Chapter 5: Business Communication: Creating and Delivering Messages that Matter (pp. 68-0)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to…

LO1 Explain the importance of excellent business communication

LO2 Describe the key elements of nonverbal communication

LO3 Compare, contrast, and choose effective communication channels

LO4 Choose the right words for effective communication

LO5 Write more effective business memos, letters, and emails

LO6 Create and deliver successful verbal presentations
Much of your success in business will depend on your ability to influence the people around you. Can you land the right job? Close the deal that makes the difference? Convince the boss to adopt your idea? Motivate people to buy your products? Excellent communicators are not only influential but also well liked, efficient, and effective. Great communication skills can dramatically boost your chance for success, while poor communication skills can bury even the most talented people.

So what exactly are “excellent communication skills”? Many students believe that great business communication equates to a knack for speaking or a flair for writing. But if that’s where you stop, you’re likely to hit a brick wall again and again as you attempt to achieve your goals. Effective communication happens only when you transmit meaning—relevant meaning—to your audience.

Communication must be dynamic, fluid, and two-way, which includes listening. Seeking and understanding feedback from your audience—and responding appropriately—form the core of successful business communication. And it isn’t as easy as you may think. American novelist Russell Hoban neatly summarized the issue: “When you come right down to it, how many people speak the same language even when they speak the same language?”

Communication Barriers: “That’s Not What I Meant!”

Why is effective communication so challenging? The key issue is noise: any interference that causes the message you send to be different from the message your audience understands. Some experts define noise in terms of communication barriers, which arise in a number of different forms. As you read the definitions, keep in mind that with a bit of extra effort, most are surmountable, and we’ll discuss strategies and tips as we move through the chapter.

- **Physical Barriers**: These can range from a document that looks like a wall of type, to a room that’s freezing cold, to chairs in your office that force your visitors to sit at a lower level than you.
- **Language Barriers**: Clearly, if you don’t speak the language you’ll have trouble communicating. But even among people who do share the same language, slang, jargon, and regional accents can interfere with meaning.
- **Body Language Barriers**: Even if your words are inviting, the wrong body language can alienate and distract your audience so completely that they simply won’t absorb the content of your message.
- **Perceptual Barriers**: How your audience perceives you and your agenda can create a significant obstacle to effective communication. If possible, explore their perceptions—both positive and negative—in advance!
- **Organizational Barriers**: Some companies have built-in barriers to effective communication, such as an unspoken rule that the people at the top of the organization don’t talk to the people at the bottom. These barriers are important to understand but hard to change.
- **Cultural Barriers**: These can include everything from how you greet colleagues and establish eye contact to how you handle disagreement, eat business meals, and make small talk at meetings. As globalization gains speed, intercultural communication will become increasingly pivotal to long-term business success.

Identifying and understanding communication barriers is a vital first step toward dismantling them, in order to communicate more
LO2 Nonverbal Communication: Beyond the Words

Most of us focus on what we want to say, but how we say it matters even more. In fact, studies cited in The Wall Street Journal’s Career Journal suggest that during face-to-face communication, only 7% of meaning comes from the verbal content of the message—38% comes from tone of voice, and 55% comes from body language such as facial expressions, gestures, and posture.\(^1\)

The goal of nonverbal communication should be to reinforce the meaning of your message. Random facial expressions and disconnected body language—arbitrary arm thrusts, for example—are at best distracting, and at worst clownish. But strong, deliberate nonverbal communication can dramatically magnify the impact of your messages. Here are a few examples of how this can work (but keep in mind that these examples do not necessarily translate from culture to culture):

- **Eye Contact**: Within American culture, sustained eye contact (different from a constant cold stare) indicates integrity, trust, and respectful attention, whether you're communicating with a subordinate, a superior, or a peer.
- **Tone of Voice**: Variation is the key to effectiveness, since paying attention to a monotone takes more concentration than most people are willing to muster. Also, even when you're angry or frustrated, try to keep your voice in a lower pitch to encourage listeners to stay with your message.
- **Facial Expressions**: People vary widely in terms of how much emotion they show on their faces, but virtually everyone communicates, whether or not they know it, through a wide range of expressions that include shy smiles, focused frowns, clenched jaws, squinted eyes, and furrowed brows.
- **Gestures and Posture**: How you handle your body speaks for you. For example, leaning forward can indicate interest, shrugging can suggest a lack of authority, and fidgeting can imply either impatience or nervousness. To increase the power of your message, both your gestures and your posture should be confident, open, and coherent.

As silly as it sounds, one of the easiest, most effective ways to improve your body language is to practice nonverbal communication in front of the mirror. Check out your gestures, notice your facial expressions, and focus on eye contact. If you have the time and ability, it’s also helpful (though humbling!) to videotape yourself delivering both a formal and informal message, and ask a trusted friend to dissect the results with you.

Accurately discerning the body language of others is another powerful business communication tool. But keep in mind that you must evaluate others in the context of common sense. When your boss keeps yawning, she may be bored, or she may just be tired. When your colleague crosses his arms, he may be indicating defensiveness, or he might just normally stand that way.

