answer the question, “What are you doing?” with the answer: communicating.

7.2. OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn about:

In this unit, you will learn about-

- Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Business communication.
- Social penetration theory.
- Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

7.3. INTRAPERSONAL BUSINESS SKILLS

When you answer the question, “What are you doing?” What do you write? Eating at your favorite restaurant? In each case you are communicating what you are doing, but you may not be communicating why, or what it means to you. That communication may be internal, but is it only an internal communication process? Let's discuss intrapersonal communication at first to understand it in the next paragraph.

Intrapersonal communication can be defined as "communication with one's self, and that may include self-talk, acts of imagination and visualization, and even recall and memory" by McLean, S. (2005) in his book *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. You read on your cell phone screen that your friends are going to have dinner at your favorite restaurant. What comes to mind? Sights, sounds, and scents? Something special that happened the last time you were there? Do you contemplate joining them? Do you start to work out a plan of getting from your present location to the restaurant? Do you send your friends a text asking if they want company? Until the moment when you hit the "send" button, you are communicating with yourself.

Communications expert Leonard Sheletsky examines intrapersonal communication through the eight basic components of the communication process (i.e., source, receiver, message, channel, feedback, environment, context, and interference) as transactional, but all the interaction occurs within the individual. (*Meaning and Mind: An Interpersonal Approach to Human Communication*, 1989). Perhaps, as you consider whether to leave your present location and join your friends at the restaurant, you are aware of all the work that sits Infront of you. You may hear the voice of your boss, or perhaps of one of your parents, admonishing you about personal responsibility and duty. On the other hand, you may imagine the friends at the restaurant saying something to the effect of "you deserve some time off!"

At the same time as you argue with yourself, Judy Pearson and Paul Nelson would be quick to add that intrapersonal communication is not only your internal monologue but also involves your efforts to plan how to go to the restaurant. *(Understanding and Sharing: An Introduction to Speech Communication,* 1985). From planning to problem solving, internal conflict resolution, and evaluations and judgments of self and others, we communicate with ourselves through intrapersonal communication.

All this interaction takes place in the mind without externalization, and all of it relies on previous interaction with the external world. If you had been born in a different country, to different parents, what language would you speak? What language would you think in? What would you value, what would be important to you, and what would not? Even as you argue to yourself whether the prospect of joining your friends at the restaurant overcomes your need to complete your work, you use language and symbols that were communicated to you. Your language and culture have given you the means to rationalize, act, and answer the question, "What are you doing?" but you are still bound by the expectations of yourself and the others who make up your community.

7.3.1. EXERCISE 1

1. Take a few minutes and visualize what you would like your life to be like a year from now, or five years from now. Do you think this visualization exercise will influence your actions and decisions in the future?

7.4. SELF CONCEPTS AND DIMENSIONS OF SELF

In this section again we will return to the question "what are you doing?" as one way to approach self-concept. If we define ourselves through our actions, what might those actions be, and are we no longer ourselves when we no longer engage in those activities? Psychologist Steven Pinker defines the conscious present as about three seconds for most people. Everything else is past or future (*The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature, 2009)*. Who are you at this moment in time, and will the self you become an hour from now be different from the self that is reading this sentence right now? Just as the communication process is dynamic, not static (i.e., always changing, not staying the same), you too are a dynamic system. Physiologically your body is in a constant state of change as you inhale and exhale air, digest food, and cleanse waste from each cell. Psychologically you are constantly in a state of change as well. Some aspects of your personality and character will be constant, while others will shift and adapt to your environment and context. That complex combination contributes to the self you call you. We may choose to define self as one's own sense of individuality, personal characteristics, motivations, and actions, but any definition we create will fail to capture who you are, and who you will become.

7.4.1 SELF CONCEPT

According to Mclean our self-concept is "what we perceive ourselves to be" *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication* (2005) and involves aspects of image and esteem. How we see ourselves and how we feel about ourselves influences how we communicate with others. What you are thinking now and how you communicate impacts and influences how others treat you. Charles Cooley in his book *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1992) calls this concept the looking-glass self. We look at how others treat us, what they say and how they say it, for clues about how they view us to gain insight into our own identity. Leon Festinger added that we engage in social comparisons, evaluating ourselves in relation to our peers of similar status, similar characteristics, or similar qualities (*A Theory of Social Comparison Processes, 1954)*.

The ability to think about how, what, and when we think, and why, is critical to intrapersonal communication. Animals may use language and tools, but can they reflect on their own thinking? Self-reflection is a trait that allows us to adapt and change to our context or environment, to accept or reject messages, to examine our concept of ourselves and choose to improve.

7. 4.2 INTERNAL MONOLOGUE

Internal Monologue refers to the self-talk of intrapersonal communication. It can be a running monologue that is rational and reasonable, or disorganized and illogical. It can interfere with listening to others, impede your ability to focus, and become a barrier to effective communication. Alfred Korzybski suggested that the first step in becoming conscious of how we think and communicate with ourselves was to achieve an inner quietness, in effect “turning off” our internal monologue (*Science and Sanity* (1933). Learning to be quiet inside can be a challenge. We can choose to listen to others when they communicate through the written or spoken word while refraining from preparing our responses before, they finish their turn is essential. We can take mental note of when we jump to conclusions from only partially attending to the speaker or writer’s message. We can choose to listen to others instead of ourselves.

One principle of communication is that interaction is always dynamic and changing. That interaction can be internal, as in intrapersonal communication, but can also be external. We may communicate with one other person and engage in interpersonal communication. If we engage two or more individuals (up to eight normally), group communication is the result. More than eight normally results in subdivisions within the group and a reversion to smaller groups of three to four members McLean, S. *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication* (2005). due to the ever-increasing complexity of the communication process. With each new person comes a multiplier effect on the number of possible interactions, and for many that means the need to establish limits.

7.4.3 DIMENSIONS OF SELF

Joseph Luft and Harry Ingram Luft (*The Johari Window: A graphic model for interpersonal relations* (1961) gave considerable thought and attention to these dimensions of self, which are represented in Figure 1. "Luft and Ingram’s Dimensions of Self". In the first quadrant of the figure, information is known to you and others, such as your height or weight. The second quadrant represents things others observe about us that we are unaware of, like how many times we say “umm” in the space of five minutes. The third quadrant involves information that you know, but do not reveal to others. It may involve actively hiding or withholding information, or may involve social tact, such as thanking your Aunt Martha for the large purple hat she’s given you that you know you will never wear. Finally, the fourth quadrant involves information that is unknown to you and your conversational partners. For example, a childhood experience that has been long forgotten or repressed may still motivate you. As another example, how will you handle an emergency after you've received first aid training? No one knows because it has not happened.

+ Others	2. Known to others but not to me	3. Not known to me or to others
-	1. Known to me and to others	4. Known to me but not to others
	+ Me	-

FIGURE 1.

These dimensions of self-serve to remind us that we are not fixed — that freedom to change combined with the ability to reflect, anticipate, plan, and predict allows us to improve, learn, and adapt to our surroundings. By recognizing that we are not fixed in our concept of "self," we come to terms with the responsibility and freedom inherent in our potential humanity.

In the context of business communication, the self plays a central role. How do you describe yourself? Do your career path, job responsibilities, goals, and aspirations align with what you recognize to be your talents? How you represent "self," through your résumé, in your writing, in your articulation and presentation—these all play an important role as you negotiate the relationships and climate present in any organization.

7.4.5 Exercise 1

1. Can you think of a job or career that would be a good way for you to express yourself? Are you pursuing that job or career? Discuss your answer with your friends?

7.5. INTERPERSONAL NEEDS

You may have had no problem answering the question, “What are you doing?” and simply pulled a couple of lines from yesterday’s Twitter message or reviewed your BlackBerry calendar. But if you had to compose an entirely original answer, would it prove to be a challenge? Perhaps at first this might appear to be a simple task. You have to work and your job required your participation in a meeting, or you care about someone and met him or her for lunch.

Both scenarios make sense on the surface, but we have to consider the *why* with more depth. Why that meeting, and why that partner? Why not another job, or a lunch date with someone else? If we consider the question long enough, we’ll come around to the conclusion that we communicate with others in order to meet basic needs, and our meetings, interactions, and relationships help us meet those needs. We may also recognize that not all our needs are met by any one person, job, experience, or context; instead, we diversify our communication interactions in order to meet our needs. At first, you may be skeptical of the idea that we communicate to meet our basic needs, but let’s consider two theories on the subject and see how well they predict, describe, and anticipate our tendency to interact.

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, represented in Figure 2 "Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs", (*Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed,1970) may be familiar to you. Perhaps you saw it in negotiation or international business classes and came to recognize its universal applicability. We need the resources listed in level one (i.e., air, food, and water) to survive. If we have met those basic needs, we move to level two: safety. We want to make sure we are safe and that our access to air, food, and water is secure. A job may represent this level of safety at its most basic level. Regardless of how much satisfaction you may receive from a job well done, a pay check ultimately represents meeting basic needs for many. Still, for others, sacrifice is part of the job. Can you think of any professions that require individuals to make decisions where the safety of others comes first? “First responders” and others who work in public safety often place themselves at risk for the benefit of those they serve.

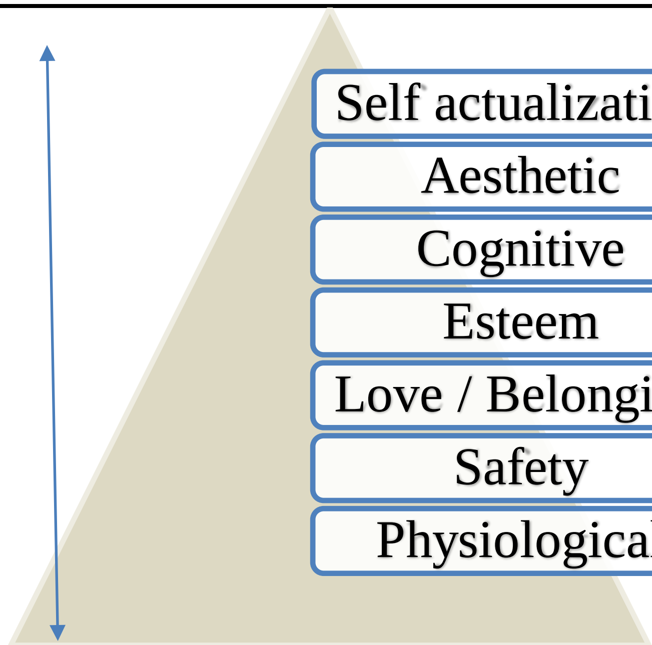
If we feel safe and secure, we are more likely to seek the companionship of others. Humans tend to form groups naturally, and if basic needs are met, love and belonging occur in level three. Perhaps you've been new at work and didn't understand the first thing about what was really going on. It's not that you weren't well trained and did not receive a solid education, but rather that the business or organization is made up of groups and communities that communicate and interact in distinct and divergent ways. You may have known how to do something, but not how it was done at your new place of work. Colleagues may have viewed you as a stranger or "newbie" and may have even declined to help you. Conflict may have been part of your experience, but if you were lucky, a mentor or coworker took the first step and helped you find your way.

As you came to know what was what and who was who, you learned how to negotiate the landscape and avoid landmines. Your self-esteem (level four) improved as you perceived a sense of belonging, but still may have lacked the courage to speak up.

Over time, you may have learned your job tasks and the strategies for succeeding in your organization. Perhaps you even came to be known as a reliable coworker, one who did go the extra mile, one who did assist the "newbies" around the office. If one of them came to you with a problem, you would know how to handle it. You are now looked up to by others and by yourself within the role, with your ability to make a difference. Maslow calls this "self-actualization" (level five), and discusses how people come to perceive a sense of control or empowerment over their context and environment. Where they look back and see that they once felt at the mercy of others, particularly when they were new, they can now influence and direct aspects of the work environment that were once unavailable.

