



PDE PROVIDER
Professional Development for the Expert

Course Title

Communication Foundation

Instructor

Alan Fata, DBA

Credit

1 PDU

Questions

20

Adaptation Statement

- *“Introduction to Professional Communications” was adapted and remixed by Melissa Ashman from several open textbooks as indicated at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise noted, Introduction to Professional Communications is (c) 2018 by Melissa Ashman and is licensed under a Creative Commons-Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license. In 2019, the textbook was updated. In 2020, minor updates were done to chapter 5.2. The adaptation statement below and all chapter attribution statements have been updated accordingly.*
- *In “Introduction to Professional Communications”, examples have been changed to Canadian references, and information throughout the book, as applicable, has been revised to reflect Canadian content and language. Gender neutral language (they/their) has been used intentionally. In addition, while general ideas and content may remain unchanged from the sources from which this adapted version is based, word choice, phrasing, and organization of content within each chapter may have changed to reflect this author’s stylistic preferences.*
- *This course is Part 1 titled “Communication Foundations” that comprises three chapter 1.1 (Learning to Write), 1.2 (Elements in Communication) and 1.3 (Critical Thinking). They are adapted from the book titled “Introduction to Professional Communications”, which can be downloaded for free from the following link:
<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/professionalcomms/>*
- *The below additions or changes have been made to the chapters in this course:*
 - Chapter 1.1**
 - *Added concept of learning to write being messy*
 - Chapter 1.2**
 - *Added questions for reflection (based on content from adapted sources)*
 - Chapter 1.3**
 - *Added questions for reflection*
 - *Added information on fake news*
- *As mentioned above, the book “Introduction to Professional Communications” by Melissa Ashman is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.*



- *Check additional references and sources at the end of the course.*
- *This adaptation has reformatted the original text, and have replaced some images and figures to make the course more shareable. This adaptation has not significantly altered or updated the original text.*
- *Few modifications have been made for the purpose of presenting this course on this website.*

1.1 Learning to write

You may think that some people are simply born as better writers than others, but in fact writing is a reflection of experience and effort. If you think about your successes as a writer, you may come up with a couple of favourite books, authors, or teachers that inspired you to express yourself. You may also recall a sense of frustration with your earlier writing experiences. It is normal and natural to experience a sense of frustration at the *perceived* inability to express oneself. The emphasis here is on your perception of yourself as a writer as one aspect of how you communicate.

Looking back

Before you can learn to write in a new context, it's helpful to explore how you got to this point. Every one of us arrives in the workplace (and the classroom) with our own beliefs and assumptions about communication. Sometimes, these beliefs are helpful. Sometimes, however, our beliefs can hold us back. So, before we dive in, let's take a moment to reflect.

Read the following questions and think them over. It may be helpful for you to write some notes in a journal.

Questions for reflection

1. How did you learn to read and write? Who influenced you?
2. What do people in your culture and/or your family believe about reading, writing, and telling stories?
3. What are some of your most positive reading and writing memories?
4. Describe some moments when you struggled with reading or writing. How did you react?
5. Have you ever changed a belief around reading and writing?
6. Do you believe that you are a good writer? Why or why not?
7. What is the most frustrating part of reading or writing for you?

Now, reflect on your answers. Do you notice any patterns? Can you identify any beliefs that might hold you back? Let's take a look at how other students answered.

Simran's story

Simran's earliest memories of reading involve being snuggled up with her grandma, siblings and cousins. She loved being read to. Before she was old enough to go to school, she often sat with her older siblings as they did their homework and pretended to write. Unfortunately, when Simran was in Grade 4, she had a teacher who criticized her writing. She began to believe that she was a bad writer. By the time she reached Grade 12, English was Simran's worst subject.

Today, Simran likes to read for fun, but hates to read for school. When she gets a writing assignment, she often starts and stops and procrastinates. She writes a sentence then gets caught up in grammar details, deletes it, starts over, then checks social media. In the end, she pulls an all-nighter and hands in her assignment with just minutes to spare. Simran likes to write fan fiction based on her favourite T.V. show, and she doesn't understand why the words come so easily when she's writing for fun, but so painfully when she's writing for school. She isn't looking forward to taking a business communication course because she thinks completing the assignments will be stressful.

