

Professional Communication (eTextbook)

Professional Communications OER

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1. Foundations of Professional Communication

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MODULE OVERVIEW

Module Chapters

The chapters in this module include:

- [Introduction to Communication](#)
- [Getting to Know Your Audience](#)
- [Choosing a Communications Channel](#)
- [Crafting Your Message with Plain Language](#)
- [A Picture Is Worth 1,000 Words: Using Visuals](#)
- [From Shotgun to Boomerang: Using Feedback](#)

Module Summary

The focus of this module is on establishing important foundational skills to address the complexities of communicating in the modern-day professional environment. Although work contexts and technology are continually changing, the key principles of communication remain the same and as relevant as ever.

By completing this module, you should understand how audience characteristics and choice of words and/or images affect the crafting of meaningful messages. You should learn how to choose an appropriate delivery method for your message and how to use



feedback to measure and improve its success. This module will stress key principles of professional communication.

You can apply the knowledge and skills developed in this module to a variety of communication contexts.

Relevance to Practice

Communication is key to your success—in relationships, at work, as a citizen of your country, and throughout your lifetime. Your ability to communicate comes from experience, and experience can be an effective teacher. This module, and the related communication course it is part of, will provide you with some experiences to help you communicate effectively in a professional context where change is rapid and you are expected to keep up. Whether you are (re-)entering the workforce or feel the need to brush up on your communication skills, this module should help you understand professional communication fundamentals that you can apply to your own context.

You did not learn to text in a day and did not learn all the shorthand—from LOL (laugh out loud) to BRB (be right back)—right away. In the same way, learning to communicate well requires you to observe and get to know how others have expressed themselves, then adapt what you have learned to your current task—whether it’s texting a brief message to a friend, presenting your qualifications in a job interview, or writing a business report.

Effective communication takes preparation, practice, and persistence. There are many ways to learn communication skills. The school of “hard knocks” is one of them. But in the business environment, a “knock” (or lesson learned) may come at the expense of your credibility through a blown presentation to a client.

This module contains a compilation of information and resources, such as readings, articles, activities, videos, and infographics, offering you a trial run that allows you to try out new ideas and skills before you have to use them in “real life.” Listening to yourself or perhaps the comments of others may help you reflect on new ways to present or perceive thoughts, ideas, and concepts. The net result is your growth; ultimately, your ability to communicate in business will improve, opening more doors than you might anticipate.

Learning Goals

Chapters within this eText centre on overarching learning goals. Goals are further described in terms of (a) specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to achieve the goals, and (b) specific learning outcomes that serve as evidence of achieving learning goals. The learning goals in this module are at an introductory level and are relevant to introductory communication tasks.

The learning goals for this module are that upon completing the readings and activities presented in this module, you should be able to do the following:

1. Analyze an audience for an intended message
2. Select an appropriate communication channel by analyzing the purpose of your message and the characteristics of your audience
3. Demonstrate the use of plain-language principles
4. Select and use/insert visuals to enhance communication
5. Use feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of a message

Developmental Attributes

Upon successfully completing this module, you should:

Understand the following:

- That good communicators choose a form and organizational pattern based on audience and purpose.
- That the choice of words, images, and medium sets a tone and defines a message.
- That feedback loops help communicators convey their message and clarify their thinking.

Know the following:

- Key principles of plain language communication
- The characteristics that define an audience
- The similarities and differences between several communication channels
- Principles that influence visual style
- The forms and function of message feedback

Be able to do the following:

- Tailor messages to the level, experience, and expectation of an audience
- Express and organize ideas clearly, concisely, and logically
- Incorporate graphics to help convey the intended message
- Select the channel(s) that best suit(s) the message
- Elicit feedback to measure the success of the message

Learning Outcomes for this Module

Upon successfully completing this module, you should be able to:

1. apply principles of plain language to produce professional communication that is effective and concise;
2. select appropriate types of visual aids to enhance the purpose or function of messages;

3. describe conditions for appropriate use of different feedback types and related tools;
4. outline characteristics of an audience using an audience analysis tool;
5. select appropriate channel(s) for workplace communication based on the audience and intended message.

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LEARNING MATERIALS

Introduction to Communication

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- describe the communication process and the eight elements of communication listed in this chapter, and

- categorize given premises as one of the eight elements of communication.

Topics

- Defining communication
- The communication process

Introduction

Think about communication in your daily life. When you make a phone call, send a text message, or like a post on Facebook, what is the purpose of that activity? Have you ever felt confused by what someone is telling you or argued over a misunderstood email? The underlying issue may very well be a communication deficiency.

There are many current models and theories that explain, plan, and predict communication processes and their successes or failures. In the workplace, we might be more concerned about practical knowledge and skills than theory. However, good practice is built on a solid foundation of understanding and skill. For this reason this module will help you develop foundational skills in key areas of communication, with a focus on applying theory and providing opportunities for practice.

Defining Communication

The word **communication** is derived from a Latin word meaning “to share.” Communication can be defined as “purposefully and actively exchanging information between two or more people to convey or receive the intended meanings through a shared system of signs and (symbols)” (“Communication,” 2015, para. 1).

Let us break this definition down by way of example. Imagine you are in a coffee shop with a friend, and they are telling you a story about the first goal they scored in hockey

as a child. What images come to mind as you hear their story? Is your friend using words you understand to describe the situation? Are they speaking in long, complicated sentences or short, descriptive sentences? Are they leaning back in their chair and speaking calmly, or can you tell they are excited? Are they using words to describe the events leading up to their big goal, or did they draw a diagram of the rink and positions of the players on a napkin? Did your friend pause and wait for you to comment throughout their story or just blast right through? Did you have trouble hearing your friend at any point in the story because other people were talking or because the milk steamer in the coffee shop was whistling?

All of these questions directly relate to the considerations for communication in this module:

1. Analyzing the Audience
2. Choosing a Communications Channel
3. Using Plain Language
4. Using Visual Aids
5. Evaluating Communication via Feedback

Before we examine each of these considerations in more detail, we should consider the elements of the communication process.

The Communication Process

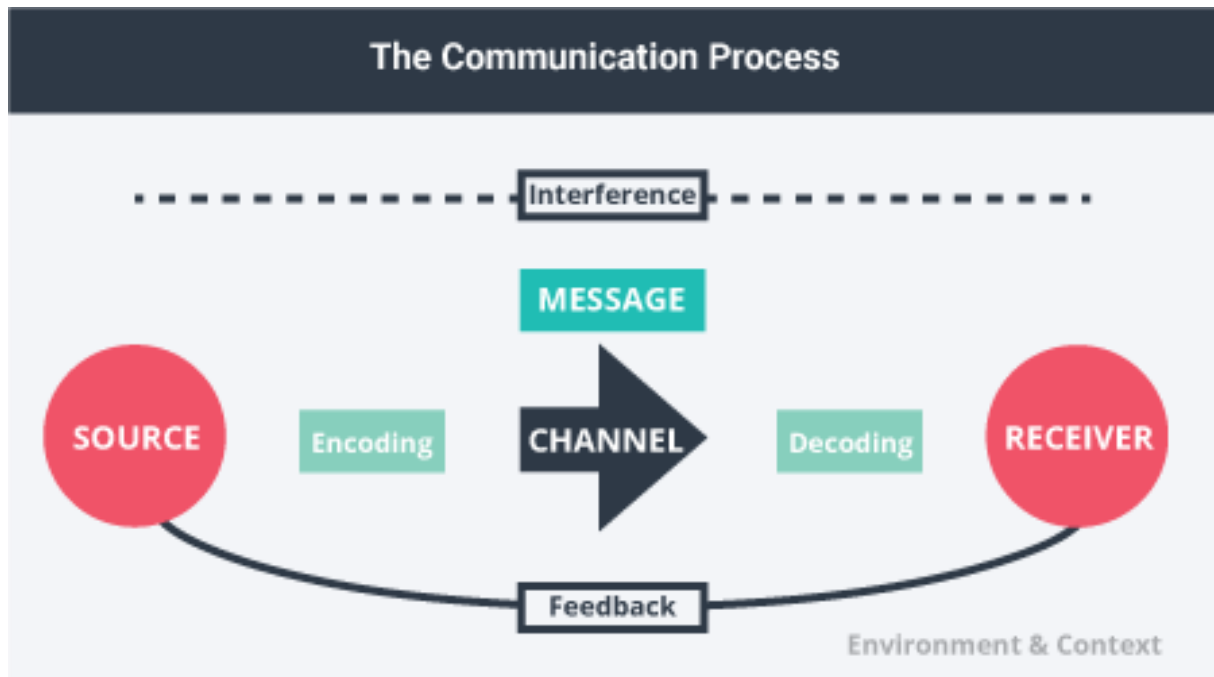


Fig. 1.1.1 The Communication Process by Laura Underwood

The communication process includes the steps we take in order to ensure we have succeeded in communicating. The communication process comprises essential and interconnected elements detailed in Fig. 1.1.1 . We will continue to reflect on the story of your friend in the coffee shop to explore each element in detail.

Source: The source comes up with an idea and sends a message in order to share information with others. The source could be one other person or a group of people. In our example above, your friend is trying to share the events leading up to their first hockey goal and, likely, the feelings they had at the time as well.

Message: The message is the information or subject matter the source is intending to share. The information may be an opinion, feelings, instructions, requests, or suggestions. In our example above, your friend identified information worth sharing,

maybe the size of one of the defence players on the other team, in order to help you visualize the situation.

Channels: The source may **encode** information in the form of words, images, sounds, body language, etc. There are many definitions and categories of communication channels to describe their role in the communication process. This module identifies the following channels: verbal, non-verbal, written, and digital. In our example above, your friends might make sounds or use body language in addition to their words to emphasize specific bits of information. For example, when describing a large defence player on the other team, they may extend their arms to explain the height or girth of the other team's defence player.

Receiver: The receiver is the person for whom the message is intended. This person is charged with **decoding** the message in an attempt to understand the intentions of the source. In our example above, you as the receiver may understand the overall concept of your friend scoring a goal in hockey and can envision the techniques your friend used. However, there may also be some information you do not understand—such as a certain term—or perhaps your friend describes some events in a confusing order. One thing the receiver might try is to provide some kind of feedback to communicate back to the source that the communication did not achieve full understanding and that the source should try again.

Environment: The environment is the physical and psychological space in which the communication is happening (Mclean, 2005). It might also describe if the space is formal or informal. In our example above, it is the coffee shop you and your friend are visiting in.

Context: The context is the setting, scene, and psychological and psychosocial expectations of the source and the receiver(s) (McLean, 2005). This is strongly linked to expectations of those who are sending the message and those who are receiving the message. In our example above, you might expect natural pauses in your friend’s storytelling that will allow you to confirm your understanding or ask a question.

Interference: There are many kinds of interference (also called “noise”) that inhibit effective communication. Interference may include poor audio quality or too much sound, poor image quality, too much or too little light, attention, etc. In our working example, the coffee shop might be quite busy and thus very loud. You would have trouble hearing your friend clearly, which in turn might cause you to miss a critical word or phrase important to the story.

Those involved in the communication process move fluidly between each of these eight elements until the process ends.

Conclusion

Now that we have defined communication and described a communication process, let’s consider communication skills that are foundational to communicating effectively.

Learning Highlights

- The goal of the communication process is to share meaning between a source and a receiver.
- There are eight essential elements in the communication process: source, message, channel, receiver, feedback, environment, context, and interference.

Check Your Understanding

Match each of the following premises with the appropriate essential element of communication.

Elements:

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

Premises:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A. Formal dress | I. A person rolling their eyes |
| B. Requesting a meeting | J. A person driving a car |
| C. Memorandum | K. Expectations |
| D. Outlining directions | L. A person giving a speech |
| E. An illustrator | M. Silence |
| F. Student in a lecture | N. Sound equipment |
| G. Multitasking | O. A person nodding |
| H. Voicemail messages | P. A noisy ceiling fan |

Tomás argues that existentialism is a waste of time. Billy does not understand what the word “existentialism” means, but he nevertheless responds to Tomás with the rebuttal that no human endeavour is a waste of time unless life itself is a waste too. According to the definition of communication presented in the reading, have Tomás and Billy communicated? Why, or why not?

- a) Yes, because they exchanged messages.
- b) Yes, because Billy’s response completed the process of communication.
- c) No, because the exchange lacked understanding and lacked shared meaning.
- d) No, because the exchange represented an incomplete process.

What is the difference between the environment and the context as elements in the process of communication?

- a) The environment includes the place and time when the communication takes place; the context is the way the speaker phrases the message.

- b) The environment includes the mood of the audience and the room where the speech takes place. The context includes the audience's expectations.
- c) The environment includes the physical and psychological characteristics of where the speech takes place. The context involves the expectations of the audience.
- d) The environment includes the prior knowledge and expectations of the audience. The context involves where the communication is taking place and the communication channel used.

Sanjay and Eileen are planning a fundraising event. Eileen prepares a timeline of activities and emails it to Sanjay for approval before she proceeds. Unfortunately, the email gets deposited into Sanjay's "junk mail" folder instead of his inbox, so Sanjay never responds to it. As a result, their fundraising plans are delayed. Which of the essential elements of communication identified in the reading were the sources of the problem that Sanjay and Eileen encountered?

- a) The message (the timeline) and the channel (email)
- b) The source (Eileen) and the receiver (Sanjay)
- c) The channel (email) and the context (Eileen's expectation of an answer from Sanjay)
- d) The context (Eileen's expectation of an answer from Sanjay) and the interference (the email system's email routing error)
- e) The receiver (Sanjay) and the feedback (Sanjay's failure to respond)

Regardless of whether a student is listening to the recording of a lecture or reading another student's notes on that lecture, which of the following can represent the communication environment?

- a) The student is on a bus headed back to their dorm room.
- b) Because they are worried about paying their rent, the student is unable to concentrate on the material.
- c) The lecturer is a very good speaker.

d) The lecture is lengthy and complex.

References

McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Communication. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>.

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Getting to Know Your Audience

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- categorize specific elements of a given communication scenario to the stages of the acronym AUDIENCE,
- write a complete audience analysis detailing each part of AUDIENCE for a given communication scenario by briefly describing the purpose of a communication and the characteristics of an audience,
- write a complete audience analysis detailing each part of AUDIENCE for a specific communication task (e.g., letter writing, presentation, etc.).

Topics

- Getting to know your audience
- Identifying your primary, secondary, and hidden audiences
- Audience needs, demographics, and characteristics
- Purpose of messages (to persuade, inform, entertain)
- AUDIENCE acronym (tool)

Framing the Audience Analysis

The communications landscape changes rapidly over time, but one criterion for successful communication remains the same: the importance of knowing who your

audience is and understanding their needs. Imagine you want to give a presentation to people in your department at work. You likely know your colleagues' personalities and what they expect of you. You might know their education levels and you are sure they understand all of your company-specific jargon. You think delivering your message should be easy, except many of them are so comfortable with you, they decide to skip your presentation because you took for granted that they would be interested. On the other hand, if you had to present to the board of directors, you might need to do more homework on who they are and what they expect from you. In other words, it is always important to get to know your audience as much as possible to give yourself the best chance at communicating successfully.

In this chapter you will begin to examine differences between primary, secondary, and hidden audiences. Then, using the AUDIENCE acronym as a tool, you will participate in activities that will help you flesh out information you need to know about your audience in order to persuade, inform, or entertain them. You will have at least three chances to practise your audience analysis skills and get peer feedback. Then, near the end of this chapter, you will craft a message that considers your audience's needs and expectations. This process will lay the foundation for you to become a communicator who is effective in persuading, informing, or entertaining an audience because you have done your best work in getting to know them, their needs, and expectations first.

Identifying your Primary, Secondary, and Hidden Audiences

Your audience is the person or people you want to communicate with. By knowing more about them (their wants, needs, values, etc.), you are able to better craft your message so that they will receive it the way you intended.

Your success as a communicator partly depends on how well you can tailor your message to your audience.

Your **primary audience** is your intended audience; it is the person or people you have in mind when you decide to communicate something. However, when analyzing your audience you must also beware of your **secondary audience**. These are other people you could reasonably expect to come in contact with your message. For example, you might send an email to a customer, who, in this case, is your primary audience, and copy (cc:) your boss, who would be your secondary audience. Beyond these two audiences, you also have to consider your **hidden audience**, which are people who you may not have intended to come in contact with your audience (or message) at all, such as a colleague who gets a forwarded copy of your email.

Check Your Understanding

What is a primary audience?

What is a secondary audience?

What is a hidden audience?

