

Chapter 1: Becoming a Successful Business Communicator

LECTURE OUTLINE

Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Why should you study business communication?
- 1.2 Why is business communication challenging?
- 1.3 What characteristics do successful business communicators share?

INTRODUCTION

- **Communication**—the process of planning, creating, delivering, and interpreting messages
- **This chapter helps you understand** how you will benefit from studying business communication, why being a business communicator is challenging, and what characteristics you should be able to demonstrate after completing this course to be a successful business communicator

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1.1

Why should you study business communication?

Teaching Tip: One way to motivate students to care about business communication is to show them how they will benefit from being a good communicator. To supplement the book and your own anecdotes, invite a guest speaker—a human resources professional, a job recruiter, or a manager—to come to class and talk about communication in hiring process and in the workplace.

Effective business communicators have a competitive edge in the job market (see Exercise 1)

- See **FIGURE 1.1** — Canadian CEOs Prioritize Skills for Entry-level Hires
- See **FIGURE 1.2** – Skills Preferred by Employers)
- Employers routinely rank communication skills among the most crucial in the workplace, yet one-third of companies surveyed in one study find these skills lacking in their employees
- Being an effective communicator will help you stand out in the workplace

Discussion Starter: The data shows that effective communicators have a competitive edge in looking for jobs. Why do you think that communication is so important?

Supplemental Homework: See IM for the following supplemental homework assignment: What Your Future Holds

Communication skills will help you, and your employer, succeed (see Exercise 1)

- See **FIGURE 1.3** – Skills Gap Identified by Employers in Ontario, 2013

- Communication skills will make you a more valuable employee
 - Effective communicators can directly affect a company's success
 - Clear writing and critical thinking can save both time and money
 - Active listening and good collaboration build strong relationships with customers and team members
 - Communication in **social media**—web-based applications designed to promote social interaction—is also valuable as it improves employee satisfaction and expands market outreach
- Communication skills may improve your salary
- Effective communication skills can improve your personal life

Discussion Starter: How do good/effective communication skills contribute to being a “great” employee?

Discussion Starter: In jobs that require exceptional math skills, such as actuarial science, accounting, finance, and business information systems, why do employers still demand strong communication skills?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1.2

Why is business communication challenging?

Teaching Tip: To help students understand the complexity of communicating, give them opportunities to reflect on their own successful and unsuccessful communication experiences.

- Communicating in a business context is complex even for students who have acquired good communication skills

Business communication is a complex process (see Exercise 2)

- **FIGURE 1.4**, a transactional model of communication, illustrates how communication works and why sometimes it doesn't
- The goal of communication is for a sender and a receiver to develop *shared meaning*; this requires several steps:
 1. Sender **encodes** a message—puts a message into words, images, or actions
 2. Sender selects a **medium**—a channel used to transmit the message, such as a face-to-face conversation, a telephone conversation, a letter, or an email message
 3. Receiver **decodes** the message—interprets the words and actions of a message and attaches meaning to them; a **barrier** is any obstacle that gets in the way of effective communication
 4. Receiver encodes feedback and selects a medium; **feedback** is any form of verbal or nonverbal response to a message

Sender and receiver communicate back and forth to create shared meaning; communication is then an **iterative process** with additional elements or improvements

Discussion Starter: Provide an example of context and ask why it is important to consider in business communication.

Discussion Starter: Review Figure 1.1. When you consider how barriers and context add complexity to communication, can one ever achieve perfect shared meaning? Why or why not?

In-class Activity: See below for the following in-class activity: Have you been misunderstood?

Supplemental Homework: See below for the following supplemental homework assignment: Analyzing a Miscommunication

Barriers often block successful communication

- *Physiological barriers* arise from a receiver's physical state
- *Psychological barriers* arise from a receiver's attitudes toward the message or toward the sender
- *Semantic barriers* arise from language that is ambiguous or difficult to understand
- *Language barriers* arise from senders and receivers not using a shared language; **jargon** is the specialized language of a specific field
- *Mixed messages* arise from conflicts between verbal and nonverbal communication

Discussion Starter: Which of these barriers have you experienced as a communicator? As a listener/reader? How did you overcome that barrier to reach your communication goal? Or how would you know that you know (is this correct? Or should it read simply "How would you know..") more about the transactional model of communication?

In-class Activity: Play the "gossip game" to illustrate through a simple exercise of whispering a statement from person to person how communication can be hindered. Start the game by writing a short sentence on a piece of paper, whispering it to one student and asking students to whisper the statement from person to person. The last person says the statement aloud. Read your written statement and discuss how the statement got distorted.

