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Course Title

Communication
Planning Messages

Instructor

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Credit
3 PDU

Questions
20

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Adaptation Statement

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- *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 consists of Part 3 titled "Planning Messages" that comprises 10 chapters: 3.1 (Pre-Writing), 3.2 (Communication Models), 3.3 (Audience Analysis), 3.4 (Purpose), 3.5 (Channels), 3.6 (Audience Types), 3.7 (Audience Demographics), 3.8 (Audience Geographics), 3.9 (Audience Psychographyics) and 3.10 (Adapting Messages). They are adapted from the said 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 3.1
  - *Changed definition of effective writing to focus on needs of audience*

  Chapter 3.2
  - *Added alternate names of some communication models*
  - *Added new examples of job interview experiences*
  - *Added questions for reflection*
  - *Added statement about need to consider/discuss communication models*

  Chapter 3.4
  - *Created a Canadian example*

  Chapter 3.7
  - *Added statistics and a discussion of consumption of social media by different age groups*

- *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.*

3.1 Pre-writing

If you think that a blank sheet of paper or a blinking cursor on the computer screen is a scary sight, you are not alone. Many writers, students, and employees find that beginning to write can be intimidating. When faced with a blank page, however, experienced writers remind themselves that writing, like other everyday activities, is a process. Every process, from writing to cooking, bike riding, and learning to use a new cell phone, will get significantly easier with practice.

Just as you need a recipe, ingredients, and proper tools to cook a delicious meal, you also need a plan, resources, and adequate time to create a good business message. In other words, writing is a process that requires following steps and using strategies to accomplish your goals.

Let's begin by thinking about your current writing process.

Questions for reflection

1. Describe your writing process. How do you tackle writing tasks?
2. What do you think the role of your writing teacher should be?
3. Describe a time when you wrote something you're proud of. How did you get started? What conditions did you write under? Did you revise?
4. How do you normally complete an assignment? Do you feel that this method is successful?
5. If you write in more than one language, do you use the same writing process for each language you write? How are your writing processes the same and different?

What role do emotions play in writing?

Because this is a business writing class, it might seem weird to talk about feelings. But how you feel about a writing task often determines how effectively you can complete it. For example, have you ever struggled to write an apology to someone you upset? Have you ever found yourself procrastinating to write an assignment you don't really understand? Have you ever found that it's easier for you to seem to write better in some classes more than others?

Emotions are the reason that sometimes you can write without thinking and sometimes you find yourself procrastinating, then staring at a blank screen, typing and deleting the same words over and over, feeling your writing becoming more awkward rather than less. That's why simply acknowledging how you feel can help you avoid procrastination.

The first step is acknowledging how you feel, and the second step is figuring out why you feel that way. For example, some students have negative feelings about a writing assignment because they don't like the teacher (or a teacher they had years ago), or they've had past struggles in a subject, or they don't understand the point of the assignment, or they're overwhelmed with other classes. Being able to identify why you're feeling an emotion takes the power out of it. Sometimes you can even find a solution to make the writing task easier.

Here are some stories about how student writers changed their writing processes.

Raveena's Story

Whenever Raveena writes, she feels a little editor on her shoulder who's always chiming in correcting her grammar and telling her that her sentences are awkward and sloppy. She spends so much time editing while she writes that she loses her train of thought and has trouble just letting her thoughts flow. Writing a single page takes her hours.

Raveena's instructor asked if she had always written this way. Raveena said she used to write easily, but during her first semester of university she had a couple of instructors who were tough graders. Whenever she would write, she would imagine her instructors criticizing her. Raveena's instructor suggested two solutions:

1) She should pretend to write to someone she likes. It's easier to write to a friendly reader than a hostile one. Raveena imagined writing to her favourite cousin and writing got a little easier.

2) She asked Raveena to put a piece of paper over her laptop screen or turn the screen's brightness to the lowest setting, then type out her thoughts. At first, Raveena found this very uncomfortable. When she turned her screen back on, she saw a jumble of text. But Raveena soon discovered that she had quickly written 500 words, which would have taken her hours under her old method. Raveena then used her excellent editing skills to shape what she had written.

Kai's Story

Kai prided themself on being able to write their essays the night before. They would drink some energy drinks and buy their favourite snacks and write for hours. They rarely revised their work. This technique worked well in high school, but when they got to university their grades started slipping. Their instructors noted that they had great ideas, but many were not well-organized or were incomplete.

Kai's instructor asked the class to bring a draft for a peer workshop. Kai told their instructor that they wouldn't be able to write a draft, since they could only write well the night before the assignment was due. Kai's instructor asked them what they liked about writing at night. Kai said that they liked how quiet it was in the house at 3 a.m. and how the pressure made them focus. Kai's instructor asked them to try to replicate the same environment (dark room, snacks, drinks etc.), set a timer for 2 hours and see how much they could write. Kai was able to write a rough draft of their assignment, though they didn't feel the "writing magic" in the same way.

During the workshop, Kai's classmates offered several useful suggestions for improvement, but they were worried about overthinking things and ruining them by doing too much revision. Kai's instructor told them to save the rough draft as a different file. If they didn't like the revisions, they could go back to the previous draft. Kai tried a number of revision techniques and ended up with a much stronger assignment. Slowly, they used more and more revision techniques in their other assignments. The result: higher grades and more sleep.

If your writing process is working for you, then there's no need to change it. But if the way you write frustrates you, consider making some changes. You might also consider changing your writing process for certain writing tasks, such as important assignments.

What is effective writing?

Effective writing can be simply described as good ideas that are expressed and arranged in a way your audience understands. Although many more pre-writing strategies exist, this chapter covers six: using experience and observations, freewriting, asking questions, brainstorming, idea mapping, and searching the internet. Using the strategies in this chapter can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process.