What are explicit expectations?

What are implicit expectations?

A Tool for Analyzing Your Audience

To help you get to know your audience even more, we will begin by working through a set of steps that, together, spell the acronym **AUDIENCE**. These steps will give you an idea of what questions to ask and what information can be useful in better connecting with your audience.

A = **Analyze**. Who is/are the recipients of your message?

U = **Understand**. What is their knowledge about your intended message?

D = **Demographics**. What is their age, gender, education level, position?

I = **Interest**. What is their level of interest/investment in your message (What's in it for them?)

E = **Environment**. What setting/reality is your audience immersed in, and what is your relationship to it? What is their likely attitude to your message? Have you taken cultural differences into consideration?

N = **Need**. What information does your audience need?

C = **Customize**. How do you adjust your message to your audience?

E = **Expectations**. What are your audience's expectations?

These categories of information have been assembled into a job aid to help you conduct your very own [audience analyses](#). As you review the tool, list the traits that apply to you for each section. If you would like to expand this reflection, consider how you might fill this tool out with traits that apply to you in your personal life versus your worklife. What are some methods you might use to find out more about an audience? Do you use any specific words at work or at home that others do not always understand? List three of those words.

Now let us take a look at putting this tool to use in a scenario. Read the following [news story about an executive at a company](#) [<http://bit.ly/1Qyqdyy>]. Reflect on these questions regarding his email:

1. Who was the primary audience for his original email?
2. Who was the secondary audience?
3. Who was the hidden audience?
4. Assuming he did an audience analysis, was it effective? Why or why not?

5. What elements of AUDIENCE might he have considered in advance to get a better outcome?

Example:

To further answer the questions above, we can use the AUDIENCE form to analyze the audience in this scenario and provide a revised message.

Category of Analysis	Description/Notes
<p>Analyze Who will receive your message?</p>	<p>Primary: Yahoo employees working on the Daily Fantasy Football development team. Secondary: Other Yahoo employees. Hidden: Anyone the email could be forwarded to.</p>
<p>Understand What do they already know or understand about your intended message?</p>	<p>Primary: Understands the technical details of Fantasy football. Secondary: May have heard of the project. Hidden: Knows little of the technical details.</p>
<p>Demographics What is their age, gender, education level, occupation, position?</p>	<p>Primary: 20s, 30s, 40s, White/Asian male, educated with bachelors' or technical degrees and above; mostly IT developers. Secondary: Various ages, gender, mostly educated, and in various positions. Hidden: Likely an American resident</p>
<p>Interest What is their level of interest/ investment in your message? (What's in it for them?)</p>	<p>Primary: Very invested (I'm their boss!). Secondary: Mild interest if they like Fantasy football or the technology behind it. Hidden: Not very invested.</p>
<p>Environment What setting/reality is your audience immersed in, and what is your relationship to it? What is their likely attitude to your message? Have you taken cultural differences into consideration?</p>	<p>Primary: Developer setting. Can speak the same IT and corporate culture jargon. Likely to be open to my message because of my position. Secondary: Corporate setting;</p>

	<p>professionalism expected because of my position. Some may find it funny, others may find it offensive. There may be different corporate cultures in different departments.</p> <p>Hidden: Could be anyone in the world. Some Americans might find it offensive, others might find it funny. Could potentially include Ice Cube, or other Black people.</p>
<p>Need</p> <p>What information does your audience need? How will they use the information?</p>	<p>Primary: Links to get others to participate in the contest staging.</p> <p>Secondary: Instructions on how to get to the staging area for the fantasy football preseason contest staging and explanation of deposit bonus.</p> <p>Hidden: Information consistent with what they already know about Yahoo’s brand values.</p>
<p>Customize</p> <p>How do you adjust your message to better suit your audience?</p>	<p>Primary: Revise to create a more professional tone by removing all references to Ice Cube, hip hop culture, and racially charged elements like Ebonics and the N-word.</p> <p>Secondary: Ensure the contest speaks to the widest variety of employees who can help test the system.</p> <p>Hidden: Ensure Yahoo’s brand is not damaged, by being above reproach.</p>
<p>Expectations</p> <p>What does your audience expect from you or your message?</p>	<p>Primary: Expects me to be professional and my message to be relevant to their work.</p> <p>Secondary: Expects me to be professional, be competent, and embody company values.</p> <p>Hidden: Expects me to be professional.</p>
<p>Revised Message:</p>	

Subject: Daily Fantasy Football goes live!

Greetings, folks.

Jerry here. I am proud to announce my team is now ready to bring you what you have all been waiting for: **Daily Fantasy Football!** Starting today, we are going to have NFL preseason contests on staging. Here is how to play:

- 1) On Desktop: [link](#)
- 2) On iOS: Download the latest dogfood app, which will point to the staging environment.
- 3) On Android: not yet available
- 4) Join the Daily Fantasy Football contest before **4 p.m. today:** [\[link\]](#)

Please join contests, create contests, invite your friends, and make sure to alert the team at [\[link\]](#) if you find any technical problems.

One more thing: The team is also testing out deposit bonuses! For every dollar you put in, we give you another dollar. If you signed up for Fantasy Football, we give you two dollars. It's easy money! When you spend money on a contest that runs, your deposit bonus becomes real money at a rate of 4 percent. That means, if you enter a \$1 contest, you get 4¢ from your bonus. So try that out and make sure your investment gets returns!

So let's go for the win-win. Play dogfood Daily Fantasy football so we can all have fun and make some money while we're at it.

Cheers,

Jerry

The Purpose of Your Message

When you communicate with an audience, you are normally trying to achieve one or more of the three following broad outcomes:

1. **Persuade** - convince your audience to do something or take some action
2. **Inform** - raise their awareness and/or understanding about a situation or issue
3. **Entertain** - capture their attention in order to distract and delight

Check Your Understanding

Match each of the following scenarios with the appropriate purpose of the message. Some scenarios may be applicable to more than one purpose.

Purpose of the Message:

1. _____ Persuade
2. _____ Inform
3. _____ Entertain

Scenario:

- A. An MC introduces the keynote speaker.
- B. You highlight a problem and offer your company's solution to that problem.
- C. A friend delivers a roast speech at your birthday.
- D. Your friend sends you a YouTube cat video.
- E. An Ikea furniture assembly booklet.
- F. A commercial about the dangers of texting and driving during a zombie apocalypse.

Here are two possible use cases where analyzing your audience will help you improve your communication:

1. You can complete an analysis to make sure you understand your audience comprehensively before you begin crafting your message. This ensures your message has the best chance at landing properly with your audience.
2. Take an existing message and use your analysis to better customize the message.

Can you think of others? In both of our suggested use cases, the AUDIENCE tool provides a framework to identify key factors you should consider when creating, revising, or reviewing communications.

Check Your Understanding

Below you will find three scenarios that you can use to practise your ability to identify your audience. Using this [Audience Analysis Form](#), complete an audience analysis for each of the three scenarios below. Compare your results with those of your peers or classmates.

Scenario 1: *Persuade*

You have the opportunity to scuba dive off of Yap Island in Micronesia with a team of ecologists, an activity that will also help your education objectives to study marine biology. The problem is you don't have the money to do it, but you believe you can raise the money by participating in a fundraising event. You want to persuade the people in your social circle who you think would sponsor you. The five people you immediately think of are your wealthy grandparents, whom you have not called in over two years; two friends from elementary school you are still somewhat close to and have high-paying jobs; and your mom, who will do anything for you but struggles a bit financially since losing her job five years ago.

Scenario 2: *Inform*

You work in a medium-sized two-storey building where about 150 people work at the company ACME Inc. Fifty people make up a mobile salesforce, and they are in and out of the office all the time, always on their smartphones. Another 50 people have flexible work arrangements and do a lot of work from home. Another 25 people do call-centre work and are usually on their headsets and on computers solving client

problems. You are the person responsible for communicating safety issues, and your boss asks you to inform everyone in the building about an upcoming fire alarm testing procedure. Your boss explains that the last time this testing was done, several people complained about not having been informed in advance about the alarms and had difficulty doing business because of the noise.

Scenario 3: *Entertain*

Your boss selects you to be the master of ceremonies for your company’s upcoming 50th anniversary celebration. You find out that the ceremony will be attended by international dignitaries; local politicians; and the board of directors; as well as most of the company’s 50 employees—largely middle-aged engineers and some disgruntled support staff, mostly in their 20s, who believe they are being underpaid.

Conclusion

In this chapter you have learned what an audience is and why an awareness of your audience’s needs and expectations is important to communicating your intended message.

You learned to define primary, secondary, and hidden audiences, and thought about ways to persuade, inform, and/or entertain them. You also used the AUDIENCE tool to examine an audience and begin to recognize when the audience and message are mismatched.

You should now be able to create messages that more effectively match your objective to successfully persuade, inform, or entertain. You are also well-positioned to get more practice and/or move on to the next module topic.

Learning Highlights

- When you craft a message, it is important to (1) distinguish between your primary and secondary audiences and (2) identify a potentially hidden audience for your message.
- To better understand your audience and plan your communications, you can use the AUDIENCE job aid to reveal audience characteristics that either facilitate or impede the communication of a message.
- There are generally three purposes of a message:
 - to persuade
 - to inform
 - to entertain

Check Your Understanding

Read each of the premises below and match each one to the appropriate place within the AUDIENCE job aid for that information.

AUDIENCE Category:

1. _____ Analyze
2. _____ Understand
3. _____ Demographics
4. _____ Interest
5. _____ Environment

Premises:

- A. 20- to 30-year-olds in their first year of college.
- B. You need to rewrite a message without jargon.
- C. Prior to a meeting, an agenda will be circulated.
- D. You identify co-workers and others in the organization.
- E. The event will count toward continuing education credits.

6. _____ Needs

F. The place, date, and time of an event.

7. _____ Customize

G. A noisy coffee shop.

8. _____ Expectations

H. An employee with vast experience with the topic.

It is the end of the day, and your audience is eager to go home. As you begin your presentation, what element in the communication process can you adjust to get their attention?

- a) The environment
- b) The message
- c) The interference
- d) The receiver
- e) The source

Which of the following would be an effective customization because it creates common ground between communicator and audience?

- a) An adult warns teenagers about the dangers of drinking and driving.
- b) A teenager tells a group of parents the story of another teenager who tried to divorce her parents because they would not let her stay out late on Saturday nights.
- c) A supervisor tells line workers about the time he fell asleep on the line and almost got fired.
- d) A doctor shocks a group of medical students with images of gunshot wounds to the head.

Which of the following is the most difficult communication barrier to anticipate?

- a) Using words that contribute to poor grammar
- b) Using words that exhibit poor spelling
- c) Using words that can be misinterpreted culturally or contextually

- d) Using words that make the presentation distracting
- e) Using words that are delivered in an inappropriate format

Laetitia is representing a solar-panel company at a home builders' convention. Her job is to explain to builders how easy it is to install rooftop solar panels so they will recommend the product to their clients. What is the general purpose of Laetitia's presentation?

- a) To inform
- b) To persuade
- c) To demonstrate
- d) To entertain
- e) To perform a ritual

Which of the following is NOT a general purpose for communicating a message?

- a) To inform
- b) To persuade
- c) To entertain
- d) To comment

Further Reading and Links

- YouTube video about audience analysis to prepare for a speech or other verbal presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQ3wJ2A_4UI
- Audience Analysis web page by David McMurray with a focus on Technical Writing. Provides good guidance on how to effectively adapt (customize) your message to suit your audience.
<https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/aud.html>

- Article about getting to know less obvious elements of your audience, such as culture and thought patterns. The focus here is on presentation and provides good activities at the end to test your knowledge using individual and peer exercises.

<http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/communication-for-business-success/s07-04-getting-to-know-your-audience.html>

- Supplementary information for primary, secondary, and hidden audiences, along with more information about the AUDIENCE tool, can be found here: [Audience Analysis: Primary, Secondary and Hidden Audiences](#)

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Choosing a Communications Channel

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- categorize specific elements of a given communication scenario as verbal, non-verbal, written, and/or digital;
- determine, based on the richness of the communication, if the appropriate communication channel was implemented for a given communication scenario;
- recommend the most appropriate channel(s) for a given communication scenario

Topics

- Principle communication channels
- Information richness
- Internal communication channels
- External communication channels

Introduction

The channel, or medium, used to communicate a message affects how the audience will receive the message. **Communication channels** can refer to the methods we use to communicate as well as the specific tools we use in the communication process. In this chapter we will define communication channels as a medium for communication, or the passage of information. In this chapter we will discuss the principal channels of communication, as well as the tools commonly used in professional communication. We will discuss the pros, cons, and use cases for each tool and channel, because, in a professional context, the decision about which channel to use can be a critical one.

Communication Channels

Communication channels can be categorized into three principal channels: (1) **verbal**, (2) **written**, and (3) **non-verbal**. Each of these communications channels have different strengths and weaknesses, and oftentimes we can use more than one channel at the same time.

Verbal Communication

Most often when we think of communication, we might imagine two or more people speaking to each other. This is the largest aspect of verbal communication: speaking and listening. The source uses words to code the information and speaks to the receiver, who then decodes the words for understanding and meaning. One example of

interference in this channel is choice of words. If the source uses words that are unfamiliar to the receiver, there is a chance they will miscommunicate the message or not communicate at all. The formality of vocabulary choice is another aspect of the verbal channel. In situations with friends or close co-workers, for example, you may choose more casual words, in contrast to words you would choose for a presentation you are making to your supervisors. In the workplace the primary channel of communication is verbal, much of this communication being used to coordinate with others, problem solve, and build collegiality.

Tone

One element of verbal communication is tone. A different tone can change the perceived meaning of a message. Table 1.3.1, “Don’t Use That Tone with Me!” demonstrates just how true that is. If we simply read these words without the added emphasis, we would be left to wonder, but the emphasis shows us how the tone conveys a great deal of information. Now you can see how changing one’s tone of voice can incite or defuse a misunderstanding.

Placement of Emphasis	Meaning
I did not tell John you were late.	Someone else told John you were late.
I <i>did not</i> tell John you were late.	This did not happen.
I did not <i>tell</i> John you were late.	I may have implied it.
I did not tell <i>John</i> you were late.	But maybe I told Sharon and José.
I did not tell John <i>you</i> were late.	I was talking about someone else.

I did not tell John you <u>were</u> late.	I told him you still are late.
I did not tell John you were <u>late</u> .	I told him you were attending another meeting.

Table 1.3.1 Don't Use That Tone with Me!

Based on Kiely, M. (1993)

Non-Verbal Communication

What you say is a vital part of any communication, but what you don't say can be even more important. Research also shows that 55 percent of in-person communication comes from non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, body stance, and smell. According to one study, only 7 percent of a receiver's comprehension of a message is based on the sender's actual words; 38 percent is based on **paralanguage** (the tone, pace, and volume of speech), and 55 percent is based on non-verbal cues such as body language (Mehrabian, 1981).

Research shows that non-verbal cues can also affect whether you get a job offer. Judges examining videotapes of actual applicants were able to assess the social skills of job candidates with the sound turned off. They watched the rate of gesturing, time spent talking, and formality of dress to determine which candidates would be the most successful socially on the job (Gifford, Ng, and Wilkinson, 1985). For this reason, it is important to consider how we appear in the professional environment as well as what we say. Our facial muscles convey our emotions. We can send a silent message without saying a word. A change in facial expression can change our emotional state. Before an interview, for example, if we focus on feeling confident, our face will convey that confidence to an interviewer. Adopting a smile (even if we are feeling stressed) can reduce the body's stress levels.

Body Language



Generally speaking, simplicity, directness, and warmth convey sincerity, and sincerity is key to effective communication. A firm handshake given with a warm, dry hand is a great way to establish trust. A weak, clammy handshake conveys a lack of trustworthiness. Gnawing one's lip conveys uncertainty. A direct smile conveys confidence. All of this is true across North America. However, in other cultures the same firm handshake may be considered aggressive and untrustworthy. It helps to be mindful of cultural context when interpreting or using body language.

Smell

Smell is an often overlooked but powerful non-verbal communication method. Take the real estate agent who sprinkles cinnamon in boiling water to mimic the smell of baked goods in her homes, for example. She aims to increase her sales by using a smell to create a positive emotional response that invokes a warm, homelike atmosphere for her clients. As easy as it is for a smell to make someone feel welcome, the same smell may be a complete turnoff to someone else. Some offices and workplaces in North America ban the use of colognes, perfumes, or other fragrances to aim for a scent-free work environment (some people are allergic to such fragrances). It is important to be mindful that using a strong smell of any kind may have an uncertain effect, depending on the people, culture, and other environmental norms.