Jian Yi's story

Jian Yi began his education in China. He was an excellent student and enjoyed writing. His teachers often praised his beautiful cursive. When Jian Yi was 12, his family moved to Canada. He was placed for a short time in an EAL class, but quickly was integrated into a Grade 7 classroom. He understood very little and felt embarrassed whenever he was asked to speak in class. Though Jian Yi's English skills improved dramatically, he never again enjoyed school.

Jian Yi doesn't enjoy reading or writing. He majored in Accounting because he believed there wouldn't be much reading and writing, and he's disappointed that he has to take a communications class. He is taking a full course load and he wants to get through this course as quickly as possible.

Both Simran and Jian Yi are good writers; Simran can write short stories and Jian Yi can write in multiple languages. Neither, however, expects to do well in this course. That's the power of unhelpful beliefs. They can set us up for failure before we've even started. By talking about our reading and writing beliefs and figuring out where they came from, we can challenge unhelpful beliefs and be more successful.

Thinking about our reading and writing beliefs is also a great way to celebrate the communication strengths you already have. For example, if you've learned Traditional Stories from elders in your community, you already know a story can be used as a powerful teaching tool when tailored to the right audience at the right time. Your

ability to play music or sing will help you write sentences that people will enjoy reading. If you can shift between multiple languages or dialects, you can adapt to a new workplace environment. Our goal is not to erase what's unique about your writing voice to make it "appropriate" for the workplace, but to build on your existing skills so that you can be successful in whatever workplace you enter.

What do experts say about reading and writing beliefs?

The question of how to become a better writer has been studied extensively for decades. We actually know a lot about how people learn to read and write, and how to help students improve. Here are just a few writing beliefs that researchers, writing teachers and scholars believe to be true (Fink, 2015). How many of these points do you agree with?

1. Everyone can become a better writer.
2. People learn to write by writing.
3. Writing is a process.
4. Writing helps us think and figure out what we have to say.
5. There is no one way to write well. Different writers have different processes and may even change their process depending on what type of writing they're doing.
6. Editing, revising and rethinking are important to help writers reach their potential.
7. Writing and reading are related. Reading will improve your writing. It doesn't even matter what genre you read. Read what you enjoy.
8. Talking about your writing with your peers and your teacher can make you a better writer.

In short, you can become a better writer. In fact, some studies have found that students who believe that they can become good writers improve faster than those who don't (Baaijen, Galbraith, and de Gloppe, 2014).

I believe that you are a good writer. I believe that you can become a better writer. I believe that you use your writing skills every day. It's hard to change a belief overnight, so perhaps you don't yet agree with me. That's okay. Over the course of the semester, we'll build on what you already know and apply it to the workplace. We'll figure out a writing process that works for you. And hopefully, by the end of the semester, you'll have created writing that you're proud of.

Looking forward

You are your own best ally when it comes to your writing. Keeping a positive frame of mind about your journey as a writer is not a cliché or simple, hollow advice. Your attitude toward writing can and does influence your written products.

Reading is one step many writers point to as an integral step in learning to write effectively. You may like Harry Potter books or be a Twilight fan, but if you want to write effectively in business, you need to read business-related documents. These can include letters, reports, business proposals, and business plans. You may find these where you work or in your school's writing centre, business department, or library; there are also many websites that provide sample business documents

of all kinds. Your reading should also include publications in the industry where you work or plan to work. You can also gain an advantage by reading publications in fields other than your chosen one; often reading outside your niche can enhance your versatility and help you learn how other people express similar concepts. Finally, don't neglect popular or general media like newspapers and magazines. Reading is one of the most useful lifelong habits you can practice to boost your business communication skills.

In the "real world" when you are under a deadline and production is paramount, you'll be rushed and may lack the time to do adequate background reading for a particular assignment. For now, take advantage of your business communications course by exploring common business documents you may be called on to write, contribute to, or play a role in drafting in your future career. Some documents have a degree of formula to them, and your familiarity with them will reduce your preparation and production time while increasing your effectiveness.

When given a writing assignment, it is important to make sure you understand what you are being asked to do. You may read the directions and try to put them in your own words to make sense of the assignment. Be careful, however, to differentiate between what the directions say and what you *think* they say. Just as an audience's expectations should be part of your consideration of how, what, and why to write, the instructions given by your instructor, or in a work situation by your supervisor, establish expectations. Just as you might ask a mentor more about a business writing assignment at work, you need to use the resources available to you to maximize your learning opportunity. Ask the professor to clarify any points you find confusing, or perceive more than one way to interpret, in order to better meet the expectations.