**A New Look at Dressing for Success**

Does it ever make sense to go to work looking like THIS? Well, it all depends on your job. If you're a copywriter at an ad agency, or a manager at a record label, or a recruiter for a teen marketing firm, you may even find that a visible tattoo or a pierced tongue can boost your credibility. But if you're a teller at a bank, or a manager at an insurance company, or a salesperson for a pharmaceutical firm, you'll find that a clean-cut, mainstream appearance will work in your favor.

Your appearance is among the most powerful forms of business communication. Some experts believe that more than 50% of another
A person's perception of you is driven by how you look. Does your appearance always correspond to your performance? Probably not. Perceptions about appearance often aren't fair. But since first impressions and snap judgments are tough to change, don't let how you look get in the way of your success on the job.

Fortunately, first impressions—especially those that stem from your appearance—are easy to manage. Start by observing how others look in your industry. Check out both entry-level workers and people who have made it big. How do you compare? Does the comparison work to your advantage? If not, what can you change? The goal, of course, is to ensure that your appearance sharpens your competitive edge, and the strategy is to tailor your look to reflect the best performers in your type of business.²

**Same Scene, Different Takes**

If you take a stroll across any American college campus, you are likely to see hordes of students with cell phones virtually glued to their ears or dancing under their fingertips from the moment one class ends until the moment the next class begins, and sometimes well into the next class. Social media absorb much of this time and energy. The social media scene has taken hold in China as well, but it has a whole different look and feel. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are officially blocked in China, but a raft of homegrown alternatives are thriving in their absence. The average Chinese Internet user is online for a hefty 2.7 hours per day, and social media are particularly popular in part because of rural-to-urban migration that has separated families, the loneliness of the one-child generation, and a distrust of information from government-controlled media. Interestingly, young people in China tend to have even more friends online than offline. The most popular alternative to Twitter in China is Sina Weibo, which—because each character in Chinese represents an entire word—allows for much longer messages within the 140 character limited micro-blogging format.

Businesses in China have jumped on the opportunity to use Sina Weibo to deliver relatively long promotional messages, including web links, directly to their target consumers. In today's global environment, businesses must learn to communicate effectively via social media across an array of platforms and countries.³

**Active Listening: The Great Divider**

How we listen (or don't listen) also sends a high-impact, nonverbal message. In fact, an old Chinese proverb asserts that to listen well is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well. Those who do both are unstoppable.

Strong listening skills—**active listening**—play an obvious role in business success. The higher you go in an organization, the more you find that people are listening. Hourly employees may spend 30% of their time listening, while managers often spend 60%, and executives might spend 75% or more. Interestingly, top salespeople also tend to spend about 75% of their communication time listening.⁴

According to the International Listening Association website, 85% of our learning is derived from listening, yet listeners are distracted, forgetful, and preoccupied 75% of the time. If listening is so crucial, why do most of us have such a hard time engaging completely? One reason may be that people listen at about 125 to 250 words per minute, but think at about 1,000 to 3,000 words per minute—that's a significant gap. Common ways to fill the void include daydreaming, thinking about the past (e.g., last night), and planning for the future (e.g., later in the day).⁵

When you listen, try to use the extra thinking time to make yourself pay closer attention to the speaker. You'll find that people tend to tell more to those who listen better, so if you polish your listening skills, you're also likely to buff up the quality of what you know and when you know it. Exhibit 5.1 highlights some listening do's and don'ts (specific to American culture).⁶

**LO3 Choose the Right Channel: A Rich Array of Options**
Figuring out the right way to send a message can be a daunting challenge, especially in light of the growing number of choices. The various options are called *communication channels*. Understanding the impact of each channel will help you make the best decision regarding which to use.

Better listening means better results. © Thomas Barwick/Digital Vision/Jupiterimages

### EXHIBIT 5.1 Tips for Better Listening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LISTENING DO'S</th>
<th>LISTENING DON'TS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use your extra mental capacity to summarize (to yourself!) what the speaker is saying. Ask yourself: Why does this matter? What's the key point?</td>
<td>Don't even glance at your emails or text messages. You won't fool anyone with those surreptitious peeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a few notes. It will not only help you concentrate but also communicate to the speaker that his or her thoughts really matter.</td>
<td>Don't begin speaking the moment the person stops talking. Take a brief pause to indicate that you're absorbing the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen with both your ears and your eyes. Notice any inconsistency between the speaker's words and body language.</td>
<td>Don't get overly comfortable. If your body is too relaxed, your mind may wander more easily.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use nonverbal communication—nods, smiles, leaning forward—to indicate interest in the speaker.</td>
<td>Don't pick up your phone—or even look at your phone—when you're listening. And whenever it's practical, set your cell phone to vibrate when others are speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use verbal feedback and questions to indicate understanding and empathy: “So you're saying that...” or “Why do you think that?”</td>
<td>Don't interrupt or finish other people's sentences. There are few better ways to cut off future communication.</td>
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Communication channels differ from one another in terms of how much information—or richness—they communicate to the recipient. Exhibit 5.2 provides a brief overview of key channels.

What other channels can you identify? Possibilities include intranet postings, WebEx, Facebook, and text messaging, among others. Where would these additional channels fall on the spectrum? Why?