Definition

Pre-writing is the stage of the writing process during which you transfer your abstract thoughts into more concrete ideas in ink on paper (or in type on a computer screen). Although pre-writing techniques can be helpful in all stages of the writing process, the following six strategies are best used when initially deciding on a topic:

1. Using experience and observations
2. Freewriting
3. Asking questions
4. Brainstorming
5. Idea mapping
6. Searching the internet

In addition to understanding that writing is a process, writers also understand that choosing a good general topic for an assignment is an essential step. Sometimes your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, and other times your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own. A good topic not only covers what an assignment will be about but also fits the assignment's purpose.

The first important step is for you to tell yourself why you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and for whom you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper.

Using experience and observations

When selecting a topic, you may also want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

Freewriting

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write freely about any topic for a set amount of time (usually three to five minutes). During the time limit, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you get stuck, just copy the same word or phrase over and over until you come up with a new thought.

Writing often comes easier when you have a personal connection with the topic you have chosen. Remember, to generate ideas in your freewriting, you may also think about readings that you have enjoyed or that have challenged your thinking. Doing this may lead your thoughts in interesting directions.

Quickly recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic. When writing quickly, try not to doubt or question your ideas. Allow yourself to write freely and without being self-conscious. Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover even more ideas about the topic. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you even more.

Asking questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? In everyday situations, you pose these kinds of questions to get more information. Who will be my partner for the project? When is the next meeting? Why is my car making that odd noise?

You seek the answers to these questions to gain knowledge, to better understand your daily experiences, and to plan for the future. Asking these types of questions will also help you with the writing process. As you choose your topic, answering these questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

Pre-writing is very purpose driven; it does not follow a set of hard-and-fast rules. The purpose of pre-writing is to find and explore ideas so that you will be prepared to write. A pre-writing technique like asking questions can help you both find a topic and explore it. The key to effective pre-writing is to use the techniques that work best for your thinking process. Freewriting may not seem to fit your thinking process, but keep an open mind. It may work better than you think.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is similar to list making. You can make a list on your own or in a group with your classmates. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer document) and write your general topic across the top. Underneath your topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and the list items as things that fit in that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next, creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic.

Idea mapping

Idea mapping allows you to visualize your ideas on paper using circles, lines, and arrows. This technique is also known as clustering because ideas are broken down and clustered or grouped together. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using idea mapping, you might discover interesting connections between topics that you had not thought of before.

To create an idea map, start with your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Then write specific ideas around it and use lines or arrows to connect them together. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.

Searching the internet

Using search engines on the internet are good ways to see what kinds of websites are available on your topic. Writers use search engines not only to understand more about the topic's specific issues but also to get better acquainted with their audience. Be choosy about the websites you use. Make sure they are reliable sources for the kind of information you seek.

When you search the internet, type some key words from your broad topic or words from your narrowed focus into your browser's search engine (many good general and specialized search engines are available for you to try). Then look over the results for relevant and interesting articles.

Results from an internet search show who is talking about the topic, how the topic is being discussed, and what specific points are currently being discussed about the topic. If the search engine results are not what you are looking for, revise your key words and search again. Some search engines also offer suggestions for related searches that may give you better results.

Not all the results online search engines return will be useful or reliable. Give careful consideration to the reliability of an online source before selecting a topic based on it. Remember that factual information can be verified in other sources, both online and in print. If you have doubts about any information you find, either do not use it or identify it as potentially unreliable.

Want to switch up your writing process?

Here are some ideas if you're getting stuck. They can be used both in school and in the workplace.

Ways to switch up your writing process

Here are some simple ways to change your writing process. Pick a few and try them.

Pre-Writing

1. Read the assignment prompt, then quickly write down 5 things you'll need to do to be successful in the assignment. Using this list and the assignment prompt, create a timeline for finishing the assignment. For example, if you're being graded on using primary and secondary research, you'll want to make time to research, analyze your sources and add your citations.
2. Go for a walk (or do some exercise) and think about your writing task. Sometimes moving your body helps you do brainstorming.
3. Create an outline for your work.
4. Use brainstorming (mind mapping, bubble maps, etc).
5. Try illustrating your project visually. Connect ideas and thoughts with lines.
6. Read a similar document to get ideas.
7. Talk about your writing task with a friend.
8. Represent your writing task visually. Sometimes creating a comic strip or series of doodles helps you to figure out where to start.

Writing

1. Turn off the screen of your computer and try writing your document. This will help you get your thoughts down without worrying about editing.
2. Use the voice recorder in your phone to record yourself describing what you want to write about as if to a friend.
3. Write an imaginary conversation between your sources. How would they respond to each other?
4. Try free-writing. Write the phrase "What I want my reader to know is…" or "The most surprising thing about my research is…" Then, set a timer for 5 minutes and write about this topic. Don't stop writing. Ignore all grammar and spelling errors. See how much you can write.
5. Schedule a time each day to write and put it in your calendar.
6. Try to Pomodoro Technique, where you work intensely for 25 minutes then take a 5 minute break.
7. Use website blocking software like Freedom, FocusBooster or StayFocusd to block your internet use for a few hours so you can concentrate.

Revising

1. Read your work out loud. The ear is a better editor than the eye.
2. Leave your work overnight so that you can come back to it with fresh eyes.
3. Describe your work to a trusted friend or family member and encourage them to ask you questions.
4. Compare your work to the assignment prompt or rubric. Read a criteria/rubric point then go to

your work and underline where in the work you met the criteria.

5. Print your work out and cut it up so that each paragraph is on its own piece of paper. Try reorganizing your paragraphs. Does another order work better?
6. If your writing uses sources, print your work out and highlight every time you use a source. If your writing has no highlighted parts, you might want to add sources. If your writing is mostly highlighted, you might want to do more analysis of the sources.
7. Underline the main point of each paragraph. If you can't point out what the point of the paragraph is, you may need to rethink it. If your paragraph has multiple points, you may need to break it up.
8. Show your work to your teacher, a colleague or friend and ask them what they think the goal of the assignment is.