FIGURE 2. MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS :

Beyond self-actualization, Maslow recognizes our innate need to know (level six) that drives us to grow and learn, explore our environment, or engage in new experiences. We come to appreciate a sense of self that extends beyond our immediate experiences, beyond the function, and into the community and the representational.



We can take in beauty for its own sake, and value aesthetics (level seven) that we previously ignored or had little time to consider.

Now that you have reached a sense of contentment in your job and can take in a museum tour, the news of a possible corporate merger is suddenly announced in the mainstream media. It may have been just gossip before, but now it is real. You may feel a sense of uncertainty and be concerned about your status as a valued employee. Do you have reason to worry about losing your job? How will you handle the responsibilities that you've acquired and what about the company and its obligations to those who have sacrificed over time for common success? Conflict may be more frequent in the workplace, and you may feel compelled to go over your personal budget and reprioritize you are spending. You may eliminate museum visits and donations, and you may decide to start saving money as the future is less certain. You may dust off your résumé and start communicating with colleagues in related fields as you network, reaching out to regain that sense of stability, of control, that is lost as you feel your security threatened. You will move through Maslow's hierarchy as you reevaluate what you need to survive.

This theory of interpersonal needs is individualistic, and many cultures are not cantered on the individual, but it does serve to start our discussion about interpersonal needs. What do we need? Why do we communicate? The answers to both questions are often related.

William Schutz offers an alternate version of interpersonal needs. Like Maslow, he considers the universal aspects of our needs, but he outlines how they operate within a range or continuum for each person. According to Schutz, the need for affection, or appreciation, is basic to all humans. We all need to be recognized and feel like we belong, but may have differing levels of expectations to meet that need. When part of the merger process is announced and the news of layoffs comes, those coworkers who have never been particularly outgoing and have largely kept to themselves may become even more withdrawn. Schutz describes under personals as people who seek limited interaction. On the opposite end of the spectrum, you may know people where you work that are often seeking attention and affirmation. Schutz describes over personals as people who have a strong need to be liked and constantly seek attention from others. The person who strikes a healthy balance is called a personal individual *(Interpersonal Underworld*,1966).

Humans also have a need for control, or the ability to influence people and events. But that need may vary by the context, environment, and sense of security. You may have already researched similar mergers, as well as the forecasts for the new organization, and come to realize that your position and your department are central to the current business model. You may have also of taken steps to prioritize your budget, assess your transferable skills, and look for opportunities beyond your current context. Schutz would describe your efforts to control your situation as autocratic, or self-directed. At the same time there may be several employees who have not taken similar steps who look to you and others for leadership, in effect abdicating their responsibility. Abdicrats shift the burn of responsibility from themselves to others, looking to others for a sense of control. Democrats share the need between the individual and the group, and may try to hold a departmental meeting to gather information and share.

Finally, Schutz echoes Maslow in his assertion that belonging is a basic interpersonal need, but notes that it exists within a range or continuum, where some need more and others less. Under socials may be less likely to seek interaction, may prefer smaller groups, and will generally not be found on center stage. Over socials, however, crave the spotlight of attention and are highly motivated to seek belonging. A social person is one who strikes a healthy balance between being withdrawn and being the constant center of attention.

Schutz describes these three interpersonal needs of affection, control, and belonging as interdependent and variable. In one context, an individual may have a high need for control, while in others he or she may not perceive the same level of motivation or compulsion to meet that need. Both Maslow and Schutz offer us two related versions of interpersonal needs that begin to address the central question why communicate.

We communicate with each other to meet our needs, regardless how we define those needs. From the time you are a newborn infant crying for food or the time you are a toddler learning to say "please" when requesting a cup of milk, to the time you are a adult learning the rituals of the job interview and the conference room, you learn to communicate in order to gain a sense of self within the group or community, meeting your basic needs as you grow and learn.

7.5.1 Exercise

1. Think of two or more different situations and how you might express your personal needs differently from one situation to the other. Have you observed similar variations in personal needs in other people from one situation to another?

7.6. SOCIAL PENETRATION THEORY

How do you get to know about other people? If the answer springs immediately to mind, we're getting somewhere: communication. Communication allows us to share experiences, come to know ourselves and others, and form relationships, but it requires time and effort. You don't get to know someone in a day, a month, or even a year. At the same time, you are coming to know them, they are changing, adapting, and growing—and so are you. Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor describe this progression from superficial to intimate levels of communication in social penetration theory, which is often called the Onion Theory because the model looks like an onion and involves layers that are peeled away (*Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (1973). According to social penetration theory, we fear that which we do not know. That includes people. Strangers go from being unknown to known through a series of steps that we can observe through conversational interactions.

If we didn't have the weather to talk about, what would we say? People across cultures use a variety of signals to indicate neutral or submissive stances in relation to each other. A wave, a nod, or a spoken reference about a beautiful day can indicate an open, approachable stance rather than a guarded, defensive posture. At the outermost layer of the onion, in this model, there is only that which we can observe. We can observe characteristics about each other and make judgments, but they are educated guesses at best. Our nonverbal displays of affiliation, like a team jacket, a uniform, or a badge, may communicate something about us, but we only peel away a layer when we engage in conversation, oral or written.

As we move from public to private information, we make the transition from small talk to substantial, and eventually intimate, conversations. Communication requires trust and that often takes time. Beginnings are fragile times and when expectations, roles, and ways of communicating are not clear, misunderstandings can occur. Some relationships may never proceed past observations on the weather, while others may explore controversial topics like politics or religion. A married couple that has spent countless years together may be able to finish each other's sentences, and as memory fades, the retelling of stories may serve to bond and reinforce the relationship. Increasingly, intimate knowledge and levels of trust are achieved over time, involving frequency of interaction as well as length and quality. Positive interactions may lead to more positive interactions, while negative ones may lead to less overall interaction.

This may appear to be common sense at first, but let's examine an example. You are new to a position and your supervisor has been in his or her role for a number of years. Some people at your same level within the organization enjoy a level of knowledge and ease of interaction with your supervisor that you lack. They may have had more time and interactions with the supervisor, but you can still use this theory to gain trust and build a healthy relationship. Recognize that you are unknown to your supervisor and vice versa. Start with superficial conversations that are neutral and nonthreatening, but demonstrate a willingness to engage in communication. Silence early in a relationship can be a sign of respect, but it can also send the message that you are fearful, shy, or lack confidence. It can be interpreted as an unwillingness to communicate, and may actually discourage interaction. If the supervisor picks up the conversation, keep your responses short and light. If not, keep an upbeat attitude and mention the weather.

Over time, the conversations may gradually grow to cross topics beyond the scope of the office, and a relationship may form that involves trust. To a degree, you and your coworkers learn to predict one another's responses and relax in the knowledge of mutual respect. If, however, you skip from superficial to intimate topics too quickly, you run risk of violating normative expectations. Trust takes time, and with that comes empathy and understanding. But if you share with your supervisor your personal struggles on day one, it may erode your credibility. According to the Mclean in his book *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication* (2005) about the social penetration theory, "people go from superficial to intimate conversations as trust develops through repeated, positive interactions. The term "Self-Disclosure" is "information, thoughts, or feelings we tell others about ourselves that they would not otherwise know" (112). Taking it step by step, and not rushing to self-disclose or asking personal questions too soon, can help develop positive business relationships.

7.6.1 Principles of Self-Disclosure

Write down five terms that describe your personal self, and five terms that describe your professional self. Once you have completed your two lists, compare the results. They may have points that overlap, or may have words that describe you in your distinct roles that are quite different. This difference can be easy to address, but at times it can be a challenge to maintain. How much of “you” do you share in the workplace? Our personal and professional lives don’t exist independently, and in many ways are interdependent.

How do people know more about us? We communicate information about ourselves, whether or not we are aware of it. You cannot communicate. Watzlawick expressed his views about communication in his book *The Language of Change: Elements of Therapeutic Communication*. From your internal monologue and intrapersonal communication, to verbal and nonverbal communication, communication is constantly occurring. What do you communicate about yourself by the clothes (or brands) you wear, the tattoos you display, or the piercing you remove before you enter the workplace? Self-disclosure is a process by which you intentionally communicate information to others, but can involve unintentional, but revealing slips. Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond offer us five principles of self-disclosure that remind us that communication is an integral part of any business or organizational setting.

7.6.2 Self-Disclosure Usually Moves in Small Steps

Would you come to work on your first day wearing a large purple hat? If you knew that office attire was primarily brown and grey suits? Most people would say, “Of course not!” as there is a normative expectation for dress, sometimes called a dress code. After you have worked within the organization, earned trust and established credibility, and earned your place in the community, the purple hat might be positively received with a sense of humor. But if you haven’t yet earned your place, your fashion statement may be poorly received. In the same way, personal information is normally reserved for those of confidence, and earned over time. Take small steps as you come to know your colleagues, taking care to make sure who you are does not speak louder than what you say.

7.6.3 Self-Disclosure Moves from Impersonal to Intimate Information

So you decided against wearing the purple hat to work on your first day, but after a successful first week you went out with friends from your college days. You shut down the bar late in the evening and paid for it on Sunday. At work on Monday, is it a wise strategy to share the finer tips of the drinking games you played on Saturday night? Again, most people would say, “Of course not!” It has nothing to do with work, and only makes you look immature. Some people have serious substance abuse issues, and your stories could sound insensitive, producing a negative impact. How would you know, as you don’t really know your coworkers yet? In the same way, it is not a wise strategy to post photos from the weekend’s escapades on your Myspace, Facebook, or similar social networking Web page. Employers are increasingly aware of their employees’ Web pages, and the picture of you looking stupid may come to mind when your supervisor is considering you for a promotion. You represent yourself, but you also represent your company and its reputation. If you don’t represent it well, you run the risk of not representing it at all.

7.6.4 Self-Disclosure Is Reciprocal

Monday morning brings the opportunity to tell all sorts of stories about the weekend, and since you’ve wisely decided to leave any references to the bar in the past, you may instead choose the wise conversational strategy of asking questions. You may ask your coworkers what they did, what it was like, who they met, and where they went, but eventually all conversations form a circle that comes back to you. The dance between source and receiver isn’t linear, it’s transactional. After a couple of stories, sooner or later, you’ll hear the question, “What did you do this weekend?” It’s now your turn. This aspect of conversation is universal. We expect when we reveal something about ourselves that others will reciprocate. The dyadic effect is the formal term for this process, and is often thought to meet the need to reduce uncertainty about conversational partners. If you stay quiet or decline to answer after everyone else has taken a turn, what will happen? They may be put off at first, they may invent stories and let their imaginations run wild, or they may reject you. It may be subtle at first, but reciprocity is expected.

You have the choice of what to reveal and when. You may choose to describe your weekend by describing the friends and conversations while omitting any reference to the bar. You may choose to focus on your Sunday afternoon gardening activities. You may just say you read a good book and mention the title of the one you are reading. Regardless of what option you choose, you have the freedom and responsibility within the dyadic effect to reciprocate, but you have a degree of control. You can learn to anticipate when your turn will come, and to give some thought to what you will say before the moment arrives.

7.6.5 Self-Disclosure Involves Risk

If you decided to go with the "good book" option, or perhaps mention that you watched a movie, you just ran the risk that whatever you are reading or watching may be criticized. If the book you are enjoying is controversial, you might anticipate a bit of a debate, but if you mentioned a romance novel, or one that has a science fiction theme, you may have thought it wouldn't generate criticism. Sometimes the most innocent reference or comment can produce conflict when the conversational partners have little prior history. At the same time, nothing ventured, nothing gained. How are you going to discover that the person you work with appreciates the same author or genre if you don't share that information? Self-disclosure involves risk, but can produce positive results.