Learning to write effectively involves reading, writing, critical thinking, and self-reflection. At times, it may seem like it's an incredibly messy process. Other times, it may feel tedious. Ultimately, writing is a process that takes time, effort, and practice. In the long-term, your skillful ability to craft messages will make a significant difference in your career.

References

Baaijen, V., Galbraith, D., and de Glopper, K. (2014). *Effects of writing beliefs and planning on writing performance*. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Effects-of-writing-beliefs-and-planning-on-writing-Baaijen-Galbraith/03701e3c57c3bca04881b7f7716f111250d6ce39>.

Fink, L. (2015). *Beliefs about the teaching of writing*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ncte.org/blog/2015/05/beliefs-about-the-teaching-of-writing/>.

Attributions

This chapter contains material taken from [Chapter 4.2 "How is writing learned"](#) in [Business Communication for Success](#) (used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 International](#) license) and [Chapter 1 "Exploring your reading and writing beliefs"](#) and [Chapter 2 "The writing process"](#) in [Business Writing for Everyone](#) (used under a [CC-BY-NC 4.0 International license](#)).

1.2 Elements in communication

Communication can mean different things to different people. It is affected by and influenced by our experiences, perceptions, culture, and more. To start, let's reflect on our beliefs about communication.

Questions for reflection

- 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?
- What does "communication" mean to you?
- What does "successful" communication look like to you?
- What are some barriers you've experienced when communicating with others in-person, online, or through writing?

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.

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 course, including analyzing the audience, choosing a communications channel, using plain language, and using visual aids.

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

The Communication Process

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. 1.2.1. We will continue to reflect on the story of your friend in the coffee shop to explore each element in detail.

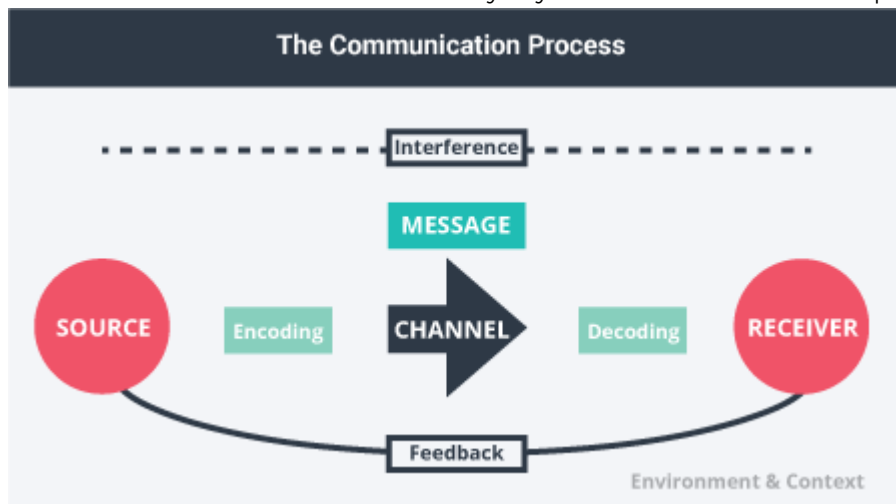


Fig. 1.2.1 The communication process by Laura Underwood

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, and more. There are many definitions and categories of communication channels to describe their role in the communication process, including 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 defense player on the other team, they may extend their arms to explain the height of the other team's defense 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.

References

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

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

Attribution

This chapter is an adaptation of [Part 1 \(Foundations\)](#) in the [Professional Communications OER](#) by the Olds College OER Development Team and is used under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#).

1.3 Critical thinking

Although understanding is the foundation of all reading experiences, it is not the goal of most post-secondary reading assignments. Your professors (and future employers) want you to read critically, which means moving beyond what the text says to asking questions about the how and why of the text's meaning. In an era of proliferating "fake news" stories and campaigns to improve information literacy, being cautious in consuming information and media is paramount.

Let's reflect on what it means to think and read critically.

Questions for reflection

- What do you think "fake news" is and isn't?
- Do you feel comfortable identifying sources of information or news stories as biased or inaccurate?
- Can you think of an example of a "fake news" story? What makes it biased or inaccurate?
- What are the potential dangers of making decisions or acting upon biased or inaccurate information?
- What does it mean to think critically? How do you do it?
- What does it mean to read critically? How do you do it?