### Consider the Audience: It's Not about You!

Clearly, the needs and expectations of your audience play a crucial role in your choice of communication channel. Even if the recipient's preferences seem absurd—for example, we probably all know someone who refuses to check email or voice mail—remember that your first priority is to communicate your message. If you send it through a channel that the audience doesn't expect or understand or like, you've crippled your chance for successful communication.

Analysis and consideration of your audience should also be a top priority after you choose your communication channel. Meeting the needs of your audience will give you a crucial edge in developing a message that works.
LO4 Pick the Right Words: Is That Car Pre-Loved or Just Plain Used?!

Mark Twain once said, “The difference between the right word and almost the right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” Perhaps that’s a little extreme, but it may not be too far from the truth. In the business world, where your messages are competing with so many others for the all-too-limited attention of the recipient, the right words can encourage your audience to stay with you long enough to absorb your message.

Analyze Your Audience

To find the right words, begin with the needs of your audience. Consider:

- **Expectations**: What kind of language do most people use in the organization? Is it formal or informal? Is it direct or roundabout? Should you differ from the norm? Why or why not?
- **Education**: The education level of the audience should drive the level of vocabulary and the complexity of the message.
- **Profession**: Some professions (e.g., website development) are rife with jargon and acronyms. How should this influence your message?

Be Concise

Comedian and sitcom star Jerry Seinfeld, once said, “I will spend an hour editing an eight-word sentence into five.” While Jerry might be going a bit too far, it pays to be clear and concise in virtually all business communication. But don’t be concise at the expense of completeness; include all information that your audience may need. (It’ll save you time down the road.)

Avoid Slang

Unless you’re absolutely certain that your audience will understand and appreciate it, do not use slang in either written or verbal communication. The risk of unintentionally alienating yourself from your audience is simply too high.

Companies that communicate effectively have a 47% higher return to shareholders.

—Business Week

Avoid Bias

Intentionally or unintentionally, words can communicate biases that can interfere with your message, alienate your audience, and call your own character into question. As a result, you will be less effective in achieving the immediate goals of your communication (and possibly any future communication as well). Three kinds of bias are common:

**Gender Bias**

Gender bias consists of words that suggest stereotypical attitudes toward a specific gender. Avoiding bias becomes tricky when you simply don’t know the gender of your audience, which often happens when you apply for a job in writing. The best solution, of course, is to find out the recipient’s name, but if you can’t do that, do not address your message to “Dear Sir” or “Dear Madam”; rather, use the title of the position (e.g., “Dear Hiring Manager”).

Another common challenge is to establish agreement in your sentences without creating gender bias. Consider the following example:

*The guitarist who loses his instrument must buy a new one.*

Technically, this sentence is correct, but it implies that all guitarists are men. A simple solution would be to convert to plural:

*Guitarists who lose their instruments must buy new ones.* This approach almost always works to help you sidestep the gender bias issue. In the rare case that it doesn’t, you can simply use the “his or her” option.

**Age Bias**

Age bias refers to words that suggest stereotypical attitudes toward people of specific ages. In American culture, older people tend to experience negative age bias much
### EXHIBIT 5.2 Communication Channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNICATION CHANNEL</th>
<th>CHANNEL RICHNESS</th>
<th>WHEN SHOULD YOU USE THIS CHANNEL?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMOS/REPORTS</td>
<td>Very low: Your audience won’t gain any information from your tone or your body language.</td>
<td>When your content is uncontroversial When you must reach a number of people with the same message When you must communicate lengthy or detailed information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMAIL</td>
<td>Very low: Here, too, your audience learns nothing beyond your words themselves.</td>
<td>When your content is uncontroversial When you must reach a number of people with the same message</td>
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<tr>
<td>INSTANT MESSAGE/TEXTING</td>
<td>Very low: Because so many of us IM or text with as few words as possible, your audience will pick up only the basics.</td>
<td>When your content is uncontroversial When you want a quick response regarding relatively simple issues When you know that your audience won’t be annoyed by it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOICE MAIL</td>
<td>Low: Your audience has the benefit of hearing your tone but not seeing your body language.</td>
<td>When your content is uncontroversial When you don’t need a record of your message (but don’t forget that the recipient can easily save or forward your voice mail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELEPHONE CONVERSATION</td>
<td>Moderate: Your audience benefits from hearing your tone and how it changes through the call.</td>
<td>When you need to either deliver your message or get a response quickly When your content is more personal or controversial When you need or want a spontaneous, dynamic dialogue with the recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIDEOCONFERENCING</td>
<td>High: Especially with state-of-the-art equipment, the channel conveys much of the richness of actually being there.</td>
<td>When you need to reach multiple people with complex or high-priority content When you need or want a spontaneous, dynamic dialogue with an audience that you cannot reach in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN-PERSON PRESENTATION</td>
<td>High: Your audience directly experiences every element of your communication, from verbal content, to tone, to body language.</td>
<td>When you need to reach a large audience with an important message When you need or want to experience the immediate response of your audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACE-TO-FACE MEETING</td>
<td>Very high: Your audience experiences your full message even more directly.</td>
<td>When your message is personal, emotional, complex, or high-priority (but if the recipient might be volatile, you should consider using a less-immediate channel) When you need or want instant feedback from your audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXHIBIT 5.2 Communication Channels © Cengage Learning 2013