7.6.6 Self-Disclosure Involves Trust

Before you mention the title of the book or movie you saw this weekend, you may consider your audience and what you know about them. If you've only known them for a week, your awareness of their habits, quirks, likes and dislikes may be limited. At the same time, if you feel safe and relatively secure, you may test the waters with a reference to the genre but not the author. You may also decide that it is just a book, and they can take it or leave it.

According to McLean "Trust is the ability to place confidence in or rely on the character or truth of someone." (*The Basics of Interpersonal Communication,* 114). Trust is a process, not a badge to be earned. It takes time to develop, and can be lost in a moment. Even if you don't agree with your coworker, understand that self-revelation communicates a measure of trust and confidence. Respect that confidence, and respect yourself.

Also, consider the nature of the information. Some information communicated in confidence must see the light of day. Sexual harassment, fraud, theft, and abuse are all issues in the workplace, and if you become aware of these behaviors you will have a responsibility to report them according to your organization's procedures. A professional understands that trust is built over time, and understands how valuable this intangible commodity can be to success.

7.6.7 Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal communication can be defined as communication between two people, but the definition fails to capture the essence of a relationship. This broad definition is useful when we compare it to intrapersonal communication, or communication with ourselves, as opposed to mass communication, or communication with a large audience, but it requires clarification. The developmental view of interpersonal communication places emphasis on the relationship rather than the size of the audience, and draws a distinction between impersonal and personal interactions.

For example, one day your coworker and best friend, Iris, whom you've come to know on a personal as well as a professional level, gets promoted to the position of manager. She didn't tell you ahead of time because it wasn't certain, and she didn't know how to bring up the possible change of roles. Your relationship with Iris will change as your roles transform. Her perspective will change, and so will yours. You may stay friends, or she may not have as much time as she once did. Over time, you and Iris gradually grow apart, spending less time together. You eventually lose touch. What is the status of your relationship?

If you have ever had even a minor interpersonal transaction such as buying a cup of coffee from a clerk, you know that some people can be personable, but does that mean you've developed a relationship within the transaction process? For many people the transaction is an impersonal experience, however pleasant. What is the difference between the brief interaction of a transaction and the interactions you periodically have with your colleague, Iris, who is now your manager?

The developmental view places an emphasis on the prior history, but also focuses on the level of familiarity and trust. Over time and with increased frequency we form bonds or relationships with people, and if time and frequency are diminished, we lose that familiarity. The relationship with the clerk may be impersonal, but so can the relationship with the manager after time has passed and the familiarity is lost. From a developmental view, interpersonal communication can exist across this range of experience and interaction.

Review the lists you made for the third of the Note 7.1 "Introductory Exercises" for this unit. If you evaluate your list of what is important to you, will you find objects or relationships? You may value your home or vehicle, but for most people relationships with friends and family are at the top of the list. Interpersonal relationships take time and effort to form, and they can be challenging. All relationships are dynamic, meaning that they transform and adapt to changes within the context and environment. They require effort and sacrifice, and at times, give rise to the question, why bother? A short answer may be that we, as humans, are compelled to form bonds. But it still fails to answer the question, why?

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. 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. The predicted outcome value theory asserts that not only do we want to reduce uncertainty, we also want to maximize our possible benefit from the association by Sunna frank, M. (*The Predicted Outcome Value During Initial Interactions: A Reformulation of Uncertainty Reduction Theory*, 1986). This theory would predict that you would choose Tuesday or later for a meeting in order to maximize the potential for positive interaction and any possible rewards that may result. One theory involves the avoidance of fear while the other focuses on the pursuit of reward. Together, they provide a point of reference as we continue our discussion on interpersonal relationships.

Regardless of whether we focus on collaboration or competition, we can see that interpersonal communication is necessary in the business environment. We want to know our place and role within the organization, accurately predict those within our proximity, and create a sense of safety and belonging. Family for many is the first experience in interpersonal relationships, but as we develop professionally, our relationships at work may take on many of the attributes we associate with family communication. We look to each other with similar sibling rivalries, competition for attention and resources, and support. The workplace and our peers can become as close, or closer, than our birth families, with similar challenges and rewards.

7.7. RITUALS OF CONVERSATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

FIGURE 3

You no doubt have participated in countless conversations throughout your life, and the process of how to conduct a conversation may seem so obvious that it needs no examination. Yet, all cultures have rituals of various kinds, and conversation is one of these universal rituals. A skilled business communicator knows when to speak, when to remain silent, and to always stop speaking before the audience stops listening. Further, understanding conversation provides a solid foundation for our next discussion on employment interviewing. Employment interviews follow similar ritual patterns and have their own set of expectations. Expectations may differ based on field, level, knowledge, and experience, but they generally follow the five steps of a basic conversation.

7.7.1 Conversation as a Ritual

Why discuss the ritual of conversation? Because it is one of the main ways we interact in the business environment, and it is ripe for misunderstandings. Our everyday familiarity with conversations often makes us blind to the subtle changes that take place during the course of a conversation. Examining it will allow you to consider its components, predict the next turn, anticipate an opening or closing, and make you a better conversationalist. Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond offer us five stages of conversation that are adapted here for our discussion in their book *Interpersonal Communication Relating to Others* (2002).

7.7.2 Initiation

The first stage of conversation is called initiation, and requires you to be open to interact. How you communicate openness is up to you; it may involve nonverbal signals like eye contact or body positions, such as smiling or even merely facing the other person and making eye contact. A casual reference to the weather, a light conversation about the weekend, or an in-depth conversation about how the financial markets are performing this morning requires a source to start the process: someone has to initiate the exchange. For some, this may produce a degree of anxiety. If status and hierarchical relationships are present, it may be a question of who speaks when according to cultural norms.

7.7.3 Preview

The preview is an indication, verbal or nonverbal, of what the conversation is about, both in terms of content and in terms of the relationship. A word or two in the subject line of an e-mail may signal the topic, and the relationship between individuals, such as an employee-supervisor relationship, may be understood. A general reference to a topic may approach a topic indirectly, allowing the recipient to either pick up on the topic and to engage in the discussion or to redirect the conversation away from a topic they are not ready to talk about. People are naturally curious, and also seek certainty. A preview can serve to reduce uncertainty and signal intent.

7.7.4 Talking Point(s)

Joseph DeVito characterizes this step as getting down to business, reinforcing the goal orientation of the conversation in his book *Messages: Building Interpersonal Skills* (2003). In business communication, we often have a specific goal or series of points to address, but we cannot lose sight of the relationship messages within the discussion of content. You may signal to your conversation partner that there are three points to address, much like outlining an agenda at a meeting. This may sound formal at first, but if you listen to casual conversations, you'll often find there is an inherent list or central point where the conversational partners arrive. By clearly articulating, either in written or oral form, the main points, you provide an outline or structure to the conversation.

7.7.5 Feedback

Similar to a preview step, this stage allows the conversational partners to clarify, restate, or discuss the points of the conversation to arrive a sense of mutual understanding. In some cultures, the points and their feedback may recycle several times, which may sound repetitious to Western ears. In Western cultures we often get to the point rather quickly and once we've arrived at an understanding; we move quickly to the conclusion. Communication across cultures often requires additional cycles of statement and restatement to insure transmission of information as well as reinforcement of the relationship. Time may be money in some cultures, but time is also a representation of respect. Feedback is an opportunity to make sure the interaction was successful the first time. Failure to attend to this stage can lead to the need for additional interactions, reducing efficiency across time.

7.7.6 Closing

The acceptance of feedback on both sides of the conversation often signals the transition to the conclusion of the conversation. Closings are similar to the initiation stepand often involve ritual norms. Verbal clues are sometimes present, but you may also notice the half step back as conversational partners create additional space in preparation to disengage, Knapp, M., & Vangelisti, A. *Interpersonal Communication and Relationships* (2000).

There are times when a conversational partner introduces new information in the conclusion, which can start the process all over again. You may also note that if words like “in conclusion” or “oh—one more thing” are used, a set of expectations is now in force. A conclusion has been announced and the listener expects it. If the speaker continues to recycle at this point, the listener’s listening skills are often not as keen as they were during the heat of the main engagement, and it may even produce frustration. People mentally shift to the next order of business and this transition must be negotiated successfully.

By mentioning a time, date, or place for future communication you can clearly signal that the conversation, although currently concluded, will continue later. In this way, you can often disengage successfully while demonstrating respect.

7.7.7 Employment Interviewing

We all join communities, teams, and groups across our lifetimes by McLean, S. (2005), *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*. We go from an unknown outsider to a new member and eventually a full member. Businesses and organizations are communities consisting of teams and groups, and if we decide to switch teams or communities, or if that decision is made for us with a reduction in force layoff, for example, we’ll be back on the job market. In order to make the transition from a outsider to an insider, you'll have to pass a series of tests, both informal and formal. One of the most common tests is otherwise known as an employment interview. An employment interview is an exchange between a candidate and a prospective employer (or their representative). It is a formal process with several consistent elements that you can use to guide your preparation.

Employment interviews come in all shapes and sizes, and may not be limited to only one exchange but one interaction. A potential employee may very well be screened by a computer (as the résumé is scanned) and interviewed online or via the telephone before the applicant ever meets a representative or panel of representatives. The screening process may include formal tests that include personality tests, background investigations, and consultations with previous employers. Depending on the type of job you are seeking, you can anticipate answering questions, often more than once, to a series of people as you progress through a formal interview process. Just as you have the advantage of preparing for a speech with anticipation, you can apply the same research and public speaking skills to the employment interview.

The invitation to interview means you have been identified as a candidate who meets the minimum qualifications and demonstrate potential as a viable candidate. Your cover letter, résumé, or related application materials may demonstrate the connection between your preparation and the job duties, but now comes the moment where you will need to articulate those points out loud.

If we assume that you would like to be successful in your employment interviewing, then it makes sense to use the communication skills gained to date with the knowledge of interpersonal communication to maximize your performance. There is no one right or wrong way to prepare and present at your interview, just as each audience is unique, but we can prepare and anticipate several common elements.

7.7.8 Preparation

The right frame of mind is an essential element for success in communication, oral or written. For many if not most, the employment interview is surrounded with mystery and a degree of fear and trepidation. Just as giving a speech may produce a certain measure of anxiety, you can expect that a job interview will make you nervous. Anticipate this normal response, and use your nervous energy to your benefit. To place your energies where they will be put to best use, the first step is preparation.

Would you prepare yourself before writing for publication or speaking in public? Of course. The same preparation applies to the employment interview. Briefly, the employment interview is a conversational exchange (even if it is in writing at first) where the participants try to learn more about each other. Both conversational partners will have goals in terms of content, and explicitly or implicitly across the conversational exchange will be relational messages. Attending to both points will strengthen your performance.

On the content side, if you have been invited for an interview, you can rest assured that you have met the basic qualifications the employer is looking for. Hopefully, this initiation signal means that the company or organization you have thoroughly researched is one you would consider as a potential employer. Perhaps you have involved colleagues and current employees of the organization in your research process and learned about several of the organization’s attractive qualities as well as some of the challenges experienced by the people working there.

Businesses hire people to solve problems, so you will want to focus on how your talents, expertise, and experience can contribute to the organization’s need to solve those problems. The more detailed your analysis of their current challenges, the better. You need to be prepared for standard questions about your education and background, but also see the opening in the conversation to discuss the job duties, the challenges inherent in the job, and the ways in which you believe you can meet these challenges. Take the opportunity to demonstrate the fact that you have “done your homework” in researching the company. Table 16.1 "Interview Preparation Checklist" presents a checklist of what you should try to know before you consider

Yourself prepared for interview.