Eye Contact

In business, the style and duration of eye contact people consider appropriate varies greatly across cultures. In the United States, looking someone in the eye (for about a second) is considered a sign of trustworthiness.

Facial Expressions

The human face can produce thousands of different expressions. Experts have decoded these expressions as corresponding to hundreds of different emotional states (Ekman,

Friesen, and Hager, 2008). Our faces convey basic information to the outside world. Happiness is associated with an upturned mouth and slightly closed eyes; fear, with an open mouth and wide-eyed stare. Flitting (“shifty”) eyes and pursed lips convey a lack of trustworthiness. The effect facial expressions have on conversation is instantaneous. Our brains may register them as “a feeling” about someone’s character.

Posture

The position of our body relative to a chair or another person is another powerful silent messenger that conveys interest, aloofness, professionalism—or lack thereof. Head up, back straight (but not rigid) implies an upright character. In interview situations, experts advise mirroring an interviewer’s tendency to lean in and settle back in her seat. The subtle repetition of the other person’s posture conveys that we are listening and responding.

Written

In contrast to verbal communications, written professional communications are textual messages. Examples of written communications include memos, proposals, emails, letters, training manuals, and operating policies. They may be printed on paper, handwritten, or appear on the screen. Normally, a verbal communication takes place in real time. Written communication, by contrast, can be constructed over a longer period of time. Written communication is often **asynchronous** (occurring at different times). That is, the sender can write a message that the receiver can read at any time, unlike a conversation that transpires in real time. There are exceptions, however; for example, a voicemail is a verbal message that is asynchronous. Many jobs involve some degree of writing. Luckily, it is possible to learn to write clearly (more on this in the Plain Language chapter and the writing module).

Digital Communication Channels

The three **principal communication channels** can be used “in the flesh” and in digital formats. Digital channels extend from face-to-face to video conferencing, from written memos to emails, and from speaking in person to using telephones. The digital channels retain many of the characteristics of the principal channels but influence different aspects of each channel in new ways. The choice between analog and digital can affect the environment, context, and interference factors in the communication process.

Check Your Understanding

True/False

Gestures are a form of non-verbal communication. **True** **False**

Speech is a form of verbal communication. **True** **False**

Writing is a category of communication channels. **True** **False**

Information Richness

Information richness refers to the amount of sensory input available during a communication. For example, speaking to a colleague in a monotone voice with no change in pacing or gestures does not make for a very rich experience. On the other hand, if you use gestures, tone of voice, pace of speech, etc., to communicate meaning beyond the words themselves, you facilitate a richer communication. Channels vary in their information richness. Information-rich channels convey more non-verbal information. For example, a face-to-face conversation is richer than a phone call, but a phone call is richer than an email. Research shows that effective managers tend to use more information-rich communication channels than do less effective managers (Allen and Griffeth, 1997; Fulk and Body, 1991; Yates and Orlikowski, 1992). The figure below

illustrates the information richness of different information channels.

Channel	Information Richness
Face-to-face conversation	High
Videoconferencing	High
Telephone	High
Email	Medium
Mobile devices	Medium
Blogs	Medium
Letters	Medium
Written documents	Low
Spreadsheets	Low

Table 1.3.2 - Information Richness

Adapted from Daft and Lenge, 1984; Lengel and Daft, 1988

Like face-to-face and telephone conversation, videoconferencing has high information richness because receivers and senders can see or hear beyond just the words—they can see the sender’s body language or hear the tone of their voice. Mobile devices, blogs, letters, and memos offer medium-rich channels because they convey words and images. Formal written documents, such as legal documents and spreadsheets (e.g., the division’s budget), convey the least richness, because the format is often rigid and standardized. As a result, nuance is lost.

When determining whether to communicate verbally or in writing, ask yourself, *Do I want to convey facts or feelings?* Verbal communications are a better way to convey feelings, while written communications do a better job of conveying facts.

Picture a manager delivering a speech to a team of 20 employees. The manager is speaking at a normal pace. The employees appear interested. But how much information is the manager transmitting? Not as much as the speaker believes! Humans listen much faster than they speak.

The average public speaker communicates at a speed of about 125 words per minute. That pace sounds fine to the audience, but faster speech would sound strange. To put that figure in perspective, someone having an excited conversation speaks at about 150 words per minute. Based on these numbers, we could assume that the employees have more than enough time to take in each word the manager delivers. But that is the problem. The average person in the audience can hear 400–500 words per minute (Leed and Hatesohl, 2008). The audience has *more* time than they need. As a result, they will each be processing many thoughts of their own, on totally different subjects, while the manager is speaking. As this example demonstrates, verbal communication is an inherently flawed medium for conveying specific facts. Listeners' minds wander. Once we understand this fact, we can make more intelligent communication choices based on the kind of information we want to convey.

The key to effective communication is to match the communication channel with the goal of the message (Barry and Fulmer, 2004). Written media is a better choice when the sender wants a record of the content, has less urgency for a response, is physically separated from the receiver, does not require much feedback from the receiver, or when the message is complicated and may take some time to understand.

Verbal communication makes more sense when the sender is conveying a sensitive or emotional message, needs feedback immediately, and does not need a permanent record of the conversation. Use the guide provided for deciding when to use written versus verbal communication.

Use Written	Use Verbal
to convey facts	to convey emotions
to provide a permanent record	when you do not need a permanent record
when you do not need a timely response	when the matter is urgent
when you do not need immediate feedback	when you need immediate feedback
to explain complicated ideas	for simple, easy-to-explain ideas

Table 1.3.3 Written vs. Verbal Communication

Direction of Communication within Organizations

Information can move sideways, from a sender to a receiver—for example, from you to your colleague. It can also move upward, such as to a superior; or downward, such as from management to subordinates.

The status of the sender can affect the receiver’s attentiveness to the message. For example, a senior manager sends a memo to a production supervisor. The supervisor, who has a lower status within the organization, will likely pay close attention to the message. But the same information conveyed in the opposite direction might not get the same attention. The message would be filtered by the senior manager’s perception of priorities and urgencies.

Requests are just one kind of communication in a professional environment. Other communications, both verbal or written, may seek, give, or exchange information. Research shows that frequent communications with one’s supervisor is related to better job performance ratings and overall organizational performance (Snyder and Morris, 1984; Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska and Guly, 2003). Research also shows that lateral

communication done between peers can influence important organizational outcomes such as turnover (Krackhardt and Porter, 1986).

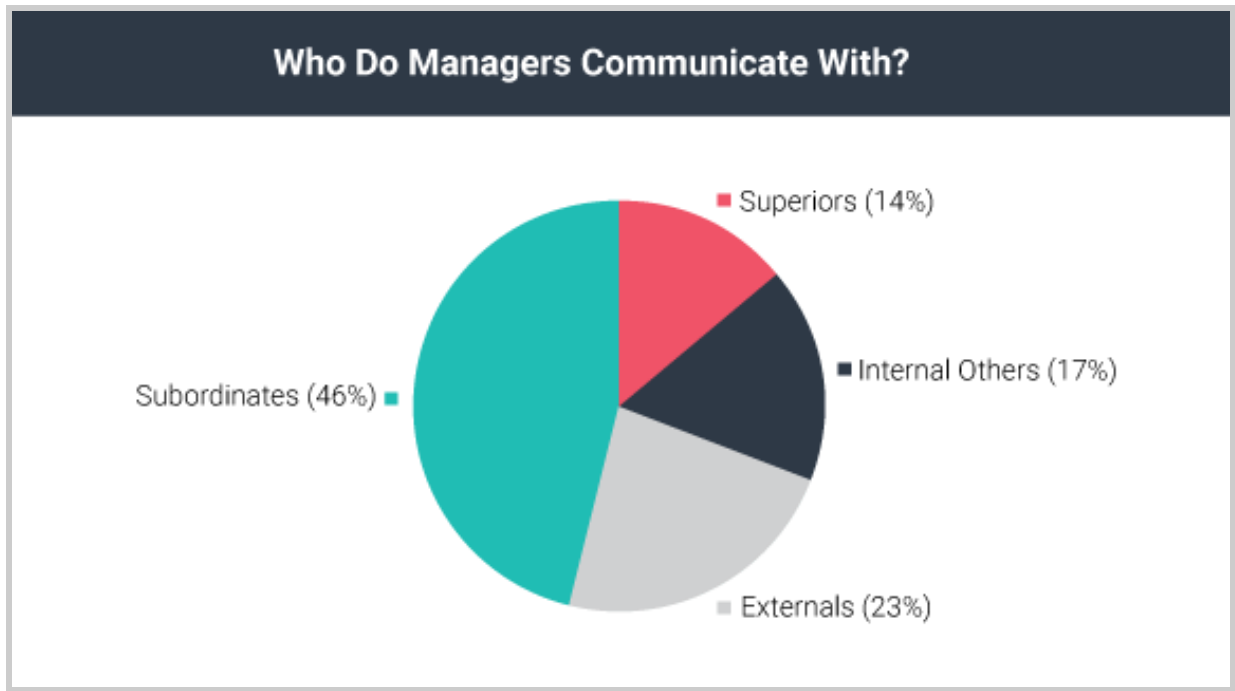


Figure 1.3.1 Who Managers Spend Time Communicating With at Work by Laura Underwood
Adapted from Luthans and Larsen, 1986

External Communications

External communications deliver messages to individuals outside an organization. They may announce changes in staff, strategy, or earnings to shareholders; or they might be service announcements or ads for the general public, for example. The goal of an external communication is to create a specific message that the receiver will understand and/or share with others. Examples of external communications include the following:

Press Releases

Public relations professionals create external communications about a client's product, services, or practices for specific receivers. These receivers, it is hoped, will share the

message with others. In time, as the message is passed along, it should *appear* to be independent of the sender, creating the illusion of an independently generated consumer trend or public opinion.

The message of a public relations effort may be *B2B* (business to business), *B2C* (business to consumer), or media related. The message can take different forms. Press releases try to convey a newsworthy message, real or manufactured. It may be constructed like a news item, inviting editors or reporters to reprint the message, in part or as a whole, and with or without acknowledgment of the sender's identity. Public relations campaigns create messages over time, through contests, special events, trade shows, and media interviews in addition to press releases.

Ads

Advertisements present external business messages to targeted receivers. Advertisers pay a fee to a television network, website, or magazine for an on-air, site, or publication ad. The fee is based on the perceived value of the audience who watches, reads, or frequents the space where the ad will appear.

In recent years, receivers (the audience) have begun to filter advertisers' messages through technology such as ad blockers, the ability to fast-forward live or recorded TV through PVRs, paid subscriptions to Internet media, and so on. This trend grew as a result of the large amount of ads the average person sees each day and a growing level of consumer weariness of paid messaging. Advertisers, in turn, are trying to create alternative forms of advertising that receivers will not filter. For example, The *advertorial* is one example of an external communication that combines the look of an article with the focused message of an ad. Product placements in videos, movies, and games are other ways that advertisers strive to reach receivers with commercial messages.

Websites

A website may combine elements of public relations, advertising, and editorial content, reaching receivers on multiple levels and in multiple ways. Banner ads and blogs are just a few of the elements that allow a business to deliver a message to a receiver online. Online messages are often less formal and more approachable, particularly if intended for the general public. A message relayed in a daily blog post will reach a receiver differently than if it is delivered in an annual report, for example.

The popularity and power of blogs is growing. In fact, blogs have become so important to some companies as Coca-Cola, Kodak, and Marriott that they have created official positions within their organizations titled Chief Blogging Officer (Workforce Management, 2008). The real-time quality of web communications may appeal to receivers who filter out a traditional ad and public relations message because of its prefabricated quality.

Customer Communications

Customer communications can include letters, catalogues, direct mail, emails, text messages, and telemarketing messages. Some receivers automatically filter bulk messages like these; others will be receptive. The key to a successful external communication to customers is to convey a business message in a personally compelling way—dramatic news, a money-saving coupon, and so on. Customers will think *What's in it for me?* when deciding how to respond to these messages, so clear benefits are essential.

Conclusion

Different communication channels are more or less effective at transmitting different kinds of information. Some types of communication range from high richness in information to medium and low richness. In addition, communications flow in different directions within organizations. A major internal communication channel is email, which

is convenient but needs to be handled carefully. External communication channels include PR/press releases, ads, websites, and customer communications such as letters and catalogues.

Learning Highlights

- To communicate effectively, we need to align our body language, appearance, and tone with the words we are trying to convey.
- Different communication channels are more or less effective at transmitting different kinds of information. Some types of communication are information rich while others are medium rich.
- Communications flow in different directions within organizations.
- A major internal communication channel is email, which is convenient but needs to be handled carefully.
- External communication channels include PR/press releases, ads, websites, and customer communications such as letters and catalogues.

Check Your Understanding

- True False Written communication works best when interaction is not required.
- True False Unlike personal face-to-face communication, messaging using digital channels requires more planning and thought in order to avoid misunderstandings.
- True False Because it is so prevalent today, email is a very good way to send important messages or messages that require immediate attention.

When you are careful to articulate your words as clearly as possible and use a vivid,

specific vocabulary, what aspect of communication are you focusing on?

- a) Environmental noise
- b) Psychological noise
- c) Interaction
- d) Verbal context
- e) Mental imagery

Which format would provide the most effective way for a supervisor to deliver a negative news message about an employee's carelessness on the job?

- a) Explain the problem in an email to the employee.
- b) Invite the employee to lunch and explain the problem then.
- c) Ask the employee to meet with you privately in your office.
- d) Leave a sealed note on the door of the employee's locker.

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Crafting Your Message with Plain Language

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- identify active and passive voice, jargon, positive and negative tone, and unnecessary words in written and oral communications;
- rewrite a given message while adhering to five principles of plain language: active voice, common words, positive tone, reader focus, and short (concise) words and sentences;
- proofread another student's work, or your own, with a focus on the five principles of plain language: active voice, common words, positive tone, reader focus, and short (concise) words and sentences.

Topics

- Active vs. passive voice
- Common words vs. jargon, slang, and euphemisms
- Tone
- Considering the reader
- Clarity and Conciseness

Introduction

No matter who your audience is, they will appreciate your ability to write using **plain language**. This is a key skill in any professional setting. Plain language writing—and speaking—will help you to get your message across clearly and concisely. This chapter will introduce you to the principles of plain language and allow you to practise them.

Principle 1: Use Active Voice

To communicate professionally, you need to know when and how to use either active or passive voice. Although most contexts prefer the **active voice**, the passive voice may be the best choice in certain situations. Generally, though, passive voice tends to be awkward, vague, wordy, and a grammatical construct you should avoid in most cases.

Recognizing Active and Passive Voice

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

Read these two sentences:

1. Matt Damon left Harvard in the late 1980s to start his acting career.
2. Matt Damon’s acting career was started in the late 1980s when he left Harvard.

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

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

The following sentences are in passive voice. For each sentence, identify

- the noun in the subject position,
- the form of the verb *to be*,
- the action verb, and
- the doer of the action.

Example 1:

The original screenplay for *Good Will Hunting* was written by Matt Damon for an English class when he was a student at Harvard University.

- The noun in the subject position is *Good Will Hunting*.
- The form of the verb *to be* is *was*.
- The action verb is the word *written*.
- The doer of the action is *Matt Damon*.

Example 2:

As an actor, Matt Damon is loved by millions of fans worldwide.

- The noun in the subject position is *Matt Damon*.
- The form of the verb *to be* is the word *is*.
- The action verb is *loved*.
- The doer of the action is *fans*.

Check Your Understanding

Decide whether each of the following sentences is active or passive.

- Matt Damon and Ben Affleck grew up together and are still colleagues and friends today.
- An Oscar was given to Matt Damon and Ben Affleck for the *Good Will Hunting* script.
- Jason Bourne, a character from the novels of Robert Ludlum, was played several times by Matt Damon.
- Besides acting in the *Bourne* movies, Matt also played the title character in *Good Will Hunting*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

Hint: You can figure this out by asking yourself, “Is the doer in the subject position paired with an action verb?” If you answer yes, the sentence uses active voice.

Using Action Verbs to Make Sentences More Interesting

Two sentences can say the same thing but leave a different impression based on the choice of verb. Which of the following sentences gives you the most vivid mental picture?

- A. A bald eagle was overhead and now is low in the sky near me.
- B. A bald eagle soared overhead and then dove low, seemingly coming right at me.

Most of us would agree that sentence B paints a better picture.