Context adds to the complexity (see Exercise 2)

- **Context**—a set of circumstances—influences the purpose of communication, the best medium to use to communicate the message, and how receivers interpret the message

Multiple audiences have different needs

- While the transactional model (**FIGURE 1.4**) depicts communication between two people, communication typically occurs among multiple people
- Multiple audiences require you to think about each individual's context, background, concerns, and agenda.

Social media expands communication opportunities and responsibilities (see Exercise 3)

- New media can help companies collect feedback from customers and gain insight into their behavior
- Companies increasingly look to employees to provide content

Discussion Starter: Ask students how they have participated in online communities. Encourage them to reflect on examples of their own transactions in social media—as customers, employees, students, or in other roles. New media strategies are rapidly changing. Press for examples that show the speed and scope of the changes that have occurred during their own lives and careers.

In-class Activity: Prepare examples from current news stories about companies' (mis)use of social media, or ask students to bring examples to class. Apply Unicorn's (p. 19) guidelines for social media to several recent examples by different companies. How easy is it to link examples of effective communication in social media to the language of the guidelines? How can clear guidelines prevent blunders, or help repair them?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1.3

What characteristics do successful communicators share?

Teaching Tip: All students will have some strengths as communicators. You can begin this section by asking students to do a self-assessment. Where do they believe they are strong? Where are they weak? What is the evidence to support their self-assessments?

- The best business communicators are strategic, professional, and adaptable (see **FIGURE 1.5**)

Effective communicators are strategic (see Exercises 4)

- **Communication strategy**—a plan for what and how to communicate to ensure that the message achieves its purpose
- Strategic communicators are purposeful:
 - **Purpose**—a reason for communicating
 - **Outcome**—what you want the recipients of your message to know, do, or feel about the subject of your message
 - **FIGURE 1.6** shows an ineffective and effective version of an email. The effective version has a clearer sense of purpose.
- Strategic communicators are audience-oriented:
 - **Audience**—the individual person or people for whom a message is intended
 - **Active listening**—a learned skill that requires you to focus on the speaker, make sense of the information that he or she presented, and when possible, provide feedback about the information to ensure you understand it correctly
 - **FIGURE 1.7** shows an ineffective and effective version of a business memo. The ineffective memo is not audience-centered.
 - Audience-centered messages must answer: 1) What content will your audience need or want? 2) How can you make the message easy for your audience to understand?
- Strategic communicators are persuasive:
 - **Persuasion**—the process of influencing your audience to agree with your point of view, recommendation, or request
 - Three useful techniques for persuasion are identifying benefits, providing reasons and evidence to support the main ideas, and anticipating audience objections.

Discussion Starter: Consider communication with friends, family, co-workers, supervisors, and/or teachers. Do you use different approaches with each group? Provide an example of a time when you communicated strategically with a specific audience.

Social Media: How do businesses use Social Media strategically? See page 1-17 of this IM for a discussion of Ford Motor Company's social media strategy.

Effective communicators are professional (see Exercises 5, 6)

- **Professionalism**—the qualities that make you appear businesslike in the workplace
- Professional communicators are active listeners—**active listening** is focusing attentively on the speaker to understand and interpret the content and then respond to acknowledge understanding
- Professional communicators are appropriate to the situation:
 - Professionalism in writing and speaking requires etiquette and respect without being overly formal
 - **FIGURE 1.6** shows an ineffective email projecting an immature, unprofessional image, and an effective email projecting a professional image
- Professional communicators are clear and concise:
 - **Clarity**—the quality of being unambiguous and easy to understand
 - **Conciseness**—using no more words than necessary for a message to accomplish its purpose
 - **FIGURE 1.8** shows a long, rambling, ineffective voicemail and a short, effective voicemail
- Professional communicators are ethical:
 - **Ethics**—a set of principles that guide decision making and leading someone to do the right thing
 - **Headline test** – quick assessment of ethical impact by visualizing the reaction to this issue if the public were aware of the individual who made this choice and the organization he or she works for

Discussion Starter: Explain how and/or why being professional and adaptable contribute to a communicator's ability to be purposeful, audience-oriented, and persuasive. [Note: Students should use the characteristics in this section to support their response.]

In-class Activity: Display a poorly written email, perhaps from a former student (removing the identity), that demonstrates bad format, spelling, or grammar. Discuss the nonverbal message the email communicates. If you like, ask students to rewrite the email message.