Table 1

Interview Preparation Checklist

What to Know	Examples
Type of Interview	Will it be a behavioural interview, where the employer watches what you do in a given situation? Will you be asked technical questions or given a work sample? Or will you be interviewed over lunch or coffee, where your table manners and social skills will be assessed?
Type of Dress	Office attire varies by industry, so stop by the workplace and observe what workers are wearing if you can. If this isn’t possible, call and ask the human resources office what to wear—they will appreciate your wish to be prepared.
Company or Organization	Do a thorough exploration of the company’s Web site. If it doesn’t have one, look for business listings in the community online and in the phone directory. Contact the local chamber of commerce. At your library, you may have access to subscription sites such as Hoover’s Online (http://www.hoovers.com).
Job	Carefully read the ad you answered that got you the interview, and memorize what it says about the job and the qualifications the employer is seeking. Use the Internet to find sample job descriptions for your target job title. Make a written list of the job tasks and annotate the list with

	your skills, knowledge, and other attributes that will enable you to perform the job tasks with excellence.
Employer's Needs	Check for any items in the news in the past couple of years involving the company name. If it is a small company, the local town newspaper will be your best source. In addition, look for any advertisements the company has placed, as these can give a good indication of the company's goals.

7.7.9 Performance

You may want to know how to prepare for an employment interview, and we're going to take it for granted that you have researched the company, market, and even individuals in your effort to learn more about the opportunity. From this solid base of preparation, you need to begin to prepare your responses. Would you like some of the test questions before the test? Luckily for you, employment interviews involve a degree of uniformity across their many representations. Here are eleven common questions you are likely to be asked in an employment interview: McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication*.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Have you ever done this type of work before?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
5. Give me an example of a time when you worked under pressure.
6. Tell me about a time you encountered (X) type of problem at work. How did you solve the problem?
7. Why did you leave your last job?

8. How has your education and/or experience prepared you for this job?
9. Why do you want to work here?
10. What are your long-range goals? Where do you see yourself three years from now?
11. Do you have any questions?

When you are asked a question in the interview, look for its purpose as well as its literal meaning. “Tell me about yourself” may sound like an invitation for you to share your text message win in last year’s competition, but it is not. The employer is looking for someone who can address their needs. Telling the interviewer about yourself is an opportunity for you make a positive professional impression. Consider what experience you can highlight that aligns well with the job duties and match your response to their needs.

In the same way, responses about your strengths are not an opening to brag, and your weakness not an invitation to confess. If your weakness is a tendency towards perfectionism, and the job you are applying for involves a detail orientation, you can highlight how your weaknesses may serve you well in the position. Consider using the “because” response whenever you can. A “because” response involves the restatement of the question followed by a statement of how and where you gained education or experience in that area. For example, if you are asked about handling difficult customers, you could answer that you have significant experience in that area because you’ve served as a customer service representative with X company for X years. You may be able to articulate how you were able to turn an encounter with a frustrated customer into a long-term relationship that benefited both the customer and the organization. Your specific example, and use of a “because” response, can increase the likelihood that the interviewer or audience will recall the specific information you provide.

You may be invited to participate in a conference call, and be told to expect it will last around twenty minutes. The telephone carries your voice and your words, but doesn’t carry your nonverbal gestures. If you remember to speak directly into the telephone, look up and smile, your voice will come through clearly and you will sound competent and pleasant. Whatever you do, don't take the call on a cell phone with an iffy connection—your interviewers are guaranteed to be unfavorably impressed if you keep breaking up during the call. Use the phone to your advantage by preparing responses on note cards or on your computer screen before the call. When the interviewers ask you questions, keep track of the time, limiting each response to about a minute. If you know that a twenty-minute call is scheduled for a certain time, you can anticipate that your phone may ring may be a minute or two late, as interviews are often scheduled in a series while the committee is all together at one time. Even if you only have one interview, your interviewers will have a schedule and your sensitivity to it can help improve your performance.

You can also anticipate that the last few minutes will be set aside for you to ask your questions. This is your opportunity to learn more about the problems or challenges that the position will be addressing, allowing you a final opportunity to reinforce a positive message with the audience. Keep your questions simple, your attitude positive, and communicate your interest.

At the same time as you are being interviewed, know that you too are interviewing the prospective employer. If you have done your homework, you may already know what the organization is all about, but you may still be unsure whether it is the right fit for you. Listen and learn from what is said as well as what is not said, and you will add to your knowledge base for wise decision making in the future.

Above all, be honest, positive, and brief. You may have heard that the world is small and it is true. As you develop professionally, you will come to see how fields, organizations, and companies are interconnected in ways that you cannot anticipate. Your name and reputation are yours to protect and promote.

You completed your research of the organization, interviewed a couple of employees, learned more about the position, were on time for the interview (virtual or in person), wore neat and professional clothes, and demonstrated professionalism in your brief, informative responses. Congratulations are in order, but so is more work on your part.

Remember that feedback is part of the communication process: follow up promptly with a thank-you note or e-mail, expressing your appreciation for the interviewer's time and interest. You may also indicate that you will call or e-mail next week to see if they have any further questions for you. (Naturally, if you say you will do this, make sure you follow through!) In the event that you have decided the position is not right for you, the employer will appreciate your notifying them without delay. Do this tactfully, keeping in mind that communication occurs between individuals and organizations in ways you cannot predict.

After you have communicated with your interviewer or committee, move on. Candidates sometimes become quite fixated on one position or job and fail to keep their options open. The best person does not always get the job, and the prepared business communicator knows that networking and research is a never-ending, ongoing process. Look over the horizon at the next challenge and begin your research process again. It may be hard work, but getting a job is your job. Budget time and plan on the effort it will take to make the next contact, get the next interview, and continue to explore alternate paths to your goal.

You may receive a letter, note, or voice mail explaining that another candidate's combination of experience and education better matched the job description. If this happens, it is only natural for you to feel disappointed. It is also only natural to want to know why you were not chosen, but be aware that for legal reasons most rejection notifications do not go into detail about why one candidate was hired and another was not. Contacting the company with a request for an explanation can be counterproductive, as it may be interpreted as a "sore loser" response. If there is any possibility that they will keep your name on file for future opportunities, you want to preserve your positive relationship.

Although you feel disappointed, don't focus on the loss or all the hard work you've produced. Instead, focus your energies where they will serve you best. Review the process and learn from the experience, knowing that each audience is unique and even the most prepared candidate may not have been the right "fit." Stay positive and connect with people you who support you. Prepare, practice, and perform. Know that you as a person are far more than just a list of job duties. Focus on your skill sets: if they need improvement, consider additional education that will enhance your knowledge and skills. Seek out local resources and keep networking. Have your professional interview attire clean and ready, and focus on what you can control—your preparation and performance.

7.8. MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1. What is the definition of intrapersonal business communication?

Q 2. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a person strives to satisfy his or her higher order needs first.

a. True

b. False

Q 3. What are some examples of Self discourse?

Q 4. What is social penetration in communication?

Q 5. What are the important areas of Self-concept?

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UNIT 8 NEGATIVE NEWS AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

8.1. INTRODUCTION

You don't hear things that are bad about your company unless you ask. It is easy to hear good tidings, but you have to scratch to get the bad news.

-Thomas J. Watson Sr.

One day, today, is worth two tomorrows.

-Anonymous

Communication is constant, but is it always effective? In times of confusion or crisis, clear and concise communication takes on an increased level of importance. When an emergency arises, rumors can spin out of control, emotions can run high, feelings can be hurt, and in some cases, lives can tragically be lost. In this chapter we will examine several scenarios in which negative news is delivered or received, and examine ways to improve communication. We will conclude with a discussion of a formal crisis communication plan. Whether you anticipate the necessity of being the bearer of unpleasant or bad news, or a sudden and unexpected crisis occurs, your thoughtful preparation can make all the difference.

8.2. OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will learn about-

- How to deliver a negative news message?
- Seven goals of a negative news message.
- How to write an effective negative news message?
- How to make open and close ended questions?

8.3. DELIVERING A NEGATIVE NEWS MESSAGE

"The negative news message delivers news that the audience does not want to hear, read, or receive. Delivering negative news is never easy. Whether you are informing someone they are being laid off or providing constructive criticism on their job performance, how you choose to deliver the message can influence its response." by Bovee & Thill in their book *Business Communication Essentials: A Skills - Based Approach to Vital Business English* (2010).

Some people prefer their bad news to be direct and concise. Others may prefer a less direct approach. Regardless whether you determine a direct or indirect approach is warranted, your job is to deliver news that you anticipate will be unwelcome, unwanted, and possibly dismissed. In this section we will examine several scenarios that can be communicated internally (within the organization) and externally (outside the organization), but recognize that the lines can be blurred as communication flows outside and through an organization or business. Internal and external communication environments often have a degree of overlap. The rumor of anticipated layoffs may surface in the local media, and you may be called upon to address the concern within the organization. In a similar way, a product that has failed internal quality control tests will require several more tests and improvements before it is ready for market, but if that information leaves the organization, it can hurt the business reputation, prospects for future contracts, and the company's ability to secure financing.

Communication is constantly present, and our ability to manage, clarify, and guide understanding is key to addressing challenges while maintaining trust and integrity with employees, stakeholders, and the public. There are seven goals to keep in mind when delivering negative news, in person or in written form:

1. Be clear and concise in order not to require additional clarification.
2. Help the receiver understand and accept the news.
3. Maintain trust and respect for the business or organization and for the receiver.
4. Avoid legal liability or erroneous admission of guilt or culpability.
5. Maintain the relationship, even if a formal association is being terminated.
6. Reduce the anxiety associated with the negative news to increase comprehension.

7. Achieve the designated business outcome.

Let's examine our first scenario:

You are a supervisor and have been given the task of discussing repeated tardiness with an employee, Chris. Chris has frequently been late for work, and the problem has grown worse over the last two weeks. The tardiness is impairing not only Chris's performance, but also that of the entire work team. Your manager has instructed you to put an end to it. The desired result is for Chris to stop his tardiness behavior and improve his performance. You can

1. stop by Chris's cubicle and simply say, "Get to work on time or you are out";
2. invite Chris out to a nice lunch and let him have it;
3. write Chris a stern e-mail;
4. ask Chris to come to your office and discuss the behavior with him in private.

While there are many other ways you could choose to address the situation, let's examine each of these four alternatives in light of the goals to keep in mind when presenting negative news.

First, you could approach Chris in his work space and speak to him directly. Advantages include the ability to get right to the point right away. Disadvantages include the strain on the supervisor-employee relationship as a result of the public display of criticism, the possibility that Chris may not understand you, the lack of a formal discussion you can document, and the risk that your actions may not bring about the desired results.

The goals include the desire to be clear and concise in order not to require additional clarification. This possible response does not provide the opportunity for discussion, feedback, or confirmation that Chris has clearly understood your concern. It fails to address the performance concern, and limits the correction to the tardiness. It fails to demonstrate respect for all parties. The lack of tact apparent in the approach may reflect negatively on you as the supervisor, not only with Chris but with your manager as well.

When you need to speak to an employee about a personnel concern, it is always best to do it in private. Give thought and concern to the conversation before it occurs, and make a list of points to cover with specific information, including grievances. Like any other speech, you may need to rehearse, particularly if this type of meeting is new to you. When it comes time to have the discussion, issue the warning, back it up in writing with documentation, and don't give the impression that you might change your decision. Whether the issue at hand is a simple caution about tardiness or a more serious conversation, you need to be fair and respectful, even if the other person has been less than professional. Let's examine the next alternative.