Try to express yourself with action verbs instead of forms of the verb *to be*. Sometimes it is fine to use forms of the verb *to be*, such as *is* or *are*, but it is easy to overuse them (as in this sentence—twice). Overuse of these verbs will make your writing dull.

Read each of the following sentences and note the use of the verb *to be*. Think of a way to reword the sentence to make it more interesting by using an action verb. Then look at the revised sentence for a suggested action verb.

Examples:

Original: A photo was snapped, the tiger was upset, and Elizabeth was on the ground.

Revision: Elizabeth innocently snapped the photo, and the lion let out a roar that sent Elizabeth scrambling backward until she tumbled down the hill.

Original: A giraffe's neck is long and thin, but it is as much as 500 pounds in weight.

Revision: A giraffe's neck towers far above its body and often weighs as much as 500 pounds.

Original: An elephant is able to drink 80 gallons of water and is likely to eat 1,000 pounds of vegetation in a day.

Revision: In one day, an elephant slurps down 80 gallons of water and munches away on 1,000 pounds of vegetation.

Note

A point of confusion that sometimes comes up when people discuss the passive voice is the use of expletive pronouns. A sentence with expletive pronouns often starts with "There is ..." or "There are" Many people mistakenly think that expletive pronoun sentences are a form of passive voice, but they are not.

To understand the difference, please read the “Avoid Expletive Pronouns” section under Principle 5.

Using Action Verbs Alone to Avoid Passive Voice

Even though the passive voice might include an action verb, the action verb is not as strong as it could be, because of the sentence structure. The passive voice also causes unnecessary wordiness. Read the following sentences and think of a way to reword each using an action verb in active voice. Then look at the suggested revision for each case.

Examples:

Original: The zebras were fed by the zoo workers. (eight words)

Revision: The zoo workers fed the zebras. (six words)

Original: Water was spewed in the air by the elephant. (nine words)

Revision: The elephant spewed water in the air. (seven words)

Original: The home of the hippopotamus was cleaned up and made tidy by Hank the Hippo Man. (16 words)

Revision: Hank the Hippo Man cleaned up and tidied the hippopotamus’s home. (11 words)

Writing in the Active Voice

Writing in active voice is easy once you understand the difference between active and passive voice. Make sure you always define who or what did what. If you use forms of the verb *to be* with your action verb, consider the reason for your choice. If you are

writing in progressive tense (“Carrie is walking to my house”) or perfect progressive tense (“Melissa will have been married for four years by then”), you will need to use helping verbs, even in active voice.

Using Passive Voice

Sometimes passive voice is the best option. Consider the following acceptable uses of passive voice.

1. When you do not know who or what is responsible for the action:

Example: Our front-door lock was picked.

Rationale: If you do not know who picked the lock on your front door, you cannot say who did it. You could say a thief broke in, but that would be an assumption; you could, theoretically, find out that the lock was picked by a family member who had forgotten to take a key.

2. When you want to hide the person or thing responsible for the action, such as in a story:

Example: The basement was filled with a mysterious scraping sound.

Rationale: If you are writing a dramatic story, you might introduce a phenomenon without revealing the person or thing that caused it.

3. When the person or thing that performed the action is not important:

Example: The park was flooded all week.

Rationale: Although you would obviously know that the rainwater flooded the park, saying so would not be important.

4. When you do not want to place credit, responsibility, or blame:

Example: A mistake was made in the investigation that resulted in the wrong person being on trial.

Rationale: Even if you think you know who is responsible for a problem, you might not want to expose the person.

5. When you want to maintain the impression of objectivity:

Example: It was noted that only first-graders chose to eat the fruit.

Rationale: Research reports in certain academic disciplines attempt to remove the researcher from the results, to avoid saying, for example, “I noted that only first graders....”

6. When you want to avoid using a gendered construction, and pluralizing is not an option:

Example: If the password is forgotten by the user, a security question will be asked.

Rationale: This construction avoids the need for the cumbersome “his or her” (as in “the user forgets his or her password”).

Check Your Understanding

Rewrite each of these sentences using an action verb in active voice:

1. The report was written by the director of sales.

2. The movie was enjoyed by all of us.
3. A safety presentation was given in the afternoon regarding workplace fire hazards by Mr. James.

Principle 2: Use Common Words Instead of Complex Words

Inappropriate word choices will get in the way of your message. For this reason, use language that is accurate and appropriate for the writing situation. Omit **jargon** (technical words and phrases common to a specific profession or discipline) and **slang** (invented words and phrases specific to a certain group of people), unless your audience and purpose call for such language. Avoid using outdated words and phrases, such as “Dial the number.” Be straightforward in your writing rather than using **euphemism** (a gentler, but sometimes inaccurate, way of saying something). Be clear about the level of formality each piece of writing needs, and adhere to that level.

Writing without Jargon or Slang

Jargon and slang both have their places. Using jargon is fine as long as you can safely assume your readers also know the jargon. For example, if you are a lawyer writing to others in the legal profession, using legal jargon is perfectly fine. On the other hand, if you are writing for people outside the legal profession, using legal jargon would most likely be confusing, and you should avoid it. Of course, lawyers must use legal jargon in papers they prepare for customers. However, those papers are designed to navigate within the legal system and may not be clear to readers outside of this demographic.

Examples:

Jargon: I need to hammer out this report by tomorrow.

Alternative: I need to type up this report by tomorrow.

Euphemism: My uncle is vertically challenged.

Alternative: My uncle is only five feet tall.

Principle 3: Use a Positive Tone When Possible

Unless there is a specific reason not to, use positive language wherever you can.

Positive language benefits your writing in two ways. First, it creates a positive **tone**, and your writing is more likely to be well-received. Second, it clarifies your meaning, as positive statements are more concise. Take a look at the following negatively worded sentences and then their positive counterparts, below.

Examples:

Negative: Your car will not be ready for collection until Friday.

Positive: Your car will be ready for collection on Friday.

Negative: You did not complete the exam.

Positive: You will need to complete the exam.

Negative: Your holiday time is not approved until your manager clears it.

Positive: Your holiday time will be approved when your manager clears it.

Avoid using multiple negatives in one sentence, as this will make your sentence difficult to understand. When readers encounter more than one negative construct in a sentence, their brains have to do more cognitive work to decipher the meaning; multiple negatives can create convoluted sentences that bog the reader down.

Examples:

Negative: A decision *will not* be made *unless* all board members agree.

Positive: A decision will be made when all board members agree.

Negative: The event *cannot* be scheduled *without* a venue.

Positive: The event can be scheduled when a venue has been booked.

Principle 4: Write for Your Reader

When you write for your readers and speak to an audience, you have to consider who they are and what they need to know. When readers know that you are concerned with their needs, they are more likely to be receptive to your message, and will be more likely to

- take the action you are asking them to and
- focus on important details.

Your message will mean more to your reader if they get the impression that it was written directly to them. When you sit down to write, either for a paper or a presentation, consider the audience analysis tool presented earlier in this module.

Then try to answer these questions in your writing with user-friendly language. Speaking directly to the audience using *you*-oriented language helps to personalize the message and make it easier to understand. Using the second-person pronoun *you* tells your reader that the message is intended for them. You might be inclined to use *he*, *she*, or *they* instead, but those terms are not as direct or personal. Using the pronoun *you* makes the message feel relevant.

Consider the following sentences:

1. Employees arriving at the Sands Hotel for the team’s day out should assemble in the lobby.
2. When you arrive at the Sands Hotel for the team’s day out, please join us in the lobby.

Which one is more inviting? Most people will find the second sentence more friendly and inviting because it addresses the reader directly.

Organize Your Document to Meet Your Readers’ Needs

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

Principle 5: Keep Words and Sentences Short (Conciseness)

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

Eliminating Repetitive Ideas

Unless you are providing definitions on purpose, stating one idea twice in a single sentence is redundant. Read each example below and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove repetitive phrasing. Then look at the suggested revision.

Examples:

Original: Use a very heavy skillet made of cast iron to bake an extra-juicy meatloaf.

Revision: Use a cast-iron skillet to bake a juicy meatloaf.

Original: Joe thought to himself, *I think I'll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.*

Revision: Joe thought, *I think I'll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.*

Removing Repeated Words

As a general rule, you should try not to repeat a word within a sentence. Sometimes you simply need to choose a different word. But often you can actually remove repeated words. Read this example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove a repeated word that adds wordiness. Then check out the revision below the sentence.

Example:

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

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

Rewording to Eliminate Unnecessary Words

If a sentence has words that are not necessary to carry the meaning, those words are unneeded and can be removed. Read each example and think about how you could revise the sentence; then check out the suggested revisions.

Examples:

Original: Andy has the ability to make the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

Revision: Andy makes the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

Original: For his part in the cooking class group project, Malik was responsible for making the mustard reduction sauce.

Revision: Malik made the mustard reduction sauce for his cooking class group project.

Avoid Expletive Pronouns (Most of the Time)

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

Now, if you remember, pronouns (e.g., *I, you, he, she, they, this, that, who*, etc.) are words that we use to replace nouns (i.e., people, places, things), and there are many types of pronouns (e.g., personal, relative, demonstrative, etc.). However, *expletive pronouns* are different from other pronouns because unlike most pronouns, they *do not* stand for a person, thing, or place; they are called expletives because they have no “value.”

Sometimes you will see expletive pronouns at the beginning of a sentence, sometimes at the end. Look at the following expletive constructs:

Examples:

(1) *There are* a lot of reading assignments in this class.

(2) I can’t believe how many reading assignments *there are!*

Note: These two examples are *not* necessarily bad examples of using expletive pronouns. We included them to help you first understand what expletive pronouns are so you can recognize them.

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

Examples

Original: There are some people who love to cause trouble.

Revision: Some people love to cause trouble.

Original: There are some things that are just not worth waiting for.

Revision: Some things are just not worth waiting for.

Original: There is a person I know who can help you fix your computer.

Revision: I know a person who can help you fix your computer.

While not all instances of expletive pronouns are bad, writing sentences with expletives seems to be habit forming. It can lead to trouble when you are explaining more complex ideas, because you end up having to use additional strings of phrases to explain what you want your reader to understand. Wordy sentences, such as those with expletive pronouns, can tax the reader's mind.

Example

Original: There is a button you need to press *that* is red and says STOP.

Revision: You need to press the red STOP button. *Or:* Press the red STOP button.

Of course, most rules and guideline have exceptions, and expletive pronouns are no different. In many cases common expressions, particularly if they are short, are not worth revising—especially in live communications such as presentations, lectures, and speeches.

Examples:

There is no place I'd rather be.

There are good days, and *there are* bad days.

There is no way around this.

How many ways *are there* to solve this puzzle?

The above sentences use expletive pronouns but are fine because they are short and easy on the reader's mind. In fact, revising them would make for longer, more convoluted sentences!

So when you find yourself using expletives, always ask yourself if omitting and rewriting would give your reader a clearer, more direct, less wordy sentence. *Can I communicate the same message using fewer words without taking away from the meaning I want to convey or the tone I want to create?* Practise evaluating your own writing and playing with alternative ways to say the same thing.

Note

Do not confuse **expletive pronouns** with **passive voice** (as also noted briefly in [Principle 1: Use the Active Voice](#)). Both expletive sentences and passive voice use forms of the verb *to be*, often result in wordiness, and sometimes obscure important

information, but they are not the same thing grammatically. The following example should help to clear up any mix-up between the two.

Example:

The following sentence uses **passive voice**:

- A few people *can be called* upon to help you.

It is passive because the subject of the sentence (*people*) are not the doers of the verb *called*. The active agent who will be “calling” is missing. Are *you* to call upon these people, or will someone else call upon them?

But the following example uses an **expletive pronoun** and is *not* in passive voice, because it has an active agent (*you*) doing the “calling”:

- *There are* a few people *you can call* upon to help you.

But even though passive voice and expletive constructs are not the same, it *is* possible—but rarely advisable—to write a sentence that uses both!

- *There are* a few people who *can be called* upon to help you.

The active agent doing the “calling” is, once again, missing; and the sentence starts with the expletive “There are.” What a convoluted sentence!

A better sentence that uses neither passive voice nor expletive pronouns would be:

- You can call upon a few people to help you.

Ah! Much better!

Check Your Understanding

Rewrite the following sentences, eliminating unnecessary words. (You may use more than one short sentence.)

- I was late because of the fact that I could not leave the house until such time as my mother was ready to go.
- I used a pair of hot pads to remove the hot dishes from the oven.
- The bus arrived at 7:40 AM, I got on the bus at 7:41 AM, and I was getting off the bus by 7:49 AM.
- The surface of the clean glass sparkled.
- There are a number of principles you can follow to ensure you are ready for your interview.
- There is a mechanic I know who operates a shop in town who offers great service.

Choose Specific Wording

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

General Words	Specific Words
---------------	----------------

children	Tess and Abby
animals	dogs
food	cheeseburger and a salad
noise	hissing and whirring

Table 1.4.1 Comparing General and Specific Words

Conclusion

In this chapter, you have recognized plain language as a way to get your message across clearly and concisely when writing and speaking. You have identified five principles of plain-language writing: use active voice, use common words instead of complex words, use a positive tone when possible, write for your reader, and keep words and sentences short. You should now be ready to get more practice using the questions in this chapter, or move on to the next topic.

Learning Highlights

- Write using the active voice to make sentences more interesting.
- Confine use of jargon to situations where your audience recognizes it. Remove slang and euphemisms from professional writing.
- Use positive instead of negative tone.
- Examine the subject matter, audience, and purpose to determine the level of formality for your writing or presentation.
- State ideas only once within a single sentence.

Check Your Understanding

Read the following statement: “It was determined by the committee that the report was inconclusive.” Identify which of the five plain-language principles the writer has NOT followed.

- a) Active Voice
- b) Common Words
- c) Conciseness
- d) Reader Focus
- e) Positive Tone

Which of the following is FALSE?

- a) Clichés are communication obstacles because they are overused.
- b) Jargon should be avoided at all times, because it is too occupation specific.
- c) You can use slang to target specific audiences.
- d) Doublespeak is not ethical.

Which of the following is NOT a good way to ensure that your document’s tone matches its intent?

- a) Read it out loud, so you can hear how the words you have chosen reflect the tone of your messages.
- b) Listen to or watch presentations that are known for having used tone effectively.
- c) Get several people to read your work and give you feedback on its tone.
- d) Publish or send the document and wait for feedback from your readers.

One of the pages on the University of Midland’s Human Resources website starts with the following paragraph: “The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) replaced the Tuition Remission and Reimbursement Program (TRR) effective November 1, 2004. This program was implemented with the Spring Semester 2005. TAP is an employee supplemental educational assistance program.” Is this an effective message? Why, or why not?

- a) Yes, it is effective, because it contains precise information and identifies abbreviations (TAP, TRR) before using them.
- b) Yes, it is effective, because it starts by making sure readers are not confused by the changes in the program.
- c) No, it is not effective, because it contains information that is now irrelevant and defines the most important term last instead of first.
- d) No, it is not effective, because *when* the new program was implemented is irrelevant and the name of the old program communicated the benefit more accurately than the new name.
- e) Each of the options above contains flawed details, and so none are 100 percent correct.

“Best practices,” “centres of excellence,” “core competencies,” “mission critical,” “roll out,” and “performance management” are all examples of:

- a) Clichés
- b) Jargon
- c) Slang
- d) Sexism

The following statement lacks which principle of plain language?

“Despite the fact that Mrs. Armadio will not be present at the commencement of her kitchen renovation project, as her legal representative, I am authorized to coordinate with the foreman of the construction crew about how the project will proceed.”

- f) Active voice
- g) Common words
- h) Positive tone
- i) Organization
- j) Conciseness

Further Reading and Links

- Five-step checklist to write better. Center for Plain Language.
<http://centerforplainlanguage.org/5-steps-to-plain-language/>

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A Picture Is Worth 1,000 Words: Using Visuals

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- categorize given images as symbols, maps, graphs and tables, diagrams, illustrations, and/or photographs;
- describe the four purposes of using visuals to enhance communication;
- search the Internet for an appropriate visual based on the purpose and content of a message, and insert it into a document or presentation including proper attribution.