Effective communicators are adaptable (see Exercises 7, 8, 9)

- See **FIGURE 1.10** – IBM as an Example of Adaptation in Business and Communication
- Companies must adapt to new technologies, new cultures, and new ways of working with others
- Adaptable communicators are current with technology and social media:
 - As technology options and challenges change, business communicators must continually address three issues:
 1. What is the best technology for the task?
 2. How can I use technology to enable more effective communication?
 3. How can I avoid the technology traps that get in my way?

- Businesses use social media to:
 - reach, support, and educate customers
 - recruit employees
 - strengthen employee satisfaction
- **FIGURE 1.11** illustrates an internal social media site designed to improve employee satisfaction
- Adaptable communicators are able to work with other cultures:
 - People of different cultures, age, and gender may approach business and communication in different ways
 - **Culture**—the learned and shared patterns in a society
- Adaptable communicators are collaborative:
 - **Collaboration**—working together to achieve a common goal

***Discussion Starter:** Technological developments provide many ways to send and receive messages. Have these tools made the communicators' job easier or more difficult?*

***Discussion Starter:** How is workplace collaboration (or teamwork) similar or different from teamwork in school?*

IN SUMMARY,

- Effective business communicators have a competitive edge in the job market
 - Communication skills will contribute to your company's and your own success
 - Business communication is complex; barriers, context, and multiple audiences add to its complexity
 - Successful business communicators are strategic, professional, and adaptable
 - The goal of this book and course is to teach you the skills and insight you will need to make good business communication decisions
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SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION @WORK:

Marc Edwards, Health Information Management at Region of Peel, Ontario

This example demonstrates why employers value several kinds of communications skills. While it may be surprising to students that an electronics retailer places such a strong emphasis on writing, for example, the prompts encourage students to make connections among the different types of workplace communication, and reflect on their own preparation and adaptability.

- **DISCUSSION QUESTION 1:** How is the need to be concise when speaking related to the need to build successful relationships in the workplace?
- **DISCUSSION QUESTION 2:** What do you think makes an email message "actionable"? Why is that an important goal?

- **Supplementary Reflection Exercise**

From the point of view of a manager, why is it important that new hires demonstrate the skills that Mr. Young describes? From the point of view of a job applicant, what are the best ways to convince an employer that you have mastered them?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. **What communication skills do businesses value?** Surveys indicate that businesses value many communication-related skills, including the ability to work in a team structure, verbally communicate with people inside and outside the organization, obtain and process information, create and edit written reports, and be persuasive and influence others. In addition, many employers say they want to hire people who can work in a diverse environment, solve problems, contribute to a team, and negotiate boundaries.
2. **In what ways can communication skills save money or make money for a business?** Clear communication can save money by streamlining operations and increasing efficiency. Clear communication can also save money by preventing misunderstandings or reducing the need for customer support. Clear communication can also make money by reaching more customers or improving compliance.
3. **What are the elements of the transactional model of communication?** In the transactional model, senders and receivers collaborate to produce shared meaning. They exchange messages and feedback back and forth, each of which must be successfully encoded and decoded. Many barriers must be overcome during the process, and the context in which the transactions take place affect many decisions about the choice of medium or the interpretation of a particular message.
4. **Name three types of feedback you might receive as part of the communication process.** Possible answers can include either verbal or nonverbal responses. For example: an answer in response to a direct question, sent as a return email; a request for clarification on a report draft, delivered as a voicemail message; a puzzled expression on the face of an audience member during a presentation in a staff meeting.
5. **Name three barriers to communication.** Possible answers include: physiological barriers; psychological barriers; language barriers; semantic barriers; and mixed messages.
6. **Define active listening. How does it differ from passive listening?** Active listening involves more than just hearing what is said. Active listeners interpret what is being said, and check to make sure that their interpretation is correct. Active listening also includes attention to body language and emotional cues to pick up nuances in what is being said and not said.
7. **When you proofread your business writing, what should you check to ensure that it looks and sounds professional?** Writers should ask whether the writing is appropriate to the situation, clear, concise, and ethical.
8. **How does business use of social media differ from personal use?** Businesses use social media strategically to accomplish different goals. Businesses focus on reaching, supporting, and educating customers, recruiting employees, and strengthening employee satisfaction.
9. **Why are collaborative skills necessary in the workplace?** Most projects are too big to be accomplished by people working alone, and require the coordinated effort of large teams.

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking questions are designed to help students understand key concepts from the chapter by applying them to open-ended questions that have no single “correct” answer. You can assign all critical thinking questions as a homework exercise or an end-of-chapter quiz. You can also select specific questions for class discussion. Although student answers will vary, all good answers will show an understanding of the question’s main concept and will apply the concept in a supportable way.