P. 73

Huh?!!
Between the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, China has gained an increasingly high profile on the world stage, and so has Chinglish, a sometimes-bizarre blend of Chinese and mangled English language that seems to pop up on signs, menus, and labels throughout the tourist-heavy cities of China. For example:

- Plus-sized shoppers at the Scat clothing chain might find themselves needing to buy “fatso” or “lard-bucket” sizes.
- Before the Beijing Olympics, tourists could visit Racist Park, later rechristened Minorities Park to avoid sending a misleadingly negative message to visitors about Chinese culture.
- Port-a-potties have sometimes been located in the “urine district.”
- Adventurous eaters can order fried enema at local eateries.
- In the past, the sick may have sought treatment at the Dongda Anus Hospital, now called the Dongda Proctology Hospital.

Although many of these language goofs are highly amusing, a number of Chinese find the snickers humiliating rather than funny. In fact, as the World Expo approached, the Chinese government established the Shanghai Commission for the Management of Language Use to eradicate by fiat the worst examples of mangled English. One of the chief translators, Jeffrey Yao, underscores that the purpose of signs is communication, not entertainment. “I want to see people nodding that they understand the message on these signs. I don't want to see them laughing.”

more often than younger people. This happens despite specific federal legislation outlawing employment discrimination against people over 40 years old. The reason may be that American culture associates youth with highly valued qualities such as creativity, speed, independence, and individualism. This bias will become increasingly detrimental as the workforce ages. Here is an example of age bias:

*We need someone young and dynamic in this position!*

You could easily eliminate the negative bias by simply deleting the word “young” or by replacing it with the word “energetic”. One clear benefit of eliminating bias in this case would be a broader applicant pool that might include an older person who is more dynamic than any of the younger applicants.

**Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality Bias**

Words can also suggest stereotypical attitudes toward specific races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Leaving aside prejudice—which is clearly wrong—the problems in this area are usually unintentional and stem from unarticulated assumptions about a person’s attitudes, opinions, and experiences. Your best plan for avoiding bias would be to forgo any references to race, ethnicity, or nationality unless they are directly relevant and clearly necessary. And, of course, never simply assume
that a single person embodies the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of a larger group. If you communicate with each person as an individual, you will not only avoid bias, but also develop deeper, more effective channels of communication.

Use the Active Voice Whenever Possible

Active voice facilitates direct, powerful, concise communication. You have used the active voice when the subject of your sentence is doing the action described by the verb. You have used the passive voice when the subject of your sentence is not doing the action described by the verb.

Here's an example of a sentence that uses the active voice:

"I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead."

—the Mark Twain © iStockphoto.com/Newbird

Most people who have traveled to other English-speaking countries know that speaking the “same” language doesn't guarantee understanding. In the United States, for example, to say that you're full suggests that you've had too much to eat, but to say that you're full in Australia suggests that you're drunk. To table an issue in the United States means to temporarily avoid discussing it, while to table an issue in England means to bring it to the table and discuss it immediately. The potential for harmful misunderstandings in a business setting should be clear with just these two small examples.

Even just within the United States, regional differences in the meaning of common words abound. According to the Dictionary of American Regional English, a sub sandwich is variously known as a sub, a hero, a hoagie, a grinder, a Cuban, or a torpedo, depending on where you live. A Northeasterner might call a dirty bathroom skeevy, while a Californian would simply call it disgusting. Although strangers tend to speak to each other in a somewhat homogenized fashion, business communication will clearly be smoother, and trust will build more quickly, if everyone involved attempts to learn the others’ vocabulary, even when they all speak the same language.

There's English and then There's English

© Nayashkova Olga/Shutterstock.com

Your sentence is doing the action described by the verb. You have used the passive voice when the subject of your sentence is not doing the action described by the verb.

Here's an example of a sentence that uses the active voice:
Our team made a mistake in the sales forecast.

Our team, the subject of the sentence, did the action described by the verb (making a mistake). The same sentence in the passive voice would read as follows:

A mistake was made in the sales forecast.

In this version, the subject of the sentence is the mistake, which clearly did not do the action. As you can see from these examples, another benefit of active voice is accountability, which can create deeper trust between you and your audience.

### LOS5 Write High-Impact Messages: Breaking through the Clutter

For many businesspeople, checking email—or even regular mail—is like approaching a fire hose for a sip of water. Goal number one is to crank down the pressure to get what you need without being knocked over by all the rest. To attain this goal, many people simply press the delete button.

Your challenge as a writer is to make your message a must-read, and the starting point should be the needs of your audience. Consider how the audience will respond to your message—think about how they will feel, not what they will do—and use that information to guide your writing. But keep in mind that it's hard to know for sure how the recipient will respond. For instance, each of the responses in Exhibit 5.3 could be reasonable for different people:

How do you know how your audience will respond? In most cases, you must simply guess based on as much evidence as you can find. The value of making a thoughtful guess is that the chances of achieving your goal will soar if you happen to be correct.