Let's say you invite Chris to lunch at a nice restaurant. There is linen on the table, silverware is present for more than the main course, and the water glasses have stems. The environment says "good job" in its uniqueness, presentation, and luxury. Your word will contradict this nonverbal message. The juxtaposition between the environment and the verbal message will cause tension and confusion, which will probably be an obstacle to the receiver's ability to listen. If Chris doesn't understand the message, and the message requires clarification, your approach has failed. The contrast between the restaurant setting and the negative message does not promote understanding and acceptance of the bad news or correction. Furthermore, it does not build trust in the relationship, as the restaurant invitation might be interpreted as a "trap" or a betrayal. Let's examine yet another approach.

You've written Chris a stern e-mail. You've included a list of all the recent dates when he was late and made several statements about the quality of his work. You've indicated he needs to improve, and stop being late, or else. But was your e-mail harassment? Could it be considered beyond the scope of supervision and interpreted as mean or cruel? And do you even know if Chris has received it? If there was no reply, do you know whether it achieved its desired business outcome? A written message may certainly be part of the desired approach, but how it is presented and delivered is as important as what it says. Let's examine our fourth approach to this scenario.

You ask Chris to join you in a private conversation. You start the conversation with an expression of concern and an open-ended question: “Chris, I’ve been concerned about your work lately. Is everything all right?” As Chris answers, you may demonstrate that you are listening by nodding your head, and possibly taking notes. You may learn that Chris has been having problems sleeping, or that his living situation has changed. Or Chris may decline to share any issues, deny that anything is wrong, and ask why you are concerned. You may then state that you’ve observed the chronic tardiness, and name one or more specific mistakes you have found in Chris’s work, ending with a reiteration that you are concerned. This statement of concern may elicit more responses and open the conversation up into a dialogue where you come to understand the situation, Chris sees your concern, and the relationship is preserved. Alternatively, in case the conversation does not go well, you will still keep a positive attitude even as you document the meeting and give Chris a verbal warning.

Regardless of how well or poorly the conversation goes, if Chris tells other employees about it, they will take note of how you handled the situation, and it will contribute to their perception of you. It guides their expectations of how you operate and how to communicate with you, as this interaction is not only about you and Chris. You represent the company and its reputation, and your professional display of concern as you try to learn more sends a positive message. While the private, respectful meeting may not be the perfect solution, it is preferable to the other approaches we have considered.

Performance evaluation usually involve constructive criticism. **FIGURE 1**. © 2010 Jupiter images Corporation

One additional point to consider as you document this interaction is the need to present the warning in writing. You may elect to prepare a memo that outlines the information concerning Chris's performance and tardiness and have it ready should you want to present it. If the session goes well, and you have the discretion to make a judgment call, you may elect to give him another week to resolve the issue. Even if it goes well, you may want to present the memo, as it documents the interaction and serves as evidence of due process should Chris's behavior fail to change, eventually resulting in the need for termination.

This combined approach of a verbal and written message is increasingly the norm in business communication. In the next two sections, we'll compare and contrast approaches, verbal and written, and outline several best practices in terms of approach. But first, we'll outline the four main parts of a negative news message:

1. Buffer or cushion
2. Explanation
3. Negative news
4. Redirect

The first part of a negative news message, verbal or written, involves neutral or positive information. This sets the tone and often serves as a buffer or cushion for the information to come. Next, an explanation discusses why there is an issue in the first place. This may be relatively simple, quite complex, or uncomfortable. In a journal article titled "Further Conceptualization of Explanations in Negative News Messages," by Limaye, Mohan R. (1997, June 1) under the title *Business Communication Quarterly* (38–50) in which Mohan Limaye makes the clear case that not only is an explanation a necessary part of any negative news message, it is an ethical and moral requirement. While an explanation is important, never admit or imply responsibility without written authorization from your company cleared by legal counsel. The third part of the negative news message involves the bad news itself, and the emphasis here is on clarity and accuracy. Finally, the redirect may refocus attention on a solution strategy, an alternative, or the subsequent actions that will take place. Table 1.

"Negative News Message Sample Script" provides an example that might apply in an external communication situation.

Table 1 **Negative News Message Sample Script**

Pasts of the Negative News Message	Example
Buffer or Cushion	Thank you for your order. We appreciate your interest in our product.
Explanation	We are writing to let you know that this product has been unexpectedly popular, with over 10,000 requests on the day you place your order.
Negative News	This unexpected increase in demand has resulted in a temporary out-of-stock/backorder situation. We will fulfil your order, received at 11:59 p.m. on 09/09/2009, in the order it was received.
Redirect	We anticipate that your product will ship next Monday. While you wait, we encourage you to consider using the enclosed $5 off coupon toward the purchase of any product in our catalogue. We appreciate your business and want you to know that our highest priority is your satisfaction.

In Table 1 "Negative News Message Sample Script", the neutral or positive news comes first and introduces the customer to the overall topic. The explanation provides an indication of the purpose of the communication, while the negative message directly addresses how it affects the customer. The redirect discusses specific actions to take place. In this case, it also includes a solution strategy enhanced with a soft sell message, a subtle, low-pressure method of selling, cross-selling, or advertising a product or service. Whether you are delivering negative news in person or in writing, the four main parts of a negative message can help you meet all seven goals.

Before we move to the verbal and written delivery of the negative news message, we need to offer a word of counsel. You want to avoid legal problems when communicating bad news. You cannot always predict how others are going to respond, but you can prepare for and deliver your response in ways that lower the risk of litigation in four ways:

1. Avoid abusive language or behavior.
2. Avoid contradictions and absolutes.
3. Avoid confusion or misinterpretation.
4. Maintain respect and privacy.

Sarcasm, profanity, shouting, or abusive or derogatory language is an obstacle to clear communication. Furthermore, such language can be interpreted as defamatory, or harming the reputation of the person, possibly having a negative impact on their future earnings. In written form, it is called libel. If you say it out loud, it is called slander. While slander may be harder to prove, no defamatory remarks should be part of your negative news message. Cell phones increasingly serve to record conversations, and you simply never know if your words will come back to you in short order. Represent yourself, the business, and the receiver of your message with professionalism and avoid abusive or defamatory language.

You also want to avoid contradictions, as they only serve to invite debate. Make sure your information is consistent and in agreement with the general information in the conversation. If one part of the information stands out as a contradiction, its importance will be magnified in the context and distract from your main message. Don’t provide more information that is necessary. Polarizing, absolute terms like “always” and “never” are often part of sweeping generalizations that are open to debate. Instead of saying, “You are always late,” choose to say, “You were late sixteen times in May.” To avoid confusion or misinterpretation, be precise and specific.

Always maintain respect and privacy. Making a negative statement about an employee in front of a group of coworkers can be considered ridicule or harm, and in the coming cases may be actionable and involve legal ramifications. In addition to the legal responsibility, you have the overall goal of demonstrating professionalism as you represent yourself and your company in maintaining the relationship with the employee, even if the end goal is termination. Employees have retaliated against their organizations in many ways, from discouraging remarks to vandalism and computer viruses. Your goal is to avoid such behavior, not out of fear, but out of professionalism and respect for yourself and your organization. Open lines of communication present in a relationship can help reduce the risk of relational deterioration or animosity. The sidebar below provides a checklist for delivering a negative message.

Negative Message Checklist

1. Clear goal in mind
2. Clear instructions from supervisor (legal counsel)
3. Clear understanding of message
4. Clear understanding of audience/reader
5. Clear understanding of procedure and protocol
6. Clear, neutral opening
7. Clear explanation without admission of guilt or culpability
8. Clear statement of impact or negative news
9. Clear redirect with no reminders of negative news
10. Clear results with acceptance or action on negative news

8.2.1 Presenting Negative News in Person

Most of us dislike conflict. It may be tempting to avoid face-to-face interaction for fear of confrontation, but delivering negative news in person can be quite effective, even necessary, in many business situations. When considering a one-on-one meeting or a large, formal meeting, consider the preparation and implementation of the discussion.

The first step involves a clear goal. Stephen Covey (1989) recommends beginning with the end in mind (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People)*. Do you want your negative news to inform, or to bring about change, and if so what kind of change and to what degree? A clear conceptualization of the goal allows you to anticipate the possible responses, to plan ahead and to get your emotional "house" in order.

Your emotional response to the news and the audience, whether it is one person or the whole company, will set the tone for the entire interaction. You may feel frustrated, angry, or hurt, but the display of these emotions is often more likely to make the problem worse than to help solve it. Emotions can be contagious, and people will respond to the emotional tone of the speaker.

If your response involves only one other person, a private, personal meeting is the best option, but it may not be available. Increasingly people work and contribute to projects from a distance, via the Internet, and may only know each other via e-mail, phone, or videophone/videoconferencing services. A personal meeting may be impractical or impossible. How then does one deliver negative news in person? By the best option available to both parties. Written feedback may be an option via e-mail, but it takes time to prepare, send, receive, process, and respond—and the written word has its disadvantages. Miscommunication and misinterpretation can easily occur, with little opportunity for constructive feedback to check meanings and clarify perceptions.

The telephone call allows both parties to hear each other's voices, including the words, the inflection, the disfluencies, and the emotional elements of conversation. It is immediate in that the possibility of overlap is present, meaning not only is proximity in terms of voice as close as possible, but both parties may experience overlaps as they take turns and communicate. Telephone calls allow for quick feedback and clarification questions, and allow both parties an opportunity to recycle and revisit topics for elaboration or a better understanding. They also can cover long distances with reasonable clarity. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) allows you to do the same with relatively little cost.

While there are distinct advantages, the telephone lacks part of the nonverbal spectrum available to speakers in a live setting. On the telephone, proximity is a function of response time rather than physical space and the degree to which one person is near another. Time is also synchronous, though the telephone crosses time zones and changes the context as one party may have just arrived at work while the other party is leaving for lunch. Body language gets lost in the exchange as well, although many of us continue to make hand gestures on the phone, even when our conversational partners cannot see us. Paralanguage, or the sounds we hear that are not verbal, including pitch, tone, rate, rhythm, pace, articulation, and pronunciation are all available to the listener. As we can see, the telephone call allows for a richer communication experience than written communication, but cannot convey as much information as would be available in person. Just as a telephone interview may be used for screening purposes while a live interview is reserved for the final candidates, the live setting is often considered the best option for delivering negative news.

Live and in person may be the best option for direct communication with immediate feedback. In a live setting time is constant. The participants may schedule a breakfast meeting, for example, mirroring schedules and rhythms. Live, face-to-face communication comes in many forms. The casual exchange in the hallway, the conversation over coffee, and the formal performance review meeting all have interpersonal communication in common.

If you need to share the message with a larger audience, you may need to speak to a group, or you might even have to make a public presentation or speech. If it needs a feedback loop, we often call it a press conference, as the speech is followed by a question-and-answer session. From meeting in the hallway to live, onstage, under camera lights and ready for questions, the personal delivery of negative news can be a challenging task.

8.2.2 Presenting Negative News in Writing

Writing can be intrapersonal, between two people, group communication, public communication, or even mass communication. One distinct advantage of presenting negative news in writing is the planning and preparation that goes into the message, making the initial communication more predictable. When a message is delivered orally in an interpersonal setting, we may interrupt each other, we sometimes hear what we want to, and it often takes negotiation and listening skills to grasp meaning. While a written message, like all messages, is open to interpretation, the range of possibilities is narrowed and presented within the frame and format designed by the source or author.

The written message involves verbal factors like language and word choice, but it can also involve nonverbal factors like timing and presentation. Do you communicate the message on letterhead, do you choose the channel of e-mail over a hard copy letter, or do you compose your written message in your best penmanship? Each choice communicates meaning, and the choice of how you present your written message influences its reception, interpretation, and the degree to which it is understood. In this section we consider the written message that delivers negative news.