Attributions

3.2 Communication models

Communication is a complex process, and it is difficult to determine where or with whom a communication encounter starts and ends. It can sometimes be helpful to consider different communication models. Below are some questions to help guide you through this chapter.

Questions for reflection

- Why do models (of anything) matter in the real world?
- What value do communication models have?
- What communication models do you know about already?
- How can learning about communication models be helpful to you?

Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Some models explain communication in more detail than others, but even the most complex model still doesn't recreate what we experience in even a moment of a communication encounter. Models still serve a valuable purpose for students of communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. When you become aware of how communication functions, you can think more deliberately through your communication encounters, which can help you better prepare for future communication and learn from your previous communication. The three models of communication we will discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

Although these models of communication differ, they contain some common elements. The first two models we will discuss, the transmission model and the interaction model, include the following parts: participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the participants are the senders and/or receivers of messages in a communication encounter. The message is the verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. For example, when you say "Hello!" to your friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by your friend.

The internal cognitive process that allows participants to send, receive, and understand messages is the encoding and decoding process. Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. As we will learn later, the level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages varies. Decoding is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: "I'm hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?" As your roommate receives the message, they decode your communication and turn it back into thoughts in order to make meaning out of it. Of course, we don't just communicate verbally—we have various options, or channels for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a channel, or a sensory route on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels. If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get their attention by waving your hands before you can ask them about dinner.

Linear model of communication

The linear or transmission model of communication, as shown in Figure 2.2.1, describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver (Ellis & McClintock, 1990). This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. The scholars who designed this model extended on a linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries before that included a speaker, message, and hearer. They were also influenced by the advent and spread of new communication technologies of the time such as telegraphy and radio, and you can probably see these technical influences within the model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive their message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

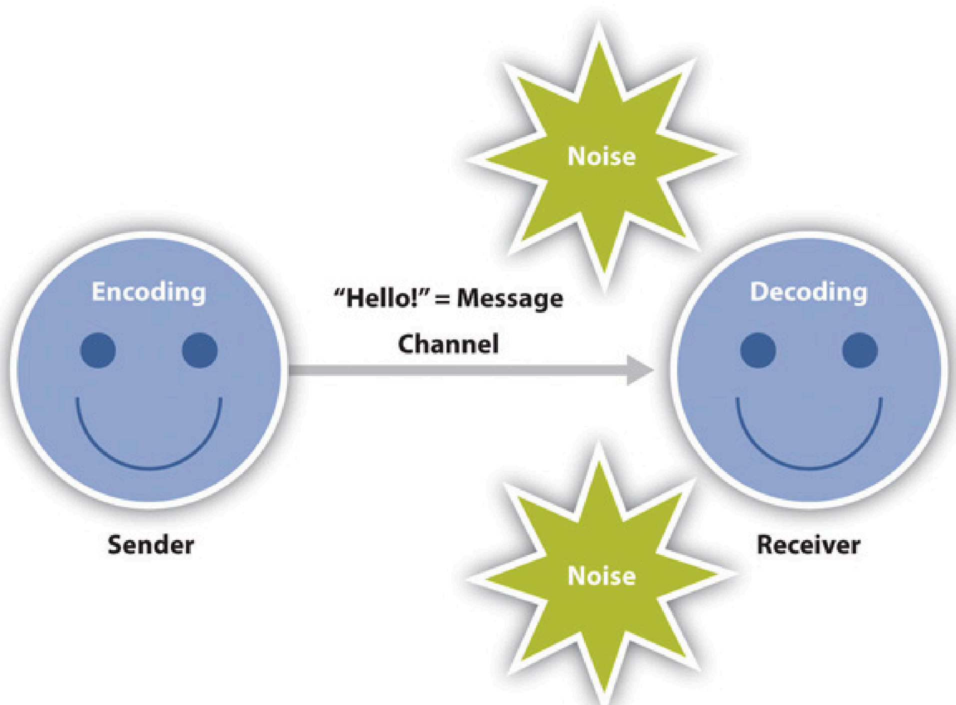

Figure 2.2.1 The linear model of communication

Although the transmission model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication.

Interactive model of communication

The interactive or interaction model of communication, as shown in Figure 2.2.2, describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts (Schramm, 1997). Rather than illustrating communication as a linear, one-way process, the interactive model incorporates feedback, which makes communication a more interactive, two-way process. Feedback includes messages sent in response to other messages. For example, your instructor may respond to a point you raise during class discussion or you may point to the sofa when your roommate asks you where the remote control is. The inclusion of a feedback loop also leads to a more complex understanding of the roles of participants in a communication encounter. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, we alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

The interactive model is also less message focused and more interaction focused. While the linear model focused on how a message was transmitted and whether or not it was received, the interactive model is more concerned with the communication process itself. In fact, this model acknowledges that there are so many messages being sent at one time that many of them may not even be received. Some messages are also unintentionally sent. Therefore, communication isn't judged effective or ineffective in this model based on whether or not a single message was successfully transmitted and received.