Topics

- Types of visuals for professional communication
- Four purposes of visuals in professional communication
- Copyright and Creative Commons
- Finding, using, and creating visuals
- Positioning visuals in text
- Visual rhetoric

Introduction

It may be a cliché to say, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” but **visual** images have power. Good communication is a multisensory experience. Children first learning how to read often gravitate toward books with engaging pictures. As adults we graduate to denser books without pictures, yet we still visualize ideas to help us understand the text. Advertisers favour visual media—television, magazines, and billboards—because they are the best way to hook an audience. Websites rely on colour, graphics, icons, and a clear system of visual organization to engage Internet surfers. Visuals bring ideas to life for many readers and audiences in multiple ways:

- As a link between raw data and usable knowledge
- To provide concrete, vivid, and quick representations
- To save space
- To speak in a universal language
- To be persuasive

Source: (Picardi, 2001)

This chapter discusses how to use different kinds of visual aids effectively.

Types of Visuals

In this chapter we will be focusing on the following types of visuals:

- Symbols
- Maps
- Graphs and tables
- Diagrams
- Illustrations
- Photos

Source: (Saunders, 1994)

We will describe these in more detail below:

Symbols: Symbols include a range of items that can be either pictographic or abstract. We are surrounded by symbols, but how often do you think about the symbols that communicate with you everyday? What symbols can you see right now in your surroundings? Maybe the icons for the apps on your phone are familiar symbols to you. How about the TV remote control, which uses symbols to indicate the function of its buttons. Company logos lead you to identify the brand before you even read any words. Or look at the tags on your clothing; they use symbols to tell you how to wash and dry the garments as intended.

Do you know what these mean?



Figure 1.5.1 Icons in Everyday Life by Laura Underwood

Maps: Maps sometimes include *map charts*, or *statistical maps*. Maps are often used to communicate geographical and other information in one visual (Picardi, 2001).

Canada Weather Map



Figure 1.5.2 Canada Weather Map by Laura Underwood

Graphs and Tables: Graphs can take a variety of forms, the most common being line graphs, bar graphs, and pie charts. Each type is better suited to different situations and purposes. For example, line graphs show change quickly, while bar charts are effective to compare data, and pie charts visualize the relation between parts and the whole (Picardi, 2001). Tables can be more effective for situations that call for qualitative data (not just numbers).

Examples:

Alberta Population Growth

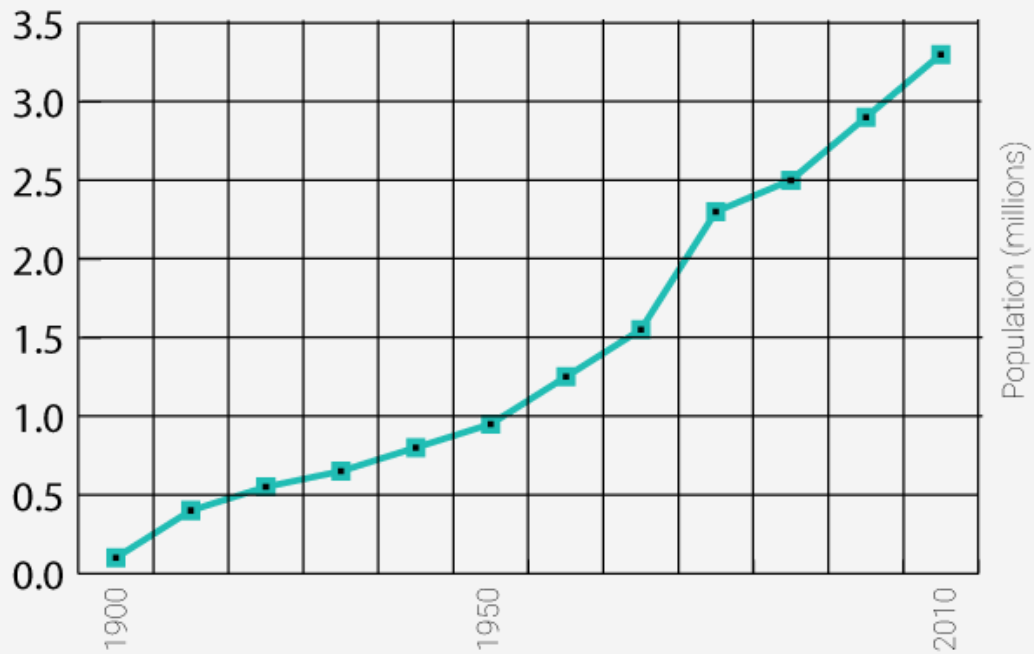


Figure 1.5.3 Population Growth Line Graph by Laura Underwood
Adapted from...

Population by Province/Territory

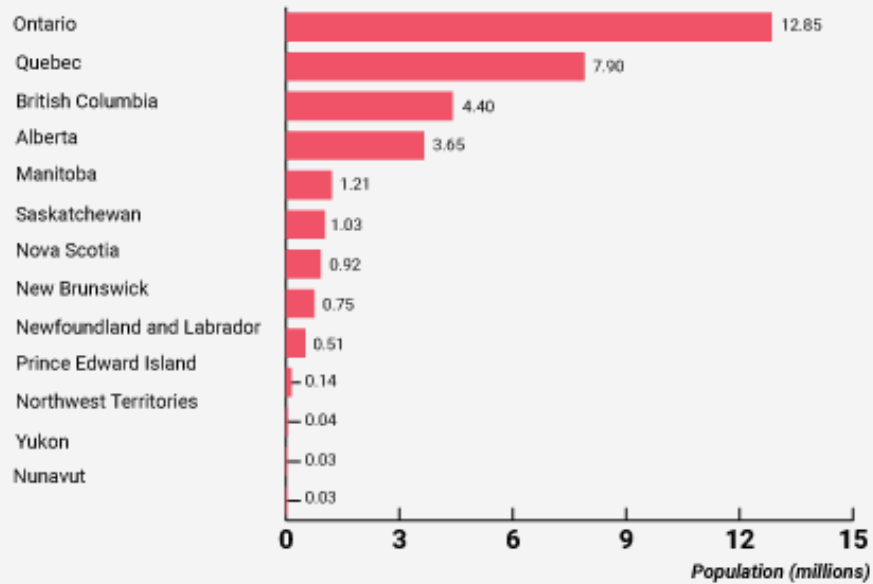
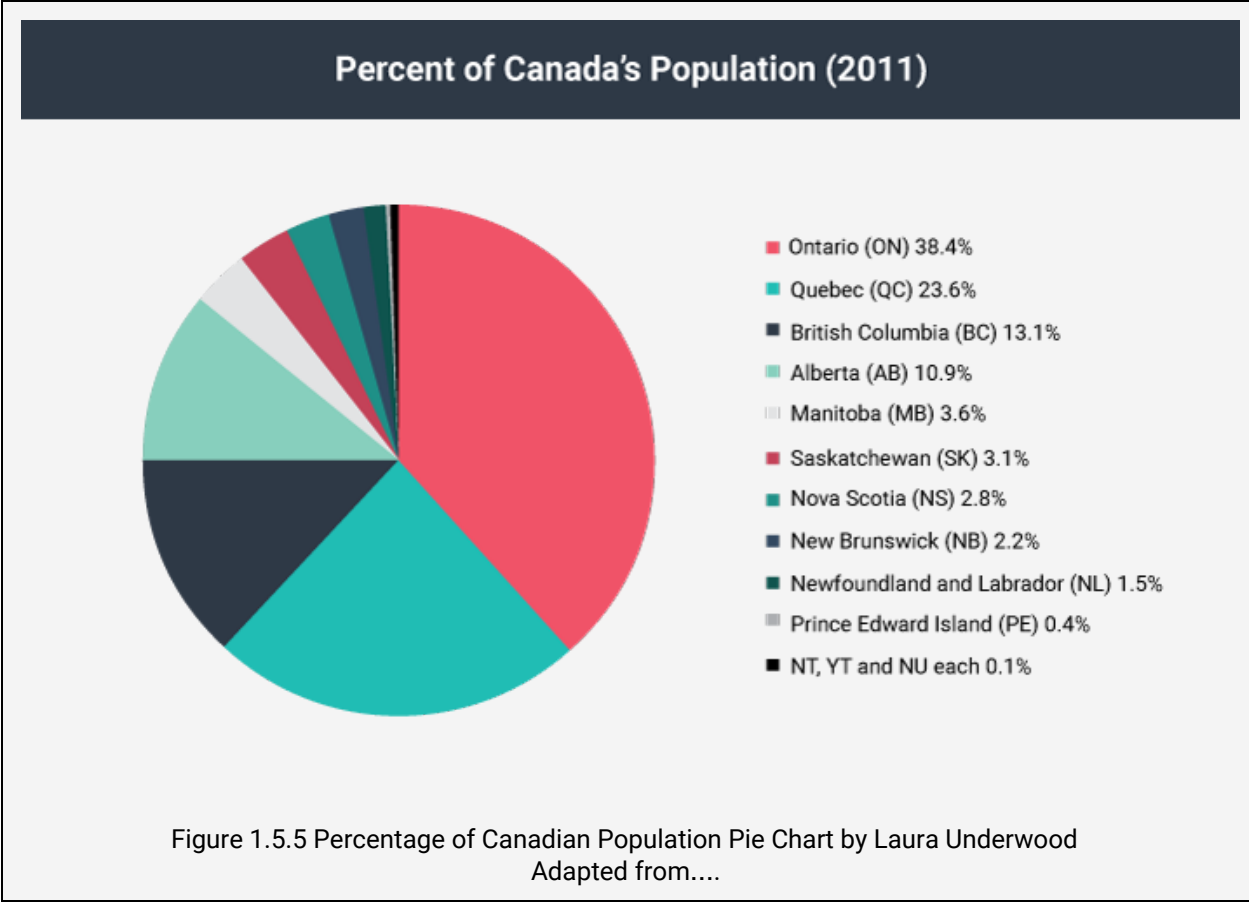


Figure 1.5.4 Canadian Population Bar Graph by Laura Underwood
Adapted from...



Tip: If you are working with numerical information, consider whether a pie chart, bar graph, or line graph might be an effective way to present the content. A table can help you organize numerical information, but it is not the most effective way to emphasize contrasting data or to show changes over time.

Diagrams: Saunders (1994) describes diagrams as “visuals drawn to represent and identify parts of a whole, a process, a general scheme, and/or the flow of results of an action or process.” One example of a diagram would be a flow chart. Flow charts are often used to show physical processes, such as in a manufacturing facility, or in the decision making procedures of a larger corporation, for example. Flow charts combine the use of text, colour, and shapes to indicate various functions performed in a process.

Example: Consensus Flowchart

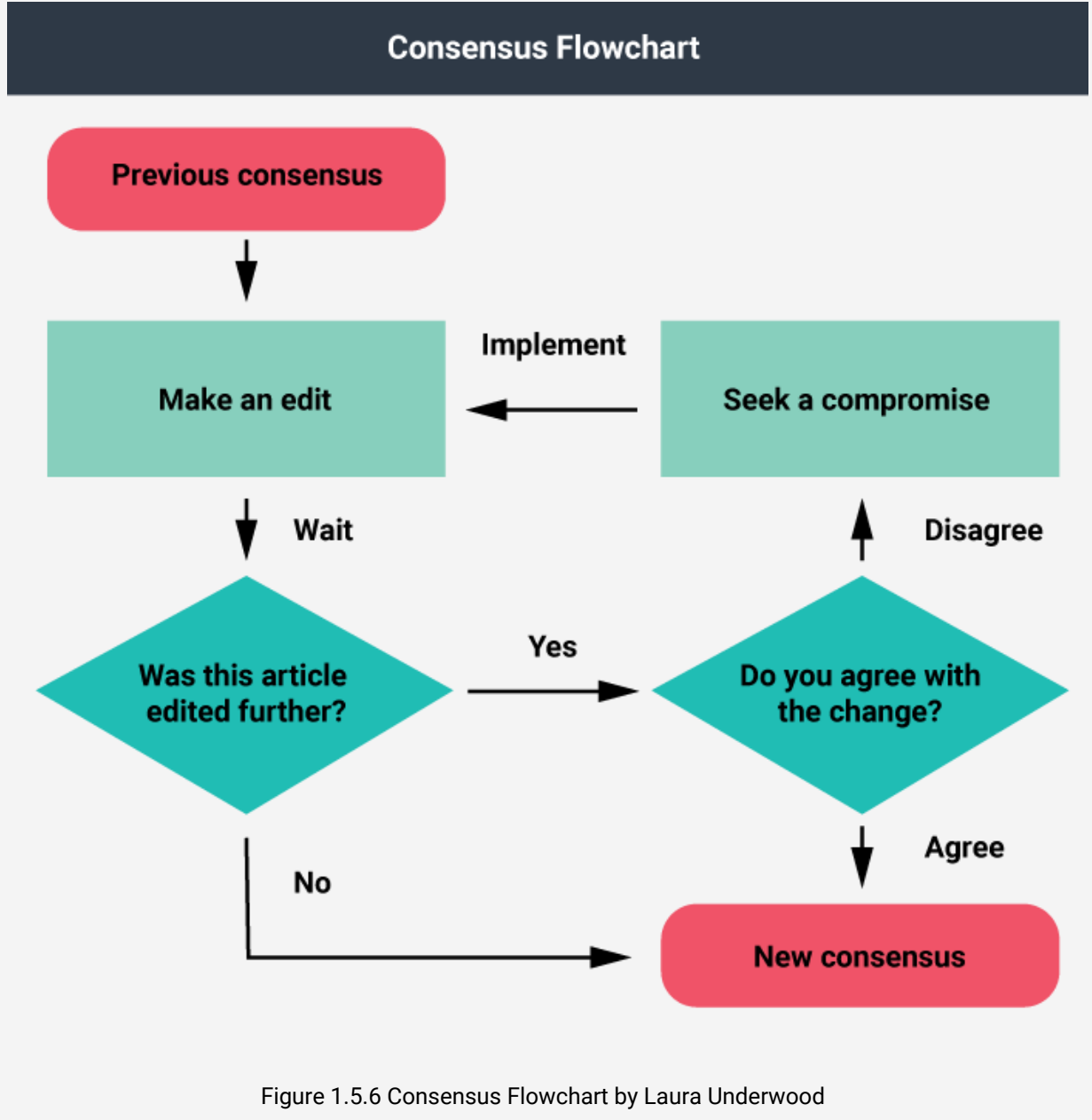
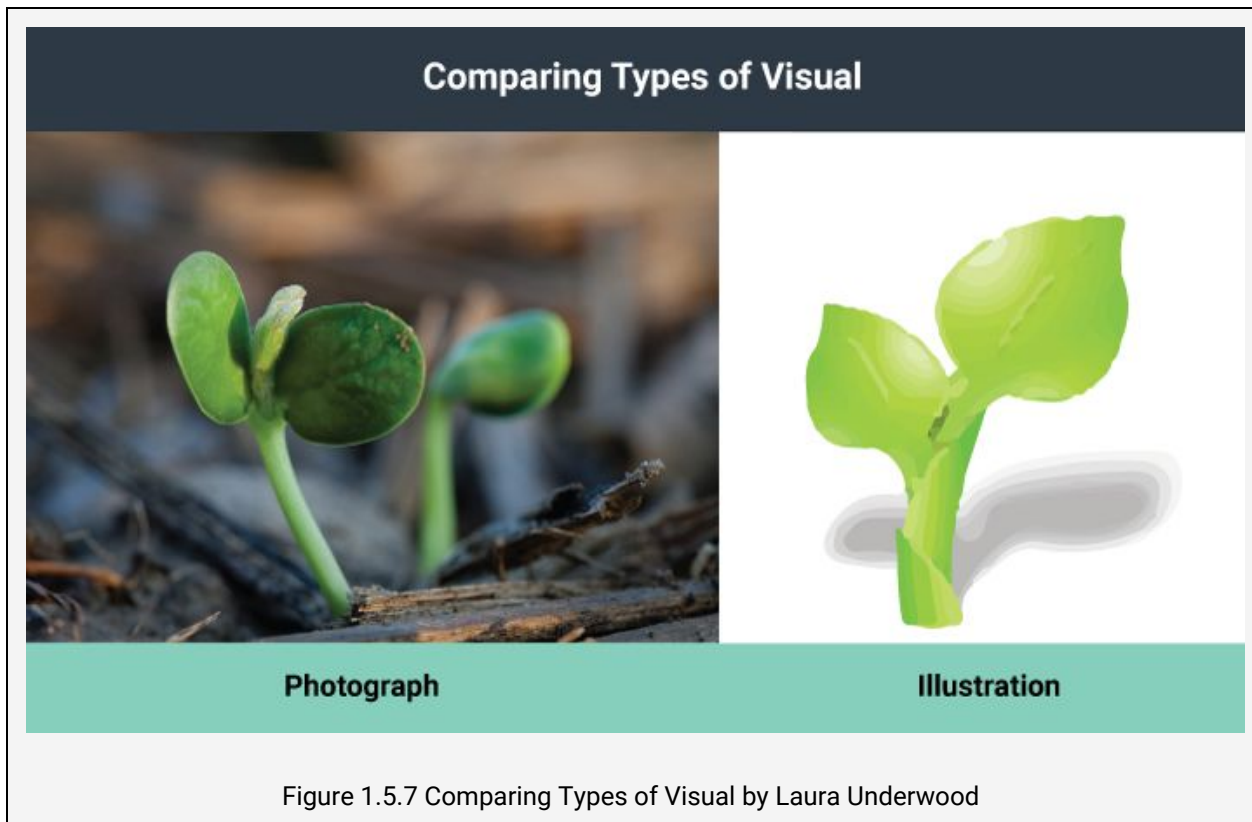


Figure 1.5.6 Consensus Flowchart by Laura Underwood

Photographs: Photographs (still or moving) depict concrete objects, tell a story, provide a scenario, and persuade an audience.