The anticipated audience response should directly affect how you structure your writing.

- If the recipient will feel positive or neutral about your message, the memo or email should begin with your bottom line. What is your request or recommendation or conclusion? Why should the audience care? Once

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXHIBIT 5.3 Messages and Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MESSAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please note the new computer password procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company plans to restructure your work team when the project is complete</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

See Exhibit 5.4 for sample emails based on different anticipated responses to messages in an Internet game development firm.

### Strike the Right Tone

Good business writing sounds natural—it flows like spoken language and reads like a conversation on paper. To strike the right tone for any given message, remember that you can choose from a wide variety of conversational styles, from formal to chatty. Imagine yourself speaking to the recipient of your message, and you'll find that the right tone emerges naturally. A few guidelines will also help:

- Use common words in most situations (e.g., use versus utilize).
- Use the active voice (e.g., We made a mistake versus A mistake was made).
- Use personal pronouns (I, you) whenever appropriate.
- Use contractions (I'll, don't, here's) as often as you would when speaking.
Don't Make Grammar Goofs

Grammatical errors will distract your reader from your writing and undermine your credibility. Most businesspeople are aware of the more common grammatical errors, so they tend to jump off the page before the content of the message. But if you're uncertain about a particular point, look at how professionally edited publications handle similar issues. Finally, don't be afraid to do a commonsense check on any grammatical question.

Edward P. Bailey, noted professor and business communication author, points out that many writers make grammar mistakes based on phantom knowledge—“mythical” grammar rules that aren’t even in grammar handbooks. His research firmly reassures us that:

- It is OK to end a sentence with a preposition when doing so sounds natural and does not involve excess words (e.g., Where is this book from? is much better than From where is this book?).
- It is OK to begin sentences with “And” or “But” (e.g., Most teens enjoy videogames with a moderate level of violence. But a small, vocal minority strongly advocates a more clean-cut approach.).
- It is OK to split infinitives (e.g., Try to effectively film the next scene is a perfectly acceptable sentence, even though “effectively” is inserted between “to” and “film.”).

EXHIBIT 5.4 Sample Emails: Same Message, Different Approach © Cengage Learning 2013

In 2010, email use by 12- to 17-year-olds dropped 59%, due to the increasing popularity of social networking sites. — TIME MAGAZINE

Once you accept these principles, your writing not only will sound more natural but also will flow more easily. Winston Churchill, a
renowned writer and speaker, was on-board with this common sense approach decades ago, as we can see from his joking comment that poked fun at tortured writing: “From now on, ending a sentence with a preposition is something up with which I will not put.”

Use Block Paragraphs

There are three elements to block paragraphs: (1) use single spacing, (2) double space between paragraphs, and (3) do not indent the first sentence of your paragraphs. This approach has become standard for business writing over the past decade, as writers have begun to include an increasing number of additional elements such as headings and illustrations. The block paragraphs create a more organized look for your page, guiding the reader's eye through the key elements of your structure.

Use Headings and Bulleted Lists Wherever Appropriate

Both headings and bulleted lists will guide your reader more easily through your writing. And the easier it is for your reader, the more likely that he or she will absorb your message, which is, of course, your ultimate goal.

- **Headings**: A heading is not a title; rather, it is a label for one of several parts. If you have only one part, skip the heading and use a title or a subject line. Consider using informative headings (e.g., “Recruitment has stalled,” rather than simply “Recruitment”), or question headings (e.g., “Have we met our recruitment goals for this campaign?”). And remember, headings are just as effective for letters and emails as they are for memos, and they are perfectly OK in one-page documents.

- **Bulleted Lists**: Bulleted lists are an invaluable tool that you can use to engage your reader's attention whenever you have more than one of anything in your writing (e.g., next steps, similar sections, questions). By formatting your lists with bullets, you are directing your reader's eye through your writing.

EXHIBIT 5.5 Ten Tips for Excellent Email

1. **Consider both your primary and secondary readers. In other words, never forget that your reader may forward your email without considering the potential impact on you.**
2. Keep it short! Many readers won't scroll down past whatever shows on their screen, so be sure to get your bottom line close to the top of your message.
3. Don't forget to proofread. This is especially important if you're asking someone to do something for you. And remember that your spell checker won't catch every mistake.
4. Use standard writing. Smiley faces, abbreviations, and five exclamation points are all fine if you're emailing your buddies, but in more formal messages they can make you look sissy (or like you just don't care).
5. Avoid attachments if possible. They take time and space to open, and they don't always translate well to cell phones and PDAs. Instead, cut and paste relevant sections of the attachment into your email.
6. Don't assume privacy. Think of your emails as postcards that anyone (especially computer system administrators and managers) can read along the way. In that light, try not to use email to communicate negative or critical messages.
7. Respond promptly to emails. If you don't have time to respond to the email itself, consider sending a message such as “Sorry, but I'm swamped right now—will get back to you early next week.”
8. Assume the best. Since emails are often brief, they can cause unintentional offense. If you receive an off-key message, don't be afraid to inquire: “I'm not sure what you mean … could you please explain?”
9. Create a compelling subject line. Make your reader want to open your message. Briefly communicate the topic of your message and why your reader should care.
10. Think before you write, and think again before you send! Since it's so easy to send email, too many people send messages in an emotional moment that they later regret. Take time to think and think again.