1. **The chapter recommends that communicators address potential audience objections. Describe a situation—either from your personal experience or a theoretical business scenario—where it would be wiser to ignore potential audience objections.**

Possible answers: It is always a good idea to imagine potential objections. However, it may be wiser not to address those objections directly in these situations: (1) You believe the audience will not think of those objections on their own. (2) You are communicating orally, in conversation. In that instance, you may want to wait for your audience to bring up objections, since you'll have the opportunity to address them immediately. (3) As part of a negotiation, you want to be able to give in to one of the audience's objections later in the negotiation process.

2. **Imagine that you are trying to persuade a teammate to agree with an idea for a presentation and the teammate accuses you of being manipulative—trying to influence someone for your personal benefit. What is the difference between being persuasive and being manipulative?**

Possible answer: Persuasion looks at something from your audience's point of view and outlines the benefits to the audience with clear supporting reasons and evidence, while manipulation serves only one person—you. For example, manipulation includes making people do something that they don't want to do, making people believe a lie so they will do things your way, and making people feel inadequate unless they agree with you.

3. **Assume that your supervisor asked you to lie to a customer in an email about why a shipment is delayed. Would it be unethical for you to write the email if you believe it is wrong to lie? Conversely, would it be unethical for you to refuse to write the email if you believe you have a responsibility to your employer? How would you resolve this issue?**

Possible answer: In general, it is unethical to lie. To resolve the situation, discuss your options with your supervisor to find some mutually acceptable version of the truth. For example, you may choose not to explain that the shipment is late because you forgot to submit the order. Instead you could truthfully provide a revised delivery date and a sincere apology.

4. **Imagine you have been asked to collaborate on a project with a colleague whose work style is very different from yours. For example, you like to plan carefully and follow a schedule, while your colleague is spontaneous. You like to write thorough drafts that require only minimal revision, while your colleague likes to write incomplete drafts and revise heavily later. Based on these differences, you think it would be more efficient and cost effective for the company to have you work on this project by yourself. Should you make that argument to your supervisor? What might be the benefits of collaborating? What are the drawbacks?**

Possible answers: Benefits to collaboration include (1) multiple points of view and talents that may lead to an improved final product and (2) division of labor that allows of sharper focus on specific areas. Drawbacks include time-consuming conflict management and negotiation. Typically, the benefits of collaboration outweigh the drawbacks.

5. **Cross-cultural communication requires you to use clear language. What are some of the other challenges of communicating across cultures?**

Possible answers: (1) not understanding others' language, (2) accidentally showing disrespect or disregard, (3) addressing others with inappropriate levels of informality, (4) misinterpreting nonverbal communication or inadvertently communicating something nonverbally.

6. Students who are not used to writing professional emails sometimes make the mistake of composing them as if they were text messages. What are some key elements of text messages that you should avoid in professional emails?

Possible answer: misspelling, incorrect punctuation, emoticons, unstructured sentences and ideas, and improper greetings and closings.

7. Businesses use different social media tools for different purposes. Based on your knowledge of Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube, how do you expect businesses would use each tool?

Possible answer: Businesses may use Facebook to engage customers, LinkedIn to recruit employees, and YouTube to provide training and education.

8. Readers often judge a person's professionalism based on whether a document is spell-checked and free of grammatical errors. Do you believe this is a fair basis for making a judgment?

Possible answers: Minor errors may indicate a person is not careful, is not concerned the professionalism of his or her work, and is not resourceful enough to find a way to get the errors corrected.

DEVELOPING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1.1 Why should you study business communication?

EXERCISE 1 Communication skills will contribute to your company's and your own success

NOTES: Answers will vary based on student experience.

1.2 Why is business communication challenging?

EXERCISE 2 Business communication is a complex process

NOTES: A good answer will explain what the original message was intended to mean, what the audience misunderstood, and why the audience misunderstood it.

EXERCISE 3 Social media expands communication opportunities and responsibilities

NOTES: Good answers may specifically apply the sample guidelines from Intel, or may spell out their own criteria.

1.3 What characteristics do successful business communicators share?

EXERCISE 4 Effective communicators are strategic and persuasive

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: To show that you understand your audience's concern, you can express empathy with how challenging it is to share a narrow alley with truck drivers. To address objections, you may need to concede that the trucks do make noise and occasionally block the alley. You can mention the benefit of living so close to the grocery store and having fresh food always available. As a solution to the problem, you can say that you will talk to truck drivers and ask them not to block the alley and to turn off their engines at all times, since the refrigeration units can maintain their temperature for hours.