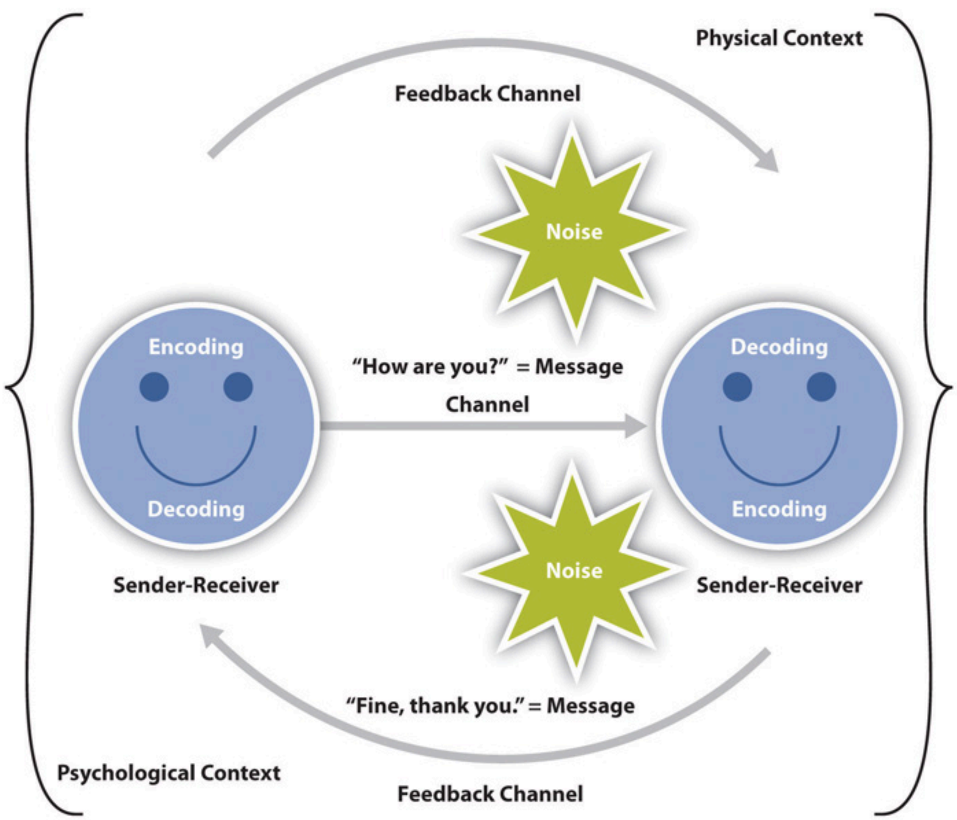

Figure 2.2.2 The interactive model of communication

The interactive model takes physical and psychological context into account. Physical context includes the environmental factors in a communication encounter. The size, layout, temperature, and lighting of a space influence our communication. Imagine the different physical contexts in which job interviews take place and how that may affect your communication. I have had job interviews over the phone, crowded around a table with eight interviewers, and sitting with few people around an extra large conference table. I've also been walked around an office to unexpectedly interview one-on-one, in succession, with multiple members of a search committee over a period of three hours. Whether it's the size of the room or other environmental factors, it's important to consider the role that physical context plays in our communication. Psychological context includes the mental and emotional factors in a communication encounter. Stress, anxiety, and emotions are just some examples of psychological influences that can affect our communication. Seemingly positive psychological states, like experiencing the emotion of love, can also affect communication. Feedback and context help make the interaction model a more useful illustration of the communication process, but the transaction model views communication as a powerful tool that shapes our realities beyond individual communication encounters.

Transaction model of communication

As the study of communication progressed, models expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don't send messages like computers, and we don't neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can't consciously decide to stop communicating because communication is more than sending and receiving messages. The transaction model differs from the transmission and interaction models in significant ways, including the conceptualization of communication, the role of sender and receiver, and the role of context (Barnlund, 1970).

The transaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. In this model, which is shown in Figure 2.2.3, we don't just communicate to exchange messages; we communicate to create relationships, form intercultural alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage with others in dialogue to create communities.

The roles of sender and receiver in the transaction model of communication differ significantly from the other models. Instead of labeling participants as senders and receivers, the people in a communication encounter are referred to as communicators. Unlike the interactive model, which suggests that participants alternate positions as sender and receiver, the transaction model suggests that we are simultaneously senders and receivers. This is an important addition to the model because it allows us to understand how we are able to adapt our communication—for example, a verbal message—in the middle of sending it based on the communication we are simultaneously receiving from our communication partner.

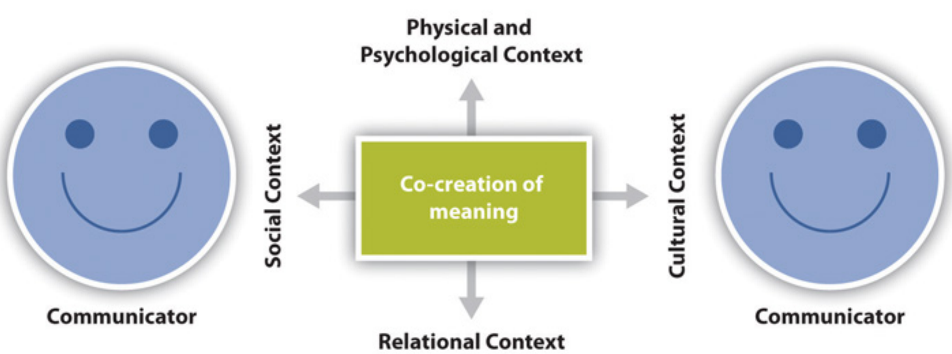

Figure 2.2.3 The transaction model of communication

The transaction model also includes a more complex understanding of context. The interaction model portrays context as physical and psychological influences that enhance or impede communication. While these contexts are important, they focus on message transmission and reception. Since the transaction model of communication views communication as a force that shapes our realities before and after specific interactions occur, it must account for contextual influences outside of a single interaction. To do this, the transaction model considers how social, relational, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

Social context refers to the stated rules or unstated norms that guide communication. Norms are social conventions that we pick up on through observation, practice, and trial and error. We may not even know we are breaking a social norm until we notice people looking at us strangely or someone corrects or teases us. Relational context includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person. We communicate differently with someone we just met versus someone we've known for a long time. Initial interactions with people tend to be more highly scripted and governed by established norms and rules, but when we have an established relational context, we may be able to bend or break social norms and rules more easily. Cultural context includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability. We all have multiple cultural identities that influence our communication. Some people, especially those with identities that have been historically marginalized, are regularly aware of how their cultural identities influence their communication and influence how others communicate with them. Conversely, people with identities that are dominant or in the majority may rarely, if ever, think about the role their cultural identities play in their communication. Cultural context is influenced by numerous aspects of our identities and is not limited to race or ethnicity.