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Be sincere; be brief; be seated.

— FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT © risteski

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LO6 Create and Deliver Successful Verbal Presentations: Hook 'Em and Reel 'Em In!

What do people fear most? The Book of Lists asserts that public speaking ranks number one for the majority of people, high above the fear of death at number four. So, when people say they would rather die than give a speech, they may really mean it! This section is designed to mitigate any fear you might have about public speaking by giving you guidance on how to create and deliver a high-impact verbal presentation.

As with most communication, the needs of the audience are the best place to begin. How does your audience feel about you and your topic? Are they interested? Hostile? Positive? What were they doing before your presentation? Dragging themselves out of bed after a late night at a sales meeting? Eating lunch? Use this information to guide how you develop your presentation. For instance, an eager, educated audience might not need as much background as a more lethargic, less-interested audience.

Opening

The opening of your presentation gives you a chance to grab the attention of the audience. If your opening hooks them, you've boosted the likelihood that you will hold their attention throughout the presentation. But developing that hook can be a challenge. The following are some suggestions for effective hooks:

- **An Interesting or Startling Statistic:** In a presentation regarding a risk management program, you could open by sharing that “Your odds of being killed in a plane crash are about one in twenty-five million, while your odds of being killed falling out of bed are about one in two million. What does this mean for us?”
- **Audience Involvement:** Pulling the audience into your opening can be very effective. For instance, in a presentation for a clothing company: “Imagine yourself with me at 11 P.M. on a Friday night, standing in line for admission to the hottest club in New York. As we inch forward, we suddenly realize that three other women in line are wearing the exact same dress as you....”
- **A Compelling Story or Anecdote:** This approach works best when it's completely genuine, using specific details that are directly relevant to the audience. For instance, in a presentation about employee benefits, you might want to share the story...
of a colleague who beat cancer using the company’s innovative healthcare program.

- **A Relevant Simile or Metaphor:** Patricia Fripp, an award-winning keynote speaker, shares a simile that worked well to open a presentation for a colleague: “Being a scientist is like doing a jigsaw puzzle in a snowstorm at night … you don’t have all the pieces … and you don’t have the picture to work from.”

- **Engaging Questions:** In a presentation about customer service, you could open by asking: “How many of you have spent far too long waiting on hold for customer service that was finally delivered by a surly agent who clearly knew nothing about your question?”

**Body**

The most common presentation mistake is to include too many key ideas in the body of your presentation. Audiences simply cannot absorb more than two to four main points, and three are ideal. Specific examples and vivid comparisons will illustrate your points and bring them to life, while trusted sources, specific data, and expert quotations will increase your credibility and persuasiveness. Regardless of the length of your presentation, be sure to use clear transitions as you move from point to point.

Just before launching into the body of your presentation, you should tell the audience your key points, ideally with visual reinforcement. Then as you move to each new point, you can refer to the blueprint that you established upfront. A clear, explicit structure will help the audience track with you as you move through your material.

**Close**

Ideally, the close of your presentation will summarize your key points. Then circle back to your introduction, so that the beginning and the end serve as “bookends” for the body of your presentation. For instance, if you began by asking questions, end by answering them. If you began with an anecdote, end by referring to the same story. As an alternative (or maybe an addition), consider sharing a quotation or a bit of humor relevant to your content.

Also, keep in mind that you should verbally signal to your audience that you are about to conclude. Once you do so—by saying, “In summary,” for instance—be sure that you actually do conclude. Nothing alienates an audience more quickly than launching into another point after you’ve told them you’re finished! Your body language will support your conclusion if you turn off your projector and move toward the audience to answer questions. And even if you aren’t so eager to field questions, try to paste a receptive look on your face—it’ll increase your credibility and set a positive tone for the Q&A session.

**Questions**

At the start of your presentation, decide whether you want to handle questions throughout your talk or save them for the end. Tell your audience your preference upfront; most of the time they will respect it. But if you do receive unwanted questions in the middle of your presentation, don’t ignore them. Simply remind the questioner that you’ll leave plenty of time for questions at the end.

Not surprisingly, the best tip for handling questions is to be prepared. Since it’s tough to anticipate questions for your own presentation, you may want to enlist the help of a trusted colleague to brainstorm the possibilities. And don’t just come up with the questions—prepare the answers, too!

**Visual Aids**

Studies suggest that three days after a presentation, people retain 10% of what they heard from an oral presentation, 35% from a visual presentation, and 65% from a combined visual and oral presentation. The numbers are compelling: visual aids matter. Depending on your audience, effective, high-impact visual aids could range from props to charts to mounted boards. But in business communication, PowerPoint slides are the most common option. If you use PowerPoint, consider these suggestions:

- **Showing Works Better Than Simply Telling:** Use pictures and other graphics whenever possible.
- **Less Is More:** Keep this helpful guideline in mind: no more than seven words per line, no more than seven lines per slide.
- **Don’t Just Read Your Slides Aloud:** Instead, paraphrase, add examples, and offer analysis and interpretation.
- **Go Easy on the Special Effects:** Too many sounds and too much animation can be painfully distracting.
- **Don’t Let Your Slides Upstage You:** Look at your audience, not at the slides. And dim the screen when you’re not specifically using it.