EXERCISE 5 Effective communicators are professional, clear, and concise

NOTES: Answers will vary based on students' experience.

EXERCISE 6 Effective communicators are professional and ethical

NOTES: Possible pros of not telling your supervisor: (1) You reduce the risk of angering your supervisor and (2) by saying nothing, you avoid responsibility. Possible cons of not telling your supervisor: (1) your supervisor may be embarrassed later, by someone else who has seen the original speech, (2) your supervisor may be sued by the person who made the original speech, (3) you lose the opportunity to win your supervisor's gratitude, if he copied inadvertently and was unaware of the plagiarism. It is more ethical to tell your supervisor than to pretend you were unaware. Your supervisor may be putting his own and the company's reputation at risk, and it is your ethical responsibility to try to prevent that from happening. However, it is not necessary to accuse your supervisor of plagiarism. Instead, you can suggest that he may want to revise his speech because it is so similar to the one on CNN that he may be accused of plagiarism.

EXERCISE 7 Effective communicators are adaptable and stay current with technology and social media

NOTES: The best answers will balance convenience and cost. Option 1 is the most costly: the cost of an hour call is \$9.60 (4¢ per minute x 60 minutes x 4 people). Option 2 will cost less: \$8.40 for an hour (7¢ per minute x 60 minutes x 2 people). Option 3 is free but less convenient. However, if everyone has the technology and is ready for the call at the same time, Option 3 is the best choice.

EXERCISE 8 Effective communicators are adaptable and collaborative

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS: (1) writing early drafts and being an active part of the revision process or (2) performing the statistical analysis and then drafting paragraphs that analyze the statistics, (3) providing feedback about the clarity of the report.

EXERCISE 9 Effective Communicators Are Adaptable and able to work with other cultures

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: (1) Acknowledge how much you admire Emma for learning a new language. (2) Praise the strong elements of Emma's work before editing it. (3) Instead of editing on your own and then showing Emma the edits, work collaboratively with her to edit the writing, so that she makes some of the edits herself. (4) Show Emma how heavily other people have edited your work.

EXERCISE 10 Increasing cultural and diversity sensitivity

NOTES: Presentations content will vary.

SUPPLEMENTAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

1. Analyzing a Miscommunication.

Consider a time when you were unsuccessful at communicating something in the workplace. Consider all the possible barriers that may have interfered with successful communication of your message. See page 8 for a discussion of barriers. Write a brief blog posting (100-150 words) with an attention grabbing headline (see "Writing Headlines That Get Results" for help with that, at <http://www.copyblogger.com/writing-headlines-that-get-results/>) and post it to the class blog or discussion forum. Other students will be able to read your post, so be sure to not use names of workplaces or people and proofread carefully before you submit it. Read some of the other posts, and if you can relate to some of the students' comments, respond to let them know.

Deliverable: One posting on the class website blog or discussion forum.

2. What Your Future Holds

What occupation do you plan to pursue upon graduation? Using both the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>) and *O*NET* (<http://www.onetcenter.org/overview.html>), do a search for the occupation. According to the information you find on either of these websites, what communication skills will you need? Write a brief email (100-150 words) to your instructor about the occupation you researched and the communication skills you will need. Proofread your email carefully.

Deliverable: An email to instructor.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

1. Have you been misunderstood?

Most people have experienced being misunderstood or misunderstanding someone else. Ask students to provide examples, preferably from their work experiences or student interactions rather than personal relationships. Explore what went wrong, focusing attention particularly on:

- encoding/decoding
- medium
- barriers
- feedback

If they were able to develop shared meaning through their communication, ask them to explain how. Throughout the discussion, help the students identify why the communication did not work well.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN ACTION

Ford Motor Company is notable for its use of social media. To raise buzz for the U.S. launch of the Fiesta, Ford recruited 100 people to drive the car for 6 months and post about their experiences on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr. The company continues to forge innovative ways to use social media. Their website, The Ford Story (<http://www.thefordstory.com/>; <http://www.thefordstory.com/ford-social-networks/>), brings together the various social media platforms used by the company to market its products and to interact and engage with customers. In an interview (<http://www.scottmonty.com/2010/03/how-ford-uses-social-media-video.html>), Ford's Head of Social Media, discusses Ford's approach to social media, the importance of connecting the use of social media to the company's business plan, the challenges corporations face when developing social media strategies, the importance of going beyond marketing to engaging people and developing relationships for success, and more.