References

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Attribution

3.3 Audience analysis

John Thill and Courtland Bovee (Thill & Bovee, 2004), two leading authors in the field of business communication, have created a checklist for planning business messages. The following twelve-item checklist, adapted here, serves as a useful reminder of the importance of preparation in the writing process:

1. Determine your general purpose: are you trying to inform, persuade, entertain, facilitate interaction, or motivate a reader?
2. Determine your specific purpose (the desired outcome).
3. Make sure your purpose is realistic.
4. Make sure your timing is appropriate.
5. Make sure your sources are credible.
6. Make sure the message reflects positively on your business.
7. Determine audience size.
8. Determine audience composition.
9. Determine audience knowledge and awareness of topic.
10. Anticipate probable responses.
11. Select the correct channel.
12. Make sure the information provided is accurate, ethical, and pertinent.

Throughout the next few chapters, we will examine these various steps in greater detail.

The audience any piece of writing is the intended or potential reader or readers. This should be *the most important* consideration in planning, writing, and reviewing a document. You "adapt" your writing to meet the needs, interests, and background of the readers who will be reading your writing.

The principle seems absurdly simple and obvious. It's much the same as telling someone, "Talk so the person in front of you can understand what you're saying." It's like saying, "Don't talk rocket science to your six-year-old." Do we need a course in that? Doesn't seem like it. But, in fact, lack of audience analysis and adaptation is one of the root causes of most of the problems you find in business documents.

Audiences, regardless of category, must also be analyzed in terms of characteristics such as the following:

- **Background—knowledge, experience, training:** One of your most important concerns is just how much knowledge, experience, or training you can expect in your readers. If you expect some of your readers to lack certain background, do you automatically supply it in your document? Consider an example: imagine you're writing a guide to using a software product that runs under Microsoft Windows. How much can you expect your readers to know about Windows? If some are likely to know little about Windows, should you provide that information? If you say no, then you run the risk of customers' getting frustrated with your product. If you say yes to adding background information on Windows, you increase your work effort and add to the page count of the document (and thus to the cost). Obviously, there's no easy answer to this question—part of the answer may involve just how small a segment of the audience needs that background information.
- **Needs and interests:** To plan your document, you need to know what your audience is going to expect from that document. Imagine how readers will want to use your document and what will they demand from it. For example, imagine you are writing a manual on how to use a new smart phone—what are your readers going to expect to find in it? Imagine you're under contract to write a background report on climate change for a national real estate association—what do they want to read about and, equally important, what do they *not* want to read about?

- **Different cultures:** If you write for an international audience, be aware that formats for indicating time and dates, monetary amounts, and numerical amounts vary across the globe. Also be aware that humour and figurative language (as in “hit a home run”) are not likely to be understood outside of your own culture.
- **Other demographic characteristics:** There are many other characteristics about your readers that *might* have an influence on how you should design and write your document—for example, age groups, type of residence, area of residence, gender, political preferences, and so on.

Audience analysis can get complicated by other factors, such as mixed audience types for one document and wide variability within the audience.

- **More than one audience.** You may often find that your business message is for more than one audience. For example, it may be seen by technical people (experts and technicians) and administrative people (executives). What to do? You can either write all the sections so that all the audiences of your document can understand them (good luck!), or you can write each section strictly for the audience that would be interested in it, then use headings and section introductions to alert your audience about where to go and what to avoid in your report.
- **Wide variability in an audience.** You may realize that, although you have an audience that fits into only one category, there is a wide variability in its background. This is a tough one—if you write to the lowest common denominator of reader, you’re likely to end up with a cumbersome, tedious book-like thing that will turn off the majority of readers. But if you don’t write to that lowest level, you lose that segment of your readers. What to do? Most writers go for the majority of readers and sacrifice that minority that needs more help. Others put the supplemental information in appendices or insert cross-references to beginners’ books.

Reference

Thill, J. V., & Bovee, C. L. (2004). *Business communication today (8th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Attributions

3.4 Purpose

Preparation for the writing process involves purpose, research and investigation, reading and analyzing, and adaptation. In this chapter, we consider how to determine the purpose of a document and how that awareness guides the writer to effective product.

While you may be free to create documents that represent yourself or your organization, your employer will often have direct input into their purpose. All acts of communication have general and specific purposes, and the degree to which you can identify these purposes will influence how effective your writing is. General purposes involve the overall goal of the communication interaction, which have been mentioned previously: to inform, persuade, entertain, facilitate interaction, or motivate a reader. The general purpose influences the presentation and expectation for feedback. In an informative message—the most common type of writing in business—you will need to cover several predictable elements:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- How
- Why (optional)

Some elements may receive more attention than others, and they do not necessarily have to be addressed in the order you see here. Depending on the nature of your project, as a writer you will have a degree of input over how you organize them.

Note that the last item, *Why*, is designated as optional. This is because business writing sometimes needs to report facts and data objectively, without making any interpretation or pointing to any cause-effect relationship. In other business situations, of course, identifying why something happened or why a certain decision is advantageous will be the essence of the communication.

In addition to its general purpose (e.g., to inform, persuade, entertain, or motivate), every piece of writing also has at least one specific purpose, which is the intended outcome–the result that will happen once your written communication has been read.

For example, imagine that you are an employee in a small city's housing authority and have been asked to draft a letter to city residents about radon. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that has been classified by Health Canada as a health hazard. In the course of a routine test, radon was detected in minimal levels in an apartment building operated by the housing authority. It presents a relatively low level of risk, but because the incident was reported in the local newspaper, the mayor has asked the housing authority director to be proactive in informing all the city residents of the situation.

The general purpose of your letter is to inform, and the specific purpose is to have a written record of informing all city residents about how much radon was found, when, and where; where they can get more information on radon; and the date, time, and place of the meeting. Residents may read the information and attend or they may not even read the letter. But once the letter has been written, signed, and distributed, your general and specific purposes have been accomplished.