Illustrations: Illustrations can be realistic or abstract. There are instances where a photograph may be too rich in visual elements and a simpler line drawing communicates more quickly and clearly. For example, next time you are in a public building, look around for the fire escape plan. Is it a photograph or a line drawing? Illustrations offer a simpler visual and can be easier to understand than photographs because they filter out unnecessary information.



Purpose of Visuals

There are a number of reasons you might consider including visuals in documents, presentations, and other communications. Four reasons are detailed below:

Decorative: Visuals that do not represent objects or actions within the text but are added, instead, for aesthetic effect are considered decorative. Decorative visuals are often added to gain attention or increase the audience’s interest. Visuals can be used this way but can detract from the message you are trying to communicate and, thus, should be used with caution.

Representational: These visuals physically represent or physically resemble objects or actions in the text and are relevant to the content of the text. For example, rather than giving a detailed textual description of a new playground, you might include an image or render of the new playground and use the text to highlight specific features or information.

Analogical: Analogical visuals are used to compare and contrast two things, and explain their likeness or correspondence. For example, a marketing consultant might try to clarify the difference between targeted marketing and mass marketing by including images of a single fisherman with a single fishing rod and line next to an image of a bigger boat with a fishing net. By using the fishing analogy, the marketing consultant is attempting to connect possible prior understanding of the audience, a visual, and the concepts of targeted marketing versus mass marketing.

Organizational: The purpose of organizational images is to provide structure to information, visually define relationships, and illustrate connections. A chart of the hierarchical structure of a company is one example of an organizational image.

Communication Purpose	Consider These Visuals
Depict an object	Photo, 3D Model, Illustration
Persuade an audience	Photo, Illustration, Chart (showing statistics)

Demonstrate a procedure	Photo, Illustration, Flowchart
Explain a process	Diagram, Symbol, Illustration
Make comparisons	Bar Graph, Line Graph, Table
Demonstrate trends or data	Line Graph
Organize information	Map, Table

Table 1.5.1 Communication Purposes and Visuals

There are many considerations to keep in mind when choosing visuals. When possible, use a variety of types of visuals, but remember that any visuals you use should enhance the content of the text. For example, only add photos if viewing the photos will clarify the text. Near each visual, explain its purpose concisely. Do not expect your readers to figure out the values of the visuals on their own.

Finding and Crediting Visuals

You have three choices for finding visuals to use in your work. You can search the Internet, use photos you have taken, or create **images** yourself.

Finding Visuals Online

The Internet is a powerful tool you can use to find visuals to complement your work. If you simply click on “images” for your topic in a **search engine**, you will generate both **royalty-free** and **copyright-protected** images. However, if you include a term such as **stock images**, **stock photos**, or **royalty-free images** along with your topic, you will be able to narrow your search to royalty-free items. Some search engines can help you filter your search by license type as well. For example, Google images includes a search tool that allows you to filter the results by license type. We should mention, however, that this tool is not perfect, and you should check the source of the image directly for its

licensing requirements. You should not take an image from a search engine unless you are sure that the creator has provided a license that allows you to do so.

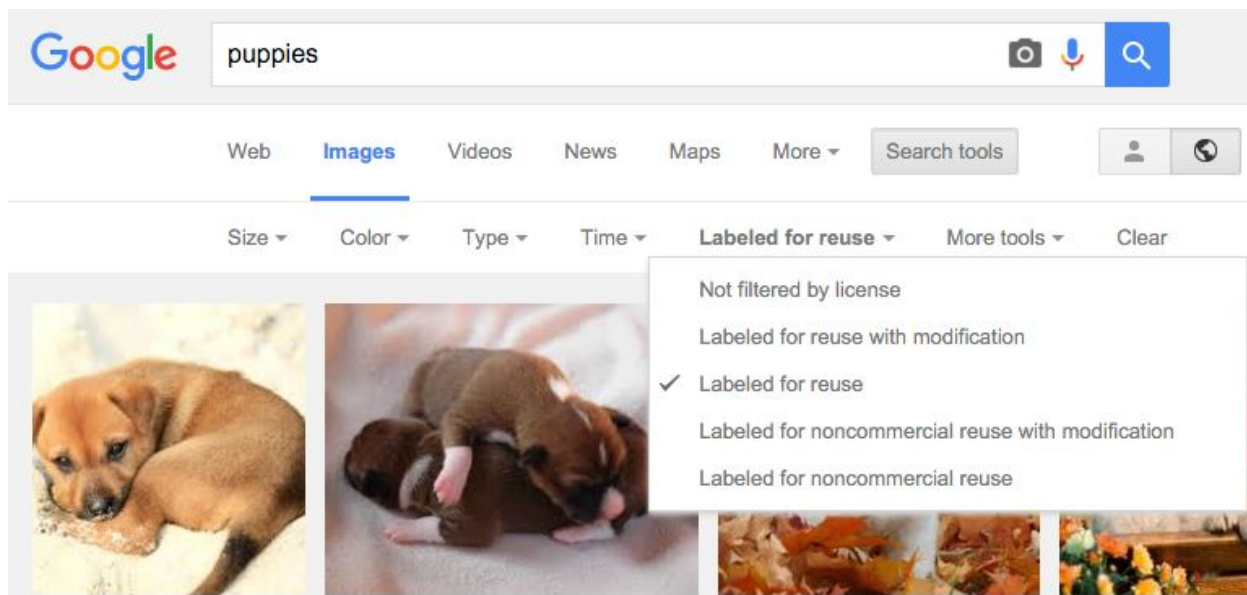


Figure 1.5.8 Google Image Search Tools

Screenshot from Google

When searching Google Images, you can search for images with specific permissions by clicking "Search Tools," then "Usage Rights."

You could also use a stock photo website that provides pay-per-use professional photos. Even on these sites you also need to be sure that the creator has provided a license for the image to be used freely in the way you intend to use it (for example, under a **Creative Commons** license).

About Creative Commons



Any time an individual or group creates something, such as a visual, they automatically have the rights to that visual and copies of it (i.e., copyright). They do not need to register with any organization in order to get the

copyrights for their work; it is assumed as soon as they create it. This means that others are required to seek permission, and often pay a fee, in order to use the work. For example, a photographer might sell one of their photos to a magazine under the condition that they will be paid based on the number of copies printed or sold.



Creative Commons is a way for creators to share their work with fewer restrictions than copyright alone. There are four distinct conditions available in a Creative Commons license: attribution, share-alike, non-commercial, and no derivatives. Upon creating a work, an author may attach a Creative Commons license that offers a combination of these conditions. The table below outlines the conditions in more detail:

	<p>Attribution - BY Others may copy, distribute, display, and perform your copyrighted work, and create derivatives based on (adapt, modify) your work, so long as they give you credit the way you request.</p>
	<p>Non-Commercial - NC Others may copy, distribute, display, and perform your copyrighted work, and create derivatives based on (adapt, modify) you work, but for non-commercial purposes only.</p>
	<p>ShareAlike - SA Others may create and distribute derivatives based on (adapt, modify) your work, but they must use an identical license to the license that your work uses.</p>
	<p>No-Derivative Works - ND Others may distribute, display, and perform your copyrighted work; however, their material must be your work verbatim, not derivatives of your work.</p>

For example, an author may wish to have their work distributed and available for free but does not want anyone to change their work. They might consider using a Creative

Commons attribution, no-derivatives license. Their work would include the following image and statement, as well as a hyperlink to the license deed:



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons

[Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#)

When using Creative Commons works, ensure you follow the requirements that the work you are using is licensed under. This often includes identifying the original creator and a link to the Creative Commons license itself.

An image may also be in the **Public Domain**, meaning that the creator's intellectual property rights have expired, been forfeited, or are inapplicable. In this case, the image is free to use globally without restriction.

For guidance on how to find Creative Commons materials, using the creative common search portal, see [How to Find Creative Commons Materials Using the Creative Commons Search Portal: A Guide for Instructors and Students](#)

Using Your Own Photos

You could, of course, use any photographs you take yourself. To avoid rights issues, ask any human subjects included in your photos to sign a waiver giving you permission to use their likenesses. In the case of minors, you need to ask their guardians to sign the permission form.

Similarly, pictures taken by friends or relatives could be available as long as you get signed permission to use the photo as well as signed permission from any human subjects in the photo. Although it might seem silly to ask your sister, for example, to give you signed permission to use her photo or image, you never know what

complications you could encounter later on. So, always protect yourself with permission.

Making Your Own Visuals

A third option is to create your visuals. You do not have to be an artist to choose this option successfully. You can use computer programs to generate professional-looking charts, graphs, tables, flowcharts, and diagrams, or hire a graphic designer to do this for you.

Subject your visuals to the same level of scrutiny as your writing. Keep in mind that if you find one person has a problem with one of your visuals, there will be others who also take exception. On the other hand, remember that you can never please everyone, so you will have to use your judgment.

Positioning Images into Text (Layout)

When you insert an image into your text, you must make some physical decisions.

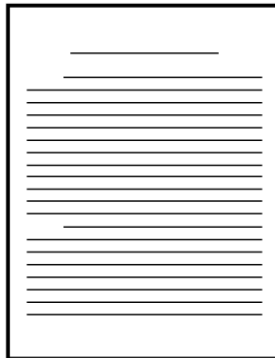


Figure 1.5.9 Text Only Document by JR Dingwall

One of the most common choices is to place the image to the right or left of your text.

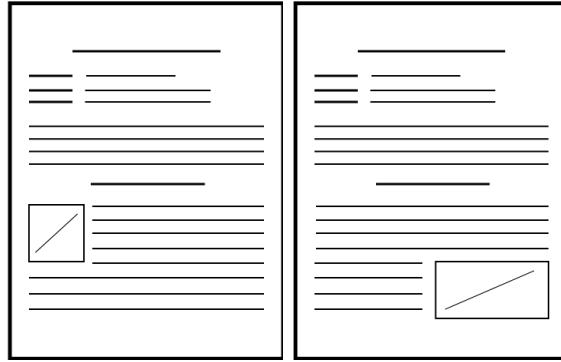


Figure 1.5.10 Left and Right Justified Images in a Document by JR Dingwall

Another choice is to move the text down to create page-wide space for the image. In such situations, the image is typically placed above the related text. This format is usually used at the beginning of a document where the image treatment does not break up the text.

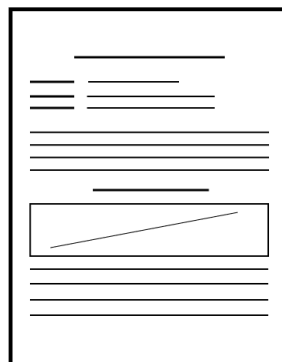


Figure 1.5.11 Full Justified Image in a Document by JR Dingwall

Using White Space

Incorporating charts, graphs, and other visuals is a way to break up blocks of text using visuals and white space. You can add **white space** by presenting lists vertically rather than running them horizontally across the page as part of a sentence. Also, leave enough white space around images to frame the images and separate them from the text.

Uses and Abuses of Visual Rhetoric

Choose visuals to advance your argument rather than just to decorate your pages. Just as you would not include words that are fluff, you should not include meaningless images. Also, just as you aim to avoid the use of fallacies in your text, you also need to be careful not to use fallacious visuals. For example, if you were arguing for the proposition that big dogs make good pets for families, you might show a picture of a friendly-looking Rottweiler puppy. But if you were against families having big dogs for pets, you might choose an image of a mean-looking adult Rottweiler baring its teeth. Watch out for the use of visuals that sway your opinion in the material you read, and use objective images in your own work.

Thanks to programs such as Adobe Photoshop, you can easily alter a photo, but make sure to do so ethically. For example, say that you are making an argument that a company unfairly hires only young people and disposes of employees as they age. You decide to show a photo of some of the employees to make your point. You take a photo of the company's employees (both old and young) and **crop** the original photo to show only the young employees. This cropping choice would be misleading and unethical.

You have probably seen tables or graphs that convey something that is not exactly accurate. For example, the two graphs in Figure 1.5.12 could be used as proof that “twice as many” high school teachers as grade school teachers choose to use computer-driven whiteboards. Graph A seems to support this statement nicely. If you look at Graph B, however, you realize that the entire sample includes only two teachers, so “twice as many” means, literally, two rather than one—an inadequate sample that leads to neither impressive nor convincing data. Be very careful not to misrepresent data using tables and graphs, whether knowingly or accidentally.

Ethical Use of Charts

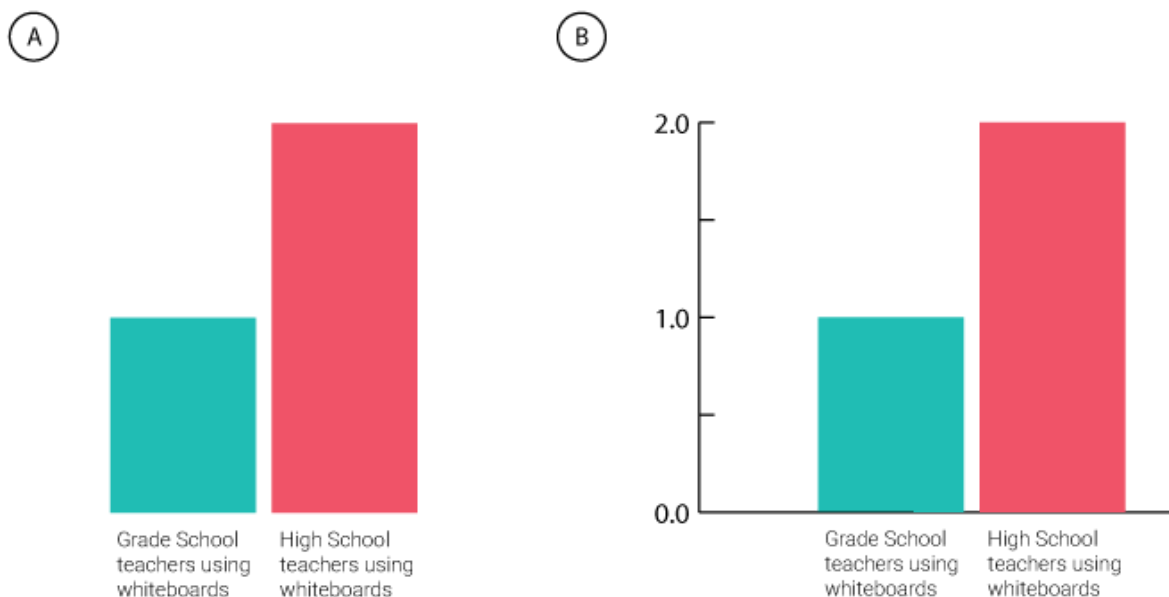


Figure 1.5.12 Ethical Use of Charts by Laura Underwood

Weighing Your Options for Visuals

Visuals, like verbal or written text, can make ethical, logical, and emotional appeals. Two examples of ethical appeals are a respected logo and a photo of the author in professional dress. Graphs, charts, and tables are examples of logical appeals. For the most part, nearly *all* visuals, because they quickly catch a reader's eye, operate on an emotional level—even those that are designed to make ethical and logical appeals. Consider the following options when you choose visuals for your work:

- Choose visuals that your audience will understand and appreciate. Besides adding information, visuals can help to establish common ground with your audience.

- Think about the possible emotional reactions to your visuals and decide if you they are reactions you want to evoke.
- Make sure you choose ethically.
- Make sure you present the information accurately and in a balanced way when using images such as charts and tables.
- Look for visuals that are royalty free or create your own, unless you are prepared to pay for visuals.
- Make sure you choose visuals that align with the ethical standards of your work, because visuals can sway readers quickly. If your text is solidly ethical but your picture(s) are inflammatory, you might compromise the ethics of your work.
- Keep captions brief if you need to use them. Some images carry meaning without any explanation. If you cannot keep the caption brief, you probably need a different visual or better context for the visual in the text surrounding it.