Let's consider several scenarios:

1. A community disaster such as illness (e.g., a swine flu epidemic, earthquake, wildfire, plane crash, or a terrorism incident).
2. An on-the-job accident with injuries or even death.
3. A product defect resulting in injuries, illness, or even death to consumers.
4. An unsuccessful product test (e.g., a new software system that isn't going to be ready for launch as planned).
5. A company merger that may result in reductions in force or layoffs.

In business communication we often categorize our communication as internal or external. Internal communication is the sharing and understanding of meaning between individuals, departments, or representatives of the same business. External communication is the sharing and understanding of meaning between individuals, departments, or representatives of the business and parties outside the organization. Across the five scenarios we'll consider each of these categories in turn.

The confirmation of swine flu (H1N1) may first occur with a laboratory report (itself a written document), but it is normally preceded by conversations between health care professionals concerned over the symptoms exhibited by patients, including a high fever, a cough, sore throat, and a headache. According to Sally Redman, a registered nurse at Student Health Services at Washington State University–Pullman, over two thousand students (of nineteen thousand total student population) presented symptoms on or around August 21, 2009.

Communication will predictably occur among students, health care professionals, and the community, but parents at a distance will want to know not only the status of their child, but also of the university. A written message that necessarily contains negative news may be written in the form of a press release, for example, noting important information like the number of students affected, the capacity of the health care system to respond, the experience to date, and whom to contact for further details and updates. This message will be read over and over as parents, reporters, and people across the country want to learn more about the situation. Like all business communication, it needs to be clear and concise.

Our next scenario offers a learning opportunity as well. An on-the-job accident affects employees and the company, and like our previous example, there will be considerable interest. There may be interpersonal communication between company representatives and the individual's family, but the company will want to communicate a clear record of the occurrence with an assurance, or statement that the contributing factors that gave rise to the situation has been corrected or were beyond the control of the company and its representatives.

In addition to a statement of record, and an assurance, the company will certainly want to avoid the implication or indication of guilt or culpability. In the case of a product defect resulting in injuries, illness, or even death to consumers, this will be a relevant point of consideration. Perhaps a voluntary recall will be ordered, proactively addressing the risk before an accident occurs. It may also be the case that the recall order is issued by a government agency. Again, a written statement delivering negative news, in this case the recall of a product that presents a risk, must be written with care and consultation of legal counsel.

If your company is publicly traded, the premature announcement of a software program full of bugs, or programming errors that result in less than perfect performance, can send the company's stock price plummeting. How you release this information within the organization will influence how it is received. If your written internal memo briefly states that the software program development process has been extended to incorporate additional improvements, the emphasis shifts from the negative to the positive. While the negative news, the delay of release, remains, the focus on the benefits of the additional time can influence employees' views, and can make a difference in how the message is received outside the organization.

The awareness of a merger, and the possibility of a reduction in force or layoffs, will be discussed along the grapevine at work, and will give rise to tension and anticipation of negative news. You could simply write a short memo "To All Employees," not include any contact information, and have an assistant walk around and place copies on everyone's chair or desk during the lunch hour. But let's look at the message this would send to employees. The written communication includes nonverbal aspects like timing and presentation as well as verbal aspects like language and word choice. The timing itself suggests avoidance of conflict, and a reluctance to address the issue with transparency. The presentation of a memo in hard copy form on your chair from an unidentified company representative will certainly cause confusion, may be mistaken for a prank, and could cause considerable stress. It will contribute to increased tensions rather than solidarity, and if trust is the foundation for all effective communication, it violates this principle.

Negative news may not be easy to deliver, but it is necessary at times and should be done with clarity and brevity. All parties should be clearly identified. The negative news itself should be clear and concise. The presentation should be direct, with authority and credibility. Communication occurs between people, and all humans experience concern, fear, and trepidation of the unknown. The negative news message, while it may be unwelcome, can bring light to an issue.

As we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, some people prefer their bad news to be direct and concise, while others prefer a less direct approach. Let's weigh the pros and cons of each approach. Table 4. "Direct and Indirect Delivery" contrasts the elements of the two approaches.

Direct Delivery	**Direct Example**	**Indirect Delivery**	**Indirect Example**
		Positive introduction	Thank you for your request for leave.
Negative news message as a introduction	Your request for leave has been denied.	Negative news message	We regret to inform you that your request has been denied.
Conclusion	Please contact your supervisor if you need more information.	Conclusion	Please contact your supervisor if you need more information.

The direct approach places the negative news at the beginning of the message, while the indirect approach packages the negative news between a positive introduction, sometimes called a "buffer" or cushion, and a conclusion. Your negative message may include the rationale or reasons for the decision.

The direct approach is often associated with a message where the audience values brevity and the message need to be concise. A positive introduction often introduces the topic but not the outcome. An effective negative news statement clearly states the message while limiting the possibility of misinterpretation. An effective closing statement may provide reasons, reference a policy, or indicate a procedure to follow for more information.

8.3. ELICITING NEGATIVE NEWS

How do you know when you are doing a good job? How do you know when, where, and how you could do a better job? What makes the difference between business or organization that is stagnant and one that is dynamic? Often the response to all these questions involves one key, but often overlooked, company resource: feedback. Feedback is the verbal and/or nonverbal response to a message, and that message may involve a company product or service.

Employee surveys, for example, may be completed online, in written form, in small focus groups, and can involve both oral and written communication. In the same way, customer satisfaction surveys may involve similar options and both provide a valuable opportunity to take a critical look at what we are doing, how it is perceived, and what areas we can identify for improvement. They often measure opinions, satisfaction, attitude, brand affiliation, preference, and engagement of customers and employees. In this section we will consider negative news as a valuable tool in self, team, company, product, and service improvement.

Across the years there have been extensive studies on how to improve businesses and companies, from Total Quality Improvement to the Six Sigma approach to excellence. Regardless of the theory, approach, or label, they all rest on a foundation of effective communication. One way that communication is often described involves customer relationship management, Bauer, J. E., Duffy, G.

L., & Westcott, R. T. (2006). *The Quality Improvement Handbook*. or the relationship between the organization (sometimes represented by the product or service itself) and the customer.

This leads us to our first point: who is the customer? You might be tempted to say the end-user, the purchaser, or the decision-maker, but customers are often categorized as internal and external. Employees themselves represent internal customers, and their relationship with the business, product, or service has value to the organization. External customers may include the end-user, but can also include vendors and related businesses that are part of the supply chain. This expanded, global view of communication and customer service relationships will guide our discussion as we explore ways to effectively elicit negative news, critical feedback, and praise for a job well done.

Positive news is part of feedback, and indeed the difference between positive and negative news often lies more in the interpretation of information than the information itself. For example, if a software product that your company has been testing for some time, scheduled for a release date in the near future, has failed several tests, the tendency to view the news as negative is understood. The fact that the problems and issues were identified prior to release, however, provides an opportunity to correct them before their impact is magnified by negative news in the press, customer rejection of an inferior product, and a diminished view of your brand, all of which could ultimately damage customer loyalty and even your stock value. The chain reaction doesn't stop there; these effects could in turn limit your ability to get additional financing as an organization, the perceived risk could elevate interest rates on your company debts, and this could reduce budgets across the organization, limiting the very research and development budget that gives rise to the new, innovative, or breakout products that will gain market share.

Viewed in this light, it could be a very positive development that the faults in the software were detected before release. In addition, by learning to view information in a dispassionate way, noting that there is more than one way to interpret much of what we gather as data, you as a business professional can enhance your ability to see new approaches to products or services.

Thomas Kuhn, author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996) states that communities operate on a set of beliefs. These beliefs form the foundation of the community, business, and organization. Employees and customers alike become socialized, learning the values, meaning, behaviors, cultural customs, expectations for excellence, and brand associations through interaction with the community. In business, we can clearly see the example of new employees becoming socialized into the company culture; they are training, learning about their jobs, and getting to know their coworkers.

We can also see how a customer interacts with a product or service, and comes to associate feelings, ideas, and expectations with a brand or company. This foundation or set of actualized beliefs becomes the norm or the status quo, and can become static or fixed. If a certain process is successful and an individual or company is rewarded, the process is often repeated. If a customer buys a certain product that works as they anticipate it will, they are more likely to make a similar purchase decision in the future.

Kuhn discusses research and the scientific method as a process that can affirm the status quo, but can also produce an anomaly, or something that doesn't fit, challenges the existing norm, or stands apart from the anticipated results. Kuhn, T. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3rd ed.). This anomaly can challenge the status quo, and may not be greeted with open arms. Instead, it may be ignored or dismissed as irrelevant, but nothing could be further from the truth. As Kuhn (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* notes, this outlying information that challenges the norm is precisely the necessary ingredient for a paradigm shift, or a change in overall view. The view itself can be as simple as the new awareness that a product has more uses than originally anticipated, or as significant as a new awareness of the brand and the company focus.

Is there a better way to produce a product? Is there a new feature that customers want? You'll never know if you don't ask, and you'll never improve or change if you don't listen to the feedback. One story that articulates this power of the anomaly, of unanticipated information that results in a change in view, involves a common business product. A research chemist for the 3M Company, Spencer

Silver, was used to trial and error as he pursued his goal of a new superglue. Kuhn, T. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. By mixing simple organic compounds in unusual ratios, he tried to create this super strong glue, but one result in particular was a spectacular failure. This particular result, a polymer, would stick to many surfaces, but it was also easy to remove, leaving no trace of itself. This odd substance was considered useless until Arthur Fry, a fellow 3M scientist, found a new use for it: removable paper notes that could be used to mark pages in his hymnal when he sang in his church choir. Minor modifications resulted in sample note pads that were passed around at 3M, and soon a new form of written communication and information organization was created: the now-famous Post - it brand note (3MCompany, 2009). Silver and Fry could have dismissed the negative result as a failure to reach the established goal of inventing a super glue, but by undergoing a paradigm shift, they revolutionized business communication. Learning to be open to information that challenges your views is a key business skill.

This now brings us to the question of how we elicit negative news, critical feedback, and assessment information. How do you learn more about the people around you? You watch, listen, and ask questions. Asking questions while watching, listening, and learning is the foundation of eliciting feedback. We can ask questions in interpersonal interviews, in small groups, and even large groups in person. We can use technology to help gather and process information, categorizing and classifying it. We can also create surveys with questions designed to elicit specific types of information.

Academic research often uses the terms “qualitative” and “quantitative” to categorize two types of information gathering. Qualitative research involves interactions, which by their very nature are subject to interpretation and, as a result, are less reliable and statistically valid. Their strength is in the raw data, the proximity to the source, and the possibility of unexpected results. The weakness in the results is often the inability to replicate the results the same way again. An example may be a focus group, where participants try a new beverage and report their experience in words and nonverbal expressions. By recording the group, we can replay and study their response to the new drink, and learn that many of the participants perceive it to be sour from their facial gestures. The written responses may not indicate this response to the same degree, and the recorded responses may portray a different story. If you replicate the focus group with new participants, you may very well have a different outcome.

Over time, patterns may emerge that produce reliable results, and indeed double-blind studies for many pharmaceuticals use a similar approach, but the number of participants has to be significantly increased while the confounding factors, or factors that can alter the results, must be anticipated and controlled. All of this involves a cost, and not every product, service, or study needs this type of investigation.

Quantitative research involves investigation and analysis of data and relationships between data that can be represented by numbers. The categorization and classification from the moment the investigation means that some aspects of the raw data will be necessarily lost in the process, but the information that remains will have a reliability and validity that compensates for this loss. Indeed, quantitative measures and representations of data are increasingly the norm in business communication, and are used to make decisions at all levels.