Now imagine that you begin to plan your letter by applying the above list of elements. Recall that the letter informs residents on three counts: (1) the radon finding, (2) where to get information about radon, and (3) the upcoming meeting. For each of these pieces of information, the elements may look like the following:

1. Radon Finding

- Who: The manager of the apartment building (give name)
- What: Discovered a radon concentration of 250 becquerels per cubic metre (Bq/m^3) and reported it to the housing authority director, who informed the city health inspector and mayor
- When: During the week of December 15
- Where: In the basement of the apartment building located at (give address)
- How: In the course of performing a routine annual test with a commercially available do-it-yourself radon test kit

2. Information about radon

   - Who: According to the city health inspector and Health Canada
   - What: Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that results from the breakdown of uranium in soil; a radon test level above 200 Bq/m^3 may be cause for concern
   - When: Radon levels fluctuate from time to time, so further testing will be done; in past years, test results were below 200 Bq/m^3
   - Where: More information is available from Health Canada
   - How: By phone, mail, or on the internet (provide full contact information for both sources)
   - Why: To become better informed and avoid misunderstandings about radon, its health risks, and the meaning of radon test results

3. City meeting about radon

   - Who: All city residents are welcome
   - What: Attend an informational meeting where the mayor, director of the housing authority, city health inspector, and representative from Health Canada will speak and answer questions
   - When: Monday, January 7, at 7 p.m.
   - Where: City hall community room
   - Why: To become better informed and avoid misunderstandings about radon, its health risks, and the meaning of radon test results

Once you have laid out these elements of your informative letter, you have an outline from which it will be easy to write the actual letter.

Your effort serves as a written record of correspondence informing them that radon was detected, which may be one of the specific or primary purposes. A secondary purpose may be to increase attendance at the town hall meeting, but you will need feedback from that event to determine the effectiveness of your effort.

Now imagine that instead of being a housing authority employee, you are a city resident who receives that informative letter, and you happen to operate a business as a certified radon mitigation contractor. You may decide to build on this information and develop a persuasive message. You may draft a letter to the homeowners and landlords in the neighborhood near the building in question. To make your message persuasive, you may focus on the perception that radiation is inherently dangerous and that no amount of radon has been declared safe. You may cite external authorities that indicate radon is a contributing factor to several health ailments, and even appeal to emotions with phrases like “protect your children” and “peace of mind.” Your letter will probably encourage readers to check with Health Canada to verify that you are a certified contractor, describe the services you provide, and indicate that friendly payment terms can be arranged.

Credibility, timing, and audience

At this point in the discussion, we need to visit the concept of credibility. Credibility, or the perception of integrity of the message based on an association with the source, is central to any communication act. If the audience perceives the letter as having presented the information in an impartial and objective way, perceives the health inspector's expertise in the field as relevant to the topic, and generally regards the housing authority in a positive light, they will be likely to accept your information as accurate. If, however, the audience does not associate trust and reliability with your message in particular and the city government in general, you may anticipate a lively discussion at the city hall meeting.

In the same way, if the reading audience perceives the radon mitigation contractor's letter as a poor sales pitch without their best interest or safety in mind, they may not respond positively to its message and be unlikely to contact him about any possible radon problems in their homes. If, however, the sales letter squarely addresses the needs of the audience and effectively persuades them, the contractor may look forward to a busy season.

Returning to the original housing authority scenario, did you consider how your letter might be received or the fear it may have generated in the audience? In real life you don't get a second chance, but in our academic setting, we can go back and take more time on our assignment, using the twelve-item checklist presented in chapter 2.3. Imagine that you are the mayor or the housing authority director. Before you assign an employee to send a letter to inform residents about the radon finding, take a moment to consider how realistic your purpose is. As a city official, you may want the letter to serve as a record that residents were informed of the radon finding, but will that be the only outcome? Will people be even more concerned in response to the letter than they were when the item was published in the newspaper? Would a persuasive letter serve the city's purposes better than an informative one?

Another consideration is the timing. On the one hand, it may be important to get the letter sent as quickly as possible, as the newspaper report may have already aroused concerns that the letter will help calm. On the other hand, given that the radon was discovered in mid-December, many people may be caught up in holiday celebrations and will not pay attention to the letter. In early January, everyone will be paying more attention to their mail as they anticipate the arrival of tax-related documents or even the dreaded credit card statement. If the mayor has scheduled the city hall meeting for January 7, people may be unhappy if they only learn about the meeting at the last minute. Also consider your staff; if many of them will be taking vacation during this period, there may not be enough staff in place to respond to phone calls that will likely come in response to the letter, even though the letter advises residents to contact Health Canada.

Next, how credible are the sources cited in the letter? If you as a housing authority employee have been asked to draft it, to whom should it go once you have it written? The city health inspector is mentioned as a source; will they read and approve the letter before it is sent? Is there someone at the region, provincial, or federal level who can, or should, check the information before it is sent?

The next item on the checklist is to make sure the message reflects positively on your business. In our hypothetical case, the "business" is city government. The letter should acknowledge that city officials and employees are servants of the taxpayers. "We are here to serve you" should be expressed, if not in so many words, in the tone of the letter.

The next three items on the checklist are associated with the audience profile: audience size, composition, knowledge, and awareness of the topic. Since your letter is being sent to all city residents, you likely have a database from which you can easily tell how many readers constitute your audience. What about audience composition? What else do you know about the city's residents? What percentage of households includes children? What is the education level of most of the residents? Are there many residents whose first language is not English; if so, should your letter be translated into any other languages? What is the range of income levels in the city? How well informed are city residents about radon? Has radon been an issue in any other buildings in the city in recent years? The answers to these questions will help determine how detailed the information in your letter should be.

Finally, anticipate probable responses. Although the letter is intended to inform, could it be misinterpreted as an attempt to "cover up" an unacceptable condition in city housing? If the local newspaper were to reprint the letter, would the mayor be upset? Is there someone in public relations who will be doing media interviews at the same time the letter goes out? Will the release of information be coordinated, and if so by whom?