Conclusion

In this chapter you have thought about the reasons to use a visual in your professional documents and have looked at different types of visuals, from diagrams and charts to illustrations and photographs. You have read about the purposes visuals serve and have learned that knowing whether your visual is intended to decorate, represent, analyze, or organize is key to choosing the right type of image.

You have also looked at ways to find and credit images, learning about Creative Commons licensing and exploring ways to fairly use others' images in your work. You have also learned a little bit about positioning images within your documents and the uses (and abuses) of visual rhetoric.

When you are confident in your ability to use images in your work, move on to the next chapter.

Learning Highlights

- You can satisfy your need for images in your work by reusing or remixing Creative Commons works, purchasing photos or images, taking your own photos, or creating your own visuals from scratch.
- You can freely use images you create or photos you capture with a camera. If you choose to use images created by others or photos taken by others, you must secure permission and/or attribute the work as specified by the creator/author.
- When inserting images, you can wrap text to provide rectangle white space, tightly fitting white space, or paper-width white space.
- Visual elements of communication are especially powerful rhetorical tools that can easily be abused but can also be used responsibly and effectively.

Check Your Understanding

Joseph is completing a marketing report that summarizes a series of calculations and complex numerical data. Which of the following visuals would you recommend he use?

- a) Symbols
- b) Graphs
- c) Photos
- d) Illustrations
- e) Diagrams

Sally is organizing a fundraiser at work and wants to share with her co-workers their progress toward the final goal. Which of the following visuals would you recommend she use?

- a) Icons
- b) A line graph
- c) Photos
- d) Illustrations
- e) A pie chart

Megan is responsible for communicating the new organizational structure of her department at work. Which of the following visuals would you recommend she use to clearly visualize the different levels and relationships between each position in her department?

- a) Symbols
- b) Graphs
- c) Photos
- d) Tables
- e) Diagrams

After creating an illustration, the creator must register the visual with the Canadian Copyright Office to obtain copyright on their work. **True** **False**

A farm that specializes in raising orphaned livestock posts the photograph, shown below, and the story behind it on various Internet websites involving the raising of horses and other livestock. The use of this visual would be considered:



- a) Analogical
- b) Decorative
- c) Organizational
- d) Representational

Decorative visuals are best when you want to:

- a) show the relationships between ideas or data
- b) provoke audience attention and interest
- c) demonstrate what a finished product looks like
- d) connect new information to concepts the audience is familiar with

Melody wants to persuade people to spay or neuter their pets, so, in her presentation, she inserts a photo of six drowned kittens. The photo caption reads, “This is what happens to unwanted pets!” Assuming that nobody spayed or neutered their pets as a result, was the visual effective in enhancing the communication? Why or why not?

- a) It was effective, because the image of dead kittens is shocking.
- b) It was effective, because the image of dead kittens is memorable.

- c) It was not effective, because no one was persuaded to spay or neuter their pets.
- d) It was be effective, because the image does not extend the scope of her message.

What is the problem with failing to credit your sources of information or visuals in a business presentation?

- a) It is plagiarism.
- b) It could be considered fraud.
- c) It could result in embarrassment.
- d) All of the above

You use pictures of buildings you found on Flickr under a CC-BY search, to show the colours available for your company's steel building. Because you are just using the pictures to show colours, not the buildings themselves, are you free to use the images without citing the source?

- a) Yes, because you are using the pictures just to show colors, not to sell buildings.
- b) No, because the CC-BY license requires attribution to the creator.
- c) Yes, because you would not talk about the buildings shown in the pictures.
- d) No, because even if you do not talk about the buildings, the audience might still think that your company built them.
- e) Yes, because the images are publicly available online.

Further Reading and Links

If you would like to read more about finding, using, and attributing Creative Commons–licensed materials, see the following sites:

- *How to find Creative Commons–licensed materials* (<http://bit.ly/1Km9EqJ>)

- How to find Creative Commons materials using Google (<http://bit.ly/1R1LPDq>)
- How to find Creative Commons materials using YouTube (<http://bit.ly/1W9AQsU>)

References

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Saunders, A.C. (1994). Graphics and how they communicate. In D.M. Moore and F.M. Dwyer, eds. *Visual literacy: a spectrum of visual learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

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- A derivative of an icon created by Google, published at https://www.iconfinder.com/icons/326567/circle_fill_pause_icon#size=128 in accordance with IconFinder’s terms of service and the conditions specified by the creator
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From Shotgun to Boomerang: Using Feedback

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- explain the ways in which communication effectiveness and feedback relate to each other,
- identify which type(s) of feedback may be available and how feedback may be gathered for a given communication scenario.

Topics

- Defining feedback
- Purpose of feedback in communication
- Types of feedback (indirect, direct, internal, external)
- Feedback approaches in a professional context (interviews, surveys, focus groups)

Introduction

Religion and politics are two subjects that often provoke emotional responses, so, once you are aware of someone's viewpoint (based on feedback you have received in the past), you might choose to refrain from discussing these topics or change the way you address them. The awareness of **bias** and preference, combined with the sender's ability to adapt the message before sending it, increases the probability that a communication will be successfully received. To complete the communication process, you will need to gather and **evaluate** feedback.

You may receive feedback from peers, colleagues, editors, or supervisors, but feedback from the intended audience can be rare. Imagine that you work in the marketing department of an engineering company and have written an article describing a new kind of water pump that operates with little maintenance and less energy consumption than previous models. Your company has also developed an advertising campaign to introduce this new pump to the market and has added it to their online sales menu. Once your article has been reviewed and posted, it may be accessed online by a reader in another country who is currently researching water pumps that fall within your product range. That reader will see a banner ad displayed across the header of the website, with the name of your company prominently displayed in their native language, even if your article is in English. Ads like this are called contextual ads.

You might never receive **direct feedback** from that user after they read your article, but indirect feedback is fairly easy to collect. Google can report how many visits your website received as a result of the ad. For example, you can find out how many visits your website received from Germany, the city where the visits originated, and whether the visitor initiated a sales order for the pump. If the sale was left incomplete, you can find out at what stage of the purchase process the user abandoned the basket or order. If the sale was successful, your sales department can provide feedback in the form of overall sales as well as information on specific customers. This, in turn, allows you an opportunity for post-sales communication and additional feedback.

The communication process depends on a series of components that are always present. If you remove one or more, the process disintegrates. You need a source and a receiver, even if those roles alternate and blur. You need a message and a channel. You also need context and environment. Interference is also part of any communication process.

The final step in the communication process is feedback. It contributes to the transactional relationship in communication and serves as part of the information cycle.

Feedback is a receiver's response to a message and can come in many forms. Let us examine several diverse types of feedback.

Direct Feedback

You post an article about your company's new water pump, and when you come back to it an hour later there are 162 comments. As you scroll through the comments, you find that 10 potential customers are interested in learning more, while the rest debate the specifications and technical abilities of the pump. This direct response to your writing is another form of feedback.

Direct feedback is a response that comes from the receiver. Direct feedback can be both verbal and non-verbal, and it may involve signs, symbols, words, or sounds. You may send an email to a customer who inquired about your water pump, offering to send a printed brochure, and have a local sales representative call. In order to do so, you will need the customer's mailing address, physical location, and phone number. If the customer replies simply with "Thanks!"—no address, no phone number—how do you interpret this direct feedback? Communication is dynamic and complex, and it is not always easy to understand or predict it.

Just as non-verbal gestures do not appear independent of the context in which the communication interaction occurs, and often overlap, recycle, and repeat across the interaction, the ability to identify clear and direct feedback can be a significant challenge. In face-to-face communication, yawns and frequent glances at the clock may serve as a clear signal (direct feedback) for lack of interest, but direct feedback for the writer is less obvious. It is a rare moment when the article you wrote is read in your

presence and direct feedback is immediately available. Often, feedback comes to the author long after the article is published.

Indirect Feedback

Indirect feedback is a response that does not come directly from the receiver or source. The receiver may receive the message and may become the source of the response, but they may not communicate the response directly to you, the author. Your ability to track who accesses your website, what they read, and how long their visit lasts can constitute feedback to guide your writing. You may also receive comments, emails, or information from individuals within your organization about what customers have told them. This is another source of indirect feedback. The fact that the information is not communicated directly may limit its reliability, but it does have value.

Check Your Understanding

Direct feedback only occurs when all parties involved are together at the same time.

True False

Non-verbal feedback is not considered direct feedback. **True False**

A blog's comment section is a direct feedback tool. **True False**

A message initiated by email to a specific person is a type of direct feedback.

True False

Non-verbal feedback is considered to be indirect feedback. **True False**

Indirect feedback is usually more reliable than direct feedback because of the way it is communicated. **True False**

Which one of the following best describes indirect feedback?

- a) Feedback that comes directly from the source
- b) Feedback that comes directly from the receiver
- c) Customer comments to a department manager about a staff member
- d) Original comments made to a blog or discussion forum

You post an article to a website, and the site provides an opportunity for users to respond. Several initial responses are posted offering some insights on the quality of the information in the article.

Determine if each of the following are true or false about the article feedback.

- Tom provides an initial response but disagrees with a few key points of the article. This is an example of direct feedback. **True** **False**
- Jane posts a link to a funny cat video she thinks you would like. This is an example of direct feedback. **True** **False**

Internal Feedback

We usually think of feedback as something that can only come from others, but in the case of **internal feedback**, we can get it from ourselves. Internal feedback may involve reviewing your document before you send it, but it also may involve evaluation from within your organization.

On the surface, it may appear that internal feedback cannot come from anyone other than the author, but that would be inaccurate. If we go back to the communication process and revisit the definitions of source and receiver, we can clearly see how each role is not defined by just one person or personality but instead within the transactional nature of communication by function. The source creates and the receiver receives.

Once the communication interaction is initiated, the roles often alternate, as in the case of an email or text message “conversation” where two people take turns writing.

When you write a document for a target audience—for example, a group of farmers who will use the pumps your company produces to move water from source to crop—they will be the target receiver you have in mind as you write. Until they receive the message, the review process is internal to your organization, and feedback is from individuals and departments other than the intended receiver.

You may have your company’s engineering department confirm the technical specifications of the information you incorporated into the document or have the sales department confirm a previous customer’s address. In each case, you are receiving internal feedback about content you produced, and in some ways, each department is contributing to the message prior to delivery. Internal feedback starts with you. Your review of what you write is critical. You are the first and last line of responsibility for your writing. As the author, it is your responsibility to ensure your content is correct, clear, concise, and ethical.

When you, as an author, consider whether the writing in a document is correct, it is important that you interpret correctness broadly. The writing needs to fit the context and be appropriate for the audience’s expectations. A piece of writing may be *technically* correct, even polished, and still be incorrect for the audience. Keeping in mind what you know about your audience (e.g., their reading levels and educational background) will help you craft a fit-for-purpose message.

Correctness also involves accuracy. A skilled writer verifies all sources for accuracy. If you do not diligently verify everything, you are opening the door to accusations; for example, false information could be interpreted as a fraud and may have legal

implications. Keep notes on where and when you accessed websites, where you found the information you cite or include, and be prepared to back up your statements with a review of your sources.

Writing correctly also includes providing current, up-to-date information. Most business documents emphasize the time-sensitive nature of the information. It does not make sense to rely on sales figures from two years ago when you can use sales figures from last year; neither does citing old articles, outdated materials, and sources that may not apply to the given discussion. That said, outdated information can serve useful purposes but often requires qualification on why it is relevant.

Business writing also needs to be clear; otherwise, it will fail in its purpose to inform or persuade readers. Unclear writing can lead to misunderstandings that consume time and effort to undo. An old saying in military communications is “Whatever *can* be misunderstood *will* be misunderstood.” To give yourself valuable internal feedback about the clarity of your document, try to pretend you know nothing more about the subject than your least informed reader does. Can you follow the information provided? Are your points supported? This is why proofreading and testing is so key to the writing process.

Finally, a skilled business writer understands he or she does not stand alone. Ethical consideration of the words you write, what they represent, and their consequences are part of the responsibility of a business writer. The writer offers information to a reading audience, and if their credibility is lost, future interactions are far less likely to occur.

Brand management reinforces the associations and a relationship with the product or services that would be negatively compromised should the article and, by association, author and company be found untrue. Advertising may promote features, but false advertising can lead to litigation.

Check Your Understanding.

Internal feedback is a type that can only come from the intended audience.

True False

Internal feedback can be described as inviting feedback from specialists in a field of study or an engineer familiar with technical details of a product, to ensure accuracy.

True False

Internal feedback can be referred to as being intrinsic, since it is provided by the author or creator of something. **True False**

Which one of the following is not a type of internal feedback?

- a) Proofreading your work for spelling errors
- b) Checking the oil level of an engine
- c) Tasting food for sweetness
- d) Extrinsic feedback

External Feedback

How do you know that your writing has been read and understood? Writing, reading, and action based on the exchange of symbolic information is a reflection of the communication process. Assessment of the feedback from the receiver is part of a writer's responsibility. Increasingly, web-based documents allow for interaction and enhancement of feedback, but you will still be producing documents that exist as hard copies. Your documents may travel to places you do not expect and cannot predict. Feedback comes in many forms, and in this part of our discussion we focus on assessing interaction and gathering information from it. External feedback involves a response from the receiver. Receivers, in turn, become a source of information themselves. Attention to the channel they use (*how* they communicate feedback), as well as non-verbal aspects like time (*when* they send it), can serve you well as feedback mechanisms.

Hard Copy Documents and External Feedback

Your business or organization may communicate in written forms across time zones and languages via digital communication, but some documents are still produced on paper. Offline technologies like a photocopier or printer are still tools you will use as a normal course of business.

Letters are a common way of introducing information to clients and customers, and you may be tasked to produce a document that is printed and distributed via “snail mail.” Legal documents are still largely in hard copy print form. So, too, are documents that address the needs of customers and clients who do not, or prefer not to, access information digitally.

Age is one audience characteristic that you might focus on when considering who may need to receive a letter in hard copy form, but you may be surprised about this. In a 2010 study of Canadian Internet use, web research firm comScore found that “while every other age group’s online engagement levelled off or even declined between the end of 2009 and the end of 2010, the number of older users jumped 12 percent. On the other hand, the number of web users aged 17 or under actually dropped 4 percent during the same period” (*Globe and Mail*, 2011).

Socioeconomic status is a better characteristic to focus on when sending hard copy documents. Lack of access to a computer and the Internet is a reality for much of the world’s population. It is often stated that half of the world’s population will never make a phone call in their lifetime, and even though the references for the claims are widespread and diverse, the idea that there are people without access to a phone is striking for many Westerners. While cell phones are increasingly allowing poor and rural populations to skip the investment in landline networks and wireless Internet is a leapfrog technology that changes everything, cell phones and computers are still

prohibitively expensive and unavailable for many.

Suppose you work for a major bank on the West Coast of Canada. You have been assigned to write a letter offering a refinance option to a select, previously screened audience composed of individuals who share several common characteristics: high-wage earners with exceptional credit scores. How will you get the attention of this audience? If you sent an email, it might get marked as spam. The audience is small and you have a budget for hard copy production of documents that includes a line item for mailing costs. If the potential customer receives the letter from your department delivered by an overnight courier like FedEx, they may be more likely to receive your message.

In 2005, United States–based Wells Fargo Bank did exactly that. They mailed a letter of introduction outlining an opportunity to refinance at no cost to the consumer, targeting a group identified as high profit and low risk. The channels selected—print-based documents on letterhead with a mode of delivery sure to get attention—were designed to prompt a response. The letter introduced the program, highlighted the features, and discussed why the customers were among a group of individuals to whom this offer was being extended (Diaz de Leon, 2005). In the letter, the bank specifically solicited a customer response, a form of feedback, via email and/or phone to establish dialogue. One could collect feedback in terms of number of respondents and in terms of the channel customers used to respond.

Hard copy documents can be a challenge when it comes to feedback, but that does not mean it is impossible to involve them in the feedback process. It is important to remember that even up until the late 1990s, most business documents were print-based. From sales reports to product development reports, they were printed, copied, bound, and distributed, all at considerable cost.