If your company produces automobiles, you may want qualitative information from potential consumers on their impression of the placement of the cupholders, but you will probably prefer quantitative information when it comes to engineering and safety. As you stress-test the steel in crash tests, assessing the force of the impact, the displacement of parts of the car as the crumple zones deform to absorb the energy, and the relative location of the crash-test dummy driver to the crush zone, you will measure it in terms of numbers. Each time your repeat the test, you should see similar results. If you don’t, you may need to test the welds and examine the production process to determine why there is an inconsistency. You may even need to test the steel itself to see if it is a materials issue, rather than a process and production problem. All this information would be measured in terms of numbers and symbols, representing velocity, tensile strength, and related factors.

Another factor in gathering feedback is confidentiality. Before you consider how to ask questions, you may want to consider to what degree you want identifying information in the process. If you are designing a campaign where employees submit suggestions to save the company money, increase production, or improve quality, and want to offer a financial incentive for ideas that are adopted, you will need to be able to identify the contributing employee for the reward. On the other hand, if you want a feedback system for employees to report coworkers who are under the influence or have substance abuse problems on the job, threatening the safety of all, then you would want an anonymous 1-800 number to give out, and to encourage its use by assuring employees that it carries no identifying markers.

Anonymous surveys can elicit information that would not be revealed otherwise, but they can also be a place for employees to vent, exaggerate, or invent responses. The validity is an issue, but the opportunity for insight may outweigh the risks. You can also provide an optional opportunity for the employee or customer to self-identify by providing a place where they could indicate contact information. A customer that completes a postpurchase survey may be offered a coupon if they register, and that contact information may be useful for follow-up contacts. Some customers will prefer, however, to write a direct complaint without identifying themselves. When designing a survey, brochure, or procedure to elicit feedback, you need to consider identification and anonymity.

In order to gather information, we often ask questions. For this application there are two types of questions: open and closed. Fink, A. (1995). *How to Ask Survey Questions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Open-ended questions allow for interpretation and a range of responses in the respondent's own words. Closed-ended questions limit the responses to a preselected range of options or choices. Your choice of open or closed questions depends on what type of information you plan to gather.

Open-ended questions may sound like the following:

1. What do you like about the product?
2. How was the service today?

3. How does the product make you feel?
4. What does our brand mean to you?
5. Why did you choose our product?

In each case, the question can be answered many ways, depending on the word choice of the respondent. The value is placed on the personal response and the range of data gathered may well be quite diverse, presenting challenge to categorize and group. Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no response.

Closed-ended questions, however, can be answered with a yes/no response. Here are five examples of closed-ended questions:

1. Have you purchased our product previously?

A. Yes

B. No

2.Why did you choose our product?

1. Price/low cost
2. Quality
3. Reputation
4. Previous experience

3. How was the service today?

A. Poor

B. Below

C. Average

D. Neutral

E. Good

F. Excellent

4. What do you like about the product? (Please indicate in rank order.)___

A.__Lowcost

B.___Quality

C.___Reputation

D._____Features

E. ___ Low maintenance

5. Please indicate the year you were born._________

The first closed-ended question is simply a closed question with its yes/no response options, but it is also an example of a categorical question. Categorical questions limit the responses to two categories. For example, you may ask a customer to indicate their sex in the response survey, allowing them to choose from two categories: male or female. Multiple choice questions allow for specific choices and limit the range of options. Likert Scale questions allow for the conversion of feelings, attitudes, and perceptions into numbers in a range. Ordinal questions request the respondent to rank order specific options. Numerical questions request a specific number, often a birth date or a serial number, that itself carries meaning. For example, age may be correlated to disposable income, and while the respondent may not be willing to respond to a direct question about their income level, they may be willing to indicate their year of birth.

To summarize the pros and cons of the two basic question types: open-ended questions are best when you want all possible responses in the respondent's own words. Closed-ended questions limit the responses to a few choices, and they can be categorized, placed in order, assess degrees of attitudes and feelings, and request specific information. Fink, A. *How to Ask Survey Questions* (1995).

8.4. CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

A rumor that the CEO is ill pulls down the stock price. A plant explosion kills several workers and requires evacuating residents on several surrounding city blocks. Risk management seeks to address these many risks, including prevention as well as liability, but emergency and crisis situations happen nevertheless. In addition, people make errors in judgment that can damage the public perception of a company. The mainstream media does not lack stories involving infidelity, addiction, or abuse that require a clear a response from a company's standpoint. In this chapter we address the basics of a crisis communication plan.

Crisis communication requires efficiency and accuracy.

FIGURE 2: © 2010 Jupiterimages Corporation © 2010 Jupiterimages Corporation

Focus on key types of information during an emergency: Mallet, L., Vaught, C., & Brinch, M. (1999). *The Emergency Communication Triangle*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh Research Laboratory.

- What is happening?
- Is anyone in danger?
- How big is the problem?
- Who reported the problem?
- Where is the problem?
- Has a response started?
- What resources are on-scene?
- Who is responding so far?
- Is everyone's location known?

You will be receiving information from the moment you know a crisis has occurred, but without a framework or communication plan to guide you, valuable information may be ignored or lost. These questions help you quickly focus on the basics of "who, what, and where" in the crisis situation.

8.4.1 Developing Your Crisis Communication Plan

A crisis communication plan is the prepared scenario document that organizes information into responsibilities and lines of communication prior to an event. With a plan in place, if an emergency arises, each person knows his or her role and responsibilities from a common reference document. Overall effectiveness can be enhanced with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for an effective and swift response. The plan should include four elements:

1. Crisis communication team members with contact information.
2. Designated spokesperson
3. Meeting place/location

4. Media plan with procedures

A crisis communication on team includes people who can

1. decide what actions to take,
2. carry out those actions.
3. offer expertise or education in the relevant areas.

By designating a spokesperson prior to an actual emergency, your team addresses the inevitable need for information in a proactive manner. People will want to know what happened and where to get further details about the crisis. Lack of information breeds rumors, which can make a bad situation worse. The designated spokesperson should be knowledgeable about the organization and its values; be comfortable in front of a microphone, camera, and media lights; and be able to stay calm under pressure.

Part of your communication crisis plan should focus on where you will meet to coordinate communicate and activities. In case of a fire in your house, you might meet in the front yard. In an organization, a designated contingency building or office some distance away from your usual place of business might serve as a central place for communication in an emergency that requires evacuating your building. Depending on the size of your organization and the type of facilities where you do business, the company may develop an emergency plan with exit routes, hazardous materials procedures, and policies for handling bomb threats, for example. Safety, of course, is the priority, but in terms of communication, the goal is to eliminate confusion about where people are and where information is coming from.

Whether or not evacuation is necessary, when a crisis occurs, your designated spokesperson will gather information and carry out your media plan. He or she will need to make quick judgments about which information to share, how to phrase it, and whether certain individuals need to be notified of facts before they become public. The media and public will want to know information and reliable information is preferable to speculation. Official responses help clarify the situation for the public, but an unofficial interview can make the tragedy personal, and attract unwanted attention. Remind employees to direct all inquiries to the official spokesperson and to never speak "off the record."

Enable your spokesperson to have access to the place you indicated as your crisis contingency location to coordinate communication and activities, and allow that professional to prepare and respond to inquiries. When crisis communication is handled in a professional manner, it seeks not to withhold information or mislead, but to minimize the "spin damage" from the incident by providing necessary facts, even if they are unpleasant or even tragic.

8.5. PRESS CONFERENCE

Holding a press conference when you are unprepared can feel like standing in front of a firing squad, where all the journalists are armed so no one will carry the guilt of the winning shot. It can make you nervous, scared, and reluctant to speak at all. It can take your fear of a misquote, or a stumble, or a misstatement replayed across the Internet thousands of times in the next twenty-four hours and make you wish for a blindfold and a cigarette, but that won't help. The way to calm your nerves is to be confident in your material. This section discusses the press conference, from preparation to execution (pun intended).

A press conference is a presentation of information to the media. It normally involves a written statement that is read exactly as written and is followed by questions and answers. The press conference normally requires a seasoned representative of the company or business with established credibility and integrity. It also requires a sense of calm in the confidence that you know your material, know how to tactfully say you don't know or don't wish to comment, and a sense of humor to handle the "gotcha" questions.

Press conferences can be held for positive news like the announcement of a new hospital wing that will increase the health care services available to the community. It can also be held to clarify information regarding the CEO's trip to Chile with an alleged mistress, the recent law enforcement sting operation on the illegal sale of controlled substances from the hospital, or to announce the layoff of employees as part of a reduction in force.

Positive or negative, your role as a speaker at a press conference is to deliver the prepared message and to represent the business or organization in a professional manner. You understand that there may be moments of tension, but you also know you have a choice in how to respond. First we'll examine preparation, then discuss the actual press conference.

You should have a good reason for holding a press conference. Wasting the media's time on a frivolous issue will only set you up for challenges later on. You should also have a brief prepared statement that you will read and restate if necessary. Today's press conference messages are often drafted by someone in public relations or media, and reviewed by legal counsel when warranted. If the task falls to you, keep it short and simple, addressing the following:

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- How?
- Why?

As a follow-up to why the press conference needs to occur in the first place, you need to consider the location. If it is a ribbon-cutting ceremony, the choice is obvious. If the announcement is less than positive, and you've been instructed by your supervisors or counsel to not offer additional remarks, you'll want a podium strategically located next to a stage exit. Your press release or invitation to the media will contain the time, date, and location of the press conference, and may contain a title or subject line as well as contact information for follow-up information.

As you prepare your background materials, learning as much as needed for the announcement, you may also want to consider using a moderator. Perhaps that will be your role as you introduce senior management to read the prepared statement. A moderator can serve to influence the process and redirect if questions go off topic or if a transition is needed. A moderator can also call a formal close the press conference and thank everyone for attending.

Finally, visual aids are an excellent way to reinforce and communicate your message. They need to be big, they need to be relevant (not just decorative), and (from a technical standpoint) they need to work. If they will be projected onto a screen, make sure the screen is available (not stuck), the laptop has power (as well as battery backup), the presentation or visual aid is on the laptop, and that the projector can and does project what you want it to. Don’t forget sound equipment if necessary, and make sure everything works the day of the presentation.

8.5.1 Holding a Press Conference

Someone should be designated as the greeter for the media. Be ready at least fifteen minutes before the scheduled time of the event. Provide each member of the media with a print copy of the actual statement that will be read before or after the event. If there is an element of surprise, you may want to hold the copies of the statement back until after the press conference has been concluded, but otherwise distributing them beforehand is standard.

The moderator opens the press conference with a welcome, indicates the purpose of the press conference and reminds everyone that there will (or will not) be an opportunity for questions following the press conference. The moderator introduces the spokesperson who will read the statement and welcomes him or her to the podium. The moderator may need to assist with sound equipment but otherwise stands back but near the speaker.

The speaker will read the statement. If there are to be no questions, the moderator will retake the podium and indicate that press kits, containing background material, fact sheets, the news release, sample photos, or related materials will be available; or simply indicate that copies of the press release are available at the back of the room. If there are questions, the moderator may still take the podium and outline ground rules for questions such as: they should pertain to the subject, be brief, and may or may not include follow-up questions. Members of the media will often ask a question and state that they have a follow-up question as a way of reserving two turns.

The moderator may indicate which member of the media is to ask a question, and typically they will stand and address the speaker directly. The speaker can take notes, but this isn't common. Instead, they should be aware that every movement is being recorded and that by maintaining eye contact, they are demonstrating that they are listening. They may reiterate the statement from the press release or refer to the background material, but should limit the scope of their response. Your team may have anticipated several questions and the speaker may have several sound bites ready to deliver. Visual media will want it visual, audio will want clarity, and print will want descriptive quotes. Meet the needs of your audience as you deliver your message.