Reading critically

Reading critically means reading skeptically, not accepting everything a text says at face value, and wondering why a particular author made a particular argument in a particular way.

When you read critically, you read not only to understand the meaning of the text, but also to question and analyze the text. You want to know not just what the text says, but also how and why it says what it says. Asking questions is one key strategy to help you read more critically. As you read a text critically, you are also reading skeptically.

A critical reader aims to answer two basic questions:

1. What is the author doing?
2. How well is the author doing it?

What is the author doing?

To answer "what is the author doing?" begin by carefully examining the following:

- What are the author's claims (a claim is what the author says is true)?
- What is the evidence (evidence is what the author offers to support what they say is true)?
- What are the assumptions (assumptions are what the author says is true or will happen without giving any support)?

It may be helpful to try to see the argument from different angles:

- How else could the author have written this piece?
- What other kinds of evidence could have been used?
- What difference would that other evidence make?
- How has the author constructed his or her argument?

How well is the author doing it?

To answer "how well is the author doing it?" consider the following questions:

- How effective is the introduction? Why might the author have started the piece with this paragraph?
- Are the main ideas supported by solid evidence?
- What evidence does the author use? Is it effective? Useful? Can you think of other evidence?
- Is the author biased or neutral? How do you know?
- Does the conclusion effectively tie the argument together? Could you draw a different conclusion from this evidence?
- What kind of language is used? How would you describe the author's style?
- How is the piece organized?

Asking questions

Asking questions of a text helps readers:

- Predict what a text will be about
- Identify confusing parts of the reading
- Clarify what confused them
- Develop a response to the text
- Understand the author's purpose for writing a text

The easiest way to develop questions about a text is to be aware of your thinking process before, during, and after reading.

- What did you wonder about before you started reading?
- What did you think the text might be about?
- What questions did the text raise in your mind as you read?
- What seemed important or surprising?
- What were you wondering when you finished reading?
- What did the author hope to accomplish in writing this text?
- Did the author achieve that purpose?
- What remains unresolved in your mind?

Thinking critically

As you approach your writing, it is important to practice the habit of thinking critically. Critical thinking can be defined as “self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking” (Paul & Elder, 2007). It is the difference between watching television in a daze versus analyzing a movie with attention to its use of lighting, camera angles, and music to influence the audience. One activity requires very little mental effort, while the other requires attention to detail, the ability to compare and contrast, and sharp senses to receive all the stimuli.

As a habit of mind, critical thinking requires established standards and attention to their use, effective communication, problem solving, and a willingness to acknowledge and address our own tendency for confirmation bias. We’ll use the phrase “habit of mind” because clear, critical thinking is a habit that requires effort and persistence. People do not start an exercise program, a food and nutrition program, or a stop-smoking program with 100 percent success the first time. In the same way, it is easy to fall back into lazy mental short cuts, such as “If it costs a lot, it must be good,” when in fact the statement may very well be false. You won’t know until you gather information that supports (or contradicts) the assertion.

As we discuss getting into the right frame of mind for writing, keep in mind that the same recommendations apply to reading and research. If you only pay attention to information that reinforces your existing beliefs and ignore or discredit information that contradicts your beliefs, you are guilty of confirmation bias (Gilovich, 1993). As you read, research, and prepare for writing, make an effort to gather information from a range of reliable sources, whether or not this information leads to conclusions you didn’t expect. Remember that those who read your writing will be aware of, or have access to, this universe of data as well and will have their own confirmation bias. Reading and writing from an audience-centered view means acknowledging your confirmation bias and moving beyond it to consider multiple frames of references, points of view, and perspectives as you read, research, and write. False thinking strategies can lead to poor conclusions, so be sure to watch out for your tendency to read, write, and believe that which reflects only what you think you know without solid research and clear, critical thinking.

References

Gilovich, T. (1993). *How we know what isn't so: The fallibility of human reason in everyday life*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2007). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools*. Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.

Attributions

This chapter contains material taken from [“Critical thinking”](#); [“Overview 3”](#); and [“Reading critically”](#) in [Developmental Writing](#) by Lumen Learning (used under a [CC-BY 3.0](#) license) and [Chapter 5.1 “Think, then write: Writing preparation”](#) in [Business Communication for Success](#) (used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 International](#) license).