One additional point that deserves mention is the notion of decision makers. Even if your overall goal is to inform or persuade, the basic mission is to simply communicate. Establishing a connection is a fundamental aspect of the communication audience, and if you can correctly target key decision makers you increase your odds for making the connection with those you intend to inform or persuade. Who will open the mail or email? Who will act upon it? The better you can answer those questions, the more precise you can be in your writing efforts.

Reference

Government of Canada. (2017). *Radon: What you need to know.* Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/radiation/radon.html.

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3.5 Channels

Purpose is closely associated with channel. We need to consider the purpose when choosing a channel. From source to receiver, message to channel, feedback to context, environment, and interference, all eight components play a role in the dynamic process. While writing often focuses on an understanding of the receiver (as we've discussed) and defining the purpose of the message, the channel—or the "how" in the communication process—deserves special mention.

So far, we have discussed a simple and traditional channel of written communication: the hard-copy letter mailed in a standard business envelope and sent by postal mail. But in today's business environment, this channel is becoming increasingly rare as electronic channels become more widely available and accepted.

When is it appropriate to send an instant message or text message versus a conventional e-mail or fax? What is the difference between a letter and a memo? Between a report and a proposal? Writing itself is the communication medium, but each of these specific channels has its own strengths, weaknesses, and understood expectations that are summarized in Table 2.5.1.

Table 2.5.1 Written communication channels

Channel	Strengths	Weaknesses	Expectations	When to choose
Instant message or text message	Very fast. Good for rapid exchanges of small amounts of information Inexpensive	Informal. Not suitable for large amounts of information Abbreviations lead to misunderstandings	Quick response	Informal use among peers at similar levels within an organization. You need a fast, inexpensive connection with a colleague over a small issue and limited amount of information
Channel	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**	**Expectations**	**When to choose**
Email	Fast. Good for relatively fast exchanges of information "Subject" line allows compilation of many messages on one subject or project Easy to distribute to multiple recipients Inexpensive	May hit "send" prematurely. May be overlooked or deleted without being read "Reply to all" error "Forward" error Large attachments may cause the e-mail to be caught in recipient's spam filter	Normally a response is expected within 24 hours, although norms vary by situation and organizational culture	You need to communicate but time is not the most important consideration. You need to send attachments (provided their file size is not too big)
Channel	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**	**Expectations**	**When to choose**
Fax	Fast. Provides documentation	Receiving issues (e.g., the receiving machine may be out of paper or toner)Long distance telephone charges apply Transitional telephone-based technology losing popularity to online information exchange	Normally, a long (multiple page) fax is not expected	You want to send a document whose format must remain intact as presented, such as a medical prescription or a signed work order. Allows use of letterhead to represent your company
Channel	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**	**Expectations**	**When to choose**
Memo	Official but less formal than a letter. Clearly shows who sent it, when, and to whom	Memos sent through e-mails can get deleted without review. Attachments can get removed by spam filters	Normally used internally in an organization to communicate directives from management on policy and procedure, or documentation	You need to communicate a general message within your organization
Channel	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**	**Expectations**	**When to choose**
Letter	Formal Letterhead represents your company and adds credibility	May get filed or thrown away unread. Cost and time involved in printing, stuffing, sealing, affixing postage, and travel through the postal system	Specific formats associated with specific purposes	You need to inform, persuade, deliver bad news or negative message, and document the communication
Channel	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**	**Expectations**	**When to choose**
Report	Can require significant time for preparation and production	Requires extensive research and documentation	Specific formats for specific purposes	You need to document the relationship(s) between large amounts of data to inform an internal or external audience
Channel	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**	**Expectations**	**When to choose**
Proposal	Can require significant time for preparation and production	Requires extensive research and documentation	Specific formats for specific purposes	You need to persuade an audience with complex arguments and data

By choosing the correct channel for a message, you can save yourself many headaches and increase the likelihood that your writing will be read, understood, and acted upon in the manner you intended.

In terms of writing preparation, you should review any electronic communication before you send it. Spelling and grammatical errors will negatively impact your credibility. With written documents, we often take time and care to get it right the first time, but the speed of instant messaging, text messaging, or emailing often deletes this important review cycle of written works. Just because the document you prepare in a text message is only one sentence long doesn't mean it can't be misunderstood or expose you to liability. Take time when preparing your written messages, regardless of their intended presentation, and review your work before you click "send."

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3.6 Audience types

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.

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3.7 Audience demographics

There are social and economic characteristics that can influence how someone behaves as an individual. Standard demographic variables include a person's age, gender, family status, education, occupation, income, and ethnicity. Each of these variables or characteristics can provide clues about how a person might respond to a message.

For example, people of different ages consume (use) media and social media differently. According to the Pew Research Center (2018), 81% of people aged 18-29 use Facebook, 64% use Instagram, and 40% use Twitter. In contrast, 65% of people aged 50-64 use Facebook, 21% use Instagram, and 19% use Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2018). If I were trying to market my product to those aged 50-64, I would likely reach a larger audience (and potentially make more sales) if I used targeted ads on Facebook rather than recruiting brand ambassadors on Instagram. Knowing the age (or ages) of your audience(s) can help inform what channels you use to send your message. It can also help you determine the best way to structure and tailor your message to meet specific audience characteristics.

Reference

Pew Research Center. (2018). *Social media fact sheet*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/.

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3.8 Audience geographics

We all understand geographically defined political jurisdictions such as cities, provinces, and territories. You can also geographically segment audiences into rural, urban, suburban, and edge communities (the office parks that have sprung up on the outskirts of many urban communities). These geographic categories help define rifts between regions on issues such as transportation, education, taxes, housing, land use, and more. These are important geographic audience categories for politicians, marketers, and businesses. For example, local retail advertisers want to reach audiences who are in the reading or listening range of the local newspaper or radio station and within traveling distance of their stores. Therefore, it's important to consider the geographic characteristics of your audience when crafting business messages.