**Google Presentations**

Although Microsoft PowerPoint remains the software option of choice for business presentations, Google Presentations software is swiftly gaining ground. Google Presentations is one of a growing number of applications based in “the cloud.” This means that...
when you buy a new computer, you don't need to spend hundreds of dollars buying PowerPoint. You simply log into your Google account, use the Google Presentations software, and save your finished product on Google's servers. Since your work is stored on the Internet, you can access it from any device with a web connection—you don't need to email it to yourself, or store it on a temperamental local drive, or worry about saving your changes as you move from work to home to school.

But Google Presentations is far from perfect. If you temporarily lose your Internet connection—while on a plane or a bus, for instance—you cannot access your work. Security might be a worry, since web-based data may be vulnerable to hackers. If Google disables your account for any reason, your work is lost. And Google Presentations does not yet include all the features available in PowerPoint, such as chart-making tools and advanced slide animations. The price, though, is pretty attractive: free! And that includes new versions and updates.

From a long-term perspective, another key benefit of Google Presentations—and all other cloud computing applications—is environmental. Newsweek writer Brian Braiker points out that “conducting affairs in the cloud is not only convenient, it's also greener: less capital and fewer printouts means less waste.” All of which suggests that the forecast for Google Presentations is far from cloudy.11

Handling Nerves

Believe it or not, most experts agree that nervousness can be useful before a presentation. A little adrenalin can help you perform better, think faster, and focus more completely. But we all know that out-of-control nerves can interfere with effectiveness. Here are some ideas to mitigate speech anxiety:

- Send yourself positive messages; visualize success. Examples: “I will be dynamic and engaging.” “They will completely support my new product idea.”
- Take ten slow, deep breaths—use the yoga approach of breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Take a sip of water to loosen your throat muscles and mitigate a shaking voice. (Water also gives you a way to fill pauses.)
- Pick a friendly face or two in the audience, and imagine yourself speaking only to those people (but don't stare at them!).
- Remind yourself that the audience wants you to succeed. Focus on their needs rather than your own nerves.

If possible, have a handful of one-on-one conversations with audience members before your presentation. This will almost certainly reinforce that they want you to succeed, which will likely take the edge off your nerves …

Handling Hostility

We've all seen hostile questioners who seem determined to undermine presenters. It can be awful to watch, but it's surprisingly easy to handle. Here are a few tips:

- Stay calm and professional. Rightly or wrongly, the hostile questioner has won the day if you get defensive or nervous.
- Don't be afraid to pause before you answer to gather your thoughts and allow the hostility to diffuse. (A sip of water can provide good cover for a thought-gathering moment.)
Once you've answered the question, don't reestablish eye contact with the questioner. Doing so would suggest that you are seeking approval for your response, which only invites further hostile follow-up.

If the questioner insists on follow-up, you may need to agree to disagree. If so, be decisive: “Sounds like we have two different points of view on this complex issue”.

Use body language to reinforce that you are done interacting with the questioner. Take a couple of steps away, and ask another part of the group whether they have any questions.

Incorporating Humor

Everyone likes to be funny, but incorporating humor in a business presentation can be risky. Only do it if you're very, very sure that it's funny. Even so, double-check that your jokes are appropriate and relevant. You should never, ever laugh at the expense of any member of your audience. Even laughing at yourself is chancy, since you risk diminishing your credibility. (But a joke at your own expense is always effective if you make a mistake; there's no better way to recover the goodwill of your audience.)

A spot on the back wall?

Many people have heard the old myth that no one will know the difference if you calm your nerves by looking at a spot on the back wall rather than at the audience. Don't do it! While you may be more comfortable, your audience will be mystified … more often than not, they'll keep turning around to find out what's so interesting back there!

Delivery

Some people are naturals, but for the rest of us, dynamic delivery is a learned skill. It begins and ends with preparation, but keep in mind that practice doesn't always make perfect—in fact, practice more often just makes permanent. So be sure that you practice with an eye toward improvement. If possible, you should set up a practice situation that's close to the real thing. If you'll be standing to present, stand while you practice, since standing makes many people feel more vulnerable. Consider practicing in front of a mirror to work on eye contact and gestures. Also, try recording your voice to work on a lively tone.

Finally, practice in front of a trusted friend or two who can give you valuable feedback. See Exhibit 5.6 for Ten Tips for Dynamic Delivery.

EXHIBIT 5.6 Ten Tips for Dynamic Delivery

1. Know your material, but never memorize it word for word.
2. Look directly at members of your audience at least 50% of the time.
3. Vary your voice, your facial expressions, and your body language.
4. Use selective notes (but keep them inconspicuous).
5. Stick to your allotted time.
6. Slow down and listen to yourself.
7. Don't apologize (unless you really did something wrong!).
8. Remember to use natural gestures.
9. PRACTICE!