Invariably the "gotcha" question, or the question that attempts to catch the speaker off guard, will be asked. "We're not ready to discuss the matter at this time," "When more information becomes available, we will let you know," "Our company has no position on that issue," or "We're not prepared to speculate on that issue at this time" are all common response phrases. Don't use "I think," "I believe," or "I don't know" comments as they invite speculation, and refrain from "no comment" if at all possible as it is increasingly perceived as if the company or representative is "hiding something."

You want to appear professional, knowledgeable, and credible—not as if you are sneaking or hiding something. Don't display a nonverbal gesture or make a face at a question, as this can also be misinterpreted. Keep your poise and balance at all times, and if you are the speaker and the question puts you off, establish eye contact with the moderator. Their role is to step in and they may move to the conclusion.

Never say anything you wouldn't want the world to hear, as microphones are increasingly powerful, video captures lips movement, and there will be a communication professional available to analyze your nonverbal gestures on the evening news. Being cool, calm, and collected is the best policy whether you are delivering positive or negative news.

EXERCISE 1

Your role as spokesperson is to write and present a prepared statement, and respond to no less than five questions. You will select one of the scenarios below based on your birth month, and prepare your statement. You are allowed to improve on facts, but should recognize that each scenario is serious and treat the assignment with professionalism.

1. January – Healthcare, Inc.

A hacker illegally accessed thousands of the new digital health care records on file with Healthcare, Inc. and posted them directly to the Internet in an early morning protest against invasion of privacy. The hacker has not been identified, but local law enforcement is on the scene investigating the incident and the offending Web sites have been taken offline. Your company has received hundreds of calls concerning the incident. The federal government required the conversion to digital records last year, and your company complied with the order. Your company used a government-approved vendor for a no-bid installation of hardware and software to secure the digital records. You represent Healthcare, Inc.

2. February – Educational Services, Inc.

Half the senior class in your private magnet high school cheated on the graduation exam, and the rest were apparently aware of the cheating, as were many of the parents. An employee, a secretary with several employee passwords, allegedly gained access to the exam before its release and provided the questions and responses to her son, who then provided it to his friends. The employee was often provided login names and passwords to facilitate records processing for several administrators when they were off site, often at conferences. Headquarters wants to minimize the publicity but cannot in good faith issue diplomas to students who cheated. The employee has been dismissed for conduct, and an investigation is underway, but graduation is next week and the evidence against the cheating seniors is clear. They won't be receiving their diplomas unless they pass an alternate version of the test that won't be ready for sixty days. Your present Educational Services, Inc.

3.March—Software,Inc.

Your company recently released its latest version of a popular business and industry software program. Programs always have a few bugs or problems upon release, even after the most rigorous laboratory testing, but this program is apparently infested with bugs. Stories are popping up across the Internet about how the program doesn't work, or specific features don't work, and your customer service team has been responding to customer complaints. The software designers report it is an exaggeration to say "infested," and point out that in all the trial tests it has worked perfectly. Your company is working on finding and addressing the issues, and is ready to create patch programs and issue refunds, if necessary, but wants to prevent a recall and a loss of consumer confidence. You represent Software, Inc.

4. April – Electric. Company, Inc.

An employee was consuming alcohol on the job and failed to adjust the voltage regulator. The voltage was increased by a considerable amount, causing several house fires, significant loss of property (appliances) and the death of an eleven-year-old child. The local media interviewed the employee's spouse who stated the employee was working a double shift, that they had called someone to relieve them, and no one came. Your company is investigating, but has no new information. You represent Electric Company, Inc.

5. May – Online Market, Inc.

An online marketplace company has been accused by law enforcement of knowingly allowing users to sell stolen goods on their Web site. Since the company never handles any of the goods themselves, and simply facilitates the exchange of goods between buyer and seller via the short-term creation of a Web page with text and images provided by the seller, the company denies all responsibility. You represent Online Market, Inc.

6. June – ABC Engineering, Inc.

A 4.2-million-dollar, two-lane bridge recently completed collapsed into the local Blue River, taking with it three vehicles. The loss of life included four men, three women, and one unborn baby. Local media has interviewed workers who indicated they were rushed to complete the bridge to get a bonus for the construction firm. The construction firm indicates that their internal investigation points to a faulty design, but the architects, engineers, and government inspectors deny the charge. You represent ABC Engineering.

7. July -Package Delivery, Inc.

A class-action lawsuit has been filed in federal court against Package Delivery, Inc. A group of employees, all female, allege sexual harassment and discriminatory promotion practices against the company. They cite photos and calendars of a sexual nature hung in the workplace and allege that male colleagues with less seniority were promoted ahead of the female workers. You represent Package Delivery, Inc.

8. August – Hamburgers, Inc.

Hamburgers, Inc. is pleased to announce a new menu practice where the nutritional information and the calorie counts will be prominently displayed, helping consumers make healthy choices from the menu. Your supervisors have heard that there may be representatives of the Cow Liberation Group (which advocates vegetarianism) and several nutritionists (who perceive the company has not done enough to improve its products) at the press conference.

Your present Hamburgers, Inc.

9. September – Headache Pills, Inc.

A person in New York died of cyanide poisoning, supposedly after taking a 200-mg Headache Pill made by your company. Your headache pills come in sealed, tamper-resistant packaging with child-proof protective caps. Some stores are voluntarily taking your product off the market. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has announced an investigation, and the family of the person who died has threatened to sue. You represent Headache Pills, Inc.

10. October – Maisy May Flower, Star Actress

You represent Maisy Mayflower as her spokesperson. She has recently returned from Bolivia where she adopted a two-year-old child. She already has three adopted children representing several countries. She is not married. Upon her return, a man claiming to be the child's father came forward to the media in La Paz, Bolivia protesting the adoption, and the U.S. media has picked up on it. It is all over the Internet. The Bolivian government issued a statement that while they cannot confirm the legitimacy of his claim, the father of the child did not present himself at court during the announced hearing, nor did he present himself in the six months preceding the adoption. The child was legally declared abandoned, and legally adopted.

You are present Maisy May flower.

11. November – Fast Food Restaurants, Inc.

A customer reported finding a severed human fingertip in soup purchased from Fast Food Restaurants, Inc. The soup and sandwich package were purchased at a Fast-Food Restaurant as a take-out order. Your company has several quality controls in place to prevent accidents like this. Local law enforcement is investigating. The customer has taken pictures and posted them all over the Web, and made both libelous and slanderous comments against your company in media interviews and blogs. The customer has never been an employee of Fast-Food Restaurants or its affiliates. You represent Fast Food Restaurants, Inc.

12. December-Congress man “Honest” Abe Johnson

The honorable Congressman from the State of Denial was apprehended in Ecuador for solicitation of a minor. The local media reports that a young girl approached him when he was with his traveling group and he offered to take a picture of her. The mother appeared, spoke to him, and slapped him in the face. She says the congressman offered her money for time alone with her daughter. The congressman stated to local law enforcement, according to a conversation with his spouse from jail, that all he did was compliment her on her daughter, something like “what a fine daughter you have,” in his best Spanish. You represent the Congressman.

8.6. MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1. What is the negative message technique?

Q 2. What do you understand by elicit negative news?

Q 3. What is ‘Press Conference’?

Q 4. How to develop crisis communication plan?

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UNIT 9 GROUP COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. INTRODUCTION

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.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to introduce the definitions of groups and teams. 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. Over the course of reading this unit, you will also be acquainted with how primary and secondary groups meet our interpersonal needs. 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. In this unit we shall also discuss how groups tend to limit their own size and create group norms. Further, in this reading you will be able to identify the typical stages in the life cycle of a group. You will also learn about different types of group members and group member roles.

1.3. WHAT IS A GROUP?

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. Humans naturally make groups a part of their context or environment.

1.3.1. Types of Groups

Groups may be defined by function. They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by the relationships within them. Groups can also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs. Some groups may be assembled at work to solve problems, and once the challenge has been resolved, they dissolve into previous or yet to be determined groups. 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.

Groups and teams are an important part of business communication. FIGURE 9.1.

Relationships are part of any group, and can be described in terms of status, power, control, as well as role, function, or viewpoint. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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.

1.3.2. Primary and Secondary Groups

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

In terms of problem solving, work groups can accomplish more than individuals can. People, each of whom have specialized skills, talents, experience, or education come together in new combinations with new challenges, find new perspectives to create unique approaches that they themselves would not have formulated alone. Secondary groups may meet your need for professional acceptance and celebrate your success, but they may not meet your need for understanding and sharing on a personal level. Family members may understand you in ways that your coworkers cannot, and vice versa. 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.

1.4. GROUP LIFE CYCLES AND 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. You came to be socialized, to experience the process of learning to associate, communicate, or interact within a group.

1.4.1. Group Life Cycle Patterns

Your life cycle is characterized with several steps, and while it doesn't follow a prescribed path, there are universal stages we can all recognize. In the same way, groups experience similar steps and stages and take on many of the characteristics we associate with life. 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. Tuckman's Linear Model of Group Development, shown in Table 9.2., 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 9.2 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.

Stages	**Activities**
Norming	Members establish spoken or unspoken rules about how they communicate and work. Status, rank, and roles in the group are established.

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. Individuals are initially tentative and display caution as they begin to learn about the group and its members.

If you don't know someone very well, it is easy to offend. Each group member brings to the group a set of experiences, combined with education and a self-concept. You won't be able to read this information on a nametag, but instead you will only come to know it through time and interaction. Since the possibility of overlapping and competing viewpoints and perspectives exists, the group will experience a storming stage, a time of struggles as the members themselves sort out their differences. 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. 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. 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. 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. Wise managers know how to celebrate success, as it brings more success, social cohesion, group participation, and a sense of job satisfaction. 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.

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.

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. 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.

1.4.2. 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 are proposed by Richard Moreland and John Levine in the book *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*.

Table 9.3 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 Web sites, talked to people currently employed at each company, and learned what you can from the public information available. At this stage, you are considered a potential member. You may have an electrical, chemical, or mechanical engineering degree soon, but you are not a member of an engineering team.

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

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

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

As a member of a new group, you will learn new customs and traditions.

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 are a full member of the group. Full members enjoy knowing the rules and customs, and can even create new rules. New group members look to full members for leadership and guidance. Full group members can control the agenda and have considerable influence on the agenda and activities.

Full members of a group, however, can and do come into conflict.

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

When this type of tension arises, divergent group members pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group. Divergent group members have less eye contact, seek out each other's opinion less frequently, and listen defensively. 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.

1.5. 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 has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure:

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 post sale 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 post sale 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 9.4 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	High	Medium	Difficult to select

Source	**Proposed Solution**	**Cost**	**Benefit**	**Comment**
	to taste edible products			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
	Incentive for postsale survey completion	Low	Medium	Make sure the incentive process is easy for the customer
Suri	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-	Medium	High	We already know customers want these

Source	Proposed Solution	Cost	Benefit	Comment
	selling edibles			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.

1.6. BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audio-Visual Interactions

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

If you are going to interact via audio and visual signals, make sure you are prepared. Appropriate dress, setting, and attitude are all required. The integration of a visual signal to the traditional phone call means that nonverbal gestures can now be observed in real time and can both 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 Web sites that gather a community of individuals dedicated to a common interest. From owner-enthusiast Web sites 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 is public relations, crisis communication plans, and inter-organizational interaction. Research into these areas often emphasizes the outcome, in terms of increased productivity and more effective strategic communication systems. 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.

1.7. TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

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 up on 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 gain 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.

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 form 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.

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. In the work, Small group and team communication, 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? In the work, *A passion for excellence: The leadership difference*, 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.

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1.12. MODEL QUESTIONS

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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? Discuss your answers with your classmates.

6. 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.

7. 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?

8. Consider again the problem you described in Question 7. In view of the seven-step framework, which steps did the group utilize? Would following the full seven-step framework have been helpful?

9. 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.

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