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3.9 Audience psychographics

Psychographics refer to all the psychological variables that combine to form a person's inner self. Even if two people share the same demographic or geographic characteristics, they may still hold entirely different ideas and values that define them personally and socially. Some of these differences are explained by looking at the psychographic characteristics that define them. Psychographic variables include:

Motives – an internal force that stimulates someone to behave in a particular manner. A person has media consumption motives and buying motives. A motive for watching television may be to escape; a motive for choosing to watch a situation comedy rather than a police drama may be the audience member's need to laugh rather than feel suspense and anxiety.

Attitudes – a learned predisposition, a feeling held toward an object, person, or idea that leads to a particular behaviour. Attitudes are enduring; they are positive or negative, affecting likes and dislikes. A strong positive attitude can make someone very loyal to a brand (one person is committed to the Mazda brand so they will only consider Mazda models when it is time to buy a new car). A strong negative attitude can turn an audience member away from a message or product (someone disagrees with the political slant of Fox News and decides to watch MSNBC instead).

Personalities – a collection of traits that make a person distinctive. Personalities influence how people look at the world, how they perceive and interpret what is happening around them, how they respond intellectually and emotionally, and how they form opinions and attitudes.

Lifestyles – these factors form the mainstay of psychographic research. Lifestyle research studies the way people allocate time, energy and money.

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3.10 Adapting messages

Let's say you've analyzed your audience until you know them better than you know yourself. What good is it? How do you use this information? How do you keep from writing something that will still be incomprehensible or useless to your readers?

The business of writing *to* your audience may have a lot to do with in-born talent, intuition, and even mystery. But there are some controls you can use to have a better chance to connect with your readers. The following "controls" mostly have to do with making information more understandable for your specific audience:

- Add information readers need to understand your document. Check to see whether certain key information is missing—for example, a critical series of steps from a set of instructions, important background that helps beginners understand the main discussion, or definitions of key terms.
- Omit information your readers do not need. Unnecessary information can also confuse and frustrate readers—after all, it's there so they feel obligated to read it. For example, you can probably chop theoretical discussion from basic instructions.
- Change the level of the information you currently have. You may have the right information but it may be "pitched" at too high or too low a technical level. It may be pitched at the wrong kind of audience—for example, at an expert audience rather than a technician audience. This happens most often when product-design notes are passed off as instructions.
- Add examples to help readers understand. Examples are one of the most powerful ways to connect with audiences, particularly in instructions. Even in non-instructional text, for example, when you are trying to explain a technical concept, examples are a major help—analogies in particular.
- Change the level of your examples. You may be using examples, but the technical content or level may not be appropriate to your readers.
- Change the organization of your information. Sometimes, you can have all the right information but arrange it in the wrong way. For example, there can be too much background information up front (or too little) such that certain readers get lost. Sometimes, background information needs to be consolidated into the main information—for example, in instructions it's sometimes better to feed in chunks of background at the points where they are immediately needed.
- Strengthen transitions. It may be difficult for readers, particularly non-specialists, to see the connections between the main sections of your report, between individual paragraphs, and sometimes even between individual sentences. You can make these connections much clearer by adding *transition words* and by echoing *key words* more accurately. Words like "therefore," "for example," "however" are transition words—they indicate the logic connecting the previous thought to the upcoming thought.
- Write stronger introductions—both for the whole document and for major sections. People seem to read with more confidence and understanding when they have the "big picture"—a view of what's coming, and how it relates to what they've just read. Therefore, make sure you have a strong introduction to the entire document—one that makes clear the topic, purpose, audience, and contents of that document. And for each major section within your document, use mini-introductions that indicate at least the topic of the section and give an overview of the subtopics to be covered in that section.
- Create topic sentences for paragraphs and paragraph groups. It can help readers immensely to give them an idea of the topic and purpose of a section (a group of paragraphs) and in particular to give them an overview of the subtopics about to be covered.
- Change sentence style and length. How you write—down at the individual sentence level—can make a big difference too. In instructions, for example, using imperative voice and "you" phrasing is vastly more understandable than the passive voice or third-personal phrasing. Passive, person-less writing is harder to

read—put people and action in your writing. Similarly, go for active verbs as opposed to *be* verb phrasing. All of this makes your writing more direct and immediate—readers don't have to dig for it. Sentence length matters as well. An average of somewhere between 15 and 25 words per sentence is about right; sentences over 30 words are often mistrusted.

- Work on sentence clarity and economy. This is closely related to the previous "control" but deserves its own spot. Often, writing style can be so wordy that it is hard or frustrating to read. When you revise your rough drafts, put them on a diet—go through a draft line by line trying to reduce the overall word, page or line count by 20 percent. Try it as an experiment and see how you do. You'll find a lot of fussy, unnecessary detail and inflated phrasing you can chop out.
- Use more or different graphics. For non-specialist audiences, you may want to use more graphics—and simpler ones at that. Graphics for specialists are more detailed and more technical.
- Break text up or consolidate text into meaningful, usable chunks. For non-specialist readers, you may need to have shorter paragraphs.
- Add cross-references to important information. In technical information, you can help non-specialist readers by pointing them to background sources. If you can't fully explain a topic on the spot, point to a section or chapter where it is.
- Use headings and lists. Readers can be intimidated by big dense paragraphs of writing, uncut by anything other than a blank line now and then. Search your rough drafts for ways to incorporate headings—look for changes in topic or subtopic. Search your writing for listings of things—these can be made into vertical lists. Look for paired listings such as terms and their definitions—these can be made into two-column lists. Of course, be careful not to force this special formatting—don't overdo it.
- Use special typography, and work with margins, line length, line spacing, type size, and type style. You can do things like making the lines shorter (bringing in the margins), using larger type sizes, and other such tactics. Certain type styles are believed to be friendlier and more readable than others.

These are the kinds of "controls" that you can use to fine-tune your messages and make them as readily understandable as possible. In contrast, it's the accumulation of lots of problems in these areas—even seemingly trivial ones—that add up to a document being difficult to read and understand.

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