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The Big Picture
Effective communication saves time and money—boosting performance and morale—across every area of business. But one vital principle holds true regardless of the more specific nature of your communication: the best way to achieve your goals is to focus on your audience, not on yourself. If you understand the goals, expectations, and needs of your audience, you can tailor your communication to boost your chances (sometimes dramatically) of accomplishing your objectives. As globalization and technological change continue to accelerate, new communication challenges will likely develop across the spectrum of business. To ensure that your communication continues to be effective, keep an open mind. Pay attention to differences among cultures, to language usage in professional publications, and to new communication technology. And don't be afraid to consult an up-to-date communication website or handbook every so often. When other resources aren't available, rely on courtesy, consideration, and common sense—valuable tools to guide your communication in any situation.

**Careers in Business Communication**

Clearly, superb communication skills are essential for any career in business, and they become even more important as you climb the ranks of an organization. In fact, even in fields that traditionally have emphasized more analytical skills (such as accounting and finance), recruiters are now seeking candidates with strong writing and speaking skills. These skills have become even more important in the face of increased globalization. But business careers that center almost exclusively on communication are typically in the marketing realm, such as advertising, public relations, sales, and related fields, which we will discuss in more detail later in the text.

What else?

**RIP and REVIEW CARDS IN THE BACK and visit www.cengagebrain.com!**

**P. 81**

**Business Communication: Creating and Delivering Messages that Matter: Rip and Review 5**

LO1 Explain the importance of excellent business communication

Effective communication happens when relevant meaning is transmitted from the sender to the receiver. Skillful communicators save time and money, and develop deeper, more trusting relationships with their colleagues. Anything that interferes with the correct
transmission of your message is a barrier to communication. Barriers can be physical, verbal, nonverbal, cultural, perceptual, or organizational. To communicate effectively, you should be able to identify and surmount any barriers that stand between you and your audience. The result? Greater chance of long-term success in every aspect of business.

Barriers to communication can be daunting ©

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LO2 Describe the key elements of nonverbal communication

The key elements of nonverbal communication include eye contact, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and posture. Studies suggest that, on average, only 7% of meaning during face-to-face communication comes from the verbal content of the message, which magnifies the importance of every element of nonverbal communication. Active listening also plays an influential role. The starting point is empathy: a genuine attempt to understand and appreciate the speaker. You should signal your focus to the speaker through verbal cues, such as “I understand your point,” and nonverbal cues, such as nods, eye contact, and leaning forward. The result will be better relationships and better information for you.

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LO3 Compare, contrast, and choose effective communication channels

Communication channels differ significantly in terms of richness: the amount of information that they offer the audience. The spectrum ranges from written communication at the low end to face-to-face meetings at the high end. The best choice depends on
your objective, your message, and your audience. To ensure that your communication achieves your goals, always consider the
needs and expectations of your audience. If you tailor each message with the audience in mind, you'll give yourself a competitive
ing edge in terms of the time, attention, and response of your audience.

Channels Have Different Levels of Richness © Cengage Learning 2013

communication The transmission of information between a sender and a recipient.

noise Any interference that causes the message you send to be different from the message your audience understands.

communication barriers Obstacles to effective communication, typically defined in terms of physical, language, body language,
cultural, perceptual, and organizational barriers.

intercultural communication Communication among people with differing cultural backgrounds.

nonverbal communication Communication that does not use words. Common forms of nonverbal communication include gestures,
posture, facial expressions, tone of voice, and eye contact.

active listening Attentive listening that occurs when the listener focuses his or her complete attention on the speaker.

communication channels The various ways in which a message can be sent, ranging from one-on-one, in-person meetings to
Internet message boards.

bias A preconception about members of a particular group. Common forms of bias include gender bias; age bias; and race, ethnicity,
or nationality bias.

active voice Sentence construction in which the subject performs the action expressed by the verb (e.g. My sister wrote the paper).
The active voice works better for the vast majority of business communication.

passive voice Sentence construction in which the subject does not do the action expressed by the verb; rather the subject is acted
upon (e.g., The paper was written by my sister). The passive voice tends to be less effective for business communication.

dynamic delivery Vibrant, compelling presentation delivery style that grabs and holds the attention of the audience.

LO4 Choose the right words for effective communication

The right words can make the difference between a message your audience absorbs and a message your audience ignores. Keep
these considerations in mind: analyze your audience, be concise, avoid slang, avoid bias, and use active voice.

LO5 Write more effective business memos, letters, and emails

Here, too, you should begin with the needs of your audience; their anticipated response should drive the structure of your writing.
Determine the “bottom line” of your communication, and be sure to deliver it up front. Your message itself should have a natural
tone and must be completely free of grammatical errors.

P. 81c
LO6 Create and deliver successful verbal presentations

A great presentation begins with a hook that draws your audience in and engages their attention. The body of the presentation typically focuses on three key points, supported by credible information and persuasive arguments. The close summarizes the key points and often refers back to the opening hook. Dynamic delivery is simply a matter of practice, with a focus on knowing your material.

Footnotes

10. Presenting Effective Presentations with Visual Aids, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration,


P. 81e

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