If one purpose of your letter is to persuade the client or customer to reply by email or phone, one way to assess feedback is the **response rate**, or the number of replies in relation to the number of letters sent. If your report on a new product is prepared for internal use and is targeted to a specific division within your company, their questions in relation to the document may serve as feedback. If you send a memo that produces more questions than the one it was intended to address, the negative feedback may highlight the need for revision. In each case, hard copy documents are often assessed through verbal and written feedback.

External Feedback in a Virtual Environment

When the Internet first came into popular use, a challenge for companies was to accurately assess their audience. When you produce content for a specific audience with a specific purpose, the reception you get to your message determines its value. Imagine that you produced a pilot television program with all the best characters, excellent dialogue, and big-name stars, only to see the pilot flop. If you had all the right elements in a program, how could it fail? It may have failed to attract an audience. Television often uses ratings (measurements of the estimated number of viewers) to measure success. Programs that get past a pilot or past a first season do so because they have good ratings and are ranked above other competing programs. All programs compete with one another within a time slot or across a genre. Those that achieve high rankings—those that receive the largest number of viewers—can command higher budgets and receive more advertising dollars. Programs that reach few people are often cancelled and replaced.

Writers experience a process of competition, ratings, feedback, and renewal within the world of online publishing. Business writers want their content to be read. Just as companies developed ways to measure the number of viewers of a given television

program, which led to rankings that influenced which programs survived and prospered and which were cancelled, the Internet has a system of keeping track of what gets read and by whom.

Page views are a count of how many times a website is viewed. Each time a user or reader views the page counts as one page view. Google and other companies commonly track the number of unique visits a reader makes to a website, using cookies, (small, time-encoded files) to identify specific users.

Rankings of website on search engines like Google are established through a number of metrics. One of the most important metrics is the number of other websites that link to yours. By linking to your page or article, another website is giving it a vote of confidence. This, in turn, results in higher rankings for your page. More people will see it and read it as a result. In time, your page may become an authority because many other pages link to it.

As a business writer you will naturally want to incorporate authoritative sources and relevant content, but you will also want to attract and engage your audience, positioning your document as an authority. Feedback in the form of links may be one way to assess your online document.

Check Your Understanding

External feedback comes from receivers of a message. **True** **False**

External feedback may take longer to receive than internal feedback. **True** **False**

Which one of the following is NOT an example of external feedback?

- a) Watching a video of your performance
- b) Employee performance evaluation
- c) Sense of smell

User-generated Feedback

Let's say you have reviewed the comments that users have left on your blog post. This, in some ways, serves the same purpose as letters to the editor in traditional media. In newspapers, magazines, and other offline forms of print media, an edition is produced with a collection of content and then delivered to an audience. The audience includes members of a subscriber-based group with common interests, as well as those who read a magazine casually while waiting in the doctor's office. If an article generated interest, enjoyment, or outrage (or demanded correction), people wrote letters in response. Selected responses would be published in the next edition. There is a time delay associated with this system that reflects the preparation, production, and distribution cycle of the medium.

With the introduction of online media, however, the speed of this feedback loop has greatly increased. Public relations announcements, product reviews, and performance data of your organization are often made available via social media. If you see a factual error in an internally released article, within minutes you may be able to respond in an email to correct the data. In the same way, if the document is released externally, feedback from outside your organization will be quick. Audience members may debate your description of the water pump or openly question its effectiveness in relation to its specifications; they may even post positive comments. Customer comments, such as letters to the editor, can be a valuable source of feedback.

Customer reviews and similar forms of user-generated content are increasingly common across the Internet. People often choose written communication as the preferred format; from tweets, blog posts, and commentary pages to threaded, theme-based forums, person-to-person exchange is increasingly common. Still, as a

business writer, you will note that even with the explosion of opinion content, the tendency for online writers to cite a website promotes interaction.

Due to the speed at which we can communicate online, customers often expect that they can send a tweet, Facebook message, or email to your company and get a response right away. This has led to an entirely new set of communications roles in the workforce, as there is now a need for employees to monitor and post to company social streams in real time, reacting to external comments and complaints as they happen.

Your goal as a business writer is to meet the audience and employer's expectations in a clear and concise way. Trying to facilitate endless discussions may generate feedback but may not translate into success. Facebook serves as a reminder that you want to provide solid content and attend to the feedback. People who use Google already have something in mind when they perform a search, and if your content provides what readers are looking for, you may see your page views and effectiveness increase.

Interviews

Interviews provide an author with the opportunity to ask questions of, and receive responses from, audience members. Since interviews take considerable time and cannot easily be scaled up to address large numbers of readers, they are most often conducted with a small, limited audience. An interview involves an interviewer, an interviewee, and a series of questions. It can be an employment interview or an informational interview in preparation of document production, but in this case we are looking for feedback. As a business writer, you may choose to schedule time with a supervisor to ask a couple of questions about how you could improve the document you produced. You may also schedule time with the client or potential customer and try to learn more. You may interact across a wide range of channels, from face-to-face to an email exchange, and learn more about how your document was received.

Surveys

At some point, you may have answered your phone to find a stranger on the other end asking you to take part in a survey for a polling organization. You may have also received a consumer survey in the mail, with a paper form to fill out and return in a postage-paid envelope. Online surveys are also becoming popular. This type of reader feedback can be valuable, particularly if some of the questions are open ended. Closed questions require a simple yes or no to respond, making them easier to tabulate as “votes,” but open-ended questions give respondents complete freedom to write their thoughts. As such, they promote the expression of new and creative ideas and can lead to valuable insights. Surveys can take place in person, for example, in an interview format, which is the format used when taking a census. For example, Statistics Canada employs people to go door to door and follow up with those households that do not return census questionnaires. Your organization may lack comparable resources and may choose to mail out surveys on paper with postage-paid response envelopes or may reduce the cost and increase speed by asking respondents to complete the survey online.

Focus Groups

Focus groups involve a representative sample of individuals, brought together to represent a larger group or audience. If you know the characteristics of your target audience, you would look for participants who can represent more than one of those characteristics. The interaction involves a question-and-answer format. If your company is looking to launch a new product, you may introduce that product to this select audience to see how they react. What they say and express may help you in writing your promotional materials. In terms of feedback, you may assemble a group of individuals who use your product or service, and then ask them a series of questions in a group setting. The responses may have bearing on the way you write about your product.

Normally, we think of focus groups in a physical setting, but, again, modern technology has allowed for innovative adaptations. Forums, webinars, and other virtual gatherings allow groups to come together across time and distance to discuss specific topics. A web camera, a microphone, and an Internet connection are all it takes. Focus groups will increasingly gather via computer-mediated technologies in the future as the costs of bringing people together for a traditional meeting increase.

Conclusion

To find out if your communication has been received and understood, you will need to collect feedback from your audience. This feedback will give you an opportunity to optimize your messages in the future, change your behaviour or methods, and clarify anything that your audience has misunderstood.

Feedback can come directly from your audience or indirectly via a third party. It may come from internal or external sources. Depending on the channel you are using, feedback might take the form of non-verbal cues, such as your receiver's expressions and body language; verbal cues, like word choice and tone; or written cues, like letters and memos. Digital channels have made it possible for audiences to rapidly respond via user-generated feedback on websites, blogs, and social media.

Companies can elicit feedback through a number of channels, including interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

No matter what channel you have chosen to communicate with, make sure to close the feedback loop with your audience to gain insight on how to become a better communicator.

Learning Highlights

- Feedback may be indirect or direct, internal or external, and may be mediated digitally in many different ways.
- Feedback “closes the loop” on communication and provides a way to determine if you have achieved the goal of communicating, to establish shared meaning.

Check Your Understanding

In a conference call with a dozen people, Suletu leads the group through a list of seven important actions that must be undertaken immediately. After she finishes describing each action, she moves on to the next without delay. Once she has covered all seven, she gives a gracious conclusion and ends the call. Suletu later receives emails from several participants with questions. *Her presentation resulted in no questions during the conference but many questions afterward.* What was missing in Suletu’s presentation?

- a) Her style did not accommodate feedback in an effective way.
- b) Her style did not use enough repetition so participants could keep up with her and recall what she did.
- c) Her style did not include the time and space her audience needed to absorb the content she presented.
- d) All of the above.
- e) None of the above.

Bill is a contract worker at an advertising agency. His manager recently discovered that Bill is also doing work for another firm. The manager calls Bill to his office for a chat. He tells Bill that his work is outstanding and that he really values having him on board. The manager also comments about Bill working for the other firm and suggests that Bill review the HR policies related to this.

What type(s) of feedback is/are provided in this scenario? Explain your answer.

After a department staff meeting, Sonia tells you, "Tom really aced the presentation today on email etiquette." She also says, "Tom has a lot of experience, and it shows." Are Sonia's comments direct or indirect feedback? Explain your answer.

Which one of the following best describes the term "response rate"?

- a) The number of replies received
- b) The number of replies received related to the number of requests sent
- c) The number of replies received from external recipients
- d) The number of replies received from internal recipients

Determine whether each of the following statements are true or false.

- A high number of responses for feedback requests indicates that a product or service is successful.
True False
- Using a page counter on a website is a feedback method that can indicate a site's success or appeal.
True False
- Website cookies can provide a more accurate measure of a site's success or appeal.
True False
- Focus group is a method of gathering qualitative data.
True False
- Survey is a method of gathering quantitative data.

True False

- If I already know what the issues are, the best method to gather feedback is with a focus group.

True False

- A focus group is better than a survey to get feedback on a product's market viability.

True False

- Focus group feedback is typically based on direct user experience.

True False

- Since surveys are best used to gather quantitative feedback, the results make it easier to set benchmarks.

True False

- A website's "bounce rate" is a good indicator about its usefulness and utilization.

True False

Match each of the following characteristic to its feedback method.

Methods:

1. _____ Survey
2. _____ Focus Group

Premises:

- A. Exploratory
- B. Conclusive
- C. Quantitative
- D. Qualitative
- E. Interactive
- F. Inflexible

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Foundations Module Conclusion

In this introductory module, you first learned that despite the proliferation of technology and change, some essentials of effective communication remain the same.

You learned the working definition of *communication* and the theory of the communication process. With this knowledge in hand, you went on to learn about getting to know your audience. You used the AUDIENCE tool to test your knowledge and practise your skills in tailoring your message to your audience's needs.

You then turned your attention to the best way to reach your audience by examining communication channels. You learned about the foundational channels, digital channels, the flow of information, and information richness. You developed the skills to determine the best channel for your audience and message.

You discovered that to tailor your messaging effectively, your choice of words and approach matters. You studied and applied the five principles of plain language to make your messages clear and concise.

You explored the ways that visuals make powerful communication tools, learning about different types of visuals and the best situations in which to use them. You also learned how to source and attribute images ethically with a better understanding of copyright, as well as licensing options, such as Creative Commons. You also gained valuable practice with layout and visual formatting to add impact and clarity.

Closing the communications loop, you took an in-depth look at the value and various forms of feedback. You learned that by incorporating feedback effectively, you create a loop that allows you to further fine-tune your message to your audience's needs and expectations.

Now that you have been well grounded in the foundations of communication, you are ready to put your skills to the test. Complete the end-of-module assessments to be sure

you are ready to move on to the Writing module, or consult the Discovery Tool to find the next stop on your professional communication journey.

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Glossary

Introduction to Communication Glossary

Channel

A medium for communication or the passage of information

Communication

Purposeful and active exchange of information between two or more people to convey or receive the intended meanings through a shared system of signs and (symbols)

Context

The psychological and psychosocial expectations of the source and the receiver(s)

Decode

Analyze and interpret a verbal or non-verbal communication or image

Encode

Convert into a coded form

Environment

The physical and psychological space in which the communication is happening; it might also describe if the space is formal or informal

Expletive Pronoun

Expletive pronouns are called expletive because unlike other pronouns, they do not stand in place of a noun and are said to have no “value.” Expletives usually appear in the form of “There is/are” They are not to be confused with the passive voice.

Interference

Things that inhibit effective communication, such as poor lighting, audio, or image quality, also known as *noise*

Message

A verbal, written, or recorded communication sent to or left for a recipient who cannot be contacted directly

Receiver

A person who gets or accepts something that has been sent or given to them

Source

A place, person, or thing from which something originates or can be obtained

Getting to Know Your Audience Glossary

AUDIENCE acronym

Stands for Analysis, Understand, Demographics, Interest, Environment, Need, Context, Expectation

Entertain

To capture attention in order to distract and delight

Hidden Audience

People who are not expected to see your message but do see it

Inform

To raise awareness and/or understanding about a situation or issue

Persuade

To convince your audience to do something or take some action

Primary Audience

The intended audience; the person or people you have in mind when you decide to communicate something

Secondary Audience

People you could reasonably expect to come in contact with your message, even though it was not primarily intended for them

Choosing a Communications Channel Glossary

Asynchronous

Not existing or occurring at the same time

Communication Channels

A medium for communication or the passage of information

Digital Channel

(Channels) Involving or relating to the use of computer technology

Information Richness

Information that conveys more non-verbal information is considered the most rich, followed by verbal communications, then written communications, which are the least rich.

Message

A verbal, written, or recorded communication sent to or left for a recipient who cannot be contacted directly

Non-Verbal Channel

(Channel) Not involving or using words or speech

Paralanguage

The tone, pace, and volume of speech

Principal Communication Channels

Verbal, non-verbal, and written communication channels are the three principal communication channels

Public Relations

The professional maintenance of a favourable public image by a company, organization, or famous person

Verbal Channel

(Channel) Relating to or in the form of words; spoken rather than written communication

Written Channel

(Channel using) Mark (letters, words, or other symbols) on a surface, typically paper, with a pen, pencil, or similar implement

Crafting Your Message with Plain Language Glossary

Action Verb

A verb that expresses action, especially in contrast to a linking verb, modal verb, etc.

Active Voice

Forms of a verb in which the subject is typically the person or thing performing the action and can take a direct object

Euphemism

A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing

Jargon

Technical words and phrases common to a specific profession or discipline

Nominalization

Where verbs (actions) and adjectives are turned into nouns (person, place, thing)

Noun

A word (other than a pronoun) used to identify any of a class of people, places, or things

Plain Language

Plain language writing aims to be clear and concise and makes sure the reader understands as quickly and clearly as possible

Prepositional Phrase

A modifying phrase consisting of a preposition and its object

Slang

A type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people

Subject

A person or thing that is being discussed, described, or dealt with

Redundancy

Elements of a piece of communication that do not (or no longer) add essential or useful information and, therefore, are not needed in conveying meaning

Tone

The general character or attitude of a place, piece of writing, situation, etc.

Wordiness

Using or expressed in rather too many words

A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words: Using Visuals Glossary**A picture is worth a thousand words**

A saying that suggests that images have more immediate power than words do

Attribute

Ascribe a work or remark to (a particular author, artist, or speaker)

Cliché

A phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought

Copyright

The exclusive and assignable legal right, given to the originator for a fixed number of years to print, publish, perform, film, or record literary, artistic, or musical material

Crop(ping an image)

Refers to the removal of the outer parts of an image to improve framing, accentuate subject matter, or change aspect ratio. Depending on the application, this may be performed on a physical photograph, artwork, or film footage, or achieved digitally using image editing software.

Images

A representation of the external form of a person or thing in art

Public Domain

A work enters the public domain when the creator's intellectual property rights have expired, been forfeited, or are inapplicable.

Royalty

A sum paid to a patentee for the use of a patent or to an author or composer for each copy of a book sold or for each public performance of a work

Search Engine

A program that searches for and identifies items in a database that correspond to keywords or characters specified by the user, used especially for finding particular sites on the World Wide Web.

Source

A place, person, or thing from which something originates or can be obtained

Stock

A supply or quantity of something accumulated or available for future use

Creative Commons

Creative Commons (CC) is a non-profit organization devoted to expanding the range of creative works available for others to build upon legally and to share; the organization has released several copyright licenses known as Creative Commons licenses free of charge to the public.

Visual

Relating to seeing or sight

White Space

The blank areas of a page or other piece of printed matter, as margins, gutters between columns, etc., regarded collectively as an element of layout and design

From Shotgun to Boomerang: Using Feedback Glossary

Bias

A concentration on or interest in one particular area or subject

Brand Management

The activity of supervising the promotion of a particular brand of goods

Direct Feedback

A response that comes from the receiver

Evaluate

To form an idea of the amount, number, or value of; to assess

External Feedback

Involves a getting then assessing a response from the receiver

Indirect Feedback

A response that does not come directly from the receiver or source.

Internal Feedback

Feedback one gets from oneself or from within one's organization

Response Rate

A rate at which a person or thing responds; specifically the proportion of questionnaires in a voluntary survey or study that receive a response, typically expressed as a percentage